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The Saga of Vanadis, Völva and Valkyrja

Images of the Divine from the Memory of an
Islandic Woman

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The Saga of
Vanadís, Völva and Valkyrja

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For Sunna

Table of contents

Abstract	4
Prologue	5
Auður - a dream	5
Language, References and Methodology	7
Island – island of light	7
References and use of language	7
Methodological statement	11
Acknowledgements and sources	12
Introduction	17
PART ONE	23
1. Re-collecting the Golden Tablets	23
Remembering	23
The roots of the Old Icelandic literature	25
The language of the Goddess – awakening the völva	40
Dancing the dream of remembrance	45
PART TWO	51
2. The Nornir	51
The V and the sacred III	51
Unz þrjár kvámu – ‘till three came’	52
3. Remembering Vanadís	60
Freyja – the first	60
Vanir and Æsir	62
The magic of myth and saga	66
Cats of the Goddess	74
Jörð - Earth - Nerthus	78
Her tears are red gold	81
Vanabréður – the sacred marriage	84
Sýr – Goddess of transformation	87
Gullveig – the golden Goddess	90
Blótgyðja - high priestess	98
Gold and the gyðja	101
Lokasenna - ástaguð – Goddess of love	104
Hyndluljóð - the descent	108
The bulls of Gefjun	116
Bird Goddess	122
Fólkvangur – Freyja’s hall	125

Valhöll – the tomb-womb	128
4. Remembering Völva	132
Viðólfa - the first one	132
Seiður – singing magic	140
They called her Heiður	145
Þorbjörg lítilvölva – the ninth sister	148
Heiður in the Sagas	153
5. Remembering Valkyrja	159
The death singer	159
Vinur –‘friends’ - weavers of death	163
The valkyrja and the hero	166
The valkyrja’s daughter	174
PART THREE	178
6. Three Times Burned – Three Times Born	178
Þorgerður Hörgabrúður – the mountain bride	178
Auður djúpúðga – the ancestress	186
7. Yet still is living	189
Álfkonan – the Vanadís of Álfheimar	189
María mey – Our Lady Mary	190
Björk – Tree Goddess	192
Vituð ér enn –eða hvað? - the resounding question of the völva	194
Epilogue	197
Bibliography	199
Appendix 1 - Icelandic words and terms	205
Appendix 2 - From Valkyrja to Valgerðardóttir	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Endnotes	0

Abstract

What we call history, is our memory, translated by the cultural, biological, mental, emotional and spiritual tools we possess, into a story or myth, which rings true to us as individuals and society at each moment. The stories and myths that are known as the Norse or Icelandic myths and sagas, are the recorded memory of individuals from many nations, women and men, living in Island¹ from the 9th century CE. Most of the scholars who have interpreted these memoirs of our ancestors in the last couple of centuries, have done so from a patriarchal, Christian, male, literary, western and logical point of view.

This work is a new interpretation, a new translation of these ancient myths, sagas and poems, which puts the Goddess, the female in her divine and human form, in the foreground. I trace this saga back to a culture existing before war and patriarchy.

¹ I use the version Island/Islandic instead of Iceland/Icelandic in the text (see explanation in the text and endnotes).

Prologue

Auður - a dream

It is a beautiful day. I, the goddess *Freyja*, stand in my white Temple up in the mountain slopes above the fjord. I am beautiful, tall as a mountain, dressed in white. Behind me in my temple, is my consort, my husband, father, and brother. He has no name and no body, only a head. Gray wavy hair and beard. Deep wise blue eyes. I love him, respect and trust him, unconditionally. I look across the land and over the fjord and I see the barren red earth everywhere. There is no life, no growth, and I wait and wonder.

Then I see the giant step up from the waters and walk towards the mountain, towards my temple. He is made of red clay and his name is *Auður*. I communicate with my consort, about my task and he gives his consent. The giant's steps are heavy, shaking the earth every time. He is without a soul, without feelings or thought. I walk towards him and take his hand. I lead him to a sacred valley, the valley of sacrifice, and we lie down on the barren earth. I am aware of the risk I am taking. I know that if I arouse his passion before his love and wisdom, he will destroy me. I am careful in my caresses. I touch his body with my loving hands and whisper words of love and wisdom in his ear. I can feel him respond, and I sense his body changing. I feel his soft skin and the growing energy in his now vibrant body. We make love.

The earth trembles and I feel his thick hair when I run my fingers over his head. We are one. I open my eyes and look into his. He is beautiful!

I look around me and the whole earth has come alive with our lovemaking. There are fields of green grass, flowers and trees. I can smell the newly awakened nature. I am pleased with my act of love and power. Grateful. I feel whole.

Then the earth trembles anew. It is a steady throbbing. I look up, and in the North, where the fjord meets the ocean, I see hundreds of giants rise from the ocean and walk their lifeless weighty steps towards me. Some are made of red clay and others are made of dark gray rock. I know that this task is never ending....

I believe that if we could truly remember our saga or our mythic reality, we would not need a hundred pages to express it, it would all be embedded in one feeling, sound, word or image. For me at this time in my life, that word would be *auður*. *Auður* is an ancient word with a paradoxical meaning. It is a common woman's name, but apart from that it does not exist in modern language in its feminine form. The masculine does, however. The noun *auður* means 'riches', 'wealth', and the adjective *auður* (masculine), *auð* (feminine), *autt* (neuter), means 'empty', 'void'. There are related feminine nouns, like *auðn* meaning 'wasteland', whereas the feminine *auðna* means 'fortune' or 'luck'. The powerful paradox of the wealth in the void, the fortune in the desert, is immediately apparent and beautifully expressed in the saga of the dream above. The origin of the female name *Auður* or *Auðr* (original form) is an old Icelandic feminine noun. Its meaning is: *örlög, dauði, hamingja, auðna, örlagadís, norn, örlagavefur* (Ásgeir B. Magnússon 1989); or translated roughly: destiny, death, happiness, fortune, goddess of fate, web of fate. My personal myth is embedded in the re-remembering of this old feminine word of paradox.

Language, References and Methodology

Island – island of light

In my native tongue my country's name is *Ísland*, I am *íslensk*¹ and this tongue, this old language of the *Sagas* and *Eddas*, is *íslenska*. According to Einar Pálsson², Gunnar Dal (1998) and more, the English translation Iceland and Icelandic is a misspelling, built on an old misunderstanding. From *Landnáma (Book of Settlements)* we have learned that Ísland is the Land of Ice, called so because one of the first settlers, Hrafnaflóki, sailed into a fjord full of ice and named this newfound land according to that. Einar and Gunnar³ don't agree. Their idea is that the settlers in this country were a group or groups of rather well educated and visionary people in search of a new kind of culture, a new social and religious system. They would never have named their chosen country randomly. The thesis is that Ísland is the Land of Is⁴, the land of the divine, land of light, and a correct English version would be Island. I don't know what the settlers had in mind when they named their new home, and I try to be careful with ideal nationalistic tendencies. However, my objective is to remain open to the diverse ways of re-collecting this nation's memory and therefore I've decided to use the Island version in this work.

References and use of language

I am Islandic, born from the soil of that island in the North, with its rich literary and oral history and magical nature. I have been nurtured with the stories and dreams of that soil, the language of the *völva*⁵ as well as the stories, language and “food” of our

patriarchal, scientific, materialistic, analytic, western, international culture. My way of approaching this material is necessarily influenced by the paradox of those conflicting parts of me, and by my language. Most of the myths and sagas are written in Old Icelandic, which was Old Norse around the time of their writing. Although modern Icelandic has changed somewhat from the old language of 1000 years ago, it is still easy for an Islander to read the old language.

Many of the key words in the myths have kept their deeper meaning and the mythic quality that cannot easily be translated into another language. In many of these words I have found hidden the threads that can be traced far back in time, beyond dualism, war and patriarchy. I therefore choose to use the Icelandic to express key concepts, such as *völva* instead of priestess or sibyl, *seiður*⁶ instead of magic, *örlög*⁷ instead of fate or destiny, *nornir*⁸ instead of fates, *jötunn* instead of giant, and *auður* when expressing the qualities and paradoxical essence of the divine.

The plural in Icelandic is more complex than the simple English addition of an -s, but still I use the Icelandic plural, such as *nornir* instead of norns, *völvur* instead of völvass and *jötnar* instead of jötuns. I have translated the words and put them into context in the endnotes and sometimes in the main text. I also use the Icelandic version of names, such as Þór for Thor, Óðinn for Odin and Freyja for the Great Goddess sometimes called Fröya or Freya. When I introduce an Icelandic word or name, and when I discuss the meaning or roots of certain names, I use italics, but with such words or names as *völva* and *valkyrja*, *nornir*, *jötnar* and *Vanadís*; *örlög*, *seiður* and *auður*, used throughout the text, I will not keep italicizing, but take the liberty to incorporate it into the English language, in this context. For the reader who wants to be able to look up the words as they reappear, there

is an alphabetical list of these words and concepts with translations and clarifications in Appendix 1.

My primary source material is the original Icelandic literature, the *Eddas*, *Heimskringla* and the *Sagas*. I try to keep true to my own understanding of these texts, although I reflect my ideas, interpretations and translations in relation to those of others. When I quote the original Icelandic sources directly, I choose to use the Icelandic texts (old or revised) and use my own translations of them as far as possible. I do this to make an attempt at being true to the original messages, which are often hidden in webs of words in the old prose, but even more so in the poems.

Islanders are usually called by their first names, since the last name is most often only an indication of whose daughter or son you are. My last name Bjarnadóttir indicates that I am the daughter of Bjarni (my father's first name). My first name is Valgerður and my daughter's last name is therefore Valgerðardóttir. If I had a son his last name would be Valgerðarson or they could have their father's first name as their last, with the addition of *dóttir* or *son*. Einar Pálsson and Hermann Pálsson are not brothers or even related, although both are distant relatives of mine (this is a small country). They both had a father called Páll, that's all. Helga Kress is the daughter of a Norseman, and therefore has a "proper" family name. Sigurður Nordal is of the generation who tried to be international and took up the use of family names. I will stick to the Icelandic tradition of going by first names or both, never only a last name, when I'm referring to Icelandic authors or figures. Snorri Sturluson will therefore be either just Snorri or Snorri Sturluson, never just Sturluson. In the bibliography, however, I will stick to APA tradition, and list the authors

by the last name. When referring to the work of people of other nationalities I will use the full name or last, as English language and reference culture suggests.

When quoting the old literature I will not refer to any specific publication and page, but to the poem, saga and/or book, and chapter or stanza number, and if necessary I will mention the manuscript. This is because there are many Icelandic editions of each and numerous translations. If for some reason a translation is not mine I will give reference for the translation.

Examples:

<i>Þar munu eftir</i>	There they again	Lying in the grass	There afterwards
<i>undursamligar</i>	wondrous will find,	they find them again	will be found in the grass
<i>gullnar töflur</i>	the golden tablets	the golden tablets,	the wonderful golden checkers
<i>í grasi finnask,</i>	in the grass,	the wonder filled;	those which they possessed
<i>þær er í árdaga</i>	those they owned	as they had them before	in the ancient times
<i>áttar höfðu.</i>	in olden days.	in most ancient times.	(Larrington 1996, p. 12)
<i>Völuspá, st. 62</i>		(Metzner 1994,p. 262)	
<i>Codex Regius</i>			

"Dóttir Njarðar var Freyja. Hún var blótgyðja. Hún kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið sem Vönum var títt." (Heimskringla, Ynglingasaga, ch. 4)

"The daughter of Njörður was Freyja. She was a *blótgyðja*⁹ (high-priestess). She was the first to teach seiður to the Æsir, as was common among the Vanir."

In the following text I capitalize Goddess when talking about her as the one goddess, archetype or power, like in Goddess religion and Great Goddess. When I use the word as a synonym for many goddesses, I don't use capitals. The same with the word god/God. I sometimes use the feminine she/her when referring to both genders, instead of the traditional masculine he/his/him or the sometimes awkward he/she, which I however

choose most often. This is done to emphasize that my writing naturally reflects who I am. I write from a woman's point of view and my ideas are influenced by my gender. Both men and women, raised in the patriarchal system, unaware of that system's influence, often without thought or comment, will use the masculine to represent both men and women.

Methodological statement

I am a woman. My method of working with information is to gather it into the creative space of my womb, along with the seed of inspiration, carry it and nurture it consciously and unconsciously until it is ready to be born, woven in words and images, movements and magic.

I am a dreamer. Into and out of my womb, my dreaming space, I gather my information. The gathering for this work has been through the written word, the myths and stories left to us from our ancestors, and those gathered by visionary searching women and men of today and yesterday. I gather information and inspiration from the spoken word of people, women and men still living in touch with our ancestry, women and men weaving a new vision into and out of our modern culture. As seeds of inspiration and understanding I make use of my own and other's dreams and visions of that ancestry, the aũur still living in another dimension, demanding to be re-membered. Attempting not to destroy the mystery of the magical paradox, my method has been dreaming it while and after the gathering. From there I have woven it into form, touched by the magical mystery of myth, of history, ideas and dreams brought from the ancestors, to become a new vision for my future, a new earth rising from the sea of forgetfulness. It is my hope

that this web can be a saga or even a seiður for those who want to remember, those who still can remember that they are born of woman, those seeking female images of the divine.

To me this process has been inevitable, my woman's way of working with knowledge can be no other. Like my ancestress Auður djúpúðga¹⁰ who sought a new land for her descendants and found the divine in the hills of that land and in the waves of the sea, I seek my auður in the spirit born out of those hills, out of the sea surrounding this land, out of nature, my ancestry, and the *álfar* and *huldufólk*¹¹ (the hidden people), the dreaming nature. I seek it in the transforming conversations, in the darkness and in my womanness, thus seeking to balance the logic of the analyzed and written word.

My epistemology, my way of knowing, is that of the dancing, dreaming, weaving, winged womb in loving embrace with the brain. It may be defined as the epistemology of the sacred marriage of the womb and brain, the egg and the seed or the Goddess and her lover. It is the epistemology of auður. I dance with the divine Vanadís and her gyðjur, the völva and the valkyrja. I move with örlög woven by the nornir, from feminist, mythical and mythological, historical, literary, etymological, archaeological, sociological, psychological, genealogical, spiritual, philosophical, political, lyrical, sacred, erotic and very personal emotional points of view.

Acknowledgements and sources

Many have written about Icelandic/Norse mythology before me. The old poetry, myths and sagas of Æsir and Vanir¹², jötnar, *dvergar* (dwarfs), valkyrjur¹³ and *dísir*¹⁴, heroes and heroines, have attracted, inspired and outwitted great scholars from all around

the world, although mostly from Northern Europe. I have not had a chance to get acquainted with more than a little portion of all this important scholarship, but those I have read have given me precious gifts, a foundation to stand on. Some have inspired me, awakened or amazed me, some aroused my anger or my passion, some given me important questions or arguments to respond to. My main sources among the woman writers are Britt-Mari Näsström, Gro Steinsland and Hilda Ellis Davidson, whose accepted intellectual knowledge of the myths exceeds mine, but whose views and approaches differ significantly from my approach, from the reality of my dreaming womb. My countrywoman Helga Kress has, - with her feminist literary analysis of *Völuspá* and the stories of völur and heroines -, been an invaluable inspiration for me.

Among the foreign male scholars who have recently influenced and informed me in a clearly positive manner are Ralph Metzner and Jürgen W. Kremer. Metzner, who is almost Icelandic with his German and Celtic roots, wrote *The Well of Remembrance* in 1994 and, as far as I can see, was the first to systematically relate the Norse myths to Marija Gimbutas' theory. That book, and my contact with Metzner, was an inspiration and relief at a time when I was thinking the same thoughts, but felt alone. Jürgen W. Kremer and I had a beautiful and creative conversation of reminiscence for a while. Kremer has given me invaluable insights through his work on the recovery of indigenous European mind. One of the outcomes of our relationship was a joint article on the Vanir culture, written in 1998¹⁵.

The late Icelandic genius Sigurður Nordal¹⁶ has inspired me with his remarkable scholarship and challenged me with his patriarchal views. I am deeply grateful to Stefán Karlsson¹⁷ for his friendship, his open mind and his willingness to share his expertise on

the old manuscripts. There is Hermann Pálsson¹⁸, whose deep and wide knowledge about the Celtic and Sámi roots of the Icelandic culture is unprecedented. He was so generous as to give me access to some of his unpublished material on völvur and it was he who introduced me to Þorgerður Hörgabrúður. I am forever grateful to him for that. Haraldur Bessason, former professor at the University of Winnipeg and former rector at the University of Akureyri, introduced me to some of the wonders of *Völuspá* and *Njáls Saga*, when I attended his course in 1995. Einar Pálsson passed away before I ever took the chance to converse with him about his exciting ideas, which in so many ways relate to mine, but his courage shines through his books, which are a wonderful inspiration.

For the archaeomythological context and the connection to other myths and historical material I rely mainly on Marija Gimbutas and her books on the Goddess of Old Europe. Mara Keller and Joan Marler's class "The Goddess of Prehistory" gave me important support and knowledge to link to my ideas. So did their friendship and the book *From the Realm of the Ancestors* edited by Joan. Mara's knowledge and deep understanding of the divine female, and therefore her insight into my work, kept me going through the dark valleys. The archaeomythology group that met in Greece in 1998: Joan and Mara, Rose Frances, Cristina Biaggi, Miriam Robbins Dexter, Michael Dames, Lucia Birnbaum, Heide Göttner-Abenroth, Kristina Berggren, Nanos Valeoritis and more, have all given me pieces of treasures, *gersemar*¹⁹, invaluable in this work. Betty Meador's books on Inanna and Enheduanna are among the foundations of my thinking and writing, as well as my spiritual nourishment. Her devotion to the poems of Enheduanna is an example for me to try to follow. This work would not have been possible without the knowledge gathered from James Mellaart and Dorothy Cameron,

Elinor Gadon, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, Judy Grahn and Christina Biaggi. Merlin Stone, Charlene Spretnak, as well as so many others inspire in their own way to re-claim the old myths. Reading Susan Griffin released some of the fetters of my writing voice.

The theory is interwoven with visions and dreams. To look at the interconnection between dreams, visions, myths, history and personal and political change, I do not rely on any one “school” of dreams or mythology. I gather support from C. G. Jung, and the many women and men who have taken his knowledge along new and old paths, as well as through the reminiscence of my foremothers and fathers who took dreams very seriously. My teacher on dreams and consciousness, Daniel Deslaurier, was always both inspiring and supportive in my search for “my” dream theory, always open and enthusiastic, being true to the dreamer in himself.

Rose Frances who never ceases to feed the dreamer in me, with her art and being, has inspired me to be true to the dream. Her art has opened windows in my soul, that won't be closed again. Ani Mander has with her embodied feminism and her acceptance of a rainbow colored methodology and epistemology, raised the winds so that I can spread my wings and fly. Z Budapest and Luisah Teish, who are völur in their own right and not afraid to call themselves priestesses of the Goddess, have been wonderful role models. My sister students, at the California Institute of Integral Studies, completed the picture with their sparkling ideas, enthusiasm for this material and support in my way of working with it. At the times when I was about to give up, I read their encouraging messages and continued!

Throughout this work I've had unfailing support, inspiration and mirroring from my soul sister Karolína, whose dreams and memories at times fuse with mine. When I

have drifted away from the descending völva inside me, she has sat down by my side and, holding my hand, descended with me. There are other important sisters and brothers whose inspiration, influence and support has made a difference for this work, as they are active participants in my life, but not all of them will be mentioned.

My daughter Sunna Elín, is the center of my life, my greatest auður. She is my Gersemi, and a continuous motivation for my work in the world. My mother Kristjana Ríkey, who gave me life, nurtured me inside and outside her womb, and gave me so many precious gifts, deserves special acknowledgement. She was my first gyðja, her radiant beauty, creativity and descents reflecting the Goddess. My grandmothers and grandfathers, all gave me gifts that have been precious in completing this mission. Last but not least there is my father. Without his unfailing support and enthusiasm I would never have made this journey. Paradoxically he joined our ancestors when this work was still in the early womb stage, but his spirit is with me in the dreamtime.

Introduction

We must refocus our collective memory. The necessity for this has never been greater as we discover that the path of “progress” is extinguishing the very conditions for life on earth.

Marija Gimbutas, Preface to *The Civilization of the Goddess*

I was born and raised in a country where people still haven't totally lost connection with the energy of earth, her winds, waters and inner fires, and the sacredness in that energy. As a child I grew up listening to the sounds of nature, bathing in her warm and cold waters, fighting the cold winter storms, gazing at the glimmering stars and the ever changing moon and the magic of the northern lights, loving the bright summer nights and listening to, dreaming, creating and telling stories. There was always room for stories. The morning stories of the dreams of the night, the night stories of álfar, jötnar and brave women, sung as lullabies, or read, told and acted out by my parents or grandparents. There were stories told by the great aunts at family gatherings, or if none of the storytellers were present there were always the books and last but not least my own very vivid imagination. As an only child I had plenty of time to nurture that very private and creative part of myself.

The favorite stories of my childhood told about mysterious women, who possessed great magical and sometimes worldly powers. In my daydreams and my night dreams, in my games acted out in private and those shared with others I became these women, women with magical powers. Deep inside me I knew that women had powers exceeding the ones modern women and men were aware of, and I soon learned that surrounding and blocking those powers there was great fear and immeasurable guilt. I could sense it in my mother, my grandmothers and in the women and girls around me. It

took me a long time to realize that the fear and guilt was linked with the fathers, a strange thought for me, because we were surrounded by men, - my father, my grandfathers and my uncles -, who were exceptionally supportive, creative and gentle in their whole way of being.

My great grandfather was a genealogist and when my father was 14 his grandfather gave him his very own book of ancestors, handwritten in a beautiful leather binding. In that book I could, as a child, read that one of my foremothers was Auður djúpúðga, a Norse woman, a traveler and queen, who had lived in many countries before settling on the shore of Island in her old age, at the end of the 9th century. I took that ancestral gift into my heart, into my womb and kept it there, as my own personal and mysterious myth. Auður djúpúðga was a contemporary of many of the völvur and valkyrjur in the stories, and for me she was and still is an important link between the myths and myself.

In the early eighties I became politically active and with a group of women started a feminist political movement in Island. At the same time I got into a relationship with the man who was to become the father of my daughter, a creative, fascinating and abusive man. Having learned and realized that many women actually feared men, I was somehow drawn to learn it by experience. At the age of 30, after two years of domestic abuse, and total inner breakdown, while becoming a stepmother, a mother, the feminist representative and the chair of the local government, and the social worker at the local hospital, my identity was in pieces. My life was a total paradox and the so-called power I had was a sad illusion. I left the father of my daughter, resigned as chair of the town council, and got back to the inner search. I read Elizabeth Gould Davis' *The First Sex*,

Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, Zsuzsanna Budapest's *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* and Marija Gimbutas' *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Slowly, but with determination, I started connecting with Auður djúpúðga, with the völvu and the valkyrja, my heritage, that had been resting in my womb all these years. I remembered my childhood dreams of becoming a völvu, a woman of real inner power, and I realized that our feminist political fight for equality and liberty, for rights and positions was lacking something. It was floating, yet rigid, in thin air, without the wings of spirit to carry it and without the roots of the ancestors to ground it.

I soon noticed that by speaking of wings and roots, of the goddess Freyja, of the völvu's vision and our hunger for a new spiritual ground to stand on, I could move some of my fellow women and men from a place of intellectual brain thought and political rigidity to an intuitive, creative womb thought. I was not then, and still am not sure what this shift does for us politically and even culturally but I know it has an effect. In the years 1985-1995 I worked on several Nordic projects, introducing my way of viewing life to my working partners. Remembering our myths, each of us with our own basis for memory, we created a platform for our visions, and the unbelievable happened. The union leader, the business manager, the poet, the journalist, the pro-and contra EU, the teacher and the politician, the psychologist and sociologist, the women and the men, young and old, all could work together in creating an outline and base, and giving a powerful voice to whatever work we were doing.

Along the way there have been times where I have lost hope, and forgotten my power, forgotten the stories of the women, and dwelled in darkness, like the *tröllkonur* – 'giantesses' of the past. I have, however, never lost my ability to dream, asleep and

awake and my dreams always bring me back to the well by the tree. There I can sense the presence of the nornir, hear the enchanting sounds of the deeply rooted völvá and feel the tingling sensation of my valkyrja wings.

The physical journey to the West, the spiritual, nurturing and challenging atmosphere at the California Institute of Integral Studies, and the inner journey to the ancestors, and into the mind of the others interpreting their saga, have all brought me closer to myself and to my passion. I connected more than ever to the ancient poem *Völuspá* and the myths. It became clear to me that the Islandic myths were a reflection of the history of Europe, that in *Völuspá* one could even find a woman's reflected memory of the world's first war, and of the conflict between the old Goddess faith and the patriarchal culture. Every day spent with people of different origins searching for their wings and roots, brought me new realizations regarding my own, and I felt a need to dig down through the layers of forgetfulness and fly up above the obstacles of socialization.

In the process of writing this thesis my focus has somewhat changed from wanting to prove the Old European origin of the Vanadís, Freyja, and her messengers, völvá and valkyrja, to a more reflecting and searching journey, digging down and flying up to get a perspective of those layers. I have tried to stay as open as possible to any idea or thought that is sparked in my brain, when reading and thinking about the myths, especially the poems with their word magic. I have become more and more interested in the archaeomythological branch of linking the origin of words (etymology) to mythical themes. Since I am no expert in etymology and I have relied mostly on one etymological source, i.e. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989), this may be a dangerous path. Therefore I have taken care to bring every idea embraced with my brain's logic, into the dreaming

space of my womb, and carry it there for some time, before birthing it. This process may not necessarily secure a healthy creation, let alone objective truth, but it creates a relationship of integrity between my ideas and myself. At times I simply recount a saga or myth, or relate parts of a those sagas/myths, without much interpretation, when they relate so closely to themes from others that I find it almost disturbing to begin to explain the mystery.

My purpose is still the same as when I started this work. I want to take an active part in finding a way to a new balance in the world of humans, and for the rest of nature, which is so endangered by our human imbalance. I have tried to give the reader a sense of the process of my own journey as well as the ideas and eventual conclusions. I believe more strongly than ever that there is hope in remembering, and that through this collective dream of remembrance we may find our way back to the loving embrace of Freyja and Óður, back to Auður.

In part one I will begin by setting the stage, so to speak, defining and contemplating the three roots of my work: the old literature, the method of archaeomythology, and the dreams. In part two I try to re-member. With the help of the old myths and sagas, the theoretical tools and dreams, I put together the broken pieces of the lost and disguised images of the Great Goddess, - here called *Vanadis* -, and her messengers, the *völvur* and the *valkyrjur*. I recount some of the poems and sagas, and at times I relate them to myths and sagas from other parts of the world, in order to find the common roots and meanings. Finally, in part three, I relate the theme of the everlasting Goddess, “three times burned, three times born”, to some historical women and the *völvur* and *valkyrjur* of our times. I relate the myths to what I see and sense happening in

the world of today, from the perspective of this island of light, situated in the remote north of our planet. Linking the past and present is *audur*, the androgynous lover-destroyer, dancing with the Goddess in and out of balance.

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his [or her] real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.

Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, 1949/1978, p. 41

Part one

1. Re-collecting the Golden Tablets

Remembering

*Þar munu eftir
undursamligar,
gullnar töflur
í grasi finnask,
þær er í árdaga
áttar höfðu.*

Völuspá, st. 62²⁰

There they again
wondrous will find,
the golden tablets
in the grass,
those they owned
in olden days.

How do I remember? How do I collect and reflect my memory? What is remembrance? Every word, every thought written on the following pages is reflecting my memory, my personal “well of remembrance”²¹. Even the words and thoughts quoted literally from other remembering scholars, poets and dreamers, are from my memory, those chosen were the ones I remembered as worth quoting. Sometimes because they reflect so clearly what I remember from other inner and outer sources, sometimes because they are a reflection of a memory different from my own.

The golden tablets in *Völuspá* are the tablets lost to the old *goð*²² (gods and goddesses). I have chosen those golden tablets as a symbol for the scattered pieces of the old wisdom, lost and then found again after *Ragnarök*²³, the destruction of the world of *goð*, and the birth of a new earth.

Völuspá is a poem of the saga of our world and the world of the *goð*, from beginning to end. It is told by a *völva* to Óðinn. In *Völuspá* the *völva* remembers, she sees. The word *spá* originally has the meaning ‘to see’ and is related to English ‘spy’ and

Islandic *speggill* (mirror). Now it usually refers to a prophecy, vision. Another old word for *völva* is *spákona* (seeing woman or seeress), and yet another is *vísindakona* (a woman of science). Although the poem is called *Völuspá*, she never uses the word *spá*. When recounting the world's saga she says “*ég man*” (I remember), or she refers to herself in third person “*man hún*” (she remembers), and when talking about what is or is becoming she uses the verb ‘to see’; “*ég sé*” (I see) or “*sér hún*” (she sees). In the second stanza of *Völuspá*, she talks about memory.

<i>Ek man jötna</i>	I remember giants
<i>ár of borna</i>	born at beginning
<i>þá er forðum mig</i>	who nurtured me
<i>fædda höfðu;</i>	in ancient times;
<i>níu man ek heima</i>	I remember nine worlds
<i>níu íviðjur,</i>	nine giant women
<i>mjötvið mæran</i>	the young tree budding
<i>fyr mold neðan.</i>	below earth.
<i>Völuspá, st. 2</i>	

We can choose to see the *völva* in *Völuspá* as the divine herself, the one who has always been and therefore remembers it all. Or we can choose to see her as a woman in touch with her ancestry, in touch with the collective consciousness of earth. A woman skilled in the art of seeing, *spákona*.

Memory is definitely collective in ways that are obvious. We all go through much the same experience as humans, we all live more and more in the same world of information. Memory is also collective in ways that are hidden and may not be meant to be fully understood. In the following I define my sources for memory, my golden tablets as three strands in a braid.

There is the old literature, lost and then found, often buried in remote places and clad in the mystery of mythical symbolism. There is the information found in the ground, in the roots of language and even in the DNA of modern people, dis-covered by archaeomythologists and other scientists, brought to us through modern literature and the world wide web. The scope of this strand is broader than any person can hold, so I will definitely limit myself more than I find feasible. There are my dreams and visions tapping into the ultimate auður, the subconscious ocean of information. Finally there is the weaving of the three into wings of words, and it may be there, in the weaving or plaiting of different strands or threads, that the golden tablets can be deciphered.

The roots of the Old Islandic literature

The original written information that I rely on when collecting my memory, are the myths, sagas and poems, which were recorded in Island in the first centuries of settlement, mostly 10th or 11th to 14th century CE, although there are a few from as late as 16th century. These are therefore called the Islandic Sagas and myths, or the Norse, referring to the Norse settlers, called Vikings, who sailed from Scandinavia and settled in Island during this time. Reading, researching and interpreting these stories we must, however, bear in mind that among the settlers were people of Celtic²⁴ origin, mostly from Ireland and the Northern part of the British Isles. There were people from Sápmi²⁵, the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia. The Norse population had also been richly influenced by those cultures before proceeding to Island, the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and even North America. Some of the Vikings, Auður djúpúðga among them, had lived in Ireland, Scotland or the Hebrides most of their lives, before proceeding further north.

Some had mixed blood, like Helgi magri who settled in Eyjafjörður. His mother was Irish and his father Norse. There is clear evidence of Celtic and Sámi settlers in Island and Norse people (especially women) of high rank were sent to Sápmi to study with the Sámi wise people (Hermann Pálsson, 1997).

Yet another golden tablet was re-collected from the grass in the year 2000, when the genetics giant deCode²⁶ announced the genealogical origins of Icelandic women (Agnar Helgason et.al. 2000²⁷). The researchers had started with tracing the matri-line in their research, since that is clearly more accountable than the patri-line. The result is that the female settlers, the first Icelandic women, are almost equally Norse and Celtic or Scandinavian/British, although some traces of Sámi blood can be found, as well as some small links to Northern Asia and elsewhere. What may be of as much interest in this context is that the research on the male roots showed that the male settlers had much more Scandinavian/Norse blood, than Celtic²⁸. This culture of Celtic and Norse women and predominantly Norse men is later characterized as Norse. This shows a continuation of the male governance in the hybrid cultures of Old to Indo-European Europe, where the female line, however, carries on the old blood and the memory of the old wisdom. If we could define Vanir and Æsir blood types or DNA, we might be able to trace our female bloodline back to the banks of the Black Sea. Anyway, the great grandmothers of the Icelandic nation were no more Norse than British/Celtic, and they had sisters from Sápmi.

The Norse people used runes as a way of writing and also in connection with *seiður* and maybe other forms of magic and healing. No myths or sagas remain “written” with runes. Runes are found engraved on stones and various things from as early as 1st century CE and as late as the late Middle Ages, but they do not include whole myths.

Names of goð or spells are found engraved with runes, as well as practical messages concerning trade and personal matters. Images from known myths are also found engraved on stones. The knowledge in the art of writing with the Latin alphabet came from the British Isles. It is therefore most likely that all written material from early Island has its roots not only in the Norse pagan culture and the old worldview of the people we have learned to call Vikings, but is also deeply rooted in Celtic and Sámi cultures. Hilda Ellis Davidson (1988), among many, has pointed out the strong relationship between the Norse, Germanic and Celtic religions. We must remember, as well, that the Vikings were extensive travelers, and brought knowledge from France, - called Valland in the literature -, from Greece, the Roman Empire, Egypt (Einar Pálsson, 1970) and even Old North America (*The Vinland Sagas*). Considering these facts I choose to define the old literature as Islandic, not for nationalistic reasons, but to emphasize that in this country many nations and cultures were gathered and together they created a hybrid island culture, reflected in the old literature. The old literature referred to in this work is therefore Irish, Scottish or Sámi as well as Norse, and it is even adorned with some Native American, Cretan or Egyptian gems. Behind all of this there is a layer of an old but not entirely forgotten culture, called Old European by Marija Gimbutas. I call it the Vanir layer. It is from this layer that I hope to reveal glimpses in the process of remembering.

Finally we must be aware of the Christian influence in all the written material²⁹. Snorri Sturluson, who wrote both *Snorra Edda* and *Heimskringla*, two of the main sources for Islandic pagan mythology, was a Christian man and although his knowledge of and feeling for the old knowledge is remarkable, he is clearly influenced by those two aspects, Christian and male. Most of the editors recording the myths were monks or other

men of the church. Jón Hákonarson, priest from Víðidalstunga, was the editor of *Flateyjarbók*, from which I collect much of my memory of Þorgerður Hörgabrúður and some stories of Freyja. Jón was very well educated and unusually broadminded in many aspects, however, he was a Christian priest and a devoted one.

As I collect my material for remembrance from the Old Icelandic literature, as well as various other old and younger sources, I try to be constantly aware of these multiple influences, these layers of cultures affecting the stories. My goal is to get behind and beyond these layers, as close to the original core as I can, yet being constantly aware of them as parts of the evolving saga. I want to find the golden tablets in the grass, those they owned in olden days, and at the same time be able to read the whole saga inscribed through the ages into these tablets. The old manuscripts are golden tablets, giving us *Snorra Edda*, *Eddukvæði*, *Heimskringla* and *Flateyjarbók*, as well as the *Sagas*. I find it necessary to give the reader an idea of what kind of tablets they are, so as to perceive how and why I collect my memory of the divine female from them.

Edda

Hljóðs bið ég allar

helgar kindir

meiri og minni

mögu Heimdallar

Viltu at ek Valföður

vel fyr telja

forn spjöll fyra

þau er fremst um man.

Völuspá, st.1

I ask for silence

all sacred beings

higher and lower

of Heimdallar's kin.

You want me Valfather

to well recount

ancient stories all

as far as I recall.

This is the opening stanza of *Völuspá*, the opening poem of the *Codex Regius* manuscript re-discovered in Iceland in 1643, by the bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson, but written in the late 13th century (Sigurður Nordal, 1923). The old manuscripts are written on skin, mostly calfskin. Iceland was a hard country to live in, with its long and cold winters and few wild animals for hunting, other than birds and fish. For centuries these written treasures went unnoticed as such, got lost in snow or fire and ironically were often used for clothing or even as a kind of chewing gum in times of hunger and hardship. This manuscript, *Codex Regius*, contained several anonymous poems, which seem to originate from different times and therefore clearly have no one author. These are mythic and epic poems about goddesses and gods, heroines and heroes, divine and semi-divine beings. The best known is *Völuspá*, *Hávamál* and a series of poems called *Völsungakvæði*.

The manuscript had no title, but goes by the formal name of *Codex Regius*, since the bishop gave it to the Danish king (Regius) later. There already existed a great work on myths and epic stories, a book partly based on these very poems, which had been lost and now were found. That manuscript had the title *Edda*. It was written by the Icelandic scholar Snorri Sturluson in the early 13th century, and on the front page of one of its manuscripts he has written:

Bók þessi heitir Edda. Hana hefir saman setta Snorri Sturlu sonr eftir þeim hætti sem her er skipat. Er fyrst sagt frá ásum og Ymi, þar næst Skáldskaparmál og heiti margra hluta, síðast Háttatal, er Snorri hefir ort um Hákon konung og Skúla hertoga.

This book is called *Edda*. It is put together by Snorri son of Sturla, in the following way. First is the account of Æsir and Ymir, then *Skáldskaparmál* and the names of many things, last *Háttatal*, a poem by Snorri on king Hákon and the duke Skúli.

This great work was therefore known by the name *Snorra Edda* (*The Edda of Snorri*). English versions go mostly by the titles *The Prose Edda* or *The Younger Edda*. The bishop Brynjólfur had earlier in a letter expressed his opinion that there existed an even greater *Edda* than that of Snorri. He believed it was written by the renowned scholar, Snorri's ancestor, Sæmundur fróði (Sæmundur the wise, 1056 – 1133), and that *Snorra Edda* was only a kind of a summary of the great *Edda of Sæmundur*. When Brynjólfur acquired the *Codex Regius* manuscript, he decided it was that very work, and called it *Sæmundar Edda*. This *Sæmundur* lived at *Oddi*, the educational center of Iceland at the time. He was educated at the Sorbonne in Paris and was known as a man of great wisdom. Stories of his battles with the Devil are still popular, since *Sæmundur* always outwitted the great Trickster himself. Later it became clear that *Sæmundur* had neither composed the poems, nor recorded them at that time, but the book kept the title *Edda*, and is now referred to as *Eddukvæði*. English titles are either *The Edda Poems*³⁰, *The Poetic Edda* or *The Elder Edda*, although some scholars stick to tradition and still refer to it as *Sæmundar Edda*. Those poems are also found in other manuscripts such as one called *A. M. 748* and *Hauksbók* (*Book of Haukur*), and some in *Flateyjarbók* as well. In *Snorra Edda*, which also exists in a few slightly different manuscripts, parts of the *Edda poems* and other old poetry are quoted for reference. Although these different manuscripts give mostly similar versions of each poem, myth or saga, they differ slightly, showing us the inevitable change which occurs over time and when oral and even written information is re-collected and re-corded.

But why did Snorri name this great work *Edda*? What does it refer to? *Edda* means great grandmother. In this respect the title chosen by Snorri most probably refers

to the fact that the stories and poems are old, from the time of the old wise ones. It has been difficult for many scholars to accept or understand that Snorri would name this great work for the grandmothers. Some have suggested that the name is derived from Oddi (the place where Snorri and Sæmundur lived and learned), or related to *óður* (poetry or song) (Simek, 1993), but Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989), finds both explanations unlikely for etymological reasons. In Icelandic history the wise woman has always had a place of power. Many women's epithets reflect this, such as *djúpúðga* (with deep wisdom) and *mannvitsbrekka* (wisdom-slope). In *Heimskringla* (The World Circle) Snorri cites Þuríður, daughter of Snorri goði (a pagan priest), as one of the main sources for Ari fróði (the wise). Ari fróði was, according to Snorri, the first to write in the Norse language. The goð rely on the old women as well. In the poems *Völuspá* and *Baldurs draumar*, Óðinn seeks the völva, ancient woman wisdom, when he needs to find answers to complex questions and remember. During the days Óðinn sits on Sökkvabekkur (Descent Bench), with the goddess Saga, conversing. Remembering, recounting the sagas of old, as the völva does in *Völuspá*, as Óðinn does in *Ásgarður*³¹, is exactly what Snorri attempts to do in his *Edda*. It is a book of old legends and myths, but mostly a key to the old code of *kenningar*³², a dictionary for new generations to understand the hidden meaning in the old poetry.

Völuspá

Although my wells of inspiration for re-collecting my memory are many, none of the written texts has been as potent as the *seiður* of *Völuspá*. I use the poem as a warp for weaving my ideas and dreams into. *Völuspá* has been called the greatest of the *Edda*

poems and even one of the greatest literary achievements of the Germanic world (Kevin Crossley-Holland, 1980, xxxiii). Sigurður Nordal quotes Julius Hoffory (*Eddastudien I*, 1889, p. 141) who wrote:

The Nordic people were given the gift, which no other nation was blessed with at those great crossroads (pagan and Christian), of an unequaled poet who could give an overview of past, present and future, so that nowhere else can we find a matching vision. *Völuspá* is not only, as Müllenhoff said, the greatest poem of the Nordic countries till this day, but never has any matching work of this kind been composed. [my translation from Nordal's translation to the Icelandic] (1923/1993, p.23)

The many³³ acknowledged scholars who have interpreted *Völuspá*, generally agree that the poem is a sacred poem, an ode to the old religion, although it is influenced by the religious change from paganism to Christianity. In spite of the changes that have probably been made in the writing and re-writing of the poem, and the time gone by, the magic lives on. Although I disagree with Sigurður Nordal on many points, I have to agree with him in his sadness over the fact that most scholars look to *Völuspá* and the Old Icelandic literature in general, as historical research material, which has little or nothing to do with us as living people. "It is put forth wrapped in shrouds, never as a living experience, which could still be worth considering, as old as it is³⁴." (1923/1993, p. 32).

Living with *Völuspá*, reading the words of the völvu, imagining her vision of all time, is to me a sacred ritual. Therefore my words are affected by that. They are based on emotion and beliefs as well as scholarly research. The words in *Völuspá* are not chosen by chance. The mystery the völvu so magically reveals and conceals at the same time goes deep into the body and mind of the listener and leaves her or him with new insights and yet restless until she has delved deeper and searched further, only to find herself

repeating to herself and to the world, the resounding words of the völvá: *Vituð ér en, - eða hvað?* (Do you know yet, - or what?)

The scholars, all in love with the poem, don't agree on the author's identity, the time and place where it was written, and of course the meaning hidden in the mysterious words of the völvá. *Völuspá* is a poem of remembering. It has generally been dated to a time when the Old Norse religion was giving way to the new faith, Christianity. The poem's metric form and language suggest that it is not older than 8th century CE (Stefán Karlsson, summer 1999, personal communication). However, its contents and myths are surely much older. Although the oldest manuscripts of the poem, as a whole, are written in the 13th century CE, most scholars agree that it was composed before 1000 CE (Helga Kress, 1993; Hermann Pálsson, 1994; Sigurður Nordal, 1923). Even if the poem is as old as the 9th century it could well be influenced by Christianity. Islanders accepted Christianity as a national religion in 999, but the new faith had been practiced by some from the beginning of settlement in the 9th century³⁵, by settlers arriving through the British Isles. It has been pointed out that much of the Old Icelandic poetry, especially the Edda poems are remnants of an oral tradition. Their form is that of a speech, and the use of repetitions is one of their characteristics, as well as rhythmic sounds, resonance of the body, which you also find in sacred or magic songs and chants (such as seiður, see below) and in the lullabies and working songs (Helga Kress, 1993, p. 61).

The influence of Christianity is quite clear in parts of *Völuspá*, and we can assume that the text has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and therefore misspelled, shuffled, cut and filled in, according to the mindset of the scribes and their (dis)ability of understanding the original message. It may well have gone through some changes before

that, especially if we assume that the poem is an old spellchant, related to or belonging to the songs required for the art of *seiður*, the magic still living strong in Iceland a thousand years ago.

My first acquaintance with a feminist exploration of the old Icelandic literature was when Helga Kress³⁶ announced to the patriarchal world, her idea that the author of *Völuspá* was a woman. This was in the eighties, and the world of patriarchy³⁷ was shaken. Sigurður Nordal, Björn M. Ólsen and Finnur Jónsson, all respected experts on the Old Icelandic literature, discuss the gender of the author in footnotes. Björn M. Ólsen (1914, p. 135fn) points out that from certain stanzas, where goddesses as mothers and wives mourn or protect their sons and lovers, one might get the impression that the author is a woman or else he emphasizes the womanly characteristics in the expression of the *völva* (see also Sigurður Nordal, 1923). Sigurður Nordal comes to the conclusion that the author must be a man. In a paper published in 1924 he identifies that man as a certain *Völu-Steinn*, since he was the son of a *völva* and as such had almost first hand knowledge about a *völva*'s way of thinking and seeing. It did not occur to Sigurður Nordal or other scholars at that time, or even as late as the 1980s that *Völuspá* is - as the name indicates - a *völva*'s vision, and therefore the original author is most likely a *völva*, who has inherited the wisdom, kept it in her memory, and then grounded it in poetry. Although today's scholars have different ideas about the author, more and more agree that the author is probably a woman. Hermann Pálsson suggests that she was a *völva* from Hálogaland in Norway, a disciple of the *Sámis* (1994 and 1997). Archaeological finds, almost a century ago, of the existence of the Sumerian/Acadian priestess and poet Enheduanna in 2300 BCE (Meador, 2000), should have erased any doubt about the ability

or tradition of women as great poets. *Völuspá* could also have many authors, many völvur who recited the poem and kept it alive orally in their seiður-ceremonies century after century, before it was recorded on skin, and men may well have performed that final act.

There is an ongoing dispute as to whether *Völuspá* originates in Iceland or Norway. On the Norway side of the debate are scholars like Finnur Jónsson (1920) and Hermann Pálsson (1994). The ones who are in favour of Iceland as the poem's country of birth, point out that the geographical imagery refers clearly to Icelandic ice and volcanic fire, while the others point out that bears and wolves are not residents of the island. One must remember that the poets didn't live in isolation; they knew a world of wild animals, volcanic eruptions and icy winters, wherever their residence might have been. In addition they knew the old myths and their rich, ancient and geographically as well as culturally extensive imagery, and they had their dreams, giving them access to infinite worlds. My belief is that the source and substance of the poem is much older than Icelandic settlement. I believe it is based on a world myth or story which has to do with forces reaching far beyond Icelandic territory. However, the author might have lived in Iceland at the time this story was put into poetic form. One undeniable fact is that the author is motivated by a time and place where paradigms are shifting, and in that context is reminded of other times and places of other paradigm-shifts. The finale of the poem³⁸ might reflect the change from Norse paganism to Christianity, but the völvur certainly reflects back to a time or times where other similar religious changes have occurred.

As mentioned above, *Eddukvæði* is a collection of poems from several manuscripts and different times. In most editions of *Eddukvæði*, *Völuspá* is the opening poem. The same theme, same story can be found in different versions in other poems,

and fractions of myths must sometimes be put together from many sources to find a whole, a meaning for a modern person. In some cases this may be due to lost stanzas, lost or distorted lines. My belief is, however, that this way of hinting at stories or themes, giving bits of images, and the extensive use of kenningar, comes from the fact that at the time people knew the stories and their symbolic imagery and could fill in the blanks for themselves. In the Christian world we need only mention the virgin, the cross, Judas, or water turned to wine, and the whole western world knows the rest of the story. Or in a more mundane context in this age of information we use concepts like input, the web and browser, and everyone knows the hidden meaning of those “kenningar” in that context. The author of *Völuspá*, whether a völva herself or not, assumes that the listener or reader knows what the völva is referring to when she gives hints, or uses metaphoric or symbolic imagery. She remembers the whole story. She refreshes our distorted memory by mentioning the tree, the first war in the world, the golden tablets hidden in the grass, Ginnungagap, Gullveig, Óðinn’s eye, Heimdallur’s ear, the betrayals, the wolf, the three *pursameyjar*³⁹ (giant maidens), etc. She may fear this knowledge will be lost with the changing times and she puts stepping-stones and images into this perfectly composed poem so that we may remember it too. Another possibility, not least at times of religious changes, is that the poem is meant to be a mystery to those outside the old faith, and therefore clad in disguise.

Parts of *Völuspá* may have existed earlier and in some other form, although the perfect harmony and poetic beauty of the poem as a whole suggests that it was originally composed very close to the way we find it today. Some words have of course been distorted and stanzas have shifted. In the manuscripts one can detect spelling mistakes

being corrected, and even whole words being replaced by others. Anyone who has written anything knows how misspelling can elude your sight, and this may have been true for the writers of old as well, so mistakes may have gone unnoticed and become a mystery or misunderstanding for coming generations.

I will not try to interpret or give an idea of *Völuspá* as a whole, other than necessary for the understanding of my thesis. For those who want to look at the rest I suggest that they read several different translations, since that gives the reader a possibility to choose her or his own understanding.

The oldest written versions of *Völuspá*, as mentioned, are from the late 13th and 14th century *Codex Regius* and *Hauksbók*, as well as the *Snorra Edda* manuscripts from the early 13th century. Those three versions are all different on various points. The *Snorra Edda* version is not put forth as a whole poem (from beginning to end), but stanzas are quoted as sources for the myths and ideas Snorri recites. The *Hauksbók* version is the youngest and *Codex Regius* is usually seen as more original. That's not necessarily so, however, since both are recorded centuries after the poem is created, both have dwelled in the memory of women and men, both are most likely recorded by men into these very manuscripts. A woman who immigrated from Island to Canada in the late 19th century taught her grandson the *Hauksbók* version, which had not been printed and she therefore had never read, but learned as a girl from her grandmothers (Haraldur Bessason, 1995, personal communication). There is a considerable difference between the two versions, mostly in the sequence of the stanzas, and some stanzas differ slightly or even significantly, others are only found in one or the other version. I will mainly refer to the *Codex Regius*, although I use the *Hauksbók* version and *Snorra Edda* as well to

mirror my ideas. Snorri says in his *Heimskringla* that he bases his writings mainly on the poems, since they are the most reliable sources. Myths and stories embedded in the poetic form and kenningar are less likely to change over time, than prose stories. They may be more difficult to understand, but solving that riddle is part of the magic.

The Sagas

Although the poems are to me the most magical sources, the sagas give another view, also of great importance. The myths are often found in both a saga and a poem, the poem probably being the source and/or inspiration for the saga-writer, as they were for Snorri.

The Icelandic Sagas can be divided into several categories. There are the *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of the Islanders), the history of settlement and the first few centuries of what we can call Icelandic history. The same characters often play the main roles in many different sagas, such as Auður djúpúðga, who is mentioned in *Landnáma* (Book of Settlements), *Laxdæla Saga* and *Eyrbyggja Saga*, and her story is also entwined into the *Vinland Sagas*, e.g. *Eiríks Saga*. These are probably all more or less based on historical incidents and people, although often dramatized and may not always be reliable historical evidence. Einar Pálsson⁴⁰ has given interesting indications that at least some of them are allegories, and he has written extensively about the allegory of *Njáls Saga* (1970 and 1994).

Another category are the *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* (The Old Norse Sagas), which take place before the Icelandic settlement and tell the stories of the ancestors of the settlers. Among those are the *Völsungasögur*, which are really not even Norse, since they

take place along the Rhine and elsewhere. *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar*, about the battles between the Danish king Ragnar and his enemies around the world, is linked to *Völsungasaga*, through Ragnar's wife Áslaug, who was the daughter of Sigurður Fáfnisbani and the valkyrja Brynhildur, two of the main characters of the *Völsungasögur*. The stories of the kings in *Heimskringla* and some of the *Flateyjarbók* sagas are entwined with Icelandic settlement. Some of them focus on the first Christian kings in Norway and their conflicts with the last pagan earls. In *Heimskringla* there are also the sagas of the old ancestors, called Æsir and Vanir, and their kings Njörður, Freyr and Óðinn, from which the two kin of the Skjöldungar and Ynglingar descended. Those kings of old and their wives, Gerður and Skaði⁴¹, were thought to be the ancestors of the Icelanders.

The Sagas are written in different times and are of very different styles. From some you get a feeling of historical facts or a true story, although disguised, others are likely allegories and still others mere fiction. All are nonetheless based on memory or ideas of the culture they take place in, and therefore can be valuable sources. *Örvar Odds Saga* and *Völsungasaga* are among the adventurous ones, whereas the *Vinland Sagas* and others in *Landnáma* (Book of Settlements) seem closer to historical facts. I do my best to give the reader a feeling for which category the sources I use belong.

I don't pretend to hold the sole truth, in the matter of interpreting what the myths, sagas and poems are telling us. I simply feel a craving need to translate them anew, explore them from my Icelandic woman's points of view. In the process of translating a text from one national language to another, Icelandic to English, I have realized that I also need a translation from man's to woman's language or rather from patriarchal to Vanir language, in order to unearth my own well of remembrance. So much has been

interpreted from a patriarchal point of view and much has, in my opinion, been misunderstood by both men and women, in the many different translations and interpretation on Islandic/Norse mythic history, that are around. On the other hand I believe we have to be careful in our innovative viewing and weaving, especially when new interpretations are created from old translations or without any direct knowledge of the original texts. I believe it is of utmost importance to always stay open to what the original texts inspire in me and mirror those inspirations and feelings in my dreams and visions, in other people's ideas and, from the creative space of my womb, weave them into a pattern.

The language of the Goddess – awakening the völva

Broader than reform, deeper than revolution, this benign [Aquarian] conspiracy for a new human agenda has triggered the most rapid cultural realignment in history. The great shuddering, irrevocable shift overtaking us is not a new political, religious or philosophical system. It is a new mind – the ascendance of a startling worldview that gathers into its framework breakthrough science and insights from earliest recorded thought.

Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, 1981, p.23

During the last century scientists and laypeople all over the world have been gathering lost information from thousands of years back, pieces from a puzzle, slowly creating a blurred image of a time long gone, yet still living in the blueprints of our memory.

On a bright sunny morning in November 1952 James Mellaart catches the first sight of a prehistoric settlement mound, rising 17 meters above the plain. He didn't know at the time, that in that mound was hidden the 9000 year old story of a civilization later to be referred to as the *Catal Hüyük* culture (Mellaart, 1965).

In 1963 my friend Karólína Stefánsdóttir, then a 14-year-old country girl in Iceland, was doing the dishes. She was listening to the Sunday news and heard of a discovery in Turkey that was to change her way of remembering forever. James Mellaart had found evidence of an ancient civilization of the Goddess, or as they said on the news in Iceland, remnants from a matriarchal culture had been unearthed. Evidence had been found that indicated an ancient culture where the female was revered as the divine. Somewhere in the memory of Karólína's womb this knowledge of the old way was buried and now came alive. She felt a renewed assurance for her sense of being the daughter of the *álfkona*⁴² (the fairy).

In that same year, 1963, Marija Gimbutas writes in her foreword to *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*:

We are in the period of a "gold rush" of discovery. The spontaneity of research and the increasing accumulation of archaeological material exist without being evaluated, analysis and synthesis always being behind the pace of excavation. [...] I release this work without the feeling that it is as I wished it to be.

In 1974, as I was graduating from high school, where I learned about human history as a story of His war for 5000 years, Gimbutas releases her *Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*, the gods being mentioned first because the other way around was still unheard of and unacceptable to the publishers. The importance of the discovery of *Catal Hüyük* has not yet reached the consciousness of the Western world. In 1982 the publishers *Thames and Hudson* have learned that Goddesses and Gods, in that order, is not against natural law and the new edition is published, filled with the same multitude of goddess images and a few of gods, exactly like it was in the former edition.

In 1994 Ralph Metzner publishes his *Well of Remembrance*, where he writes about the Vanir culture and their goddess Gullveig, among others. Reading his book in 1996 was a lot like looking into a mirror of thought. So much of what he was saying there reflected exactly my own thoughts, and no wonder. Before writing the book he had been collecting his memory with people like Marija Gimbutas, Carlos Castaneda, Riane Eisler and Snorri Sturluson, to name just four of the numerous scholars who have also influenced me. In addition he was born and raised in Northern Europe, of Celtic and Germanic ancestry, just like myself.

Archaeomythology – the gift of Maria Gimbutas

I use the archaeomythological theory of Marija Gimbutas as a loom, a guiding tool to weave my web. Gimbutas grew up in Lithuania, a country quite different from Island, but with some similarities. Lithuania converted to Christianity as late as the 15th CE century and although Christianity takes over in Island as early as the year 999 CE, the old religion lived on. Marija Gimbutas grew up among stories, poems and folk songs reflecting the old beliefs still living among the people. Lithuanians are strongly Catholic, and she grew up with her namesake Marija, mother of Jesus, one image of the Goddess. I will not dwell here on the background of Marija Gimbutas' findings and ideas. I will come back to the connection between today's reverence for the Goddess in modern Europe and Gimbutas' ideas. Joan Marler (1997), among others, has given detailed account of Gimbutas' work. I need, however, to mention the main ideas that caught my attention in relation to the Islandic myths and the saga re-membered and re-corded by the völvu in *Völuspá*.

After extensive and in-depth re-search and re-membrance, re-translating the symbols and images of Old Europe, into a new context, Gimbutas comes to the conclusion, that from as early as the 7th millennium BCE there existed throughout most of Europe a well developed, peaceful, artistic and matristic civilization. This culture was based on the reverence of the divine female, the Great Goddess in her many aspects, and Gimbutas has therefore termed it the Civilization of the Goddess. This Goddess is depicted in symbols and images found throughout Europe (in fact the whole world, but I will contain my references to Europe). One of the most common symbols was the **V**, or the pubic triangle, the vulva. There were also spirals, eyes, moon, star and water-symbols. Among the most common images are those of bird-like women and snakes as well as women with extraordinary fertility traits and stiff nudes. Male symbols are often a simple phallus, and the phallus is also found in combination with goddess/female traits, e.g. a phallic head and neck on a body with breasts and a huge vulva⁴³.

Remnants of grave goods and other archaeological evidence shows that the peace of Old Europe was broken, the culture disrupted and the religion confused, beginning around 5300 BCE, by invading pastoralists, moving in from the Northeast. They seem to have moved from the steppes of what we now know as Russia, first invading the area around the river Don, north of the Black Sea. From there they pushed, mingled with and dominated the existing cultures, to the south and west and finally, in the 3rd millennium BCE, up to the Northwestern part of the continent. Their vehicle and strongest 'weapon' was the horse, which had been eliminated in Western Europe during the Ice Age. Their symbols were of the sky and they revered the male divine, although female deities probably had secure places in their pantheon as well. We don't know what created this

difference in cultures living not so far apart, and who undoubtedly developed from the same roots. It may have been living conditions, it may have been other things unknown to us at this moment, but which may be revealed from their hiding places in the grass, as time goes by.

Gimbutas points out that although this new warrior culture dominated the old culture and the Goddess slowly changes form and role over time, the old faith was never totally erased. With the mixing of the old with the invading cultures, there was created a hybrid culture, with layers from the old shining through the new, although sometimes very obscure. She maintains that some of the old European myths and even the not so old folk beliefs reflect these layers, when looked into carefully and mirrored in the artifacts found buried in earth.

When I first became acquainted with Gimbutas' ideas of the culture and religion of the Goddess in Old Europe, the Kurgan invasions and the hybrid culture resulting from the battling and mixing of the old and invading peoples, I couldn't help thinking of the myths of the Æsir and Vanir. I couldn't help noticing the resemblance between the Vanir and the Old Europeans on the one hand, and the Æsir and Kurgans on the other. I am not the only one. Anyone getting a feeling for Gimbutas' ideas, while knowing the Islandic/Norse/Germanic myths, will have to link the two. It's obvious, and in her book, *The Living Goddesses*, edited by Miriam Robbins Dexter and published after Gimbutas' death, she makes that link clear. As I have mentioned, Ralph Metzner was among the first to publish this discovery in 1994. Marija Gimbutas, who died just before his book was out, writes the foreword and says:

[Metzner] gives an excellent overview of Indo-European diffusion from central Europe into northern Europe and the ensuing clash of cultures and ideologies. Many earlier studies described

the two groups of gods, the Vanir and Æsir, but neglected to explain that they represent totally disparate cultures and religions. – One matristic, peaceful and earthbound, the other patriarchal, warlike and dominated by male sky gods.

... We must personally journey to the Well of Remembrance, imbibe its ancient Earth wisdom, and make that wisdom visible in our world. Ralph Metzner's important work provides a stepping-stone on our path. (Metzner, 1994, xii)

Her work was certainly a stepping-stone for Metzner as well as myself. He acknowledges Marija's influence on his work:

Her profound work in archaeomythology of the cultures of Old Europe provided the impetus and the context for this fresh look at Nordic-Germanic mythology, and her concept of hybrid mythologies was the key interpretive lens that helped me understand many obscurities and puzzles. (1994, xiii)

I agree.

Dancing the dream of remembrance

Dream journal, July 1996

I remember the dance. It has to be danced naked, through the streets of the town. In endless circles, spinning naked, with nothing to hide behind. That is the only way to remember the ancestors.

There once was a man who tried to reach the ancestors through a book cover. It was a big book cover, folded endlessly, in circles. The ancestor was in a black rectangular picture in the upper right hand corner. The picture on the book cover, in subtle, golden brown colors, in the opposite, lower, left hand corner. Folding that cover was the magic. It was made of very thin paper, and like I said, folding it was the riddle. That man had known the secret of folding, so that one didn't notice the folds between the book cover outside and the ancestor, who after the folding was residing in the upper, left hand corner, on the inside. In that way, they say, he was able to reach the ancestors.

I saw the cover unfolded, the sheer thin paper, thinner than anything you can imagine. I saw the black ancestor in one corner and the golden brown picture in the other. I even saw the traces of the folds and how he folded it endlessly, in circles, until it looked like any other book cover, except for the ancestor on the inside.

But that is all an illusion. I know that the folding of the cover is important, but I have been told, that you will never really remember the ancestors if you don't dance. If you don't dance, naked, twirling through the streets of the town.

Remembering, I dance. My slender, golden brown body naked; my long, dark hair flowing, as I dance, spinning in circles, endlessly, through the streets of the town.

Dreams have always been my most powerful source of knowledge. It is in accordance with my ancestry, probably the ancestry of us all. We can read books and unfold manuscripts, but in addition to that we must dance the dream dance, spinning, without logic, without our modern culture's "clothes", naked. The sagas and myths are full of dream lore. Not only humans, but also the *goð* themselves dream, and their dreams are of utmost importance. In the Edda-poem *Baldurs draumar*, Óðinn travels to the Underworld to seek the wisdom of a *völva*, after having had disturbing dreams. The *völva* resides in the realm of the subconscious, and dreams are among her most important material in her *spá*.

One of the most impressive dream stories of old is from *Ólafs Saga Tryggvasonar* in *Flateyjarbók*.

Þyri Haraldsdóttir was the daughter of an earl in Holtsetaland. The earl was wise, but his daughter's wisdom and knowledge on dreams was such that he sought counsel from her in every matter. Gormur, king of Denmark, wants to marry this woman, and asks her father for her hand. The Earl says that she should decide for herself, "since she is much wiser than I am". Þyri's answer is that king Gormur should return to his home, and build a house, big enough to sleep in,

where no house has stood before. There he should sleep alone for three nights and pay attention to his dreams. Then he was to send a messenger to her, telling her the dreams. “If you don’t dream, don’t bother to call on me again” she said. Gormur was fortunate enough to remember his dreams, and Pyri became queen of Denmark, known to be the wisest woman there ever. Her interpretation of his dreams was the basis for their wise and harmonious reign.

A rich heritage is found in Islandic folklore. Many have recorded the legends through the ages; one of them was my great grandfather, Oddur Björnsson. His work *Þjóðtrú og þjóðsagnir* (Folk Belief and Folklore, 1908/1977) is dear to me not only because the stories were collected and published by my ancestor, but because of his emphasis on and insight into dreams and vision. In the foreword, another male relative, Jónas Jónasson, writes:

There are many things in people’s experience, which they have not understood, and therefore expressed in various ways. First we shall mention the dreams, with all the variations, which come forth in this incomprehensible and instinctively unconscious life and work during our sleep; it takes form as both *berdreymi* (dreams of the future), *draumspá* (dream visions) and innumerable ways which affect our daily lives.

This work is not really about dreams; they are my inspiration and source for refreshing my memory, for re-translating my saga, and they are essential to me in balancing the often blinding logic. In *The Wisdom of the Heart* (1990), Karen Signell point out how challenging it can be for women to find true meaning in the myths we grew up with. The myth’s male protagonists are “preoccupied with war, rationality, power over death and the subordination of women” (p.15). It is therefore such a joy and relief when with the help of our own dreams, reflected in the knowledge gathered by today’s Jungians and other dream specialists we can remember and recollect reflections of ancient images

and feminine knowledge with all its paradox and mystery, its *auður*. Betty DeShong Meador's (2000) work on the priestess Enheduanna and her goddess Inanna, is based on a dream, and dreams also influenced Ralph Metzner's *Well of Remembrance* (1994).

During the long process of this writing, and before, I have had many dreams that opened blockages and revealed to me the hidden messages of the myths and symbols, the golden tablets. Some of them are so powerful and clear or demanding that I include them in the work, others remain unmentioned although they may sometimes be the very seeds for my thoughts. This whole process of remembering, my introduction to my Old European roots, began, or rather became conscious years ago, through the dream of *Auður* and Freyja, recited in the Prologue above. It was a so-called big dream, my personal mythology revealed so beautifully. The dream was, is and will be my own *völuspá*, a gift from the depths of what I know as 'my memory', of the saga of what I call 'my life' and what we call 'our history', through what we call 'time'. It is a saga of *örlög*, what is and will be my *auður*. According to Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) *auður* is related to the Lithuanian *áudziu* or *áusti* (to weave), and the dream reveals in an emotional, historical, etymological and psychological manner, the very paradoxical web of life.

The immediate result upon my awakening from this dream, was that I started re-reading the *Eddas*, a reading that brought me to where I am now, reading and writing about the unlimited *auður* of the past. Freyja was re-emerging in my search for an image of the Goddess, but that search had been more like fumbling. I had never before sat down with *Snorra Edda* and read it from word to word. When I did, it felt like magic. I had from early childhood been interested in my ancestress *Auður djúpúðga*, and at the time of the dream I had for some years been considering writing a book about her. My first

reaction to the name Auður was therefore that it had to do with her story, - and it may have -, but it felt strange that it should be linked to a male giant in the dream, since I had no knowledge of the word used as a man's name. As I read *Gylfaginning* the ice of oblivion melted and another Auður appeared from the great ocean and into my full consciousness.

Nörfi eða Narfi hét jötunn er byggði í Jötunheimum. Hann átti dóttur er Nótt hét. Hún var svört og dökk sem hún átti ætt til. Hún var gift þeim manni er Naglfari hét. Þeirra sonur hét Auður. (Snorra Edda, Gylfaginning, ch. 10)

Nörfi or Narfi⁴⁴ was the name of a giant, who lived in Jötunheimar. He had a daughter named Nótt (Night). She was black and dark as her kin. She was given to the man called Naglfari⁴⁵. Their son was Auður.

It feels so magical, when memory is re-collected like that. Never had I heard of this giant, or so I thought, never had I heard of the myth of Nótt and her three children, begotten with three men. There was the son Auður begotten with Narfi. Then there was the daughter *Jörð* (Earth), begotten with *Annar* (Another or Second), but Annar is also another name for Auður⁴⁶, which could suggest that Auður/Annar was Nótt's son/lover. The third was *Dagur* (Day), a son begotten with *Dellingur* (Shining), who could be the Sun.

As I continued my dreaming, the giant Auður, son of Nótt, kept shaking my earth. As I looked into the word auður, and found its feminine roots, another well of remembrance was opened. I felt I had finally found a word that expressed the essence of the divine, as I experience her/him. Part of what the dream was telling me was that what is masculine and what is feminine is forever interchangeable and interchanging, but the essence of auður shines through. If we look into the well of remembrance, deeply enough,

we might find in all the myths and all its characters, this auður, this web of wealth, so wondrous but sometimes so well concealed in the clay.

Dreaming is descending into the layers of consciousness that reach beyond cultural prejudice, beyond or beneath the mists of forgetfulness, into the essence. In *Völuspá* the völva ascends to refresh Óðinn's memory, and when she's done she descends anew. The last words of the poem are “*nú mun hún sökkva*” (now she shall descend). Freyja descends to the giantess Hyndla, when searching for her lover's roots. One of the less known and obscure myths or mythical images from the poems and *Snorra Edda*, is the one about Óðinn and Saga. They are said to sit each day on Sökkvabekkur, (Descent bench), under the cool waves, drinking from golden bowls, feeling good (*Grímnismál*, st. 7). Saga's name doesn't need translation in this context, and in the following I will sit with her, in Óðinn's place, drinking and descending in dreaming conversation.

To remember who Vanadís, völva and valkyrja really are, to remember who I really am, I will descend into the well of remembrance, drinking and dreaming.

Part two

2. The Nornir

The V and the sacred III

The amazing repetition of symbolic associations through time and in all of Europe, on pottery, figurines, and other cult objects has convinced me that they are more than “geometric motifs”; they must belong to an alphabet of the metaphysical. Further search for the links between these symbols and the image of a deity revealed that the V and chevron (double of triple V) are the Bird Goddess’s insignia, and that other symbols of this family are associated with her mysterious source of life, the life waters, and with her function as Life Giver.

The Bird Goddess as a whole has many functions, and some of her symbols – such as tri-line, net, triangle and snake – are therefore transfunctional. They are associated with life creation and regeneration. (Gimbutas, 1989, p. 1)

As I drink from the well of remembrance, dreaming and collecting the constantly re-emerging images of the divine female in the myths and sagas, rooted in ancient cultures and religions, I make my stop by the golden letter **V** and the sacred three. The **V** or the chevron (multiple **V**’s) is one of the core symbols of Old Europe (Gimbutas,) and can in fact be traced as a written symbol all the way back to the Lower Paleolithic Acheulian Age, ca. 300.000 years ago (see Gimbutas, 1989, 1991, and 2001, p. 43, fig.36). It is obviously related to the sacred yoni triangle and the number three, although the third line in the **V** is open. To me the **V** symbolizes the vulva/völva, woman of wisdom. It resembles the beak and wings of the Bird Goddess, and is connected to the Vanadís, Goddess of the Vanir, whose bird is the *valur*⁴⁷ (falcon). The **V** also brings to mind the valkyrja and the three *Skapanornir*⁴⁸: Urður, Verðandi and Skuld, emerging from the great womb, the well, weaving their web and carving the örlög of earth’s children into their pieces of wood. The Skapanornir are connected to the valkyrja, since

she is the chooser of the slain, a woman of örlög. From Urðarbrunnur (The Well of Urður), - from which the nornir emerged at time's beginning, and where they dwell -, there were born two swans, *álfir*⁴⁹ (*Snorra Edda, Gylfaginning*, ch.15 and 16). As we shall see, the valkyrja's bird form is often a swan and they appear in groups of three, six, nine, 12 or 21.

The sacred III, clearly a central element in Old European art and symbolism, as well as in the myths from Inanna's descent to Christ's resurrection, and divine images from the triple goddess to the church's trinity, is very much alive in the Islandic myths, *Völuspá* as elsewhere. The goddess Gullveig⁵⁰ is burned three times, and three times she is born anew. The triple three, nine, and other multiplications of three also played a central role in the old customs. In the opening stanza of *Völuspá* there is a reference to Heimdallur's kin or children, the human race or races, whom this god begat with three women of different origin and status and whose saga is told in another poem, *Rígsþula*⁵¹. The eldest of the three is Edda (Great-grandmother), then there is Amma (Grandmother) and last Móðir (Mother). In the second stanza of *Völuspá* the völva reveals her own origin, the memory of nine worlds and nine great women, elsewhere identified as that same Heimdallur's nine mothers, at the time when the tree of life, Yggdrasill, was but a bud beneath the earth.

Unz þrjár kvámu –‘till three came’

Remembering is not an easy task. Our remembrance gets distorted with time, and so there are many different versions of the great saga of our origin and existence. In *Völuspá* the völva recites her earliest memory:

<i>Ár var alda</i>	In earliest times
<i>það er ekki var</i>	was an emptiness
<i>var-a sandur né sær</i>	was no sand, no sea
<i>né svalar unnir</i>	nor soothing waves
<i>Jörð fannsk æva</i>	the earth unborn
<i>né upphiminn,</i>	and heaven none
<i>gap var ginnunga</i>	the great void waiting
<i>en gras hvergi.</i>	grass grew nowhere.

Völuspá, st. 3

In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri tells us what then happened.

When the great ice and the great fire merged in the great void of Ginnungagap⁵², the giant Ymir⁵³ was born from the first drops of melted rime. When he/she slept so close to the fire, the sweat poured and from that sweat a man and a woman were born. Ymir's two feet begat a son with one another. They were the first Hrímpursar⁵⁴, ancestors of the jötnar.

When the second drop fell, a cow was born. Her name was Auðumla⁵⁵ and she fed Ymir with her milk. She licked the salt from the rime stones, and from that a man was born in three days. His name was Búri⁵⁶, and he was beautiful and potent. His son by an unknown mother was Borr and he had three sons with Bestla, daughter of a Hrímpurs. Their names were Óðinn, Vili⁵⁷ and Vé⁵⁸. The brothers killed Ymir, and in her/his blood they drowned all of the kin of Hrímpursar except one family. From the body of Ymir they created earth and heaven. Between heaven and earth they placed four dwarfs, Austri, Vestri, Norðri and Suðri, the four directions, to hold up the four corners of heaven.

Ymir's fate reminds us of the Sumerian Tiamat, who created the first humans and was then killed by her grandson Marduk. The old and original is sacrificed and the giant race continues to be a threat to the younger races of Æsir and even the Vanir. Of that same race of giants are many of the most powerful women, among them the weavers,

spinners or scorers of time and destiny, the whisperers of secrets, the Skapanornir. Their names are Urður (she who is or has become), Verðandi (she who is becoming) and Skuld (debt or obligation). They play an important part in *Völuspá*, obviously, since they destine, carve and weave what the völva remembers and sees. As if to help us to step out of linear thinking, she entwines the threads of their story into the story-web, which they themselves are weaving. The Skapanornir were born or arose from the great well or womb, Urðarbrunnur, at the dawn of time, and they are the ones who guard the well. At the beginning there was no time. The völva remembers the timeless Ginnungagap, Ymir and Auðumla. She remembers a confused universe, where stars and the sun do not know their place, moon doesn't know her power. Then she remembers the naming of stars and sun and moon. Again the three. It has been a golden age of innocence, when the women make their entrance, with their conscious connection between the cycles of the moon and their own. Snorri refers to that point in time or stage in the evolution of consciousness, by saying:

“Og er sú öld kölluð gullöld, áður en spilltist af tilkvámu kvinnanna. Þær komu úr Jötunheimum”
(*Snorra Edda, Gylfaginning*, ch. 14)

And that age is called the golden age, before it got spoiled by the arrival of the women. They came from Jötunheimar (the world of giants).

With the appearance of the three Skapanornir, Snorri says that the golden innocence was spoiled, but in fact there is no such indication. The völva simply states the fact that the women arrived to this golden world, from another world, Jötunheimar.

Tefldu í túni
teitir váru
var þeim vettergis
vant úr gulli
unz þríár kvámu
þursameyjar
ámáttkar mjök
úr Jötunheimum

Völuspá st. 8

On peaceful plains
they played with tablets
games of gods
gold was plenty
till three came
towering maidens
mighty women
from the mountains.

After this stanza, there comes the story of how the dwarfs were first created and then a long list of their names, put into nine stanzas⁵⁹. It seems that the dwarfs were created before humans. They came alive in the body of Ymir, i.e. the earth (*Snorra Edda, Gylfaginning*, ch.14) and then the dwarfs started molding humans from this same earth (*Völuspá*, st. 10). Those seem to have been without real life. When we get to the next stanza we have different versions in the *Codex Regius* and *Hauksbók* manuscripts, and still another in the printed version of the text, which the scholars of our time have taken the liberty to “correct”.

Unz þrír komu
úr því liði
öflgir og ástkir
Æsir að húsi,
fundu á landi
lítt megandi
Ask og Emblu
örlöglausa.

Völuspá, st. 17

Corrected

Till three came
from that team
strong and loving
Æsir to a house,
saw on the shore
short of life force
Askur and Embla
lacking örlög.

Unz þríár komu
úr því liði þussa meyjar
ástkir og öflgir
Æsir að húsi,
fundu á landi
lítt megandi
Ask og Emblu
örlöglausa.

Völuspá,

Hauksbók

Original

Till three came
from the group of
giant maidens
adoring and able
Æsir to a house,
saw on the shore
short of life force
Askur and Embla
lacking örlög.

This is the story of the creation of the first people, Askur⁶⁰ and Embla⁶¹, two pieces of wood found on the shore, without life force and without *örlög* – ‘fate’. Those three (*þrír* or *þrjár*), who then arrived, gave life and *örlög* to the logs. In every printed edition of the poem, those three are said to be *þrír* (three, masculine) male gods. However, when looked at closer we find that in both manuscripts, *Codex Regius* and *Hauksbók*, those three are said to be *þrjár* (three, feminine), probably the same *þrjár* as in the preceding and the following (see below) stanza, the þursameyjar or nornir. In the *Hauksbók* manuscript it even says, “*unz þrjár komu úr því liði, þussa meyjar*” (‘till three came from the group of giant maidens’ or ‘till three came from that group, giant maidens’). Scholars like Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962) and Sigurður Nordal (1923) find the feminine reference to the creators, to be so unacceptable, that they immediately dismiss it as an error in both manuscripts. I admit that the stanza may seem strange this way, but in these old poems sentences are often broken and continued some lines later.

There is some confusion between the *Æsir* and the nornir, since both are mentioned in the same context, but that doesn’t mean that we automatically dismiss the nornir and keep the *Æsir*. The nornir are mentioned in the preceding stanza, the *Æsir* again in the following one:

<i>Önd þau né áttu</i>	They had no breath
<i>óð þau né höfðu</i>	they had no life force
<i>lá né læti</i>	no blood no temper
<i>né litu góða;</i>	nor good looks;
<i>önd gaf Óðinn,</i>	Óðinn gave breath,
<i>óð gaf Hænir,</i>	Hænir gave life force,
<i>lá gaf Lóðurr</i>	Lóðurr gave blood
<i>og litu góða.</i>	and good looks.

Völuspá, st.18

If we choose to depend on the manuscripts, instead of the patriarchal scholars, with their andocentric bias, we can have a brand new version - or ancient rather - of the story of the first humans, Askur and Embla. The ones, the three, who destine lives, they are also the ones who give örlög to the first humans. The Æsir may create life force, give breath and blood and feelings, but the nornir give örlög to those before being *örlöglaus* (without fate).

Óðinn and his brothers are giant lads, since their mother was of the giant race. Alone they can play and build tools, even golden tools, but they cannot create life. That is only possible after the arrival of the mighty women from the mountains of Jötunheimar. The three giant nornir are the ones who water the Great Tree of Life. It so happens that the tree and the man have the same name, Askur, and the life of both may depend on their nurturance.

*Ask veit ek standa
heitir Yggdrasill
hár baðmur, ausinn
hvíta auri
þaðan koma döggar
þærs í dala falla
stendr æ yfir grænn
Urðarbrunni*

I know the ash
named Yggdrasill
wondrous tree watered
in white flowing earth;
thence falls the dew
in dawning valleys
grows ever green
guarding Urðarbrunnur.

*Þaðan komu meyjar
margs vitandi
þrjár úr þeim sæ
er und þolli stendr
Urð hétu eina
aðra Verðandi
-skáru á skíði -
Skuld hina þriðju.*

Thence came maidens
much knowing,
three from the sea
surrounding the tree;
One they named Urður
another Verðandi
- scored in wood -
Skuld the third.

Þær lög lögðu

þær líf kuru

alda börnum

örlög seggja.

Völuspá, st. 19 and 20

They laid down laws

lives they destined,

chose all children's

chance of fate.

One bright Icelandic summer night I had been, - as so often before -, contemplating the above stanzas and the nature of the *nornir*. The next morning I woke up from a dream, which I couldn't remember, but I knew deep in my womb what the words of the *völva* were telling me. I "knew" that the three giant maidens were the three phases of the moon. *Urður* is the full moon, the Moon Goddess showing herself in her fullness, she who has become, the present. *Verðandi* is the waxing moon, she who is becoming, the becoming present. *Skuld* is the waning moon, the one who has been, who cuts and is cut, debt, karma⁶². The runes of old were scored (carved) in stone or wood. The words '*skáru á skíði*', which literally mean 'scored in wood' have most often been interpreted as the *nornir* carving the *örlög* of all beings on pieces of wood (*skíði*)⁶³. That morning, however, I saw it from another point of view as well. The *nornir* cut or carve our destiny, but we score them into wood, and thus affect our destiny. The *nornir* were named by humans, we gave them the names: *Urður*, *Verðandi* and *Skuld*, and by naming them, carving in wood what they stand for, the track of time, *örlög* were created for children of all times.

If we see this story as the dawning of consciousness, we can see that the three giant maidens are the three phases in each moon-cycle. It was the naming of time and the marking of full or new moons on wood, bone or clay that disturbed the golden age of innocence. It was this discovery, which made humans aware of time and *örlög* (literal translation is 'original law'). It was the awareness of the moon and her cycles, in perfect

alignment with women's cycles, which destined the fate of humans as such. Man and woman. We can still see this marking of time in the figure of the Goddess of Laussell, with her moon-shaped horn in one hand, resting the other on her pregnant belly. The thirteen marks on the horn represent the thirteen lunar months – in the sky and in woman – of one solar year. The numerous artifacts from Old Europe where the people have carved 3, 9 or 13 lines in wood, clay or bone, reflect this (Gimbutas, 1989). Seeing the connection between woman time, moon time and sun time must have been a disturbing as well as enlightening discovery. Judy Grahn calls this a *metaform* “an act or form of instruction that makes a connection between menstruation and a mental principle” (1993, p. 20).

The nornir dwell in and by the well. With its water and white *aurr* (mud), they feed the tree, every day, so that life may go on. From the tree the dew falls into the valleys flowing into the well again. In another saga, better known to us, there was a woman, a man and a tree. That woman disturbed the golden innocence too, like her giant sisters.

In the following chapters I will trace the threads through the layers of time in myths of Vanadís, völva and valkyrja. The threads become intermingled or even the same, since the three V's all represent aspects of the divine being, we call Goddess. Therefore there will be repetitions, but then again repetitions as well as contradictions characterized the old Islandic myths and poems.

3. Remembering Vanadís

Freyja – the first

Freyja á mörg nöfn, en sú er sök til þess, at hon gaf sér ýmis heiti, er hon fór með ókunnum þjóðum að leita Óðs. Hon heitir Mardöll ok Hörn, Gefn, Sýr. Freyja átti Brisingamen. Hon er ok kölluð Vanadís.” (Snorra Edda, Gylfaginning, ch. 35)

Freyja has many names, and the reason is that she referred to herself in different ways, when she traveled among foreign peoples, looking for [her husband] Óður. She is called *Mardöll* – ‘Shining Sea’ and *Hörn* – ‘flax’, *Gefn* – ‘Giving One’ and *Sýr* – ‘Sow’. Freyja owns *Brisingamen*. She is also called Vanadís.

Vanadís is the *dís* of the Vanir. She is also called *Vana goð* and *Vanabrúður* (*Snorra Edda, Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 28 and 44). She is their priestess or holy bride, when they are referred to as a tribe of this world, she is a goddess when they are mentioned as beings of another realm. The Vanir are goð of *ár og friður* (prosperity and peace); goð of love, sexuality, wealth and the womanly wisdom called *seiður*. They are goð of the sea and earth, although their realm surely touches the sky, the wind and rain, the moon and the stars and whereas the sun obtained a more central place in the Indo-European culture, these old cultures did not neglect to deify the sun⁶⁴.

The Vanadís is best known to us as Freyja, but she has many names and titles, as Snorri mentions, and appears in various forms. Freyja may be derived from the root **fraujan-* meaning ‘lord’ or ‘lady’, related to Old Indian *pravaná* (leaning forward), Old Slavic *pruvu* (the first) and Greek *pró* (early). In Icelandic we find other words of the same root, such as the prefix *for-* meaning ‘pre-’ (as in pre-fix), and *frum-* meaning ‘first’ or ‘original’, and *fram* (forward) (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). If this is so, Freyja means simply ‘the first one’ or ‘the Goddess’.

Freyja, like Vanadís, is really not a name, but a title comparable to ‘Lady’. We see the same in the way we address Our Lady Mary, Notre Dame, Vor Frue and the Sumerian goddesses like Nin-gal, whose name means ‘Great Lady’, the ‘*Nin*’ being the lady’s title. Inanna’s grandmother was Ninlil and her grandfather Enlil ‘lord and lady *Lil* (air)’ (Meador, 2000). This title, Freyja, has survived as her most common name, and her brother/lover, referred to in *Heimskringla* as Yngvi-Freyr (Lord Yngvi) or Ingunnarfreyr (Lord of Ingunn)⁶⁵, is best known to us as Freyr.

Freyja is the fertile sow, Sýr; she is the growth of earth, the flax, Hörn; she is the giver, Gefn; and she is the shining sea, goddess of the ocean, Mardöll. She can be referred to as the owner of Brisingamen (fire necklace), the owner of valfallur (the slain), of her hall Sessrúmnir (Many Seats Hall) and *fressar* (the he-cats). She can be referred to as the mother of Hnoss, or Óðs mæð (maiden of Óður), sister of Freyr, daughter of Njörður, *hið grátfagra goð* (the fair-tear goddess) or *ásta guð* (love goddess). In addition to this Snorri reminds us that all the Ásynjur (goddesses) can be referred to by each other’s names (*Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 28). Therefore Freyja could be called Frigg, Sága, Eir, Gefjun, Fulla, Sjöfn, Lofn, Vár, Vör, Sýn, Hlín, Snotra, Gná, Sól, Bil, Jörð and Rindur (Gylfaginning, 35 and 36) as well as Sif and Iðunn⁶⁶ (*Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 29 and 30). She could be called Gerður or Skaði. In the poems and myths she is also Menglöð, Göndul and she may be Gullveig. These names and titles reflect partly her role as a Great Goddess; partly they reflect her long and complex, although obscure saga as Vanadís and Ásynja, valkyrja and völva.

Vanir and Æsir

According to Snorri (*Ynglingasaga*, ch. 1) there was an area in the north of the *heimskringla* (world disc), north of the Black Sea, called the Great or the Cold Svíþjóð/Sweden. Svíþjóð could mean 'the tribe of the sow'⁶⁷, but in Sweden there were at the time of our stories, many nations living, with many different tongues. There were giants and dwarfs, and people of all colors, as well as all kinds of animals, and even dragons. To the east of Svíþjóð there is a river called Tanaís, now known as Don. This river runs into the Black Sea. In ancient times it was called Vanakvísl (the Vanir delta), and on its west banks lived the people called Vanir. Their name has been connected to the Latin *venus* (love), and their goddess Venus, the rune *wunjo* (joy), and the Icelandic words *vina/vinur* (friend), *vin* (oasis), *una* (enjoy) and *unna* (to love). Another explanation may be that the word is related to *vána* (wood or grove)(Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). Metzner (1994, p. 151) also mentions the possible relation to the Latin *vannus* (winnowing-van). I find the relation to Venus, *vinur/vina/vin* and *wunjo*, i.e. the connection to love, friendship and joy, so illustrative of their culture that I don't need to look further.

The Vanir culture was prosperous. They were wealthy and their lands fertile. Among them there was Njörður *hinn auðgi* (the rich) and his two children, Freyja and Freyr. Their mother was the sister of Njörður, but Snorri never mentions her name. The Roman writer Tacitus talks about the tribes of Great Svíþjóð, Svíónés in his book *Germania* (98 CE). His account is much younger than the time we are trying to remember, but it is still much older than Snorri's. Tacitus mentions one Nerthus, a goddess worshipped all over Germania. It seems feasible to look at the possibility that Nerthus was a remnant of the Vanir culture. The etymological connection between

Njörður and Nerthus is clear (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989; Simek, 1993). The meaning of their names is something like 'the strong one', 'the powerful one' or 'the nurturing one', related to Old Irish *nert* (power) as well as the Icelandic *næra* (to nurture). Njörður belongs to a group of words that have an *-ur* ending, and can be found both as feminine and masculine nouns and names. Auður is another such noun/name. According to Simek and Ásgeir B. Magnússon, the feminine is the more original in these cases. We could therefore draw the conclusion that Njörður was originally Freyja's mother, not her father, or that she/he belongs to the group of deities, which were originally androgynous, both male and female. The Sumerian Enlil and Ninlil may have been such a pair, and our own Ymir and Auðumla were androgynous, as we have seen. Freyja and Freyr may be a later version of that same phenomenon⁶⁸.

The Vanir were a peaceful nation. Their main attributes that remain in the literature, are those of *ár og friður* (good harvest and peace). As late as the dawn of Christianity in Norway, in an age of constant warfare, the Viking Age, their goð were called upon to achieve this longed for *friður* (peace). Friður in Old Icelandic has a deeper meaning than simply the antonym to war. *Friður* also meant *vinátta* (friendship) and *ást* (love) and is related to *fríður* (masculine) and *fríð* (feminine) (beautiful, kind), *frilla* (feminine) (mistress, concubine), *fríðill* (masculine)(lover), and e.g. Gothic *frijon* (to love) and Old Indian *priyá* (wife, lover). The English 'free' is of this same family of words, as well as Frigg's name (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). Vanir and friður are thus two terms portraying the same attributes. *Ár* means 'year' and is from the IE roots **ie* and **iō* (to walk) and refers to the "walking" or journey of the moon (and maybe the sun) in one year. It also means 'fertility' and 'good harvest', as in Old Slavic *jara* (spring)

(Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989), and the 13th rune *jera, ár* (Blum, 1982). The title of the pagan chiefs *jarl* (earl), is also of this same root.

As the name Svíþjóð may well suggest, the pig or the sow was held in high regard among the Vanir. They may also, as Snorri (*Ynglingasaga*, ch.1) and Tacitus (*Germania*) suggest, have been only one of many tribes living in Svíþjóð, who all had this love for the sow in common. Freyja, the Vanadís, was called Sýr. She was The Great Sow. The boar was her brother Freyr's sacred animal, but he is not referred to as a boar, himself. Freyja is not defined in the literature as queen or stately leader, but as high priestess and goddess, although her Lady title may suggest that she was also queen, if such a phenomenon existed among the Vanir.

East of the river Tanaís or Don was Asia or Ásaheimur and there lived the Æsir. Their main city was Ásgarður. According to Snorri, the name of their tribe derives from their place of origin, Asia, but modern scholars, such as Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) and Simek (1993) have other explanations. Ásgeir suggests that Ás (plural Æsir) is related to Old Indian *ásu-* meaning 'life force' or 'world' and Old Persian *ahura* (< *nsura-), meaning (a special) 'god'. He does not, however, relate that to Asia. Simek claims that Ás (Æsir) is an old word for goð, coming from the root *ans-, and he mentions the goddess Vih-ansa, in that respect. He also refers to a rune engraving in Denmark from 200 CE. There it says: "*a(n)sau wíja*" (I dedicate to the Æsir (or goð)). This could relate the Sumerian god An to the Icelandic Ás. Simek also mentions the possible relation to Icelandic *ás* meaning 'hub' (of a wheel), 'pole' or 'stake'. That could easily be seen as a connection between the Æsir, the nornir and the Tree of Life. My guess is that Asia

derives from *ás*, *ásu*, *ans-* and *ahura*, meaning the same as *Ásgarður* and *Ásaheimur*, ‘the garden (or world) of the goð’, the center of the world.

The *Æsir* culture was quite different from that of the *Vanir*. The *Æsir* were warriors, and the animal they held in greatest regard was not the pig, but the horse. Their leaders were men. Óðinn was the main chief, a great warrior and shaman, and with him ruled twelve high priests called *díar* or *drottnar*. They were to be held in high regard, served and obeyed by all. Óðinn was married to Frigg and he had two brothers, Vili and Vé, who at one time, when Óðinn was away, took over the ruling of *Ásgarður* and both married Frigg for a while (*Ynglingasaga* ch.1-3). Óðinn traveled all over the world and won all his battles, so that he was a ruler in many lands. The *Vanir* were people of peace, but the day came when Óðinn also attacked them (*Ynglingasaga*, ch. 4).

In *Edda* (*Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 5) Snorri tells us that both *Æsir* and *Vanir* continued the fighting for a long time creating a lot of damage on each other’s land. After some time of constant warfare they all got tired of fighting and did a ritual of peace. Sitting around a cauldron, the representatives of both tribes spit into the cauldron and from this drink of reconciliation there was born a being, wiser than any being ever known. This being’s name was Kvasir⁶⁹. The story of reconciliation is to me beautifully erotic, and has a clear “*Vanir* taste” to it. The cauldron is an unambiguous womb symbol, and the *Æsir* and *Vanir* mixing their bodily juices in the cauldron to create a being, is a wonderful description of the creation of a balanced hybrid culture. But the symbol of the balance didn’t live long. Kvasir was later killed by two dwarfs and his blood poured into two cauldrons and a kettle. From the honey-mixed blood in the kettle was created the mead of inspiration and poetry, which Óðinn later stole from the giantess Gunnlöð, but

that's another story. In the literature Kvasir is referred to as belonging to both of his parental roots since he is in *Gylfaginning* (ch. 50) called the wisest among the Æsir, whereas *Ynglingasaga* (ch. 4) describes him as the most sagacious of the Vanir (see below).

According to *Heimskringla (Ynglingasaga)*, after the war had gone on for a long time and both parties had destroyed much of each other's land, the Æsir and Vanir decided to make peace and exchange hostages. The Vanir gave away their finest men, the rich Njörður and his son Freyr, as well as the wise Kvasir, whereas the Æsir tried tricks and sent the handsome but not so gifted Hænir along with the very wise Mímir, giant of memory. When the Vanir discovered that when alone, Hænir wasn't as bright as he seemed when he has Mímir by his side, they cut off the head of Mímir and returned it to the Æsir. Óðinn anointed Mímir's head with herbs and keeps it alive, for counsel (*Ynglingasaga*, ch. 4).

The magic of myth and saga

History evolves to myth and myths are the dreams of nations, they are neither logical nor straightforward. If we have a need to view history in a chronological order we have a problem when it comes to myths, not least to mythical poems. Hilda Ellis Davidson has pointed out that:

If in our strong desire for the rational we try to create a logical scheme out of such scattered ideas and images, we are doing violence to the tradition of the poets and seers who left us clues as to the nature of the Other World. (1988, pp. 72-73)

My belief however, is that the poets and seers did not only leave us clues to an Other World, but to this world as well, creating a magical connection between the two. After the reconciliation we hear little of the Vanir as a tribe separate from the Æsir. Freyja joins her brother, Freyr and their father Njörður, to live with the Æsir. They are still referred to as Vanir, but they become part of the culture of the Æsir, although they keep the characteristics of their peaceful, earth-culture, and are able to survive inside or beside the very different warrior sky-god culture of the Æsir.

After the peace pact between Vanir and Æsir, Óðinn traveled to the north, and with his sons as well as Njörður and Freyr, took over the rule in Svíþjóð and appointed his men as chiefs or kings in those lands of the north. He set new laws for those lands, the same as they had in Ásgarður. All dead men should be burned with their possessions, which they would take with them to Valhöll, the hall of the dead. The ash and possessions of noble men should be buried in *haugar*⁷⁰, whereas in memory of those who had some less worldly power, but were still worth remembering, a *bautasteinn* (standing stone) was erected. In the states of the now hybrid nations of Æsir and Vanir, there were held three special *blót* (feasts, sacrifices), one at fall for a prosperous year, one at midwinter for the growth of the earth and the third during summer, for victory.

All the *díar* were married to women of the north. Freyr to Gerður, and the Nordic Skaði was first married to Njörður and later to Óðinn, with whom she had many sons. Óðinn, Njörður and Freyr all died in old age and became deities. When they were all dead, Freyja continued the sacrifices, as she was the only one among the *goð* still living, and she became the most renowned (*Ynglingasaga*, ch. 8-10).

This is the *Heimskringla* version of the Æsir and their assimilation with the Vanir. Snorri gives another version in the Prologue of *Edda*. According to that saga, Óðinn lived in Troy (Anatolia) and was the descendant of King Priam's daughter Tróan and her husband Mennón. Tróan and Mennón's son was Þór or Trór⁷¹ and his wife was Síbil, whom we (Islanders) call Sif. She was a spákona, a sibyl. Þór found her on his travels in the North of the world, and no one knows her kin. She was the most beautiful woman of all, but then again he was quite a handsome guy too, as well as a hero. Þór had been raised in Þrakía, or Thrace, and became the strongest man of all. He traveled across the world, explored all continents and killed, all by himself, berserks and giants, dragons and beasts. The Trojan Þór was an ancestor of Óðinn. In *Gylfaginning* (ch. 9) Snorri informs us that Troy and Ásgarður are one and the same. Óðinn, father of Þór with Jörð, - and son of the ancient ones, Borr and Bestla -, fuses with Óðinn, descendant of Þór, - Mennon and Tróan's Thracian son -, and builds a city in Ásgarður or Troy. There the gods and goddesses build themselves temples and shrines on Iðavellir (Plains of Ida).

Here, as in *Ynglingasaga*, Óðinn was married to Frigg. Her Anatolian name was Frigida. Those two learned through visions that in the North of the world they would be held in high regard, so they decided to travel there with their people. Óðinn made himself a city in Sigtún, and there he appointed twelve chiefs and set all laws according to Turkish custom. In Denmark Óðinn appointed his son Skjöldungur as king, and married him to Gefjun. Their descendants are the Danish kings. In Norway he set Sæmingur, - his son with Skaði -, on the throne, and he became the forefather of the Norwegian Earls. In Sweden he appointed as king, his son Yngvi (Freyr). He married Gerður and their descendants are the Ynglingar. Here we have again, a clear fusion of sagas. Yngvi Freyr,

son of Njörður, has here become the son of Óðinn. I am not going to treat these fusions as errors, but see them as the inevitable nature of history turned myth. In the Sumerian myth of Inanna's descent, she sends a pleading message to three of her fathers, An, Nanna and Enki. Óðinn is known as Alfaðir, father of all.

The men of the Æsir, were married to women of the northern countries, and the Asian tongue became the national tongue, but in names of places one can still detect an old language, unrelated to this one of the Æsir (*Snorra Edda*, Prologue). This detail in Snorri's account is remarkably reminiscent of Marija Gimbutas' findings on the Kurgan invasion into Old Europe and the hybridization of those two cultures:

The proto- or Early Indo-Europeans [...] arrived from the east, from southern Russia, on horseback. Their first contact with the borderland territories of Old Europe in the Lower Dnieper region and west of the Black Sea began around the 5th millennium B.C. [...] Following the collision of cultures, Old Europe was transformed, and later European prehistory and history became a "marble cake" composed of non-Indo-European elements. The subsequent existence of a very strong non-Indo-European linguistic and mythological substratum cannot be overlooked. (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 352)

It is tempting to see the earth oriented Vanir as these Dnieper-Donets tribes, the Old Europeans; and the sky oriented Æsir as the Indo-Europeans. The jötnar could be the tribe living furthest to the North-West of Europe, ancestors of the non Indo-European Finns and Sámis. The tribe later called Æsir, is then the hybrid nation of first Vanir and Æsir, and then also the jötnar, where the Æsir culture is the dominant, but the Vanir and jötnar layers live on with the people, and especially among the wise women, the völvur, whose very task it was to remember. The Vanir are later, as I have mentioned, characterized as deities of 'ár og friður'. Njörður is the god of wind and sea; he gives good fortune to seafarers and to fishermen. Freyr is the god of rain and sun, sexuality and

the fruits of the earth. He gives prosperity to those who call on him. While he ruled in Uppsala, his major center in Svíþjóð, there was peace, good harvest and prosperity among all the people. After his death he was buried secretly in a mound or *kurgan* with three windows. His people were told that he was alive and all the taxes were given to him in the mound. Into one window they put the gold, into the second the silver, and through the third they put the copper. For three years Freyr's death was kept secret, and the peace and prosperity continued. Freyja continued the sacrifices, and she was the only one of the goð still living. The peace continued for some time after that, while the Ynglingar, descendants of Freyr, ruled and Freyja continued the blót (*Ynglingasaga*, ch.10).

The nature of myth is to be mysterious and filled with paradox. Thus let us consider the possibility that there was a time when Óðinn, the chief of a tribe called Æsir, ancestor of the Trojan kings and queens, ruled in a city situated by the north banks of the Black Sea, east of the river Don. At that time a tribe called Vanir lived on the west banks. The Æsir waged war against the peaceful Vanir, and finally assimilated them into their society. This in no way takes away the possibility that much later another Óðinn was a king in Troy and later in Scandinavia, a warrior and poet, and that his story developed into the legend of a half blind but very wise old man or spirit. Nor does this reject the myth of a goð, a creator, ancestor and all-father, worshipped in most of Northern Europe, whose name was Wotan or Óðinn.

In Phrygia, Anatolia, within sight from the city of Troy, there is the Mount Ida, associated with Kybele. In Crete there is also Mount Ida, sacred to the goddess Aphrodite and to Zeus (Baring and Cashford, 1991). The old goðar and gyðjur are said to have built their temples and shrines on Iðavellir⁷² in Troy or Ásgarður. The goðar built Gláðheimar

(Happy Home) and the *gyðjur Vingólf* (Friendly Room, Love Place). This memory of an ancient culture, where *goðar* and *gyðjur*, men and women lived in harmony, on the plains under Mount Ida, could so well refer to both Ida of Anatolia and Ida of Crete. The archaeological findings in both Catal Hüyük and Knossos indicate that what is Snorri is “remembering” although in a con-fused way, may be factual. Although Catal Hüyük is in Central Anatolia, its ancient culture remnants are an indication of a time of peace and harmony in that part of the world, and in relation to the Goddess. *Vingólf*, the shrine of the goddesses, is also connected to Vanir and Venus, our *Vanadís*, and may also have been the shrine of their sisters, the Cretan Aphrodite, as well as the Anatolian Kybele.

Myth, legend and history are mixed all over the world. Since we have begun the comparison to Sumer, there we also find this mixture, where Dumuzi, the shepherd, becomes king of Sumer by marriage to Inanna, the goddess, queen of heaven and earth and bright star of heaven (Wolkstein and Kramer, 1983; Meador, 2000). Sargon, king of Acadia and later Sumer the Great, was long thought to be a mere myth. In 1922 English archaeologists found an alabaster disc inscribed by the high priestess Enheduanna, claiming that she is Sargon’s daughter, so there was a direct proof for his and his daughter’s existence. On the other hand, this same Enheduanna claims to be the true lady and wife of Nanna, the Moon god, and he was not of flesh and blood, at least not at that time. The many clay tablets inscribed with poems by Enheduanna, as well as others, found before and after this great find, help us decipher the difference, what is myth and what history. Sargon was never a god, although he loved the goddess Ishtar/Inanna, and may have acted in ritual as her husband. His grandson Naram-Sin took the full step and elevated himself to a godly position, just as Dumuzi had done earlier. He became God of

Akkad, a position previously held by Ishtar, so we see here a manifestation of the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi⁷³ (Meador, 1992 and 2000; Wolkstein and Kramer, 1983).

There is no doubt that in the myths and sagas, the human and the divine intertwines. There are no clear borders between the worlds, and whether or not the Vanir and Æsir have ever existed as tribes with those names, they represent the ancestral memory of the people who remembered and finally wrote the sagas and myths. Freyja is Vanadís, Lady of the Vanir. Her brother and lover is Freyr, Lord of the Vanir. Are they originally human or are they “merely” the personification of the forces and aspects of nature and feelings of humans? My thesis is that they are both.

As we can see from the above examples, it is difficult if not impossible for us to decipher where the border lies between myth and fact. Snorri is either unable to draw that line, or he consciously chooses not to. Then again, where does this border lie in our own lives? Where is the border between my dream and my waking reality? Which part governs my feelings and actions? When I fall in love, is it with the man or the god I see in the man. Are my tears, - when I lose the man, or the god in the man -, in any way related to the red golden tears of Freyja, or Isis or Inanna? Are they related to the natural principle, imminent in and affecting all of life, and therefore divine? My love for my daughter, is it all in my programmed nerves, or is it inspired by a force in nature, which has been called the mother-daughter myth, and kept alive by threads with powers stronger than any logic or physio-logic can account for?

And does it really matter to me whether there ever was a tribe called Vanir, whose *gyðja* was known by the title Freyja and by a multitude of other names? Does it matter where they lived and traveled, or whether other peoples might know this same Vanadís

by other names? This link between people across national borders, this link between humans and the rest of nature, matters to me. The link between dream and waking reality matters to me. When I read the myths of Inanna many years ago, it changed my self-image. I could mirror my own feelings, emotions and desires in those of nature and of the mythic dream. When I had a dream where I was in the role of Freyja, making love to a giant called Auður, it put my life and my work in a whole new context. When I stood face to face with a goddess who introduced herself as both Hekate and Hel, at the moment of my father's death, I finally understood the phenomenon we call life cycle. And as I met and merged with other goddesses from around the world, each time it grounded this sense of belonging. Gradually a feeling of separateness accompanied with purposelessness vanished, and was replaced with trust in the principle of auður, found in myth, found in dreams, and I felt a need to ground this principle in my waking reality.

There have been many attempts at linking Freyja with well-known goddesses from around the world, mostly Eurasia and North Africa. Those mentioned most often are Isis, Inanna and Cybele or Kybele. There are also those who have looked into the similarities and fusion between Freyja and the other Norse or Islandic female deities, mostly Skaði and Frigg. For natural reasons the myths of these goddesses are similar in a great many ways, since they represent similar qualities in woman, human society and nature, and in addition to that, stories tend to become influenced by other stories. Snorri is obviously directly influenced by Greek mythology in his prologue, and parts of *Edda*. His forerunners in myth-memory were surely also influenced by stories from their own countries as well as those they visited.

I don't assume that the Vanadís is Inanna, nor Isis, Aphrodite or Kybele, but they are important mirrors for those who want to remember the origin of Freyja, gyðja of Svíþjóð. In spite of her fame and her incredibly many faceted role and nature, very little remains of her myths as more than fragments or clues in poems or single sentences in the Sagas and Eddas. As for archaeological material there is not much that tells us anything. There are some rock-carvings in Scandinavia, and a pendant, thought to represent Freyja (see picture in Metzner, 1994). This is very different for the goddesses mentioned above; they leave us with whole books of myths, well-documented descriptions of their rituals, as well as temples and images. Therefore it can be of interest to look at their stories and the history of their people to fill the gaps in the story of Vanadís.

Cats of the Goddess

En er hon ferr, þá ekr hon köttum tveim ok sitr í reið. Hon er nákvæmust mönnum til á að heita, ok af hennar nafni er það tignarnafn, er ríkiskonur eru kallaðar fróvur. Henni líkaði vel mansöngur. Á hana er gott að heita til ásta. (Gylfaginning, ch. 24)

But when she travels she rides with two cats and sits in a chariot. She is most accurate for people to call and rely on, and from her name it is a title of honor to call grand ladies *fróvur* (ladies). Love songs were to her liking. It is good to call on her for love.

We know Freyja had cats, *fressa* (he-cats) according to our precious Snorri, and we know they pulled her carriage. That's all. There is nothing more to be found on cats and their meaning in the Islandic myths. Although Freyja is today symbolized by a black house cat, e.g. on the chocolate bars named after her, there is no indication that her cats were of that type. Just as a wolf is called *mar* (horse, sea) in *Hyndluljóð* (see below), Freyja's cats could very well be any kind of catlike animals. Many great goddesses have

a strong relation to catlike animals, mostly lions and leopards. Among them are Kybele and Inanna or Ishtar, as well as the Snake Goddess of Crete. The great goddess of Catal Hüyük is seated on a throne and flanked by two catlike animals, leopards or lions (e.g. Baring and Cashford, 1991; Cameron, 1981; Gadon, 1989) and the “Mistress of animals” at Hacilar, Anatolia, also has her leopards on her lap and beside her (Gimbutas, 1991, p.227). The lion is inseparable from the image of her “descendant” the Phrygian/Roman Kybele (Baring and Cashford, 1991, pp. 82-83). They pull her chariot and guard the gates of her cities. Kybele’s lions are male-cats, like Freyja’s, whereas if the Catal Hüyük goddess has lions by her side, and not panthers, they are female lions. As we mention Kybele, we should bear in mind the relation Snorri gives in his setting of the Æsir and Ásynjur (Freyja among them at one time) on Iðavellir in Phrygia and the names of two of the great goddesses, Frigg and Sif. Frigg, also called Frigida, could be related to Phrygia, and Sif, also called Síþil, could well be a version of Cybele (Kybele).

The lion is sacred to Inanna (Wolkstein and Kramer, 1983, p. 185), as well as her relative Lilith (Gadon, 1989, p. 123; Meador, 2000, pp. 110-112). In fact one of Inanna’s names is Labbatu, meaning ‘lioness’, and in the poem *Inanna and Ebih*, Enheduanna addresses Inanna as the lion, in her invocation (Meador, 2000, p. 91). All over the world and at all times from the Neolithic to Christianity, we find this relationship between woman/Goddess and feline beasts, such as the Indian Durga, Our Lady Mary and Sophia. In South America the jaguar is a sacred symbol of the feminine and the Underworld (Sun Bear et.al. 1994) and in Egypt the goddess Bast is a black cat, and/or a lion. Bast is the protector of pregnant women and childbirth, goddess of joy and pleasure, as well as having the combination of a peace goddess and a warriorress (Ishbel, 1989, p. 205; Jobes,

1961), in common with Freyja. In Egypt the name for cat ‘*mau*’, is cognate with the word for ‘mother’ (Babcock and Boulet, 1994).

Closer to Island, than Egypt and Anatolia, lived the Celtic goddess Brighid, later adopted by the Christians and called St. Bridget or Bride. To her the cat, whether wild or domestic, is sacred. The Welsh Ceridwen, in her sow form as Henwen, gives birth to a kitten that grows to become the fierce Palug Cat, one of the three plagues of Anglesey, killed by King Arthur. Those three plagues have their parallel in the Islandic trinity of the Wolf, Fenris, the great snake, Miðgarðsormur, and the goddess Hel. Many places in Britain are named after cats, such as Caithness, where Auður djúpúðga (see below) set off from Scotland to Island and where the Kati or ‘cat-people’ lived. Cat skins and heads were used as power objects in war (Carr-Gomm, 1994, pp. 55-57). Brighid is a protectress of childbirth (Gimbutas, 2001, p.184), like her Egyptian sister. She, or her Catholic counterpart, is even recalled having been the midwife and foster mother of Jesus, a later version of another tale of the Celtic Son of Light (Stewart, 1990, p. 98). Freyja is Gefn and Gefjun, the giver. Her role as mid-wife or protectress of women in childbirth is displayed in *Oddrúnarkviða*, one of the *Völsunga-poems* (stanza 9). There she and Frigg are called upon for help, when a woman in childbirth is in danger.

Long before I even ventured my thoughts in the direction of Freyja as my goddess, or became aware of her, Bast’s or Brighid’s connection to the cat and their role as protectors in childbirth, I had a dream. At the time I was a young mother myself, newly divorced, working at the hospital in my hometown, mostly at the maternity department. I was also a member of the municipal council. In the dream I was in my living room, watching over a group of she-cats.

A Dream

They form a circle. The She cats. Graceful and filled with power, though realizing the danger. They are protecting the birthing one in the center. The phone rings. I am watching them as they have chosen my living room as their place of ritual. I dare not leave them, sensing the danger. The phone rings again. They are humming, chanting a birth song, in harmony with the moaning and “mauwing” of the birthing cat. I feel one with them and grateful. The phone rings a third time and I leave the room to answer. I talk for a while about mundane problems and become distracted from my chosen task. Then I hear a scream, the horrible cry of the She-cats. I run into the room finding there the group of He-cats, standing straight in a row, throwing the newborn infant from spear to spear, before they eat her. The cries and the moaning of the She-cats are unbearable to my ears. Their graceful power has transformed into indescribably sorrow and a thirst for revenge. Why did I answer the phone? They trusted me! I can feel my own hatred for the He-cats grow and my hunger for revenge is born.

The powerful and peaceful goddess of childbirth, of fertility and fecundity, goddess of weaving and singing, poetry and *seiður*, as well as death and regeneration, for some reason or probably a number of reasons, took on the image and role of the warriorress and the demon. The mistress of animals became the witch. Her power animal, the cat, was persecuted along with her in Europe, burned in baskets or roasted on spits. By that time those represented by the He-cats in my dream had lost all memory of her as the great giver of all; Great Mountain Mother, Kybele, with the lions; as Fjörgyn⁷⁴, the one who gives life, Gefn, our mother earth.

Jörð - Earth - Nerthus

Freyja's origin might have been Jörð (earth), whom our ancestors saw as a living being, the eternal mother. In the words of Marija Gimbutas:

There is no doubt that the prehistoric veneration of Mother Earth survived intact up to the time of the worship of Demeter and Persephone in Greece, Ops Consivia in Rome, Nerthus in Germanic lands, Zemyna or Zemes Mate in the Baltic area, Mother Moist Earth in Slavic lands, and elsewhere. Her power was too ancient to be altogether destroyed by succeeding patriarchal religions, including Christianity. (1991, p. 230)

In the Prologue to *Edda*, Snorri Sturluson gives us an idea of this original image of the Goddess as Earth or Earth as Goddess.

Af þessu skildu þeir svo að jörðin væri kvik og hefði líf með nokkrum hætti, og vissu þeir að hún var furðulega gömul að aldartali og máttug í eðli. Hún fæddi öll kykvendi og hún eignaðist allt það er dó. Fyrir þá sök gáfu þeir henni nafn og töldu ætt sína til hennar. (Snorra Edda, Prologue).

From [what they detected of earth's nature, the people of old] understood that the earth was alive and living in a certain way, and they knew that she⁷⁵ was extraordinarily old of age and powerful by nature. She fed all beings and took possession of all that died. For that reason they gave her a name and traced their ancestry to her.

He adds that those were the ideas of peoples who did not understand spirit, only matter, and thus reveals his Christian dualistic mindset. In the creation myth of Ymir and Auðumla and their grandsons, Óðinn, Vili and Vé⁷⁶, those three create earth from the slain body of Ymir, and the sky above her as well. In the myth of Nótt and her children, also from *Edda*, he defines her as a giantess, the second child of the dark Nótt and her second consort Annar/Auður. Later, still in that same *Edda*, he counts her as one of the Ásynjur/goddesses (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 10 and 36). Jörð is also defined as Þór's mother by

Óðinn and therefore Frigg's *elja* (rival), and Snorri says Jörð is both Óðinn's daughter and wife (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 9; *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 27).

Here we can clearly see the evolving ideas of more than one hybrid culture. The 'original' idea of Jörð as goddess, the daughter of Nótt and Auður/Annar, created out of the darkness and the riches in the void, has been influenced by the patriarchal pagan culture of the Æsir and finally by Christianity. The former giantess and Great Earth Mother, is adopted by the Æsir pantheon, created by the three brothers, from the body of their ancestor/ess, then she becomes the almighty Óðinn's lover, mother of his son Þór, and thus his possession and his wife's rival. Finally, by the Christian Snorri she is almost dismissed as mere matter, and although alive, he views her as an idea of a primitive culture.

Tacitus gives us an image of *Terra Mater* as he saw her being revered among the Germanic tribes of Northern Europe in the 1st century C.E. As I have already mentioned he calls her Nerthus, and describes her as a great goddess who travels among her people, covered by a cloth in a wagon drawn by cows. She is accompanied by a priest.

These days are joyous, and whichever places she deems worthy of her visit as a guest are festive. They do not enter upon wars, they do not take up arms; all iron is locked up (emphasis mine); only at this time are peace and quiet known and only at this time loved. (Tacitus, [98] 1991, pp. 83-84).

He describes the bathing of Nerthus - or the image of her - in a lake. She is attended by slaves who, after the bathing ritual, after having set eyes and hands on their deity or *dís*, are swallowed up by that same lake, sacrificed to the deity so to speak. Her resting place or temple seems to be a grove by the ocean, probably on an island in the Baltic Sea. A

bathing ritual seems to be a part of the worship of many goddesses. Kybele, who also rode in a wagon, like Freyja and Nerthus, was bathed annually (Gimbutas, 2001, p. 192). A part of the preparation for the *hieros gamos* ritual in ancient cultures was the ritual bathing of the high priestess and/or goddess (image), as well as the king or priest (Dalley, 1989, p.154; Meador, 2000, p. 60). Before her annual marriage to Dumuzi, Inanna, queen of heaven and earth, was bathed and so was he. In one of Inanna's poems she says:

"listen
I will scrub my skin with soap
I will rinse all over with water
I will dry myself with linen."

From *Holy Song*, Meador, 1992, p. 61

This bathing is done in honor of the lover/husband Dumuzi, the shepherd who became king by his marriage to Inanna. When Inanna took on the journey to the Underworld and was killed by her sister Ereshkigal, to be revived by the messengers of Enki, Dumuzi betrayed her and was punished by being outlawed from his kingdom in Uruk, to dwell half of each year in Ereshkigal's realm. Inanna, his queen and lover, mourns him. So does his sister, Geshtinanna.

Inanna wept for Dumuzi:
Gone is my husband, my sweet husband.
Gone is my love, my sweet love.
My beloved has been taken away from the city,
O, you flies of the steppe,
My beloved has been taken from me ...

From "The descent of Inanna", Wolkstein and Kramer, 1983, p. 86

Inanna weeps for Dumuzi and her tears may be red gold. She is the star, the morning and evening star, the goddess of opposites, of paradox.

Her tears are red gold

For the last ten years or so, my life has been filled with my love for two great goddesses, Freyja and Inanna. The better I get to know the two of them the more I see the One, the First (Freyja) in them. One is the daughter, the other granddaughter of water and earth deities, Njörður and Nerthus and Enki and Ninkugaga. Both have a brother/lover, Freyr and Utu, both have husbands they lose and weep for, Óður and Dumuzi. Both are goddesses of life, love and death, earth and sky, gentleness and cruelty, peace and war, devoted wives, and every king's lovers. Both visit their Underworld sisters (see *Hyndluljóð* below), although the stories are different. We know so much about Inanna's love for and life with and without Dumuzi, we know nothing of Freyja's husband except this:

Freyja er tignust með Frigg. Hon giftist þeim manni, er Óðr heitir. Dóttir þeirra er Hnoss. Hon er svá fögur, at af hennar nafni er hnossir kallaðar, þat er fagrt er ok gersamligt. Óðr fór í braut langar leiðir, en Freyja grætr eftir, en tár hennar er gull rautt.

Freyja is greatest [among the goddesses] with Frigg. She married a man called Óður⁷⁷. Their daughter is Hnoss. She is so beautiful, that from her name, that which is beautiful and precious is called *hnossir* [jewels/treasures]. Óður went away on long travels, but Freyja weeps for him, and her tears are red gold.

Freyja's many images include that of the weeping wife and lover, mother of treasures, death wielder, valkyrja and völva. However, her longing for Óður and the tears she weeps for him do not indicate that she is the typical consort, as Frigg is for Óðinn. Freyja is also Óðinn's lover, but never his wife. Neither is she the typical mother goddess, in contrast to Frigg. She is Baldur's mother, and he is the one Frigg weeps for. As Demeter is strongly bound to her daughter Persephone, and mourns when she is abducted to Hades, Frigg is devastated when Baldur dies and is sent to Hel. She has done

all she could think of to prevent the death of her beloved son, but to no avail. She has taken an oath from every element and being, earth, water, fire; iron and other metals; all trees and stones, animals, birds and snakes; from every poison and ailment, that they would never harm Baldur. Then Loki⁷⁸ tricked her into telling him that she had left out the young and innocent mistletoe, and so he put the branch in the blind brother's hand, and that sweet and soft branch killed Baldur (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 49). Frigg challenges all the Æsir to go to Hel and retrieve Baldur, and promises the one who does, love and devotion. Her younger son accepts the challenge, but Baldur does not return. There is no such story on Freyja.

Despite the many differences, there are similarities between the two goddesses, both are connected to Óðinn, both have Falcon cloaks, both have the gift of seeing, the gift of the völvu, both are fertility goddesses, both are connected to *fríður* (peace and love), but their connection to their lovers and children are fundamentally different. Freyja has two daughters, it seems, Hnoss and Gersemi⁷⁹, symbols of beauty and richness. There is no story that indicates her feelings for them, or gives us an image of them as anything other than the beauty and treasure in their names. Óður is also just a name, meaning 'song', or 'poetry', 'praise', 'madness' or 'fury'⁸⁰. Who he was, where he came from, where he went or how he got lost, is a total mystery. His name is of the same root as Óðinn, and it could be suggested that Óður is an older version of Óðinn, both as a word and god/man. The Greek Odysseus⁸¹ is also probably related to those two. Óðinn and Odysseus go away on long travels and adventures and leave their wives behind, like Óður. But both Frigg and Penelope stay put, take care of the husband's kingdom and the

suitors, Frigg in Ásgarður, Penelope in Ithaca, which could suggest at least a fusion of those two stories.

Freyja, on the other hand, doesn't stay waiting. She has a multitude of lovers, but there is no story of any suitors other than the giants whom she doesn't even consider as husbands. The Æsir repeatedly gives her away to the giants, but every time she protests with memorable authority⁸², so the Æsir (mostly Loki and Þór) need to save the situation. On one such occasion her fury is such that her necklace of fire bursts. Freyja has no intention of marrying anyone other than Óður. She weeps for him and her tears are of red gold, they are bright and precious. She searches, she's active in her search, but he seems to be lost forever. She travels in her carriage drawn by cats or flies in her falcon cloak or rides her boar through the Underworld and takes care of all her many tasks in the world. She is death wielder and life bringer. She waters the earth, gives nourishment to the plants, weaves the flax to linen, weaves the *örlög* of humans, supports women in childbirth. She entices the gold out of its hidden places, and is the teacher of *seiður*, the ancient magic. Freyja is everyman's lover. Óðinn is among her lovers and at times we sense a partnership between them, which is some of the closest we can get to complete female-male equality in the myths.

Freyr and Freyja are brother and sister, as well as lovers. Their parents were sister and brother, which again refers to a culture of female/male equality. After the assimilation into the Æsir culture this sibling love is no longer allowed, according to Snorri, and both Freyr and Njörður find themselves wives and lovers outside their own family and tribe. Metzner points out that endogamous relationships were common among

most ancient matrifocal societies, whereas in the Indo-Germanic societies, exogamy was preferred (1994, p. 154). This seems to have been known to Snorri.

Vanabráður – the sacred marriage

Njörður suffers the strange fate (alone among the gods, I should think), to become almost a ransom, given to a giant-maiden as her husband. In one of the disputes between the Æsir and Jötnar, the giant Þjassi is killed. His daughter is Skaði, a maiden and huntress, who runs on her skis in the snowy mountains with a bow and arrows, very reminiscent of Artemis. Skaði is called *Öndurdís* or *Öndurguð* (Ski-goddess), and *Brúður guða* (Bride of gods). Her name means ‘destruction’, ‘damage’ or ‘loss’ and she is obviously of the sort that the Æsir want to soften, her wrath is not easy to handle. So when she comes to Ásgarður to protest against her father’s murder, they offer her to choose a husband among the male gods. She is however not allowed to see any part of the gods except their feet. They line up and when she sees a pair of extraordinarily beautiful feet, she thinks that those must be Baldur’s and chooses the owner. It turns out that the wondrous feet belong to Njörður and although Skaði is disappointed, the agreement stands. They are married. Njörður is a sea god and Skaði is a mountain goddess, and so their marriage becomes problematic. Skaði cannot stand the shrieking gulls by the sea, which keep her awake at night, and Njörður misses the swansongs, but is kept awake by the howling wolves. Since both come from the ancient tribes where equality is honored, they decide to spend nine nights each at the other’s place and then shift (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 23). Later Skaði and Njörður split and she becomes one of Óðinn’s wives. Among their

many sons is Sæmingur, ancestor of Earl Hákon, the last defender of the Goddess culture in Norway⁸³ (*Ynglingasaga*, ch. 8).

Some scholars see Skaði as Freyja's mother, but although the myths are paradoxical and time is not chronological, to me it is very clear that Freyja is the daughter of Njörður and his sister and is with him in Ásgarður before he marries Skaði. Olivier Gouchet suggests in his contribution to the Marija Gimbutas anthology, *From the Realm of the Ancestors* (Marler ed., 1997, pp. 278-292), that Freyja, Frigg and Skaði are one goddess. In a way of course, I agree with him. They all reflect aspects of the female divine, in some ways similar. Their roles become fused and their roots can all be traced back to the one Great Goddess. However, we cannot overlook the beautiful fact that in the myths they each represent one of the three main tribes in Islandic mythology, and as such may originate from three different cultures. Freyja is the Vanadís, Frigg is an Ásynja and Skaði is a *jötnamær* – 'giant maiden'. Just as three different women in three different and unrelated families take and are given very similar roles in their families and in those roles they develop similar qualities, so do these three goddesses reflect similar qualities and roles. Very likely their stories have also been intertwined or "contaminated" and mixed up, - in the minds of women and men, as well as geographically -, after thousands of years of living as neighbors. As the three cultures, the matrifocal or egalitarian Vanir and perhaps jötnar, and the more male-dominated and war-focused Æsir fused, their goddesses adapted to the changes.

Adapting to the changes of the new culture is also Freyr, who marries a giantess like his father, but unlike him, he is deeply in love. The saga of their courting is very different from the above. In the poem *Skírnismál* this myth is beautifully told. The poem

is thought to be among the oldest *Edda-poems*, from around 900, and has been described as a *hieros gamos* myth (Simek, 1984, pp. 216 - 217).

One day Freyr falls into the temptation of sitting in *Hliðskjálf*, the high throne of Frigg and Óðinn, and from there he can spy the most beautiful sight, the giantess Gerður, whose arms light up the ocean and the sky. He falls in love instantly but cannot reveal his feelings and becomes melancholic. Njörður and Skaði ask Skírnir, Freyr's servant and friend to find out what ails him. Freyr tells him he is in love, but that neither Æsir nor álfar⁸⁴ will agree to such a relationship. He thinks that he will not be allowed to love Gerður, and that she will not accept him. Skírnir offers to go and fetch her if Freyr will give him his sword and horse. Freyr agrees and he also equips him with some golden apples and the golden ring Draupnir, burned with Baldur and returned from Hel. Gerður refuses to take the gifts, but accepts Freyr's marriage offer, after Skírnir has threatened her with all kinds of evil spells. She says she will meet Freyr in the grove called Barri, in nine days and nights.

The reference to the goð's opposition to exogamy is interesting in the light of both Óðinn's many relationships with giantesses and Njörður's marriage to one. However, according to *Ynglingasaga* (ch. 10-11), Freyr and Gerður were happily married and had a son called Fjölnir. They are the ancestors of Ynglingar, the kings of Sweden/Svíþjóð, to whom many Islanders can trace their roots. Among the many descendants of Ynglingar were Haraldur hárfagri, king in Norway, at the time of the Islandic settlement, and Ólafur hvíti, king in Dublin, Ireland, husband of Auður djúpúðga.

Who was Gerður? She was of the northern tribes, the most ancient ones, and as the foremother of the Ynglingar she was the *edda* of the Islanders. She was Freyja's sister in law and Skaði's kin's-woman. Her name may be related to *garður* (garden) and *gerði* (enclosure), and mean either the 'goddess of the field' or the 'protector of the land'

(Simek, 1993; Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). She may have represented the land, Earth Goddess, or even the sun or moon. In the poem *Skírnismál*, Freyr describes her glowing arms, their light reflected in the sea and the sky. Her name is one of the most common endings in Icelandic women's names, my name, Valgerður, being one; another is Þorgerður, the name of one of the last Norse goddesses. I will return to the saga of Þorgerður Hörgabráður in the last chapter, but it may well be that Gerður, wife of Freyr, as another bride of the Vanir, lived on in Þorgerður Hörgabráður.

Sýr – Goddess of transformation

Before Freyr fell in love with and married Gerður and before Freyja became Óðinn's lover or Óður's weeping wife, he was the boar and she was Sýr, the sow, and their people were Svíþjóð, the people of the Sow. The sow and the boar were among the most powerful images of the Goddess of Old Europe, surviving into Indo European Celtic and Norse cultures and thus the Icelandic. Clay sculptures of pigs from the beginning of the Neolithic age have been retrieved, so there is evidence for the reverence of the sow or pig for at least 8000 years (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 229). She was linked with fecundity, fertility, abundance, mother earth and agriculture. The sow is a symbol of life and regeneration. As we see from Snorri, Sýr was one of Freyja's many names and both she and her brother Freyr ride a boar. The boar is just as old as the sow, but the boar was a symbol of death and possibly rebirth, or maybe even some nurturing underworld aspect. In the 7th millennium BCE Catal Hüyük death shrines in Turkey, James Mellaart found breast reliefs molded over tusked lower jaws of boars (Mellaart, 1965, p. 20; Gimbutas, 1991, pp. 254-255). The boar is also present as a symbol of death at the Lepenski Vir

burial site on the banks of the Danube from ca. 6500 – 5500. Their bones were found on altars and buried with humans, often accompanied with dog bones (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 286).

The pig, both domesticated and wild, was obviously important to the people of ancient times as a source of food and skin, but that cannot be the only reason for the sacredness. In the biggest part of what Snorri calls *Svíþjóð* the great, i.e. Northern Europe, the pig was found both wild and tame. In Celtic myths the Tuatha de Danann brought the pig or boar to Ireland and the Hill of Tara was once known as *Muc Unis* or ‘Pig Island’, because the Danann people changed it to pig shape (Stewart, 1990, p. 52 and Carr-Gomm, 1994. p. 86). As a sacred animal it survived the culture change from the Old European to Indo-European. This might be one example of the hybridization of cultures, and it might also reflect that the pig was also sacred to the Indo-European invaders, the Kurgans. There the boar is a symbol of the warrior or hero, as is very clear in Celtic mythology⁸⁵. This may in part be due to the boar’s fierceness and valor, his power and weapon like tusks, or/and it may have to do with his connection to the goddess or queen. That could also explain why Freyja and Freyr were given their place in the *Æsir* pantheon, whereas other Old European animals, such as the snake and wolf, were outlawed as monsters. The boar was a totem animal for the Swedish kings. In the myth of Freyja and Hyndla in *Hyndluljóð* (see below) Freyja rides the boar *Hildisvíni*, also called *Gullinbursti* in the poem, but who is actually her lover *Óttar* in disguise. In another tale *Hildisvín* or *Hildigöltur* (battle swine, battle boar) is a war-helmet worn by a Norwegian king killed in battle, but for some reason very precious to the Swedish king *Aðils*, son of one *Óttar*. In that same battle another war-price is the gold-ring *Svíagrís* (Pig of the

Swedes) (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 54). The sow and the boar are the emblems of the Swedish kings, the Ynglingar, through the ages. Yngvi Freyr was the ancestor of those kings and he rides the boar Gullinbursti in battle. In ritual circumstances in the mythic world, such as at Baldur's funeral, he sits in his wagon drawn by the boar.

The pig was sacred to the Greek goddess Demeter and her rituals honoring the sow or the piglets as fertile ground survived into Kurgan times (Gimbutas, 1974, pp. 214 - 215). Although Demeter and Freyja are different they are of the same roots. So is the Welsh Ceridwen. In my attempt to remember those roots, I remember the *Thesmophoria*, where women went underground with young pigs and brought up rotten ones. Then the women sat on the fields menstruating, honoring the Great Snake and the Great Sow and her daughter, while the pigs' rotten flesh was mixed with seeds. Finally on the third day the field was fertilized with women's blood, the seed mixed with composted pig flesh ready for planting and new life was ready to grow (Meador, 1992, pp. 92-103).

I remember Inanna, who went underground and was hung, by her Underworld sister Ereshkigal, to rot on a peg for three days and nights. I remember the *kurgarra* and *galaturra* who descended into earth, moaned with the birthing Ereshkigal until she gave them Inanna's rotten body. They "planted" the life giving water (blood?) and the life giving plant (seeds?) on her rotten flesh and she was reborn, ready to ascend from the black earth (Meador, 1992, pp. 46, 70-79). And I remember Cerridwen, the sow, who chased little Gwion Bach, he as a hare and she as a hound, he as a salmon and she as an otter, he as a bird and she as a hawk, and finally she ate him, he as a grain of wheat, she as a hen, and three times three months afterwards, she gave birth to him, the golden boy Taliesin (Stewart, 1990, pp. 88-92). The transformative aspect of the sow is very clear in

all these myths, and it is displayed in the pig masks and figurines from the 5th millennium, where grains are “planted” into the sculpted pig heads and bodies (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 229).

The modern Icelandic word for sow today is *gylta* and the boar is *göltur*. Both are conspicuously close to *gull* (gold), as the word for ‘golden’ is *gyllt* (fem.) and *gylltur* (masc.). The tears of Sýr were red gold.

Gullveig – the golden Goddess

Dream Lesson - Spring 1997

I am learning about Gullveig and the Tree. The Tree is also a being, a woman’s body, the body of the Goddess. By the roots of the Tree, which are in the South but represent the North, there is a Bowl made of pure gold, and the Bowl is the goddess Gullveig.

I am looking at this as a picture, a visual representation of the Goddess that I would like to create. I am trying to see her clearly as the Tree and golden Bowl, her images, rather than who she is.

*Það man hún fólkvíg
fyrst í heimi,
er Gullveigu
geirum studdu,
og í höllu Hárs
hana brenndu;
þrisvar brenndu,
þrisvar borna,
oft, ósjaldan,
þó hún enn lifir.*

Völuspá, st. 21

She well remembers
world’s first war,
when Gullveig
was stabbed with spears
in hall of High
they burned her;
three times burned,
three times born,
again, often,
yet, she still lives.

The woman, Gullveig, mentioned here, is nowhere else to be found in the old literature. Yet her attempted murder is the reason for, or at least connected to, the first war in the world, according to the poem. She and her saga are a mystery. The above stanza is number 21 in *Codex Regius*, and follows a description of the world tree, the great well and the three nornir. Sigurður Nordal has said that the stanzas 21-26 are by far the most difficult to understand (1923/1993, p. 85). At the time he wrote about Gullveig, not much had been written about the first wars in the world, as related to a conflict between sky-god and goddess cultures. However, he suggests that Gullveig is Freyja, a goddess or völva from the Vanir tribe, and that her burning set off the first war.

Gullveig's reputation in the scholarly literature has up until this day been rather negative to say the least. As Eve has been made responsible for man's sins, as the jötnameyjar were made responsible for the loss of the golden age, Gullveig has been made responsible for war in the world. She is generally defined as the corruptress of men and gods, the corrupting greed for gold or the power of gold in the image of an evil witch. Sigurður Nordal has for almost a century remained the main authority on *Völuspá*, in Icelandic academia and beyond. He has not gone unchallenged, but if you don't agree with him, you better build your critique or disagreement on solid ground. In his famous interpretation of *Völuspá* ([1923] 1993, p. 76-77) he defines Gullveig's name, building his thesis on another authority, Müllenhoff (1883). To those two and many others (Näsström, 1995; Hermann Pálsson, 1996; Ólafur Briem, 1968; Simek, 1993; Crossley Holland, 1980) it is clear that *gull-* is 'gold' and *-veig* is 'power', so "Gullveig is the power of gold in a woman's image" (Sigurður Nordal, 1923/1993, pp. 76-77). Näsström

(1995, p. 63) and some others (Titchenell, 1985, p. 94) define her name as ‘thirsty for gold or drunk of gold’.

My most often trusted, etymologist Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) comes to the rescue once more and gives me the obvious meaning of Gullveig’s name, without being aware of it himself. The *gull*-part has never been complicated, it means gold, it’s the –*veig* part we can’t agree on. According to Ásgeir, *veig* has at least three or four meanings. One is ‘power’, ‘weight’, another is ‘strong beverage’ and third is ‘thread’, ‘golden thread’, ‘plait’; from the IE root **uei-k-* ‘to bend or turn’. From this version of the word we have the old adjective *veigaðr* (woven with golden threads) and the word *veigarr* (a sword with a gold-threaded knot). It is also tempting for my dreaming womb to jump at another of Ásgeir’s suggestions and relate Gullveig’s name to the Old English *wæge* and Old Saxon *wégi* (chalice) and Old Germanic *bah-weiga* (bowl), all likely derived from the IE **uei-k-* above (see dream above). So from this point of view Gullveig could be ‘the one with the golden hair’ or ‘wearing golden garments’ or she could even be ‘the golden chalice or bowl’, i.e. the great womb or *völva*.

Sigurður Nordal, and the others mentioned above, seem stuck in the view of Gullveig as a personification of the destructive power of materialism and greed, disturbing the peace in Ásgarður, and thus causing the world’s first war. According to them, the *Æsir* seem to have been innocent beings in a golden age, until this witch of the Vanir entered the hall of Óðinn with her temptations and destructive power. Gold is mentioned several times in *Völuspá*⁸⁶, and every time it has a positive meaning to it, it is a symbol of perfection. Why then should a woman whose name means ‘Golden one’ or even ‘Power of gold’ or ‘Golden drink’, be seen as a negative or destructive being?

The fact that she doesn't die when burned is another factor of speculation for the scholars. Quoting Müllenhof again Sigurður Nordal (1923/1993, p. 77) explains the last lines by saying that gold was sometimes burned three times to clarify it, thus referring to alchemy. He adds that a sufficient explanation for the threefold burning would however be that when dealing with *seiðmenn*⁸⁷ (shamans) and *völvur*, no persecution was thought effective except burning by fire. Gullveig was so potent, that not even the mythical threefold burning could destroy her. To me it is obvious that the *völva* is telling us that she, in the form of Gullveig, the Goddess, can never be destroyed. This incident in the hall of the High One, was the first time anyone ever attempted this, but as we shall see it was not the last. We shall also see that no matter how often she is burned, broken or erased, she is always reborn, again and often. Why Gullveig needed to be burned in the first place we don't know, and none of the above make an attempt at answering that important question.

A refreshing exception among the scholars is Ralph Metzner, who looks at the Gullveig question in his book *The Well of Remembrance* (1994, pp. 165-172). As I mention above, Metzner, like Gimbutas and myself, sees the two tribes of *Æsir* and *Vanir* in Norse mythology according to Gimbutas' ideas of Old Europeans and Indo-Europeans. Once you do that, it seems rather obvious that Gullveig is the Great Goddess. When I read *Völuspá* after having been introduced to the ideas of Gimbutas, I found in the stanzas on Gullveig a clear description of the fall of the civilization of the goddess, of peace and prosperity. It is such a profound illustration of the rise of patriarchal warfare, the beginning of male dominance and fear of the female, that it touched the core of my being. To me it was and is obvious, that the *völva* is recounting her own story, her

remembrance of the first religious or cultural shift. It is her own fate, as well as Óðinn's, that soars through her memory. Heiður, found in the next stanza, definitely fills the picture.

<i>Heiði hana hétu</i>	Heiður she was called
<i>hvars til húsa kom</i>	wherever she went
<i>völu velspáa</i>	visioning völva
<i>vitti hún ganda;</i>	invoking her <i>völur</i> ;
<i>seið hún hvars hún kunni</i>	<i>seiður</i> performed everywhere
<i>seið hún hugleikin</i>	<i>seiður</i> in ecstasy,
<i>æ var hún angan</i>	ever enchantment
<i>illrar brúðar.</i>	to evil bride.

Völuspá st. 22, *Hauksbók* version

The name Heiður means both shining, bright, and heathen or ‘she from the heaths (*heiðar*)’. In the Middle Ages (which is the time of the recording of this poem), witches in Germany were often called Heide (Metzner, 1994, p. 167). Heiður is a common name for a völva, and might have been a kind of a priestess-title, originating in one of Freyja’s names, like Sibyl became a title, a synonym for a völva, but was originally derived from the name of the Roman/Anatolian goddess Cybele or Kybele (Onsell, 1994, p. 163; Walker, 1983, p. 966). The listener/reader gets the impression that Heiður is the same as Gullveig, she is the one whom they continuously try to burn, to kill, but who is always reborn. It is as if the völva is giving us the evidence for the still living Goddess, she herself is that evidence.

There is in fact common agreement around the idea that Heiður is the völva telling the story, and that she is Gullveig reborn (e.g. Sigurður Nordal, 1923/1993, p. 78). The völva remembers all, from early beginning, from before there was anything, so if she is not another incarnation of Gullveig, she has at least been around long enough to know

her and follow her through all her rebirths. The fact that she uses the pronoun *hún/hana* (she/her) when referring to herself⁸⁸ and here, when telling the story of Gullveig and Heiður, supports the idea that she is that völvá.

In the last line of this stanza it says that Heiður was the *angan*⁸⁹ (delight) of an evil bride or woman. This sentence has been used to proof that Heiður and thus Gullveig, was in fact evil, corrupt and that her seiður was black magic. Even Hermann Pálsson has identified this evil bride as Freyja herself, but he doesn't see Heiður and Gullveig as one and the same (1994, pp. 58-65). Others have found it strange that the völvá would refer to herself as the delight of evil women. This dilemma is of course partly due to a dualistic mindset, which assumes that a woman would not reveal her 'evil' side in a poem.

Metzner refers to a German translation of *Völuspá* where *illrar* is translated *widrig*. *Widrig* means 'horrible', but its original meaning in German is 'contrary'. So Metzner uses 'contrary women' as a translation of '*illrar brúðar*' (1994, pp. 167-168). However, *illrar* in both old and modern Icelandic, means 'wicked, evil, bad'; possibly 'useless' or 'vain' (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989), but never 'contrary'.

I have to admit that I fell into the trap of finding it too difficult that the völvá speaks ill of herself, and tried my best to find another word that could replace *illrar* (evil) in the original text, such as *allrar* (all; a- instead of i-) or Ullar, referring to Ullur, the son of Sif. He is one of the more obscure gods, but who seems to have been revered in the north and is *Öndurguð*, like Skaði. I asked for the opinion of Dr. Stefán Karlsson, since he knows the manuscripts better than almost anyone alive, and he assures me that in the manuscript it says *illrar*, nothing else. It could of course be a misspelling, but the fact is that this stanza has many versions and has obviously been mind boggling for the scribes.

In the *Codex Regius* it does not say *brúðar* (bride, woman), but *þjóðar* meaning ‘nation’, ‘peoples’. This has been changed in the manuscript. Above *þjó-*, someone has written *brú-*, without removing or covering the *þjó-* part. If *þjóðar* is more original, it can change the meaning of the stanza completely. Instead of Heiður/Gullveig being the delight of wicked women, it could mean that she was (before the burning) the delight, favorite or lover⁹⁰ of a malevolent, vile, evil nation, or in other words, the enemy. The völva could be indicating that Heiður/Gullveig used to be the favorite, the delight or even the love/r of the Æsir who then tried to kill her. If this is so we have quite another chapter to our story.

<i>Heiði hana hétu</i>	Heiður she was called
<i>hvars til húsa kom</i>	wherever she went
<i>völu velspá</i>	visioning völva
<i>vitti hún ganda</i>	invoking her staff
<i>seið hún kunni</i>	knowledgeable in seiður
<i>seið hún leikin,</i>	skilled in seiður,
<i>æ var hún angan</i>	ever was endearing
<i>illrar <u>þjóðar</u>.</i>	to the enemy nation⁹¹.

Völuspá st. 22, *Codex Regius* version

I propose this possibility as a probable and preferred interpretation or version of this mysterious stanza. The last sentence could then refer to the myth of Freyja, at one time, being Óðinn’s lover, i.e. if Gullveig, alias Heiður is also Freyja. Are they all the same? Näsström who defines Gullveig as ‘thirsty for gold or drunk of gold’ discusses their connection in her extensive book on Freyja, and comes to this conclusion:

They call her Heiður, a typical name for a witch, who would use *seiður* and all kinds of evil; and somehow she manages to demoralize them. [...] We can only guess that the woman arriving from the Vanir is Freyja herself, who symbolizes gold and riches and who is skilled in sorcery. (1995, p. 63)

It is interesting, but somewhat depressing to read this interpretation, in probably the only book written exclusively about Freyja the Great Goddess, and by a woman. Sigurður Nordal comes to the same conclusion. Gullveig is obviously Freyja herself, a representative of the Vanir, since they are wealthy (the destructive power of gold) and from them comes the *seiður*. She has been visiting the Æsir, and in some way (he doesn't explain how) she has disturbed them severely so that they feel they have lost something, and have to get compensation (1923/1993, p. 86). After the burning it was Óðinn himself, the High-God or Great Father of the Æsir who threw his spear into the battle, and that was "still the world's first war" (*Völuspá*, st. 24).

Fleygði Óðinn

ok í folk of skaut.

Þat var enn folkvíg

fyrst í heimi.

Brotinn var borðveggur

borgar ása.

Knáttu vanir vígspá

völlu sporna.

Völuspá, st. 24

Óðinn flung

and fired at the people

it was still

world's first war.

Broken was the border wall

of bright Ásgarður

Vanir used war spell

to win the battle.

These last words tell us clearly that the war was between the Vanir, who won because they knew how to use *vígspá* (war-spell or war-vision), and the Æsir, whose leader sent his spear into the battle. This description accords with Snorri in *Heimskringla*, where Óðinn was the one to start the war, and that the Vanir defended themselves. To be able to even get an idea of who Gullveig is, we have to look to a time, place and people in history where a peaceful existence was replaced with warfare. This was not really the world's first war, since Æsir had been warriors for a long time, and Óðinn had traveled far and wide and conquered many a nation (*Ynglingasaga*, ch. 2). So the war with the

Vanir was only the first war for the Vanir, but if the völva is from the Vanir tribe, she may see it as the first war in her world.

Blótgýðja - high priestess

Dóttir Njarðar var Freyja. Hún var blótgýðja. Hún kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið sem Vönum var títt. (Ynglingasaga, ch. 4)

The daughter of Njörður was Freyja. She was a *blótgýðja* (priestess of sacrifices). She was the first to teach seiður to the Æsir, as was common among the Vanir.

This brief quote from Snorri suggests that Freyja originally had the role of a gýðja, which means both ‘priestess’ or ‘völva’, and ‘goddess’, and we know that she kept that role even after the death of all the other deities. She taught this art of seiður to the Æsir. Óðinn seems to have been the only male Ás to practice the art at that time, as we learn from Snorri:

Óðinn kunnir þá iþrótt sem mestur máttur fylgdi og framdi sjálfur er seiður heitir, en af því mátti hann vita örlög manna og óorðna hluti, svo og að gera mönnum óhamingju eða vanheilindi, svo og að taka frá mönnum vit eða afl og gefa öðrum. En þessi fjölkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svo mikil ergi að eigi þótti karlmönnum skammlaust við að fara og gýðjunum kennd sú iþrótt. (Ynglingasaga, ch. 7)

Óðinn knew the art, which gives greatest power and which he practiced himself, called *seiður*, and by means of it he could know the fate of men and predict future events, and he could also inflict misfortune or sickness upon humans, or deprive people of their wits or power and give them to others. But from the practice of this knowledge, comes such female passion or *ergi*⁹² that it was considered shameful for men to practice it, and so the art was taught to the *gýðjur*.

My hunch is that the völva remembers what Snorri has forgotten. At the time before the war, those nations lived on either side of the river in peace with each other.

The Vanir were known for their wealth and prosperity. They had discovered how to unearth the golden metal, the only thing on earth truly reminiscent of the radiance of the golden sun and the stars. They practiced their magic called seiður, a magic of the Great Goddess, and only practiced by her representatives on earth, i.e. the gyðjur. Their high priestess or goð was referred to as Freyja, 'Lady'. The position was at one time held by a woman so beautiful, that she was referred to as Gullveig, in her dress woven with golden threads, and adorned with a headdress, belt, necklace and staff of pure gold. She was a frequent visitor at Ásgarður, where she was teaching the magic called seiður, to the gyðjur of the Æsir nation. Óðinn was fascinated by her skill in magic as well as by the woman herself, so much so that he dared to become an apprentice of Gullveig, and learn the seiður himself, although it was not thought an art seemly for men. He of course developed it in his way, and failing to stay away from the temptations of worldly power mixed with mystical knowledge, he used it against his enemies. This might have been the very reason seiður was originally only practiced by the gyðjur.

We can easily envision a scene where the freyja Gullveig, the dís of the Vanir, is in Óðinn's hall, maybe confronting him on his misuse of their magic, or some other dispute which could have arisen. She is so threatening to the Æsir king, who is not used to confronting women of such power, that he or his men attack her. They lose their temper so totally that they capture her with their spears and set fire to her in the very hall. Protected by the Great One, she doesn't burn, or another possibility is that she did burn, but to the Æsir's dismay she returned, like reborn, again and again, her sisters representing the same Great One, dressed in the same way. Every time they tried to kill her, every time the war arose anew, sometimes giving victory to the Vanir, sometimes to

the Æsir, but Gullveig lived. Much later, after they had made truce and the Vanir chiefs as well as Freyja traveled together with the Æsir to the North, where Freyr became king and Freyja high priestess in Svíþjóð, she alone was left of those who had loved and fought in Ásgarður earlier. She was the one to keep the memory, by teaching the seiður to the women called völvur. So when Óðinn, in his realm of the dead, evolved to ancestor and goð, worries about the örlög of his world, he needs to seek wisdom and advice from one of Gullveig's descendants. She is now the völvva called Heiður, still bearing the name of the bright one, although she is gone underground. This is the worldly explanation, but there is surely in every myth a deeper message hidden, a message of inner auður.

In a historical and mythological context we can see this story as revealing a time when the sky-gods or the people of the sky-gods made an attempt to get rid of the Goddess. They tried three times or more, they stabbed her and burned her, but every time she was reborn and according to the völvva, she is still living. We can do nothing more than to play with clues. We will never know who Gullveig really was, or why, when and where the first war was fought. Doing research and putting forth ideas may be defined as serious work but a good part of it will always be a play with ideas. It is serious in that remembering the past often helps us understand the present, it is play in that it consists of not only finding pieces to a puzzle, but the one doing it is also the one who paints the image of the puzzle as she/he proceeds. My memory of Gullveig is that she is the Great Goddess, the power of life, death and regeneration, seen in woman, seen in sow, seen in the earth. This earth gave the shining and precious metal called gold/*gull*. My inner earth is a source of gold too, a source that outside forces can burn and stab. Inside me there is an ongoing war, but as I look into the sky on a dark night, see the moon and the stars

reflecting the light of the resting sun, like golden tears, she is reborn in me, again and often, and at this moment she is so very much alive.

Gold and the gyðja

There is a strong link between the Vanir and all kinds of treasures. The tears of Freyja are red gold, her priceless necklace, *Brísingamen*⁹³ (necklace of fire), is golden⁹⁴. We now know that gold, as well as copper (red gold?), was important among the old tribes west of the Black Sea. Discovered in the middle of the 5th millennium BCE, it was used for the manufacture of religious symbols and jewelry. Gimbutas suggests that the Copper Age Goddess was the patroness of metallurgical crafts and mining (1991, pp. 52, 118). Goddesses throughout Europe kept this function, Brigid in Ireland, and Athena in Mycenae (Gimbutas, 2001, p. 158).

Closely connected to the art of metallurgy and to gold is the element of fire. The valkyrja Brynhildur is surrounded by a ring of fire, cast by Óðinn. Gullveig is burned in fire, and her descendants the witches follow her. Gold is harnessed in fire, and so is she. In the sacred enclosures of St. Brigid, where no man was allowed to enter, there was a perpetual fire burning. At the temple of Aqua Sulis in Bath, England, a similar fire was burned for Minerva, dedicated to her by the mythical god-king Bladud or Baldudus. Reliefs of these goddesses sometimes show flames upon their breasts (Stewart, 1990, pp. 95-97).

Freyja's power symbol is the *Brísingamen*, and *brísingur* means 'fire'. Heimdallur, who is sometimes seen as the sun, is called "*mensækir Freyju*" (the retriever of Freyja's necklace). Fractions of myths on the subject of the theft of *Brísingamen*,

where Loki and Heimdallur fight over it, can be found in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 15. Loki shifts to the shapes of a seal (so does in fact Heimdallur) or a salmon. Salmon is sacred in Celtic mythology⁹⁵ and it is interesting to note that a necklace called Brosingamene, and its theft is the subject of one of the myths of Beowulf. In lines 1197-1201 of the poem, there is the story of Hama (Heimdallur?) stealing the Brosingamene, from the hall of Eormenirc (Simek, 1993, p.43). Beowulf was of Swedish origin, although the story is Anglo-Saxon. So here we probably have another Celtic/Saxon/Norse hybrid myth, turned Islandic. Heimdallur would be a subject for at least a chapter. Here we have to cut that short, but it is of interest to mention that in some of the myths Heimdallur is a ram. The ram was sacred to the Old European Bird Goddess (Gimbutas, 1989, p.75), and Heimdallur is clearly an ally of the Islandic one.

Although Freyja is not characterized as a goddess of metallurgy or mining, she is closely connected to the smiths. The masters of metallurgy in Islandic/Norse/Germanic mythology are the dwarfs. We find them in *Völsungasaga*, the famous story of the ring of Niflung, but they are also the ones who fashion all the most precious tools for the Vanir and Æsir. They couldn't fashion living humans, only clay forms (see *Völuspá* st.10), but they created the great boar Gullinbursti⁹⁶, whom Freyr rides to battle. They are also the creators of Þór's mighty hammer, and Sif's golden hair, which although made of pure gold, grows on the head, like normal hair. They are the designers and creators of Freyr's ship *Skíðblaðnir*, which can be folded to "pocketsize"⁹⁷. The dwarfs are all male, - there are no female dwarfs in the myths -, so they are not procreative and must rely on women of other races for heterosexual lovemaking.

In *Flateyjarbók*, we find the story of how Freyja acquired the golden Brísingamen⁹⁸. She was at the time living among the Æsir in Ásgarður, east of the river Tanias/Don, and was the lover of Óðinn. This story could be the link to *Völuspá*, and Gullveig/Freyja at this time being the *angan* (delight) of the Æsir.

As the story goes, there were four dwarfs living in a stone in Ásgarður. They are said to have mingled more with humans in those days. Freyja had a house, which was always securely locked to outsiders other than those she would, on her own free will, let in.

One day she visits the dwarfs in the stone and lays eyes on the Brísingamen, a golden necklace, which the four dwarfs are crafting. The beauty of the necklace instantly captures Freyja, and her radiant beauty captures the dwarfs. She offers them gold and silver for the necklace, but they have enough of such auður. They say they will each sell their share, and what they want in return is one night with her each. She agrees. The next four nights she makes love to the dwarfs in the dark of the stone and then returns to her house with the Brísingamen.

Óðinn's companion Loki has followed her and he tells Óðinn what he has seen. Óðinn becomes furious with jealousy, since he is very much in love with Freyja and desires the Brísingamen too. Óðinn gets Loki to shape-shift and steal the necklace from Freyja. First Loki changes into a fly and gets through a tiny hole under the roof, into her temple. Then he finds that she is sleeping with the necklace on and the lock is underneath her neck. He changes into a flea and bites her, so she turns and he gains access to the lock of the Brísingamen, takes it and brings it to Óðinn.

Freyja wakes up the next morning discovering that the necklace is gone. She becomes furious, goes to Óðinn's hall and demands to have it back. Óðinn sets a condition for that. He says she can have the necklace if she finds the world's two most powerful kings and causes a forever-ongoing war between them.

And so she does, according to *Flateyjarbók*. Might it be that this was the moment the Æsir attacked Gullveig, with Óðinn leading them, and the Vanir defending her? Might

it be that Freyja was not willing to accept Óðinn's condition, upon which he became furious (*óður*) and attempted to murder her? *Flateyjarbók* is recorded in the 14th century and is heavily influenced by Christian beliefs and morals, so this story in *Sörla þáttur* is surely affected by that. I will come back to Freyja and her örlög in Óðinn's hall, but for now I shall stay with her role as Great Goddess of love and sexuality.

Lokasenna - ástaguð – Goddess of love

In the poem *Lokasenna*, one of the old poems, thought to be written in Island in the 10th century, before the advent of Christianity (Guðni Jónsson, *Eddulyklar*, 1954), Loki gives all the goð their share of insults and gets his share back. He has this to say about Freyja:

*Þegi þú Freyja
þik kann ek fullgörva
er-a þér vamma vant;
ása og álfa,
er hér inni eru,
hverr hefir þinn hórr verit.
Lokasenna, st. 30*

Shut up Freyja
I know you full well
you are not without vice;
the Æsir and Álfar
who are in this hall,
all have whored with you.

He continues his accusations, and spells out her sexual relationship to her brother Freyr, which he considers a great crime. Their father Njörður responds to Loki's words by saying that it is no big deal if a woman has lovers other than her husband. As to the allegation that one of her lovers is her brother, we need not look further for an explanation than to the fact that Freyja and Freyr are the children of Njörður and his sister, and that even Snorri was aware of the fact that sister-brother incest was not a crime among the Vanir. Loki also accuses Óðinn of being *argur* (homosexual) and his wife

Frigg of having had affairs with Óðinn's brothers while he was away in war. The former has to do with Óðinn using the "un-manly" art of seiður; the latter is from the story of Óðinn's brothers taking Frigg as their wife, while he was away on long war-journeys. This could refer to Frigg having the position of *hofgyðja* (high priestess), and when the brothers took the place of the king in his absence, she became their Lady automatically. It is interesting that it is Freyja who takes the role of responding to Loki on behalf of Frigg. She reminds him of the fact that Frigg knows the örlög of all things, although she doesn't talk about them.

Loki is not in any way a representative of moral judgment. To him nothing is sacred or forbidden. He is a thief, a liar, a murderer and he has had sexual encounters with all kinds of beings of both genders. He is the mother of Óðinn's magical eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, and he is the father of the Underworld goddess Hel. He is the androgynous goð of creation and the Underworld, the chaotic forces of nature. Óðinn and Loki are blood brothers, - which could mean that they are two sides of one goð -, and the Æsir make use of him when it's convenient, they assimilate him into their pantheon, but finally bind him in fetters. It is Skaði who then puts a venomous snake over his head, so the poison drips into his face. When this same Skaði will not make truce with the Æsir unless they can make her laugh, Loki ties one end of a rope to the beard of a goat and the other to his own testicles. The goat and Loki each pull the rope until they're both screaming for mercy and he falls into Skaði's lap. The angry and sad giantess, whose father the Æsir have just killed, because of one of Loki's tricks, cannot control herself and laughs⁹⁹. He is the great trickster, voicing the moral of others in *Lokasenna*, but mostly mocking their morality, in order to be funny and scandalous. He manages to shock

the Æsir, who look upon women and goddesses as their possession or exciting attraction, and who take their own maleness very seriously. An exception to that is the very masculine Þór, who on one occasion dresses up as a bride, pretending to be Freyja¹⁰⁰.

Lokasenna takes place at a feast in the sea god Ægir's hall, where all the Æsir and Vanir. In this poem and its prologue, the Vanir are called álfar, something we see quite often in the myths and sagas. The goð are all gathered to celebrate good fishing or hunting, except for Þór who is out fighting giants. Ægir has acquired a great cauldron, with enough ale for all the goð. The hall is lit with gold, and the ale is served freely. Servants are praised. Loki comes uninvited, causes a scene, and after all the goð have become drunk, the mockery and insulting debates take place.

Similar feasts or ritual customs are found in other cultures. The Saturnalia was a yearly festival in ancient Rome. It was characterized by mockery and misrule. It was named after Saturn, the old earth god who later turned evil and devoured his children. According to Moslems he is the protector of thieves and swindlers (Jobes, 1962). There are clear similarities between Saturn and Loki, so the Lokasenna might have been some kind of yearly ritual or feast, where things were meant to be out of control and insulting. At the Saturnalia servants and masters changed places, and in *Lokasenna* the servants of both Ægir and Freyr are mentioned by names, something we don't see elsewhere.

Another similar feast was connected to Inanna in Sumer. Her cult feasts were carnivals of outrageous conduct and characterized by orgiastic behavior and even bloody castration (Meador, 2000, p.20). We must be careful in assuming that Loki's accusations of Freyja's (and the others) sexual performance in *Lokasenna* reflects the ideology of the old custom. Although the Æsir were more moralistic towards sexual matters than the

Vanir, Loki is not a spokesman for those morals. His role in the party or poem was to be insulting and he played the part skillfully.

A different reason lies behind Hjalti Skeggjason's insult at Alþingi, in the late 10th century. Hjalti, who was among the first to try to Christianize the Islanders, clearly saw Freyja as the most powerful and dangerous of the goð. His words: "*Vilk eigi goð geyja. Grey þykki mér Freyja*" ('I will not speak against the goð, [but] I think Freyja is a bitch') (*Íslendingabók*, ch. 7 and *Kristnisaga*, ch. 9), spoken from the chair at Alþingi, were seen as *goðgá* (blasphemy against the goð) and he was outlawed for that reason. This story is recorded in both *Íslendingabók* and *Kristnisaga*, and may show that Freyja was held in high regard among the pagans, while she was the one most despised or feared by the Christians. The saga of Þorgerður Hörgabrúður (below) mirrors this hatred among the Christians towards the Goddess.

Lokasenna is probably written some years or even decades earlier. Although the powers of Freyja/Gullveig lived on after the Christening and up until our days, the church did its best to demonize her and her sexual powers. She became a *norn*, a term having by that time acquired the same meaning as 'witch' or 'hag' in English. She is depicted as a witch riding on a broomstick (see picture in Metzner, 1994), or the hag with her black cat.

Hyndluljóð - the descent

<i>Vaki mæðr meyjja</i>	Wake mighty maiden
<i>vaki mín vina</i>	wake my friend
<i>Hyndla systir</i>	my sister Hyndla
<i>er i helli býr</i>	the hollow dweller
<i>nú er rökkur rökkrá</i>	now is the darkest dark
<i>ríða við skulum</i>	we shall ride
<i>til Valhallar</i>	to the Hall of Valur
<i>ok til véð heilags.</i>	and to the holy shrine

Hyndluljóð, st. 1

In *Hyndluljóð*, a poem recorded in the 14th century and therefore clearly under Christian influence, Freyja is however still riding her boar and not a broom. In the role of the condemned one is the giantess *Hyndla* (bitch)¹⁰¹, and she joins the voices that accuse Freyja of immoral conduct. In her case one can detect some rivalry, although it feels more like a kind of teasing between two powerful but unequal women. Freyja visits the giantess in the lower realm, in order to ask her a favor. Freyja, the Great Goddess, is clearly the one more advantaged, but she needs the knowledge of her Underworld sister, a woman at that time scorned, feared and condemned by both goð and men. Just as Óðinn needs to soften the völvu in *Völuspá* with gifts and tricks, Freyja has to make friends with the giantess, keeper of the gateway to Hel, keeper of memory. She awakens her with the beautiful and enticing words above.

The Goddess greets the giantess who has been sleeping in a cave, as sister and friend and invites her to ride with her in the darkest of dark. It is the deep darkness of a time long gone as well as the unaccepted Otherworld, and the hidden world of subconsciousness and death. It is in this darkness that the Goddess and the giantess can be equal. Meador (1992) points out that women are by their instinctual nature at home in

the dark and that a woman-based religion would have to honor the powers of darkness. Here we have the remnants of a woman-based religion, although very much pushed away into the darkness called forgetfulness. I agree with Meador, and although the giantess residing in this darkness is distrustful towards the golden Goddess, the latter knows that only in that darkest of darkness can they meet. Giantesses cannot be exposed to sunlight, in the light of day they turn to stones. In Inanna's descent to Ereshkigal, the law said she could not return from the Underworld. In Islandic myths, however, Freyja, Óðinn and Hermóður (Baldr's brother), are able to descend to the Underworld and return. Moreover, Freyja's realm includes the world of death and rebirth.

Freyja promises Hyndla gifts from Óðinn and affection from Þór, if she will ride with her to Valhöll, to the place of dead and reborn warriors. Freyja rides her boar and encourages Hyndla, awakened from her sleep inside the hollow cave, to take her wolf and join her. Hyndla mocks Freyja's boar, saying he is slow and no comparison to her wolf, and that it seems the boar is no other than her lover, Óttar the young, in disguise. Freyja denies this saying Hyndla must be dreaming, that the boar is Gullinbursti, also called Hildisvíni¹⁰², made for her by two dwarfs, Dáinn and Nabbi¹⁰³.

The favor she wants to ask Hyndla has nevertheless to do with Óttar, who in order to get back his father's power and win a stake, needs to know his own roots. Hyndla is here the one who remembers, the völvu so to speak. Included in this poem in the manuscript (*Flateyjarbók*) is also *Völuspá hin skamma* (*Völuspá the short*), so it may well be that Hyndla is actually a völvu. As we will delve deeper into below, Hermann Pálsson (1997) has suggested, that the giants' mortal representatives were the Sámi people of the

north. We know that the völvur were often Sámi, so this giantess could well be one of them.

Freyja knows that Hyndla will not easily be convinced, so she gives a good reason for their obligation to cooperate in helping Óttar out in his troubles.

<i>Hörg hann mér gerði</i>	He made me a shrine
<i>hlaðinn steinum,</i>	shaped with stones,
<i>- nú er grjót þat,</i>	- now that grand
<i>at gleri orðið –</i>	rock is glazed –
<i>rauð hann í nýju</i>	reddened with bull's
<i>nauta blóði;</i>	new blood;
<i>æ trúði Óttarr</i>	Óttar's devotion ever
<i>á Ásynjur.</i>	was to Ásynjur.

Hyndluljóð, st. 10

This is probably the only description of a bull ritual to the Goddess, remaining in the Icelandic myths and poems. It is also an indication that at the time of the poem, there were not many men left who were dedicated to the goddesses. Óttar is a devotee of the goddesses¹⁰⁴, and although we don't know much of his identity, he is one of Freyja's own kin, the Ynglingar, and might well be the king who once ruled in Svíþjóð, (*Ynglingasaga*, ch. 27). Óttar has fashioned a *hörgur* (altar) for Freyja, and he has sacrificed bulls on it, so often that the fresh blood has reddened and glazed the stone. She mentions that he was always true to Ásynjur. The fact that Freyja gives this as a reason for Hyndla helping him out, suggests that in his devotion to them there is implicit a fidelity to all female deities, also giantesses. Skaði and Gerður certainly belonged to both the group of giantesses and Ásynjur, so there might be no clear distinction here. Hyndla does as Freyja asks her, and gives a detailed list of his ancestors and ancestresses, Skjöldungar and Ynglingar.

When the remembering of the völvu is done, Freyja asks her to give him the ale of remembrance so that he may keep all her words with him for three days and nights. It is at this moment that Hyndla gets tired, says she wants to sleep and accuses Freyja of promiscuity. “Óður’s loved one, you run out at night like the goat Heiðrún among the he-goats. It was not enough for you to run to Óður, full of desire, you let others under your skirt”. Freyja doesn’t respond to Hyndla’s allegations, but threatens to cast a ring of fire around her, so that she will not escape and it seems Hyndla chooses to lie in the fire rather than give in to all of Freyja’s wishes.

If we look at the complete poem as it is found in *Flateyjarbók*, we have another *Völuspá* as well. Included in it is the part mentioned above, called *Völuspá hin skamma*, because of its similarities with the first and longer *Völuspá*. Much has been researched and written, around *Hyndluljóð*, but what most scholars are interested in, is to identify this Óttar heimski, around whom the journey revolves, and his contestant Angantýr.

Näsström (1995) has done extensive research on the poem and gives a detailed analysis of the possibilities of his identity and the Underworld journey’s purpose. She proposes that the poem describes a shamanic initiation, and compares the Goddess-Hero relationship in *Hyndluljóð* to the relationship between valkyrjur and heroes in two other mythic poems and stories. I agree with her that one of the *minni* (memories) of the poem might be about a warrior’s initiation, and the boar disguise supports that; but I will attempt to focus on another aspect or layer, i.e. the remnants of the Old European Goddess culture reflected here.

Hyndla is clearly a representative of the Underworld, Freyja visits her in the darkest of darkness. Óttar’s name might be interesting in this context, since it is related to

ótti –‘fear’. A psychological way of interpreting *Hyndluljóð* could be Freyja riding on the back of her fears, seeking their roots or causes, by facing her dark side and riding along with it. Freyja wants Hyndla to ride with her to the place of death and continuous rebirth, Valhöll. She promises her the love of the best of all the Æsir, Þór.

After having addressed Hyndla, the ‘Bitch’, with loving words, Freyja refers to her as the cave dweller. Caves and dogs and underworld goddesses are all closely connected in myth. The cave is a symbol for the womb and the tomb. The dog is the psycho pomp, the Goddess’ ally. Caves were used as graves throughout the ages and the best known is probably the one Jesus was laid down in and rose up from. From the Upper Paleolithic through the Neolithic age, caves were sacred places, sanctuaries where we can still find images of goddesses and gods, dogs, boars and horses, as well as human bones (Gimbutas, 2001, pp. 43, 60, 138); Baring and Cashford, 1993, pp. 15-18).

Hekate, the Greek crone counterpart of Demeter/Kore dwells in an underworld cave with her dog, the three-headed Cerberus. Anubis, the brother of Isis, is a dog and the guardian of the underworld. Isis herself is sometimes said to be Sirius, also called the Dog Star, which rises in July at the time when the month of *Hundadagar* (Dog-days) starts. Dogs were sacred to Kybele (Gimbutas, 2001, p.181), whom we have seen has many of Freyja’s qualities. So has the fearsome Ragana of the Baltic, the destroyer and balancer who has the quality of the giantess, the mountain goddess, valkyrja and norn, all in one, and she sometimes appears as a dog (p.206).

Hel, the great Underworld Goddess of Islandic mythology has Garmur with her, the wolf or dog. When Óðinn goes to her realm to learn about Baldur’s dreams, her dog, covered with blood, meets him. The wolf, Hel’s brother, is the great destroyer in Islandic

myths, he who kills Óðinn and eats both the sun and the moon. Skaði, the Nordic Artemis, she who travels in the snowy mountains among the animals, with her bow and arrows, is at home among the wolves. In her name Skaði (destruction, damage), we find that wolf quality.

In Hyndla's name and in her wolf, and the fact that Freyja visits her on her golden boar, which is her lover Óttar, in the darkest of darkness, we have the remnants of Freyja's function as an underworld goddess, a goddess of death and rebirth. Another such clue is found in *Egils Saga*¹⁰⁵, where the main character, Egill, has lost his son and wants to follow him into the realm of death. He has shut himself in his room and refuses to eat or drink. His daughter, Þorgerður, tricks him to let her in, pretending to want to die with him. She says she will not eat, until she is with Freyja (*Egils Saga*, p.78). Freyja's valkyrja aspect is well known (see below). She receives and revives the fallen warriors, but this is one of few indications that in her realm also the ones who die of other causes, rest with her.

Óttar has made bull sacrifices to Freyja. He is here on a descent into the realm of death and rebirth and thus reminiscent of Dumuzi, who also descends and ascends. Bull sacrifices to the Goddess, are well known from other cultures. Kybele had a bull sacrificed to her every year, at the *taurobolium* on March 24th, to ensure regeneration. So had Artemis in Greece (Gimbutas, 2001, pp.181, 210). Kybele's son/lover was Attis and Artemis loved her "son" Adonis. Both wandered between life and death, the Under- and Upper worlds, like Dumuzi/Tammuz. Adonis is killed by a boar and so are both Tammuz and Attis in some stories (Baring and Cashford, 1993, pp.362-363, 406-410).

Where the threads of these myths of Freyja and Hyndla, Kybele, Aphrodite and Inanna/Ishtar meet it is hard to say, but to me it is obvious that they do. The names of Attis, Adonis and Óttar, Óður and Óðinn, also sound like distant relatives. In Crete the playful bull leaping was connected to bull sacrifice in honor of the Goddess. It took place on July 20, the day of the rising of Sirius in conjunction with the sun. In Egypt it was Isis, and in Sumer Inanna, who were honored by the slaying of the bull (Baring and Cashford, 1993, p.119).

Bulls were sacrificed to Freyr, Þór and Óðinn, as well as the Goddess. Gimbutas has pointed out that the original symbolism of the bull as regenerative and “of the Goddess”, changes in the Indo-European culture to become the male-symbol of the thunder god (1991, p. 400). Þór is the thunder god in Islandic myths, but we must not forget that he, as well as the other two, Freyr and Óðinn/Óður, are closely related to the Goddess and to fertility rites. Óðinn sacrifices himself, bleeding for nine days and nights. He descends to the Underworld, seeking knowledge like Freyja, and he retains many of the old qualities of the Goddess, as we see in the fact that he, alone among males, learns the seiður. He is also the typical Indo-European male, warrior and rapist. Þór and Freyr are often interchangeable (see below), and although a god of thunder and war, Þór is the one who survives as the Goddess’ devoted and protective counterpart and lover. Let us remember that he is the son of Earth and husband of Sif, who is a sibyl, a völva.

Freyr remains a fertility goð till the end, and his rites have little to do with the sky-gods’. All sacrifices to him were for ‘ár og friður’, including human love and desire, as well as the fertility of the earth and peace. In *Kormáks Saga* which takes place during early Islandic settlement, the hero wants to win the hand of a beautiful woman named

Steingerður. He is to meet his rival in a duel, and seeks help from Þórdís spákona at Spákonufell. So does his adversary. In the story there are two kinds of sacrifices mentioned. The antagonists fight several times and each time the hero wins without killing or shedding the blood of his opponent, and after that he sacrifices a bull. At one time the wounded opponent is advised to take the blood of one of these bulls, sacrificed by his adversary, and pour it on the hill of the álfar. Then he is to make sausages¹⁰⁶ from the rest of the blood and the entrails of the bull and give to the álfar. This is supposed to heal his wounds. Another sacrifice connected to this saga is when the same Þórdís spákona sacrifices three geese and pours their blood in a cup. This is to ensure the love of the woman (*Kormáks Saga*, ch. 22-23). Freyr was the king of Álfheimar, and the Vanir are often referred to as álfar, as we have seen. Since he was the goð of sexuality accompanied by his sister, this bull sacrifice could indicate a blót to him. The spilling of human blood on ground, which had been dedicated to Freyr, was considered a sacrilege, so the detail that no blood was spilled in the battle, could have a significance.

Bull sacrifices were bound in law in Island at the beginning of settlement. A ring should lie on every altar in the country. When a goði¹⁰⁷ would pass a judgment in any matter, give a sentence or otherwise take the place of the goð or the Skapanornir, he was to put the ring on his finger soaked in the blood of a sacrificed bull, and state an oath to that ring. In the oath he would call upon Freyr, Njörður and *Hinn mikli ás* (the Mighty Ás) (Jón H. Aðalsteinsson, 1997, pp.170-171). No one knows whom that Mighty Ás might be, and I will leave that discussion for another occasion. The point I want to make is that the bull and its sacrifice were associated with the Vanir goð, and with örlög, until the end of the old faith.

The bulls of Gefjun

Freyja's connection to the bull is not mentioned elsewhere, but as we have learned Freyja is only a title, and her names are many. One is Gefn or Gefjun. *Gylfaginning* starts with a story of Gefjun who was sent by Óðinn to get some land from Gylfi, king of Sweden. She made love to Gylfi and he gave her some of his land. Gefjun had four sons with a giant from Jötunheimar. They were bulls. She put her sons to a plow and they pulled the plow through the land so deep that it got loose from the mainland, and then they towed it out to sea. Their description in the following lines reminds us of the relationship between the Goddess' bull, island, moon and more.

<i>Báru öxn ok átta ennitungl þar gengu, fyrir vineyjar víðri valrauf, fjögur höfuð. Gylfaginning ch. 1</i>	The bulls carried eight head-moons while walking, with the wide chosen vineyard, and four heads.	The oxen wore eight brow-stars (eyes) as they went hauling their plunder, the wide island of meadows, and four heads Faulkes transl. 1987, p. 7
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It is of utmost interest that most scholars do not seem to understand the symbolism of the bulls' *ennitungl* (forehead-moons) or horns. The Icelandic editors of both *Heimskringla* (Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir et.al., 1991) and *Snorra Edda* (Guðni Jónsson, Hermann Pálsson and Finnbogi Jónsson, 1954; Heimir Pálsson, 1984) as well as Anthony Faulkes who has done the translation of the Everyman's *Snorra Edda* (1987), interpret *ennitungl* as a kenning for 'eyes'. To me the image of the eight moons (horns) and four heads is beautifully symbolic. It could be an indication of a time span that the myth refers to. Eight horns, could be eight months, or they could also be four waxing, four waning, with four full (the heads) in between, i.e. four months. Four months could refer to the time from sowing to harvesting in Northern Europe, and this poem talks about plowing, it

may seem natural to assume, that it has to do with harvesting. But it could be something else.

It is at times like this that I so profoundly wish that my knowledge of the Old Icelandic were deeper and wider. I know in my heart that the myths and sagas, sometimes clad in a humorous fashion by their writers, and the poems with their puzzles, carry memories of knowledge and a culture that has been misunderstood and pushed away into oblivion, a culture I long to learn to remember. I find it doubtful that the story of Gefjun and the four oxen is simply about the island of Sealand being taken from Sweden and given to Denmark¹⁰⁸, although that may well be one of the messages hidden there. The presence of the four bulls, sons of the Goddess and a giant, with their eight horns and four heads, plowing and pulling an island, is too much to be just kenningar, used for fun.

I am also sure that the sentence in the poem: “*gengu fyrir vineyjar víðri valrauf*”, which I have translated as ‘walking with the wide chosen vineyard’, has embedded in it a more exciting message than that. In explaining my point I am handicapped by the language gap, both between English and Icelandic, and by modern Icelandic and the fecund imagination of the Old Icelandic poets, as well as the *auður* of their language. *Vin-*, *við-*, *val-*, the three ‘v’-s in these lines excite me. *Vin-* is ‘vineyard’, but it also means and is related to *vinur/vina* meaning ‘friend’, and both Venus and Vanir. *Við* means wide, but *val-* relates to both ‘choice’ and ‘the slain’, as well as the bird *valur* (falcon). *Rauf* can be ‘theft’, but it is also ‘rift’ and used for a vulva opening, ‘vagina’ or any opening of that shape.

The plow is a well-known phallic-symbol, and the plowing of the fecund earth is a reflection of the *hieros gamos*. To make the earth bear fruit, to be able to plant seeds in it, we need the plow.

In the Sumerian poems of Inanna we have this theme put into words more plainly:

peg my vulva
my star sketched horn of the Dipper
moor my slender boat of heaven
my new moon crescent cunt beauty

I wait an unplowed desert
fallow field for the wild ducks
my high mound longs for the floodlands

my vulva hill is open
this maid asks who will plow it
vulva moist in the floodlands
the queen asks who will bring the ox

The king, Lady, will plow it
Dumuzi, king, will plow it.

From *Vulva Song*, Meador, 1992, pp. 59-60

The subject of this erotic poem seems to me very similar to the one about Gefjun and the oxen. The same applies to the sensations awakened in my body and mind when reading them. Once more the old poets of Sumer come to the rescue. Where the Icelandic poets are obscure and the scribes unknowing, the Sumerian some 3-4000 years before them were direct and in touch with their Goddess, as woman, as star, as land. Dumuzi was a king/god, who married the Goddess, to gain power in her land. He was a shepherd, but Inanna belonged to the tribe of those who harvested the earth, the corn growers.

Gefjun, who obviously was of the harvesting tribe, Vanir, was also married to a king/god of another tribe, the Æsir.

In *Ynglingasaga* we find the saga of Gefjun and the poem as well as the follow up. After she had acquired the island with the help of her oxen, she set it so that it lay beside Óðinn's island, Óðinsey. There she made her home, and was later married to Skjöldur, son of Óðinn (and Gefjun?), who became king of Denmark. Their descendants are the Skjöldungar, who are among the ancestors of Óttar, Freyja's lover, devotee, bull slayer, boar and warrior.

The four oxen of Gefjun, have much of the same function as the four dwarfs had in the stone with Freyja. They are creating auður. The theft in both stories is an interesting by-theme, although the context is different. The lover aspect of Gefjun in relation to both Gylfi, the father of the four bulls and the bulls themselves, as well as Óðinn and his son, is echoed by Loki in *Lokasenna*. There he refers to a time when Gefjun made love to Heimdallur, after he had retrieved her necklace from Loki (Näsström, 1995, p. 186). This could be a reference to the saga of Loki stealing Freyja's Brísingamen, and if Heimdallur did retrieve it for her, she might well have thanked him in a proper Vanir manner.

Heimdallur was the son of nine mothers, giantesses of the sea who bore him on the shore, in the space where sea and land meet. One of them was Angeyja, another word for the island of Viney. Heimdallur was gifted with the power of earth, the cold sea and the blood of sacrifice (*Völuspá hin skamma*, st. 7-9). This theme of the Goddess and her son the bull or bulls, in connection with sacrifice is widespread as we saw above (Baring and Cashford, 1993, p.75). In Old Europe one of the images of the God was that of a bull

or a hybrid bull/man, sometimes a man with bull's head and horns. Might the sons of Gefjun have been such anthropomorphic creatures, since the poet says that they carried four heads and eight moon-horns?

From other sources we learn that Gefjun has a death wielder function. She receives those who die as maidens, as she is a maiden herself (*Gylfaginning*, ch.35). This little detail could disturb our thesis of Gefjun being one of Freyja's images, but we know that both Freyja and Gefjun are lovers and mothers, although Gefjun holds that role more clearly, as the ancestress of the Sköldungar. On the other hand, myth is paradox and one of Freyja's/Gefjun's images is surely the maiden, just as Kore, Demeter and Hekate are one.

In Crete, Catal Hüyük and Malta, as well as numerous other places of Old Europe and beyond, from the 7th to the 2nd century BCE, the bull's horns and head, the bucranium, is a sacred Goddess symbol, related to regeneration (Gimbutas, 2001, pp.33-36). Dorothy Cameron's discovery of the likeness between the bucranium and the uterus with the phallopian tubes, when she was working with the images of Mellaart's finds in Catal Hüyük (1981), was a major "golden tablet". As mentioned above, the development of the bull to a patriarchal war or thunder god symbol, does not take away the fertility aspect, so obviously displayed in the myths of Gefjun and Inanna. The heads of bulls found in old shrines in the above places are all associated with the Goddess' function as regenerator of life.

In Catal Hüyük's temples we find the bucranium both in the shrines of life and death. Some are connected to the birth giving frog goddesses, like the one in Shrine EV1 (Cameron, 1981, pp. 8-9), which seems to be giving birth to three or four bulls, three

already born and the fourth being born. The goddess is in a frog posture, but to my eyes she looks like an animal of the cat family. They are also in the death shrines, along with the vultures, the ones eating the flesh of the dead, so that they can be reborn (Gimbutas, 1991, p.238; Cameron, 1981, pp.18, 30). The birth giving goddess of Catal Hüyük might be an ancient relative of Gefjun/Freyja, giving birth to the fourfold.

Bird Goddess

Symbols are a means of conveying ideas, which are inexpressible in any other form.

Dorothy Cameron, 1981, p. 9

A living symbol from my diary – a memory from a not so distant winter¹⁰⁹

The ravens have settled on the rocks in my backyard. Sometimes there are just the two, who seem to have made themselves at home there, sometimes a flock of 13, when I have just fed them with the leftovers from my kitchen. Their huge beautiful shining black bodies make perfect contrast with the white snowy earth. They fly and dance and converse and inspire me in my writing, as I sit in my office facing east and the rock.

Yesterday they seemed excited about something, their dancing was a staccato movement and as their number increased on and around the rock their attention was all elsewhere. Suddenly they all took flight. I walked into the kitchen, and looking out the window, there to the north I saw the sky filled with ravens, all the ravens of the area it seemed. Amongst the black flock there was an even bigger more powerful bird, a silvery gyrfalcon.

A falcon does not visit this town every day. This was one of the moments when thinking makes way for experience, intuition, a noetic feeling that has nothing to do with ideas, nothing with belief, all with experiencing and remembering.

I saw her, I saw the Goddess, Freyja and her companions, the valkyrjur. Had I never heard of Freyja's falcon cloak and the raven shape of the valkyrjur, I know that the experience would have been there, although different. The linking of knowledge, of names, the linking of myth with experience is important, it gives form and more importantly it gives connection to the experience of others in other times and places. It makes me realize that this is something my ancestors have felt before me, something which people all over the world experience in similar ways.

In Jungian terms the birds would have been coined as symbols, probably

‘relatively fixed symbols’. Jung (1974, pp.104-105) proposes that some symbols are “relatively fixed”, so that in e.g. dreams they represent somewhat the same phenomena for “all” people. I agree with this, but like Jung, I wonder why this is so. Might it be that in their essence they are reflections of divinity, wherever they appear in the world. Thus the ravens symbolize the valkyrjur to me¹¹⁰, the falcon symbolizes Freyja as Mardöll, silvery as the moon. The Old European regeneratrix appeared to me, life, to an Islandic woman of the 21st century . The birds didn’t feel like symbols any more than I am a symbol. A person from another culture might have experienced the same, but given it other names. In the connection between what I saw and myself, there was the Goddess at that moment. I saw her image in the flock of valkyrjur. The clear and total reverence the ravens showed the falcon was remarkable. They may not think of the falcon as their Goddess, or of themselves as her companions, they may not have a need for such definitions, but that they experience her power was clear to me in that instance.

In Old Europe and beyond, both in time and space, the cat, the dog, the pig, the bear, the snake, the ram, the bull and the bird are interconnected through the goddess of life, death and regeneration. The Bird Goddess is among the oldest epiphanies of this energy that is the foundation of all existence (Gimbutas, 1989, p.189; 1991, pp.230-236). On my altar there are the feathers of owls and falcons, as well as ravens, geese, swans, merlins, the birds of the sea and the vultures, and there are the three gyðjur standing together. In the middle there is the bird goddess of ancient Egypt, all white with her hands raised in a wing position, her faceless snake-like head and her female body, with buttocks that resemble my own. To her left is the gyðja of Knossos, with her bare breasts, snakes writhing up her arms and her cat on her head and to her right there is Athena, with

her owl and snake, as well as her shield and helmet. All are remnants of the Great Bird Goddess, still flying among us.

The Bird Goddess, as well as the above discussed pig and bull (and others), have embedded in them both the male and female principles (Gimbutas, 1982, p.135), and as such they are related to Freyja/Freyr. In Catal Hüyük the vulture is the messenger of the goddess, or one of her epiphanies, as well as representing the male principle, with his/her phallus-like head. We see in this vulture some of the same androgyny as in the snake, with its phallus-shape as well as its connection to the womb and rebirth and therefore the female principle. The vultures eat the corpses of the dead, and thus facilitate the rebirth process. The frescoes in the death shrines showing the vulture in connection with the vulva and womb of the Goddess, bearing new life inside her (Gimbutas, 1991, p.238), are to me a clear message of the cyclical and bi-sexual nature of nature. The heads of the dead were laid under or beside the bull's heads, while their bodies' bones were stripped of their flesh by the bird goddess (Cameron, 1981, p.30). This mirrors the process we see in *Hyndluljóð* and *Kormáks Saga*, where the mortal gives bulls and geese to Freyja/Freyr. The Catal Hüyük Goddess as bull and bird, receives the dead mortals.

The Bird Goddess is sometimes a water bird, sometimes a bird of prey or vulture (Gimbutas, 1991, pp.230-236). We see this combination in the valkyrja, who is sometimes a swan, sometimes a raven or as in Freyja's case, a falcon, *valur*. The goose sacrifice in *Kormáks Saga* may signify that the goose was sacred to the Vanir or álfar, but as we have seen those sagas of pre-settlement, recorded hundreds of years after their supposed happening, are not very reliable sources. However, the fact that geese fly in a

V-shaped flock, and in Island they arrive in spring, give birth and leave in the fall, could well support the notion, that here in the north also the goose was sacred to the Goddess.

Just as Kybele and Inanna's lions changed to cats, or were always represented by cats further north, the vultures of Catal Hüyük are represented further north as owls, ravens and falcons. We find very little reference to owls in Islandic mythology, in contrast to e.g. Celtic myths and old artifacts. It is of interest that although the owl is well settled in Island today, it only immigrated in the 20th century, as far as can be seen. The birds of the goddess in Islandic myths are the swan, the raven and the falcon.

The falcon is the bird of Freyja. She has a falcon cloak, a *hamur* (shape, cloak) that she can wear. Frigg seems to have one as well. The stories tell us little about how they use their bird -cloaks, we hear more of the times Loki borrows them, to be able to fly to Jötunheimar (*Þrymskviða* and *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 3 and 27). Loki can shape shift into almost anything as we have seen, but nevertheless, when he needs to fly swiftly, he borrows Freyja or Frigg's *valshamur* (falcon-cloak). So from the clues we can guess, find pieces from the puzzle and put them together. We know that Freyja receives the fallen warriors.

Fólkvangur – Freyja's hall

In the poem *Grímnismál*¹¹¹, Óðinn, in the disguise of a man called Grímnir, describes the homes of all the goð and the nature of the mythic world, Goðheimar. He describes his own Glaðheimur and the great Valhöll. Freyja's domain, Fólkvangur, is described in the 14th stanza, like this:

*Fólkvangr er inn níundi,
en þar Freyja ræðr
sessu kostum í sal;
hálfan val
hon kýss hverjan dag,
en hálfan Óðinn á.*

Grímnismál, st. 14

Fólkvangur is the ninth,
where Freyja determines
the guests seats;
half the slain
she chooses each day
but half are Óðinn's.

This poem is the main source for Snorri when he writes:

Freyja er ágætust af Ásynjum. Hon á þann bæ á himni er Fólkvangr heitir. Ok hvar er hon ríðr til vígs, þá á hon hálfan val og hálfan Óðinn. [...] Salr hennar Sessrúmnir, hann er mikill ok fagr.
(Gylfaginning, ch.24)

Freyja is the finest among the Ásynjur. She has a place in heaven called Fólkvangur, and wherever she rides to battle, half the valur (slain) are hers and half Óðinn's. [...] Her hall, Sessrúmnir, is grand and beautiful.

So while Óðinn chooses half of the *valur* (slain) to follow him to Valhöll, the other half follows Freyja to Fólkvangur, where there is always ample room in Sessrúmnir, meaning, 'room with many seats'. There are many parallel, but very different places for the dead according to Old Icelandic mythology. In addition to Valhöll and Fólkvangur, there is the domain of Rán, the queen of the sea, who catches those who die at sea in her net. Then we have the tale of Gefjun/Freyja who receives all those who die as maidens. Last there is Hel for all the rest, i.e. those who die of old age or sickness, and the criminals. According to *Völuspá*, stanzas 38 and 39, some of those traitors and murderers spend eternity among poisonous snakes and hungry wolves, in a hall standing on *Náströnd* (Corpse-shore). This last is clearly a Christian influence, one of the most obvious in *Völuspá*. The division into different places of death is quite surely a phenomenon of an age where the hierarchical structure of life was strong and it followed

people to their graves. Freyja receives some chosen ones, like Þorgerður daughter of Egill, who was willing to take her life in honor of her brother and father. One can guess that the women, who followed their husbands or lovers to death, also get a seat in Freyja's hall.

We must bear in mind that when Snorri was writing *Edda* and *Heimskringla*, remembering the old culture, Iceland was immersed in civil war. In the Kurgan or Æsir culture described by Snorri, the warriors were the chosen ones. We have no images neither in prose or poetry, nor pictures of life at Freyja's place, but many such remain from Valhöll. There the warriors gather as they rise from the *valur* (battlefield). They're welcomed by the valkyrjur, who serve them the reviving mead and keep them company during the night, so that they can fight again the next day.

Before the war, in the Old European or Vanir culture, there can neither have been a Valhöll, nor a Fólkvangur, as we know them from the myths. Neither can there have been a valkyrja, choosing the slain and serving and healing the warriors. All people would have descended or ascended to the Bird Goddess, after their journey on Earth, this goddess at that time being an aspect of the one later called Freyja. The name of her domain, Fólkvangur, is one that could have existed before and after the first war. As strange as it may seem, the noun *fólk* means all of the following: 'people', 'group of people', 'folks', 'humans', 'army', 'sword' and 'battle' (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). In a world where life revolves around war, 'people' or 'humans' will have become equivalent with 'fighting men', 'warriors', and then the word goes from there to the sword and the battle itself. *Vangur* is 'a field', 'meadow' or 'pasture', a place where new

life grows each year. Probably originally a lush valley or a low hill and is related to Gothic *waggs*, meaning '(fields of) Paradise' (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989).

So originally Fólkvangur was simply The Valley (Hill or Meadow) of Death and Regeneration, the place where Freyja, the first one, received all the dead people, so that they could be reborn. Her womb Sessrúmnir had unlimited space, she could take to her womb all those who died, so that they could be revived and reborn.

Valhöll – the tomb-womb

Óðinn's hall, Valhöll, is equivalent to Freyja's Fólkvangur. Could Valhöll have existed before the war? The reappearing word *val* in the Icelandic myths cannot be overlooked. Freyja's bird is *valur*, her priestesses are *vala/völva* and *valkyrja*, and her consort Óðinn is called *Valfaðir* in *Völuspá* and he reigns in Valhöll, where the *valur* (the slain warriors) gather after death and before rebirth. So let's take one more close look at this re-appearing word and/or prefix *-val-*.

Val is found in words for something round, like in *vala*, *völva* and *völur*, something evolving and turning (see more on this in the chapter on *völva* below). *Valur* is 'falcon', also called *fálki*, and we see a correlation to that in Sámi where a falcon is called *falle* or *valli*. The slain in the battlefield are also called *valur*, probably related to the IE **uel*¹¹² and Latin *vellere*, which both mean 'to tear apart'. This IE root **uel* is also at the base of *vulva*, *völur*, *vala* and *völva*, there it means to bend or turn. Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) finds it unlikely that *valur/fálki* is from that same root, *vellere* and **uel*, whereas I here assume that it may well be.

Val can also refer to ‘choice’ or ‘to choose’. Val-höll is the hall or palace of the slain, the fallen warriors, or the chosen ones. Or is it? When we look closer at this word we find that like Fólkvangur, Valhöll could very well have had an earlier existence, before the war. Let’s look at the word *höll* (palace, hall). *Höll* is of the same root and meaning as *hóll* (hill), *hol* (hall, hollow), *hellir* (hollow, cave), *hulin* (hidden), Hulda (hidden one), Holla, hell and Hel (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). The image reflected from all these words and names is in fact an empty, enveloping space, a tomb or womb.

So from this we see that Valhöll can mean ‘the round cave’, or ‘the hall of the vulture or falcon’, or ‘the hollow vulva’ or ‘the hidden round place’ or ‘the evolving space’ or ‘the chosen hall’ etc. Whichever of these translations we choose, Valhöll is a tomb-womb space, it is the Goddess’ womb of regeneration. Hel has the same meaning. It is a hollow place, or the goddess of that hollow place. Hel is half-blue (or black) and half-white, which shows well her regeneratrix nature. We can assume that there was a time when Hel and Valhöll were the same, or Hel was the goddess of Valhöll, the womb lying in Freyja’s fertile Fólkvangur (Valley of the Dead).

Now let’s also look a little closer at *val-kyrja*. *Val* means choice, among all the other things, and so does ‘*kyrja*’. Most scholars maintain that valkyrja is combined of *valur* (slain) and *kyrja* (choose), meaning ‘the one who chooses the slain’. But *kyrja* also means to ‘sing in a strong voice’, coming from Greek *kyrios* (lord), so it really means the voice of God - or Goddess-. Valkyrja could therefore be the singing falcon, the one who sings the song of death. In today’s world “a swan-song” means the last song, the song of death, and the “song” of the falcon’s sister, the owl, is a well-known death omen.

I am fully aware that *kyrja* in *valkyrja* is most likely of another root than *kyrios*, voice of the Goddess. *Valkyrja* is the same word as the Old English *wælcyrge* (Davidson, 1964, p.62), but I use this reflection here to move into the dream dance and look at things from another perspective, naked.

The song of the falcon, alias *Freyja*, could have been a death song, at the same time announcing a new life, and therefore the singing *valkyrja*, is the one who chooses, not only the slain warriors, but all the dead to be reborn. *Óðinn*, whose name is probably the same as *Óður*, is the song or poem of life, as well as fury and madness. *Óður* is the song and life force of the goddess. By the time their task has been diminished to dividing the slain warriors among themselves, *Freyja* in her longing for her lost song, weeps tears of red gold.

One of the most striking differences between the Old European or Vanir civilization and the Kurgan or *Æsir* that followed, was in their burials. No weapons except implements for hunting are found in European graves until ca. 4500-4300 BCE (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 352). In Kurgan graves we find the evidence for the myths and sagas, where the king or chief of warriors is buried in a burial mound, a kurgan or *haugur*, with his horse, dog, weapons and often wife and slaves too (Gimbutas, 1991, pp.399-401; Näsström, 1995, pp.40-41). Before that women and men were buried in womblike graves, caves or tombs, without goods or with a few things: a comb, a flint stone or an arrowhead, some jewelry, pottery or weaving tools and the white stiff nude, the old image of the goddess of death with her small breasts and exaggerated vulva. A few rich women's graves have been found from the old civilization, with lots of jewelry and other things suggesting that she had an important role in life. One such was found in Catal

Hüyük, probably the grave of a gyðja, a völva (Gimbutas, 2001, pp. 21, 113-115, 399).

The völur of old were remnants of that old culture of the Vanir, and through their memory the old wisdom was kept alive. Apart from the obscure myths and sagas, the only remnants we have of the völur are their graves, *völuleiði*, found all over Island.

4. Remembering Völva

Viðólfa - the first one

<i>Eru vödur allar</i>	All vödur come
<i>frá Viðólfi</i>	from Viðólfur
<i>vitkar allir</i>	<i>vitkar</i> all
<i>frá Vilmeiði</i>	from Vilmeiður
<i>seiðberendur</i>	<i>seiðberendur</i>
<i>frá Svarthöfða</i>	from Svarthöfði
<i>jötnar allir</i>	giants all
<i>frá Ými komnir.</i>	from Ymir come.
<i>Völuspá hin skamma (Hyndluljóð)</i>	

The völvu is a gyðja of the Vanadís. She is the one who continues the work of Freyja, being blótgyðja and practitioner of seiður. In the above stanza we have on the one hand, a list of all the seiður practitioners, and on the other their ancestors, as put forth in *Völuspá hin skamma*, mentioned in the above chapter. *Völuspá hin skamma* is not a very reliable source of history or myth, although it gives nice little clues, some very well concealed from the modern, patriarchal Christian mind. The author of the poem seems to have been concerned with the phonetic correlation between the different practitioners and their ancestors, so let's not take this stanza too literally. Nevertheless it may contain some interesting information.

Viðólfur is said to be the father or ancestor of all the völvur¹¹³. The name in the manuscript (OI) is *vidolfui*, which has been made up to date to be Viðólfur, but has again been changed by some scholars,- from Finnur Jónsson (1926) onward -, to Vittólfur. Viðólfur could mean 'wolf of the tree', but that is thought an unlikely interpretation, by Simek (1993), Guðni Jónsson (1954) and more. They decide that the name of this

ancestor must be Vittólfur, the *vitt-* part meaning ‘sorcery’ and *-ólfur* meaning ‘wolf’.

According to Saxo Grammaticus (d.1216) there was once a king called Vitolfus or Vittólfur, and they assume he could be the ancestor of all the völvur. I find that unlikely and almost absurd and Dag Strömback (1935, pp. 27-29) agrees. He does not believe they can be one and the same, so he sticks to the Viðólfur version. That would make all völvur descendants of the ‘tree wolf’. This may well be so. Viðólfur could also refer to Fenrir, the original wolf, who in the world’s destruction, at Ragnarök, kills Óðinn and swallows the moon and sun. He was the son of Loki and Angurboða. She was a tree or wood being, a giantess living in the Ironwoods, so Viðólfur could be her son and the völvur his descendants. Angurboða puts on the disguise of a völva, when Óðinn goes on his underworld journey to seek interpretation on his dreams of Baldur. Hyndla rides a wolf and if she is the völva in *Völuspá hin skamma*, then yes.... there could be a close connection between wolf and völva as mentioned in the chapter above.

I have another thesis, however. I think that Viðólfur is really *Viðolfa* (genitive *viðolfu*, as in the manuscript if you take away the *-i*¹¹⁴ at the end) and means ‘the völva (from or) of the tree’, i.e. “the first one”. All beings evolve from the tree of life, the *askur*, later referred to as Yggdrasill (Óðinn’s horse). So of course do the völvur. Goddesses around the world are associated with the tree. In Lithuania the goddess Laima is a linden tree as well as the goddess of trees, and her animals are born from trees. The birch and aspen trees of Laima are the ancestors of the ewe and the goat (Gimbutas, 2001, p.200). Inanna/Ishtar is closely connected to the tree (Meador, 2001, pp.16, 156), Eve’s destiny grows from the tree and the first woman and man, Embla and Askur, were created out of trees.

From the sea under the tree emerged the nornir at time's beginning. They are the first ones, scoring the örlög of earth's children into pieces of wood, into the tree. Seeing, remembering, scoring örlög is the function of the völva as we shall see. Urður, Verðandi and Skuld are the *viðólfur*, or ancestresses, of every völva. Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) traces the roots of *úlfur* (wolf) to the IE **uel*¹¹⁵ and it so happens that he does the same with the verb *völva* (see below). Whether the völva and her wolf are originally one and the same in the myths, I will not dare to suggest, but leave the possibility for the reader to ponder on.

The völva has been said to take her cognomen from her staff, the *völur* (masculine singular), also called *gandur* (Simek, 1993 and Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). Hermann Pálsson (1997, p. 87) agrees and says that the völva and her staff were so interconnected that the meaning of völva is obviously “woman with staff”. To me it would make more sense that the staff is called after her - one would assume that the völva comes first, then her völur - or that both words have the same root and meaning, because the völva and her völur are so interconnected. We find the same root in the Latin *volvere* (to turn), and the English ‘evolve’, and from that root comes also the English word ‘vulva’ (see Helga Kress, 1993, p.35 and Hermann Pálsson, 1997, p.87). So the name for the priestess practicing seiður comes from her place of femaleness, her vulva, or both words derive from the evolving regenerative function of woman as mother and gyðja of life and death. To make this even more obvious the masculine noun *völur* (also spelled *völr*, *olfr*, *olfi*, like in *viðolfi*) and the verb *völva* is, according to Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989), derived from the Germanic *wel-*, IE **uel* meaning ‘to bend’, ‘turn’ or ‘to tear’, ‘destroy’. The verb *völva* means ‘to take the edge off a knife’. A *völur* is a staff, as well as ‘hub’ (of the

wheel), ‘a measuring rod’, and a ‘branch’, ‘bough’, or the ‘blunt edge of a knife’. This could explain the fact that the völvá is at times called *vala*, which can also mean a round small stone. Once I was walking by the river at my country-place when a red *vala*, sitting in the distance amidst the gray stones, caught my eye. I walked towards it and picked it up to find it fit exactly into my palm, and on its “lower side” a clear woman-made (or man-made) vulva mark as well as an inscribed V. This *vala* now rests on my altar.

The symbolism in the etymology of the noun völvá is so clear, that we need not look further. Therefore it is of interest that in all the literature I have re-searched, I have not found one reference to this relationship between the noun and the verb völva. Ásgeir B. Magnússon who traces the etymology of the verb and the nouns völur and völva on the very same page (1989, p.1159), doesn’t even mention it. Considering all the vulva marks, paintings and sculptures that have been found from prehistoric times carved in rocks, painted, sculpted, formed in any way people of that time could think of, we need not be surprised that a woman who is the representative of the powers of nature is symbolized by her place of creation, life and mystery. Gimbutas does not doubt their symbolic and religious significance:

The emphasis on vulvas in the figurine art of later epochs makes it clear that those of the Upper Paleolithic are not merely "female signs" (so termed by Leroi-Gourhan 1967) - simple expressions of physiology - but instead symbolize the vulva and womb of the Goddess. (1989, p. 99)

The images of gyðjur (priestesses and/or goddesses) found in Old Europe reflect this too (Gimbutas 1982, 1989, 1991, 2001). The emphasized V-mark or vulva mark on their bodies, can be seen as their name or title. In a conference or at work in modern times we bear nametags. The vulva mark on the priestess figurines is their nametag. The

staff emphasizes her connection to the realm of maleness as well, her connection to Freyr as well as Freyja.

There is a story in *Flateyjarbók* about a particular fertility ritual practiced on a remote farm in Norway, where the lady of the house kept in her possession the penis of a horse, which she called *Völsi* (undoubtedly of the same meaning). Every night the woman would pass the phallus *Völsi*, around to her husband, two children and another woman in that household, in a ritualistic manner, asking for its blessing (*Flateyjarbók* II, 1945, pp. 441-446). As I mention above, another word for the *völur* was *gandur*, also used for the great snake *Miðgarðsormur* (the snake that circles the world), and for the wolves and horses on which the *völva*, *valkyrja* or Goddess rode (see *Völuspá* above 'vitti hún ganda' (invoked her staff)). Gandur then became a synonym for the staff and the act of *seiður* itself or magic and sorcery in general (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). Freyr and Þór, were both revered as fertility goð, and their symbol was the phallus. Among the few figures of the goð remaining from the time of their worship, is that of Freyr depicted with his huge phallus, and of Þór with his double-headed hammer (figures in Magnús Magnússon, 1976 and Metzner, 1994).

The connection between the tree as staff or *völur*, and the well as the vulva/*völva* of a woman, shines forth in the mythology where the tree of life, from which all *völvur* stem, stands by the well, *Urðarbrunnur*, and is nourished with water and white *aurr* (clay) by the *nornir* every day. It is from that watering that life goes on and the honeydew falls in the valleys every morning, feeding the bees. From this well there are also born two birds, called swans (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 16). The eroticism of this beautiful description, seems to have escaped most scholars. The vulva is a symbol for the place of life, power

and regeneration, the place of the womanly fluids, the red blood of life and the white clay that waters the vödur, the bough or phallus of a man, who enters the most powerful place in a woman's body. So to make it perfectly clear that seiður was a woman's art, practiced in honor of the Goddess called Freyja, and that the practice was fully connected to the male or Freyr principle as well, the gyðja who practiced it was named after her power place and called völvu, her staff was called vödur. A Bronze Age engraving on a sandstone cremation lid, shows a woman and man reaching out to one another in a circle of corn. Behind the female figure there is a tree (Magnús Magnússon, 1976). The urn itself is the regenerating womb of Viðólfu.

Another word for the practitioners of seiður (mentioned in the short stanza above) is *seiðberendur* (sing. *seiðberendi*). It has generally been thought to mean carriers of seiður (*bera* means 'carry'), and pertain to people of both genders, who would practice seiður, but according to Hermann Pálsson (1997, p.87) and Strömbäck (1935, pp.29-31) *berendi* is an old word for the womb, related to *bera* (to give birth). This would indicate another strong link between seiður and woman. *Berendi* is most often used for female mammals other than women, but also known for women's wombs. The prefix *ber-* is also related to the noun *björn* (bear), female *birna* (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989), again giving a mythical context, since the first humans (giants) may have been of the bear tribe. Bears are, as we have seen, intimately connected to the Old European Goddess, as well as the younger version of her such as the Celtic Artio, the Greek Artemis and Baltic Laima, as well as (my own) Auður. In the Baltic countries we can see this relationship between Goddess, mother and bear as late as the 20th century, when pregnant women and newborn mothers were referred to as "The Bear", Laima also being the goddess of childbirth

(Gimbutas, 2001, pp.144, 187, 200). Those two names, *völva* and *seiðberendi*, which indicate the original function of the *seiður* as a religious woman-centered ritual, a way for the *gyðja* to connect with Freyja, might have been enough to keep a Kurgan man away from having anything to do with it. At one time the *völur* (staff) might have been a man, a *goði*, representing Freyr. With increased distrust between men and women, and the condemnation of their sexual union as a sacred act, the *völva* would have replaced the *goði* or *völur* with a wooden staff.

Who *Svarthöfði* - 'Black head' is, the ancestor of *seiðberendur*, we don't know, and I will not delve into that here. *Vitki*, however, is a name used for male practitioners and is probably directly derived from the verb *að vita* (to know), related to German *wissen*, and the English witch and wicca. Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) connects it to Old English *witig* (wise) and *wit(e)ga* (prophet, wise man). *Vísindakona* is of this same root. Their ancestor was *Vilmeiður* - 'The Good Tree', which again supports the tree theory for *Viðólf*. As we can see from the above, as well as from Snorri's note on *seiður* being an unmanly ritual, men seem to have entered the group of practitioners rather late, and although they used all kinds of sorcery frequently, e.g. in *Island*, being a *vitki* is not a profession, and he is in no way equivalent with a *völva*. An interesting paradox is that during the witch persecutions in *Island* in the 17th century, almost all the victims convicted and burned for *fjölkyngi* (sorcery), were men practicing *galdur* (sorcery); only one woman was burned (Matthías V. Sæmundsson, 1996).

The last lines in the above stanza, tell us that the *jötnar* all come from *Ymir*, as we already know. Hermann Pálsson (1997) has dealt with the relation between *jötnar* or *tröll*¹¹⁶ and *seiður*, but here I will only mention that briefly. There is a feeling of the old

and powerful, the grand and sometimes fierce forces of nature, in the tribe of jötnar as opposed to the war-culture and control among the Æsir. The Vanir seem to make some kind of bridge between the two, both Freyr and Njörður were married to giantesses, as we have seen. The jötnar are also the female aspect of the *goð*. Not only are the giantesses wives and lovers of gods, they are also their mothers. Jörð was both the daughter and wife of Óðinn, and mother of Þór.

On the other hand in the Sagas and some of the poems, jötnar is a term used for people of great magical powers and seems to pertain to the Sámi. As mentioned, Norse people of high rank, especially women, were sent to Sápmi to study seiður, since the Sámi were considered the most knowing and powerful in the area, they were the most *fornir* (ancient). The terms jötnar as well as dvergar and tröll are sometimes used in a derogatory way about the Sámi people, but there are also instances where these term are used in a perfectly neutral or positive way, as in the second stanza of *Völuspá* where the völva says that she was fostered among the jötnar. That could be seen as a reference to the mythical tribe, but since the völva (the poet), was a woman of this world she could also be referring to the Sámi people, who would have been her teachers in the art of *seiður* (Hermann Pálsson, 1994, 1996 b),1997, 1998). Helga Kress (1993) has also pointed out that most of the völur were either Sámi or from the isles off of the coast of Scotland, the Hebrides.

Seiður – singing magic

*Valdi henni Herföðr
hringa ok men
fékk spjöll spaklig
ok spá ganda
sá hún vitt ok ofvitt
of veröld hverja.*

Völuspá st. 29

Warfather granted her
rings and gemstones
acquired wise spells
and wonder visions
she saw far and wide
into the worlds.

Hermann Pálsson, - who in 1954 (the year I was born) was the advisor of Guðni Jónsson, editor of the Sagas and Eddas I use for reference in this thesis -, has done more research on völur than most of his colleagues. In an unpublished chapter “*Völur og galdranornir*” (1997b), he gives accounts of over a hundred women who in one way or another are displayed in the Sagas or poems as völur or related to seiður or other magic in some way.

Most of these women have names, some are however nameless, and are referred to by their title, as völva, spákona, seiðkona, norn, tröll, *forn*¹¹⁷, *fjölkunnug*¹¹⁸, *vísindakona*¹¹⁹, *kveldriða*¹²⁰ or valkyrja etc. All refer to women of magical or strong powers. At times they exist in the mist between myth and history, some are clearly women of the human realm, others obviously fiction and still others of the otherworld realm. Freyja, in her many incarnations through time, has been referred to with most of the above descriptions.

The völva (the one who turns, bends and evolves), is the one who sits at the hub, (or völur) of the wheel, thus having a view into every direction. She could not only see into the wheel of time, she could turn it and bend, influence the future with her prophesies. She was an evolver. She stored memory and from that memory she could

predict a future, but in addition to that she was in touch with the collective memory of all times and places, Urður, Verðandi and Skuld. From that connection came her ability to predict the becoming present. In Neolithic Europe and Asia Minor, - in the era between 7000 and 3000 BCE –, “religion focused on the wheel of life and its cyclical turning” (Gimbutas, 2001, p.3).

We have learned that Freyja was the original keeper of the seiður, the Vanir magic, which she taught to the Æsir. We have come to the conclusion that Gullveig is Freyja, and is reborn in Heiður, practicing seiður wherever she goes. Some sources (*Sigurdrífumál* e.g.) give the idea that the runes, the magical symbols, were an important aspect of the seiður, others see the runes as more related to the patriarchal Æsir magic called *galdur*, and Óðinn as the master of *galdur* and runes. Seiður and *galdur* may be two different traditions of magic or shamanism, but they clearly overlap at times, and may have with time come to be one. Blót (sacrifice, offering), was at one time an essential aspect of seiður and most sources indicate that singing or chanting was of utmost importance.

Freyja was a blótgyðja, a priestess or goddess of sacrifices and she was the one to teach the Æsir the art of seiður, which was practiced among the Vanir at that time. Óðinn was a master in seiður, but it was not thought fitting for other men, since “with this sorcery comes such female passion or *ergi* (homosexuality) that it was considered shameful for men to practice it, and so the art was taught to the priestesses” (*Ynglingasaga*, ch. 7). Its practice was only safe for women of a certain rank or education, i.e. the gyðjur, the Vanadís herself, and the ones who work with and represent her. The fact that Óðinn himself practices it, in spite of its danger to his manhood, can be

seen as an indication of its importance and his need to learn. Óðinn is ready to sacrifice almost anything for learning and wisdom, and this makes him lose his eye, as well as give birth to the runes.

The seiður has its positive or *heilla*-aspect (wholeness or fortune aspect), in the seeing, remembering and prophesying. However, in the literature a great emphasis is also put on the destructive side. The shameful side of men practicing a woman's kind of sorcery is made clear in *Lokasenna*, where Loki and Óðinn accuse each other of having committed the ultimate ergi. Loki refers to Óðinn's practices of beating drums and flying above earth in disguise, considering both a proof of Óðinn's womanliness or ergi.

We may find the origin of seiður mirrored in the different ideas of its etymology. Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) gives us a few different possibilities: It is related to West Germanic *saitchamiae*, which is a name for Old Germanic mother goddesses, and is also related to Lithuanian *saitas* (magic); it could be related to *sími* and *seiður* meaning fetters or threads and could in that way relate to the web of the nornir, the female creators of destiny; seiður could also be related to Old Indian *saman-*, meaning 'song' or 'poem', from the IE **sei-* **soi-*, -'to sing' or 'sound'. This last possibility has the same meaning as Óður. All explanations sound appropriate and likely, and so does the Icelandic meaning of the word kept in the folk tradition to this day, where *seiður* means *álfatöfrar* (elf magic), or any kind of enticing magic or effect. The verb *seiða* means to 'entice' or 'charm'.

Strömbäck, who already in 1935 wrote his book, *Sejd* (Swedish for seiður), is still the authority on that mysterious magic. He distinguishes between so-called "white" and "black" (sic!) seiður, white being the divinatory aspect, black the cursing part or the kind

that was aimed negatively at a person's spiritual life or meant to cause psychological damage. Any kind of heathen ritual in Christian times was of course considered evil, as was the nature of women, so most of what is recorded in the Sagas doesn't tell us much about the true nature of the art. Some sources give us indications of the essence as the divinatory aspect, the seeing and dreaming, the connection to the great wisdom or the *auður* of the great well, Urðarbrunnur. That is the power to which the völva or vitki gets access through the seiður. Strömbäck lists the many references on white seiður from the old literary sources, which he sees as remarkably unanimous (pp.142 - 144). In line with what Snorri says about the gyðjur learning or practicing the seiður, the great majority of the white seiður practitioners mentioned in the literature are women. Their title is seldom gyðja however, but most often völva or the other cognomens mentioned above.

The categorizing of seiður and other kind of magic into black and white, is a Kurgan or patriarchal phenomenon. Gimbutas has pointed out that in Old Europe "black did not mean death or the underworld; it was the color of fertility, the color of damp caves and rich soil, of the womb of the Goddess where life begins. White, on the other hand, was the color of death, of bones" (1989, p.xix).

There are a few aspects that seem to be of special importance in the practice of seiður, aspects that are not mentioned in connection with other forms of fjölkyngi or magic. In most of the stories about völvur practicing seiður we find one or more of the following descriptions: the völva is sitting high while she practices, above the crowd; she carries a staff, her vödur or gandur, often adorned with precious stones; she has a group of women (or women and men) with her to form a protective circle around her and sing. Singing seems to have been an essential element for the völva to enter into a trance-state,

a prerequisite for the ‘seeing’ or connecting to the *náttúru* (spirits) present. She does not sing herself, but has a group of people or only one singer chanting or singing special trance-evoking songs. Finally dreaming, or entering a trance state, during the night, is mentioned as a prerequisite for the seiður, or a part of it.

Hermann Pálsson (1997b) calls the seiðkonur of both north and south *völur* (*völvur*) and *galdranornir*, the latter term more common in modern everyday use, meaning ‘a witch’. It has a very clear negative clang to it whereas *völva* is a mystical, mythical, but rather benign word. The witches in the fairy tales, like the Grimm’s tales, are called *galdranornir*. They are either old, ugly hags, evil, child-eating monsters like in *Hansel and Gretel*, or the jealous, wicked stepmothers like in *Snow White*. Some of the women in the tales of the *Sagas* and even *Eddas* are reminiscent of the *galdranornir*, but most are not. Most are powerful wise women, either old and experienced, or young and beautiful, women who sometimes are only beneficent in the stories, whereas others are full of revenge. Those have most often in one way or another been betrayed or threatened by the heroes of the stories, although of course there are also examples of the evil witch. Those called *völvur* are usually of this world, wise women, without malice.

Where the line goes between seiður and *galdur* or other kinds of sorcery or *forneskja* (old wisdom), is very difficult to decide. By the time the stories that are our source material were written down, there might have been a general confusion, about which was which. The term seiður might then have been applied to all kinds of magic and words like *galdur*, *fjölkyngi* and *tröllsháttur* (behaving like a tröll), been used for seiður as well. In modern Icelandic the word galdur has taken over as a general term for magic or sorcery. So in determining what seiður was about and its connection to the culture of

Freyja and the Vanir, we have to use our dreams and imagination in addition to the *Sagas, Eddas* and our re-searching mind and use it all with care.

They called her *Heiður*

*Ein sat hún úti,
þá er hinn aldni kom
yggjungur ása
ok í augu leit.
Hvers fregnið mig?
Hví freistið mín?
Allt veit ek Óðinn
hvar þú auga falt
í inum mæra
Mímisbrunni.
Drekkur mjöð Mímir
morgin hverjan
af veði Valföðurs.
Vituð ér enn - eða hvað?
Völuspá, st. 28*

Alone she sat outside
when the old one arrived,
the anxious god,
into her eyes he gazed.
What do you seek from me?
Why do you entice me?
All do I know Óðinn
where thine eye was sold
into the finest
Fount of Mímir.
Each morning
Mímir drinks mead
from Valfather's pledge.
Do you know yet - or what?

These are the words of the *völva* in *Völuspá*, directed at Óðinn, who wakes her up from her deep sleep, and demands answers to his questions, the questions he cannot answer himself. He pulls her from the underworld, from the world of remembering. He brings her gifts, rings and necklaces, as is fit for the Goddess, but that is not enough. He has to lock his gaze into her eyes and entice her in order to get her out of her all-one-ness and talk to him. She asks him why? What is this all about? What do you want from me? And throughout the poem she repeats the question: *Vituð ér enn - eða hvað?* (Do you know yet – or what?) After the prophecy she descends, into the realm of the underworld, having finished her task, *Nú mun hún sökkvask* (Now she shall descend). Descending is remembering.

In the poem *Baldurs draumar* Óðinn descends to Hel's realm, to seek the interpretation of the völva on some strange dreams, which no one in the world of Æsir can decipher. He disguises himself and rides to the Underworld. He is met by a blood-swaddled dog, but he doesn't let him prevent his journey. He rides on to the huge house of Hel, turning towards the east-door, where he knows he can find a *völuleiði* (the grave of a völva). Singing his galdur he awakens her. She has been resting below for a long time.

*Var ek snivin snævi
ok slegin regni
ok drivin döggu,
dauð var ek lengi.*

Baldurs draumar, st. 5

Snow has fallen on me,
rain has rapped me,
the dews have dropped on me,
long have I been dead.

She is like her sister, sitting outside, tired and reluctant to give in to his wishes, but he coerces her to answer his questions. Each bit of information she gives, is followed by the words: “*nauðug sagðak, nú mun ek þegja*” (I spoke reluctant, now I will stay silent), but he eggs her on. The völva can tell him that the dreams predict Baldur's death, his upcoming descent to her realm. She finally recognizes Óðinn and he her. She is the underworld giantess Angurboða, Loki's consort and mother of the fearful trinity: the wolf Fenrisúlfur, the serpent Miðgarðsormur, and the mistress of that domain, Hel. The link between the völva and the goddess of death, whether called Hel, Angurboða or Freyja, is clearly revealed in *Baldurs draumar*, since she rises from the völva's grave. Till this day Islanders seek answers to their questions to the dead, mediums being much more popular than psychologists, when life becomes too difficult to handle.

The völvu's main function with her *seiður* is to give answers to humans, such as those two in *Völuspá* and *Baldurs draumar* give to the goð. She reveals knowledge about life, love, war and death; about the weather and the outcome of a journey; she reads into the dreams and hidden auður of the people seeking her assistance. She is the link to the Goddess, whether in her underworld or fertility aspect, she is the link between the nornir and the people who have lost their connection to the well of remembrance. Although the völvu usually emphasizes that she is merely uttering what she sees, she seems to some degree to be able to affect the lives of people with her seiður-premonitions. As we shall see in the following stories she can give rewards to those who earn it as in the story of Þorbjörg and Guðríður. In that way she is the representative of the Goddess, one who not only sees across the borders of worlds, but has power to affect the *náttúrur* (the spirits of nature), and thus in a way weave *örlög*. On the other hand, she is the voice of örlög, of Urður and auður, the irreversible destiny as in the saga of Örvar Oddur below.

We have to continuously remind ourselves that these are all descriptions from a time when patriarchy had taken over, first with the Æsir dominance in religion and culture and then Christianity. Among the many sagas of völvur practicing seiður there are two that describe the rituals in some detail. Those tales might tell us something about the then remaining importance of the female energy and values of Freyja in the practice, and the beginning of the end of it. One is from *Eiríks Saga*, about a völvu in Greenland towards the end of the 10th century and the other is from *Örvar-Odds Saga*, and takes place in Norway, a couple of centuries earlier, although chronological time is a little diffuse here, as elsewhere in the *Fornaldarsögur* (Old Norse Sagas).

Þorbjörg lítilvölva – the ninth sister

Eiríks Saga is based mostly on facts and in it we find the story of Þorbjörg, called *lítilvölva* (little völva). She used to travel with her nine sisters (or eight, making them nine altogether), who were all völur, but the others were all dead at the time of the story. Why she is called *lítilvölva*, we don't know, she might have been small of stature, since there is nothing indicating that her powers were diminished in any way, except the fact that she is now alone, although previously belonging to a group. She may also have been the youngest sister, beginning her practice while she was still little, a young girl. Þorbjörg traveled during winters, visiting the farms. Völur are often *farandkonur* (traveling women), who go from place to place to give their gifts of prophecy. In *Völuspá* Heiður was a traveling völva, who visited many homes. They seem to have been held in high regard in heathen times, and offered all kinds of gifts for their prophecies, as well as good food and rest.

According to the saga, the leading farmer in Greenland, Þorkell, is worried because the hunting has been very poor and the weather bad. A man is sent for Þorbjörg, since Þorkell sees it as his duty to ask her *frétta*¹²¹ (news) about the future of the Greenland settlement. When the völva comes to the house of the prominent farmer, she is greeted with great respect by everyone, “as was the custom when such women were received”. After she has greeted those she saw fit, Þorkell takes her by the hand and sees her to her seat or throne prepared for her. Her seat is high and softened with hen-down. She is well dressed.

Hon hafði yfir sér tuglamöttul blán, og var settur steinum allt í skaut ofan. Hon hafði á hálsi sér glertölur, lambskinnskofra svartan á höfði ok við innan kattsinn hvít. Ok hon hafði staf í hendi, ok var á knappur. Hann var búinn með messingu ok settr steinum ofan um knappinn. Hon hafði um sig hnjóskulinda, ok var þar á skjóðupungur mikill, ok varðveitti hon þar í töfr sín, þau er hon

þurfti til fróðleiks að hafa. Hon hafði á fótum sér kálfskinnskúa loðna ok í þvengi langa ok á tinknappar miklir á endunum. Hon hafði á höndum sér kattskinnglófa, ok váru hvítir innan ok loðnir. (Eiríks Saga, ch.4)

She wore a blue woven mantle adorned with stones all the way down to the hem. She had a necklace of glass beads and on her head a black lambskin hood lined on the inside with white cat's fur. In her hand she held a knobbed staff. The knob was of brass and decorated with stones. She wore a belt made of touchwood, and fastened on it a large bundle, and in this she kept the magical tools which she needed to seek her wisdom. On her feet she wore furry calfskin shoes with long laces that had large tin-buttons on the ends. Her hands were dressed in catskin gloves, with the white fur inside.

From her seat she explores the farm, watches the people and the animals, but doesn't say much. She is given a special meal.

Henni var gerr grautr af kiðjamjólk ok matbúin hjörtu ór öllum kykvendum, þeim er þar váru til. Hon hafði ok messingarspón ok hníf tannskeftan, tvíhólkaðan af eiri, ok var brotinn af oddurinn.

She was given a porridge made of goat milk and prepared hearts from all the animals, found at the farm. She had a brass-spoon and a knife with a tusk handle, with two copper rings, and the blade's point was broken off.

After the meal Þorkell asks her how she is doing, what she can make of the things she sees and how soon she will be able to tell the *fréttir* (news or prophecy). She claims that she will not say or do anything until the next morning, when she has slept there overnight.

Here we can find several clues as to the origin, status, role and rituals of the *völva*. Although the *Sagas* are fiction to a certain degree, we know that most of the characters existed at one time, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that Þorbjörg was a real person. She was held in high regard. This is partly because of the belief that the *völva* has

the ability to affect persons and happenings with her visions, but mostly because her visions are of immense importance for the culture's existence.

She had sisters. The story says she had nine sisters, but it is more likely that they were nine in all, and they may not have been born sisters, but worked and lived in sisterhood. The fact that she is alone could indicate that this is a dying profession. Her clothes are blue, a well-known ceremonial color, as well as the color of Hel and Óðinn. Hel is half-blue¹²² and half-white, but Óðinn was often clad in a blue cloak. Þorbjörg's black lambskin hood is lined inside with white cat fur. So the cat is white the lamb is black, which sets our prejudice in motion, since we tend to see it the other way around. This may indicate that Freyja's cats were white, that is if they were cats. Whether black sheep were of some ceremonial significance for the goddess we don't know, but that could be one of the reasons for their bad reputation today. Apart from the colors of the animals, her hood and her gloves indicate her connection to the cat and the sheep or ram, both animals of the Old European Goddess, as we have seen above. Her mantle is adorned with precious stones and around her neck she has a stone or glass-bead necklace. What glass means in this context we don't know. Freyja's *hörgur* (stone-altar) has become glass, from the bull's blood, so glass-beads could simply mean glass-like. Polished amber is glass-like and golden, so I envision the völva in her dark blue mantle, all set with amber, the golden tears of Freyja, and wearing them around her neck, like we have seen on images of the Old European gyðjur (Gimbutas, 2001, pp.84, 177).

She has the staff, her völr, made of wood and golden brass, decorated with stones. Around her waist she has a belt, which seems to be made of touchwood, her connection to her ancestress the tree. She eats goat's milk and hearts. These too, may be

symbolic, since milk and blood, as well as goats, have an obvious relation to the Goddess and her life and death aspects. Her knife has a tusk handle, probably made of walrus tusk, since this is in Greenland, but in other countries further south, this handle would be from boar's tusk. The two rings of copper could be symbolic of the sacred marriage, and the fact that the knife has a broken point signifies its ritualistic use.

Although this gyðja of Freyja is in significant ways different from the *gyðjur* in the culture of ancient Crete, we can clearly see the resemblance between them. There are, on the one hand, the priestesses' in the Xeste 3 temple on the island of Thera, and the ones on the seal stones recovered from Knossos; on the other there is the above description of Þorbjörg lítilvölva in Greenland. The seal stone goddess is standing on a mountain holding a scepter or seated on a tripartite platform, with lions flanking her. She receives gifts while seated. On one seal she sits under a lush tree. The Cretan priestess was:

seated high on a throne on a tripartite platform, flanked by a griffin and a monkey. Young girls bring her flowers in baskets. She is exquisitely dressed in a crocus costume and adorned with necklaces of ducks and dragonflies. Large golden hoops hang from her ears. Her dress harmonizes with the marshy landscape; she is mistress of nature. (Gimbutas, 2001, p. 142)

Þorbjörg will not speak until she has slept. Dreaming is of utmost importance to the völva (see Hermann Pálsson, 1997, pp. 92-94; *Fóstbræðra Saga*; *Orkneyinga Saga*). In the *Sagas* there are numerous accounts of women (and men) who use dreams, as a means of acquiring knowledge and it is still a prevalent tradition. Dreaming was considered an important part of the preparation for seiður, as well as looming large in the seiður itself, that consisted mainly of divination and dream interpretation.

Although most of the people present the following day are Christians, they all pay respect to the heathen völvá. She asks for women who can perform the song called *Varðlokur*¹²³, needed for the seiður. No one is found until Guðríður, a noble and Christian young woman from Island says: “Neither am I a sorceress nor a wise woman, but in Island I learned from my foster-mother, Halldís, a poem which she called *Varðlokur*”. Þorkell is delighted, but she continues by saying: “This is the sort of ceremony that I want to have nothing to do with, for I am a Christian woman”. The völvá tells her that she might help someone with her singing and not be worse off after, and finally, with pressure from Þorkell, she agrees. The women at the farm cast a ring around the völvá and Guðríður sings, and the singing is so beautiful that no one has heard anything comparable. This singing is crucial. The völvá thanks her and praises her, saying that the náttúru (spirits) that before had shunned the place now appear. The völvá says: “Now many things stand revealed to me which before were hidden both from me and from others”. She gives a prophecy of better times and a bright future for the whole community, but the best reward she gives to Guðríður. With her singing she has soothed the náttúru whose messages are now clear to the völvá.

It is a distinctive and prosperous life she sees for Guðríður and her descendants. The author of *Eiríks Saga* ends this story with telling us that there were few things that did not turn out as Þorbjörg prophesized (*Eiríks Saga*, ch. 4). Guðríður is the first known white woman to give birth to a child in the Americas. She was among those who in the following years sailed to Newfoundland and tried settlement there¹²⁴.

Þorbjörg is alone, now that her sisters seem to be gone or dead, and she has to rely on the singing of somebody in the house where she is performing. We can envision a time

when the nine sisters performed the seiður together, one sitting up high, the others standing in a circle around her, creating the protective closure and chanting the song called Varðlokur, all dressed according to the custom, honoring Freyja and the spirits of nature.

Heiður in the Sagas

The völva in *Örvar Odds Saga (Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda)* lived and worked in Norway at least a century and a half earlier than Þorbjörg lived in Greenland (according to the saga it was 300 years earlier, but that is not plausible). Her name was Heiður and she traveled around with a *raddlið* (voice team or choir) of 15 young men and 15 young women. She must have been quite successful in her work, since this kind of luxury is not mentioned in other stories at the time. This could, however, have been the custom earlier, but as so often we must remember that we are dealing with a saga of mostly fiction. We should note that the name of this völva is Heiður, like that of the völva in *Völuspá*. Whether or not she is the same, or inspired by her we don't know. Six völur in the literature bear this name, so it could be a common name or even a title for völur (see chapter on Gullveig above), or/and some of the stories might refer to the same woman. Of more than a hundred women who Hermann Pálsson has defined as völur or galdranornir, other than the six Heiður, there are four Gríma (mask) and five Grímhildur, four Gróa¹²⁵ and over twenty with names beginning with *Þór-*, *Þor-* or *Þur-* which is a reference to Þór. I will look more into this connection between Þór and the goddess below in the chapter on Þorgerður Hörgabráður.

Heiður is invited to a farm in Norway where the soon to be hero, Örvar Oddur, is staying. Örvar Oddur is a brute and a non-believer, believes in his own power or as it was termed in those days, his '*máttur og megin*'. When his foster-father, Ingjaldur, asks him and his foster-brother, Ásmundur¹²⁶, to fetch the völva to the next farm, where she was staying, he refuses and says that if she is invited he will surely take revenge. Ingjaldur ignores his protest and asks Ásmundur to invite the völva. After having been received much in the same manner as Þorbjörg, greeted with reverence and given a good meal, Heiður performs her seiður during the night, while the people of the house are sleeping. It is called *náttfararseiður* (night-traveling-seiður), and she performs it with her 30 young women and men. What the náttfararseiður consisted of we don't know, except of the indication that the young people must have sung or chanted, invoking the seiður, probably making a circle¹²⁷ around the völva who then traveled in trance to receive the *spá* (vision).

The next day, she receives everyone in the household and tells them their fate. She starts with the farmer and his son, and then she speaks to all the others. Örvar Oddur is upset about the völva's visit and hides underneath a blanket of furs. She notices him of course and asks why he shuns her. He demands that she be silent about his life, since he does not believe in her stuff. He even threatens to hit her with a club he has in his hands, if she speaks. She is not easily silenced, and in a poem she tells him what she foresees about his prosperous life, which shall be the longest any man will live, three hundred years. She also visions that after traveling across the whole world, Oddur will return to this place and be killed by the head of his gray horse, Faxi. Hearing this he becomes furious and does as he threatened to, hits her on the nose so the blood spurts out.

“Takið fót mín” sagði völvu, “ok ek vil fara á burt heðan, því at þess hefi ek hvergi komit fyrr, at menn hafi barit á mér. Eigi skaltu þat gera” sagði Ingjaldur, “því at bætr liggja til alls, ok skaltu hér vera þrjár nætr ok þiggja góðar gjafir”. Hún þá gjafirnar, en burt fór hún af veislunni.
(Örvar Odds Saga, ch. 2)

“Take my clothes”, said the völvu, “and I will part from here, since I have never before been to a place where men have beaten on me.” “Do not go”, said Ingjaldur, “since we shall make up for all, and you shall stay here three nights and accept good gifts from us.” She accepted the gifts, but left the feast.

Everything she predicted came true. In his fear and anger Örvar Oddur killed the gray horse, Faxi, immediately after the prophecy, but when returning to the place almost 300 years later, he stumbles upon the scull and from underneath it writhes a snake, which bites the arrogant man. While dying, Örvar Oddur thinks back, acknowledging the truth of Heiður’s spá in a long poem.

In another story (*Vatnsdæla Saga*), a Sámi (Finn) völvu is also threatened by a young man, whose great future she foresees, but he does not act out his threat. The hate, fear, blindness and arrogance towards the Goddess, is well expressed in the words and acts of the young (or ageless) men, representatives of the new times. We see the same in the before mentioned words of Hjalti Skeggjason, later in the words of the authors or writers of the *Sagas* and up until our days in the interpretations of the scholars.

The wise women of early settlement in Island, as well as Norway, often serve as foster mothers and protectors of the young warriors. One of the customs they seem to have practiced was to rub the naked bodies of those young men from head to toe, before they went to battle. This was done in order to see if they could feel some imbalance, an indication or foreboding sign of possible wounding. Their “massage” also gave a

protective shield to the warrior. There are numerous stories of this performance, and one such woman is Gríma (mask), who rubs or blesses her hero and his clothes, and sings over him before he goes to battle. She also sings old songs to affect the weather (*Fóstbræðra Saga*). The singing as a part of the preparations, indicates some sort of a seiður-ritual.

Another Heiður was the foster-mother of Haraldur hárfagri, whose name means ‘the fair-haired chief of warriors’. He was the Norwegian king who drew many of the settlers away from Norway, to Island, a Viking in the 9th century, i.e. before the advent of Christianity in Norway. It may be interesting to note that Haraldur was at one time in love with a woman called Gyða, a hofgyðja. She was a proud woman and told him that she would not have him until he had conquered all of Norway. He vowed that he would neither cut nor comb his beautiful golden hair until he had done as she wished, thus his epithet, *hárfagri*. Another wife of this king was Snæfríður (beautiful as snow), a Sámi princess, whom he loved so dearly that he kept her body and stayed by her side for three years after her death, or until he finally acknowledged her rotten state (*Flateyjarbók II*)¹²⁸.

Haraldur’s foster-mother, Heiður, lived in northern Norway (Sámi?) at a place called Gandvík. We know that gandur is the völva’s staff, a word also used for a phallus. A *vík* is a cove, a V-formed indentation into the land from the sea. So Gandvík is clearly a sexually symbolic name. Haraldur sent two of his men, Haukur and Vígharður to see Heiður, before a crucial battle. They brought her his gifts: a golden ring, two pieces of old ham of boar, and two barrels of butter. When they arrived at Gandvík, she sat by the fire and yawned awfully. This yawning seems to be a characteristic of the völur and may

indicate their half-conscious state. She was not dressed as well as her namesake in *Örvar Odd's Saga*, wearing nothing but a leather-dress, the sleeves only reaching to her elbows, indicating that she was half-naked. The men, who were tall of stature, only reached under her armpits, she was so huge. They gave her first the golden ring, then the boar-meat and the butter. She put the ring on her finger, took each of the barrels of butter under her arms and the boar on her back, announcing that of all the king's gifts the boar was dearest to her, and that Haraldur knew her needs and wishes.

She lights a fire and then she undresses the men and proceeds to rub their bodies. First she takes Haukur and finishes the ritual by asking him to kiss her. So he does, although the völva's one lip reached her breasts and the other spread over the nose. Vígharður is reluctant to take off his clothes and rejects the giantess' kiss. This he shouldn't have done, since he falls in the battle, whereas Haukur survives and returns to Heiður. She heals his wounds and sees him to a ship, and he lives happily ever after (*Flateyjarbók II.*). This saga has more of a legendary quality to it than the others, this Heiður could have lived in a cave and ridden a wolf, like Hyndla. She is huge and lives in the north, which indicates her jötunn origin. She receives a gold-ring, butter (milk from sheep, goat or cow), and last but not least, the meat of the boar, which to her is the most precious gift. All three are found in the memories of Freyja, the golden goddess, who rides the boar and is likened to the goat Heiðrún. She is also Heiður. Þorbjörg eats gruel of goat-milk and the hearts of all the other animals, probably also the swine. She has two golden rings on the (boar or walrus¹²⁹) tusk-handle of her knife. The fact that Heiður's protégées are Haraldur the golden haired one and Haukur (hawk), may also be of importance in understanding this little saga. As in the fairy tales some of the women of

seiður are old and monstrous, others are young or ageless and beautiful. All are powerful, and the ugly ones are no less sexual than the young, bold and beautiful, as we see from this saga.

Heiður wore a leather-garment, as Sámi women did in those times, their dresses made of reindeer-skin. The word *skinnkirtla* (skin-cloak) was used for Sámi women as well as giantesses, and may be one of many indications that in this Christian patriarchal literature they were one and the same (Hermann Pálsson, 1997, p.23). The Sámi can very well have been (and be) some of the last guardians of the Old European cultures. They, in their symbolic form as the jötnar, were the first humans; and they seem to be the last to keep the seiður and the memories of old alive. In the multi-hybrid culture of Iceland they got some help from their sisters and brothers from Ireland and the Hebrides. Þorbjörg may also have been of the indigenous people of Greenland, who have been keepers of their kind of seiður. There is nothing in her saga that indicates her origin, other than her name, which is very Norse and relates her to Þór.

Þór was a warrior, like his father Óðinn. The völva not only prepared her warriors for battle, with her rubbing and prophesizing, she sometimes followed them to the battle-scene itself. With the integration of the Vanir and Æsir cultures and introduction of war into the lives of the gyðjur and their lovers, the völva and the valkyrja seem to melt into one another. This is true for the great völva and valkyrja Vanadís, as well as her earthly counterparts.

5. Remembering Valkyrja

The death singer

*Sá hon valkyrjur
vitt of komnar,
görvar at riða
til Goðþjóðar;
Skuld hélt skildi,
en Skögul önnur,
Gunnr, Hildir, Göndul
ok Geirskögul.
Nú eru taldar
nönnur Herjans,
görvar at riða
grund valkyrjur*

Völuspá st. 30

Valkyrjur the Vala
visioned from afar,
eager to ride
to the gods' assembly,
Skuld held the shield,
Skögul was second,
Gunnr, Hildir, Göndul
and Geirskögul.
Now I have counted
the brides of war,
Valkyrjur ready
to ride across earth.

*Hrist ok Mist
vil ek at mér horn beri
Skeggjöld ok Skögul,
Hildir ok Þrúðr,
Hlökk ok Herfjötur,
Göll ok Geirönul,
Randgríðr ok Ráðgríðr
ok Reginleif,
bera þær Einherjum öl.*

Grímnismál, st.36

Hrist and Mist
shall bring me the horn,
Skeggjöld and Skögul,
Hildir and Þrúðr,
Hlökk and Herfjötur,
Göll and Geirönul,
Randgríðr and Ráðgríðr,
and Reginleif,
they pour ale for Einherjar.

In these two stanzas we have two different descriptions of the valkyrjur, *dísir* of death and rebirth, one from *Völuspá*, the other from *Grímnismál*. In *Völuspá*, they ride to battle, announcing the death of Baldur and the last great war in the world of the goð¹³⁰. In

Grímnismál the valkyrjur are in their servant role. Óðinn says he wants them to give him the mead-horn, and carry ale to the *Einherjar* (the dead and reborn warriors) in Valhöll. In their names and the atmosphere of the poems, there is little left to remind us of the Bird Goddess of old. They are affiliated with Óðinn and his warriors, and reduced to handmaidens in the great father's hall of death warriors, Valhöll.

In these two poems the names of the valkyrjur are not the same. Although most of them reflect war and death, we also find names of völvur, Ásynjur and nornir. We recognize Skuld from the threefold nornir and Þrúður as Þór's only daughter. Göndul is Freyja's pseudonym when she takes on a valkyrja disguise in *Sörla þáttur*, but Göndul is really a völvu name, related to gandr. This example illustrates the confusion or fusion between the groups of female deities and women of power, which clearly dominated the recording of the myths at that time in Iceland. Of course the same name may have been used for different divine or mythic beings, but I find it more likely that at times the poets and writers mixed the groups of female beings, and völvu, valkyrja, dís, norn and even Vanadís, Ásynja or jötnamær, all became one. The qualities of all those beings reflected more or less the qualities men relate to women, although exaggerated.

Let us refresh our memory of the etymological essence of the word valkyrja. *Val* can mean choice and so can *kyrja*. *Val* is also related to the IE **uel* and Latin *vellere* meaning 'to tear' or 'rip apart'. The *valur* can therefore mean 'the slain', and because of her function to decide over life and death of the warriors in battle, there has been an almost unanimous understanding that valkyrja is combined of *valur* (slain) and *kyrja* (choose), and means 'the one who chooses the slain'. But we have seen that *kyrja* can also mean to 'sing in a strong voice', or 'to sing to the divine', and has its roots in the

Greek *kyrios*, (lord). I had therefore concluded above that *val-kyrja* could be the one who sings the song of death, whether in war or at peaceful times. She is the messenger of the Death Goddess, and although the stories we have of valkyrjur are all more or less related to warriors, that may be because they all tell about times of war. The fact that Freyja is also a valkyrja, the chooser of the slain, as we learn from *Grímnismál* (above), supports this thesis. Freyja is Vanadís, and the Vanir's culture was a peace culture. The valkyrjur are also called dísir, both as the ones who weave the web of fate for men in battle, as well as in their role as lovers and healers. The *dísablót*, one of the main feasts of the year, was in their honor, and the greatest dís of all was the Vanadís (Ström, 1954). In addition to the descriptions in the stanzas above, in other poems and stories we get a more detailed and interesting image of these mystical beings, valkyrjur. Their numbers can be three, six as in *Völuspá*, nine, twelve or twenty-one; and in *Grímnismál* they can be counted to the magical number thirteen. Their names often reflect wisdom and nurturing as well as war. Like Freyja they weave the web of fate, they choose the time of death, they love, nurture, heal and they kill, they are like the vultures of Catal Hüyük, the fearful, desired and inescapable regenerative element.

During my years at The California Institute of Integral Studies, one of my Women's Spirituality sisters pointed out the possibility of a connection between vulture and val-kyrja. If *vala/völva* and *vulva* are the same word or closely related, why shouldn't the *vul-* in vulture be the same as the *val-* in valkyrja? I have not been able to confirm this relation, but until proven wrong I will keep it as a possibility. With this in mind, one can assume that the valkyrja, as well as Freyja and Óðinn choosing the warriors, are later versions of the swans of Urðarbrunnur, birds of the nornir, and the vultures found on the

walls of Catal Hüyük, who also seem to be priestesses in bird-cloaks preparing the dead for rebirth (Cameron, 1981, p. 30). Freyja is clearly the regenerating Bird Goddess herself. We see the same in myths from other cultures, such as the Basque vulture goddess Mari, who is surrounded by other vultures, the Celtic Morrigan or Badb (Badhbh) who is a crow (Gimbutas, 2001, p.184) or raven (Stewart, 1990, p.83); and the Baltic Ragana, who as well as taking the shape of a dog, sometimes flies as a crow surrounded by other Raganas of lesser importance (Gimbutas, 1991, p.343).

Although Óðinn has become the valkyrja's father or leader at the time of the *Eddas* and *Sagas*, her origin is probably older than he is, and clearly older than war in the world. As the valkyrja is diminished into the daughter of Óðinn, Freyja herself suffers a similar destiny at the hands of the heathen and Christian scholars and kings. She is diminished into Óðinn's messenger. In the before mentioned *Sörla þáttur* from *Flateyjarbók* (the story of the dwarfs and Brisingamen), Freyja is forced to perform a task that Óðinn sets for her. The task is to create an ongoing war between two major kings, who each rule over twenty minor kings. The two kings are to fight every day and be reborn every morning to continue the fighting until a Christian kills them all. Freyja accepts and performs the task. The kings are from Denmark and Serkland. Serkland is thought to be West Africa, but the name may come from the city of Sarkel, by the river Don/Tanai/Vanakvísl (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). Freyja takes on the role of a valkyrja, messenger of the great Óðinn, calls herself Göndul and entices the good king Héðinn to perform evil deeds, by giving him a poisoned drink. The detail in the story that only a Christian can free the great kings from her evil spell, explains some of this role-

change. It is interesting that another woman in this story also bears a valkyrja-name, Hildur. She is the good woman, the voice of reason and support in the saga.

A valkyrja is always a female being, but unlike the völvá, she has no male counterpart, none of her functions are taken over by a male. Her mate is the warrior, but she seldom chooses a mate for life. One of her main attributes is that she can fly as a bird, or she can ride on the back of a horse in thin air and in deep water, as well as move swiftly on the ground. She is seldom a mere human, although some valkyrjur wander in the mist between the worlds of goð and humans, but like other half-mythic beings, she has human feelings and her story is often a love story, although she is infinitely attached to her örlög as valkyrja. Her bird-form is a symbol of freedom, and when she gives in to her love for a man, or when men capture her, she may lose her swan-feathers. In this case she is akin to the mythic sealskin woman, the selkie, who transforms from seal to woman, but after a while she is bound to return to her natural state.

Vinur – ‘friends’ - weavers of death

As swans and as weavers of örlög the valkyrjur are closely related to the Skapanornir. We find the remnants of their role as weavers of death in the story of *Darraðarljóð*, which can be found in *Njáls Saga*. The story takes place at *Katanes* (Caithness), the place of the cats, on Good Friday in the year 1014. It gives a mythic account of the famous battle between the Vikings and the Irish king at Clontarf. A man taking a walk in Caithness saw 12 men riding and then disappearing into a women’s bower or temple. He went to the bower, looked in through the window and saw that the

men were really twelve women, weaving. They used men's heads in place of weights, men's intestines in place of weft and warp. And they chanted:

<i>Vítt er orpið</i>	Blood rains	Wide is the slain's
<i>fyr valfalli</i>	From the cloudy web	warp of death.
<i>rífs reiðiský</i>	On the broad loom	Bloody tears
<i>rignir blóð.</i>	Of slaughter	torn from clouds.
<i>Nú er fyr geirum</i>	The web of man	Flanked by spears,
<i>grár upp kominn</i>	Gray as armor	is the gray web
<i>vefr verþjóðar</i>	Is now being woven;	of the warriors,
<i>sá er vinur fylla</i>	The valkyries	woven by women,
<i>rauðum vefi</i>	Will cross it	the weft so red
<i>randvés bana.</i>	With a crimson weft.	for soldier's death.
<i>Vindum vindum</i>	Let us now wind	Wind and wind
<i>vef darraðar</i>	the web of war	the web of battle
<i>og siklingi</i>	and then follow	and the king
<i>síðan fylgjum.</i>	the king to battle.	we come to follow.
<i>Þær sjá bragna</i>	Gunn and Gondul	They see the bloody
<i>blóðgar randir</i>	can see there	circle of shields,
<i>Gunnr og Göndu, l</i>	The blood spattered shields	Gunnur and Göndul
<i>þær er grami fylgdu.</i>	that guarded the king.	who guard the king.
...
<i>Látum eigi</i>	Let his life	Let him not
<i>líf hans farast,</i>	not be taken	leave this life,
<i>eigu valkyrjur</i>	Only the Valkyries	sole valkyrjur
<i>vals of kosti.</i>	can choose the slain.	shall choose the slain
<i>Darraðarljóð,</i>	(translation:	
<i>Njáls Saga</i>	Magnús Magnússon and	
	Hermann Pálsson, 1960).	

The poem is a long one, and after the weaving and chanting, the women go out and ride away, six to the south and six to the north. While this is happening, the battle is supposed to have taken place at Clontarf, where almost all the men were killed, except

one young warrior, protected by the valkyrjur. *Darraður* means ‘spear’ and one of Óðinn’s names is Dörruður, so the poem may refer to Óðinn, but more likely it simply means ‘Spear-poem’, referring to the spears of the valkyrjur, with which they weave their web of örlög. From even this short bit of the poem, we can detect men’s fear at the time connected to the valkyrja as a goddess of örlög and death, as well as the still living belief in their power. These maidens of örlög, call themselves valkyrjur in the poem, as well as *vinur* (friends). Freyja also addressed Hyndla as *vina* in *Hyndluljóð*. *Vina/vinur* is as we have seen, most probably related to Vanir and Venus (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). Although there is nothing loving or friendly about the atmosphere of *Darraðarljóð*, in the myths surrounding the Vanir, there is however, nothing fearful or grotesque, or anything similar to the scenes in this poem. The fact that the the women in the *Darraðarljóð* ride on horseback, relates them to Óðinn and the Æsir, but then again, the age of war has long since begun and mythic beings as well as humans adapt.

The Bird Goddess of Old Europe had a dual nature. As giver of life and nourishment she appeared as swan, duck or egg, and as death wielder her form is a bird of prey or carrion eater, vulture or raven. The swan was in fact also a bird of death, and its color, white, is in accordance with white as the color of death. To the Bird Goddess death is a part of a spiraling process, of nurturing and being nurtured, she is as active in the slaying part as in the reviving and healing part, but those parts cannot be separated. It could be of interest here, that the only mention of re-incarnation to the human realm that I have come across in the Islandic myths is in relation to the valkyrjur and their heroes¹³¹, in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* and *Völsungakviða hin forna*.

The valkyrja and the hero

Hervör alvitur –‘all wise’ and Völundur

In the heroic myths of the Old Norse Sagas and Eddas the hero can seldom be separated from the valkyrja, they are essentially a pair. The valkyrja in these poems and sagas is usually not a group being, she is very much an individual, an independent woman. An exception may be Hervör, who is a close relative of the nornir, one of a threefold valkyrja-entity.

Völundur and his two brothers are the sons of the king of the Finns, the Sámis. They run on skis while hunting, like their goddess Skaði. At one time they come to the Valley of Wolves where they build themselves a house by the Lake of Wolves. One morning they come across three swan-maidens, sitting by the lake, weaving their flax. They have their swan-cloaks beside them. They are valkyrjur, having flown from the dark woods of the south to the northern mountains. Their names are Hervör *alvitur* (all wise), Hlaðguðr *svanhvít* (swan white) and *Ölrún* (Ale rune).

The three northern brothers take the three southern swan-maidens to their house, and there they live for seven years, but in the eighth year the women start longing for the darkness. On the ninth winter they have no choice but to fly away, to live according to their örlög. Two of the brothers go looking for their women, but Völundur stays in the Valley of Wolves, waiting for the return of Hervör alvitur. He fashions rings, one after another, from red gold, hammered against a gemstone. He slips the rings over the branches of a linden tree, until it is all covered with seven hundred rings, all made for his love, the wise valkyrja.

Völundur later suffers an abysmal fate, but his name lives on in the term *völundarsmiði*, meaning ‘a beautifully crafted piece’. In that respect he is akin to the *dvergar*, who were known for their unmatched skills in crafting, and they also crafted the most famous of all rings of gold, Draupnir. The dwarf is always male, as the valkyrja is always female, but I have not come across stories about dwarfs as lovers, except the one

of Freyja and the dwarfs of the dark stone. As I have also mentioned above, the Sámis were at times called *dvergar* as well as *jötnar* and *þursar*. In the poem *Völundur* is called king of *álfar* and we have seen how *álfar* and *Vanir* are often referred to as the same tribe, and Freyr is called king of *álfar*. *Álfur* is quite a common proper name for kings affiliated with the Goddess, whether *Sámi*, *Vanir*, or from other unnamed tribes (see *Álfur* and *Gyðja* in *Örvar Odds Saga*, below).

As the dwarfs of *Ásgarður* fashioned *Brísingamen* for Freyja, *Völundur* fashions rings of red gold, all for his *valkyrja*, and we may see this saga as the reversed fate of Freyja and *Óður*. *Óður* goes away, and so does *Hervör*. In their deep sorrow, *Völundur* and Freyja weep tears/rings of red gold. I could reflect upon what this red gold represents in the connection between lovers, and why this metal is such an instrument of *örlög* in so many of the myths, but I will not. I will merely state that it is more than a symbol of greed, and of what we today connect to wealth. Before leaving *Völundur* and the *valkyrja* I want to point to the fact that in this poem we have the common connection of *álftir* (swans), *álfar*, *valkyrjur*, *öndurgoð* (skiing gods/goddesses), wolves and *Sámis*. Like in all good heroic myths we have the abysmal *örlög* of the hero, but although the swan maidens of this story weave the *örlög* of the men, there is nothing fearful about their way of being, unlike the ones in *Darraðarljóð*.

Sváva and Helgi

In the poem *Helga kviða Hjörvarðssonar*, we have another well known theme, which is the Freyja and Hyndla or Inanna and Ereshkigal theme, the Underworld Goddess versus Goddess of heaven and earth. The *valkyrja* in this poem is an individual woman, a

semi-mythic being, who travels in or leads groups with other valkyrjur, nine or twenty-one, but she is an individual, independent from the group.

The hero, who is dumb and has no name, meets a group of nine valkyrjur. One is the most gracious. Her name is Sváva. She addresses him with the name Helgi (holy or whole), and tells him where he can find a sword guarded by a snake. From that moment he can speak, he has a name and the most important tool of any hero, a sword. She follows him in battles and protects him, but stays anonymous, he does not know her name or identity.

On one occasion Helgi and his friend Atli are met by a giantess called Hríngerður, whose father they have killed. She asks Helgi to spend a night with her and thus pay the ransom for her father's murder. He refuses and then she tells them that she would not hesitate to kill them if not there was Sváva, the valkyrja who loves and protects Helgi. Hríngerður knows that Sváva rides in a group of three times nine maidens. When they ride, dew drops from their horses' manes and hail falls into the tall trees. The giantess describes Sváva as the golden maiden and is obviously at awe by her power and beauty. The men keep Hríngerður talking, till the sun rises, and she turns to stone.

Helgi finds Sváva again and they become lovers but she stays true to her identity as valkyrja, continues to stay at her father's house and ride to battle. Helgi and Sváva are however not able to escape their örlög, on the day of Yule, which was the day of the great *álfablót*. Héðinn is met by the giantess riding on a wolf, with snakes for reins. She offers him her company, but he rejects her and she has her revenge. At the blót that evening, when the boar was served, and the toasts made to the goð, Héðinn is tempted to make a vow of having Sváva as his lover. At that very moment Helgi is deadly wounded in a battle. Helgi dies in the arms of Sváva, but he asks her to take Héðinn as her husband after his death. She answers that she had made the vow to never love anyone but Helgi. It is said that Helgi and Sváva were reborn.

The theme of the Goddess, the hero of the sword, and the giantess, is not the only link to the myths of the Vanir that we find here. This giantess' father has been killed by

the hero/god, just like Skaði's father was killed by the Æsir. This valkyrja does not have a swan or other bird-cloak that we know of. She rides in air and water, *riður loft og lög*, but probably on horseback like the valkyrjur in *Völuspá*. She is a golden maiden, with unmatched powers. Whether the powers of the giantess are not strong enough to break through the protection given to Helgi by the valkyrja, is not clear, since she too may suffer from the örlög set by the old one at the right moment.

Sváva was the daughter of king Eylimi. Her sister was Hjördís Eylimadóttir, mother of Sigurður Fáfnisbani.

Brynhildur and Sigurður

The most famous valkyrja is probably Brynhildur, the wonderful, mysterious and merciless lover of Sigurður Fáfnisbani, who has him killed in her desperation and anger, and then she takes her own life. As Freyja was punished for disobeying her lover Óðinn, so was his daughter the valkyrja Brynhildur. Brynhildur took sides in a battle with one of the kings, against Óðinn's wishes. His punishment was that she should lose her valkyrja-nature and get married. She pledged to marry no one who knows fear, and asked him to cast a ring of fire around her, so that no one would dare to ride through it except the greatest of heroes.

After Sigurður has killed the great dragon-snake, Fáfnir, he finds Brynhildur lying asleep on a hill, inside a ring of fire¹³². She is clad in armor, which has grown into her skin, indicating that she has been there a long time, or that her valkyrja-nature is an integral part of her being. He cuts off her armor with his sword. They recognize each

other immediately, and he is eager to learn of her wisdom. She gives him a drink of memory and a wisdom poem¹³³. She starts by calling upon the goddesses and gods:

<i>Heilir æsir.</i>	Hail to Æsir.
<i>Heilar ásynjur.</i>	Hail Ásynjur.
<i>Heil sjá hin fjölnýta fold.</i>	Hail to you almighty earth.
<i>Mál of mannvit</i>	Speech and wisdom
<i>gefðu okkur mærum tveim</i>	give to us lovers
<i>ok læknishendur, meðan lifum</i>	and healing hands, while we live.

<i>Bjargrúnar skaltu kunna,</i>	Savior runes you shall know
<i>ef þú bjarga vilt</i>	if you wish to save
<i>kind frá konum;</i>	a child being born;
<i>á lófum þær skal rísta</i>	those shall be cut in palms
<i>ok of liðu spenna</i>	and fastened on joints,
<i>ok biðja þá dísir duga.</i>	seeking the dísir's support.

Sigurdrífumál, st. 4 and 9

Brynhildur lists all the important runes and advices against betrayal and blindness that she can give him, doing her best to prevent the örlög created for Sigurður and herself. She knows their auður, the unfathomable love, treasures and terrible örlög awaiting them, but he will not listen. He finds her wisdom unequaled, but is blinded by fascination. They make love and promise each other eternal love; then he leaves her on the mountain. We know the rest of the *Völsungasaga*.

Queen Grímhildur, mother of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, gives Sigurður a drink of oblivion; he forgets all about Brynhildur, and marries Guðrún. Guðrún's brother, Gunnar, is in love with Brynhildur, and Sigurður who is a true friend shifts shape with Gunnar, and rides through the fire to get Brynhildur for him. Gunnar and Brynhildur marry, and when she finds out that both her husband and her former lover have betrayed her, she becomes sick with grief and then hatred. She eggs Gunnar and his brother on to kill Sigurður; she then kills herself, and is burned with him.

After Sigurður's death, his widow Guðrún's hatred and cruelty grows to unknown dimensions. She marries again, to Brynhildur's brother Atli (Attila the Hun) and has two sons with him. On one occasion she kills the sons, and serves their blood and hearts to her husband. Then she kills him.

The *Völsungasaga* is a beautiful and terrifying epic of heroes and heroines, of love and hatred, and cruelty beyond compare; but does it have anything to do with the connection to the Old European Bird Goddess, and to the themes we have been exploring from the Vanir culture?

Brynhildur's ring of fire is reminiscent of Freyja's necklace, Brísingamen, but necklaces and rings of fire are such common symbols in the old myths and legends, that we would be stretching it a bit too far, if we assumed that in Brynhildur we could find Freyja's image through the ring or the fire. A closer relation is found in their roles as valkyrjur, disturbing the peace between the two great men, Sigurður and Gunnar in Brynhildur's case, Héðinn and Högni in Freyja's. This role of theirs is an adaptation to Kurgan, patriarchal thinking, where men's quarrels were thought to be caused by women, and it is a distortion of their roles as valkyrja and Vanadís.

What we can see in both Brynhildur and Guðrún, is that they are women of örlög, they choose the dead, and Brynhildur is a völva as well as a valkyrja. She knows her own destiny. She dreams, she sees, she even tells Sigurður about their future in order to try to change, what she knows to be their örlög and therefore unchangeable. Like other valkyrjur she is a weaver, and at one time she weaves the saga of Sigurður into a long cloth with images of golden threads.

There is hardly any indication of Brynhildur being a bird, and none in the *Sagas*. In the poem *Helreið Brynhildar*, there is one stanza that reminds us of her bird origin. This is still another poem where a valkyrja and a giantess challenge each other, and in that way still another version of Hyndluljóð. After Brynhildur has been burned with her lover, Sigurður, she rides in her chariot to the Underworld, to Hel. On her way she drives through the mound of a giantess. The giantess scolds the valkyrja for intruding into her domain, once more a reminder of the fierce Ereshkigal punishing her sister Inanna, for invading her underworld privacy. Brynhildur is still proud and answers by recounting her trials and tribulations through time:

<i>Lét hami vára</i>	The angry king
<i>hugfullr konungr</i>	took my cloak
<i>átta systra</i>	and my eight sisters'
<i>und eik borit;</i>	lay them under the oak;
<i>var ek vetra tólf</i>	I was but twelve years
<i>ef þik lystir vita</i>	if you want to know
<i>er ek ungum gram</i>	when to the young man
<i>eiða seldak.</i>	I pledged my vow.

Helreið Brynhildar st. 8

This stanza is difficult to decipher, but we can try. What makes it difficult is that here we have memories not recorded elsewhere. When we meet Brynhildur in *Völsungasaga*, she is a grown up woman, has been a valkyrja for some time, and has been taken out of that function by Óðinn. We have never heard anything about her life as a child or as a valkyrja before the fateful battle where she lets the “wrong” king die. From her memories, told to her underworld sister in *Helreið Brynhildar*, she reveals something about a time when a king who is *hugfullr* (determined)¹³⁴, takes the *hamir* (shapes, cloaks) of Brynhildur and her eight sisters, and lays them under an oak tree. The king she

mentions could be Óðinn himself, who took her and her sisters into his service. He could also have been her father, and he could have given them the bird forms under the tree, instead of taking them away. This could refer to an initiation ceremony, where the king/father gives his daughters to Óðinn or the Goddess, symbolized by the oak.

Could the king have been Sigurður, and then she would have been only 12 years old when she made her pledge to him, or was the pledge for the young prince Agnarr, whom she protected in the fateful battle? Is she saying that she was only 12 years old at the time when Óðinn put her to sleep in the ring of fire? And when he took away her bird form.

Around the world of today, girls are given in marriage at the age of 12 or 13. The UN ambassador, Waris Dirie, in her book *Desert Flower* (1998), recounts when her father planned to give her away at that age. Brynhildur may well have been 12 years old, when she was initiated as a valkyrja, or as a woman. To be able to fully understand the context we need to know more, and we don't, but from this one stanza we can assume that Brynhildur, as well as Hervör and Freyja, had her bird-cloak and that it had significance in some kind of rites of passage.

Her name, Brynhildur, seems at first glance to be very war related. *Bryn-* comes from *brynja*, meaning 'armor', and *-hildur* is 'battle', but this is an Æsir interpretation. If we look behind that, *brynja* is actually derived from Old Irish *bruinne*, from **brusnios*, meaning 'breast'. So *brynja* means 'breast-plate' (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989) and could originally have simply been a word for breast. The *-hildur* part of the name is related to Hel, Holla and Hulda and hollow, hill and hall (see above). Here we have, once again, an incorporation of an Old European phenomenon, the Great Goddess of death and rebirth,

the breast of the Underworld, into the Kurgan patriarchal war culture, the valkyrja, ‘singing bird-goddess’ turned ‘chooser of the slain’. Brynhildur, which looked at from this perspective, really means simply ‘woman’, the one with *brynja* (breasts) and *hildur* (womb), has become the warriorress, clad in *brynja* (armor), ready for *hildur* (battle). When Inanna, queen and goddess of Sumer, prepares herself for the descent to her sister Ereshkigal, she puts on her breastplate, her *brynja*, exactly like she does before her wedding to Dumuzi. A breastplate may simply have been a *men* (necklace), and the Brísingamen, may have been Freyja’s *brynja*.

The valkyrja’s daughter

Áslaug / Kráka / Randalín

Although Freyja has a daughter or daughters, none of the female beings we have been remembering here are typical mothers or mother goddesses. The nornir are never mentioned as mothers, although there is a Sámi queen called Skuld, who is one of the ancestors of the Ynglingar. Skaði is also the mother of Óðinn’s sons, and Gefjun is a mother, but not the valkyrjur as such, nor the völvur. Brynhildur is an exception, and as a true valkyrja, independent and unbound, she was a single mother. When Sigurður awakened Brynhildur on the hill the first time, the fruit of their love was a daughter, Áslaug, who was fostered with Brynhildur’s uncle *Heimir* (World).

After the death of her parents, Heimir leaves the country with Áslaug, then three years old. He builds a huge harp and hides Áslaug in it, disguises himself as a poor man, and carries her through the world. When Áslaug is hungry Heimir gives her a tiny bite of a vine-leek to taste, and when she cries he plays the harp for her. In this manner they travel all the way up through the North of Europe, all the way to a narrow fjord in Northern Norway. There a woman called Gríma

(Mask) discovers Heimir's rich clothes under the rags, and she urges her husband Áki to kill Heimir. Then they raise Áslaug as their daughter. Since she is beautiful and they are ugly, Gríma covers her beauty with dirt, and calls her *Kráka* (Crow), after her own mother. From the moment Heimir is killed, Kráka never utters a word, and the old ones think that she is dumb.

When Kráka is eighteen, Ragnar loðbrók, king of Denmark, visits the remote fjord. He has just lost his beloved wife. Ragnar stays aboard the ship and sends his men to the farm, to bake some bread. Kráka washes her hair and body in a creek, and appears to the men at the farm, her beauty radiating. At that occasion she also speaks for the first time in 15 years. When the men return to the ship, bewildered by her beauty, and with burned bread, the king becomes curious. He sends her a word and puts her through a test. She must solve three riddles, since her beauty is only worth something to him, if her wisdom equals her beauty. She must come to his ship without the escort of any person, and yet not alone. She must not be dressed, and yet not naked. She must not have eaten, and yet she must not feel hunger. She solves all three tests.

King Ragnar wants her to follow him to Denmark, but she sends him away to come back for her a year later. Áslaug becomes queen of Denmark, and has many sons with Ragnar, but she doesn't reveal her true identity, until she is carrying the youngest, Sigurður, in her womb. At that time Ragnar is planning to marry another woman, but changes his mind, knowing who Áslaug really is. She bears the son, and calls him Sigurður ormur í auga (Sigurður with the Snake in his eye). Her sons all become great heroes, and when they are grown men, fighting with their father, Áslaug gets in touch with her ancestry and rides with them to battle. She takes the name Randalín (Shield Woman).¹³⁵

Áslaug is a shape shifter, like all the valkyrjur. She transforms from a golden child to a mute black crow, to a mother and wife, and finally she becomes the fighting valkyrja, her bond with her long gone mother awakened. Áslaug is in fact the only valkyrja I have come across who is linked with the black bird, in this case the crow, which relates her to the Celtic Morrigan and Basque Ragana.

This saga of Áslaug/Kráka was converted into a fairy tale, and when I was growing up, it was my favorite. The magic of the harp-song, her tragic and powerful silence, the three unsolvable tasks that she passed, and her örlög, were all so fascinating to the little girl. The fact is that the stories of Áslaug and Brynhildur are an important link between myth, history and my present.

From valkyrja's daughter to Valgerðardóttir

My name is Valgerður Hjördís Bjarnadóttir. According to traditional patriarchal sources Valgerður means 'the one who guards the battlefield' and Hjördís is 'the goddess of the sword'. At this point I would be tempted to redefine those interpretations. Valgerður is linked to the goddess of earth and the valur, i.e. Freyja, and Hjör-dís is the dís of Freyr, since Freyr's symbol is the sword. Both names relate clearly to the one source, the first one, the twin deity, Freyja-Freyr. My father's name Bjarni, means bear, and is thus related to our oldest ancestors.

When I realized as a little girl that Auður djúpúðga, was my earliest ancestress in this country, I felt special, unaware of the fact that most Islanders can trace their roots to her and the other settlers. There was something in her name and saga that fascinated me. Later, as I was searching for my mythological roots, I found that those roots and my earthly ones fused in Auður djúpúðga. Her husband, *Ólafur hvíti* (the white wolf) was the great grandson of Áslaug Brynhildardóttir and Ragnar loðbrók, (*Íslendingabók, Langfeðgatal*). As we have seen, Áslaug's father was the son of Hjördís Eyrimadóttir, sister of the valkyrja Sváva. It seems like magic that Icelandic women and men can

actually trace their roots back to valkyrjur and dragon slayers, with references from the sagas. It is not only fascinating, but also extremely empowering.

This game of tracing our roots back to mythical figures seems to have been practiced among Islanders from the beginning. It is the very motive behind Snorri's *Heimskringla* and maybe *Edda* too. There he traces his own roots back to Yngvi Freyr, Njörður and Óðinn, and even king Priam of Troy, using different sources and links as we have seen above in the chapters on Vanir and Æsir. For the fun of it I attach (Appendix 2) the shortcut from my daughter Sunna Elín Valgerðardóttir, to our foremothers Brynhildur Buðladóttir and Hjördís Eylimadóttir. From there we can also trace it further to Yngvi Freyr and Gerður and Njörður (and Nerthus?). The possibility that Brynhildur and Sigurður may never have existed, and the probable model for the mythical Brynhildur lived many centuries before the set date for the myths, in no way destroys the magic, since what we are dealing with here is not grounded logical facts, but the mystery of myth and its paradoxical links to personal saga.

Part three

6. Three Times Burned – Three Times Born

Þorgerður Hörgabrúður – the mountain bride

*Flýtir hann sér í goðahús
prýddur pelli og skríði
féll fram á sín bæði kné
og tilbað Hörgabrúði
Þorgeirs Rímur*

He hurries to the house of gods
clad in clothes of pride
kneeling down on both his knees
for sacred Mountain bride

One of the remnants of goddess worship in fusion with ancestor or ancestress worship is found in the saga of Þorgerður, goddess of Hákon jarl, the last pagan earl in Norway. Hákon was the descendant of Sæmingur, son of Óðinn and Skaði. Hákon's love for Þorgerður is described in the lines above. In the many short fractions of stories we have of Þorgerður Hörgabrúður¹³⁶, we have almost as many slightly different versions of her name. She is also called *Hölgabrúður*, *Helgabrúður*, *Hörðabrúður* and *Hörgatröll*. They could all be right, according to different times and places but the epithets have different meanings, and therefore give different ideas of her role and origin. I have changed my mind a couple of times regarding which one I find most likely or maybe interesting, but at this moment I choose to use the version Hörgabrúður, meaning 'bride of the shrine' or 'mountain goddess, bride or woman'¹³⁷.

The above stanza, in which she is called Hörgabrúður, is part of a longer poem or rimes called *Þorgeirs rímur*, recorded by Bjarni Einarsson in 1955, in his *Munnmælasögur* (Oral Legends) (Hermann Pálsson, 1997b). The stanza recounts the relationship between Þorgerður and Hákon Hlaðajarl, who as mentioned, was the last

pagan earl in Norway. He lived in Hálogaland, in the north of Norway and his devotion to his ancestress or goddess Þorgerður must have been remarkable to his contemporaries, since there are so many fantastic tales about their relationship. Who she was while living, we don't know. Even the stories from this late date, late 10th century, have a myth-like atmosphere around them, so what is waking reality and what fantasy or myth is unclear. What is clear is that Earl Hákon existed, that he was the last pagan earl in Norway and the main opponent of the Christian kings Ólafur Tryggvason and Ólafur helgi. It is also quite clear that he worshipped or loved a gyðja called Þorgerður and her sister Irpa¹³⁸, and that those two had a special place in the inner sanctuary of the temples he built for the pagan goð. There are detailed accounts of these temples in *Ólafs Saga Tryggvasonar* and *Njáls Saga*, and they seem to have been the last sanctuaries for the old deities in Norway. There is also evidence of the worship of Þorgerður Hörgabrúður in Island, by one Grímkell, who was a settler in the Northwest of Island. He was from Hálogaland (Hermann Pálsson, 1997b).

Her name, Þorgerður, relates her to Þór, although the Gerður part may refer to Freyr's bride from the giant world. Gerður is used in so many names, however, e.g. Valgerður, becoming simply a common word for woman, so we should not jump to conclusions. Näsström (1995) among others, suggests that Þorgerður is a late version of Gerður and she may be right, but I find it necessary to tread lightly in using the last half of her name as an indication for her being the old giantess. Þorgerður is actually a very common name at the dawn of Christianity, and if she was a living woman at one time, her name may indicate nothing. Her relationship to both Þór and Freyr, as we shall see, is what supports these ideas around her name.

According to Snorri, Þorgerður was the daughter of one Helgi, and he calls her either *Helgabrúður* or *Hölgabrúður*. *Brúður* is often used in the meaning ‘woman’ or ‘goddess’, as Freyja is *Vanabrúður*, and literally means ‘bride’, which makes Snorri’s “daughter thesis” rather unlikely. It is more probable that she was the wife of some Helgi. Þorgerður comes close to being a valkyrja, and they often had consorts named Helgi. Other sources say she was from Hálogaland, and thus *Hölga* (< *Háloga*) – *brúður*. If this is the right version of her name, it seems more likely or at least more interesting to me that she is *hölga-* or *helgabrúður* in her own right, meaning not the bride of Helgi, but ‘holy or sacred bride’. Brigid, Sacred Bride or Saint Bridget, is well known from Ireland as one of the last goddesses, although she surpassed Þorgerður *helgabrúður* and lived to be a Christian deity, something Þorgerður was far from.

Þorgerður’s *haugur* (mound) seems to have existed, which indicates that she was worshipped as an ancestress, likely having the role of a *hofgyðja* (priestess) in life. There is a saga of her brother, Sóti (Dark one), who also seems to have lived on in his potent mound, made of earth and silver. Þorgerður may also have a Sámi origin, since she is in one saga referred to as tröll. She may well have been such a potent völva, that she took her place among the goð after her death. The fact that her brother was also worshipped, points in the direction of the Vanir, brother and sister pair. Yngvi-Freyr, like Sóti, was buried in a *haugur* or house, which was filled with gold, silver and copper.

In *Flateyjarbók* we find the most substantial parts of her saga. Earl Hákon relied on Þorgerður and her sister in his warfare against the Christians. On one occasion he is losing a battle, and he calls on Þorgerður for help. He kneels down and turns to the north, addressing her. He asks her to accept gifts of all sorts, but she doesn’t answer. Then he

says he will sacrifice men, but she still doesn't answer. At last he gives her his youngest son, and has him sacrificed by his slave. Then he returns to his ship, addressing his men with these words:

“ok veit ek víst að oss mun sigurs auðið verða, ok gangið fram at betr, því at ek hefi heitit á Þorgerði Hörðabrúði og þær báðar systur, ok munu þær eigi bregðast nú heldr en fyrr.”
(*Flateyjarbók I*, 1945, p. 210)

“and I know that we shall be granted victory, and use all your strength, since I have called upon Þorgerður Hörðabrúður, and the sisters both, and they will not forsake us now, more than hitherto”.

At that moment heavy clouds filled the sky, and the northern wind blew strong with snow, thunder and lightning, against Hákon's enemies. Then the sisters appeared among Hákon's men, and arrows flew from each of their fingers, killing a man with every dart. Hákon won this battle, but later his own slave, the one who performed the sacrifice of his son, killed Hákon.

Human sacrifice is a common theme in the *Sagas*. Kings, especially the Ynglingar, seem to be sacrificed to the Goddess in *Ynglingasaga*. I have chosen not to look specifically into that part of the culture, since it is heavily loaded with Christian prejudice, and because that would be a theme for a whole thesis. There is however little doubt that although kings and king's sons, may have been ritually sacrificed for Freyja or Þorgerður, many more have suffered a sacrificial death in battle in the name of Óðinn.

In another tale in *Flateyjarbók*, taking place after Hákon's death, we find a tragic and vivid description of Þorgerður's “death” or demolition, reminding us of Gullveig, who was killed again and often. Hákon had built a great temple of glass and gold, filled with treasures, gold and silver. In *Njáls Saga* we find one version of the destruction of a

temple, where Þór resides, sitting in his chariot with Þorgerður and Irpa to either side of him. This connection to Þór might indicate that Gerður was really her name or title (as Freyja is a title and name), but that in this case she was Lady of Þór and not Freyr, although those two often have very similar qualities.

The story I am referring to in *Flateyjarbók* takes place after Earl Hákon has been killed, and King Ólafur Tryggvason is taking over all of his possessions and worldly power. To mark his own power and that of his new God and his son Jesu Christi, he has broken into Freyr's temple and taken an idol of Freyr and cut it to pieces in front of Freyr's devotees, Earl Hákon's men. Guided by one of Hákon's former followers, Porkell, he proceeds to another temple, in a grove deep in the woods.

Þar var búð eitt sæti harðla fagrt, og í því sæti sat ein kona, klædd harðla vel. Konungr spurði hver kona sú væri. (Flateyjarbók I., 1945, pp. 452-453)

“There was a seat, decorated rather beautifully and in that seat there was a woman, dressed rather well. The king asked who that woman might be”.

Porkell tells him that the statue is Þorgerður Hölgabrúður, friend of Earl Hákon. The king then strips the statue of her clothes and golden treasures, drags her outside and ties her naked body to the tail of his horse. In that manner he rides to his men and asks, “Who wants to buy a woman?”. They ask whose possession she is, and he answers that since she has lost her dear husband, she is now in their custody.

“Sá hefir ok hátr verit um hrið, at höfðingjar þessa lands, hverr eftir annan, hafa hana helsti mjök þrísat, en nú er svá komit hennar högum, at hon mun hlíta verða várri forsjá.” (p. 453)

“For some time we have had a situation, where the chiefs of this land, one after another, have adored her a bit too much, but now her situation is such that she has to abide by us”.

As the men look closer at the image, they recognize her, and one of them exclaims:

“Hví ertu hér Þorgerður, svá herfilega hneist og óvirðulega af flett þínum bjarta búnaði, þeim er Hákon jarl lét þig hafa, þá er hann elskaði þig?” (p. 453)

“Why are you here Þorgerður, so terribly shamed and disgracefully stripped of your glowing costume, which Earl Hákon gave you whence he loved you?”

Becoming aware of the fact that he is in a dangerous manner revealing his own love for the Goddess, the man then continues by stressing that never did he love her, and that he had used every opportunity to humiliate and make fun of her. The king then asks the men to dress Þorgerður again, puts her on the throne and surrounds her with the golden treasures from her temple, Hákon’s offerings to her. Then he orders them to walk by her, while he carefully examines their emotional response. When all the men have thoroughly denied their love for Þorgerður, king Ólafur orders them to strip her of her clothes again, and then he hits her with his club so hard that she breaks to pieces. Then he sets fire to the statues of both Þorgerður and Freyr, and burns them to ashes.

It is surprising how emotionally moving the account of this incidence is in Flateyjarbók, considering the fact that a devoted Christian records it. The men relate to this wooden Goddess, as though she were alive. Þorgerður obviously had a strong position in the pagan culture in Northern Norway at that time. From the king’s words about the pagan chiefs’ devotion to her, “one after another, having adored her a bit too much”, it seems that she has been venerated for some time, centuries even. She is killed with Freyr, she is his female counterpart, and she is found sitting on one side of Þór, her sister Irpa on the other, they are his “brides” or sisters. Her name, Þorgerður Hörgabrúður (Bride of the shrine (or stone) or Mountain bride), relates her to the blótgyðja and Vanabrúður, Freyja herself, as well as Þór and Freyr. Her golden image

also reflects Freyja, as well as Gerður with her golden arms, and Sif, with her hair of gold. The arrows, flying from her fingers, have the sound of Skaði. Skaði is also her devotee's foremother. It is not far-fetched to assume that Þorgerður Hörgabrúður was the last Great Goddess of Norse Norway, in some way an incarnation of Freyja, Gerður, Sif and Skaði. The Sámis continued to worship their goddesses and in fact still do, in spite of all the Christian patriarchal attempts to destroy those beliefs. In that way Þorgerður Hörgabrúður, like Gullveig, has been killed and reborn, again and often, and yet is still living in northernmost Norway, in the Sámi sun goddess Beive, the fire goddess Sáráhkka, and the bow or arrow goddess Jouksaáhkka (Myrhaug, 1997, pp. 84-88).

Another arrow-goddess and another Goddess murder is described in *Örvar Odds Saga*. Although it is supposed to take place far away from the coasts of Island or Norway, it is in many ways strangely similar to the saga of Þorgerður and Freyr and reflects the awe and attitude towards the Goddess and her husband/brother/lover, still looming large in the times of the writing of the *Sagas*. Örvar Oddur was the young man who hit the völva, Heiður, after she had given him a most promising prophesy. Among his evil deeds during his 300 year long life, was the killing of a hofgyðja in Antiokkia¹³⁹, Syria. Her name is simply Gyðja and her husband is called Álfur, two powerfully symbolic names, and that *Saga* is full of powerful symbols. After Örvar Oddur has shot Álfur with his special arrows, through both of his eyes and heart, he proceeds to the great city where Gyðja tries to stop him, by standing in the opening of the city's gate, arrows flying from each of her fingers, just like they did from Irpa and Þorgerður. Örvar Oddur sets fire to all the temples and shrines he can reach in the city, shocking Gyðja, who addresses him with a poem.

*Hverr veldur eldi
hverr orrustu
hverr jarls megin
oddum beitir?
Hof sviðnuðu
hörgar brunnu
hverr rauð eggjar
Yngva liði?*

Örvar Odds Saga, ch. 29

Who makes fire
who makes war
whose earl-power is behind
those arrows?
Temples were scalded
shrines were burned
Who reddened his blade
from Yngvi's blood?

Gyðja calls on Freyr, the Æsir and Ásynjur for help, but to no avail. Örvar Oddur attacks her with a club, as he did the völva Heiður almost 300 years earlier, and as King Ólafur attacked Þorgerður Hörgabrúður. Gyðja flees from him into the main temple, and Oddur does not have the courage to follow her into the sacred shrine of the Goddess, so he finds a window through which he throws a huge boulder, which breaks her spine. After that he returns to her husband who is not yet dead and beats him with the club till he dies.

It is interesting that the author defines the king and high priestess of Antiokkia as servants of the Æsir, Yngvi Freyr, and the Ásynjur. It is also of interest to find, in the description of the murder of this Gyðja and Álfur, so many memories from Freyr, Freyja and the saga of Hörgabrúður above. Just like Þorgerður is defined as *tröll* (giantess), this Gyðja is called *gýgur* (giantess), as she dies. The patriarchal scholars have also called Gullveig/Heiður an evil witch. Whether one of the authors of those two Sagas, of Ólafur and Oddur, are influenced by the other's story, and whether both might have been influenced by *Völuspá* and the saga of Gullveig, I don't know. The likeness is striking, but my belief is that what we have here is a collective myth with roots in real memory,

three versions of the threefold death of the goddess, killed by the invading king/god/hero and reborn to become again the bride of the king and hero.

Auður djúpúðga – the ancestress

Auður djúpúðga was the bride of king Ólafur hvíti. She was a Norse valkyrja and a Celtic Christian. The stories of Auður djúpúðga are found in several *Sagas*¹⁴⁰, among the *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of the Islanders), as opposed to *Örvar Odds Saga* and *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, which are found among the *Fornaldarsögur* (The Old Norse Sagas) and in *Flateyjarbók*. The latter are known to have less historical reference, as they take place in the outside world and before the settlement of Island, but the saga of Auður djúpúðga is somewhere in the mist between myth and history. It is only a fraction of other *Sagas*. We know in fact very little about this woman, although she is probably the best known woman among the original settlers in Island; but her vague saga is still adventurous, mysterious and mythical, as well as grounded in Islandic soil and my own woman's blood. Born in Norway, Auður seems to have traveled with her father, Ketill *flatnefur* (flat nose)¹⁴¹, to the Hebrides and from there she settled in Dublin, Ireland with her husband Ólafur hvíti. He was king in Ireland a short while during Viking times and they had one son, Þorsteinn *rauður* (the red). There is no clear evidence that Ólafur reigned in Ireland, let alone Auður, but when Ólafur was killed she is said to have left for the Hebrides again and raised the boy there. Auður had two sisters, Þórunn hynna and Jórunn mannvitsbrekka. They all became settlers in Island, and so did their brothers. Their names and/or epithets are of interest. We have examined Auður's first name in depth already. Her epithet, *djúp-úðga* means 'deep minded' and goes well with Auður.

There is in fact one other Auður djúpúðga in the *Sagas*, but she is only mentioned once, and doesn't seem to have any affiliation with our Auður djúpúðga. In *Laxdæla Saga* Auður is called Unnur, but I will not try to find any explanations for that here, other than to mention that Unnur means wave or sea, and may in fact be related to *unna* (love), *vina* (friend), Venus and Vanir. Þórunn hyrna is *Þór-unn* (loved by Þór) and *hyrna* is 'the horned one'. The third sister's name, *Jór-unn* is 'loved by a horse', or 'lover of the horse' and her other name *mannvitsbrekka* means simply 'human wisdom-slope'. Auður may be called Unnur in *Laxdæla Saga*, because the two other sisters have names with *-unn* (love or sea) in them. The brothers bear well known names Björn and Helgi. Although all those names were common in that part of the world in those days, there is no need to deny the possibility that they are allegorical.

During Auður's stay in Celtic Britain, Christianity was well established there, the Goddess religion gone into the mist. The former Great Goddess, Brigid, Morgan or Danu, lived on in St. Bride or Bridget, Mary and even in the Sheela na gig. When Auður djúpúðga set sails for Island, a grandmother having lost her husband, father and son, she took with her the children of her son Þorsteinn, six girls and one boy, and she took with her the new faith, Celtic Christianity. She built her ship in the dark woods of Scotland, and fled from there. She made her first stop in the Orkneys, where she gave away one of her granddaughters, then she sailed to the Faeroes, where she gave away another, and from there to Island. She settled on the west coast, and reigned in her area till old age. She gave her four granddaughters away, she gave freedom to her slaves and she married her young grandson, Ólafur feilan, to a Celtic woman from Barrey, one of the islands of the Hebrides. Her name was Álfdí, a name that needs no further interpretation here.

Auður invited everyone to the wedding and people came from all over the country to celebrate with Ólafur and Álfdrís. Auður was an old woman by that time, and people remarked that she looked incredibly strong and powerful as she walked to her room after the first evening's feasting. She called her grandson to her bed and asked him to continue the feast for three days and nights, but that her time had come to leave. She died and was buried on the shore, where the waves of the Great Mother could caress her body.

Auður is said to have raised a cross on a hill near her farm. That hill and those nearby are called *Krosshólar* (Cross-Hills), and it is said that her descendants, - who returned to the old pagan faith for the next century -, developed a strong belief in those hills. Hills have continued to have magical powers in the Islandic folk beliefs, and the mind of modern people. They are the homes of the álfar, as well as the sacred breasts of earth. The hills of my country, with the small bushes of birch and willow, made the perfect environment for a dreamer, and it was lying in the grass on those hills, shaded by the leaves of the birch that I dreamt my dreams of having birds' wings to fly. That was where I came closest to feeling the breast of the Goddess in my culture.

7. Yet still is living

Álfkonan – the Vanadís of Álfheimar

Álfkonan, the Fairy, is still very alive in Islandic people's minds and in nature. When I was growing up, my grandmother used to tell me stories of her interaction with the people of Álfheimar – the world of Fairy. She had played with the children of that world, as a girl, and as a mother, she had been supported by them at times of distress. My own mother had been delivered into this world with the help of the Álfkona. The (human) midwife, who assisted my grandmother at my mother's birth, was known to have an assistant from Álfheimar. I don't think there is a single Islander today, who has not heard similar stories from the older members of her/his family. The rocks and hills of this country are still, in the modern world of the 21 century, alive with the spirit of the álfar. This race is known to be a beautiful one, and both men and women have been enticed into the hills and rocks by the both women and men of the álfar tribe. Some have returned to tell the stories, some never return. As a child I stood by the window on New Years Eve, staring at the rocks in our garden, praying to be able to see the álfar, but I never did. My father once saw a group of them, men and women. The women were all dressed in blue and the men in brown. In his mind, there was no doubt about this, although he was a very down to earth man.

All the aspects of the culture of the álfar, are corresponding to that of the Vanir. They are people of love, singing, seiður and healing. We have also seen that Freyr is the ruler of Álfheimar and the Vanir are often called álfar (as in Lokasenna). We could therefore assume that the Vanir and their culture, have lived on, in the minds of humans,

as well as in nature, in the form of the álfar. The Vanadís is still living, in the form of the *Álfadrottning* (Fairy queen).

In Celtic mythology we have the same phenomenon, in the Tuatha De Danann, the tribe of the Goddess Danu or Dana, who made an agreement with the humans, that humans would be allowed to rule in the upper regions, while the Tuatha De Danann became the rulers of the lower regions. “To this day the *sidh* or fairy hills are found all over Ireland, and strong folk traditions preserve the knowledge of a mysterious people living underground” (Stewart, 1990, p.134). It is appealing to ponder upon the possibility that the Vanadís and Danu are one and the same, or at least related in more than simply being two images of the Goddess. Vanir and Danu could be etymologically related, Danmark (Denmark) could be the land of Danu, and in the name of the river Don, called both Tanaís and Vanakvísl by Snorri, we find the integration of the two.

In Island, as in Ireland, the Vanadís or Danu was replaced by María or Mary, with Christianity. She was the Goddess worshipped by Auður djúpúðga and her sisters. It is of interest that the common image of Mary in our modern culture, is almost exactly the same as the image of the Álfkona, a beautiful woman, dressed in blue.

María mey – Our Lady Mary

The Goddess whom the English speaking call Lady or Virgin Mary, and I learned to know by the name María mey, was living among the Islanders, as well as other Northern Europeans for centuries, but the time came when she, like her older sisters, was burned. While the conversion from paganism to Christianity was relatively peaceful in Island, the process from Catholic to Protestant Christianity, was stained with blood. The

last Catholic bishop was killed in the 16th century, but his daughter Þóra, who lived in Eyjafjörður (the place where Þórunn hýrna lived, and I still do), continued the worship of María for another 50 years after that .

As I was visiting in Lithuania in the fall of 1999, my friend Margarita Jankauskaitė took me on a tour around Vilnius. She took me to the main gate in the old border wall. Above the gate, inside the wall itself, Our Lady Marija resides in her temple overlooking the city. Worn steps of stone lead up to the temple, which is a small chapel, and up those steps some old women crawl on their knees to show their devotion to the Mother Marija. Margarita told me that while she was pregnant she stopped by in the temple of Marija, to pray for the baby's health, every time she came from visiting her doctor.

I walked up the stairs following and passing a stream of women of all ages, crawling up the worn stone-steps. By the entrance door we passed a wooden carved image of Christ on the cross, the women bowed and greeted him shortly, but went immediately on to meet Marija. There was one man in the chapel; he was measuring the altar-cloth, which probably needed to be replaced. He didn't seem to give any notice to the women around him, nor they to him. The women sat, knelt or stood around the tiny chapel, praying. Many were weeping.

I knelt before the beautiful golden image of Our Lady and immediately tears started running down my cheeks. I felt profound grief for the fact that She had been taken away from me, from Islandic women, from all Protestants, women and men. The religious/political leaders of my country had taken this tradition from the old culture. To be able to drop by in the midst of a daily routine and have an intimate talk with my

Goddess, away from me. For the moment I had forgotten that she can never be taken away, every time an image of her is stabbed, burned or buried, she is reborn in a new form. I grew up with the álfkona, not realizing her true nature. Reverence for the Lady had also been restricted in Lithuania during the Soviet times, but the people will not forget her.

I imagine it was with this kind of love for the female divine that Marija Gimbutas grew up. She has also mentioned how old customs, like milk-feeding the white snake, Egla¹⁴², was part of everyday life in her country. Marija Gimbutas, with her snake- and bird-goddesses, her incredible ability to re-member, has given us a chance to reclaim the essence of the old culture, but we will not return to old ways. Every time Gullveig is reborn in a human body or mind, it is in a new form, whereas her essence, auður stays the same.

Björk – Tree Goddess

The rune berkana or bjarkan gets its symbolism from the birch, called *björk* in Icelandic. This soft but strong tree has not only had its roots in Icelandic soil for millennia, but has also grown into the psyche of the nation. The *björk* is the only tree that has managed to form woods in this northern island. Ari fróði tells us that at the time of settlement in Iceland, the woods covered the island from shore to mountaintop. This scene is difficult to imagine for the modern Islander, used to travel from almost every shore to almost every mountain, without getting more than a glimpse of a lonely *björk* on a hillside. There are exceptions, for example around Akureyri, where I grew up and still live, and in the valleys of north and east, such as Fnjóskadalur where I spend my

summers surrounded by the birch woods. With my paternal grandfather and in fact most of my extended paternal family, I spent my summers planting, chasing sheep and tending to the trees. After half a century we are now reaping the rewards, as the few groves have grown to woods, and finally the young sprouts have the necessary protection and nurturance to grow to trees. The hills are no longer adorned with the small bushes of my childhood; they are being covered with björk, tall and gracious, as they may have been in Auður djúpúðga's time.

The björk (*berkana*, *bjarkan* or *berkano*) symbolizes the Goddess in the runic alphabet. It is therefore interesting that the most widely known Islander of all times, is the singing diva, Björk. It is of even more interest that as Björk grows, she takes more and more on the image of the Goddess. When appearing at the Oscars, to sing her *Selma Song*, she was in the valkyrja's swan-shape, causing turmoil among the Hollywood stars. On her latest album she sings her *Pagan poetry*, in a mysterious humming voice; she *kyrjar* (chants), and in the video version she is clad in nothing but pearls, the gems or *gersemar* of the ocean. Björk has a divine way of crossing all boundaries, and yet never referring to anything but the essence of the divine. Her videos are adorned with the beauty of Icelandic nature, the symbolism she uses is simple love, the *völva* and *völur* in divine intercourse, forever disguised in the mist of metaphor. She is a new *gyðja* in her very special way, a true descendant of Brynhildur, retrieving her lost bird-cloak, a singing valkyrja.

Vituð ér enn –eða hvað? - the resounding question of the völva

*Geyr nú Garmr mjök
fyr Gnipahelli
festr mun slitna
ok Freki renna;
fjöld veit ek fræða,
fram sé ég lengra
um ragna rök
römm sigtíva.
Völuspá*

The dog fervently barks
Before the grand cave
the fetters will be torn
and the wolf will run;
I know much more
I see far and further
of the powerful örlög
of the great goð.

This stanza is a repeated theme in *Völuspá*, joined with the völva's question *Vituð ér enn, - eða hvað?* (Do you know yet, - or what?). This recurrent message of where we are heading, along with the continuing expression of the völva's dismay of Óðinn's blindness, should have woken the descendants of the goð from their waking sleep. But it didn't. For a thousand years and more she has sent her message across the world of humans, but we have given away our hearing as well as our eyesight, thrown those important abilities away. Never have we been closer to Ragnarök, the end of the world of humans and the goð we have chosen. In the last battle she sees the total destruction:

*Sól tér sortna,
sigr fold í mar,
hverfa af himni
heiðar stjörnur;
geisar eimi
ok aldrnari,
leikr hár hiti
við himin sjalfan.
Völuspá, st. 57*

Sun will blacken,
earth sinks into sea,
shining stars
from heaven vanish;
Furious flames
in the towering tree;
the raging heat
reaches heaven.

Since I began the writing of this work we have moved considerably closer to this scene. War is raging all across the world, there are no boundaries any more. Brothers are fighting in the name of their god with different names, and Óðinn is as blind as ever. The situation in Island in the 13th century, was in some ways similar, although in a smaller context. The different families or tribes of the country were at war, and would probably have destroyed the culture, sunk the earth into the sea and burned the tree of life, if they would not have been stopped by the völvu. This was the age called *Sturlungaöld*, the age of the Sturlungar, called after Snorri's family. This was the time when Snorri and so many of the other writers were recording the poems, myths and sagas. So it was a time of enormous intellectual and technological changes, and a time of remembering, as well as a time of total blindness towards the need of nurturing the tree. Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir was the niece of Snorri, daughter of Sighvatur Sturluson. She was known to be the wisest woman in the country. Along with the Bishop, she was called to lead the negotiations between the warring parties, but it was made clear that if Steinvör and the Bishop didn't agree, she was to have the final word. She led the peace talks and she was successful (*Sturlunga Saga*). The writing, the remembering of the old myths, the recording of *Völuspá* may have awoken them, we don't know. She may have recited the words of the völvu, *Vituð ér enn –eða hvað?*, in order to catch their attention. The national peace has lasted for over seven centuries, although Island, as a member state of the NATO, is at this time at war like the rest of the world. Where are the women of today's peace-talks? For decades Israeli and Palestinian women have talked, danced, sung, laughed and cried together, in their attempts to settle their differences across borders. Why are those women not called upon for advice, at this crucial moment? Will the women in Afghanistan ever

live to see ‘*ár og friður*’, peace and prosperity for their children? Will we be able to turn the tide, from total destruction of our earth mother, to regeneration through the power of auður?

My hope is that just as Gullveig is burned and reborn again and often, so is earth. After earth has sunk into the sea and the tree has burned like Gullveig did in the hall of Óðinn, she rises again.

*Sér hún upp koma
öðru sinni
jörð úr ægi
iðjagræna;
falla fossar,
flýgr örn yfir,
sá er á fjalli
fiska veiðir.*

Völuspá, st. 59

She sees upcoming
a second time
green earth growing
great from the sea
Falling waters
flying eagle
from the mountain
fish catching.

Epilogue

On every step of my journey through this work, I have been inspired and encouraged by Marija Gimbutas. Her courage, passion, stamina, intelligence, scholarship and impeccability and her loyalty to her roots, have at times overwhelmed me, but then she shows me her humble side and reminds me of the fact that she too was self-critical, doubtful and even scared. I visited her grave in Kaunas, Lithuania, last summer, in the graveyard standing by the street bearing her name. The grave, where her earthly remains rest alongside her mother's, was hard to find. It does not stand out, it has no fancy sculptures like so many of the others. Their grave has a statue of a mother with her child in her arms. Marija Gimbutas was true to her roots, incessant in her search for truth and sincere in her interpretation of what she found. She searched and researched, wrote and rewrote, re-membered till her dying day, knowing that this work is never-ending.

Auður - a dream

It is a beautiful day. I, the Vanadís, stand in my white temple, Sessrúmnir, up in the mountain slopes above the fjord. I am beautiful, tall as a mountain, dressed in white. My temple is empty except for my consort, my husband, father and brother, behind me. He has no name and no body, only a head with gray wavy hair and beard. His eyes are deep, wise and blue. They remember, they remember all. I love him, respect and trust him, unconditionally.

I look across the land and over the fjord, and I see the barren red earth everywhere. The tree has burned, the sky has blackened, stars have vanished and earth has sunk in sea. There is no life, no growth, and I wait and wonder.

Then I see the giant, stepping up from the waters and walk towards the mountain, towards my temple. He is made of red clay and I recognize him as Auður, first son of Jörð. I communicate with my consort about my task, and he gives his consent.

The steps of Auður are heavy, shaking this barren earth. He has no soul, no feelings or thought. Yet I can so easily detect the wealth sleeping in his body. I walk towards him and take his hand. I lead him to Fólkvangur, the Valley of Death and Rebirth, and we lie down on the barren earth.

I am aware of the risk I am taking. I know that if I arouse his passion before his love and wisdom, he will destroy me. I am careful in my caresses. I touch his body with my loving hands and whisper words of love and wisdom in his ear. I can feel him respond, and I sense his body changing. I feel his soft skin and the growing energy in his now vibrant body. We make love. The earth trembles and I feel his thick hair when I run my fingers over his head. We are one. I open my eyes and look into his. He is beautiful! My lost Óður returned to me. After all the red tears I have shed for him, I welcome him back.

I look around me, and the whole earth has come alive with our lovemaking. There are fields of green grass, flowers and trees. I can smell the newly awakened nature. I am pleased with my act of love and power, grateful. I feel whole.

Then the earth trembles anew. It is a steady throbbing. I look up, and in the North, where the fjord meets the ocean, I see hundreds of giants rise from the ocean, and walk their lifeless weighty steps towards me. Some are made of red clay and others are made of dark gray rock. I know and accept that my task is eternal.

I release this work in the hope that it may contribute to the re-membling of the loving embrace of Auður.

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Appendix 1 - Islandic words and terms

Annar means ‘other’ or ‘second’, and is Nótt’s second husband. In another text he is a descendant of the Trojan Þór and is also referred to as Athra, who is according to Jobes (1961) another version of Auður. Athra or Aethra is in the Greek myths the personification of the all-permeating atmosphere. She is a Greek goddess, daughter of Nyx/Night/Nótt, who is also mother of Theseus/Sun, by Aegeus/Sea

Askur is the first man, as well as the Tree of Life or World Tree, Askur Yggdrasils (the Horse of Yggur (the frightened or frightening one, e.g. Óðinn)). Askur is the ash tree, but it can also refer to any tree.

Auðumla is the original cow, the second being created in Ginnungagap, by the merging of ice and fire. Auðumla created the first man, Búri, by licking the salty stones. The most common version of her name is Auðhumla. Auðumla could mean either ‘the original lowing cow’ or ‘the fateful lowing cow’, or ‘the rich lowing cow’.

Auður in modern Islandic is used as a masculine noun meaning wealth/riches and as a masculine adjective meaning empty/void. An Old Islandic version of this word as a feminine noun is no longer in use, except as a woman’s name. In that form it means riches/wealth and destiny/örlög and joy/delight and death and void and web. (See Annar, above)

Álfdröttning (- *kóngur*) are the queen and king of the álfar (see below). Their image has in the last century been influenced by ideas of fairies from abroad. On the night of the thirteenth of jól (yule), January 6th, in Island, there is a great fire and celebration with álfar, tröll, púkar (little demons) and dvergar. The procession of those beings is lead by a wagon with the queen and king of álfar, dressed in a “Shakespearean” fashion, but the idea can without doubt be traced back to the *álfablót* of old.

Álfkona is composed of *álfur* and *kona* –‘woman’ and means a woman of the álfar tribe. Men sometimes feared the álfkona, since she was/is a sexual being who lured men into the rocks, and could be destructive if they didn’t obey.

Álft (plural *álfir*) is one of the two most common names for the bird called swan in English. The other is *svanur*. *Álft* is from IE **albut-* and **albit-*; Latin *albus*, meaning white. *Álft* is very likely related to *álfur* (see below) See also *svanur* (below).

Álfur (plural *álfar*) is a name used for a tribe of hidden people, who nowadays live in stones, rocks and hills, a graceful and powerful race. Their healing power is great and so they are sought in health threatening circumstances, such as difficult childbirth. They often interact with humans as healers, as well as lovers but they can also be dangerous, even killers. The female, *álfkona*, seems to be more powerful or more approachable than the males. Many still, in the Island of today, consider *Álfar* a real tribe, and their existence is at times taken into consideration, e.g. when roads are built through so-called *álfasteinar* (fairy stones) or *álfhólar* (hills) or *álfaklettur* (rocks). Then they are contacted by mediums and consulted. In the old literature *álfar* sometimes seems to be used as a synonym for Vanir, especially in the context *Æsir* and *álfar* (Vanir), meaning all the *goð*. Freyr was the ruler of

Álfheimar (World of Elves)

Ár: 'year' and 'early', or 'prosperity' and 'good harvest', as in the context *ár og friður*, 'prosperity and peace'. Freyr and Njörður were 'sacrificed to' for *ár og friður*.

Ás/Ásynja: God/Goddess of the *Æsir*, or a person of the tribe of *Æsir*, if human. The Vanir: Freyja, Freyr and Njörður are often referred to as *Æsir* (*Ás/Ásynja*), and so are some of the *jötnar*, such as Gerður, Loki and Mímir. *Ás* is probably from the root **ans* meaning god.

Ásgarður is the world of the *goð*. In the Icelandic mythology there are nine worlds, among them are *Miðgarður*, world of humans, and *Ásgarður*, world of *goð*.

Blót is used both for the ritual of sacrifice or offering to a deity, as well as the ceremony and/or feast connected to the offering. *Blót* and *seiður* are connected, *blót* is often followed by a *seiður*, or *seiður* seems sometimes to require a ritual sacrifice.

Blótgyðja refers to a goddess or priestess (see *gyðja* below) of sacrifices or offerings.

Borr, Bur or *Burr* means son. There may be an etymological and perhaps logical relation between *burr*, *borr*, *búri* and bear, the bear being the ancestor image in many northern myths.

Búri and his son *Borr* or *Burr* (as in some versions) are probably all sons.

Dagur: Day. In the myths *Dagur* is the third child of *Nótt*, his father being *Dellingur* (the Shining).

Dís and *día* (fem. sing.), *disir* (plur.) and *dú* (masc. sing.), *díar* (plur.) are old Icelandic words for goddess and god, or divine beings. Etymological sources suggest that *dú* is related to the Latin *deus*, but do not see this connection in the female *dís*-version, which they say related to Old Indian *dhisána*

(divine female). *Dís* is used more often than *día*, and *díi* is only used in poetry, meaning ‘god’, and then by Snorri in *Ynglingasaga*, where it seems to be more related to earthly power, since Óðinn’s chiefs were called *díar* or *drottmar*. *Dís* is common in modern Icelandic. It has partly kept its original meaning and is used for all kinds of spirits, like *vatnadís* (female water-spirit), *skógardís* (fairy of the forest), but also the *fegurðardís* (beauty queen) of this realm. It is also common in women’s names, both as a proper name *Dís* and as e.g. in my own middle name *Hjördís*, which means ‘Goddess of the sword’. *Díi* and *día* are never used in modern Icelandic.

Drottinn, drottning - In modern Icelandic ***drottinn*** is seldom used in the context of worldly power. It means Lord in the context Lord Jesus or God, whereas ***drottning*** means queen, usually referring to queens of this world, but can also refer to Mary, queen of heaven, *himnadrottning*. The verb, *að drottna*, means to reign usually in the negative meaning to dominate.

Embla was the first woman. The word is thought to represent a tree of some sort, but unlike *Askur*, *Embla* is not mentioned in another context. Etymological sources indicate that *Embla* could come from **almilön* and be the Elm tree. More likely it’s related to the Gaul *amella* meaning ‘goat leaf’ or the Greek *ámpepos*, an Old European word for vine. If the last is the case *Embla*, the first Norse/Icelandic mythic woman is at least etymologically Old European.

Ergi is an old word meaning passion, lust, cowardice and male homosexuality. Today it is mainly used to express irritability. Related to *argur*, modern meaning irritated or angry.

Fjölknúg means simply ‘knowing a multitude of things’ or in other words ‘wise’.

Fjörgyn is another name for *Jörð*/Earth, the mother of *Þór*. *Fjörgynn* (masculine) is the father of Frigg, but since neither the fem. nor masc. form of this name is known in any other context, scholars argue whether they are one and the same, or one derived from the other, or unrelated.

Forn means ‘ancient’, but in the context of this text it is an adjective meaning ‘skilled in sorcery’ or *seiður*. *Forn* can be used for both men and women and is often used in the context *forn í skapi* meaning ‘ancient in temper’. *Njáll* (from *Njáls Saga*) was *forn í skapi*. He was a very wise man. My belief is that it has to do with memory, the ones knowing the ancient way.

Forneskja used to mean old knowledge, *seiður* or sorcery. Nowadays it has the meaning ‘ancient times’ or even something like ‘The Neolithic’, and is also used to describe something or someone who seems to come from antiquity, can even mean ‘terribly out of fashion’.

Freyja and **Freyr** are sister and brother of the Vanir tribe. They are also lovers, a twin deity. Their names mean Lady and Lord, related to Old Slavic *prŭvŭ*, meaning ‘the first’. Also related to *pro-* and Icelandic *frum-*, meaning ‘original’ or ‘first’.

Frétt is used for the vision of the *völva*. She is asked ‘*frétta*’ to tell what she sees. Today *frétt* is the common word for ‘news’.

Frigg is the wife of Óðinn. Her name means ‘woman’, ‘loved one’ or ‘wife’. Related to Old English *fréo* (woman). Also related to *fría*, *frjá* (to love), *fríður* (peace) and *fríður* (beautiful, kind (to pay in kind)).

Gefjun is the Giving or Wealthy One, related to Latin *Gabiae* as in *Dea Garmangabis*. Also related to *göfug* (noble) and Gothic *gabei* (richness, treasure) and *gabigs* (rich). Gefjun was the wife of Skjöldur, son of Óðinn, lover of Gylfi, king in Sweden; and mother of four oxen and the foremother of the tribe of Skjöldungar. Gefjun is one of the images of Freyja.

Gefn: The Giving One, one of Freyja’s names.

Gersemi is one of Freyja’s two daughters, her name meaning treasure. Gersemi is only mentioned in *Ynglingasaga*, not in Edda, where the adjective ‘*gersamligt*’ is used to describe the qualities of Freyja’s other daughter *Hnoss*. Since both names have the same meaning, ‘jewels’, ‘treasures’ or ‘treasured’ or ‘cherished’, they could be two names for one being, or rather for the qualities of Freyja.

Ginnungagap is the original void, the black hole. The name could mean the ‘hole of deception’ (*ginna* = deceive) or ‘the great hole’ (*ginnungur* = huge).

Goð (singular and plural) is a neuter word meaning deity, female or male. It is sometimes spelled *guð* (singular), like the modern masculine *guð* (god). It is interesting to note that in the singular it most often refers to the female deities, ex. *ástaguð* (lovegod), which is one of Freyja’s titles. The later masculine form *guð* (god), as we call the heavenly Lord today, did not exist in that meaning or form in the oldest manuscripts. It was always neuter (whether spelled *goð* or *guð*) and referred to the pagan deities, female and male.

Goði is a title for the male representative of the *goð*, the priest, and equivalent to the female *gyðja*. The *goði* in Island was a secular or worldly as well as religious chief. The land was divided into 36 *goðorð* (*goðorð* means literally ‘word of god’, but acquired the meaning ‘office’ or ‘state’ of a *goði*). *Dorgeir Ljósvetningagoði* was the last great *goði* in Island, but he gave away his power, and that of his religion in the year 999, when Islanders converted to Christianity. The pagan religion has had its comeback in recent years and now there are several *goðar* practicing in Island, and the high priest is called *Allsherjargoði*.

Gróa could be from the verb *gróa* (grow), and simply mean, ‘Growing one’ or the ‘One who makes things grow’, but it could also be from the Gaelic *gruach* (woman).

Guð is a word fully equivalent to the English ‘god’. It is now masculine, but used to be neuter and used for both gods and goddesses (see *goð*, above).

Gullinbursti means ‘Golden brush’, and probably refers to the boar’s fur or skin. The fact that boar-skin is used to make hairbrushes till this day, and combs were connected with boars in ancient times (see text) makes this name all the more symbolic.

Gyðja means goddess and/or priestess, and is thus the female equivalent of both *guð* and *goði*.

Haugur (burial hill) is the same phenomenon as the Indo European *kurgans* (Maria Gimbutas)

Heimdallur is the Shining Ás, son of the nine waves and the ancestor of mankind or maybe of hierarchy, since he was the father of the three races of slaves, farmers and kings (*Rígsþula*).

Heimdallur plays a central role in the Islandic myths, from *Völuspá* to *Rígsþula*, but is nevertheless one of the most obscure of the *goð*. His name is thought to mean The Light of the World (*heimur* = world; *dallur* = shining), but there are also those who assume his name is Heimdalur, meaning the valley (*dalur*) of the world. Heimdallur guards the bridge between the worlds and his horn *Gjallarhorn* is both a hearing tool and an instrument of great sound, a tool of warning.

Hel is the goddess or giantess of the Underworld, *Niflhel/Niflheimur*. She is the daughter of the giants Loki and Angurboða, sister of Miðgarðsormur and Fenrisúlfur, those three being the three great monsters of Islandic myths. Hel’s name is related to English cell and cellar, as well as hall; German Holla and Islandic *höll* (palace), and *hóll* (hill) and *hellir* (cave). From IE **kel* (hide).

Hildisvíni is a synonym for boars used in battle. The boar's name is thus *Gullinbursti*, and he is a *hildisvíni*, which means 'battleboar'. Gullinbursti is Freyr's *hildisvíni*, made for him by two dwarfs. Here we may be seeing the "con-fusion" between Freyr and Freyja, one being with two images.

Hjördís is the Goddess of the Sword. As sword is the symbol of Freyr, this name could also mean the sister/bride/woman/goddess of Freyr. Hjördís is my middle name as well as the name of the mother of Sigurður Fáfnisbani, grandmother of Áslaug Brynhildardóttir (Kráka).

Hnoss is one of Freyja's daughters, her name meaning 'treasure'.

Hrímpurs (plural: *hrímsþursar*) means giant of hoarfrost or ice. *Þurs* is often used for giants in general, as in *Þursameyjar*.

Huldufólk (hidden- people) is another word for the álfar or a related tribe.

Hyndla is an old word for bitch and doesn't necessarily have a negative meaning. It simply means she-dog.

Hörgabráður, (*Þorgerður*), also *Helgabráður*, *Hörðabráður*, *Hörgatröll* and *Hölgabráður*. She was one of the last goddesses to be worshipped in Norway, the special deity of Earl Hákon, the last pagan Earl. *Hörgabráður* relates her to the *hörgur*, which is the shrine of the Goddess, a sacrificial place, altar and/or a mountain.

Iðavellir are the plains where the *goð* built their city. *Iðavellir* means Ida Plains whereas Mount Ida would be *Iðafjall* or *Iðafell*. *Fell* could well have been changed to *vellir* with time, so *Vingólf* the shrine or temple of the old Icelandic *gyðja*, *Vanadís*, could well have been situated on *Iðafjall*, *Mount Ida*.

Irpa is Þorgerður Hörgabráður's sister. Her name is thought related to *jarpur*, which is the color dark red. She could have been the dark aspect of the sister-pair, although they seem more like two of similar kind.

Jörð means Earth. Jörð is the daughter, second child, of Nótt. She is the sister of Auður and maybe his daughter too (see Annar above); Jörð is mother of Þór; lover of Óðinn. Described by Snorri as the primordial deity, worshipped by humankind before they discovered spirit.

Jötunn, plural *jötnar* are the giants, people living in the northernmost part of the world, as well as the first humans begotten by the androgynous Ymir. Jötnar are sometimes assimilated into the tribes of Æsir and Vanir.

Kenning (plural *kenningar*) is a feminine noun, meaning ‘metaphor’ or more literally something ‘known’, ‘felt’ or ‘recognised’. The poems were full of *kenningar*, or words dressed in disguise. They may partly have been created for the sake of art or to stretch the brain, but more likely used by the learned to disguise the true meaning of a sacred or secret poem. All the archetypal beings and elements of the myths have their *kenningar*. Examples of *kenningar* for Freyja are *Óðs mey* (maiden of Óður), *eigandi fressa* (owner of cats) and *hið grátfagra goð* (the fairtear goddess). Gold is on the other hand *kennt* (referred to) as inter alia *grátur Freyju* (Freyja’s weeping or tears) or more complicated *Óðs beðvinu augna regn* (the rain from the eyes of Óður’s bed-friend).

Kona: woman

Kveldriða means ‘One who rides at night’, and was a person who could “*riðið loft og lög*” ‘ride in air and on sea’. She (or he) was the predecessor of the *norn*, the witch on the broom, and probably the descendant of the valkyrja.

Loki is of jötunn origin. He plays a central role in Icelandic mythology, as the charming, reckless and evil trickster, enemy/blood-brother of Óðinn, whose tricks lead to the disaster of Ragnarök.

Maður: man

Man: woman

Máni: Moon

Mánuður: month

Mardöll is one of Freyja’s names. *Mar* means ‘sea’ and ‘horse’ and *döll* (shining), related to Dellingur and Heim-dallur.

Men (as in Brisinga-men) is a word related to Old Indian ‘*manya*’ (neck) and Old German ‘*menni*’ (necklace). It also brings to mind the relationship between the moon, menstruation, mind and the fiery *men* of Freyja, who also is called *Menglöð* (she who loves the *men*). There are those who have suggested that Brisingamen is a belt of some kind, and that may be right, and doesn’t really change the myth. The goddess figurines from Old Europe wore both necklaces and belts. According to

Skáldskaparmál ch. 56, *men is hálsgjörð*, meaning a neck- ring and seems to refer to a solid necklace, as opposed to a string of stones.

Miðgarður is The Central Garden, the world of humans.

Naglfar is also known as the ship of death in *Ragnarök*, the apocalypse of the world of *goð*. May be related to the Germanic goddess Nehalennia and Latin *necāre* – ‘to kill’.

Narfi is the father of Nótt, grandfather of Auður, Jörð and Dagur, but is also known as the son of Loki. Narfi may be related to English ‘narrow’, and could be a snake name.

Náttúrun are the spirits or energy present at a seiður. Those who bring the prophesy or *frétt* (news). *Náttúra* literally means ‘nature’.

Njörður is the father (and/or mother) of Freyja and Freyr, first husband of Skaði, a Vanir chief. His namesake is **Nerthus**, goddess worshipped in Germania at the time of Tacitus. The meaning of their names is something like ‘the strong one’, ‘the powerful one’ or ‘the nurturing one’, related to Old Irish *ner* – ‘power’ as well as the Icelandic *næra* – ‘to nurture’.

Norn (plural *nornir*) is a woman of örlög (see entry), the one who chooses or weaves the destiny of *goð* and human alike. Snorri talks about *nornir* of different tribes, and the good and bad *nornir* visiting a child at birth, more in the fashion of the ones we know from fairy tales such as *Sleeping Beauty*. The most famous *nornir* are Urður, Verðandi and Skuld, residing by Urðarbrunnur (the Well of Urður), carving the örlög of all beings into the tree. The term Skapanornir is sometimes used to distinguish those three from *nornir* in general. Norn was in Christianity turned into a word for a witch. Today the word has the same negative meaning to most Islanders as ‘witch’ has in English speaking cultures, but Icelandic women are bringing it closer to the old meaning, using it more like the ‘English’ Wicca.

Nótt is a giantess, the mother of Auður, Jörð and Dagur. Her name means Night.

Óður and **Óðinn** are really two versions of one word. In modern Icelandic **óður** has a double meaning. It is an adjective meaning ‘mad, crazy, infuriated, out of control’; and as a noun it means ‘song, poem, poetry’. An old meaning is also ‘soul or psyche’. Óður and Óðinn are likely the same name, Óður the older version. **Odysseus** is of the same root as the Greek word *odysseomai*, which means ‘to be angry’ or ‘to rage’, and could therefore also be another version of Óður and Óðinn. **Óðr**

is the old version of Óður. The -u- in the ending -ur (as in Njörð > Njörður, brúðr > Brúður, Valgerðr > Valgerður), is a later addition, seemingly to facilitate pronunciation.

Saga (Sága) is the goddess who sits in conversation with Óðinn every day on Sökkvabekkur (Descent or Sinking bench). Saga means ‘story’ and ‘history’.

Sámi and **Sápmi** are the terms the people of Northern Scandinavia use for their country. Those people are better known in the rest of the world as Lapps and their country Lappland. In the old Icelandic literature they are referred to as Finns.

Seiðkona is a woman of seiður, a völvu.

Seiðmaður is the most common word for male shamans (male counterpart to the völvu), a man who performed seiður, also called vitki.

Seiður is a particular kind of magic or art of divination that was practiced in the North well into Christianity. According to the Sagas, the practice was most developed among the Sámi people and among the people of the northernmost isles of Britain. From there seiður seems to have come to Iceland and what we know of the old practice was recorded there.

Skaði is a giantess, goddess of wilderness and the mountains. She travels on skis, with her bow and arrows and the wolf is her familiar. She is called *Öndurdís*, or *Öndurgoð* (ski-goddess). Skaði is daughter of Þjassi, wife of Njörður and Óðinn, foremother of Earl Hákon, who worshipped Þorgerður Hörgabráður.

Skapanornir (singular *skaparnorn*) are the three nornir (see above), who sit by Urðarbrunnur and destine the lives of humans and goð. *Sköþ* (genitive: *skapa*, verb: *skapa*) means örlög as well as ‘creative organs’ and ‘creation’.

Skuld is the name of one of the nornir, and is related to *skal* or *skulu* (shall), and means ‘debt’, ‘obligation’ or ‘that which comes from the what was’ or ‘the one who was’. Related to the concept of karma. Could refer to the waning aspect of the moon and relate to the modern concept of past.

Sól: sun

Spákona is a völvu, a seeress (*spá* is ‘sight’ or ‘prophecy’).

Svanur (swan) is related to Latin ‘*sonus*’ sound, and Old English swinsian ‘sing’ or ‘play a song’. The word *svanni* meaning ‘woman’ is said related to *svanur*.

Svíþjóð means the ‘nation’ or ‘tribe’ of the sow or pig. The Swedish version of the name is *Sverige* or *Svea-riike*, *-rige/riike*, possibly meaning the ‘state’ or ‘country’ of the sow or pig.

Tröll is related to *tryllt(ur)* meaning ‘mad’, ‘delirious’, ‘out of control’, ‘infuriated’ or ‘spellbound’. A *tröll* was a sorcerer/ess, one who could become and make others *tryllt*, but it was also used in a derogative way for the Sámi people. In modern Icelandic *tröll* has a similar meaning as giant, either a huge person or a mythic being of gigantic size.

Urður is one of the nornir, probably the original one (the one who is), related to English *weird*, *wyrrd*, word. From the verb ‘to be’. Could refer to the fullness aspect of the moon, that is the moon as it is, not as it appears to be. Could refer to the modern concept of present.

Valgerður means according to traditional patriarchal sources, ‘the One who guards the battlefield’. My own interpretation is ‘woman of Earth (*jörð*, *gerður*) and the valur (the dead and falcon)’, that is Freyja.

Valhöll is the hall or palace of the slain, the fallen warriors, or the chosen ones. May originally have been a symbol for the womb- tomb of regeneration (see text and endnotes).

Valkyrja is a goddess of love, death and regeneration. Could be related to *vala/völva* and *vulva*, and even vulture (see text and endnotes).

Valur is 1) an old Icelandic name for the falcon (also called *fálki*). The slain in the battlefield are also called *valur*, probably related to the IE **uel* and Latin *vellere*, which both mean ‘to tear apart’. This IE root **uel* is also at the base of *vulva*, *völur*, *vala* and *völva*, there it means to bend or turn.

Verðandi: Becoming or The one who becomes, one of the three nornir. From the verb ‘to be’. Could refer to the waxing aspect of the moon and refer to the modern concept of future.

Vé means ‘sacred place’, ‘sanctuary’. *Vé(i)* is also the name of one of the three brothers, Óðinn, Vili and Vé, mentioned in *Ynglingasaga* and *Snorra Edda*. This word is nowhere else to be found as a name.

Vili (or *Vilji* or *Vilir* as in *Ynglingasaga*) is one of the three original brothers. It may mean fighter, related to **Wih(i)lian* ‘to fight’, or it may be related to *Vé*, or mean *vilji* (will).

Vísindakona, literally ‘wise women’ or ‘reliable woman’ or ‘the one who knows where (to find something)’, synonymous with *völva*. It is the modern word for ‘a woman of science’ or a ‘female scientist’. *Vísindamaður* means scientist and is used for both genders, but *vísindi* in saga-times seem to have been more related to women than men. *Vís* means both ‘wise’ and ‘secure’.

Völur is a staff, a long and round stick, and best known as the staff of the *völva*. It also means hub (of the wheel), a measuring rod, branch, bough, or the blunt edge of a knife.

Völur is also a version of the plural of *völva*, the *-v-* falls out. The genitive of *völva* is *völu*, and *vala* is another version of the same noun in the nominative case.

Völva (noun) is related to the Latin *volvere* ‘to turn’ and to the English ‘vulva’. A *völva* was a sibyl, a seeress, originally a priestess of Freyja.

Völva (verb) means to take the edge off a knife. It is derived from the Germanic *wel-*, IE **uel* meaning ‘to bend’, ‘turn’ or ‘to tear’, ‘destroy’.

Yggdrasill was the tree of life, The Horse of Óðinn – Óðinn hanged himself in the tree for three times three days and nights (see also *Askur*).

Ymir or **Ýmir** is the original giant, the first being, created by the melting of ice and fire. The name is probably from IE **jumia-* or **jemo*, and related to Mid-Irish *emon* ‘twins’, suggesting that Ymir really means androgynous or bisexual being. It could also be related to *ymja* and *umla*, meaning ‘to sound’, ‘moan’ or ‘mumble’. Ymir’s fate (being killed by her/his grandsons, who used his body to create a world of order) reminds us of the Sumerian Tiamat and her/his name reminds me of the African Yemaja.

Örlög is an old word meaning something like destiny or fate, but has a deep, web-like or karma-like quality to it, the quality of the word *auður*, which also means *örlög*. The *nornir* of whom *Urður* is the best known, chose/created the *örlög* for all humans as well as other beings, even the *goð*. *Ör-* is here the same as Gothic *us-* and *uz-* and Old German *-er-*, *ir-* and *ar-*, and also the same as the *ur-*, meaning ‘original’ or ‘from the deep’. It is used as an emphasis. The *-lög* part of the word means ‘law’ and is related to the English and also to the verb ‘to lay’ and ‘law’, meaning ‘that which is laid down’. *Örlög* therefore means the original or ‘super’-laws, those laws that will not be changed.

Endnotes

¹ Pronounced *Eesland*

² I cannot find any reference to this in Einar Pálsson's books, but both Gunnar Dal and other followers of this idea refer to him. Since Einar has passed on to our ancestors, I cannot ask him.

³ I use first names when referring to Icelandic persons. See note on quoting.

⁴ The prefix *IS* means divine, light. The prefix is found in the name of *Israel* and *Ishtar* and many other names of deities and sacred places (Jobes, 1961). Some link the name to Isis (Páll Sveinsson, Icelandic prologue to *Germania*, 1928) and say that places like *Paris* are named after her, formed from the words *par* – *isis*.

⁵ A *völva* is a sybil, a seeress, sometimes called *vísindakona* (woman of science) or *spákona* (prophetess). The word *völva* is very probably related to the latin *volvere* 'to turn' and to the English 'vulva' (see much more in text).

⁶ *Seiður* is a particular kind of magic or art of divination, that was practiced in the North well into Christianity. According to the Sagas, the practice was most developed among the Sámi people and among the people of the northernmost isles of Britain. From there *seiður* seems to have come to Iceland and what we know of the old practice was recorded there. As we shall see Freyja was a priestess of *seiður*. The original meaning of the word is mirrored in the different ideas of its etymological roots, ranging from mother goddess to threads in a web, to sacred singing. The Icelandic meaning of the word is kept in the folk tradition to this day, where *seiður* means *álfatöfrar*, 'elfmagic' or any kind of enticing magic or effect (see chapter on *seiður*). A common misunderstanding is that *seiður* is the same as *seyður*, which derives from *sjóða*, to cook or boil. *Seiður* is not performed in a cauldron.

⁷ *Örlög* is an old word meaning something like destiny or fate, but has a deep, web-like or karma-like quality to it, the quality of the word *auður*, which also means *örlög*. The *nornir* also called *skaparnornir* (*skapa*=create), of whom *Urður* is the best known, chose/created the *örlög* for all humans as well as other beings, even the *goð*. *Ör-* is here the same as Gothic *us-* and *uz-* and Old German *-er-*, *ir-* and *ar-*, and also the same as the *ur-*, meaning original or from the deep. It is used as an emphasis. The *-lög* part of the word means 'law' and is related to the English and also to the verb 'to lay' and 'law', meaning that which is laid down. *Örlög* therefore means the original or 'super'-laws, those laws that will not be changed.

⁸ A *norn* (plural *nornir*) is a woman of *örlög* (see above), the one who chooses or weaves the destiny of *goð* and human alike. The root or original meaning of the word is unclear. Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) thinks it may be related to the verbs *norna*, *nyrna* (Swedish dialect) meaning to whisper or tell a secret. Another possibility is that it is of the root **(s)ner-* to weave or spin. The most famous *nornir* are *Urður*, *Verðandi* and *Skuld*, residing by *Urðarbrunnur* (*The Well of Urður*), carving the *örlög* of all beings into the tree. *Norn* was in Christianity turned into a word for a witch. Today the word has the same negative meaning to most Icelanders as 'witch' has in English speaking cultures, but Icelandic women are bringing it closer to the old meaning, using it more like the 'English' *wicca*.

⁹ *Blótgýðja* refers to a goddess or priestess (*gýðja* means both) of sacrifices or offerings. The word *blót* is used both for the ritual of sacrifice or offering to a deity, as well as the ceremony and/or feast connected to the offering. *Blót* and *seiður* are connected, *blót* is often followed by a *seiður*, or *seiður* seems sometimes to require a ritual sacrifice.

¹⁰ See more about *Auður djúpuðga* below.

¹¹ *Álfar* and *huldufólk* are invisible human-like peoples living in hills and rocks in Iceland. They often interact with humans as healers, lovers but they can also be dangerous, even killers. The women of these tribes seem to be more powerful or more approachable than the males (see also entries in Appendix 1. on *álfkona* and *álfi*)

¹² The reason I capitalise *Æsir* and *Vanir* and not *jötnar*, *dvergar* and *dísir*, is because I see *Æsir* and *Vanir* as the names of tribes or "nations", having all the characteristics of humans, whether of this realm or mythic, whereas *dísir*, *dvergar*, *álfar* and *jötnar* seem to be more mythical and archetypal, although they could of course also represent certain tribes (see e.g. Hermann Pálsson on the Sámi-jötnunn relation).

¹³ I use the Icelandic version *valkyrja* (plural *valkyrjur*) instead of the English *valkyrie*, to harmonize with the *völva*.

¹⁴ *Dís* and *día* (feminine, singular), *dísir* (plural) and *dii* (masculine, singular), *díar* (plural) are old Icelandic words for goddess and god, or divine beings. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989) suggests that *dii* is related to the Latin *deus*, but does not see this connection in the female *dís*-version, which he says related to Old Indian *dhisána* (divine female). *Dís* is used more often than *día*, and *dii* is only used in poetry meaning god, and then by Snorri in *Ynglingasaga* where it seems to be more related to earthly power, since the king Óðinn's chiefs were called *díar* or *drottmar*. In modern Icelandic *drottinn* means Lord in the context God, whereas *drottning* means both earthly and heavenly queen. *Dís* has partly kept its original meaning and is used for all kinds of spirits, like *vatnadís* (female waterspirit) and *skógardís* (fairy of the forest), but also the *fegurðardís* (beauty queen) of this realm. It is also common in women's names, e.g. my own middle name *Hjördís*. The plural *dísir* is often identical with valkyrjur. *Dii* is never used in modern Icelandic.

¹⁵ Bjarnadóttir and Kremer: "Prolegomena to a cosmology of healing in Vanir Norse mythology"; In *Yearbook of Cross Cultural Medicine and Psychotherapy*, 1998.

¹⁶ Sigurður Nordal wrote a book on *Völuspá* in 1923 and was the authority on the old literature for the most part of the last century. He was a genius, although caught in the fetters of patriarchal thinking.

¹⁷ Stefán Karlsson is the former director of the Árni Magnússon Institute (the institute for the preservation and research of the Old Icelandic manuscripts). He is the country's most prominent expert on the manuscripts, inter alia Codex Regius. He has been a most supporting and encouraging friend for me in this work.

¹⁸ Hermann Pálsson is professor emeritus at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of numerous books on the old literature, and a specialist on the Icelandic, Celtic and Sámi connection. He has also translated some of the *Sagas*, as well as *Völuspá* to English.

¹⁹ *Gersemi* is one of Freyja's two daughters, her name meaning treasure.

²⁰ When quoting *Völuspá*, I use the version and stanza numbers from Codex Regius, except in special cases, and then I mention the manuscript.

²¹ This concept of the "well of remembrance", termed so by Metzner (1994), is so beautiful that I borrow it at times throughout this paper.

²² *Goð* (singular and plural) is a neuter word meaning deity, female or male. It is sometimes spelled *guð*, like the modern masculine *guð* (god). It is interesting to note that in the singular it most often refers to the female deities, ex. *ástaguð* (lovegod) which is one of *Freyja*'s titles. According to Helga Kress (1996, p. 187-208), who refers to and consults with the finest specialists, among them Stefán Karlsson (privat letter, *fn*s.48 and 72)), the later masculine form *guð* (god), as we call the heavenly Lord today, did not exist in that meaning or form in the oldest manuscripts. It was always neuter (whether spelled *goð* or *guð*) and referred to the pagan deities, female and male.

²³ *Ragnarök* is the apocalypse of the world, according to the Icelandic myths. It literally means "Death of the gods", *rök* meaning *örlæg* or death, and *ragna*, being the genitive form of *rögn* or *regin*, meaning gods and goddesses (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). *Ragnarökkur*, translated "Twilight of the Gods" is a younger version of the word, often used by modern scholars, and found in both *Snorra Edda* and *Lokasenna*, but both Simek (1993) and Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989), maintain that *Ragnarök* is more original.

²⁴ When I use the term Celtic, I am referring to the settlers who came from the British Isles, mostly Ireland and the Hebrides. As Helgi Guðmundsson (1997, p.1) points out, referring to these origins as Celtic is really too broad, whereas Irish is too narrow.

²⁵ Sámi and Sámji are the terms the people of Northern Scandinavia use for their country. Those people are better known in the rest of the world as Lapps and their country Lappland. In the old Icelandic literature they are referred to as Finns.

²⁶ *deCode* is an international genetic firm, situated and rooted in Iceland, researching the genes of Islanders. The firm's strength lies in the fact that Islanders are a relatively "pure" nation, genetically speaking, and thus all kinds of DNA or gene constructions can easily be traced.

²⁷ www.decode.is

²⁸ More on this research on the origin of Icelandic settlers (using mitochondrial DNA) in *American Journal of Human Genetics; electronic publication, February 23rd 2000; and March 2001 68(3):723-37*. Agnar Helgason, Sigrún Sigurðardóttir, Ryk Ward and Kári Stefánsson

²⁹ My main sources among the old literature are: *Völuspá*, the opening poem of *Eddukvæði*; *Snorra Edda*, both *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*; *Flateyjarbók*, mostly *Sörla þáttur* (Freyja and the Brisningamen) and *Jómsvíkingasaga* (Þorgerður Hörgabrúður) and *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, mainly *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Örvar Odds Saga* and *Völsungasaga*. I also collect information from other Edda-poems such as

Völundarkviða, *Sigurdrífumál*, *Hyndlukvæði*, *Lokasenna* and more, as well as stories from other *Sagas*. All are written in the Christian era in Island, although some may have lived long in the memory of people.

³⁰ Numerous English translations of *Eddukvæði* exist, with different titles. Of those most commonly known and used are W.H. Auden's and Lee M.Hollander's. Other more recent translations and interpretations are *The Poetic Edda* by Carolyn Larrington (1996), Elsa Brita Titchenell's translation in *Masks of Odin* (1985) and Ralph Metzner's translation of parts of *Völuspá*, in *The Well of Remembrance* (1994)

³¹ *Ásgarður* is the world of the *goð*. In the Icelandic mythology there are nine worlds, among them are *Miðgarður*, world of humans, and *Ásgarður*, world of *goð*.

³² *Kenning* (plural *kenningar*) is a feminine noun, meaning 'metaphore' or more literally to 'know, feel or recognise'. The poems were full of *kenningar*, words dressed in disguise. They may partly have been created for the sake of art or to stretch the brain, but more likely used by the learned to disguise the true meaning of a sacred or secret poem. All the archetypal beings and elements of the myths, have their *kenningar*. Examples of *kenningar* for Freyja are *Óðs mey* (maiden of Óður), *eigandi fressa* (owner of cats) and *hið grátfagra goð* (the fairtear goddess). Gold is on the other hand *kennt* (referred to) as *inter alia grátur Freyju* (Freyja's weeping or tears) or more complicated *Óðs beðvinu augna regn* (the eye rain of Óður's bedfriend) (*Skáldskaparmál*, 28 and 44).

³³ When Sigurður Nordal wrote his interpretation of *Völuspá* in 1923, he relates that the interpretations are so many that there is no way for him to have an overview of them all. Although there has not been a steady growth of interest in the poem since then, those who have written about *Völuspá* in one way or another since 1923 are too many to even consider referring them all.

³⁴ This is my translation of Nordal's Icelandic text. When quoting modern material, such as this, I do not include the original text, but all translations are mine if not otherwise marked. I try to make them as literal as possible, and ask pardon of the authors, known and unknown, if I don't do them justice or misinterpret their texts.

³⁵ Although there is some dispute around the dates of settlement, I will stick to the common theory that the first settlers came to the country in the late 9th century.

³⁶ Helga Kress was the first Icelandic scholar to officially 'claim' the female authorship of *Völuspá* on behalf of the *völva*. Her ideas shook and still are shaking the patriarchal structure and shattered the thousand year old silencing of the *völva*. In her book *Máttugar meyjar* (Powerful maidens, 1993) she gives many examples of how the *völva* was silenced a thousand years ago by the then emerging patriarchal culture (see also in the chapter *Remembering völva*).

³⁷ When I talk about scholars of patriarchy, I am referring to the men and women who have been brought up in and adapted to a worldview, where man is primary and woman is secondary, and where domination and fear of woman by man, is central in history and myth.

³⁸ In *Hauksbók* there is a last stanza, not found in the Codex Regius, announcing the entrance of "*hinn ríki*" (the rich one or powerful one) from heaven, which some have interpreted as a prophecy on Christ's new rule. Gro Steinsland has pointed out that this could well refer to Heimdallur, since he resided in heaven and was often referred to as "*hinn ríki*" (1991, pp.340-346).

³⁹ *Þrjár þursameyjar* (three giant maidens) are mentioned in stanza 8 in Codex Regius, those who disturbed the peace of the golden age (see *Unz þriar komu* - Till three came)

⁴⁰ Einar Pálsson defines some of the *Sagas* as allegories, and gives evidence for Egyptian as well as Greek and other foreign influences in the old culture. The sacred Pythagorean triangle and the sacred circle as a pattern in Viking settlement, is a theme he discusses in his work. According to Einar the sacred geometry, symbolism and religious systems of old were in fact international, i.e. the travelers (in this case the Vikings) learned those ways on their travels and adapted them to their new societies. In his series on the religion and social structure of Old Island (with runic names as *Úr*, *Ás*, *Reið*) and his English publications such as *Evil and the Earth* (1994), he has written about the possible influence of Egyptian, Greek and other mysteries and philosophy on the settlers in Island. It is this influence which he claims to be the source of the reason behind the name Island.

⁴¹ Gerður was married to Freyr (also called Yngvi) and was the mother of his son Fjölfnir, forefather of the Ynglingar. Skaði was married to both Njörður and Óðinn, and had many sons with Óðinn according to Snorri (*Heimskringla*), one of them was Sæmingur, forefather of the last pagan earls of Norway. Óðinn's son Skjöldur was married to the goddess Gefjun, and their descendants were the Skjöldungar.

⁴² *Álfkona* is a female *álfur* (*kona* = woman). *Álfur* (plural *álfar*) is a name used for a tribe of hidden people, who nowadays live in stones, rocks and hills, a graceful and powerful race. *Álfar* are still, in the Island of

today, considered a real tribe by many, and their existence is at times taken into consideration, they are e.g. consulted by mediums, when roads are built through their rocks or hills. In the old literature *álfar* sometimes seems to be used as a synonym for *Vanir*, and *Freyr*, *Freyja's* brother ruled in *Álfheimar* (World of Elves). *Álfur* is probably related to Latin *albus* meaning white (see also connection to *álft* (swan).

⁴³ I am not giving detailed references for Gimbutas' ideas, since these highlights are to be found in almost every chapter of her books *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1974, 1981), *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), *the Civilisation of the Goddess* (1991) and *The Living Goddesses* (1999/2001).

⁴⁴ *Narfi* is also known as the son of *Loki*. *Narfi* is related to English 'narrow', and could be a snake name. One of *Loki's* sons was the great snake *Miðgarðsormur*.

⁴⁵ *Naglfar* is also known as the ship of death in *Ragnarök*, the apocalypse of the world of *goð*. May be related to the Germanic goddess *Nehalennia* and Latin *necare* (to kill).

⁴⁶ *Annar* is in another text (*Snorra Edda, Gylfaginning*, ch. 3) called *Athra* and *Athra* is according to *Jobes* (1961) another version of *Auður*. From this I gather that *Jörð* is the daughter of *Nótt* and her firstborn *Auður*. *Athra* or *Aethra* is in the Greek myths the personification of the all permeating atmosphere. She is a Greek goddess, daughter of *Nyx/Night*, mother of *Theseus/Sun*, by *Aegeus/Sea*; and in Roman myths she is mother of *Coelus (Uranus)* by *Dies/Day* (*Jobes*, 1961, pp. 42, 156).

⁴⁷ *Valur* is an old Icelandic name for the falcon (also called *fálki*). According to *Ásgeir B. Magnússon* (1989) it refers to a falcon or hawk from *Valland* (Gaul). Although etymologists do not seem to see a connection between *valur* (the slain or the battlefield, related to OE *wæl* and OG *wal*) and the *valkyrja* on one hand and the *valur* (falcon) on the other, I find it tempting to at least play with the idea.

⁴⁸ *Skapanornir* (singular *skapanorn*), is sometimes used to distinguish those three from the *nornir* in general. *Snorri* talks about *nornir* of different tribes, and the good and bad *nornir* visiting a child at birth (*Gylfaginning* 15), more in the fashion of the ones we know from fairy tales such as *Sleeping Beauty*. *Sköp* (genitive: *skapa*) means *örlög* or 'sexual/creative organs' or 'creation'.

⁴⁹ *Álft* (plural *álftir*) is one of the two most common names for the bird called swan in English. The other is *svanur*. I will discuss the swan and its names in the following chapters, but here I want to mention the etymological roots. *Svanur* is according to *Ásgeir B. Magnússon* (1989) related to Latin '*sonus*' sound, and OE '*swinsian*' sing or play a song. The word *svanni* meaning woman is said related to *svanur*. *Álft* is from IE **albut-* and **albit-*; Latin *albus*, meaning white. *Álft* is very likely related to *álfur* (see above).

⁵⁰ See chapter 3 on *Gullveig*.

⁵¹ It is this poem, *Rígsþula*, that *Dumézil* uses as a base to his theory of the tripartite system, of priests, warriors and nobility and care takers, farmers etc. (*Gimbutas*, 1999, xvi, 121 and 196; see also *Jens Peter Schjöldt*, in *Steinsland et al.* 1991, 304 and 313; and of course *Dumézil* himself, 1958 and more). Although an important and central discussion, I will not enter into that discussion here. I find its context highly questionable, very patriarchal, although of course not without interesting viewpoints.

⁵² *Ginnungagap* is the original void, the black hole.

⁵³ *Ymir* is probably from IE **jumia-* or **jemo*, and related to Mid-Irish *emon* 'twins', suggesting that *Ymir* really means androgynous or bisexual being (*Simek* (1993) and *Ásgeir B. Magnússon* (1989)). It could also be related to *ymja* and *umla*, meaning 'to sound', 'moan' or 'mumble'. *Ymir's* fate reminds us of the Sumerian *Tiamat* and her/his name reminds me of the African *Yemaja*.

⁵⁴ The name *Hrimþursar* means giants of rime, hoarfrost or ice. *Purs* is often used for giants, as in *Þursameyjar (Völuspá, st. 8)*

⁵⁵ *Auðumla's* name has not been fully understood. The most common version of her name is *Auðhumla* and some (*Ásgeir B. Magnússon*, *Simek*) say that *-humla* is related to English 'humble' IE **humlō(n)*, meaning 'polled' or 'without horns' and that *Auð-* is richness, so she is 'the rich polled cow'. I must admit that I want to be able to see *Auðumla* with horns (see more on the bucranium below), so this explanation doesn't appeal to me. Another version of her name is *Auðumla*, and as we see above, *umla* means 'mumble' or 'low'. So since *Auður* can mean *örlög*, fate, original, and *umla* can mean 'to low', *Auðumla* would be either 'the original lowing cow' or 'the fateful lowing cow', or 'the rich lowing cow'. That could also link *Ymir* and *Auðhumla* etymologically.

⁵⁶ *Búri* and his son *Borr* or *Burr* (as in some versions), are probably all sons, *bur* meaning 'son'. *Barn* means 'child' in Icelandic, and the verb *bera* is 'to bear'. English 'born' and OE *bearn* are of the same root. *Jürgen Kremer* (1999) has pointed out the etymological and perhaps logical relation between *burr*, *borr*, *búri* and the bear (*ursus*), bear being the ancestor image in many northern myths. Bears are especially related to the Sámi (Finns) in the Sagas, and so are the *jöttnar* (see below). This supports *Kremer's* idea.

⁵⁷ *Vili* (or *Vilir* as in *Ynglingasaga*) is another mystery, it may mean fighter, related to **Wih(i)lian* ‘to fight’, or it may be related to *Vé* (Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989); see below).

⁵⁸ *Vé* means ‘sacred place’, ‘sanctuary’ (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989), and this word is nowhere else to be found as a name.

⁵⁹ Most scholars agree that stanzas 11-16, the *dvergatal* (list of dwarves) - is a later addition to the poem. This is not necessarily so, their long list of names could refer to important stepping stones in our history (for different views see Hermann Pálsson 1996, Nordal 1954 etc.)

⁶⁰ *Askur* is also the name of the Tree of Life, *Askur Yggdrasils*. *Askur* is the ash tree, but it could mean any tree.

⁶¹ *Embla* was the first woman. The word is thought to represent a tree of some sort, but unlike *Askur Embla* is not mentioned in another context. Etymological sources indicate that *Embla* could come from **almilön* and be the Elm tree. More likely it’s related to the Gaul *amella* meaning ‘goatleaf’ or the Greek *ámpelos*, an Old European word for vine (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). If the last is the case *Embla/woman* is at least etymologically Old European.

⁶² For another interpretation of their moon-functions see Z. Budapest, *Summoning the Fates*, 1998

⁶³ Elsa Brita Titchenell (1985) adds an interesting viewpoint to this. Her translation is this: ‘One was named Origin, the second Becoming. These two fashioned (*skáru á skíði*) the third, named Debt.’

⁶⁴ For examples of sun images see Marija Gimbutas, 1999, p.41, fig.35; and P.Gelling and H.E. Davidson (1969).

⁶⁵ Who this *Ingunn* might be, is unclear. She could be *Freyja*, and *Freyr* being her lover/brother might be called her *Freyr* (Lord). The *Ingvaeónes* are mentioned by Tacitus (98), a Germanic tribe. Ásgeir B. Magnússon (1989) mentions the possibility that *Ingunn* is derived from IE **inguni-*, and that she is an ancient earth goddess. As with most matrilinear or matristic explanations he does however, not find that a likely explanation. *Ing* is, according to an old English mythic poem, the ancestor of the *Ingvéónis*. In that poem he is said to be king of the East-Danes (see more about the relationship between Danes, Dana and Vanir below). The Sumerian *Enlil*, was a god of air, and was also called Lord Air. Could he have been Lord of *Lilith*. The priests in Sumer were ‘*en*’ of a goddess, whereas the priestesses were ‘*en*’ of the gods (Betty Meador, 2000, p. 50).

⁶⁶ For the interpretation of some of these goddess’ names and functions, see Appendix I.

⁶⁷ The *-þjóð* part in *Svíþjóð* means ‘nation’ or ‘tribe’. The Swedish version of the name is *Sverige* or *Svearíke*, *-ríge/ríke*, possibly meaning the ‘state’ or ‘country’ of the sow or pig. For a clear etymological analysis of that interpretation see Olivier Gouchet (1997, p. 280). Ásgeir B. Magnússon favours the explanation that *Sví-*, *Sve-*, comes from IE **se* and **swe* which means ‘related to’ or ‘belonging to’.

⁶⁸ For more thoughts around *Njörður* and *Nerthus*, and their original nature see Bjarnadóttir and Kremer 1998.

⁶⁹ This kind of ritual is known from many ancient cultures, where a group of people get together, chew berries and spit the juice into a cauldron. The fermented juice is in Norwegian called *kvas* and in Russian *kvas* (Simek, 1993, pp. 151-152). Ralph Metzner has written about the importance of this myth in the *Well of Remembrance* (1994, ch.12).

⁷⁰ *Haugur* is the same phenomenon as the IndoEuropean *kurgans*, mentioned by Maria Gimbutas (1989 and 1991).

⁷¹ In this account Snorri gives both Icelandic and “foreign” names for the kings and queens.

⁷² *Iðavellir* means *Ida Plains* whereas *Mount Ida* would be *Iðafjall* or *Iða fell*. *Fell* could well have been changed to *vellir* with time, so *Vingólf* the shrine or temple of the old Icelandic *gyðja*, *Vanadís*, could well have been situated on *Iðafjall*, *Mount Ida*.

⁷³ See *The Descent of Inanna* e.g. in Meador (1992), and Wolkstein & Kramer (1983), and the somewhat different *Ishtar* version in Dalley (1989).

⁷⁴ *Fjörgyn* is another name for *Jörð/Earth*, the mother of *Þór*. *Fjörgynn* (masculine) is the father of *Frigg*, but since neither the fem. nor masc. form of this name is known in any other context, scholars argue whether they are one and the same, or one derived from the other, or unrelated.

⁷⁵ *Jörð* (earth) is a feminine word in Icelandic and is in the Icelandic text referred to as she (*hún*) or her (*henni* or *hennar*)

⁷⁶ In *Snorra Edda* they are called by those names, but in *Völuspá* their names are *Óðinn*, *Hæmir* and *Lóður* (see chapter on *nornir* above).

⁷⁷ *Óðr* is the old version of *Óður*. The *-u-* in the ending *-ur* (as in *Njörð* > *Njörður*, *brúðr* > *Brúður*,

Valgerðr > Valgerður), is a later addition, seemingly to facilitate pronunciation. I generally use the *-ur* version, except when I feel the other is important for the context.

⁷⁸ *Loki* is of jötunn origin. He plays a central role in Icelandic mythology, as the charming, reckless and evil trickster, enemy/friend of Óðinn, whose tricks lead to the disaster of Ragnarök. See much more about *Loki* below in the chapter on *Lokasenna*.

⁷⁹ *Gersemi* is only mentioned in *Heimskringla*, *Ynglingasaga*, not in *Edda*, where the adjective ‘gersamligt’ is used to describe *Hnoss*’ qualities. Since both names have the same meaning, ‘jewels’, ‘treasures’ or ‘treasured’ or ‘cherished’, they could be two names for one being, or rather for the qualities of *Freyja*.

⁸⁰ In modern Icelandic *óður* has this double meaning. It is an adjective meaning ‘mad, crazy, infuriated, out of control’; and it means ‘song, poem, poetry’. An old meaning is also ‘soul or psyche’ (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989). Óður and Óðinn are likely the same name, Óður the older version.

⁸¹ According to Nanos Valeoritis (personal communication, July, 1998) *Odysseus* is of the same root as the Greek word *odyssaomai*, which means ‘to be angry’ or ‘to rage’, and could therefore also be another version of Óður and Óðinn.

⁸² There are many myths on *Freyja* and the giants, but I will not include them in this paper.

⁸³ More on the Earls of Hlaðir and Hákon jarl in the chapter on Þorgerður Hörgabrúður.

⁸⁴ *Álfar* in the combination *æsir og álfar* are often synonymous with *Vanir* (see e.g. *Lokasenna*), which suggests that *álfar* is another name for *Vanir*. *Freyr* is the ruler of *Álfheimar*.

⁸⁵ The Celtic boar tales are too many to mention, but a well known example are the stories of King Arthur.

⁸⁶ In stanza 8, it signifies the golden age; in 58 the wondrous golden tablets are rediscovered; in st. 61 she visions the gold covered temple at Gimlé, symbol of a new world, without betrayals and war.

⁸⁷ *Seiðmenn* (singular *seiðmaður*) is the most common word for male shamans (male counterpart to the *völva*), a man who performed *seiður*, also called *vitki* or *vísindamaður*.

⁸⁸ There is one exception to this. In stanza 5, she says ‘*sól* didn’t know her place’, otherwise she uses she/her only when talking about herself, *Gullveig* and *Heiður*.

⁸⁹ *Angan* means both ‘good scent or perfume’ and the ‘delight or favourite’ of someone.

⁹⁰ In stanza 53, *Friggjar angan* refers to Óðinn. So *angan* can even mean ‘lover’ or ‘loved one’.

⁹¹ I choose to change the translation of the whole stanza, not just the last line, both because the whole stanza is different in *Hauksbók* and also simply to try other versions and making an attempt at creating an understandable translation.

⁹² *Ergi* is an old word meaning passion, lust, cowardice and male homosexuality. Today it is mainly used to express irritability.

⁹³ *Men* (as in *Brisinga-men*) is a word related to Old Indian ‘*manya*’ (neck) and Old German ‘*menni*’ (necklace), however, I can’t help thinking about the relationship between the moon, menstruation, mind and the fiery *men* of *Freyja*, who also is called *Menglöð* (she who loves the *men*). There are those who have suggested that *Brisingamen* is a belt of some kind, and that may be right, and doesn’t really change a thing. The Goddess figurines from Old Europe wore both necklaces and belts (Gimbutas, 1991).

⁹⁴ There is also the possibility that this gold in some cases is the golden amber, ‘tears’ from trees transformed by the sea to ‘gold’. Amber was and still is very precious to the people of the North (Bjarnadóttir and Kremer, 1998). Amber is sometimes called the gold of the North, and it could have replaced the golden metal, as those tribes moved northward.

⁹⁵ It would be a subject for another thesis to look in depth at all the similarities between Celtic and Icelandic myths, the sacred animals, *goð* and other beings. Therefore I will only tiptoe on and around this important relationship. For more on salmon as sacred see e.g. Stewart (1990, p. 127) Carr-Gomm (1994) and Hilda Ellis Davidson (1988).

⁹⁶ *Gullinbursti* means ‘Golden brush’, and probably refers to the boar’s fur or skin. The fact that boar-skin is used to make hair-brushes till this day, and combs were connected with boars in ancient times (see text) makes this name all the more symbolic.

⁹⁷ For more detail on the dwarfs and their skills in metallurgy see *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 43

⁹⁸ This story of the *Brisingamen*, is called *Sörla þáttur* (see exact translation in Näsström, 1995, p.108).

⁹⁹ See the myth of *Skaði* and her father *Þjassi* jötunn in *Skáldskaparmál* csh. 1- 3.

¹⁰⁰ See more on *Þór* and his connection to the Goddess in the chapter on Þorgerður Hörgabrúður.

¹⁰¹ *Hyndla* is an old word for bitch and doesn’t have to have a negative meaning. It simply means she-dog.

¹⁰² Here it seems that *Hildisvíni* is a synonym for boars used in battle. The boar’s name is thus *Gullinbursti*, and he is a *hildisvíni*, which means ‘battleboar’. In another myth *Gullinbursti* is *Freyr*’s *hildisvíni*, made for

him by two dwarfs (with other names). Here we may be seeing the “con-fusion” between Freyr and Freyja, one being who has two images.

¹⁰³ *Dáinn* means ‘dead’ and *Nabbi* is probably the ‘small one’. *Dáinn* is mentioned in the *Dvergatal* of *Völuspá*, but in the tale in *Snorra Edda* (*Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 43) of how Gullinbursti was created, the dwarfs’ names were different.

¹⁰⁴ In this context, *Ásynjur* means goddesses.

¹⁰⁵ *Egils Saga* (the saga of Egill Skallagrímsson) is one of the greatest *Sagas* and by some thought to be the work of Snorri Sturluson.

¹⁰⁶ It is still the custom in Iceland to make sausages in the fall from the blood, liver, hearts and kidneys of sheep. It is thought to be the most nutritious and healthy, as well as cheap, food.

¹⁰⁷ *Goði* is a title for the male representative of the *goð*, the priest, equivalent to the female *gyðja*.

¹⁰⁸ Sealand is the biggest island in Denmark, divided from Sweden by a chasm or narrow channel. The story is supposed to tell the story of how that happened, and probably a story of politics as well, since Sealand has belonged to both countries at different times.

¹⁰⁹ This waking vision is also the subject of an article of mine, published in *North meets North* (2001)

¹¹⁰ It must be said here that although the common myth of *valkyrja* as raven has reached my inner image of her, I have not found one single myth or saga where she in fact is a raven. She is a swan or a woman. See more in the chapter Remembering *Valkyrja*.

¹¹¹ In *Grimnismál* Frigg and Óðinn make a bet which Frigg wins with tricks. Óðinn, in disguise as usual, is captured by his own protegee and gives a poem to free himself, a rather common thing in those days. The poem contains among other things information about the homes of the *goð*.

¹¹² I want to remind the reader that the IE root is not really spelled **uel*, but my computer/printer doesn’t allow me to write or print the old letters.

¹¹³ In the poem it says *völur*, which is a version of the plural of *völva* (plural also *völvur*), the –v- falls out. The genitive of *völva* is *völu*, and *vala* is another version of the sama noun in the nominative case. I will use the plural *völvur* in this paper, in order to avoid confusion.

¹¹⁴ In this case an –i ending would indicate a masculine noun, whereas a –u ending indicates the feminine. The fact that we have here –ui (*vidolfui*) at the end, is very conspicuous and makes no sense. The most straight forward solution is to remove the last letter, -i, since that is probably a spelling mistake.

¹¹⁵ *u is really not the correct symbol for the IE letter, which is a u underlined with a waving line, but it’s the closest I can find in my computer.

¹¹⁶ *Tröll* is related to *tryllt(ur)* meaning ‘mad’, ‘delirious’, ‘out of control’, ‘infuriated’ or ‘spellbound’. A *tröll* was a sorcerer/ess, one who could become and make others *tryllt*, but it was also used in a derogative way for the Sámi people (see Hermann Pálsson, 1998, p. 43). In modern Icelandic *tröll* has a similar meaning as giant, either a huge person or a mythic being of gigantic size. In folklore and fairy tales *tröll* live inside the mountains and they turn to stone when caught in daylight. Therefore we have the remnants of them spread all over the country in natural “standing stones”. They are not very intelligent, sometimes wicked or fierce, sometimes humble and gentle beings. In Scandinavia, *troll* is an otherworld being, usually living in the earth, but whereas in Iceland they are huge, in Scandinavia they are small, more resembling a dwarf. The most famous of the Icelandic *tröll* is *Grýla*, a monstrous hag who kills children. She has 13 sons, who are the Icelandic “Santa Clauses”, called *Jólasveinar* ‘The Yule-lads’. They come from the mountains, one each day for 13 days preceding *jól* ‘Christmas’ and then return the following 13 days. On January 6th the last *jólasveinn* returns to the mountains and the *jól* is over. My thesis is that *Grýla* is the darkness of *jól* or winter solstice, and her sons are originally not days but months, the 13 lunar months. She has a feeble husband, whom she controls, and she is in many ways similar to the Irish goddess *Caillach*.

¹¹⁷ *Forn* means ‘ancient’, but in this context it is an adjective meaning ‘skilled in sorcery’ or *seiður*. *Forn* can be used for both men and women and is often used in the context *forn í skapi* meaning ‘ancient in temper’. *Njáll* (from *Njáls saga*) was *forn í skapi*. He was a very wise man. My belief is that it has to do with memory, the ones knowing the ancient way. *Forneskja*, meaning ‘ancient times’ or even something like ‘The Neolithic’, is often used today, also to describe something or someone who seems to come from antiquity, can even mean ‘terribly out of fashion’, but used to mean old knowledge, *seiður* or sorcery.

¹¹⁸ *Fjölkunnug* means simply ‘knowing a multitude of things’ or in other words ‘wise’.

¹¹⁹ *Vísindakona*, literally ‘wise women’ or ‘reliable woman’ or ‘the one who knows where (to find something)’, is the modern word for ‘a woman of science’ or a ‘female scientist’. *Vísindamaður* means scientist and is used for both genders, but *vísindi* in saga-times seem to have been more related to women

than men. *Vís* means both ‘wise’ and ‘secure’

¹²⁰ *Kveldriða* means ‘One who rides at night’, and was a person who could “*riðið loft og lög*” ‘ride in air and on sea’. She (or he, it could be a man) was the predecessor of the *norn*, the witch on the broom, and probably the descendant of the *valkyrja*.

¹²¹ *Frétt* is used for the vision of the *völva*. She is asked ‘*frétta*’ to tell what she sees. Today *frétt* is the common word for ‘news’

¹²² *Blán* refers to a very dark blue color, almost bluish black, the color of the night sky.

¹²³ Many attempts have been made to find the song *Varðlokur*, and for deciding what it was about, or even just what the name of it means. Strömbäck (1935) has written pages on the subject, but my guess is that *Varðlokur* simply means ‘a protective circle or space’, and that the purpose of it - in addition to inducing a trance - was to make a protective space.

¹²⁴ For an English translation of these stories see *The Vinland Sagas* (Magnús Magnússon and Hermann Pálsson, 1965)

¹²⁵ *Gróa* could be from the verb *gróa* (grow), and simply mean, ‘Growing one’ or the ‘One who makes things grow’, but it could also be from the Gaelic *gruach*, (woman) (Ásgeir B. Magnússon, 1989).

¹²⁶ It sometimes seems that no name in the Sagas is a coincidence. This could support Einar Pálsson’s theory of the Sagas being at least in part, allegorical. *Ing-jaldur* and *Ás-mundur* are both heathen, bearing names referring to the *goð*, *Ing* and *Ás*. *Örvar Oddur* means simply ‘arrow-point’, and that is his whole mission in life, to hit his enemies with his magical arrows.

¹²⁷ In a class on Consciousness, with Daniel Deslaurier at the California Institute of Integral Studies, in San Francisco, we split the women and men into two groups, who then took turns in standing in circles around the group of the other sex, chanting. This was immensely powerful and trance-invoking and there was a distinct difference between the men and the women’s experiences.

¹²⁸ Those fascinating stories from *Flatleyjarbók* are among the many such legends, filled with symbolic as well as entertaining details, which can easily be traced far back in time.

¹²⁹ In that part of the world, walrus can easily be seen as the boar of the ocean.

¹³⁰ Baldur’s death and the war of Ragnarök, are described in the following stanzas in *Völuspá*.

¹³¹ In *Helgakviða Hjörleifssonar* the lovers *Sváva valkyrja* and *Helgi Hjörvarðsson* die, but are said to be reborn. In *Völsungakviða hin forna* they reappear as the hero Helgi Hundingsbani and his beloved Sigrún valkyrja. This latter Helgi was the son of Sigmundur Völsungur, and half-brother of Sigurður Fáfnisbani.

¹³² Or a wall of white and red shields, according to *Völsungasaga*

¹³³ This poem is recorded in *Völsungasaga* as well as in *Sigurdrifumál*.

¹³⁴ *hugfullr* is literally ‘mindfull’ and has been interpreted as *hugprúðr* (brave) by Hermann Pálsson *Eddulyklar* (Guðni Jónsson ed. 1954), but when I look at the three *Edda*-contexts where we find this word, it feels to me more like ‘angry’ or maybe ‘determined’, than brave. Fullur hugar in modern Icelandic means something like ‘very determined’.

¹³⁵ The saga of Áslaug is found in *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar*, in the Old Norse Sagas. It is too long to be recounted in full here, in fact it could be a subject for a book, and I urge the reader to look it up and read it.

¹³⁶ The sagas, poems and legends where we find fractions of Þorgerður’s story are: *Snorra Edda*, *Njáls Saga*, *Ketils Saga Hængs*, *Færeyingasaga*, *Jómsvíkingasaga* and *Ólafs Saga Tryggvasonar* (the last three found in *Flatleyjarbók*) and more.

¹³⁷ Although I call her *Hörgabrúður*, I use the other versions when quoting texts.

¹³⁸ Irpa’s name is unknown in any other context. It is thought related to *jarpur*, which is the color dark red. She could have been the dark aspect of the sister-pair, although they seem more like two of similar kind.

¹³⁹ Antiokkia was in Syria, and there may be a connection between *Syr-ia* and *Sýr*, i.e. the sow.

¹⁴⁰ The Sagas where you find pieces of Auður’s saga, are *Laxdæla Saga*, *Eiríks Saga (Vinland Sagas)*, *Eyrbyggja Saga* and *Landnáma (Book of Settlements)*

¹⁴¹ In the introduction to his translation of the Vinland Sagas, Hermann Pálsson (1965) suggests that this epithet, *flatnefur* (flatnose), may indicate a Sámi origin, since the typical nose of Sámi person has a shape different from the typical Norse.

¹⁴² Eglá was the queen of Snakes, according to an old Lithuanian myth.