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SHAMANISM IN NORSE MYTH AND MAGIC

VOLUME I

BY

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PREFACE

Shamanism and magic within the Norse field have been the subject of several major studies in recent years. Even within the bounds set by our limited medieval sources, the topic is a wide one – wide enough, perhaps, not to call for particular pleading when another study is presented. Each scholar has his or her own forte; my own focus is on the literary use of mythic motifs, and this has informed my approach throughout, although not all the discussion is devoted precisely to this consideration. My focus therefore differs somewhat from other recent substantial studies: Neil Price, in his *The Viking Way*, covers a good deal of the same ground as do I, but his most worthwhile focus is upon archaeological aspects of the topic; François-Xavier Dillmann, in *Les magiciens dans l'Islande ancienne*, concentrates on what the title states, magicians (rather than magic as such) as depicted in Icelandic family sagas; John McKinnell, in *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*, offers a detailed analysis of beings such as *vǫlur*, but his focus is upon the structural analysis of literary themes, and his ambit extends far further into folklore materials than does mine, though I do indeed recognise that while motifs which appear in literature may have many sources, any attempt, such as, in part, the present one, to glimpse something of the ancient pre-Christian traditions through this literature takes us into a pre-literary world of originally oral tradition, which formed part of the folklore of the people concerned. The present study therefore involves looking at the manipulation of motifs, many (but not all) deriving ultimately from folk tradition, in an increasingly artisitic, literary milieu; yet the overriding concern is to answer the question of whether Norse literature indicates that ancient Scandinavians had the notion of a practice which might reasonably be termed "shamanism", whether as an actual phenomenon of ordinary life, or as a motif appearing in fictional settings.

I hope that the length of the present study will not predispose the reader to nod in agreement with the poet and cataloguer of the great library of the ancient world at Alexandria, Callimachus, who proclaimed μέγα βίβλιον μέγα κακόν, "a big book is a big evil"; the length in fact reflects a fundamental aim I have sought to meet, namely to avoid considering an isolated list of supposedly "shamanic" features divorced from their context: I therefore present fairly full discussions of the myths and texts in which these features occur, dealing with a wider range of interpretations than the purely shamanic. I do not engage in lengthy consideration of purely historical or archaeological materials or arguments.

The present work is the result of a long process of maturation; I began my investigations in the topics under consideration in the mid-1980s,

leading to my doctoral thesis, submitted at Oxford University in 1993. Personal circumstances thwarted my intention to develop my research and produce a more substantial and connected interpretation than appeared in my dissertation within a reasonable period thereafter, but, my thoughts on the topic having naturally developed over the years, I am glad now to be able to offer these reflections in a rather more considered form than would have been the case fifteen years ago, and which in important areas also amend earlier published work of mine (the section on *Hrólfs saga kraka* in Chapter 20 is, however, adapted from my recent article, Tolley 2007*a*).

Whilst the book is scholarly in intent, I believe it may also be approached by less specialised readers, as well as by scholars whose speciality is not Norse. I have presented as wide a range both of shamanic source material (though still very selective) and of Norse texts as seemed feasible and justified by the aim of contextualising the Norse sources under discussion, and out of consideration for readers who may not otherwise have ready access to them. I have also held to the principle that all materials discussed should not only be presented in the original language whenever possible, but also rendered into English (as translation is interpretation, and the scholar is thereby obliged to clarify what he believes a text to mean; translations are mine unless noted otherwise). I trust too that the reader will find I have been able to avoid any obfuscation of academic jargon and expression.

It is my hope that this volume will contribute positively to the growing debate in this area of research, and that the reader will emerge from this book not only with greater understanding, but also, through that, with greater enjoyment of the works considered and appreciation of the cultures described.

Clive Tolley

Chester, Christmas 2008

THE COVER ILLUSTRATION

The front cover shows the painting by Thomas Fearnley (1802–42), a Norwegian of English descent, of the Slinde birch, which he completed in 1839. The tree grew on an ancient Iron Age grave mound, Hydneshaugen, in Sogn. It was the subject of a number of romantic paintings and poems in the nineteenth century, which have rendered it one of the best known of Norwegian trees, yet its tale is not a happy one. It is clear from local research, in particular by Wilhelm Christie in 1827, that the tree was regarded as holy in the eighteenth century, and offerings of beer were placed at its foot at Christmas, but such customs had dwindled by the early nineteenth century. The mound was supposed to contain treasure, guarded by a white snake, and twelve interlocking copper cauldrons. In 1861, the tree had a girth at ground level of 5.6 metres, and its height was 18.8 metres, whilst the canopy had a diameter of 21.6 metres. The grave mound on which it grew, which was 19 metres in diameter and 4 metres high, was a local boundary nexus; Fearnley's painting illustrates how the tree also functioned, at least metaphorically, as a vertical axis uniting heaven, earth (mountain) and sea, as well as, on a temporal plane, standing on the boundary of light and darkness, day and night – the discussions later in the present volume suggest these may not have been simply nineteenth-century romantic notions. The tree blew down in a storm in 1874. In 1892–3 locals dismantled the grave mound, no longer awed by the old stories that disaster would ensue any damage to the monument, and removed three thousand loads of stone from it. A couple of burial cists were found, but no treasure, cauldrons or white snake; no archaeological survey was undertaken. Nowadays a new road and petrol station have, it seems, obliterated what remained of this once revered site.

The Slinde birch is surely a late local manifestation of an ancient Norse tradition of sacred guardian trees, which reached its culmination in myth in the form of the world tree, guarding and sustaining the cosmos and reflecting its passage through time, stretching up to heaven and, like the Slinde birch on its burial mound, reaching down to the world of the dead, where resided the serpent Níðhǫggr and where were to be found springs bestowing life and wisdom, as well as the spring Hvergelmir, the Cauldron Roarer, the source of all waters. In Siberia, it was along the world tree that the shaman was believed to pass to other worlds to fulfil his spiritual missions for his community.

Aside from its topical relevance, Fearnley's depiction of the Slinde birch stands as a fitting symbol for much that is discussed in the present volume: it is an imaginative, artistic response to and use of an object rooted in cult,

as are many of the poetic and literary sources discussed here, and it portrays something of erstwhile religious significance, a significance which had already faded into vague memory. The Slinde birch teeters, a thing of beauty, on the brink of oblivion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As work on this volume has been long and intermittent in the extreme, so too my acknowledgements reach back into the past. I warmly thank the Warburg Institute, London University, for a Frances Yates Fellowship in the autumn of 1995, which enabled me to put the beginnings of this study into motion; the months spent there were valuable to me, and I remember the kindly academic atmosphere and the Fellows with great affection. I thank the British Academy for a grant in part-support of a six-month visit to Finland in 2003–4, and the Kalevala Institute in Turku and its director Anna-Leena Siikala for their welcome, and Prof. Siikala for her continued support thereafter; I would also particularly like to acknowledge the support given during and after my stay by my colleague and friend, the Institute's indefatigably helpful Maria Vasenkari, editorial secretary of Folklore Fellows' Communications, as well as Pekka Tolonen, who has helped in various ways, such as obtaining materials in Turku after I left. I feel deeply indebted to the Finnish Literature Society, in whose library (and bookshop) I have spent many an hour in research, and which has honoured me by making me a Correspondent Member. I thank the Dorothea Coke Memorial Fund for a small grant to meet some of the production costs, particularly with the illustrations, and following the trustees' request make the following acknowledgement: "The printing of this book is made possible by a gift to the University of Cambridge in memory of Dorothea Coke, Skjaeret, 1951." I also thank the Viking Society for Northern Research for a travel grant to carry out final research in London.

The cover illustration for the first volume has been provided by the National Museum in Oslo. I am most grateful to my good friend Aidan Hart, an artist and iconographer of rare talent, for drawing the bishop chess-piece. Otherwise, regrettably, funding has not been available for the professional production or obtaining of illustrations: the basis of the maps of Siberia is a professional product, provided by R. H. Publications, but otherwise the content of the maps has been my own work; for the cover photograph of the second volume and for other drawn illustrations, of the *vǫlva*, of runestones and of the shamanic costume, I have had to rely on my own meagre artistic skills, for which I beg the indulgence of readers.

My heart-felt personal thanks go to Ursula Dronke, as well as to her husband Peter; I have benefited from knowing both of them, not only as the most perceptively acute and enthusiastic scholars, but also as friends who have welcomed me into their home and supported me in countless ways through the years. Ursula Dronke first fired my imagination when, as an undergraduate in the Classics School at Oxford seeking to extend my

field of intellectual stimulus, I wandered into one of her seminars out of interest, and, so to speak, never left. Since then she has guided me through my doctorate, and more recently I have been honoured in assisting her with her great edition of *The Poetic Edda*. As well as on individual matters, which I have sought to acknowledge explicitly, I owe much to Ursula Dronke in the more general aspects of approach adopted in this study, which we have discussed over the years (which is not to suggest that she would endorse everything in this study). I wish also to thank her successor at Oxford, Heather O'Donoghue, who has carried on the same tradition of friendly concern and help when needed. I have been much heartened, at moments when work was tending to flag, by the encouragement of other fellow scholars of Norse studies, notably Richard North, Stephen Mitchell and Bryan Weston Wyly, whom I would like to thank also for advice on various points which have arisen in the course of research. My debt to Åke Hultkrantz (external examiner for my doctorate) will be evident from the discussions in this book, but it is also with much warmth that I recall his and his wife Geraldine's friendly welcome at their home near Stockholm. It is a matter of great regret to me that I was unable to complete the present book before he died in October 2006, but I welcomed his encouragement and positive appraisal of this work in its earlier stages.

I am most grateful for the extensive comments made by the official readers for Folklore Fellows' Communications, who, going beyond the call of duty, have enabled me to improve this volume in many ways. I also thank those who graciously spent time in reading through portions of the book as it neared completion and sent comments, or who have helped over individual queries: Ursula Dronke, John McKinnell, Alison Finlay, Carolyne Larrington, Richard North, Sverrir Tómasson and François-Xavier Dillmann (Norse matters), Martin West (with his unparalleled expertise both in classical and Indo-European languages and myth, as well as the impact of shamanism upon them), Frog (for extensive comments in the areas of Finnish and Norse), Alaric Hall (Old English), Senni Timonen (Finnish folk poetry and beliefs), Riho Grünthal (Finno-Ugric linguistic matters), Pekka Hakamies (for help in checking translations from Russian), Rod Sturdy (for his linguistic expertise in Arabic and Swedish), Karl Reichl (on Turkic matters), and Olle Sundström (for forwarding some difficult to obtain Russian materials). I have made use of many libraries and harangued librarians with challenging requests: I would particularly mention the helpful staff of the British Library, of University College, London (especially Bess Ryder of the Scandinavian section), of Fennicum in Turku, and of Chester Public Library, as well as Nicholas Smith, of the Rare Books Department of the University Library, Cambridge, who copied pages from Crusius's *Annales Suevici* for me, thereby saving a journey to Cambridge.

Finally I thank my wife Patricia. Having been courted with interpretations of the Brísingamen, she was unlikely to allow me to abandon this work even in the face of growing responsibilities elsewhere, and of having to spend six months apart while I worked on it; without her it might well never have appeared.

CONVENTIONS

Source texts. The main source texts referred to throughout the study are gathered together in volume II, and referred to by number in the discussions in volume I. The intention is that the two volumes should be used in close conjunction, as much of the argument is focused on interpretation of these texts, and their presentation in a discrete section is meant rather to emphasise their fundamental importance than to divert attention from them.

Cross-references. Many matters discussed at length are referred to in passing elsewhere; I rely on the reader to peruse the Contents and Index to find relevant entries, but where it has seemed of benefit to point the reader to index entries, I have done so with a reference in small capitals within angle brackets ⟨THUS⟩; ⟨QV⟩ (i.e. *quod vide*) signifies the index entry to be consulted is identical with the term mentioned immediately before the reference. ⟨ ⟩ are also used to enclose references by number to the texts presented in the Sources section. I have wholly eschewed the use of cross-references to particular pages (other than in the index itself, of course).

The indexes. The indexes relate to volume I. It is intended that they be used in conjunction with the detailed list of contents to uncover passages of specific interest.

References are made by author-date system; ancient sources are generally referred to by author and title. As far as possible, physical volumes are indicated by upper-case roman numerals, "books" (generally in Latin works) by small-capital roman numerals, chapters and sections by arabic numerals, however designated in the original publications.

Citations. Run-on citations of sources in original languages are marked off with « and », and translations of these sources with the normal speech marks, " and ". Words or phrases cited as lexemes rather than specific quotations are put in italics.

Standardisation of Norse and other texts. In order to arrive at some semblance of consistency in the matter of citing from both standardised and diplomatic scholarly editions, I follow the common practice (as in the Íslenzk fornrit series, for example) of standardising most West Norse texts (East Norse are left unstandardised). In practice, this means citations on the whole follow editions if these are already standardised (but I have generally altered *ö* to *ǫ*, as *ö* represents a sound change which was only beginning at the time of the very latest texts used here; I also render the reflexive ending as *-sk* rather than *-st* except in the latest texts; some of the excessive and wholly

unauthentic punctuation used in some editions is toned down; it is common to find slips into modern forms even in scholarly editions, and these have been corrected when noted). I have standardised any diplomatic texts myself (however, law texts, cited for example from *Norges gamle love*, are not standardised). Standardisation is only ever a compromise, and can at times be misrepresentative (it is scarcely acceptable, in truth, to standardise a ninth-century skaldic text to a thirteenth-century ideal, for example), yet it seems preferable to adhere to the practice in a work of this nature, as a diplomatic orthography would at times be distracting in the extreme. Precise manuscript forms are only a matter of concern in the present study when explicitly discussed; similarly, I generally incorporate silently any emendations from the editions used, though such forms are discussed when pertinent. Diplomatic versions and manuscript facsimiles of many texts have been published and may be consulted by readers who wish to do so. Old English (and other Germanic) texts are not traditionally standardised, and are cited according to the editions used, except that I use the Old English *wyn* character *ƿ* instead of *w*, since I can see no reason for replacing the original form with this purely modern letter, and I do not (generally) reproduce the diacritics used for example for long vowels.

Norse texts. Eddic poems are cited from various editions (which on occasion vary in stanza numbering); I have also consulted the manuscripts and occasionally differ slightly from the printed editions used. I cite firstly from the edition of Ursula Dronke (*Atlakviða, Atlamál, Baldrs draumar, Guðrúnarhvǫt, Hamðismál, Lokasenna, Rígsþula, Skírnismál, Vǫlundarkviða, Vǫluspá*), then from *KLE* (*Alvíssmál, Fáfnismál, Grípisspá, Hárbarðsljóð, Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar, Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* and *II, Hymiskviða, Hyndluljóð, Reginsmál, Sigrdrífumál, Þrymskviða*), or failing that from the edition of Jón Helgason (*Grímnismál, Vafþrúðnismál*), but none of these editions is complete (though the *KLE* edition is nearing completion). Other heroic poems (*Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, Guðrúnarkviða I, II* and *III, Helreið Brynhildar, Oddrúnargrátr, Sigurðarkviða in skamma*) are cited from the edition of Neckel and Kuhn (eschewing the idiosyncratic standardisation); *Hávamál* is cited from the edition of Evans; *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* and *Grógaldr* (together forming *Svipdagsmál*) are cited from the edition of Robinson; *Hlǫðskviða* is found within *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (also in Neckel and Kuhn *Edda* edition); *Forspjallsljóð* is edited by Bugge; *Sólarljóð* is edited by Fidjestøl; for *Grottasǫngr* I use my own edition. A translation of all the main Eddic poems is found in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington, World's Classics, Oxford: University Press, 1996.

Skaldic verse in general is cited from the edition of Finnur Jónsson (*Skjaldedigtning*); other editions have been used for selected poems: *Darraðarljóð* is edited by Poole; Davidson (1983, a most valuable edition regrettably only available in thesis form) edits Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal*, Einarr Helgason skálaglamm's *Vellekla*, Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld's *Hákonardrápa* and Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa*; North edits Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's *Haustlǫng*. Finnur Jónsson's *Skjaldedigtning* will

in time be replaced by the new international edition under the leadership of Margaret Clunies Ross, but this has not advanced far enough at the time of publication to make use of here; in any case, I have no reason to believe that my conclusions derived from the analysis of skaldic verse would be seriously affected by it. No general translations of skaldic verse can be recommended; the verse is so complex that it almost invariably requires detailed analysis for its comprehension.

For Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* most references are given to chapter (so various editions may be consulted, though I have used Finnur Jónsson's from 1931), but I refer to the edition of Finnur Jónsson when it is necessary to consider particular manuscript forms, whereas I use Faulkes's standardised edition for citations of text. The translation by Faulkes (one among several available) may be recommended.

Saga editions are listed individually in the References; generally, Íslenzk fornrit editions are used where available. Many of the family sagas are presented in translation in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, various translators, general editor Viðar Hreinsson, 5 vols., Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997.

Names of divine beings in Norse. I refer to all supernatural beings in lower-case forms, as *æsir, vanir, álfar, dvergar* and so forth; however, it is clear that Snorri, with his euhemerising tendencies, regarded Æsir and Vanir as more or less racial terms, so it is appropriate to use these upper-case forms here.

Kamlanie. I use the Russian term "kamlanie" (камлание, pl. "kamlania", камлания) instead of the commonly used "séance" for the shamanic rite, in which the shaman typically (but not necessarily) goes into trance and converses with spirits, since "séance" is apt to evoke images of spiritualist meetings, and is best confined to that usage.

Finnish forms. I use Finnish nominative plural forms when necessary, which are marked by *-t*, and which may cause consonant gradation and other changes: thus the plural of *väki* is *väet*.

Sámi forms. There is a good deal of variation in spelling in the sources; for names, other than for direct citations, I generally use the forms in Mebius (2003), which are predominantly North Sámi.

Ethnonyms. In general, the native names of peoples are used (so Mansi, rather than Vogul, for example), at least in principle; in some cases, no native name in fact exists, or has not received recognition. Most names are, in any case, passed through Russian, and then anglicised, so forms are only approximate. Huge variations exist in ethnonym forms in English; some attempt is made to impose consistency (mainly based on the most commonly used forms in recent publications such as Forsyth 1992), though the result is bound to be somewhat arbitrary. I add a plural -s when referring to ethnic groups as necessary, except when the singular "looks" plural in English, that is when it ends in a sibilant or -i/y (as Nenets, Mansi).

ABBREVIATIONS

A	Manuscript AM 748 I 4to, fols. 1–6, of the Eddic poems, only partially preserved, early fourteenth century
acc.	accusative
AeW	Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*
AR	Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*
ASPR	*Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*
BL	Uno Holmberg, *Baum des Lebens*
C	Manuscript AM 748 II 4to, *c.* 1400, containing parts of Snorri's *Edda*
ch.	chapter(s)
comm.	commentary
CR	Codex Regius of the Eddic poems, manuscript GkS 2365 4to, *c.* 1270
dat.	dative
DONP	*Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog. A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*
DR	*Danmarks runeindskrifter*, ed. Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke
fem.	feminine
Flateyjarbók	Manuscript GkS 1005 fol., composed in 1387–90 for Jón Hákonarson (*Flateyjarbók* refers to the published version: see References)
FFPE	*Finnish Folk Poetry Epic*, ed. Michael Branch, Matti Kuusi and Keith Bosley
FN	*Fornaldarsögur norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson
gen.	genitive
H	The Hauksbók version of *Landnámabók*
Hauksbók	Manuscript composed in 1306–8 for Haukr Erlendsson, now divided among manuscripts AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to, AM 675 4to
ÍF	Íslenzk fornrit series of Old Norse texts
KLE	*Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, ed. Klaus von See *et al.* 7 vols. (I, VI, VII not yet issued).
KLNM	*Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid*, ed. John Danstrup *et al.*

lv	*lausavísa*
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae historica
nom.	nominative
p., pp.	page, pages
PE	*The Poetic Edda*, ed. Ursula Dronke, vols. I and II
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne
pl.	plural
pr.	prose associated with Eddic verse; the nearest stanza number is given.
R	Codex Regius, GkS 2367 4to, *c.* 1325, containing Snorri's *Edda*
S	Sturlubók manuscript, *c.* 1275–80, which perished in the Copenhagen fire of 1728; a copy (AM 107 fol.) had been made by Jón Erlendsson.
sg.	singular
Skj	*Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson
SLS	Åke Hultkrantz and Louise Bäckmann, *Studies in Lappish Shamanism*
SnE	Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, ed. Finnur Jónsson
st.	stanza(s)
T	Codex Trajectinus, Utrecht University Library MS 1374, *c.* 1600 (copy of a medieval manuscript), containing Snorri's *Edda*
U	Codex Upsaliensis, Uppsala University Library MS DG 11, *c.* 1320, containing Snorri's *Edda*
VA	Harald Bjorvand and Fredrik Otto Lindeman, *Våre arveord. Etymologisk ordbok*
W	Codex Wormianus, AM 242 fol., *c.* 1350, containing Snorri's *Edda*

I. PROLEGOMENA

1. Introduction

Norse myth is the main topic of this work, and the main aim is to discuss and clarify a selection of myths and practices, in particular magic practices, usually in the specific form of *seiðr*. The selection is made on the basis of their arguably "shamanic" character, or connection to myths which might be so described. Shamanism provides material for comparative investigation, and is used to help elucidate the Norse myths in question; I aim to present a fairly broad selection of materials in order to give a sufficient indication of the nature of the sources which are compared,[1] but it is not my aim to consider in detail questions of interpretation posed by shamanic texts, except as this impinges on the main areas of discussion:[2] it *is* my aim to discuss the Norse sources in detail.

The scope of investigation is not confined just to elements which relate directly to shamanism as a religious phenomenon: other characteristic elements of the belief-systems of societies which practised shamanism, notably cosmological concepts such as the world tree, and the ritual of the bear hunt, are also discussed. Some have fallen into the trap of ascribing shamanism to the ancient Scandinavians on the basis of coincidences of imagery or practice in both Norse and Eurasian[3] belief-systems relating to such meta-shamanic phenomena; clearly, some investigation is called for to clarify what may reasonably be said on these issues. Equally, it seems misplaced to consider the Norse evidence in isolation from other European evidence for shamanic-type practices, and so some consideration is given to the question of shamanism in ancient Greece, and the witchcraft of medieval western Europe, and a brief consideration is made of European contacts with the peoples of the steppe in the early Middle Ages, whence some shamanic ideas may have been brought.[4]

[1] The amount of material relating to classic shamanism which is presented is in fact but a small selection; for a useful collection of texts rendered into Italian, see Marazzi (1984).

[2] I make one exception: the Norwegian account in *Historia Norwegie* of Sámi shamanism, which I seek to elucidate both from a Norse perspective and from that of Sámi and Siberian shamanism.

[3] I use "Eurasia" to refer, approximately, to the territory of the former Soviet Union, which includes most of the areas of classic shamanism (by extension, the Sámi areas are also included in the cultural-geographic area of Eurasia); I do not consider areas south of the steppe in any great detail, though I do make some use for example of Indian and Japanese material, which, treating the term "Eurasian" flexibly, may be included within it.

[4] I also make some use of Celtic materials, but a more thorough study than as yet exists of Celtic traditions of seers and magicians, themselves often exhibiting broadly shamanic

The use of shamanism as a criterion of selection deliberately raises the question: did the Norse in fact practise shamanism? "Norse" (or "Scandinavian") refers to the ancient, and particularly pre-Christian, Germanic-speaking inhabitants of Scandinavia and (secondarily) of colonies they settled elsewhere (notably Iceland), who for many centuries before their conversion to Christianity around the end of the first millennium had had a fairly hierarchical society based largely on agriculture and trade, whilst in its classic form shamanism, a practice of mediation with the spirit world, is associated above all with the scattered and often nomadic societies of northern Siberia, which relied primarily on hunting for subsistence, and which usually lacked a developed social hierarchy.

The reason for examining this question is that features are found in Old Norse literature and other writings which appear to reflect characteristic attributes of the classic forms of Siberian shamanism; the fact that the Norse lived on or near the geographical periphery of the classic shamanic world gives us further motivation for examining the issue. However, the problems that hinder a direct answer to the question are manifold, chief among which are the difficulties of defining shamanism precisely, and then of considering whether Norse practices do in fact fit within this definition – a task made all the more trying by an insufficiency of extant information about ancient Scandinavian beliefs and practices. Whilst I do not avoid these difficulties, my approach is more one of highlighting and defining as closely as possible what does remain in our Norse sources, and seeing to what extent it may compare with classic Siberian shamanism and also with non-classic forms from further south (but without straying too far into the definitional maze of whether it "is" shamanism or not). One line of argument often propounded by those eager to uncover shamanism amounts to detecting features in Norse records which may be paralleled in indisputably shamanic societies, and then concluding that the ancient Scandinavians, either in the pagan period, or even, in later times, practised some form of shamanism. I seek to avoid this logical fallacy (for many such elements occur individually outside shamanism), but I also seek to discuss such areas in some detail, without, however, seeking to elicit arguments for the presence of shamanism when the evidence does not support it. The scope of the study is, in fact, rather wider: shamanism acts as a point of reference, but it is my aim to probe more generally into the nature of pre-Christian belief in Scandinavia, and in particular its expression in myth. This inevitably also involves discussion of the nature of our sources, many of which are composed well after the disappearance of paganism as a practised system of belief or ritual.

Naturally, the topic of the present work does not emerge *ex nihilo*. I do not wish, however, to give a detailed history of the scholarship on the topic – such surveys are tedious and serve little purpose – but rather to bring in earlier work in the course of discussion at appropriate points. I will merely

characteristics, would do much to help contextualise the Norse evidence within a broader north European setting.

note that comparisons between Norse and Sámi, and other, shamanic practices and beliefs go back well into the nineteenth century, notably to Fritzner's comparison between Sámi and Norse magic practices (1877); in 1935 Dag Strömbäck argued for a strong connection between Norse *seiðr* and Sámi shamanism, whereas Åke Ohlmarks (1939) saw the evidence as not supporting such a link, whilst recognising similarities with forms of shamanism from further afield. In more recent years, the debate may be said to go back to Peter Buchholz's short thesis of 1968, which outlined a number of features in Norse myth of an ostensibly shamanic nature, and hence rekindled the debate about the extent to which ancient Norsemen practised a form of shamanism.[5] Thereafter opinions have been divided on the issue, with for example Regis Boyer and François Dillmann arguing against any strongly shamanic presence in Norse, while Neil Price is more sympathetic to the idea, and, like Strömbäck, seeks parallels in Sámi practices and beliefs. As long as the debate focuses only on those features which can be directly perceived as shamanic or not, it will continue endlessly; my own approach is to attempt to encompass a rather wider array of material in order to provide a much more substantial body of contextual evidence and argument, of which the debate on shamanic features forms part. Rather than relying on, or referring to, the presentations of primary materials by scholars such as Buchholz or Price, I have presented such materials anew along with my own interpretations (acknowledging the contributions of earlier scholars as appropriate).

As nearly all our ancient Norse records are literary[6] in form, a constant leitmotiv will be the interpretation of the sources which relate religious or mythic information in the light of their literary context. I find myself much in agreement with Jane Harrison, who in the introduction to her great work on Greek religion, *Prolegomena*, pointed out the tension inherent in using literary sources to illuminate religion (1962: vii): whereas for literature Homer is the beginning, for religion he represents "a culmination, a complete achievement, an almost mechanical accomplishment, with scarcely a hint of *origines*, an accomplishment moreover, which is essentially literary rather than religious, sceptical and moribund already in its very perfection". These words apply just as forcibly to the Norse monuments,

[5] Buchholz's thesis is at best preliminary in nature: the number of texts and mythic motifs discussed is very limited, there is practically no discussion of the reliability and background of sources, and little consideration of the degree to which supposedly shamanic features in Norse add up to anything like a systematic religious practice.

[6] By "literary" is meant that the main focus of the piece is on the aesthetics of the composition (use of words, structures and so forth), whether the composition is written or oral in origin; the point is that the main purpose is not to communicate a religious message or information. Many works might be termed "semi-literary", in that the main purpose was (arguably) divided among various concerns; for example, Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān's account of his journey to the kingdom of the Bulgars, which describes a Viking funeral, was partly what we might call ethnographic, but this is balanced with a desire to produce an aesthetically pleasing composition (in this case, we have the further complication that the extant account is in fact only a summary of the original with various passages cited from it; a different sort of problem also arises from the account being that of an outsider to the culture described).

where our earliest poetic records already appear for us as highly crafted artefacts; none of the texts functioned as hymns, for purposes of worship, though religious considerations, or more precisely the artistic crafting of religious concepts in literary form, were still important in early texts such as *Vǫluspá*. Harrison declared her concern to be with the "substratum of religious conceptions, at once more primitive and more permanent" which are found in Homer and elsewhere, and yet her aim was to "come to a better understanding of some forms of Greek poetry"; a similar aim motivates the present study. The sources are often the works of poets who use material which, while perhaps originally possessed of an essentially religious purpose, is always directed to poetic ends. In fact, to obscure matters still further, religion and rite are rarely glimpsed in the literature we have; more often we are presented with myth, which may reflect religion or rite but does not do so in a necessarily straightforward way. Nonetheless, it is the practice and belief lying behind the literary presentation of myth that is sought in this study – but given the indirect way in which these have to be uncovered, they are bound to be "seen through a glass darkly". Yet, like Harrison, my ultimate aim is to achieve a better understanding of the poetry (in this case Norse poetry).[7] The more clearly we can perceive the nature of the material the poets worked with, the greater will be our perception of what use, in poetic terms, they have made of it. The aim in the present work is not primarily to produce a book of literary criticism, or even of literary motifs, in the way for example McKinnell (2005) does with material which overlaps with that considered here, yet literary considerations are bound to enter the arguments, as is consistent with the nature of our sources. I would like to think that this study will further the appreciation of Norse poetry in literary terms, mainly because the poets deserve to be treated for what they are, but also because without it our understanding of the myth and religion will be seriously compromised, as indeed already happens all too frequently at the hands of those lacking a keen literary awareness.

Methodology

My approach to the study of the materials considered is essentially pragmatic and seeks to avoid being hide-bound to a theoretical framework imposed from without. I am, of course, familiar with various theoretical approaches, and have employed them (or elements of them) as they have seemed appropriate. The only theoretical position I adhere to consistently is that the human mind is not bound by any one approach to reality; no individual theory will serve to explain the multifarious expressions of human imagination.[8] It is my aim to respect the complexity of the evidence

[7] Prose works are also considered, but are less of a focus of this study (as opposed, for example, to Dillmann's exhaustive study of magicians in ancient Iceland (2006), where by contrast the poetry lies largely outside the work's ambit).

[8] As Bleeker (1979: 176) notes: "As to methodology, there actually exists only one general

and the mental capacity of the original thinkers who produced it, and to allow the sources to speak for themselves as far as possible; the converse approach of applying an ideologically formulated theory and finding evidence to fit it has been eschewed.

It is fundamental to my approach to place any inferences about the presence or absence of shamanism within as broad a context as possible: throughout, the prime question I seek to answer is "What is the nature and meaning of the text or motif under discussion?" rather than directly "Is this text or motif shamanic?" In essence, I find the primary sources far more fascinating than any theoretical discussion; yet a few further remarks may not be out of place.

One principle adopted in this study in the elucidation of Norse sources is to work from the close to the distant. "Close" means other sources close in time and place, and "distant" means sources further removed in time or place. Problems arise immediately, of course: most of our Norse sources are written down in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, but many are believed to be much older, in whole or in part, and moreover many derive not so much from their place of writing, Iceland (usually), but rather Norway or elsewhere, with roots going back further in time and place. As well as geographical distance, cultural distance also has to be taken into account; Indian traditions may be more informative than Sámi, for instance, since both Indian and Norse mythic systems developed out of a shared Indo-European base (at least, so it appears), whereas the Sámi belonged to a different cultural sphere. Levels of culture also have to be borne in mind; an agricultural society with a hierarchy from peasants to princes (the Norse) is rather different from semi-nomadic hunters with only rudimentary animal husbandry (the Sámi).

Hultkrantz (1970: 84) writes: "Every allegation which is made concerning a religion or an element of religion is comparative in its nature, this being due to the fact that the identification in itself presupposes a comparison with other religions and other elements of religion." He mentions the two main types of comparison: between phenomena that can be related genetically to each other (for example, they belong to one time and place, or one is a borrowed version of the other), and between those that cannot (they are from societies with no links); the present study involves both

rule, i.e. that one should study the religious phenomena both criticially, unbiasedly, in a scholarly manner, and at the same time with empathy [...] I am firmly convinced that the average historian of religions should abstain from speculations about matters of method, which can only be adequately solved by students of philosophy and philosophy of religion." This eminently sensible statement has come under much bombardment from partisans of the "theory before practice" school, but is reiterated by Hultkrantz, who, in an important work on the methods of comparative religion available only in Swedish, says (1973*a*: 7): "It should, however, be apparent that every method is only a help-mechanism, that it only suits a particular type of objective, and that a humanist science like comparative religion with its many turns of insight cannot be bound to any specific method. It is always the aim of research and its object which determine which methodology should be used, and it is up to the individual researcher to choose the method he finds most practical and appropriate in the context. One and the same comparative religious investigation can indeed make use of several methods, according as the objectives change."

sorts of comparison. A genetic relationship between motifs strengthens the case for interpreting one in the light of the other. Yet the pursuit of genetic relationships between phenomena is often bound to fizzle out in uncertainty, given the inevitable sparsity of information, and the pursuit of genetic relationship poses problems: for example, why should we accept *a priori* that the society of adherents to an Indo-European mythic system was coterminous with the society of speakers of Indo-European languages, or indeed postulate that such a thing as Indo-European myth existed as a definable entity at all?[9] In the present study, I have not pursued the matter of genetic relationship far, but I have assumed that such a relationship exists with other Indo-European mythic systems, and I have provided a historical account of links between Scandinavia and societies with acknowledged shamanism, to illustrate the general point that a genetic relationship may have existed in many cases (but I do not seek to prove it other than in certain instances), as the Norse were in direct contact with the Sámi and Finns, and probably with other Siberian peoples on their trade routes to Bjarmaland and down to the Byzantine Empire. Such relationships, where they are of a genetic kind, could either reflect direct borrowing, or a common participation in a widespread and geographically contiguous circumpolar culture.[10]

In so far as the comparisons are non-genetic, the aim may be described as *typological*, in other words to delineate what Norse features are of the same type as those found elsewhere, and in what ways: only once this is done can questions about borrowing, shared mental complexes and so forth be considered.[11] The further purpose of making typological comparisons may, however, be to suggest meanings, or structures, within mythic traditions, even when they are not (apparently) related. The assertion, which I follow, is that people, at least those living in roughly comparable economic and social settings, tend to realise a given notion about the world in similar symbolic ways, even down to details; why this should be is in the province of psychologists, but the implication is that when we encounter similar

[9] Cf. Hultkrantz (1973*a*: 65), who objects to the principle of stopping comparisons at language boundaries, since religious studies are not the same as philology, and he asks if for example sufism in Arabia and Iran should be regarded as distinct phenomena on the grounds that the languages of the two countries are unrelated. He observes that it is well recognised that myths and tales wander from one people to another irrespective of language.

[10] The possibility of an Indo-European heritage of shamanism can also not be dismissed; thus Fleck (1971*b*: 57, 65) notes similarities to Iranian practices, for example. In fact, lexical borrowings in for example Finnish (such as *nimi*, "name", or *vesi*, "water") indicate contact between proto-Indo-European and proto-Uralic speakers, and at a subsequent period there was strong contact between Finno-Ugric speakers and Indo-Iranians in which it appears much religious vocabulary entered the Finno-Ugric languages. The ancient and long-standing contact between Uralic and Indo-European peoples at least raises the possibility of shamanic ideas passing between them, and certainly illustrates the complexity of trying to trace genetic relationship between religious ideas.

[11] It is worth noting that commonly accepted notions such as that of a circumpolar cultural complex (to which I do *not* believe ancient Scandinavia belonged, other than in certain aspects which were probably borrowed) are typological in nature, and not proved, over all, by evidence of cultural contact.

symbolisms, one may elucidate the meaning of the other. I am, however, far from Eliade's realist, or neo-Platonic idealist, position, with his notions of the "logic of symbols" and "invariant core meanings";[12] the comparisons are introduced by way of suggestion, and the likelihood of their being useful depends on how much supporting evidence there is, and how far we believe structures of myth tend to be replicated throughout the world (for whatever reason). Tradition is, in any case, always variable. Meaning resides in an interaction between accepted (but changing) tradition and individual creativity, so that a myth or symbol cannot in fact ever be said just to have one meaning per se (hence, my position is fundamentally informed by nominalism in a way Eliade's is not).

Needless to say, the results of comparison are bound to be speculative to a greater or lesser extent, but uncertainty is a hallmark of almost any consideration of medieval sources. There is a certain inadequacy imposed by the practical necessity of isolating merely one aspect of ancient religion, namely shamanism, and the insufficiency of contextualised source materials on both the Norse and Siberian sides leads to a discussion which might otherwise be more holistic in its approach. Nonetheless, these problems are relative, and do not preclude us from making useful observations about Norse monuments.

Some concepts

RELIGION

Religion has been defined in many different ways. The functional definition of religion as "ultimate concern", suggested by Baird (1971: 18), may appeal in a general study of religion, but is scarcely of much use in the Norse field: we cannot, given the paucity of sources, determine what was of ultimate concern to people, a matter which no doubt varied from one person to the next anyway; we cannot say in any case that worship of the pre-Christian gods of the Norse people necessarily was, or related to, their ultimate concern. For the present purposes, especially given that this work is not primarily concerned with the nature of religion in itself, the definition of Hultkrantz (1973*a*: 13, my translation) is adequate: "the certainty of the existence of a supernatural world, a certainty which is mainly expressed in various sorts of opinions relating to belief and which in concrete terms is manifested in rites and observances, as well as in narrative accounts". In most cases, it is (the outward manifestation of) Norse religion that is referred to, that is the worship of the *æsir* and *vanir* gods and related beliefs

[12] A useful summary of Eliade's approach is given by John Clifford Holt in his introduction to Eliade (1996: xiv–xv). For a lengthy and penetrating discussion of Eliade's approach, see Dudley (1977). Dudley (ibid. 129), following Lakatos, makes an important point about methodology and falsification theories: he suggests that instead of attempting to use methodological falsification, a system should be judged on whether it is progressive, leading to the discovery of new or unexpected phenomena and accounting for known but unexplained phenomena, or degenerative, when it ceases to clarify unexplained facts and when there are alternative theories that promise to be more progressive.

and practices, especially as expressed in our surviving, mainly written, monuments. Shamanism is counted as a religious practice reflecting the religious belief system of the society concerned.[13] Religions may impose ethical codes on adherents, as in the religions of the Book; they may also be primarily aimed at enlisting (or in the case of magic compelling) the aid of divine powers to further the aims of individuals or communities in an amoral fashion. Most sources indicate that Norse religion was of the latter sort; the same is true of many forms of shamanism. The division is scarcely hard and fast, however, and one sort may develop into the other (Judaism, for instance, appears to have moved over into the ethical category in the course of its recorded history).

Connected with religion are terms used when two religions come together. Baird (1971: 142–4) has pointed out the need for a more precise terminology here; thus, when elements from different religions come together in a harmonious unit then the term *synthesis* is appropriate; when the elements co-exist without consistency, we have *syncretism*; when an element is absorbed from outside and the borrowing religion changes as a result, we have *reconception*. Yet determining which process is at play in any given instance requires an objective knowledge of the history of the religions in question, which is rarely available in the case of Norse paganism.

RITUAL

Rites may relate to many aspects of life – passage from one state to another (such as adolescence), the seasons, commemorations, exchange, communion, affliction, feasting, fasting, politics (Bell 1997: 94). Although ritual has sometimes been seen as a sort of dramatised version of myth, such a view is now rejected; the relationship of ritual to myth is often casual, so the one cannot automatically be used to illuminate the other (G. Kirk 1970: 18). Rites can only be understood by taking their whole social context into account, yet they are not merely reflections of social order (or of mythic order). Bell (1997: 38) argues: "These rites also function to reinforce the social status quo, since temporary inversions or suspensions of the usual order of social relations dramatically acknowledge that order as normative. Hence [...] ritual is the occasion to exaggerate the tensions that exist in the society in order to provide a social catharsis that can simultaneously affirm unity and effect some semblance of it. The goal of ritual as such is to channel the expression of conflict in therapeutic ways so as to restore a functioning social equilibrium." There has, of course, been a long

[13] A. Jensen (1963: 233) regards shamanism as magic: "Shamanism – as we encounter it today – is inseparable from acts of volition, which in extreme forms do not even hesitate to make the deity subservient to human will. This is 'genuine magic'; through it, shamanism attains its exceptional position." This legitimate viewpoint raises matters of the distinction between religion and magic, which I do not believe it would be beneficial to discuss here. For the present purposes, magic may be regarded as a subclass of religion, one in which ritualistic control of the supernatural plays a significant role.

tradition of social interpretation of ritual (with varying ideas about how ritual reflects society), but this is not the only dimension: ritual clearly also fulfils a religious function, and also participates in the symbolic world of the adherents – the symbols of ritual must be interpreted in terms of the position they occupy within the overall system of symbols operating within the society concerned (ibid. 41). Ritual action may be metaphoric (for example, pouring water stands for rain) or metonymic (a crown stands for royal authority). An interpretation of the socio-mythic structure of ritual is offered by Bouritius (1979: 406–7), who argues that ritual reflects what he terms a "macro-micro-cosmic order relationship": most societies believe that a macrocosmic primordial chaos is abolished by the establishment of a macrocosmic order, which is realised on the microcosmic level as a human society, the life of which maintains order. Yet there is always a latent tension between hidden chaos and order, so that order is perceived as potential disorder, and all rituals are directed at the continuation and realisation of the everlasting order of macrocosmic and microcosmic relationship. Whilst order itself is everlasting, the forms in which it is realised are in a state of change, so that rituals are to be understood as ordering a continuum, and as fighting the hidden chaos latent in all life. There are three types of rituals, dedicated to *ordering*, *re-ordering* or *new-ordering* the macro-micro-relationship. The first includes rites of passage, which put all members of a community in their just place, and daily rituals needed in ordinary life, such as hunting rituals; the second group includes seasonal rituals, re-ordering society and its concrete environment of place and time on the everlasting model of the original macro-cosmic order, and renewing the powers of nature, as well as rituals directed against latent chaos in everyday life, such as healing or anti-witchcraft rituals; the third group includes for example rituals of new religious movements, which change the order of the macro-micro-cosmic relationship in totally new circumstances unbounded to kinship, time or place.

MYTH

Imagination is central to myth. A myth conveys an unreality that is imagined as real.[14] A myth is a tale – though it may be presented so allusively as to lack almost all narrative thread.[15] Myths may be distinguished from legends, which purport to communicate historical stories, though since gods and supernatural beings intervene in legends, and since legends may be humanised versions of divine myths, the distinction is often difficult to make in practice. Myths are also in principle distinct from folktales, in which the supernatural element is subsidiary and the narrative element

[14] I thank Ursula Dronke for this succinct description.

[15] In Norse poetry, a so-called *kenning* may be an allusion to a mythic or legendary motif (or narrative); for example *Draupnis dǫgg*, "dew of Draupnir", designates gold, since the mythological ring Draupnir dripped gold rings from itself. Even in extended poems, the narrative element may be limited: for example, a myth of Þórr is alluded to in *Þórsdrápa*, but rather by means of a series of scenes than a linked narrative.

to the fore; again, since myths often employ folktale elements, particularly for instances of ingenuity, the one class overlaps with the other. Myths are distinguished as being about serious matters – this may be the gods, or the creation of the world, or reflections on deep problems (of society or individuals); nonetheless, among these serious matters may sometimes be counted humour. Myths are not narrative versions of rituals: the connection with rituals is often tenuous and trivial; nor do they necessarily reflect religious practices or beliefs. Myths are usually traditional, and exist as part of cultural heritage, but each retelling alters elements, sometimes drastically, and a non-traditional myth is a theoretical possibility. Interpretations of myth no doubt varied from time to time, place to place, person to person. In Norse, we usually have a myth preserved only once or a few times, and often in a fragmentary or allusive form. Each realisation of a myth is distinct, and we must aim to distinguish between what the poet "inherited" and what he has altered, rearranged or emphasised differently, despite the difficulty of doing so in many instances.[16]

It is unacceptable to impose a particular generalised theory on all myth, such as structuralism or social function. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that myths often, if not always, served a function beyond the purely narrative, be it religious, political, initiatory or whatever, and hence the structuring of a particular version may be subject to these external factors.

I assume on the part of the reader an understanding that myths are often expressed through figurative language; I do not undertake any discussion of this topic here, since much has already been written on it. As an example of what I refer to, consider the mental processes at work when a shaman says that his drum is a boat which takes him to the other world; having set off on this path of metaphor, the shaman is then free to elaborate the picture of the boat in question. Both the drum and boat are legitimate objects of study (are both "real", so to speak) in the context of the present study; it is necessary to be able to perceive the distinction between, for example, physical objects of rituals or concepts such as the structure of the cosmos and mythical objects which explain or materialise them, whilst also discerning the conceptual interpenetration involved.[17] The essential figurativity of myth also allows for, indeed encourages, the figuring of concepts in multiple ways, even within one myth – and the all too frequent attempts to apply "logic" at the expense of imagination to the interpretation of myths leads to an over-systematised and stultified misapprehension of the poetic creativity which engendered and refined them. Thus when, for example, I suggest that Óðr may be viewed both as an *áss* mate to the *vanr* Freyja, and as a realisation of her own inspired soul, *óðr*, it is not because I am hedging my bets as to the "correct" interpretation,

[16] This summary of myth is based largely on G. Kirk (1970: 7–40). He points out the unacceptability of pinpointing the function of myth in general: for example, he attacks Lévi-Strauss's notion that all myths mediate contradictions, or the ideas of the nature-myth school, and so forth.

[17] Siikala discusses this area at greater length with specific reference to shamanic texts (2002: 49–60, whence the drum/boat example is taken; see also the works referred to there).

but because I believe that ancient poets exploited all the potential readings of the myths they told, and of the words they used in telling them.

EVOLUTIONISM AND CHANGE

Evolutionism is the notion that religions develop along a predictable course from primitive to advanced, and it is usually normative, i.e. each successive stage is regarded as better than the previous. This approach, typical of the nineteenth century,[18] is now defunct;[19] the point of mentioning it is to distinguish it from legitimate approaches to the uncovering of processes of religious change. An example of this is the ecology of religion, which seeks to relate the type of religion found in a society to its relationship to its environment and hence the source of its economy; the correspondence is pertinent particularly in more "primitive" societies (see Hultkrantz 1979).

An important aspect of cultural change is the survival of elements from earlier stages, which may be simple practices, superstitions or aspects of the overall world view, which make statements about reality which are no longer experienced as true. In practice this means that in investigating any religious system, we should expect to find elements which are inconsistent with each other because they reflect different rates of change, or for that matter may reflect different geographical origins.

In the unfurling of religious, and indeed cultural, change there is an interplay of the polarities of creativity and *Urdummheit*. The term *Urdummheit* was used by evolutionists with reference to the supposed state of primordial human ignorance, but is appropriated by A. Jensen (1963: 8) as an apt word for something found at all stages of human development: "it is spiritually uncreative [...] it was in most instances a significant force in the degeneration of originally meaningful phenomena into semantically depleted routines". Thus, whatever stage of a culture we look at, we shall find such depleted routines, as well, perhaps, as newly creative forms of expression.

These points are mentioned as a potential theoretical means of justifying the existence of something like shamanism, which is after all characteristic of socially non-hierarchical hunting societies, as a survival within Norse religion even though the society was clearly hierarchical (and not primarily based on a hunting economy); moreover, while it may have been a meaningful phenomenon in say the tenth century, it could have become fossilised and depleted by the thirteenth.

[18] It was pursued by leading scholars such as Müller, Tylor and Lang.

[19] The fact that certain human activities, for example scientific knowledge, involve progress has the unfortunate effect of persuading people that all human activities progress; religious evolutionism was a crude response to the new thinking of Darwinism. A. Jensen (1963: 34) puts the case well: "It has long been apparent that the idea of progress could contribute statements of only limited value to culture history. Who would apply 'progress' to a comparison of the work of Beethoven, Bach, and Corelli? [...] But the inalienable, individual worth of a culture, which permits no comparison with other cultures, is not fundamentally (and never solely) determined by the sum and the distinctiveness of rational cognitive elements; it lies in a genuine creativity which can never be any the truer, more beautiful, or better, for belonging to a more advanced period."

2. The nature of the sources

The great majority of sources used in the present work are written; I delimit the field of investigation to exclude, other than incidentally, sources of an archaeological nature, or which stem from later oral folk tradition.[1] In the case of Norse texts, they are not only written, but also chiefly literary, or sometimes historical, in nature, and date predominantly to before around 1400. Shamanic texts are mainly of a broadly ethnographic nature, recorded by outsiders observing the practices of shamanic peoples; they are mainly from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries. The principal texts which are considered in the discussions are presented in the Sources section in the second volume (which it is intended should be used in conjunction with the discussions throughout); some general observations about the source materials are offered here, but more detailed presentations of the background and interpretation of the individual texts are given, in the main, in the course of discussion later in the volume.

Sources for shamanism

Our sources of information on shamanism are varied.[2] Records of Siberian shamanism begin in the thirteenth century, but become plentiful only in the seventeenth; full and reliable accounts were made from about 1880, and from the early twentieth century onwards trained ethnologists, sometimes native to shamanic cultures (for example, Banzarov), have undertaken extensive field work, which has, however, been increasingly the taking down of the last vestiges of moribund traditions.

After the Revolution, shamanism continued to be a subject of research by Soviet scientists; they are characterised by a more or less overt political agenda, predictably reflecting a materialist Marxist-Leninist perspective. Whilst a good deal of useful information is given, the ideological approach

[1] For a study which seeks to incorporate far more archaeological material into the discussion of Norse shamanism, see Price (2002). I am not an archaeologist, and whilst accepting that archaeology may sometimes have useful material to offer, I remain generally sceptical that physical objects by themselves, without some piece of writing or other expression of human thought upon which to hang an interpretation, can suggest meanings (as distinct from any utilitarian purpose their form suggests). The classic case is the Scandinavian rock paintings, which appear to be replete with narratives of possibly religious significance, which, however, we can never fathom or define more specifically than to observe, for example, that the sun played a significant part in prehistoric religion; the extensive literature on these is therefore more or less ignored here (see Schjødt 1986, and, for a somewhat more positive view of the usefulness of rock art in comparative religious study, Hultkrantz 1986; there are, admittedly, some interesting contributions to the interpretation of Scandinavian rock art, such as Bradley 2006).

[2] See Siikala (1978: 77–87) for a detailed account of the history of recording of information on Siberian shamanism.

can sometimes call into question their value as scientific studies, and the self-adulatory tone of some of them, contrasting with what was actually taking place in the Soviet empire (in particular programmes designed to root out all aspects of local cultures), can make them particularly sickening to read. Since throwing off the shackles of Communism research has fortunately continued and is moreover often published in English or German.[3]

Shamanism has also become, over the last few decades, a major component in general anthropological and religious studies in the West (see, for example, the whole chapter devoted to it, with references to further works, in Morris 2006). Such works often expend considerable effort on matters such as the distinction between trance, ecstasy and possession in an attempt to plumb the religious nature of shamanism, as well as seeking to place the study of shamanism within philosophical schools of anthropology or religious study. These more general considerations lie outside the ambit of the present work.[4]

Since shamanism still survives (just), there are some excellent modern studies based on field work. I would mention as exemplary Jane Atkinson's *The Art and Politics of Wana Shamanship* (1989) and Caroline Humphrey's *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Daur Mongols* (1996). To mention some points from Humphrey's work: the emphasis is upon shamanism as one part of the overall culture of the Daurs, and indeed determined in its nature by that culture. Not only is a questioning, comprehensive approach taken, but the very assumptions that a Westerner brings to the questioning are themselves questioned. Unfortunately, such approaches are rare, and have only taken place in very recent years, when shamanism has largely disappeared from many areas of the world (particularly from Siberia). Humphrey, however, was in a privileged position, of having a native informant who had spent much of his life in the West, and so could communicate his ideas clearly, and this was supplemented

[3] Most of the major Russian research into shamanism has appeared in one form or another in English or German; there are, of course, many studies available only in Russian, but these are generally concerned with what might be termed the minutiae of shamanism, which it is beyond the aim of the present study to consider except in so far as they are relevant to Norse materials. Hence, whenever possible, I use materials which have been published in Western languages, which are more accessible to most scholars of Norse (myself included), both linguistically and in terms of library holdings. For a detailed study of Soviet researchers into shamanism (primarily of the Samoyed peoples) and their political agendas, see Sundström (2008). .

[4] On the issue of trance/ecstasy/possession, it seems clear that in practice shamanism included various degrees of altered consciousness, even within a single tradition, which stretched from an unaltered state to one in which the shaman might appear merely a vessel of the spirits. The determination of the physiological differences between such states is not of relevance in the present study, nor are they used to determine the presence or absence of "true" shamanism. It may be expected that in general possession will involve the summoning of spirits to the shaman to speak through him or her, whereas trance is more likely to involve the shaman's soul undertaking journeys to the spirit realms, but examples such as the Indian Soras, where spirits speak through the shaman, yet the shaman is also believed to travel down to the realm of the dead (Vitebsky 1993: 21), show that any such simple expectations are often likely to be frustrated.

by visits to the area studied, where further interviews were obtained. We cannot question the past in this way, only weigh up fragmentary and biased sources, and our results are bound to be more hesitant. Essentially, the further we go back from the present, the less satisfactory the sources become.

Another way of looking at our records of shamanism is from the point of view of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*: almost all the accounts we have are etic, and therefore represent a view of one type of society (generally a more primitive one) by another (in the main, a modern or early-modern Western one). Whilst this is a fascinating topic, which indeed has spawned a number of important studies (such as Flaherty 1992; Hutton 2001; and, with a focus more upon neo-shamanism, Znamenski 2007), it is concerned essentially with the recipient, non-shamanic, society, and hence lies outside the compass of the present study. There is one area of exception, however. The studies mentioned are almost invariably deficient in that they begin too late, often only with seventeenth-century accounts. Our earliest reasonably detailed Western account of shamanism is from the twelfth century, and it is Norwegian (the *Historia Norwegie*);[5] a number of other, less significant, accounts of Sámi shamanism also exist in Scandinavian sources before the main records begin in the seventeenth century. My discussion of these sources therefore complements the published studies of the reception of shamanism in the West.

Shamanism was practised by speakers of many language groups. The neighbours of the Norsemen were predominantly Finno-Ugric speakers (the Sámi and the Finns, with other groups scattered in European Russia, through whom the Vikings passed on the way to the eastern Mediterranean). Not all Finno-Ugric speakers had a developed form of shamanism, at least in historical times, but the Sámi certainly did, as did the Ob Ugrians (the Khanty and Mansi). The Hungarians, who split from the other Ob Ugrians in the first millennium AD and migrated south, appear to have preserved vestiges of shamanism, as recorded in Hungarian folklore (see, for example, Oinas 1987, Hoppál in Siikala and Hoppál 1992: 156–68, Voigt 2001), but the intermingling with traditions local to the Carpathian area presents problems of interpretation which, while fascinating, would lead the present study too far astray; hence I use Hungarian materials only sporadically. More obviously relevant to the Norse area are the beliefs of their neighbours the Finns. Finnish[6] sources present their own problems. Shamanism in Finland survived in a coherent but remnant form, as compared with classic shamanism, and the Finnish sources used in the

[5] The next oldest Western accounts would appear to be those of Pian del Carpine, who wrote of Tatar practices seen on an expedition of 1246, and Marco Polo's account of Chinese shamanism (written in 1298) (Flaherty 1992: 26–7).

[6] I use "Finnish" as a short-hand for "Finnish/Karelian": the majority of traditional poetic texts were recorded in Karelia, which spans the Finnish–Russian border, but most of which in fact lies outside Finland. Various dialects were spoken in Karelia, all closely related to more westerly Finnish but distinct in certain respects (Karelian dialects have now largely been displaced by Russian).

present volume are not only shamanic but also mythic, and are mostly poetic; they are thus comparable to Norse sources, preserving ancient motifs in traditional verse. The earliest writer to give information about Finnish gods is the Lutheran reformer Mikael Agricola (1510–57).[7] Serious collection of mythological poems did not however begin until the late eighteenth century under the inspiration of Gabriel Porthan; there are now some 150,000 poems (mostly variants) in the *Kalevala* metre in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society, of which around 86,800 have been published in the multi-volume *Suomen kansan vanhat runot* (Ancient poems of the Finnish people), now available online (Timonen 2000: 627).[8] The dating of Finnish poems poses problems. As they belong firmly to an oral tradition, our records merely present a particular version of a poem as sung on one occasion; nonetheless, these poems, considered as an artistic assemblage of themes rather than of specific words, have an origin at a particular point of history. Yet working out what that point may have been is fraught with difficulty. Kuusi proposed a system for establishing broad dates for poems, based on various factors. One of these factors is style (as set out for example in Kuusi 1994*a*); while Kuusi's analysis of differences in style in traditional poems is interesting, the inferences drawn about what styles are likely to have originated at any historical period are characterised by rather more assertion than evidential proof;[9] moreover,

[7] On the collection of Finnish folk beliefs and poems see Virtanen and Dubois (2000: ch. 1), Hautala (1954, 1958); a brief account is also given in *FFPE* (pp. 27–38). Although it scarcely constitutes a full scholarly edition, I refer to *FFPE* for versions of relevant poems when possible, since it provides a fairly substantial collection in Finnish, with English translation, of some of the main Finnish poems (including, on occasion, variants), as well as brief introductions and commentary on each. There is, of course, a huge literature in Finnish which informs these presentations, some of which is listed in *FFPE*, and which I refer to when it appears enlightening on points under discussion. One of the main earlier anthologies of traditional poetry in Finnish is Haavio (1980, 2nd edn), which has valuable discussions of mythological background, though it is rather outdated (being written in 1952), presents the poems in standardised Finnish without ascription of singer, place or collector, lacks a line-by-line commentary, and does not discuss social context or purpose.

[8] For readers not conversant with Finnish, it is worth pointing out that as most poems exist in many – sometimes hundreds – of variants, the selection of 148 poems edited and translated in *FFPE* in fact presents a far larger proportion of the total number of major narrative and mythological themes (as opposed to poem variants) than might be apparent.

[9] As an example of the problematic nature of the methodology of suggesting dates may be mentioned comparison with Norse poems (for example Kuusi 1949: 348); these are themselves often of uncertain date, and the stylistic interpretations he uses, by scholars such as Finnur Jónsson and Erik Noreen, have of course been subjected to half a century of criticism. In any case, the co-existence of stylistic features in two traditions only weakly suggests contemporaneity of these features, even if it can be proved; in fact, it is unlikely that Finnish oral poetry underwent similar chronologically determined stylistic developments to Norse skaldic verse, from which it is utterly distinct in almost every aspect. Kuusi's notions of what constitutes a style would need greater space than can be afforded here; it is simply worth pointing out that, valuable as a typological analysis of features such as syntax is, it is impossible to assign particular syntactic features to particular periods without external corroborating evidence. Kuusi (1978: 223) also suggests a line of development of the *Kalevala*-type verse form, which he relates broadly to actual dates: but this chronological scheme is based on now discredited notions of when the Finns occupied given parts of Finland, and needs wholly reconsidering.

the categorisation of the features of a particular style derive in large part from the subjective opinions of the modern scholar – it is impossible to demonstrate that any traditional folk-poetry singer would accept them.[10] There is a clear need, which has still not been met, to attempt to delineate the stylistic features of individual singers, of particular communities, and of the whole *Kalevala*-type verse area, before any firmer arguments can be drawn. There are, of course, many other factors involved in assigning a date to traditional poems;[11] nonetheless, the need for a re-examination of some of the arguments is worth noting (to some extent, more recent scholarship, as exemplified by Siikala 2002, seeks to establish broader cultural epochs as likely to have given rise to elements within the poems, without being precise either about dates or about individual poems' provenances). Despite such doubts, it is, in any case, clear that, as in Norse poetry, ancient pre-Christian elements survived to varying extents in the Finnish poems; Siikala (1986*a*: 224) for example is of the opinion that "some mythical poems and the so-called adventure poetry contain so many features referring to pre-medieval cultural milieux that it is impossible to imagine that folk poetry singers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Karelian cultures invented them – especially since no corresponding tradition in prose has been found to exist": it is these ancient elements from pre-medieval cultural milieux which are of use in the present study, whatever the absolute age of the compositions. The slow adoption of Christianity means that the gap between a pagan origin and the time of recording may not be as great as might be imagined.

Norse and other sources for Germanic traditions

The scope of sources discussed here is somewhat wider than purely Norse texts, as analogous materials are drawn from other Germanic and classical writings, but the Norse material forms the focus.

Some evidence on Germanic religious practice is to be gleaned from classical sources as ancient as Strabo (7 BC) and Tacitus (AD 98);[12] post-

[10] These comments are not meant as a critique of the "Finnish method" of analysing folk poetry (and folklore) taken as a whole, as set out in some detail in Kuusi (1980). The method seeks to apply logical methods to determine the dissemination and development of poetic redactions through examination of recorded variants, and in this respect relative datings may emerge, but it is notable that Kuusi only mentions dating within the context of the section on stylistics, a section which lacks any detail, and where the reader is referred for more discussion to the introduction to Kuusi (1963) – where, in turn, scarcely any more detail is given.

[11] An example in Finnish of the detailed use of a wide array of arguments over the date and dissemination of the *sampo* poems is found in Kuusi (1949); he shows that some later poems deal with datable events, though none of these are relevant to this study. Some mythological poems in the *sampo* cycle existed in groups of variants on either side of historical borders (between Sweden and Russia), indicating an origin prior to the establishment of the border, and subsequent differentiation on either side (ibid. 326–35): however, such datable events, which merely form a *terminus ante quem*, again fall too late to be relevant for the present study.

[12] The dates represent the publication of Strabo's *Geography* and Tacitus's *Germania* (Pauly

classical sources in Latin such as the late-eighth-century Langobard Paulus Diaconus's *Historia Langobardorum* are also made use of. Chronicles and histories, notably the twelfth-century Norwegian *Historia Norwegie*, are occasionally cited. Arabic sources give factual evidence of the practices, including sometimes the religious practices, of the Rus, who were in origin Swedish Vikings who traded through modern Russia; the most important such source for the present study is the account of a Rus funeral in 922 by Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān.[13]

As noted, most of the written sources in Germanic languages used in the present study are *literary*: they are artistic compositions whose main aim was not the expression of religious worship – religious texts are almost entirely non-existent – nor, usually, merely to recount the events of a myth, but to select and remodel them. They were composed for an audience that already understood the necessary religious or mythological background, as well as the ways that complex artistic artefacts like skaldic verse work. To go into further details of literary theory would take us too far beyond the topic of this work; many works already deal with this topic within the Norse field, such as the recent study of Clunies Ross (2005) on Old Norse poetry and poetics (where further references may be found).

One obvious fact about almost all Norse records (some early runic inscriptions form an exception) is that they were written down long after the introduction of Christianity, even when they were composed, which not all ostensibly "pagan" poems were, before the conversion. The reasons for the survival of ancient myth and legend in a Christian society is an interesting one, but is not relevant here;[14] however, it *is* relevant to bear in

1964–75, *s.vv.* "Strabo" and "Tacitus"). As Tacitus is the earliest extant author to give any detailed information about Germanic peoples, the reliability of his account has come under scrutiny; it is generally agreed that his picture is coloured by influences from his own Roman culture, but the extent to which this invalidates what he says is a contentious issue. The matter needs a more thorough discussion than appears to have been undertaken anywhere; my own stance is to err on the side of accepting him as reliable (but being aware of a certain degree of distortion due to classical influences or rhetorical considerations). Jankuhn (1966) argues that in general archaeology confirms his reliability, and in the field of beliefs, McKinnell (for example 2005: 51–2) also considers him generally reliable.

[13] Questions of various sorts arise when dealing with such sources. How far is a Moslem writer's understanding of pagan practices reliable? Thus, for instance, the "angel of death", while doubtless an actual female officiand in the ritual described, cannot have been conceived as an angel by the Scandinavian Rus, to whom the concept was alien. How far were Rus practices actually Scandinavian, as opposed to Slavic (or Bulgar, or Finnic)? Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān's account is analysed from this perspective by Schjødt (2007), who concludes (146): "There seems to be no doubt that the ideological framework behind this funeral ritual is likely to have existed among the pre-Christian Scandinavians, and even if there may have been no funeral ritual proper carried out in exactly the same way all over Scandinavia, it would be a serious mistake not to use ibn Fadlan's description as a sort of model when trying to reconstruct such rituals from archaeological material or from texts that are defective in some way." However, while Schjødt offers an excellent analysis of points which may be paralleled in Norse myths, he offers no consideration of possible parallels in Slavic, Finnic or Bulgar traditions, so the question cannot be described as settled.

[14] See, for example, McKinnell (2007*a*), who, among other things, argues (49) that "What I would finally like to suggest, however, is that eddic poetry on mythological subjects was preserved (and continued to be composed) mainly because, like the works of Ovid, it could be used to investigate some of the personal, social, and moral issues that faced Icelandic

mind that texts which were themselves ancient were subject to alteration within the Christian milieu that preserved them, and that, given that certain ancient pagan elements did survive in these ancient texts, it was possible for antiquarian-minded Christians to fabricate pseudo-pagan texts. The opposition between paganism and Christianity is but one aspect of the development of religious notions, and their expression, over the centuries. Norse paganism itself was certainly no monolith, unchanging over time and place, and our surviving monuments doubtless represent traditions (or fragments of traditions) of different geographical and chronological origin. Yet, with some few exceptions, it is generally difficult or impossible to trace the date or place of origin of pagan motifs. The uncovering of parallels, for example from classical sources, can sometimes suggest that a motif is ancient; yet even if a motif is in itself very ancient, its context, and hence its specific meaning, may nonetheless vary greatly. Unless otherwise indicated, any suggestion in the present work of the existence of a pagan Norse motif (including those which are arguably shamanic) is intended to place the motif in the religious belief system of some (not necessarily all) Scandinavians of the few centuries preceding conversion, with the implication (sometimes made explicit by reference to more ancient analogues) that such motifs are often derived from yet more ancient and centuries-old tradition, but also with the understanding that a countless line of poets and other tellers will each have used such motifs for their own specific purposes.

Some of the main types of Norse sources are:[15]

Skaldic poetry. The extant verse dates back as far as the ninth century and it continued to be composed for several centuries; since the verse-style flourished for long after the conversion, comparison of the old and the new provides good relative dating evidence. It is commonly by named authors, and can be fairly accurately dated (often to within a few years). While written down in many cases several centuries later, the texts are on the whole reliable, representing something close to the original composition, since the strict metrical requirements prevent serious corruption, and facilitate emendation when corruption does occur.[16] On the other hand surviving compositions are rarely more than fragmentary, as often they have been preserved as illustrations of poetics or of history, not as complete poems; in Snorri's time (the early thirteenth century) it is clear that the skaldic corpus was substantially more complete, and he makes use of sources, and refers without citation to others, now lost to us. A great deal of skaldic verse consists of so-called *lausavísur*, "loose verses" – odd verses inserted into sagas

secular aristocrats". In another vein, Nordal (2001, esp. ch. 1) argues that skaldic verse continued to be found useful as a vernacular equivalent of some of the complex Latin verse discussed in the schools, that is it offered a sought-after intellectual training.

[15] McKinnell (2005: ch. 3) presents a somewhat fuller discussion of Norse sources relating to myth or religion.

[16] This statement admittedly masks a good deal of debate on the issue, as well as varying levels of textual corruption between poems; for further discussion, see for example the earlier chapters of Clunies Ross (2005).

and ascribed to early skalds, but often by the saga writers themselves, or their immediate predecessors: such verses are of uncertain (often late) date.[17] Skaldic verse is rarely concerned primarily with communicating facts (which may be few and far between), but with clever, ornate poetic expression within strict metrical and other rules. Deriving actual pieces of information from skaldic verse is therefore fraught with difficulty.

A stanza may be given as an example of skaldic diction from the earliest preserved poem, the ninth-century *Ragnarsdrápa* by Bragi Boddason (*Skj* B_1 4, st. 16); the verse recounts the god Þórr's fishing of the mighty serpent which, lying in the depths of the ocean, encircled the world:

Vaðr lá Viðris arfa
vilgi slakr, es rakðisk,
á Eynæfis ǫndri,
Jǫrmungandr at sandi.

The fishing-line of Viðrir's heir lay not at all slack – as unwound – on Eynæfir's snow-shoe – Jǫrmungandr on the sand.

Here, Viðrir is a name for Óðinn, whose son is Þórr; Eynæfir is a sea-king's name, used generically as a designation of the giant from whose boat ("snow-shoe", emphasising giants' association with the barren cold) Þórr is fishing; Jǫrmungandr is the world serpent. Its unwinding on the beach is presented dramatically as a syntactic obtrusion into the statement relating Þórr's angling.

Eddic poetry. The separation of Norse verse into skaldic and Eddic types is somewhat arbitrary, and some poems are inbetween cases, but generally skaldic verse follows stricter metrical rules than Eddic, and is often by named poets, and associated with particular events or people, whereas Eddic is always anonymous and is "traditional" in nature, dealing with more general topics of myth or legend, and it does not, in general, engage in complex kennings (poetic periphrases); the justification for distinguishing skaldic and Eddic verse is further discussed in Clunies Ross (2005: 21–8). As an example, stanza 22 of *Grímnismál* will serve:

Valgrind heitir,	"Gate of the slain" is its name,
er stendr velli á	that stands on the plain,
heilǫg fyr helgom durom;	holy before the holy door;
forn er sú grind,	ancient is that gate,
en þat fáir vito,	but few know
hvé hon er í lás lokin.	how it is locked.

The reference to Valgrind is unique, but it may be related to other gates as boundaries of the otherworld, such as Nágrindr, "Corpse gates" (*Skírnismál* 35, *Lokasenna* 63); the actual information in the stanza, however, is given

[17] See for example Marold (1992) for a consideration of skaldic verse as a source for Norse religion; she makes the important point that the whole of the tenth century should be viewed as one of transition to Christianity – and in fact Christianity was an influential force in the North even before this.

in a straightforward manner, and the word order is almost prosaic. The contrast with skaldic diction should be clear.

The largest collection of Eddic poetry is found in the Codex Regius (GkS 2365 4[to]), written down in Iceland around 1250–1300.[18] There is considerable debate about the nature and dating of Eddic poetry (which I consider somewhat more fully below), but the outer limits are generally recognised (for example, Clunies Ross 2005: 5) as the ninth and fourteenth centuries, though the mythic or legendary motifs may well go back to much earlier dates.[19] One criterion of date is the extent to which the particular poem shows an understanding of pagan myth or religious practice;[20] thus *Vǫluspá* for example shows a depth of understanding of pagan practices, yet within a Christian mould: hence its composition must be placed near to the end of official paganism in Iceland in 1000.[21] On the other hand *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*

[18] Lindblad (1954: 241, 325) dates the manuscript to *c.* 1270 (arguing also that it was based on earlier antecedents from before *c.* 1240); however, the margin of uncertainty of date is necessarily fairly wide, as Stefán Karlsson confirmed to me (personal communication), since we do not possess a sufficient number of Icelandic manuscripts from this period to make a closer dating possible.

[19] Fidjestøl (1999) devotes a whole book to the question of dating Eddic poetry; the work was left unfinished at his death, with some significant topics left undiscussed, such as the use to be made of skaldic verse in dating Eddic poetry, and the question of loans and allusions. Over all, whilst the work maps out some of the main areas of the topic, it cannot be described as furthering our understanding greatly; we encounter statements such as the following (187–8), which is a *petitio principii* (since it asserts a position about the nature of pre-written Eddic verse for which we have no evidence): "In the very moment that Eddic poetry was written down, a metamorphosis took place, in which it was transferred from one type of literature into another, radically different from, or even directly opposite to, what it had been before, namely a fixed text." For a briefer discussion on the dating of Eddic poetry, see Söderberg (1986).

[20] The matter is, of course, more complex than this, since the identification of a pagan element only illustrates that the passage in which it is contained is likely to be of pagan origin (if it is not a later fabrication), without implication either for the rest of the poem, into which it may, for example, be an interpolation, or for the age of the specific wording in which it is expressed, since this too may change. It is possible to adduce arguments based on other criteria to suggest that at least some poems (notably most of *Vǫluspá*) are, in fact, coherent wholes, though other poems (for example *Grímnismál*) do not have great artistic cohesion. The dating of poems such as *Lokasenna* is a contentious issue, illustrating the difficulty of arriving at anything like a firm conclusion even on some of the basic questions concerning the nature of our sources; the poem shows a depth of knowledge about myths whose basis in pagan religious belief can be paralleled by comparative research, as pointed out by U. Dronke (1989), who also, among other things, notes the fact that while we have poetic compositions from around the thirteenth century, none of them in the least resembles *Lokasenna*, nor do we have any evidence from this time for any archaising "school" able to produce such a well-wrought fabrication of paganism which we would have to suppose the poem to be (this is not to argue, of course, that the particular form in which the poem is preserved has not been altered, and possibly its content edited to some small extent, since its date of composition). Yet other factors point to a not particularly early date, in that there are possible allusions to other Eddic poems, and the frequency of the expletive particle places the poem chronologically tenth out of thirty-one in the Codex Regius (Fidjestøl 1999: 224) – though the validity of this factor as a criterion of date is itself open to debate. *Lokasenna* certainly alludes to myths we no longer have in poetic form, but other Eddic, and indeed skaldic, poems could well have been extant in say the twelfth century where such myths were presented. (On the dating issue here, see also Ruggerini 1979: 154–62; Söderberg 1986: 56–61; McKinnell 1987–8.)

[21] A similar dating applies if it was composed in Norway, where paganism officially ended

for example is a composition that makes widespread use of extant Eddic sources in a way that is literary and creative but does not reflect any specific pagan belief or religious reference (though it may preserve allusions to older beliefs otherwise lost from record): hence a late date of *c.* 1200–50 is to be assigned to it (P. Robinson 1991: 397–406).

Snorri Sturluson's works. The works of (or ascribed to) the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (†1241), in particular his *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga* (and to some extent other parts of *Heimskringla,* of which *Ynglinga saga* forms the first section) contain much mythological knowledge culled from earlier poetic sources, which on occasion are cited; Snorri is sometimes the only preserver of a mythological or religious record as a result of the loss of his source since his time,[22] but also sometimes, it would seem, because he has invented the feature himself.[23] Whilst Snorri is cited frequently, I use his work as a primary source only in instances when other, earlier poetic sources are not extant.[24]

Sagas and other prose sources; most used are *Íslendingasögur* (family sagas of Icelanders) and *fornaldarsögur* ("sagas of ancient days"), with occasional reference also to other types such as *riddarasögur* (chivalric sagas). These date from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries (and some even later). They make considerable use of pagan themes, but these are often the creation of the authors made on the basis of increasingly vague traditions of actual paganism; nonetheless, arguably genuine elements do survive.

Laws of Norway and Iceland (and occasionally other Scandinavian areas). Laws were originally handed down orally, but began to be committed to writing soon after the arrival of Christianity, and underwent many revisions thereafter. Icelandic laws rarely mention anything connected with paganism, but the mainland Scandinavian codes have slightly more.

a few years earlier than in Iceland. The apocalyptic theme of *Vǫluspá* argues for a dating of *c.* 1000. Christianity was not, of course, necessarily adopted wholesale and deeply by the whole population in one fell swoop, but my position is that its official adoption would have weakened the understanding of pagan religious elements within a couple of generations, so a date very much later than mid-eleventh century for *Vǫluspá* (leaving aside the millennium arguments) would appear unlikely. Moreover, McKinnell (1994: 107–8) has shown that the poem must almost certainly have been composed between 962–5 and 1046–65, since *Vǫluspá* mentions two *valkyrjur,* Skǫgul and Geirskǫgul, which appears to be a misunderstanding of Eyvindr Finnsson's *geir-Skǫgul,* "spear-Skǫgul", as a separate being from Skǫgul in *Hákonarmál* 12 (*Skj* B$_1$ 58), composed around 962–5; the *terminus ante quem* is given by Arnórr jarlaskáld's allusion to *Vǫluspá* in *Þorfinnsdrápa* 24 (*Skj* B$_1$ 321) when he mentions the sun darkening and the land sinking into the sea (cf. *Vǫluspá* 54, «Sól tér sortna, sígr fold í mar», "The sun starts to blacken, land sinks into sea").

[22] Of course, if Snorri alone records something, we can go no further than to deem it *likely* that it is a part of older tradition on the basis of other relevant information; an example is the information in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 that the *vanir* became the *blótgoð,* "sacrificial gods", among the deities.

[23] For example, that the three maidens who determine men's fates were *nornir* who came from a hall (rather than a sea) beneath the world tree.

[24] Clunies Ross (1994: 32) also notes Snorri's selectiveness: "When pagan material did not accord with his Christian explanatory model, he tended to omit it, so the apparent comprehensiveness of the *Edda* is to some extent an illusion." Examples include the myth of Óðinn on the tree (recounted in *Hávamál* 138–9 (48c)) and Gullveig (recounted in *Vǫluspá* 21).

As a good deal of the earliest evidence for pagan practices is found in sources of an originally oral type, it is worth considering briefly what the nature of these sources is. Extreme oralists take the Norse poems as recordings of a performance of a poem, and each performance is viewed as an autonomous recreation of the "text", of no greater or lesser value than any other performance. The amount of variation between performances is accepted as being potentially great. The aim of reconstructing the original text, by consideration of likely interpolations and so forth, is rejected. This is scarcely an acceptable approach to Norse texts, and it moreover represents the imposition on our sources of a particular theory of orality derived from outside the Norse field, against the evidence proffered by those sources, and is at the least disingenuous in its ignoral of the clearly scribal history behind the recorded versions of texts;[25] moreover, it seems to me an uninformed approach, given the recognition afforded by scholars working on indisputably oral traditions that each tradition is different, and values memorisation to varying degrees, sometimes deeply (see the contributions to Honko 2002, to pick but one example).

The situation is in fact bound to have been a complex one; a scribe, and before him a singer in the oral tradition – and singer and scribe may on certain occasions have been one and the same person – could alter a text either through carelessness, or deliberately, or else because variation was a natural part of re-realising a song. At the beginning of the written period some "recreation" of lines in correct metrical form is likely to have taken place as a result of the scribe's familiarity with variants found in the oral tradition interplaying with failings in short-term memory of the text. The likelihood of change occurring in the transmission of a particular poem can only be assessed on an indivual basis; as noted, Eddic poems are more likely to have incorporated changes than skaldic because of their looser structure, but also the more general point can be made that carefully worked texts are either less likely to suffer change (since their corruption is more patent), or if they do suffer it, we are more able to detect it; for example, had a "Húsatal" of extra divine dwellings been added to those already presented in *Grímnismál* we might well be none the wiser,

[25] On the Codex Regius, Lindblad (1954: 233–5, 247–53, 325–7) has shown that several stages of written development may be discerned, going back to before 1240, and including two distinct histories, of the mythological poems on the one hand and the heroic on the other (which appear to have been united into one collection only shortly before or as a result of the composition of the Codex Regius collection); it is therefore not unlikely that the poems go back in written form to about 1200, at around which date, indeed, the learned monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson in the monastery of Þingeyrar composed the poem *Merlínusspá* (*Skj* B₂ 10–45), which quotes from Eddic poems, including *Grípisspá*, itself probably a written composition from the start – the inference Lindblad draws (1978: 22) being that there was already a written collection of Eddic poems available to Gunnlaugr. Of course, given that the Eddic poems do not appear to come from a tradition which espoused the sort of fluidity found for example in Finnish oral poetry, it is possible that Gunnlaugr's source (if we accept Lindblad's arguments for the borrowing) existed in a fixed oral form. Arguments can be made either way for the existence of written forms of Eddic poems between about 1190 and 1240, but they appear to have achieved something approaching the form in which they are recorded in the Codex Regius during this period.

whereas the Dvergatal, or list of dwarfs, of *Vǫluspá* is clearly an irrelevant interpolation in a subtle poem with important plays on key words, choice of myths, and structure.

In fact we only rarely have different versions of texts on which arguments about variation can be based; when we do, it seems to me that the vast majority of difference can best be explained as a result of scribal, not oral, change (whereas, for example, the many variants in Finnish traditional poems are almost entirely oral in origin). For example, the supposed evidence of the Hauksbók version of *Vǫluspá* as indicating an oral Eddic tradition, with widely variant versions of this and other poems existing well into the fourteenth century, may be dismissed. Ursula Dronke, in her edition of the poem (in *PE* II), has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that all the Hauksbók variants, barring an occasional line possibly introduced from other popular verse, can be explained as scribal confusion of a broken-up text and lost pieces.[26] Moreover, while Snorri in the 1220s to 1230s clearly had access to a wide range of both Eddic and skaldic poetry now lost to us, the compiler of the Codex Regius some fifty or so years later did not – he was unable to correct errors or gaps in his written exemplars from any oral versions; the tradition, at least in the areas to which this scribe had access, had by then become both attenuated, and perhaps purely written (though no doubt the oral tradition survived longer in some areas than others – we may ponder, for example, whether the presence of *Grottasǫngr* in its entirety within manuscripts SR and T of Snorri's *Edda*, as opposed to only the opening stanza in C, derives from an immediate oral tradition later than Snorri's time).[27]

Whilst there was bound to be a certain amount of variation between performances of poems in the oral period, our surviving evidence suggests that memorisation of a notionally fixed text was the main principle followed; possibly this may be a reflection of the rise in the ninth century or earlier of the strictly structured skaldic verse, which of its nature demands

[26] Quinn (1990) attempts to see the Hauksbók version as a legitimate alternative reflecting variations in oral tradition, but Dronke's arguments that the version derives (apart from a few stray lines imported from oral poems) solely from confusion in a scriptorium are much more persuasive, and tip the balance towards literacy rather than orality being the more important component in the transmission of Eddic verse in the thirteenth century.

[27] Quinn (2000) provides a useful survey of orality and literacy in Iceland from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, though some of the points she makes call for more detailed and careful consideration: for example, the fact that verse in Eddic metres was still being composed in the mid-thirteenth century (and indeed, in an antiquarian manner, even later) does not mean, for example, that the poems found in the Codex Regius were still being re-realised in an oral fashion, or indeed that they were known at all in an oral form, at the time the Codex was compiled. The assumption Quinn notes as being fairly commonly espoused by Old Norse scholars that skaldic verses found cited in various prose texts derive from immediate oral tradition may also be questioned (which is not to say it need necessarily be discounted, however): though we have no direct evidence of a skaldic collection equivalent to the Eddic Codex Regius, the erstwhile existence of such a manuscript is eminently possible – if the Codex Regius had happened to perish, for example on one of the many ships transporting manuscripts from Iceland to Denmark (which were indeed wrecked on occasion), our view of the interplay of orality and literacy in the Eddic tradition would be quite different, which should act as a warning when speaking of the skaldic corpus.

memorisation rather than improvisation for its survival.[28]

In dealing with Norse materials we are confronted with the problem of Christianity. Adhering to my standpoint as set out above, the earliest records antedate the official introduction of the new faith (around 1000), though not its influence. I take as my starting point that familiarity with the old beliefs waned with the coming of the new; hence greater familiarity indicates greater proximity, usually in time, but potentially also in place, to pagan belief and practice. Whilst all relevant factors must be considered, and may alter our assessment, in general I believe that this may be used as a principle of dating, though it can scarcely be anything but vague as our only point of comparison is the small corpus of dated skaldic poems, which indeed do not necessarily lend themselves easily to such comparison.

It is possible to take the line that if we wish to uncover anything reliable about Norse paganism, our study should be confined to poems definitely composed in the tenth century and before, a line pursued for example by Marold (1992). This seems to me a deceptively simplistic temptation. Several very obvious factors militate against such an approach. We do not have direct access to any actual pagan verbal material, except a few enigmatic runic inscriptions: the early skaldic poems were all written down in (roughly) the thirteenth century, and were therefore the ones chosen for preservation by a society long Christian; the centuries of oral transmission before their recording will have had some effect on them, and vicissitudes subsequent to their recording have further reduced their number through the loss of manuscripts. Even if we had a more complete corpus of pagan skaldic verse, the view of religion we would gain would be biased, since most skaldic verse is in the form of praise poems dedicated to warrior princes, where it is no surprise, for example, to find that the dominant god is Þórr; religion outside this rarefied setting could well have differed significantly. We must, certainly, be ever on guard when using the much fuller sources composed in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, but when their reliability as transmitters of lore from the pagan period is taken into account sufficiently, I do not believe we end up with a picture of paganism which is any more distorted than if we chose to ignore them, and is certainly a lot fuller. Marold objects to a structuralist tendency to ignore the nature of sources and reconstruct meanings on the basis of disparate pieces of information. The present study is not structuralist, in any classic Lévi-Straussian sense for example, but I do use what may be called basically structuralist arguments at various points; I have attempted to bear in mind the likely reliability of the sources employed in each case, but essentially any such reconstruction of a myth's meaning or structure must remain tentative. More problematic to me seems the implication, such as may be inferred from the ability to reconstruct such structures, that these structures were indeed some sort of fixed mythological entity in the pagan period, whereas the truth will certainly have been that many

[28] I consider the oral/written problem in Old Norse texts more fully in Tolley (2002*a*); see also Lönnroth (1971), J. Harris (1983).

inconsistent features existed alongside each other, with poets and others making their own varying structures and deriving their own meanings within the kaleidoscope of living tradition; unfortunately, we can only work with what we have, which may to a great extent leave the impression of a monolithic mythic structure which never existed.

TEXTS ON MAGIC

Adam of Bremen, discussing the early-eleventh-century Norwegian king St Óláfr in *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* II.57, claims that this righteous monarch rid the land of sorcerers, but then switches to the present tense to intimate that Norway still exceeded other lands in the number of such monsters:

> Dicunt eum inter cetera virtutum opera magnum zelum Dei habuisse, ut maleficos de terra disperderet, quorum numero cum tota barbaries exundet, precipue vero Norvegia regio monstris talibus plena est. Nam et divini et augures et magi et incantatores ceterique satellites Antichristi habitant ibi, quorum prestigiis et miraculis infelices animae ludibrio demonibus habentur.

> They say that among other works of virtue he had a great zeal for God, so that he evicted sorcerers from the land: the whole heathen world overflows with their number, but Norway in particular is full of such monsters. For diviners and soothsayers and magicians and spell-casters and other satellites of Antichrist dwell there, by whose tricks and wonders unfortunate souls are made a laughing-stock of demons.

The medieval sources – could we but take them at their word – bear out the general truth of Adam's statement.[29] But it is not my intention to examine all magic as recorded in medieval Scandinavian records (see Dillmann 2006 for a wider presentation of magicians and their art in primarily Icelandic prose sources), but only such as has attracted attention through its apparent similarity to shamanic practices. Any such separating off of one sort of magic is bound to be arbitrary to some extent, but the sources themselves name a particular sort of magic *seiðr*, and it is this which has attracted most attention for its shamanic character, and which is hence dealt with in most detail here.

The practice is attributed to both gods and men. The practitioner of *seiðr* is called by various names, most commonly "*seiðr* man/woman", but also, in the case of women, *vǫlva* – though the activities of the *vǫlva* are not (explicitly, at least) confined to *seiðr*; other terms such as *spákona*, "prophecy woman", *vísindakona*, "wise woman", and periphrases such

[29] Adam too, of course, is one of these medieval sources in question, which cannot be relied on, generally speaking, to give a true picture of magic on the ground. Adam had his own reasons for misrepresenting or exaggerating the lack of Christian observance in Norway, a country which for some time had been converted, but which was not (yet) under the control of Adam's German master, the would-be patriarch of the North, Archbishop Adalbert. Yet there may be some grain of truth in his statement.

as a woman who is *fróð ok framsýn*, "wise and foresighted", also occur. As McKinnell (2005: 95–6) points out, there is practically no distinction, such as between divinatory and efficatory roles, in the use of the terms. I do not offer any comprehensive survey of the many terms, usually compound words, connected to *seiðr* or other magic: doing so would tell us nothing more than that the writers of mainly thirteenth-century works of fiction could easily come up with whatever term seemed appropriate to them in a given context – we have no reason to suppose such terms derive from ancient tradition; moreover, the terms are considered by Dillmann (2006, *passim*), and, gathered together in a more convenient manner, by Price (2002: ch. 3).

It is clear that although *seiðr* remained distinct as a term, the practices referred to do not necessarily form a discrete type of magic, at least by the time of most of the prose texts which mention *seiðr*; an overall examination of magical practices (which it is impossible to undertake here: but see Dillmann 2006, which surveys this whole area) would reveal that the assigning of the title *seiðr* to any particular example is more or less random. For example, bad weather is attributed to *seiðr* (or at least to performing on a *seiðr*-platform) in *Laxdœla saga* ch. 35 ⟨102⟩, but in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 40 Þorgríma galdrakinn is paid to cause bad weather, without *seiðr* being mentioned; the same is true of Gríma in *Fóstbrœðra saga* ch. 10, who uses old chants she had learnt in her childhood to change the wind to help her protégé Kolbakr (see Dillmann 2006: 91–3).

The etymology of the word *seiðr* is unclear, and hence it is impossible to lay too much emphasis on interpretations of possible prehistories. A brief survey may, however, be of some value (derived from *AeW*, *s.v.* "seið"; recently Hall 2007: 119 presents effectively the same etymology). The word may be related to Old English *ælfsiden*, "elf magic"; along with the fact that in Old Norse a related strong (hence probably ancient) verb *síða*, "to practise *seiðr*", is found, this suggests at least a fairly ancient Germanic heritage. Related may also be Welsh *hud*, "magic" (< **soito-*). Other suggestions listed by de Vries seem implausible, in particular the suggestion of a connection with Finnish *soida*, "to ring";[30] there does not appear to be any Finno-Ugric origin to the word.[31] An original meaning of "bind" for the root from which *seiðr* derives is possible – it fits well with designations elsewhere of sorcery, for example Latin *fascinum*, "evil eye, bewitchment", alongside *fascia*, "band, bandage", and would suggest a binding by the practitioner either of spirits to her power, or else of human victims under a spell.

The earliest mention in skaldic verse of *seiðr* is in Kormákr's *Sigurðardrápa*, *c.* 960 ⟨98⟩; thereafter it is mentioned fairly frequently, though not in skaldic

[30] The dentals in the Finnish forms cited are deceptive: *-da* is simply an infinitive ending, and the root is *soi-*, which immediately bears less similarity to the Norse word.

[31] Karsten (1955: 11) proposes a connection with Sámi *sieidi*, but the difference in meaning poses problems, and later scholars do not favour any etymological link: a *sieidi* is a natural object perceived as in some way abnormal – for example, an unusually formed rock – and hence regarded as sacred; offerings are made to *sieidi*.

verse, and only rarely in Eddic – but the Eddic texts include *Lokasenna* and *Vǫluspá*, both of which contain much archaic mythic (and potentially ritual) material (on which see in particular U. Dronke 1989: 106–8).[32] Most of the sources mentioning *seiðr* are prose sagas, mainly of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, of which a high proportion are fantastical *fornaldarsögur*. On the whole, the corpus of texts represents a motley collection scoring fairly low on the scale of reliability for providing information about an actual practice; some of the texts are of considerable literary interest, however (though many are frankly not).

All the sources on *seiðr* were assembled and cited by Strömbäck (1935, with supplement by Almqvist 2000), but it seems beneficial to give them all in the Sources section of the present study, along with an English translation, as it is otherwise difficult to gain an overall view of the material and what sort of sources the term occurs in. Were a wider survey to be produced of all references to magical activities, it would not, I think, differ greatly in terms of distribution among these various types of source, but it would be considerably larger.

The question of how far literary sources' mentions of magic indicate the real presence of magical practices in medieval Scandinavia is a matter of importance. The collection of sources on *seiðr* cited in the Sources section will demonstrate that on an axis ranging from the factual historical to the fantastic imaginative, the occurrences of *seiðr* are very much concentrated towards the latter end; the study by Boyer (1975) on pagan survivals in *samtíðarsögur* (contemporary histories) such as *Sturlunga saga* is therefore particularly valuable. There is little doubt that of the various types of medieval saga these come closest to revealing what life in thirteenth-century Iceland actually involved at around the time when most of our literary sources were composed, or (in the case of originally oral poetry) recorded. Among the significant points Boyer makes are the numbers of occurrences of various pagan features known from other sources:

gods	many mentions, esp. in verse, but no religious value is attached to gods.
place names implying cult	about a score (as opposed to many in *Íslendingasögur*)
day/season names	almost none
festivals	survive, but toasts etc. are christianised: no actual pagan elements are found

[32] The verse occurrences of *seiðr* and related words are listed by McKinnell (2005: 96–7). *Seiðr* occurs twice in a literal sense (*Vǫluspá* 22 ⟨125⟩; *Orms þáttr Stórólfssonar* ch. 6 ⟨107⟩), and four times in skaldic verse in kennings for battle (⟨83⟩). *Seiðkona* does not occur in verse, and *spákona*, "prophecy woman", and *spámær*, "prophecy maiden", once each in allegedly tenth-century stanzas (Kormákr, *lv* 53 (*Skj* B, 82); Þórarinn máhlíðingr, *lv* 7 (*Skj* B, 107), in a kenning for missiles, "dangerous prophecy maidens" of battle). The verb *síða* or *seiða* occurs six times: twice in mythic Eddic poems (*Vǫluspá* 22; *Lokasenna* 24), three times in supposedly tenth-century verses (twice in Vitgeirr's verse on Rǫgnvaldr réttilbeini (*Skj* B, 29), and in Kormákr, *Sigurðardrápa* 3 (*Skj* B, 69)), and once in a verse attributed to a giantess in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* ch. 1 ⟨90⟩ (a late, archaising text).

Jól	assimilated to Christmas
vetrnætr	assimilated to St Michael's feast (except in one saga)
blót as sacrifice	none (*blót* just means "swear, revile" in *samtíðarsögur*)
ǫndvegissúlur	none (*ǫndvegi* is replaced by *hásæti*)
tannfé payment on first tooth	none
reincarnation (*endrborinn*)	1 (*Þorgils saga skarða*)
hugr as wandering soul	1 (in the late *Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns*)
fylgja/hamingja	4; *fylgja* concept merged with guardian angel
landvættir	2
álfar	2 in kennings; 2 in miracle stories, representing impish beings, not the pagan spirits
troll	assimilated to *draugr* or *flagð*, regarded as demons
seiðr	none
fjǫlkyngi	1[33]
vǫlva	none[34]
galdr	none
gandreið	none
runes	none
prophetic powers	5 (without magical powers)
pagan baptism (*ausa barn vatni*)	nearly all important people have them, but as a sign of sanctity.
betrothal/marriage rites	none
death rites	none
political/juridical systems	none
law	survive (formulas christianised)
hólmganga duelling	no pagan elements like *níðstǫng*
fóstbræðralag fostering	none
	none

Such references as there are to pagan matters occur largely in skaldic verse or in connection with artistic objects, suggesting a literary/artistic convention. All the details of the gods and myths, even the kennings, can be derived from Snorri's *Edda*; Boyer (ibid. 156) concludes that "as far as mythology is concerned in the *samtíðarsögur*, the so-called pagan revival or pagan survivals are a purely literary feature devoid of all living religious significance". Most of the pagan survivals are concentrated in the latest piece, *Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns*, of *c.* 1300; mistakes such as the parity of gold to silver being 1 to 10 instead of the correct 1 to 8 of the Viking Age show an antiquarian desire to reconstitute an image of the past: the author "has endeavoured to recreate a society and an atmosphere as he imagined

[33] This is noted by Gísli Pálsson (1991: 164).
[34] This is noted by McKinnell (2005: 98).

that they should have been" (ibid. 165). On witchcraft, Boyer (ibid. 161) notes that none of the distinctively Norse features such as *seiðr* occur, and such mentions as there are cannot be distinguished from continental models. He concludes (ibid. 138):

> The so-called pagan revival in Iceland is the result of foreign and literary influences [...] there is a kind of displacement of time (décalage) or deliberate attempt to fuse past and present by including archaic elements in the texts [...] The pagan features which may appear in the *samtíðarsögur* have not infrequently an origin which is *not* local.

The importance of Boyer's conclusions must not be underestimated. To form a picture of Viking Age "shamanism" on the basis of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *fornaldarsögur* and the like, compositions which are manifestly fantastic in intention and drawn up at a time when the magic they describe was at best an antiquarian memory, would be only slightly more reliable than, say, determining the nature of magical practices in contemporary England on the basis of the Harry Potter novels. When magic is mentioned in late sources it needs to be treated with special caution. It is possible that some genuine tradition derived from pagan times is preserved on occasion – but it may equally well be an antiquarian invention of the author, or if it is indeed traditional lore it may still have been misrepresented or attenuated. Nor should the degree of literary borrowing be underestimated: a number of examples are discussed later in the volume, but the overall effect of such borrowing is to reduce the number of independent witnesses to traditions over which a huge Damoclean question mark was already hanging. Thus McKinnell (2005: 97) comments on how remarkably consistent the picture of *seiðr* is in the sources: but what is this evidence of? If the sources are assumed to be independent, then we might conclude we are being given a picture of something "real" in the everyday world that the writers could describe. But if the writers are all borrowing from each other, we arrive at the diametrically opposed view that there is no reality to the practice described other than as a literary tradition; this, as we have seen, is the view that Boyer arrived at, with good reason as far as Iceland is concerned.

CONCLUSION

Despite the apparent absence of paganism in thirteenth-century Iceland, it survived in the literary culture of the poets and was recorded in some detail by Snorri Sturluson, whose *knowledge* of pagan myths and to some extent practices was considerable, even if his *understanding* of them can often be faulted; some practices may in addition actually have continued in continental Scandinavia – their continued condemnation in the laws, and, arguably, events such as that recorded in *Vǫlsa þáttr*, set in an out-of-the-way farm, are some sort of indication of this.[35] Unless we take an extreme

[35] McKinnell (2005: 98–9) notes that early Norwegian law codes forbid *seiðr*, defined as

position of assuming that all supposedly pagan or near-pagan poems are in fact the creation of a twelfth- and thirteenth-century pseudo-pagan revival, the poetry provides at least a better prospect of having preserved ancient lore about both the gods and practices such as *seiðr*. It is therefore upon the poetry that the present study is focused; in some areas, we only have evidence from prose sources, so there is no choice but to use them, but on the whole the prose sources are regarded with a greater degree of scepticism.

at segja spár or *at fara með spásǫgum*, "to tell fortunes" or "to go for fortune-tellings"; those seeking prophecies are said to *gera Finnfarar*, or *fara at spyrja spá*, or *fara á Finnmarkr at spyria spádóm*, or *trúa á Finna*. In Iceland, there is a reference in *Hákonarbók* §19 ⟨78c⟩ to *spáfarar* but this is derived from Norwegian codes: no other prohibitions exist in Icelandic law. Norwegian codes also prohibit «at vecia trǫll upp oc fremia heiðni með því» ⟨78⟩. *Hákonarbók* is the only Icelandic code to mention *sitja úti*. An apparent historical event is recorded in *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* ch. 16 ⟨81⟩, in 1161, when a woman called Þórdís skeggja was commissioned to sit out to discover if Hákon might be victorious.

3. Norsemen and their neighbours

The present chapter falls into two distinct halves. In the first place, I present an outline, based chiefly on archaeological evidence, to show the deep-rooted and continuing contact that existed first between Norsemen and their Sámi and Finnic[1] neighbours, and then in later centuries between Norsemen and the many inhabitants of eastern Europe. This demonstrates the possibility that this contact may have resulted in the borrowing of shamanic motifs – though of course it cannot prove any such borrowing. The second part presents written sources dealing with the Norsemen's neighbours. Records of Finnic peoples date back to Antiquity, and the information used by classical writers was derived from Germanic (presumably ultimately Scandinavian) informants, not directly from the Finnic peoples themselves. The written evidence, even when it purports to be historical, is to a large degree literary in nature (this is true even of writers like Tacitus); the intention here is thus to demonstrate the *perception* of Sámi and Finns in the minds of the Norsemen, rather than any precise historical reality. The close awareness of their neighbours' magical practices again demonstrates the possibility of Norsemen having borrowed such practices, or of accommodating them within their own traditions (accepting *Finnar* to practise magic among them, for example).

Historical contacts between Scandinavians and their neighbours

THE NORSEMEN

Speakers of an Indo-European dialect which would have developed into proto-Germanic and then Norse are widely believed to have arrived in Scandinavia in the form of the Corded Ware culture at around 2300 BC (Carpelan and Parpola 2001: 65; Mallory 1991: 264).[2] The Nordic Bronze Age culture (*c.* 1700–500 BC) of southern Scandinavia was a direct development of the Corded Ware culture (Stenberger 1984: ch. 9; Carpelan and Parpola 2001: 90); it exerted strong periodic influence on coastal Finland. At the end

[1] "Finnic" refers to Finnish and other closely related languages (Estonian, Livonian, Vote, Ludian, Karelian, Vepsian), to which Sámi is somewhat more distantly related; the other Finno-Ugric branches are further removed: Mordvin, Mari, Permian (Komi and Udmurt), Khanty, Mansi, and the various Samoyed languages. Finnic is now no longer contiguous with the other languages: languages such as Merya and Muromian, which would have acted as a bridge to the others, disappeared in the Middle Ages.

[2] See also Helle (2003: 52–3). *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia I: Prehistory to 1520* (i.e. Helle 2003), which also covers Finland, is the most recent survey in English of the prehistory of the area under consideration here, but is frankly disappointing, as it often lacks both detail and clarity, so I have made use also of earlier works, mainly not in English.

of the Bronze Age, *c.* 500 BC, the long-standing prestige economy suffered a great set-back, but a new agrarian society emerged in the next few centuries as the Iron Age developed (J. Jensen 1982: 193). There is no sign of anything but a continuity of population in this period, and there are marked signs of cultural continuity from the late Bronze Age in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia in cultures such as the Jastorf (Schutz 1983: 309). The rise of proto-Germanic ethnic groups is often placed in the earlier Iron Age, from *c.* 500 BC (ibid. 310): it is, however, really impossible to say how people in the northern German and southern Scandinavian areas viewed themselves ethnically at any particular prehistoric period, and clearly earlier forms of Germanic dialects had been spoken here for many centuries throughout the Bronze Age, which in the earlier periods would not have been clearly distinguished from other Indo-European dialects such as the ancestors of the Baltic languages (indeed, many such dialects must have disappeared without trace). Schutz (ibid. ch. 6) discusses the "northern genesis" of the Germanic peoples, and the ideas implied in such an investigation, in more detail, but it is of little relevance in the present context.

THE FINNS

The succession of archaeologically determined cultures in prehistoric Finland is complex, and the complexity is amplified when surrounding areas, and relationships between them, are taken into account.[3] A cultural continuity may be traced in Finland at least back to the Comb Ceramic II period (*c.* 3300–2800 BC), if not further, and overall it is this culture that is judged most likely, balancing archaeological and linguistic criteria, to have brought to Finland the late proto-Uralic language (i.e. the ancestor of the Finnic languages), though it may have absorbed speakers of distantly related languages in the regions it spread to. The Comb Ceramic II culture spread across Finland and Russian Karelia up to the Arctic Circle, as well as Estonia, Latvia and the south-eastern shores of the Gulf of Finland; it originated in the Lyalovo Ware culture of the upper Volga. (Carpelan and Parpola 2001: 79–82)

The Corded Ware culture (*c.* 2500–2000 BC) most probably represents a settlement of new migrants from the south, who are assumed to have been Indo-European (Moora 1956: 85–90). It is likely that the Corded Ware culture brought some form of agriculture (the culture is characteristically agricultural further south), but the earliest firm evidence of agriculture from Finland so far is from *c.* 2000 BC (Nunez 1999; Vuorela 1999). The Corded Ware culture merged with the Comb Ceramic II culture, with

[3] For a useful and quite detailed summary of (fairly) recent discussion of both archaeological and linguistic evidence for the prehistory of the Finns and their contacts with Indo-Europeans, Balts, Germanic peoples and others, see Häkkinen (1996), as well as the somewhat more academic Fogelberg (1999); Carpelan, Parpola and Koskikallio (2001) is a valuable discussion, in English, of the origins and interactions of prehistoric Indo-European and Uralic peoples. For a discussion of the archaeology of north-east Europe as it relates to Finno-Ugric prehistory, see Carpelan and Parpola (2001). Calibrated dates for the ancient cultures are a few centuries older than the dates given here.

features from the latter predominating in the subsequent Kiukainen culture of south-west Finland (Helle 2003: 56). The Kiukainen culture also received influences from southern Scandinavia and Estonia (Carpelan and Parpola 2001: 89); Kiukainen finds have also been made in Scandinavia, in Hedningahällen in Hälsingland and in Gotland, indicating some settlement (Huurre 1979: 85–90).

By the Bronze Age (*c.* 1500 BC) the population of Finland was divided into hunters in the interior and agriculturalists on the coast; both received bronze simultaneously, the inlanders from the east and the coastal dwellers from the west. Overwhelming evidence of contact with cultures to the east and west is found at this time (Huurre 1979: 107–8); there were probably a number of Scandinavians living among the Finnish population, at least as traders (ibid. 95–109). Their aim would have been to procure goods such as furs which they could trade on to obtain metal from central Europe for the Scandinavian bronze industry (Carpelan and Parpola 2001: 90–1).

Iron was first imported to Finland *c.* 500 BC; by the end of the first century BC it was being produced locally. The Scandinavian contact continued, but there was also increasing influence from the southern Baltic region and the Vistula; in the later Roman period Gotland became a significant centre of trade (Huurre 1979: 190–1). Finds from the whole Iron Age in Finland show strong Germanic influence, though it is thought more likely this was the result of local chieftains benefiting from trade with Scandinavia and acting as middle-men to the dwellers inland (Helle 2003: 78). In the early Roman period jewellery often followed a general Germanic pattern, and Scandinavian influence increases in the Migration Age. Weapons are almost without exception of (originally continental) Germanic type. By the Merovingian period, however, there were probably master smiths dwelling in Finland, and weapons of a specifically Finnish type are found (notably the barbed angon spears) (Huurre 1979: 178–82; Kivikoski 1967: 103).

Trade clearly took place towards the east as well; from *c.* 500 to 700 there was a flourishing district near the Kama, which possessed for example Persian and Byzantine silver bowls; traders from this region brought the so-called Permian belts with them to Finland (Kivikoski 1967: 104).

The early Merovingian period (*c.* AD 600–800) was one of intense Germanic influence (though whether as a result of settlement or merely strong trends of fashion is undecided: Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984: 289–94). Thus the oldest ship graves date from this time: burial, use of boats in graves and rich grave ornament are characteristics of the Vendel culture in Sweden.

The Swedish town of Birka was a trade centre from *c.* 800 to 875, and goods from as far afield as China have been found there, as well as many Arab coins: the town's existence seems to have been dependent on the trade route to the eastern realm of the Bulgars on the Volga, and when this route was closed Birka perished (Ellis-Davidson 1976: 69). Western Finnish pottery has been found at Birka, indicating the presence of Finns there (Kivikoski 1967: 112). Birka's successor Sigtuna did not become a prominent centre of trade with Finland.

The trade route the Vikings followed took them along the Gulf of

Finland; many coins have been found indicating a Viking presence on the south coast, and fewer on the north. The sporadic finds from the Finnish coast indicate that the Finns came down from inland districts to trade with the Vikings, but had no permanent settlement on the coast (Kivikoski 1967: 110). No finds of Finnish materials have been made along the Swedish trade route through Russia, which suggests that Finns were not included among the Rus (Kivikoski 1967: 114).

In west Finland interment became predominant *c.* 1000; in Varsinais-Suomi, Satakunta and Häme the depositing of grave goods ceased by *c.* 1150; in Savo and Karelia it continued after 1200 (Huurre 1979: 133). It is likely that Christianity was general in western Finland by 1200, but in Karelia pagan burials continued into the fourteenth century (Huurre 1979: 224).

THE SÁMI

The Sámi are archaeologically elusive. We know from historical records and place names that they dwelt throughout the interior of Finland up to about the fifteenth century, since when they have been retreating northwards (Vahtola 1999). How long they have dwelt down through the centre of Scandinavia is more contentious, but it is at least since the earlier first millennium AD (Sammallahti 1999: 88–9), and probably considerably longer.[4]

As the Sámi have lived since prehistoric times well down into Scandinavia, contact with Scandinavians is almost certain to have taken place from an early date, and evidence of Norse and Sámi contact from the later period is clear. Helle (2003: 80) points out how graves from between Norrland and Värmland of the early centuries AD show both Sámi and Scandinavian features, indicating an adoption of Germanic culture or even ethnic affinity. Simonsen (1967: 71–2) sees the Varanger period (ninth-century) hoards from Norway as evidence of the Sámi tax known from historical sources. He also mentions a find from North Troms containing many Sámi objects (such as bone arrowheads) but also Norse furniture, which he interprets as a Norwegian settlement which had adopted a Sámi life-style.

[4] They can be traced with certainty to the Iron Age; the settlement at Juikenttä (Sodankylä), for example, was in continuous use from the first centuries AD to the seventeenth century. Moreover, since Säräisniemi II pottery (*c.* 1500–0 BC) was found there this is presumably to be seen as Sámi, which furnishes a link back to the Bronze Age Asbestos Ceramic culture. Whilst this had strong links with the east, continuity with the preceding indigenous cultures is also clear: for example the site at Nimisjärvi (Säräisniemi) was in continuous use from the Suomusjärvi period to the Roman. Säräisniemi II pottery in fact seems to be the result of the conflation of the earlier Textile and Asbestos Ceramic traditions, and its distribution corresponds fairly closely to that of the Sámi in historical times (Helle 2003: 59; Carpelan and Parpola 2001: 89). Huurre (1979: 151–4) notes that two cultures were to be found in northern Fenno-Scandinavia in the Stone Age: the Schist-quartzite, perhaps derived from the ancient Komsa culture, and the Comb Ceramic (from which the Asbestos Ceramic culture derived), and he considers it archaeologically possible that the Sámi stem from a mingling of these two cultures. Halinen (1999) argues that the Sámi derive from the first, mesolithic inhabitants of the region, and that there has been cultural continuity ever since, even if, arguably, influxes of new populaces may have taken place (in particular the Comb Ceramic culture).

On the topic of the central Scandinavian graves on inland lake sites from the Viking and earlier periods, Price (2002: 236–8), following Zachrisson (1997), emphasises that apparent distinctions between graves of hunters (interpreted as Sámi) and agriculturalists (interpreted as Norse) may be deceptive, reflecting lifestyle rather than ethnicity. He nonetheless distinguishes certain features which are likely to mark out certain graves as Sámi, such as the stone-set mounds from the Iron Age or Roman periods covered in reindeer antler, or the later graves with skin scrapers of Sámi form, since these features are not met with in agrarian settings and can be paralleled from known Sámi sites. The overall impression is of an extended interaction between the Scandinavian and Sámi cultures through much of central and northern Scandinavia. Zachrisson, on the basis of the archaeological discoveries, and taking the caveats into consideration, has mapped a distribution for the Sámi in the Viking period which comes considerably further south and into more lowland areas of central Scandinavia than the modern distribution, extending down as far as Uppland in Sweden, including coastal regions, almost to the coast at Oslo, and covering almost the entire mountainous region of Norway. A great deal of this area was also inhabited by Norsemen, so social intercourse was inevitable.

Scandinavian finds have also been made in Lapland, for example a scramasax, axe and spearhead in a sixth-century grave at Kalkoniemi (Kemijärvi), axes (Kemijärvi, Sodankylä), a scramasax (Inari). Brooches of the ninth century and other jewellery have been found at Kajaani, Kuhmo, Suomussalmi and Kuusamo: these are Norwegian in origin, and may have arrived on a trade route via the White Sea; there are in fact few non-Norwegian Scandinavian finds here. After 1100 finds often contain Norwegian coins, which indicates well-organised trade or tax. Also, many Finno-Ugric finds have been made in the northern fiefs of Norway as far south as Trondheim from the tenth century; these may have come from Finns on northern journeys. Sámi sacrificial finds of the eleventh century include Karelian items (Kivikoski 1961: ch. 8), which may confirm the picture of various sorts of Finns trading in Lapland found in *Egils saga*, though the level of organisation implied in the saga is probably a later invention (the saga is of thirteenth-century composition).

Especially in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries there were strong contacts between the Sámi areas of northern Sweden and Norway and northern Russia (hence with Finno-Ugric peoples who were already becoming slavicised), attested for example by many items of jewellery and pendants. The trade appears to have been conducted along rivers; there is no evidence that a northern sea route was of importance (Makarov 1992).

THE VIKINGS IN RUSSIA

The establishment of the medieval realm of Rus ⟨MAP 3⟩, between the Baltic and the Black Sea, was a long and complex process involving many ethnic and other groups, but one of the catalysts was the exploitation of this area by the Rus, Viking traders (and sometimes warriors) originating from

the Mälar valley in central Sweden (called Ruotsi in Finnish) and Åland (which itself was thoroughly settled by Swedes by the seventh century, and imported pottery, and probably wives, from Finland); a fairly detailed (and very readable) analytical account of the history of Russia up to 1200 is given by Franklin and Shepard (1996).[5] The Scandinavian finds of *c.* AD 500 from the island of Tytärsaari and from Riekkala near Sortavala show that Norsemen were using the Gulf of Finland from an early date, presumably seeking a trade route to the south (Kivikoski 1967: 89–90); indeed, Jordanes indicated that the Swedes traded in furs, indirectly, with the Byzantines.

Conditions advantageous for trade developed in the eighth century. The Khazars, a Turkic people originally practising shamanism (but later largely converted to Judaism), had established a realm to the north-west of the Caspian, and extended their control along the Black Sea steppe and areas to the north thereof. Khazar traders were frequenting the port of Darband on the north-west coast of the Caspian by the 730s, and this became a major trade channel with the Arab world, along which the Khazars traded furs from the north. The Abbasids moved their capital to Baghdad in 762 and established a protected market for traders, and issued many silver dirhams. Dirhams were finding their way to Scandinavia by 800, by which time a settled peace existed between the Khazars and the Arab world to the south.

The first major Rus incursion into the developing eastern trade network took place to the south of Lake Ladoga. The Finnic population here can be traced to about AD 600 (ibid. 111), but the Viking settlement of Aldeigjuborg (Staraya Ladoga) was founded in the mid-eighth century (the earliest find is a seventh-century brooch found in the oldest, mid-eighth-century layer), and came to act as a staging post on the trade route to the south, whilst acting as a hub of trade in many directions, in particular channelling furs from the far north through Ladoga, the Svir, Onega and the Dvina; amber has also been found. The earlier strata of the town do not contain Finnic materials, but Balts were present alongside the Scandinavians from the start. Dirhams are found from the very inception of the town. (Franklin and Shepard 1996: 12–21)

Further settlements were established by the Rus further into Russia. Whilst the *Повѣсть временныхъ лѣтъ* is scarcely a reliable source for this early period, it appears to preserve some elements of truth in its account of how a series of towns existed among the various peoples of the region – Novgorod among the Slovenes, Polotsk among the Krivichi, Rostov among the Meryas, Beloozero among the Veps, Murom among the Muromians – but that Ryurik (Norse Hrœrekr) ruled over them all (ibid. 38). Archaeology confirms that in the early period (mainly ninth century) there was an armed Scandinavian elite in the Rus towns, and that Norsemen gravitated to towns, whether or not they had actually founded them. Aḥmad ibn Rustah, writing between 903 and 913 but relying on somewhat

[5] This is supplemented by the less satisfactory (and badly edited) Duczko (2004), which focuses more on the Rus as Scandinavians.

earlier sources, describe the Rus as living on an island (Hólmgarðr, "Island town", i.e. Gorodishche, the forerunner of Novgorod), and that the ruler there is the *khagan* of the Rus; in 838–9 the Rus sent an envoy, most likely from Hólmgarðr, to Constantinople and then to Frankia (reported in the *Annales Bertiniani, s.a.* 839). (Franklin and Shepard 1996: 39–41)

The next earliest Scandinavian presence after Aldeigjuborg is found in the territory of the Finno-Ugric Meryas (now extinct), in the settlement at the Sarskii fort near Lake Nero (the forerunner of the nearby medieval city of Rostov), which existed from the sixth century and was populated at first by members of the local tribe, but where from around 800 there is a strong Scandinavian presence; this was a centre for the trade of dirhams up to the north, and the Scandinavians appear to have been tempted away from Aldeigjuborg to secure an advantage in this fur and silver trade (ibid. 22). The Sarskii fort appears to have been on one of two major north–south trade routes, that which passed from the Caucasus north-west across the steppe up to the valleys of the Don or Donets, or other rivers, towards the middle Dnepr and then on further north; the other major route followed the Volga further to the east (ibid. 27).

The Rus were a transient minority in the Finno-Ugric areas of Murom and the Sarskii fort, but for a time were the majority at Timerëvo and other settlements in the Yaroslavl area. Izborsk, where a Scandinavian minority presence is found from the ninth century, already existed in the eighth century with a mainly Finnic populace, with some Slavs and Balts; the Balts occupied large areas of the taiga in north-western Russia, but the Slavs arrived at Izborsk and around Lake Ilmen from the south only in the eighth century. Both Aldeigjuborg and Hólmgarðr were in areas predominantly occupied by Finnic peoples, and Beloozero was in the Finnic Veps territory, with a smallish Scandinavian presence. Both Izborsk and Beloozero were on major trade routes, which the Rus sought to exploit (ibid. 46–9). To the south and south-east of Ladoga, and to a lesser extent to the south-west of Beloozero, there is a widespread distribution of Scandinavian finds across the countryside, but in the other areas, the finds are confined to the towns and the trade routes along the rivers (ibid. 49; Stalsberg 1982: 283). There is generally a strong intermingling of native items with the Scandinavian, though the Ladoga region appears to have been more concentratedly Scandinavian. The Scandinavian graves are richer than the Finnic or Slavic ones, and often contain items like scales, indicating the Scandinavians were tradesmen; it does not appear that in general they took up farming (Stalsberg 1982: 280–2). There was continuing contact with Sweden throughout the Viking period (ibid. 271, 284).

The Rus were somewhat hemmed in to the south and east, yet they eventually exploited both routes. On the middle Volga a newly independent realm of the Turkic nomadic Bulgars, who had been living in the region since at least the eighth century under the suzerainty of the Khazars, was established shortly before Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān's mission there in 922. This posed both an opportunity and a threat to the Rus; on the one hand, they were able to expand their trading activities to the new centre near Kazan,

which attracted fur traders from the reaches of the Kama valley and beyond to the north, and channelled silver from the south, but the Bulgar realm prevented the Rus using the lower reaches of the Volga on any regular basis, forcing them to confine their trade to that with the Bulgars (and to pay the appropriate taxes) (Franklin and Shepard 1996: 61–5). Towards the south was the powerful realm of the Turkic Khazars, with whom the Rus at times attempted to deal (ibid. 69), and the steppe, over which swept various marauding bands of nomads: in the ninth century the main ferocious force on the Black Sea steppe was the Hungarians, who for example appear to have been responsible for the destruction of the Bulgar fort of Tsimlyanskoye on the Don in the mid-ninth century. The Hungarians in time moved further west, into Europe, leaving the steppe open for a yet more ferocious Turkic tribe, the Pechenegs, who occupied the Black Sea steppe from around the 890s and were a menace to all whom they encountered (ibid. 84–5). Despite the difficulties, around 900 the Rus established a centre at Kiev, previously a Khazar tax-collection point and site of a ferry over the Dnepr for those passing east–west; in 907 and 911 they established trading rights with Byzantium. All the Rus names at this point are Norse, and elements of material culture linked several of the Rus settlements with Birka: it was to be some time before the Scandinavian culture of the Rus was absorbed in that of the local populaces (ibid. 105).

The opportunities for dissemination of ideas between different peoples is illustrated by the ninth-century Mayatskoye forts on the middle Don; there were already some Slavs living this far east, but the forts were occupied chiefly by Alans, whose realm lay to the south-east towards the Caucasus, and Bulgars; in the settlements around the forts lived the indigenous local population, as well as a few Finno-Ugric peoples, Iranian Alans, Turkic Bulgars and Slavs each with their own distinctive dwellings randomly assembled within single settlements (ibid. 80).

The Viking Rus travelled to distant locations well beyond Russia. Between 864 and 884 they attacked Abaskun, an important emporium on the south-east coast of the Caspian whence merchants would venture onto the Volga trade route. In 912 a Viking force penetrated as far as Ardabil in Azerbaijan, this being one of three recorded raids within the area between 910 and 912, where no further raids seem to have taken place for a number of years. In 944, however, they sacked Barḍa'a in Armenia, apparently under the leadership of one Helgi (H-L-G-W), taking the women and children slaves (ibid. 117, 147). In 968 the major trading centre and capital Itil itself, along with other major Khazar forts, was overrun, marking the demise of the Khazar realm (ibid. 143; Ellis-Davidson 1976: 111–12), though the Rus rulers were by this stage heavily slavicised – the degree to which the Rus regarded themselves as Scandinavian is debatable and naturally diminished over time, yet Vladimir, who spent time in exile in Sweden, still relied on a gang of Swedish Varangians to usurp the throne in Kiev around 980 (though his subsequent treacherous betrayal of them perhaps indicates the weakness of any loyalty felt towards the original Rus homeland).

During the ninth and tenth centuries Scandinavians were, then, in direct contact with many eastern European peoples, including several Finno-Ugric tribes (even the Hungarians), as well as Balts, Slavs and Turkic-speaking peoples; incidental contacts via the markets of Bulgar, Itil and the southern Caspian would have taken place with many peoples living further to the east (Foote and Wilson 1973: 220–9). Much of the trade was essentially oriented on an north–south axis, but the routes included east–west sections: thus by *c.* 1000 a route was established from Permia along the Volga to Lake Onega, up to the White Sea, across the rivers to the Gulf of Bothnia, and into northern Scandinavia (Stalsberg 1982: 285), passing through far northern latitudes where shamanism was often a central practice in the life of the inhabitants. As the tenth century draws on, it becomes increasingly less appropriate to view the Rus as fundamentally Scandinavian traders; the silver trade, which enticed the Scandinavians into Russia in the first place, diminished, and actual Viking finds along the Volga, for example, disappear by the late tenth century, probably reflecting a lessening of trade as a result of the closure of the Central Asian silver mines (ibid.). The slavicised descendants of the Viking Rus by now were concentrating not on trade directed back to Scandinavia, but on the establishment and strengthening of their realm of Russia.

CONCLUSION

The Norse culture of Scandinavia was well established, and almost certainly the result of a long and essentially unbroken development going back to the Bronze Age and before. For much of this time, the Germanic speakers were in contact with both Finns and Sámi. During the Merovingian and Viking periods Norsemen began to explore further afield, deep into what is now Russia and beyond. Many of the peoples they came into contact with were practisers of shamanism, and it is clear that lively trade routes brought many different peoples into contact in the east of Europe during the Viking period, rendering the borrowing of motifs of a mythic or religious type, even from remote peoples, a distinct possibility.

The Finnar and other Finno-Ugric peoples

Literary mentions of Finno-Ugric, primarily Sámi, peoples go back some two millennia in Western European sources;[6] I present a survey of these writings up to about the thirteenth century, first dealing with those in Latin and Greek up to Adam of Bremen, then those in Old English, then those in Old Norse.[7] First, however, a point of nomenclature needs clarifying.

[6] I do not deal with Arabic or Russian sources.

[7] The survey by Milan (2001) continues on into later centuries; his point is to demonstrate that the *Fenni* of Tacitus are indeed Sámi, not Finns (a matter which could be described as already well settled, despite occasional doubters), which he does by a thematic analysis of Tacitus's account. A fairly wide-ranging survey of Finns (in a wide sense) as they appear in Old Norse sources is also presented by M.-L. Holmberg (1976). The most thorough

"FINNS" WHO WERE NOT FINNS

The *Fenni/Finni/*Φίννοι (Latin and Greek), *Finnas/Finne* (Old English) or *Finnar* (Old Norse) were most likely the ancestors of the Sámi,[8] not of Finns in the modern sense; the application of the term "Finns" to the Suomalaiset is in fact fairly late: the term *Fenni* or *Finni* in Latin is not used clearly to refer to Finns until the bull of Pope Alexander III *Gravis admodum* of 1171/2, for example (Milan 2001: 84).[9]

Apart from the tribal name, *Finn(r)* was also a personal name in Old English and Norse. Both may originate in a proto-Germanic **finnaz*, "wanderer" or "hunter", which later appropriated the proper senses of the tribal and personal names (Svennung 1974: 139), though this etymology is far from settled (another interpretation is that it means "finder" in the sense "guide": Valtonen 2008: 382, who also cites a range of other suggestions).

As a tribal name, *Finnar* was used in Old Norse to refer to Sámi (who are called *Lappir* in West Norse only in *Fundinn Nóregr* within *Orkneyinga saga* (p. 4); in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 12 the term *semsveinar* occurs, "Sámi lads"), and there is no reason for assuming the word had changed its essential significance since Tacitus's day, who is the earliest writer to use the term (*Fenni*). Until recently Sámi have continued to be called *Finnar* in Norway (note the name *Finnmark* for their region), whereas Finns who immigrated were called *Kvæner* (Svennung 1974: 135), a word used already in Old Norse (as *Kvenir*) to refer to a particular group of Finns. In *Egils saga* other tribes are referred to as *Kirjálar* (Karelians) and *Kylfingar*,[10] suggesting that even in the thirteenth century there was no overall term for "Finns" in our sense – which is unsurprising, given the lack of any political or close geographical or cultural unity between the various groups from which modern Finns are descended. The nearest we may get to this is possibly the term *Finnlendingar*, "Finnlanders", used by the eleventh-century poet Sighvatr (cited

discussion of the North (not just Finno-Ugric peoples) in classical and Old English sources is Valtonen (2008), who also contextualises the sources in a way that is beyond the scope of the present chapter. Grünthal (1997), in his discussion of Finnic ethnonyms, also mentions many of the oldest sources in which the ethnic names occur; the etymologies of the various ethnonyms is complex and contentious, and are mentioned in the present discussion at most in passing – full analyses are offered by Grünthal.

[8] This bald statement of course needs qualifying, though in essence it is probably correct: *Fenni* was clearly the name for a group of people given by proto-Norse speakers, not a self-designation, and hence the people concerned may not have conceived of themselves as one race at all; similarly, the Scandinavians who used the term **Fennōz* probably did not have a clear idea of exactly who constituted the group so named, or how widespread they were. Similar reservations should be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the most of the peoples considered in the chapter.

[9] The earliest papal bull to use *Finlandensis* and *Finlandia* with clear reference to Finland, according to de Anna (1992: 11), dates from 1229, however.

[10] The Finnish for "Karelia" is *Karjala*, from which *Kirjálar* must by some (unclear) means be derived (Grünthal 1997: 85–6). *Kylfingr* could derive from *kolfr*, "club", which could be a translation of Finnish *kainu(t)* (Vilkuna 1957: 130) or Vote *vatja* (Briem 1929–30); at least the link with *kolfr* is accepted by Grünthal (1997: 135–6), who points out, however, that it is uncertain that the Kylfingar were Finnic; a Turkic origin for the name has even been suggested. The Kylfingar appear in early Russian sources as forming a group in the time of Yaroslav of Kiev (†1054) under the name Кълбяги (Grünthal ibid.; Briem ibid.)

below) in reference to those living in *Finnland*, which appears to denote the south-west coastal region of Finland, where Finns did indeed dwell. However, the name *Finnland*, which on an eleventh-century rune stone at least appears to refer to Varsinais-Suomi (whereas the mention of *Tafstaland*, i.e. Häme, on another stone, indicates these two regions were distinguished),[11] was presumably originally given in reference to the vast stretch of land whose most notable inhabitants were the *Finnar*, or Sámi, which included effectively all of present-day Finland. Svennung (1974: 133–5) suggests that the Swedes originally referred to both populations, Finns and Sámi, as **Fennōz*, and later formed the compound word **Skriðifinnōz*, "skiing Sámi", to distinguish the Sámi; the sources which mention Skrithifinni, however, still use *Finni* to refer to Sámi, so *Finnar* cannot have been confined to Finns even in East Norse. We do, nonetheless, find some indications that *Skriðifinnar* was a Swedish term, whereas the Norwegians stuck with the simple *Finnar*: for example, in the late-ninth-century Old English Orosius, a general section on the geography of the North, based on the Latin original, mentions the *Scridefinne* as living to the north-west of the Swedes – we may assume an original Swedish source for this information, which comes among a list of peoples surrounding the Swedes – whereas in the section derived from Ohthere, the Norwegian voyager, we find mention only of *Finnas* (note also the difference in declension) for the same people.

FINNS WHO WERE NOT "FINNS"

As noted above, a term used in Norway for Finnish settlers was *Kvæner*. This is an ancient term, first recorded in the account of the Norwegian merchant Ohthere given to King Alfred in the late ninth century; the name is there anglicised to *Cpenas*. The Cwenas are said to harry the northern Norwegians over the mountains periodically, which indicates they originated from an area to the east of the mountains, above the north of the Gulf of Bothnia. The term certainly only ever applied to a particular group of Finns, and does not indicate what Finns from further south in Finland were known as. The *Kve(i)nir* are mentioned frequently in Old Norse; one of the earliest references is in the twelfth-century *Historia Norwegie* 1.7, where the *Kweni* are mentioned, juxtaposed with *Kyriali*, *Cornuti Finni* and *Biarmones* (Karelians, horned Sámi (whatever that may mean) and Bjarmians) in a brief and vague geographical reference. The form «Kweni» may represent a form changed by folk etymology to resemble *kvæn*, "woman"

[11] The rune stone (U 582) of *c.* 1030 from Söderby-Karl, Uppland, no longer extant, read: **biarn auk ikulfriþ raistu stain aftʀ utrik sun sain han uaʀ tribin ą Finląnti**, "Bjǫrn and Ígulfríðr raised the stone after Ótryggr their son; he was slain in Finnland". Another stone (Gs 13), from Gävle, Gästrikland, probably eleventh century, reads in part: **brusi lit rita s[tain þina a]btiʀ ahil brur sin in hąn uarþ tauþr a Tafstaląnti**, "Brusi had the stone inscribed for Egill his brother; he was killed in Häme" (*Tavastland* is still the Swedish for Häme). See *Upplands runinskrifter* and *Gästriklands runinskrifter* for details; also the presentations in Samnordisk runtextdatabas, available at http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm. Pictures of the stones are redrawn here as FIGS. 10 and 11.

(*AeW*, *s.v.* "Kvænar"; on the names, see also comm. *ad loc.* in *Historia Norwegie*); the same may be true of the Old English form (cf. *cpen*, "woman"). Some sources confirm the whereabouts of Kvenland already suggested by Ohthere: *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 1 says:

> Fornjótr [...] réð fyrir því landi, er kallat er Finnland ok Kvenland; þat liggr fyrir austan hafs botn þann, er gengr til móts við Gandvík; þat kǫllu vér Helsingjabotn.

> Fornjótr ruled that land that is called Finnland and Kvenland; it lies to the east of the end of the gulf which lies in the direction of the White Sea; we call it Helsingjabotn.

Egils saga ch. 14 reads:

> En austr frá Naumadal er Jamtaland ok Helsingjaland ok Kvenland, Finnland, Kirjálaland; en Finnmǫrk liggr fyrir ofan þessi ǫll lǫnd.

> And east from Naumadal is Jamtaland and then Helsingjaland, then Kvenland, then Finnland then Karelia; Finnmark lies above [i.e. north of] all these lands.

Landafræði (*Alfræði íslenzk* p. 12) reads:

> Næst Danmǫrk er Svíþjóð en [minn], þá er Eyland, þá er Gotland, þá Helsing[aland], þá Vermaland, þá K[v]enlond II, ok eru þau [no]rðr frá Bjarmalandi.

> Next to Denmark is Sweden the Less, then Eyland (Öland), then Gotland, then Helsingjaland, then Vermaland, then two Kvenlands, and they are north from Bjarmaland.

The reason that two Kvenlands are mentioned is that the region as a whole was divided by the top of the Gulf of Bothnia (thus, someone setting sail over the Gulf would leave one Kvenland and arrive in the other). The implication is that there were Finns (as we would call them) living in the northern reaches of Finland and Sweden at this time. Julku (1986: 182) in fact concludes, on the basis of evidence including place names and ancient boundary traditions: "Ancient Kainuu occupied the coastal strip around the head of the Gulf of Bothnia from the Forest of Käme or Kyrö as far as the broad limit represented by the Skellefte River." The modern boundary between Sweden and Finland, along the Torneå valley, goes back only to the fourteenth century, and was the result of Swedish settlement of Umeå and Bygde beginning in the late thirteenth century, followed by various mass settlements organised in the early fourteenth century in a bid to extend Swedish control, which petered out around the Torne river, where an already thriving Finnish settlement was encountered (itself, it seems, the result of a similar migration from Finnish areas). However, there is evidence, identified at the time Julku was writing as reaching back to the eleventh century, of an earlier and sparser population, which may be identified with the Kvenir (ibid. 184). The evidence is rather more

ambiguous than Julku indicates, however. The populations of Västerbotten and Norrbotten appear to have been multicultural from the Iron Age up to the Middle Ages, with links both towards Sweden and Finland, and methods of subsistence were seasonal and varied, including agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, fishing and fur-collecting; the coastal fur-trading settlements of Finnish Ostrobothnia may have been Norse-speaking (Valtonen 2008: 393–6). Exactly how to relate the Kvenir to this cultural milieu is a matter of debate.

The region of Kvenland in Finnish was called Kainuu (to use the modern Finnish form) – the name of a district of Finland to this day, which, however, no longer includes the westerly reaches of ancient Kvenland west of the Torneå. It seems likely that *Kvenir* is derived from *Kainuu* (or its antecedent), but not according to any recognised sound laws: the Norse evidently adapted the Finnish form to something more linguistically acceptable to them.[12]

Latin and Greek sources

Tacitus is the earliest extant source to mention any Finno-Ugric peoples. However, there is some evidence that further references have been lost, either through disappearance of sources, or through textual corruption:

a. Tacitus mentions a tribe *Oxionas* (acc. pl.) beyond the Fenni. The declension is Greek, and implies a Greek source for the information. Pytheas, who travelled as far as the Arctic in the fourth century BC, is the only Greek writer in the least likely to have referred to such a remote people. His writings, now all but completely lost, were regarded in the ancient world as «fabulosa» (Tacitus's description of the Oxiones), though modern research has largely vindicated what we have left of them (Pekkanen 1984: 231; see Cunliffe 2001 for a fuller discussion of Pytheas).

[12] The etymology of the name *Kainuu* is far from certain. Lönnrot (1958, *s.v.* "kainu 2") derived it from *kainu*, meaning "low-lying land"; however, Vilkuna (1957: 111–12) objects that Lönnrot may have deduced this meaning himself from the landscape of Kainuu, especially as there is scant evidence of this meaning from elsewhere. The derivation from a supposed proto-Scandinavian form **hwainoo*, "low-lying land", supported by Julku (1986: 182), is both inaccurate and impossible (as he admits had already been pointed out). Vilkuna (1957: 109) argues that the long *uu* of *Kainuu* indicates an earlier form *Kainut*; in certain dialects this is still in use as a name for a club-like part of a sled. He proposes that the people named themselves after a club, a symbol of authority (cf. English *club* in both its meanings) (ibid. 112–16; see nn. 80c, 98, 176). Vilkuna (ibid. 136) attempts to explain the Old Norse form *Kveinir* as a regular phonetic representation of Finnish *Kain-*; he cites instances from place names where Old Swedish *-vei-* corresponds to Finnish *-oi-*: however, no instances of *-vei-* representing *ai* are cited, nor is it clear that *Kveinir* is necessarily a more genuine representation of the Old Norse form of the word than *Kvenir*. The Old English form *Cpenas* probably represents Old Norse *Kven-*; if the Old English form had a long *ē*, it could possibly represent Old Norse *Kvein-* (the diphthong *ei* not existing in Old English), though the expected representation of the latter form would be **Cpānas*: cf. Old Norse *hreinn*, "reindeer", rendered in Ohthere's account (and nowhere else in Old English) as *hrān*. For further discussion of the etymology of *Kainuu/Kven* see Valtonen (2008: 390–3).

b. Pliny the Elder (before AD 79) in his *Natural History* IV.13.96 gives some information on the immense island of Scatinavia, then mentions Aeningia, apparently regarding it as another huge island, before passing on to the Vistula: Aeningia was thus, it seems, situated approximately between Scandinavia and the Vistula. The name (manuscripts also *Aepigia, Aepingia, Epigia*) may be a corruption of **Feningia*, i.e. the land of the Fenni: in most of Finland at this time, apart from a few narrow bands on the south-west and west littoral (where Finns dwelt), lived the Sámi (i.e. the Fenni) (Svennung 1974: 67).[13] No precise interpretation of **Feningia* has been agreed upon, however; Svennung (ibid. 144) suggests it could be either a diminutive formation or a place name in **-ing-ja*. There is, over all, insufficient information to link it with Finland, and it could well have referred to some other island in the neighbourhood of Scandinavia.

TACITUS

The first of two surviving references to Finnic peoples occurring in sources of the classical period, both of which purport to be accurate historical records, is in Tacitus's *Germania* (AD 98). As a conclusion to his work, he portrays in ch. 46 a race of "noble savages", no doubt arousing a mixed feeling of disgust and envy in his urbane audience: these people are the *Fenni*:

> Fennis mira feritas, foeda paupertas: non arma, non equi, non penates; victui herba, vestitui pelles, cubili humus; solae in sagittis spes, quas inopia ferri ossibus asperant. idemque venatus viros pariter ac feminas alit; passim enim comitantur partemque praedae petunt. nec aliud infantibus ferarum imbriumque suffugium quam ut in aliquo ramorum nexu contegantur; huc redeunt iuvenes, hoc senum receptaculum. sed beatius arbitrantur quam ingemere agris, inlaborare domibus, suas alienasque fortunas spe metuque versare; securi adversus homines, securi adversus deos rem difficillimam adsecuti sunt, ut illis ne voto quidem opus esset.

> The wildness of the Fenni is astonishing, their poverty wretched: they have no weapons, no horses, no homes; wild plants are their food, skins their clothing, the ground their bed; their hope lies solely in their arrows, which they tip with bones for want of iron. The same hunt nourishes both men and women equally; for the women accompany the men everywhere and seek part of the prey. For babies there is no shelter from wild animals and rains other than being covered over in a knot of branches; hither the young resort, and this is the refuge of the old. Yet they think it more fortunate than to groan over fields, to labour away at homes or to risk their own or others' fortunes to the vicissitudes of hope and fear; safe against men, safe against the gods, they have attained the most difficult thing: not even to have need of prayer.

[13] Grünthal (1997: 40) rejects the idea that Pliny could have written of Finland under some scribally antecedent form of *Aeningia*, but the proposal nonetheless remains viable; among other things, Grünthal raises unnecessary difficulties by assuming the hypothetical form in question must have been **Finingia*, rather than **Feningia*. Even so, it is true that such a form would represent a compound with an *-ing-* suffix for which we have no evidence elsewhere.

Tacitus gives nothing like a precise location for the Fenni, though he seems to work generally from known to unknown, moving towards the north-east; however, he begins ch. 46 by questioning whether three races, the Peucini, Veneti and Fenni, should be classed among the Germani at all. He notes that the Veneti (or more properly Venethi, probably a Slavic people that gave rise, in name at least, to the later Wends and to *Venäjä*, the Finnish for "Russia") ranged in their plundering trips between the Peucini, down by the Danube and Black Sea, and the Fenni; the Veneti are probably to be located somewhere in the region of Belarus, and the extent of their plundering may be exaggerated, but it perhaps suggests a homeland for the Fenni more in the region of Finland than the mountains of Norway, indicating an East Norse source for the information on them.

The Fenni's non-agricultural lifestyle, along with their rough type of shelters, accords well with known features of Sámi lifestyle, particularly when subsequent historical developments are deducted from their later recorded *modus vivendi* (in particular, they began using iron, and took to domesticating reindeer, only in the first few centuries AD). Yet, as Grünthal (1997: 44) points out, in Tacitus's time the Iron Age was only just beginning in Finland, and the ancestors of the Finns (Suomalaiset) still relied heavily on hunting and a semi-nomadic lifestyle in the wilderness – to outsiders, they may have differed little from the Sámi, and both Finns and Sámi may have been lumped together within the Germanic term answering to the Latin *Fenni*. Our attitudes towards the accuracy of the description must, however, be tempered by the need to bear in mind that Tacitus is surely taking advantage of the Fenni's remoteness (and therefore the impossibility of confirming the information) to extrapolate philsophical ideas of the "noble savage" (to use a term related to the notions of a much later philosopher) (Rives 1999, comm. 46/3); alienness is a feature which marks all succeeding accounts of these people, even by their neighbours the Norsemen.[14]

The form found in Tacitus, *Fenni*, differs slightly from that in later sources, *Finni*: this is explained by a Germanic sound change of *e* to *i* before nasals (cf. early borrowings in Finnish which still preserve the *e*, such as *rengas* beside Old English *hring*, "ring"), which clearly took place after the information used by Tacitus had arrived in the Mediterranean world.[15]

Other references to Finnic peoples may be discerned in Tacitus's account. In ch. 45 he mentions the *Aestii* as living on the «dextro Suebici maris litore», "on the right [i.e. south or east] coast of the Suebian [i.e. Baltic] Sea"; they were ardent agriculturalists and gathered amber. While it is natural to associate the Aestii with the Estonians, it is possible that they were a collective group of Finnic, Baltic and Turkic peoples (Ross 1978: 103–4). Ross suggests that in Tacitus's statement «lingua Britannicae propior»,

[14] On the image of the alienness of Finni, see de Anna (1992). He notes that the Fenni/Finni were slotted conveniently into a pre-existing topos of "primitive peoples", which persisted for a long period (and does not require particularly close borrowing from one source to another to explain the sources' homogeneity).

[15] Attempts to read *Fenni* and *Finni* as separate peoples, such as have sometimes been made, are wholly without foundation.

Britannicae should be emended to *Pruthenicae*, i.e. "their language is closer to Prussian"; he views the name *Aestii* as clearly of Baltic origin. On the other hand it has to be explained how the name came to be applied (by Germans) to the Estonians, which may indicate a long-standing inclusion of the Estonians among this people. A further complication is that the only word of the Aestii Tacitus cites, *glesum* for "amber", is certainly Germanic. The magic cold of the Este, reported by Wulfstan in the Old English Orosius (Lund 1984: 25), may refer to a Turkic shamanic practice of *yat*, involving the control of the weather by special stones, but equally (indeed preferably, given the distance of Turkic peoples from the Baltic) it could simply refer to the common practice of the Baltic area of storing ice over the summer in underground chambers. Over all, Tacitus appears to have received muddled information, which can no longer be clarified.

Beyond the Fenni, Tacitus says, lived the Hellusii and Oxiones. Much (1967: 535–6) associated the names with Germanic words meaning "elk" and "ox"; Pekkanen however suggests that the root of *Oxiones* is the old Finnish *oksi*, "bear". Both names, according to Pekkanen (1984: 232), would be totemistic designations of Finnish tribes or clans. Much's tentative suggestion leaves the matter with the aura of uncertainty that is its due: that the names may have a Germanic base seems probable, in that information about them (as about the Fenni) is likely to have arrived via Germanic mediators; however, the underlying meanings of "elk" and "ox" cannot be regarded as anything close to certain. Pekkanen's interpretation rests on still shakier foundations.[16]

[16] Several serious objections may be raised against Pekkanen's proposal. *a.* It relies on *Hellusii* meaning "elk people", as a parallel to the "bear people" (*Oxiones*): yet no explanation is forthcoming as to why one name should have a Germanic base, the other a Finnish one. Nor is any linguistically viable early Finnish form suggested which could lie behind *Oxiones*. *Oksi* is the nominative singular, whereas for any derivative (and practically all other case forms) the root *ohte-* is used, which would not yield the recorded Greek/Latin form. *b.* The proposal rests in part on a suggestion of Kuusi (1963: 43), that the Stone Age tools decorated with bear and elk heads from Finland may point to the country's Stone Age inhabitants having been divided into two clans, of which one worshipped as their forefather the bear, the other the elk. Kuusi was not an archaeologist, and his archaeological interpretations, and the notion of a sharp split between areas of bear and elk hunting, are at best speculative. Moreover, the age and provenance of the animal-headed weapons is not sufficiently discussed (in fact the elk-heads begin much earlier: Salo 2007), but it is at least clear that such evidence relates to a much earlier period than is relevant for illuminating the situation in Pytheas's (or Tacitus's) time – notwithstanding vague claims of "continuity" to the contrary. Since both elk and bear were important to the economy and belief systems of ancient Finland, it is natural to find both animals depicted within one society: there is simply no need to postulate different clans. *c.* It is clear from the investigations of Pulkkinen and Salmenkivi (2007) that place names relating to the bear suggest no particular geographic splits. This article nonetheless still seeks to support the Pekkanen theory, but the efforts to postulate two non-geographically specific tribal areas with (however) core geographical areas, in an attempt to accommodate the distribution both of place names and the elk and bear-headed carved objects, put one in mind of doomed Ptolemaic epicycles. Finnish place names do not in fact provide secure evidence of ancient cult or totemic practices, since they are impossible to date other than in the widest terms (embracing a latitude sometimes of millennia); Pulkkinen's and Salmenkivi's work is important in terms of Finnish onomastics and for its implications for the Finnish bear cult in later centuries, but not for the situation millennia ago. *d.* The proposal involves the observation that the totem animal is not hunted; the Karelians are known not to have hunted

PTOLEMY

Ptolemy (*c.* AD 170), in *Geographia* II.11, mentions the Φῖννοι as holding the northern parts of Σκανδία (not in all manuscripts), and later, *Geographia* III.5.20, as a smaller race living in another place, Σαρματία, about the Vistula. Their location in different areas apparently arises from a misreading of maps (Schütte 1952: 264); Tacitus's uncertainty in *Germania* ch. 46 about whether to assign the Fenni to Sarmatia (whatever that meant precisely – probably roughly the Russian steppe) or to Germania may also have contributed to Ptolemy's confusion.

Tacitus does not clearly indicate contiguity between the Fenni and Germanic peoples; Ptolemy is more explicit: straight after the Scandian Φῖννοι are mentioned the Γοῦται and Δαυκίωνες as holding the southern parts of Σκανδία: these are probably Götalanders and Danes; and the Sarmatian Φίννοι are situated between the Γύθωνες and Σούλωνες, or Goths and Swedes (as interpreted by Pekkanen 1984: 233–6).

JORDANES

Jordanes, a Goth (possibly of Alan descent), made use of the now lost *History of the Goths* of Cassiodorus (written *c.* 520), who, among other things, had acted as a *quaestor* in the court of the Gothic Roman emperor. Jordanes mentions the *Screrefennae* in his *De origine actibusque Getarum* ch. 2, written *c.* 551; whether this derives from Cassiodorus is impossible to determine, but this remains a possibility:

> Aliae vero ibi sunt gentes Screrefennae,[17] que frumentorum non queritant victum, sed carnibus ferarum atque ovis avium vivunt.
>
> There are indeed other races there: the Screrefennae, who do not seek sustenance from grain, but live on the flesh of wild animals and birds' eggs.

Then a little later he mentions the Finni beside various Germanic tribes:

> Finni mitissimi,[18] Scandzae cultoribus omnibus mitiores
>
> the most gentle Finns, more gentle than all the inhabitants of Scandza.

the bear: the *karhunpeijaiset*, "bear-wake", hunting rites (see Chapter 20) were from Savo, where correspondingly there is little evidence for elk hunting. The Oxiones would thus have been forerunners of the Karelians, the Hellusii of the west Finns. This "evidence" amounts to nothing: the very point that bear-hunting did not take place in one area is inaccurate, and even if it were, it would only tell us about a recent situation. The settlement patterns of ancestral Finns were quite different a couple of millennia ago, and have been subject to the vagaries of centuries of change. *c.* Pekkanen's suggestion is more than a little inspired by Finnish romantic notions and has, unfortunately, not been accorded the critical appraisal it calls for. Finnish linguists do not seem to have commented on the *Oxiones* problem; Riho Grünthal, at least, feels that Pekkanen's etymology is at best unlikely (personal communication); Valtonen (2008: 78) remains uncommitted and does not discuss the problem in detail. Pekkanen's suggestion, though interesting, rests on so many uncertainties that it can scarcely be described as any less fabulous than the peoples whose identities it attempts to unveil.

[17] Manuscript variants: crefenne, rerefennae, reraefennae, rerefenne, refennae.

[18] De Anna (1992: 17) notes that the readings «mitissimi» and «mitiores» have been ques-

The way of life again points to the Sámi. The repetition of the name in different forms probably indicates the use of different sources.

PROCOPIUS

Procopius was a native of Caesarea, and trained to become a lawyer in Constantinople. He travelled widely in the service of General Belisarius, accompanying him for example to Mesopotamia, Carthage and Sicily. He has a sizeable section on the Σκριθίφινοι in his *History of the Wars* VI.15.16–25, composed *c.* 555:

> Τῶν δὲ ἱδρυμένων ἐν Θούλῃ βαρβάρων ἓν μόνον ἔθνος, οἱ Σκριθίφινοι ἐπικαλοῦνται, θηριώδη τινὰ βιοτὴν ἔχουσιν. οὔτε γὰρ ἱμάτια ἐνδιδύσκονται οὔτε ὑποδεδεμένοι βαδίζουσιν οὔτε οἶνον πίνουσιν οὔτε τι ἐδώδιμον ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἔχουσιν. οὔτε γὰρ αὐτοὶ γῆν γεωργοῦσιν οὔτε τι αὐτοῖς αἱ γυναῖκες ἐργάζονται, ἀλλὰ ἄνδρες ἀεὶ ξὺν ταῖς γυναιξὶ τὴν θήραν μόνην ἐπιτηδεύουσι. θηρίων τε γὰρ καὶ ἄλλων ζῴων μέγα τι χρῆμα αἵ τε ὗλαι αὐτοῖς φέρουσι, μεγάλαι ὑπερφυῶς οὖσαι, καὶ τὰ ὄρη, ἃ ταύτῃ ἀνέχει. καὶ κρέασι μὲν θηρίων ἀεὶ τῶν ἁλισκομένων σιτίζονται, τὰ δέρματα δὲ ἀμφιέννυνται, ἐπεί τε αὐτοῖς οὔτε λίνον οὔτε ὄργανον ὅτῳ ῥάπτοιέν ἐστιν, οἱ δὲ τῶν θηρίων τοῖς νεύροις τὰ δέρματα ἐς ἄλληλα ταῦτα ξυνδέοντες οὕτω δὴ ἐς τὸ σῶμα ὅλον ἀμπίσχονται. οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ τὰ βρέφη αὐτοῖς κατὰ ταυτὰ τιθηνοῦνται τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις. οὐ γὰρ σιτίζονται Σκριθιφίνων παιδία γυναικῶν γάλακτι οὐδὲ μητέρων ἅπτονται τιτθοῦ, ἀλλὰ ζῴων τῶν ἁλισκομένων τοῖς μυελοῖς ἐκτρέφονται μόνοις. ἐπειδὰν οὖν γυνὴ τάχιστα τέκοι, δέρματι τὸ βρέφος ἐμβαλομένη κρεμᾷ μὲν εὐθὺς ἐπὶ δένδρου τινός, μυελὸν δέ οἱ ἐπὶ τοῦ στόματος ἐνθεμένη ξὺν τῷ ἀνδρὶ ἐπὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν στέλλεται θήραν. ἐπὶ κοινῇ γὰρ τά τε ἄλλα δρῶσι καὶ τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα μετίασι τοῦτο. τούτοις μὲν οὖν δὴ τοῖς βαρβάροις τὰ ἐς τὴν δίαιταν ταύτῃ πῃ ἔχει.

> Of the barbarians living in Thule one sole race, called the "Skrithiphinoi", has a bestial lifestyle. They do not dress in clothes nor walk about with shod feet, they do not drink wine nor have any victuals from the earth. They do not cultivate the ground, nor do the women do any work for them, but the men along with the women only ever pursue the hunt alone. A great supply of wild beasts and other animals is proffered by the forests, which are excessively huge, and the mountains which rise up there. They always feed on the flesh of the beasts they capture, and clothe themselves in the pelts, since they have neither linen nor any means to sew, but, binding the skins of the animals together with tendons, they cover their bodies with them. Nor do they follow suit with other people about [nursing] children. For the Skrithiphinoi do not nourish their children on the milk of women and they do not touch a mother's breast, but are nourished solely on the marrow of the beasts which are caught. So, as soon as a woman has given birth, she wraps the child in an animal skin and immediately hangs it on a tree, placing some marrow on its mouth, and sets out with her husband on the usual hunt. For it is in common that they do everything else and that they follow this pursuit too. Such then are the ways of life there among these barbarians.

tioned, with alternatives such as «minutissimi» and «minores» being suggested, in reference to the small stature of Sámi. However, Jordanes's statement can be seen as a reflection of Tacitus's observation on the lack of arms among the Fenni.

Procopius's sources are uncertain; it is possible that information about the far north was available in Constantinople from the Eruli, a Germanic tribe which had split into two groups, one in Illyria and one which had returned to Scandinavia, which maintained contact with each other, yet it is more likely that Procopius had a literary source – Tacitus's account is not strikingly close in detail, which leaves the possibility that it was primarily a lost book of Cassiodorus that Procopius used (Whitaker 1983: 286–7).[19]

THE RAVENNA COSMOGRAPHER

The Ravenna Cosmographer,[20] writing *c.* 700, mentions Rerifenni and Scerdifenni (the difference originating in manuscript variants in Jordanes), who live in the mountains by hunting (IV.12):

> Item iuxta ipsam Sithiam litus oceanum ponitur patria que dicitur Rerifennorum et Scerdifennorum. cuius patrie homines, ut ait Athanaric Gothorum phylosophus, rupes montium habitare et per venationes tam viri quamque mulieres vivere, cibo <cocto> vel vino ignari existentes, in omnibus dicuntur. que patria super omnes frigida esse ascribitur.[21]
>
> Then next to this Sithia, an ocean shore, is situated the homeland which is said to be that of the Rerifenni and Scerdifenni, the people of which country, as Athanaric the philosopher of the Goths says, inhabit the crags of mountains and live, both men and women, on hunting, existing entirely without knowledge of [cooked] meals or wine. This land is recorded as being cold above all others.

The next chapter places this land next to Dania, which is stated to include Norway («Nordomannorum patria»).

PAULUS DIACONUS

Paulus Diaconus was a Langobard of the Friuli district of northern Italy. In his *Historia Langobardorum* I.5, written *c.* 787, he mentions the *Scritobini*; they are hunters and use skis, and dress themselves in garments made from reindeer hide (he goes on, after the passage cited, to describe the winter and summer solstices):

[19] Whitaker (1983: 293) in fact concludes that since the accounts of Jordanes and Procopius do not show any specific similarities, they may each have picked up oral stories, and not have used Cassiodorus. Whilst we cannot demonstrate that Cassiodorus discussed the Scrithifinni, it seems to me likely that he did so, acting as a source for this strange name in both Jordanes and Procopius; in particular the account of Jordanes is too brief to conclude that its source must have differed from that of Procopius, especially when, within its few words, it nonetheless shares the distinctive ethnonym with Procopius. Another possibility is raised by Whitaker (ibid. 295), that the source may not have been Cassiodorus, but Athanaric, a Goth philosopher named by the Ravenna Cosmographer as his source (see below), who is otherwise unknown.

[20] The Cosmographer's works, including the section considered here, were copied by Guido of Ravenna, who is thus not an independent witness.

[21] Manuscript variants: rerifennorum, reriphenorum, rerefenorum; scerdifernorum, scerdifenorum, scordifennorum, sirdifenorum; aithanarit, arthanarit, athanarich (the edition uses the form Aithanarit in the main text, but the correct form was clearly Athanaric).

> Huic loco Scritobini[22] – sic enim gens illa nominatur – vicini sunt. Qui etiam aestatis tempore nivibus non carent, nec aliud, utpote feris ipsis ratione non dispares, quam crudis agrestium animantium carnibus vescuntur; de quorum etiam hirtis pellibus sibi indumenta peraptant. Hi a saliendo iuxta linguam barbaram ethimologiam ducunt. Saltibus enim utentes, arte quadam ligno incurvo ad arcus similitudinem feras adsecuntur. Aput hos est animal cervo non satis absimile, de cuius ego corio, ut fuerat pilis hispidem, vestem in modum tunicae genu tenus aptatam conspexi, sicut iam fati, ut relatum est, Scritobini utuntur.

> Near this place [the furthest borders of Germania] live the Scritobini – for so this people is named. Even in summer they have no lack of snow, and nourish themselves on nothing more than the raw flesh of wild beasts: indeed, they are not unlike the beasts themselves in their way of life. From the shaggy pelts of these beasts they make garments for themselves. They take their name from their skiing according to the vulgar tongue. For they chase wild beasts by using skis, pieces of wood curved by some art into the likeness of a bow. Among them is an animal not unlike a stag; I have seen a garment made from its hide, bristling as it was with hairs, formed into the shape of a knee-length tunic, such as, so it has been related, the said Scritobini use.

The fact that Paulus had himself seen a garment said to have originated among the Sámi is of great interest. The most likely time and place for this to have happened is during his sojourn at Charlemagne's court from 782 to 786 (Capo, in Paulus edition, pp. xxv–xxviii), which would imply some direct contact with the Sámi of Scandinavia at this early date, and thus raises the possibility of further information having been known about the Sámi in the main centre of Western culture at the time. Capo (edition, comm. 1.5.1) notes that Paulus appears to rely on oral information rather than the earlier written accounts to form his description; this information, as Whitaker (1983: 297) remarks, was clearly of good quality and thus perhaps first-hand.

ADAM OF BREMEN

Adam of Bremen (*c.* 1075) gives considerable information on the Baltic in his *Descriptio insularum aquilonis.* He says (ch. 14) that beyond Birka the Swedes ruled wide areas as far as the "land of women", which may be a folk-etymology of *Kvenland.* Beyond them, he writes, lived the *Wizzi* (perhaps Veps, cf. Russian Весь) (Ross 1981: 55), *Mirri* (the Меря of Russian chronicles, a now-extinct Volga-Finnic people), the *Lami* (perhaps Livonians), the *Scuti* (perhaps Chuds) and the *Turci.*[23] He calls the inhabitants of

[22] Manuscript variants: Scrittobini, Scriptobini, Scriptovini, Scriduwinni, Scridowinni, Scritofinni, Seritovinni, Cristobini.

[23] The interpretations are as given by Pertz (Adam of Bremen 242 n.), and need to be treated with caution; the suggestion that the Turci could be inhabitants of Turku, for example, is unlikely, given that the city, whose Finnish name (a lexical borrowing from Slavonic) means "market place", did not exist before the late thirteenth century. The Turci are more likely Turkic races on the European steppe, mentioned often in Russian chronicles under the name Torki.

the Land of Women Amazons; they were supposed to become pregnant on a gulp of water (ch. 19). The Amazons are mentioned again later, as semi-mythical; he concludes the chapter with a more factual record (ch. 25):

> Narravit michi rex Danorum sepe recolendus gentem quandam ex montanis in plana descendere solitam, statura modicam, sed viribus et agilitate vix Suedis ferendam. Hiique incertum esse unde veniant; semel aliquando per annum vel post triennium, inquit, subiti accedunt. Quibus nisi totis resistatur viribus, omnem depopulantur regionem, et denuo recedunt.

> The much to be recalled Danish king told me that a certain race is accustomed to descend out of the mountains onto the plains, of modest stature but scarcely endurable by the Swedes for their strength and agility; and it was uncertain whence these people come: once in a year, or every other year, he said, they suddenly arrive. If they are not resisted with full strength they lay waste the whole region; and they depart again.

These may have been Finns: the description matches that of the Cwenas given by Ohthere (see below).

Adam also mentions the *Scritefini*, some of whom had become Christian (ch. 24):

> In confinio Sueonum vel Nortmannorum contra boream habitant Scritefini, quos aiunt cursu feras preterire; civitas eorum maxima Halsingland.[24]

> On the borders of the Swedes or Norwegians to the north live the Scritefini, whom they say are able to run faster than wild animals; their greatest political centre is Hälsingland.

Adam's mention of *Scuti* is potentially interesting, if it does indeed refer to the Chuds, who were frequently mentioned in medieval times in Russian sources. However, vagueness of application of the term Чюдь in the Russian chronicles – it could refer to more or less any Finnic people (Grünthal 1997: 281) – makes identification of the Scuti difficult.[25]

English sources

BEOWULF

In the Old English poem *Beowulf*, the hero, when describing his fraught and lengthy swimming match with Breca, which serves to show he is up to

[24] The reference to a *civitas* is puzzling, but probably means a political centre rather than a city; Scholion 137 says that the Scritefini's region was Hälsingland (i.e. Norrland): they lived in the mountains there. In later centuries centres such as Jokkmokk were established for the purpose of trade and tax-collection among the Sámi, close to their traditional winter habitations, and the *civitas* here may be a forerunner of such centres.

[25] The Chuds are discussed at length by Grünthal (1997: ch. 6); the name may be an ancient borrowing from Germanic (an antecedent of Old Norse *þjóð*, "people") into early Russian, which was then applied to Finnic-speakers fairly indiscriminately. Within Finnic languages the term only occurs in Sámi, where it is probably borrowed from Russian at an early date.

dealing with mere-dwelling monsters such as Grendel, the poem's antagonist, describes (line 580) how he finally came ashore in *Finna land*. There is no attempt at geographical authenticity (though, as the editors of *Beowulf* note, p. 149, *Finna land* is commonly taken to be Finnmark in the north of Norway); the point is to indicate that Beowulf reached the very ends of the earth – the northern realms of the fabulous *Finnas* – in his exploit.[26]

WIDSIÐ

The Old English poem *Widsið* preserves many ancient legendary traditions, but it is impossible to date any of these precisely beyond saying they are earlier than *c.* 1000, when the poem was committed to writing. In line 20 Cælic is named as king of the *Finnas*, and the *scop*, the fictional narrator of the poem, claims he had travelled among them as well as among the *Scridefinnas* (lines 76, 79).

It has been proposed that *Cælic* could represent Finnish *Kaleva*, an ancestral hero and establisher of *Kalevala*, "Kaleva's land", in Finnish and Estonian folk poetry (Chambers, in *Widsith* 1912: 192, citing Heinzel from 1886). Unfortunately, the idea is a mere reflection of the ill-informed and romantic notions about Finland current in the nineteenth century; suffice it to say that Kaleva is a far less prominent figure in Finnish folktales than the publication of the *Kalevala* in 1835 may have led some outsiders to believe, and our knowledge of the historical phonology of the Finnish language allows us to exclude the possibility of deriving *Cælic* from any antecedent of *Kaleva*. Of course, the name may have been corrupted in transmission (as Chambers hints), but such corruption would bring in its train the impossibility of ever demonstrating any connection.[27] We have no reason to think that any other people than the (vaguely perceived) Sámi are indicated at this point in the Old English poem.

THE OLD ENGLISH OROSIUS

More certain information is to be gained from the accounts of travellers presented around 890 to King Alfred and included in the Old English version of Paulus Orosius's *Historiae adversum paganos* (Bately 1980: 13–18; Lund 1984: 16–25); of the travellers, Ohthere was Norwegian (Old Norse

[26] All the Old English sources presented here are dealt with in more detail by Valtonen (1992, and esp. 2008).

[27] I am grateful to Riho Grünthal for confirming by email my suspicions about the possibility of *Kaleva* being the antecedent of *Cælic*. The chief problem lies in the supposed earlier form of *Kaleva*, namely *Kaleγa*, when in fact there is practically no evidence for the independent existence of *γ* as a phoneme in early Finnish, but plenty of indication that the element *-va* never had any phoneme like *γ* in it (if anything, it may be a weakened form of *-pa*). On the other hand, other ancient words exist in Finnish which *Cælic* could be related to; most notable is *Kalanti*, the name of an ancient settlement area – taking Cælic as "one from Kal-land" offers a more likely solution than any connection with a mythical Kaleva. In the end, however, we simply do not have enough information to be able to discern any secure connection with any Finnish word.

Óttarr), Wulfstan probably English. As the accounts are rather long, a summary of a few points only is given here.

Wulfstan sailed to the Vistula and on to Estland. Estland is larger than Estonia (it is described as very large: «spyðe mycel»), if indeed it included modern Estonia at all, since Witland, bordering the Vistula to the east, belongs to the Este («belimpeð to Estum»), and Zalew Wiślany, distant from modern Estonia, is called *Estmere* "the Est lake" (cf. Lithuanian *Aismarės*). Each *byrig*, or fortified settlement, is said to have a king, and there was a great deal of strife. Notable features of diet were mares' milk for the king, and mead for the lower classes; there was a good deal of honey and fishing too. Cremation was the custom, and Wulfstan spends a lot of time describing the funerary rites. One tribe of Este knew how to cause cold, and could freeze a barrel of beer even in summer. It is unlikely that these customs relate to Finnic peoples, who even in Wulfstan's day did not live as far south as the area he visited, though Estonians may have been included in the wide confederacy of the Este. Nonetheless, the account has a general importance in that it demonstrates that trading expeditions ventured relatively far east, and participants were clearly interested in the customs they observed.

Ohthere declared that he lived the furthest north of any Norwegians, though the land extended much further north, «ac hit is eal peste, buton on feapum stopum styccemælum piciað Finnas, on huntoðe on pintra ⁊ on sumera on fiscaþe be þære sæ», "but it is all uninhabited, except for a few places here and there where the *Finnas* have their camps, hunting in winter, and in the summer fishing in the sea". Ohthere was a rich man in the currency of the region, reindeer, but the Norwegians there chiefly grew rich on the tribute paid by the Finnas (Lund 1984: 20):

> Ac hyra ar is mæst on þæm gafole þe ða Finnas him gyldað. Þæt gafol bið on deora fellum ⁊ on fugela feðerum ⁊ hpales bane ⁊ on þæm sciprapum þe beoð of hpæles hyde geporht ⁊ of seoles. Æghpylc gylt be hys gebyrdum.
>
> Their wealth, however, is mostly in the tribute which the *Finnas* pay them. That tribute consists of the skins of beasts, the feathers of birds, whale-bone, and ship-ropes made from whale-hide and sealskin. Each pays according to his rank.

Curious to find out what, if anything, lay beyond the uninhabited region, he set out on a long voyage, and sailed right round the north of Norway and the Kola Peninsula (the land of the Terfinnas,[28] i.e. the Terskii Bereg, is mentioned: see Ross 1981: 24–8), down to a great river. The whole way he encountered only Finnas engaged in hunting, fishing and bird-catching. But beyond the great river the land was all settled by Beormas. Their language was almost the same as that of the Finnas. They told him many stories of the region.

The Bjarmar are mentioned widely in Old Norse. The earliest reference is in *Gráfeldardrápa* 5 (*Skj* B_1 66), *c.* 970, which sites them on the shores of the

[28] Tyrfi-Finnar, to be identified with the Terfinnas, are mentioned in Norse in *Ævidrápa Ǫrvar-Odds*.

Vína (probably the Dvina) – though, as Jackson (1992: 126) points out, skaldic references to named rivers may indicate no more than "river" in a general sense. Ross (1981: 29–83, including Afterword by Chesnutt) discusses the Bjarmar at length, giving a comprehensive survey of Norse references to them (see also Haavio 1965). He concludes that they are Karelians, some (Ohthere's *Beormas*) found on the White Sea, some around the mouth of the Dvina. That they are Finnic, rather than for example Permian, is confirmed by the name of their god *Jómali* (*Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 133), cf. Karelian *jumala*, "god"; the word does not occur in Permian, and related Sámi forms, considered by Ross (1981: 50), are unlikely to have given rise to the Norse form. Vilkuna (1956) derives the word *Bjarmar* from Finnish *permi*, used until recently of wandering tradesmen from outer Karelia; the word would thus originally have designated occupation rather than nationality. Bately (1980: 186–7) questions some of Ross's conclusions, for example that in the ninth century Karelians lived all round the White Sea, or indeed north of the Ladoga region. However, Kivikoski (1967: 148–9) notes that permanent settlement by Karelians on the north and east shores of Lake Onega begins at the end of the Viking period; before this the White Sea would have been within the sphere of influence of the Karelians living south-east of Lake Ladoga. Our knowledge of settled areas at particular times is, in any case, subject to archaeological research, which is far from complete in this region.

Ohthere mentions another people, the Cwenas (Lund 1984: 21):

> Ðonne is toemnes þæm lande suðepeardum, on oðre healfe þæs mores, Speoland, oþ þæt land norðepeard; ⁊ toemnes þæm lande norðepeardum Cpena land. Þa Cpenas hergiaþ hpilum on ða Norðmen ofer ðone mor, hpilum þa Norðmen on hy, ⁊ þær sint spiðe micle meras fersce geond þa moras, ⁊ beraþ þa Cpenas hyra scypu ofer land on ða meras ⁊ þanon hergiað on ða Norðmen; hy habbað spyðe lytle scypa ⁊ spyðe leohte.
>
> Beyond the moors Sweden borders the southern part of the land as far as the north, and the country of the *Cwenas* borders the land in the north. Sometimes the *Cwenas* make raids on the Norwegians across the moors, and sometimes the Norwegians make raids on them. There are very large fresh-water lakes throughout these moors, and the *Cwenas* carry their boats overland onto the lakes and from there make raids on the Norwegians. They have very small, very light boats.

The Scridefinne and Cwenland are also mentioned immediately before Ohthere's account, in a general geographical description of the north (Lund 1984: 18): «be norþan him ofer þa pestenne is Cpenland, ⁊ be pestannorþan him sindon Scridefinne ⁊ be pestan Norþmenn», "to their [the Swedes'] north over the waste is Cwenland, and to their north-west are Scridefinne and to the west Norwegians". This account is not based on anything in the original Latin of Orosius; the sources of information are uncertain, but Lund (1984: 9) points out the vibrant contact with the Frankish court and lands at this time, whence much of the information may have been gathered and then passed on to the English. It has already been noted that that Paulus Diaconus at an earlier time is likely to have gathered information about the Sámi at Charlemagne's court.

Scandinavian sources

Sámi are mentioned frequently in Norse sources; I present here merely a selection of texts and references to illustrate some of the main themes (see Mundal 1996 and Herman Pálsson 1997 for a detailed treatment).

PRIMITIVE LIFESTYLE OF THE SÁMI

The primitive lifestyle of the Sámi is illustrated in the *Historia Norwegie* 4.1–4:

> Est igitur uastissima solitudo affinis Norwegie diuidens eam per longum a paganis gentibus. Que solummodo Finnis et bestiis incolitur, quarum carnibus semicrudis uescuntur et pellibus induuntur. Sunt equidem uenatores peritissimi, soliuagi et instabiles, tugurea corticea pro domibus insidentes, que humeris inponentes leuigatis asseribus pedibus subfixis, quod instrumentum "ondros" appellant, et per condensa niuium ac deuexa moncium agitantibus ceruis cum coniugibus et paruulis aue uelocius transferuntur. Est enim illorum incerta mansio, prout copia ferarum tempore instante eis dictauerit uenationis loca.

> There is then a most desolate wilderness on the borders of Norway, dividing it lengthwise from pagan peoples. It is inhabited only by Sámi and wild animals: on the half-raw flesh of these they feed themselves, and with their pelts they dress themselves. They are indeed most skilful hunters, venturing out alone and not staying settled, residing in leather huts instead of houses; they place these on their shoulders, and with smoothed laths fixed under their feet (an instrument they call *ondri*[29]), they move swifter than a bird across thick snows and the slopes of mountains with their spouses and children, driving reindeer. For their abode is unfixed, as the abundance of wild animals dictates to them the places for hunting at any particular time.

When, as a result (the heathens claimed) of the Christian rule of the sons of Eiríkr in Norway, the seasons worsened, Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir (*c.* 970) turned to the Sámi for a comparison to the harsh condition the Norwegians were then suffering (*Skj* B_1 65, *lv* 12):

> Snýr á Svǫlnis vǫru
> svá sem hǫfum inn sem Finnar
> birkihind of bundit
> brums at miðju sumri.

> It snows on Svǫlnir's [i.e. Óðinn's] mistress [earth] – so we have indoors like Sámi bound the hind of the birch's bud [goat, sheep] – at midsummer.

The Sámi's skiing is mentioned in another anonymous verse (*Skj* B_1 174, C st. 3, cited by Snorri without ascription and thus undatable):

> Erum á leið frá láði
> liðnir Finnum skriðnu;

[29] The word in fact represents Old Norse *ǫndurr*, a special short, fur-lined ski for the right foot used for pushing off (Grønvik 2000*b*: 13–14, 69–70); it is not of Sámi origin.

austr sé ek fjǫll af flausta
ferli geisla merluð.

We are launched on our path from the land where the Sámi ski; eastwards I see mountains from the ships' road [sea], illumined by a ray of light.

The Sámi were proverbial for their range in skiing; the comprehensive terms of outlawry for someone who breaks a legal settlement in *Trygðamál* (*Vígslóði* §388 in *Grágás* 1879: 406) includes them: the culprit is to be driven away from God and Christendom

svá víða sem menn varga reka, kristnir menn kirkjur sœkja, heiðnir menn hof blóta, móðir mǫg fœðir, mǫgr móður kallar, elldar upp brenna, finnr skríðr, fura vex, valr flýgr vár langan dag, ok standi byrr undir báða vængi

as far as people drive wolves, Christians go to attend church, heathens sacrifice in temples, a mother rears her son, a son calls his mother, a fire burns, a Sámi skis, a flame grows, a hawk flies the day long in spring, and a breeze stands under both wings.

Both skiing and hunting are attributed to Vǫlundr and his brothers, sons of the king of the Finnar, in the prose introduction to *Vǫlundarkviða* – «þeir skriðo ok veiddo dýr», and in the verse (10/6–8) Vǫlundr is described as a «veðreygr skyti, / Vǫlundr líðandi / um langan veg», "weather-eyed hunter, Vǫlundr, passing over the long way", and Egill, one of the brothers, «austr skreið», "skied east" (5/1) (or possibly just "slid off east").

Sámi are generally regarded as nomadic, dwelling in a primitive type of shelter designated *gammi*, as by Sigurðr slembidjákn, who stayed in one (*c.* 1138) while some Sámi built him a couple of boats (*Haraldssona saga* ch. 6; *Skj* B, 467):

Gótt vas í gamma,
es glaðir drukkum
ok glaðr grams sonr
gekk meðal bekkja.

It was fine in the *gammi*, as joyfully we drank and the warrior's joyful son went among the benches.

However, the existence of the word *búfinnr*, a settled Sámi, indicates that some Sámi adopted a more Norse form of lifestyle; sometimes they are presented as living among Norwegians (for example Finnr in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 82). *Norges gamle love* II, 491, presents a little cameo tale, in which a Sámi was settled in an area between Jämtland and Ångermanland (1268 x 1273):

Þar deilldu þau vm i anduerdri kristni Gunilldr sniælla er bio a Solatunum en Arne illi het madr er bio j Hiælsio a Rafuundum. Hann var fyrstr madr kristin. Þar volde þat þeirra asætte at Gunilldr tok fin sin ok setti a land Arna vidr Blafinnugs tiorn. Tok Arne þan fin ok sœkte nidr j vatnet. Sidan varo þat saatmæle þeirra at Arne gallt londen firir austan tiornena. Þa let Gunnildr en fara j votn Arna. En Arne let sua marka votn sin er hann for fra. Sœkte nidr reinshornom heilum ok rak j iarnagla till merkis ok fan Arne

> med þui agirnd Gunilldar ok sattrof. En sidan gengo þau lond aftr vndir Arna e[n] finrin het Blafinnr ok var af honum kallat Blafinz tiorn.
>
> In the early Christian period Gunnhildr the eloquent, who lived at Solatúnir [in Sollefteå], and Árni the awkward, a man who lived at Hjælsjór [Hällesjö] in Rafundar [Ragunda socken, Jämtland], were in contention. He was the first person to become Christian. Their argument was caused by Gunnhildr taking her Sámi and settling him on the land of Árni by Bláfinnungstjǫrn [Blåfinntjärn, between Fors socken, Jämtland, and Långsele socken, Ångermanland].[30] Árni caught that Sámi and drowned him in the water. Thereafter their settlement stated that Árni ruled the lands to the east of the tarn. Then Gunnhildr still allowed passage down to Árni's water, but Árni had had his water marked out when he left: he plunged whole reindeer antlers down and drove in iron nails as a boundary, and by that means Árni discovered the greed of Gunnhildr and her breach of the settlement. But thereafter those lands returned to Árni's control. And the Sámi was called Bláfinnr, "Dark Sámi", and Bláfinnstjǫrn, "Tarn of the Dark Sámi", was named after him.

TRADE AND WAR

Both Finns and Sámi are mentioned quite frequently in connection with trade and tax, which also often involved fighting. The setting for the shamanic kamlanie described in the *Historia Norwegie* ⟨138⟩ is said to have been a meeting of Norwegians and Sámi for purposes of trade.

The tax on furs exacted by the Norwegians from the Sámi is mentioned as early as Ohthere's account (see above); the *Historia Norwegie* 4.11–12 also describes it:

> Sunt eciam apud Finnos scuriones quam plures ac mustele. De quarum omnium bestiarum pellibus regibus Norwegie, quibus et subiecti sunt, maxima tributa omni anno persoluunt.
>
> There are also among the Sámi very many squirrels and ermines. They pay enormous taxes every year to the kings of Norway, to whom they are also subject, in the pelts of all these animals.

The thirteenth-century sagas add some details (the antiquity of which is naturally open to debate);[31] in *Egils saga* ch. 8 taxation of the Sámi and trade with them go hand in hand, and are a right conferred by the king; likewise the trade rights, apparently monopolised, of Hárekr and Þórir hundr are confirmed by King Knútr in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 170. *Egils saga* also illustrates the connection with fighting; Þórólfr's trips as Sámi tax collector are described in ch. 13, and on one occasion he meets some Kylfingar, who had come west to trade with the Sámi, and kills them (ch.

[30] Blåfinntjärn is (it seems) discussed in *Fornvådaren* 5 (1933–6), which I have not accessed.

[31] While *Egils saga* and *Heimskringla* are written long after the events they describe (both are probably by Snorri, †1241), the accounts of Norse–Sámi relations are probably accurate in outline: the descriptions refer to the same tradition about the tax as earlier sources like *Historia Norwegie* and Ohthere, though the organised nature of the trade and tribute, and matters such as the Kvenir–Karelian animosity, may be more thirteenth than eleventh-century features. Snorri, as a friend of Jarl Skúli, would know traditions of this past trading in northern Norway.

10). Another time, he meets some Kvenir, who ask him to help their king Faravið against Karelian attacks (ch. 14). Kylfingar, Kvenir and Karelians are all, apparently, Finnic groups, seemingly engaged, like the Norwegians, in trade with the Sámi.

Bjarmaland was also exploited for trade and plunder, particularly of grave mounds and temples, the latter motif probably being largely the invention of the saga writers; see Ross (1981: 28–39) for summaries of the sagas, *Bósa saga*, *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, *Hálfs saga*, *Óláfs saga ins helga*, as they relate to Bjarmaland. In connection with one expedition the name of the god of the Bjarmians is given as *Jómali* (*Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 133), representing Finnish/Karelian *jumala*, "god".

Finnland itself is also referred to by Sighvatr (before 1030) in *Víkingavísur* 3 as a place where King Óláfr went harrying (*Skj* B_1 213):

> Hríð var stáls í stríðri
> strǫng Herdala gǫngu
> Finnlendinga at fundi
> fylkis niðs en þriðja.
> En austr við lǫ leysti
> leið víkinga skeiðar
> Bálagarðs at barði
> brimskíðum lá síða.

Fierce was the third storm of steel of the prince's son on the warlike path to Herdalar at the encounter with the Finnlanders, while east beside the water the host of Vikings loosed their warships. Bálagarðr's coast lay by the flank of the ocean sea-timbers [ships].[32]

Sometimes Sámi are said to be aggressors; in *Gull-Ásu-Þorðar þáttr* (p. 345) some Sámi are said to have taken the farm of Sigurðr Hranason in northern Norway (in the twelfth century).

MARRIAGE

Sexual relations between Norwegians and Sámi fall into two broad categories; practically all instances are either fictional or unreliable as fact, though the accounts in *Landnámabók*, *Annálar* and *Heimskringla* may be at least historically based. In the first place Norwegian noblemen take (noble) Sámi women as wives. *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13 ⟨111⟩ tells how Vanlandi marries Drífa, the daughter of Snjár inn gamli the Sámi.[33] In *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*

[32] Although edited by Finnur Jónsson as proper names, there is no strong argument for taking either Herdalar or Bálagarðr as such: *herdalar/herdalir* may be simply the valleys where fighting took place, and *bálagarðr* probably means "castle of flames", perhaps in reference to watch-fires at castles kept by the Finns (possibly a defence against Viking raids such as Sighvatr describes); the coastal reaches of Finland were indeed occupied by small castles at this time (see map XVIII in Huurre 1979: 201).

[33] In such tales, the Sámi girl is invariably daughter of the Sámi king (when a relationship is spelled out). Mundal (1996: 110) asserts that the Sámi king was no fairytale figure, since the Icelandic annals for 1313 relate that Marteinn, king of the Sámi, visited King Hákon. It is possible that the Norwegians recognised some particular leader(s) of the Sámi population as "kings", but what status such individuals had within Sámi society itself cannot be said,

ch. 25, Haraldr marries Snæfríðr, daughter of the Sámi Svási (based on *Ágrip* ch. 3–4, where Svási is called king of the Sámi, and the daughter's name is Snjófríðr: see Driscoll in *Ágrip* pp. 86–7 on the development of the story).[34] A Sámi woman Lekný/Leikný/Lækný is mentioned in *Finnboga saga* ch. 9 and *Landnámabók* S244, H208. She was the mistress of an Icelandic chieftain, with whom she had a son Finnr/Finni, nicknamed *draumspeki*, "dream-interpreter". One of the Icelandic settlers, Hrosskell, was married to Jóreiðr, granddaughter of the Sámi king Mǫttull (*Landnámabók* S43, H31). King Hringr marries Hvít, daughter of the Sámi king (*Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 24 (ch. 17 in Slay's edition)).

In most cases, marriage to Sámi women is perilous, however, and results in disaster. When her husband leaves her, Dría attempts to get him back by magically inspiring him from afar with a longing to return; when this fails, he is trampled to death by a nightmare.[35] The beauty of Snæfríðr is bewitching, even in death; after bearing Haraldr some children she dies, and her body remains incorrupt. The king dotes over it in an all-absorbing state of madness (even, it seems, composing a skaldic poem about her, *Snæfríðardrápa*, of which some remnants remain) until Þorleifr persuades him to move it, whereupon all manner of corruption emerges from it. Hringr's wife proves to be an evil stepmother.

We have occasional tales of Norwegian women falling into the hands of Sámi: in the Icelandic *Konungsannáll* of 1258 (*Annálar* p. 47) the crew of Eyjólfr is said to have been killed in Finnmark, and sixteen years later two of the women on board reappeared in Norway; no sexual relationship with the Sámi is mentioned, however. In *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 32 a Norwegian girl from Hálogaland (in the north of Norway) named Gunnhildr, the future queen of Eiríkr, is freed from two Sámi sorcerers who are instructing her in their art; she says both of them wanted to marry (*eiga*) her.

These two social relationships mirror the pattern of the relationship between gods and giants: gods desire to marry beautiful giantesses (the primary example being Freyr's wooing of Gerðr in *Skírnismál*), though the relationships seem to be doomed (most famously in the case of Njǫrðr and Skaði), whereas giants are always trying to acquire goddesses, which they attempt to do by force or deception (for example, Þrymr's plan to get Freyja by stealing Þórr's hammer in *Þrymskviða*).[36]

other than that it was no doubt quite different from that perceived by the Norwegians. As almost all the Sámi girls are given Norse names based on words for snow, winter and the like, it is probable that few of them were historical persons.

[34] This recalls the custom of the Este (who may have included the Estonians) related by Wulfstan: a dead man would lie uncremated for half a year, corruption being prevented by artificial freezing (Bately 1980: 17; Lund 1984: 24–5): «⁊ þær is mid Estum an mægþ þæt hi magon cyle gepyrcan, ⁊ þy þær licgað þa deadan men spa lange ⁊ ne fuliað, þæt hy pyrcað þone cyle hine on», "and there is a tribe among the *Este* that knows how to cause cold, and this is why the dead men there lie so long and do not rot, because they keep them cold". Note how the names of Sámi women always recall ice and snow.

[35] It is to be noted that Snorri mentions Sámi magic three times in his prose context for *Ynglingatal*, but the verses themselves do not mention it.

[36] For a more detailed (but feminist-oriented) treatment of these two social relationships see Clunies Ross (1994: ch. 4).

GIANTS

Finnic peoples are connected with giants. In Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* VIII.14, Thorkillus and his men are greeted in Biarmia by the huge Guthmundus, and various fantastic adventures ensue. The name of the king of Biarmia in *Gesta Danorum* V.13.1, Egtherus, is also that of the giant who in *Vǫluspá* 41 sits happily on a grave mound playing his harp as the world's end approaches.

Giants were associated with magical powers (to cite but one example, note the illusions wrought on Þórr by Útgarða-Loki, *Gylfaginning* ch. 45–7). It was no doubt this characteristic, shared with Finnic peoples (see next section), that prompted a connection between them; the remoteness and cold of the lands of the Sámi and especially Bjarmaland would also have contributed – giants are constantly associated with the cold (and indeed originated from the cold in myth): Ymir, the primeval giant, is described as a *hrímkaldr jǫtunn*, "rime-cold giant", in *Vafþrúðnismál* 21/5, and his successors are the *hrímþursar*, "rime giants". The legendary names of Sámi are often based on snow words – *Snæfríðr*, "Snow-lovely", *Drífa*, "Snow drift", *Snjár*, "Snow" (*Ynglinga saga* ch. 13 ⟨113⟩, *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 25 ⟨116⟩); *Snær*, "Snow", appears in *Fundinn Nóregr* as a son of *Frosti*, "Frost",[37] a descendant of Fornjótr, who, according to the *Flateyjarbók* version, ruled over «Jótlandi, er kallat er Finnland ok Kvenland», "Jótland [giant land] that is called Finnland and Kvenland" (*Flateyjarbók* I, 219; *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 1, including this variant); Fornjótr is moreover included in the list of giants in *Þula* IV b 3/5 (*Skj* B_1 659).[38] Nórr, the grandson of Snjár, was the founder of Norway.

In his poem *Háleygjatal*, composed for the earls of Hlaðir, Eyvindr Finnsson took the rulers' noble lineage back to the union of Óðinn with the giantess Skaði, according to *Ynglinga saga* ch. 8; their son was named Sæmingr. Davidson (1983: 60), who suggests that in the original *Háleygjatal* Sæmingr may in fact have been the son of Freyr and grandson of Óðinn and Skaði, views *Sæmingr* as deriving from the Sámi's name for their land, *Sápmi*,[39]

[37] *Fundinn Nóregr* forms a "preface" to *Orkneyinga saga*; a (probably) later version of *Fundinn Nóregr* appears in *Flateyjarbók*, and is referred to as *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk*. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between these texts and the purpose of *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk*, see Rowe (2003); she concludes (215) that while Magnús Þórhallsson, the compiler of the latter part of *Flayteyjarbók* from 1388 on, "was imagining a Norwegian monarchy gloriously independent of the rest of Scandinavia and the church, Margareta was forging Norway, Denmark, and Sweden into the Kalmar Union"; this serves as a salutary reminder of the potential disengagement – in this case the text is a sort of fantasy-world rejoinder – between literary texts and their social setting.

[38] Clunies Ross (1983: 48) suggests that Fornjótr was regarded, not only by Snorri but also in skaldic verse, as the father of the personified natural forces of fire, wind and sea seen as destructive (fire: *Ynglingatal* 29 (*Skj* B_1 12): «glóðfjálgr [...] sonr Fornjóts», "the glowing hot son of Fornjótr"; cold wind: *Norðrsetudrápa* (*Skj* B_1 388): «tóku fyrst til fjúka/ Fornjóts synir ljótir», "first the hostile sons of Fornjótr began to blow drifting snow"; sea: no skaldic evidence, but *Fundinn Nóregr* presents Hlér (god of the sea) as a son of Fornjótr; Snorri has identified the three sons as elements (Clunies Ross 1983: 64).

[39] Some aspects of her etymology appear false, such as the connection with Finnish *Suomi*, which does not mean "Lapp", and is most likely not associated (or only in the remotest way) with *Sápmi* (Grünthal 1997: 62–72); nonetheless, the overall point is surely valid.

emphasising the northern origins of the Háleygir (just as.Haraldr hárfagri establishes his dynasty through his marriage to the Sámi Snæfríðr).

The lineage of the powerful northern earls of Hlaðir was thus to be traced to a union between a god and a giantess (via a Sámi, apparently, in *Háleygjatal*), just as the god Óðinn's parents were "man" and giantess. The prototype of the mating of opposites made manifest on the divine plane as a *hieros gamos* of god and giantess could be realised on the human level as a marriage of king and Sámi,[40] a union which would emphasise the king's progenitorial role. This role is not, however, emphasised in the existing (derivative) sources, though Haraldr hárfagri's father Hálfdan svarti had a dramatic dream in which his rich hair represented his abundant offspring (*Hálfdanar saga ins svarta* ch. 7), and Haraldr's marriage to the Sámi Snæfríðr may, from one angle, have been intended to realise the *hieros gamos* in the manner indicated. Later, there was even an attempt to deny or expunge the founding king's link with the "alien" Sámi, when, in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 34 ⟨116*b*⟩, Eiríkr blóðøx "burnt in" his half-brother Rǫgnvaldr réttilbeini, the son of Snæfríðr, with his eighty *seiðmenn*. Interestingly, Snorri says that this act was much praised, which suggests active (and probably racist) hostility among Norsemen towards the Norwegian royal alliance with the Sámi.

MAGIC

It is striking that the Latin and Greek sources considered above do not mention the magical practices of the Finni; the first mention in Latin appears to be by Bartholomeus Anglicus in the early to mid-thirteenth century: describing *Winlandia*, by which an area to the east of the Norwegian mountains is meant, he says (xv.172): «Gens eius est barbara, agrestis et saeva, magicis artibus occupata», "the population is barbarous, wild and savage, and given over to magical practices", the practice of controlling winds through tying knots being specifically mentioned. In Norse sources, the practice of sorcery is the most commonly noted characteristic of *Finnar*, and the Norwegian laws forbid anyone to "believe in Sámi or witches" ⟨140⟩. There is even a verb *finnvitka* in Old Norse, "to Sámi-bewitch", indicating the extent of the association of magic with Sámi.[41]

Almost none of the accounts of sorcery by Sámi can be regarded as

[40] For an extended (one might say prolix) treatment of this point, see the whole of Steinsland (1991).

[41] The association apparently passed into folk belief, to judge from the following eighteenth-century account of a sort of pox, most probably originally regarded as caused by Sámi magic (*Félagsrit* 1789: IX, 209): «*Finnar* (Vari, Jonthi) eru gulleitar og stundum døckleitar bólur, er mest þjóta út um andlit og enni; inni þeim er hvít þyck vilsa, og stundum bólgna þeir og grafa. Cartheuser segir, at Finnar eigi helst heima hiá þeim, er menn segia séu uppá heiminn», "*Finnar* are yellow and sometimes dark-coloured pox that mostly break out around the face and forehead; in them there is thick white pus, and sometimes they swell and suppurate. Cartheuser says that *Finnar* tend to affect especially those that people say are sensual." (Johann Friedrich Cartheuser, 1704–77, was a German doctor and author of *Fundamenta materiae medicae*, Frankfurt, 1741–9.)

historical, except that of the shamanistic performance related in *Historia Norwegie* ⟨138⟩. This account is best treated on a par with later ethnographic accounts and has been analysed accordingly, in the context of essentially factual accounts of shamanism. We do occasionally have other fairly objective notices of Sámi practices; for example, the Icelandic *Lǫgmannsannáll* (*Annálar* p. 139) records *s.a.* 1403:

> *Item* þat sama ár varð sá atburðr norðr á Hálogalandi í Nóregi, at einn Finnr, sá er Feðmingr hét, lá úti í einni bjargskoru heil þrjú ár, svá sem dauðr væri. Lá þar hjá honum bogi hans ok ǫrvamælir. Féllu hvárki á hann dýr né fuglar alla þessa stund. Síðan reis hann upp ok lifði mǫrg ár síðan. Var herra Árni Óláfsson þar þetta sama ár ok sagði þetta út hingat.

> *Item* the same year an event took place in Hálogaland up in the north of Norway, namely that a Sámi called Feðmingr lay outside on a notch in the hill for three whole years as if dead. His bow and quiver lay beside him. Neither wild animals nor birds fell upon him this whole time. Thereafter he rose up and went on to live many years. Master Árni Óláfsson was there the same year and brought the news out here.

Naturally, much here is impossible – not least the three years of trance outside, but also the unlikelihood of knowing that the Sámi went on to live many years, if the news was brought out soon after the event by Árni, as is implied. Nonetheless, the Norse appear to have been fascinated, here as in the *Historia Norwegie*, by what we may take to have been an extended Sámi shamanic trance, which itself may indicate the Norse were unfamiliar with such practices in the magic performed within their own society at this time.

Another interesting account is found in *Alfræði íslenzk* ⟨139⟩; this was written down in 1387, but the scribe is particularly careful in this instance to note his sources, which go back to the priest who features in the account. As in the passage cited above from the Annals, this account reveals the magical practices of the Sámi as a source of interest to the Norsemen, but there is an underlying theme of spiritual contest: there is a constant repetition of *fjǫlkyngi*, "magic", and its variants, as a sort of underlying menace in these barbaric regions, which nonetheless yield to the greater magic, the *stórmerki*, of the Christian Mass and the crucified Christ. Yet the account appears to preserve enough of a real event for us to glimpse a little of the Sámi perspective. The shaman would have been the most perceptive of his people to the nature of this new religion, and it is fully to be expected that a shaman should gain his knowledge through a vision, which must have been a heightened construction of the perceptions he has gained: the vision the shaman has at the Mass is a parallel to the spiritual visions he has on his trance journeys, and in the usual way he recounts what he has seen after the event. His lying unconscious outside the tent is striking; it is difficult not to think this may have been a deliberate trance rather than just a fainting fit. If it was a deliberate act, presumably the shaman was attempting to uncover some explanation from his helping spirits of what this new religion was about.

It was no doubt because of the Sámi practice of shamanism that Scandinavian superstition associated the Sámi with magic of all kinds. This superstition was probably old – it is recorded in a verse of Sighvatr Þórðarson relating to the last fight of St Óláfr in 1030 (*Skj* B, 242–3: see below), though most of the evidence for it survives in prose texts from *c.* 1200 onwards.

Several types of magical practice are attributed to the Sámi; just a small selection of instances is given here. Perhaps the closest to shamanic tradition is the legend that Sámi could travel in spirit forms other than human over great distances of land or sea: in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 12 ⟨123⟩ Ingimundr sends some Sámi from Norway to spy out his future home in Iceland, which they manage to do in three days (*Landnámabók* ⟨100⟩ relates the same story); it is not said in what form they travelled, but in a similar incident in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 33 Haraldr Gormsson sends a wizard in whale shape to spy out Iceland (here, conversely, the wizard is not explicitly Sámi). The *Historia Norwegie* witnesses to a tradition of Sámi magicians travelling supernaturally as whales.

Foresight and fortune-telling were typical Sámi skills: a straightforward example is found in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 10 ⟨123⟩, where a Sámi woman turns up at a gathering in Norway and tells fortunes; more interestingly, in *Hálfdanar saga ins svarta* ch. 8 a «margfróðr», "very wise", Sámi is tortured by Hálfdan svarti to explain some Christmas portents:[42] he refuses – the portents clearly refer to Hálfdan's own death – but he tells Haraldr hárfagri (who sets him free) of his great future and his father's death by falling through the ice.

Finnar create storms on land and sea: in his account of the background to Sighvatr's verse on the Finnlendingar quoted above Snorri says that the *Finnar* conjured up a storm by night against Óláfr, whose *hamingja* defeats the storm in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 9. The power of raising storms is twice ascribed to Bjarmians by Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* I.8.16 and IX.4.22.

Sámi could use illusion for defence, as when Arngrimus attacked and they defended themselves by making three stones look like mountains, and a stretch of snow like a mighty torrent in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* V.13.2.

Necromancy was, it seems, believed to be practised by the Bjarmians: it is hinted at in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ch. 7, where the Vikings have to ensure that the Bjarmians do not possess themselves of any corpses, which could be used for magic against the Vikings: «Þá mælti Oddr til sinna manna: "Þér skuluð at því hyggja, þó at nǫkkut falli af liði váru, at þér takið hvern sem dauðr er ok kastið út á ána, því at þegar munu þeir gøra fjǫlkyngi í lið várt, ef þeir ná nǫkkurum inum dauða"», "Then Oddr spoke to his men: 'You must be careful, even if we lose some of our company, that you take everyone that is dead and cast him out into the river, since otherwise they will work magic against our company, if they get hold of any of the dead'". Necromancy may also perhaps be seen in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*

[42] Sámi of later times believed in Christmas spirits that fly about in the air (Rheen 1897: 27), possibly suggesting a long-standing expectation that they would know something about spirits that appear at this time.

ch. 76 when Óláfr tortures Eyvindr, «inn fjǫlkunngasti maðr», "the most skilled in magic", who confesses he has been brought to life in a human body («kviknaðr í mannlíkam») by Sámi magic.

The fearful power of Sámi women is seen in the bewitching beauty of Snæfríðr, even in death. Fatal jealousy is the hallmark of Drífa, who engineers her husband Vanlandi's death. (See above on these marriages.)

Sámi appear as magical artificers: in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 193 Þórir hundr has had two winters of trade with the Sámi, and thus knowledge of their skills, when by Sámi magic he has his reindeer skins made impenetrable – more so than chain-mail – against weapons. He thus later proves invincible to King Óláfr – a tradition going back to Sighvatr's time, whose verse, *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* 16, states «galdrar [. . .] meginrammir / fjǫlkunnigra Finna / fullstórum barg[43] Þóri», "the most powerful spells of the Sámi magicians protected great Þórir" (*Skj* B_1 242–3).

Sámi are mentioned as near-magical hunters and bowmen: when Gunnhildr is freed from the Sámi sorcerers (see above) in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 32 she comments on the Sámi's shooting skills: «hvatki er þeir skjóta til, þá hœfa þeir», "whatever they shoot at they hit". Evidence of this near-magical ability is seen in the account in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 108 of the bowman *Finnr* (either his name, or "Sámi") opposing Óláfr Tryggvason: he hits Einarr þambarskelfr's bow before he can finish off Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson.

The presentation of Sámi as teachers of their magic and the picture of their physical and psychic skills could owe something to Norse awareness that Sámi shamanism was a profession – presumably Gunnhildr was to become a sorceress rather than huntress: cf. the role of the girl helpers in later Sámi shamanism ⟨SHAMANS: ASSISTANTS⟩ – and something perhaps to the legends of foreign magicians from whom their pupils were keen to escape (as Sæmundr from his master in *Jóns saga ins helga* ch. 4; cf. also Vélent escaping from the dwarfs in *Þiðreks saga* ch. 61).

The menacing powers of the Sámi are closely associated with the fact that they are tyrannised by the Norsemen: they possess wealth in furs, and native skills – reindeer skins strengthened like iron, marksmanship and magic – that make them invaluable servants. When Norsemen and Sámi meet hospitably (as in the *Historia Norwegie*), the Sámi's shamanic magic is presented as a source of interest rather than menace (though the intention on the Sámi's part may well have been to impress the Norsemen with their magical abilities). The potentially deadly hostility of the Sámi queens may well represent racial antipathy directed against tyrants.

Conclusion

Documentary evidence confirms the long-standing contact between the peoples of Fenno-Scandinavia evident from archaeological evidence; the

[43] The singular *barg* here functions as if plural *burgu*, possibly implying *galdrar*, "spells", is regarded as a sort of collective noun indicating "magic".

descriptions of the Sámi, under the Germanic-derived term *Finni*, illustrate this clearly, and archaeological evidence indicates that contacts between the Germanic peoples of Scandinavia and the Finns and Sámi date back far into the prehistoric period. Most of the evidence points to the Germanic culture being the dominant one in a relationship which was, nonetheless, close.

The non-Norse documentary sources focus upon the Sámi as examples of *barbaritas*: living on the edge of the world, they were naturally at a cultural nadir as much as a geographical one. The notion of alienness continues in the Norse sources, but here we have other elements added, in particular the association with sorcery. The *Historia Norwegie* indicates that quite detailed knowledge of actual Sámi shamanism existed among the Norse, from which the more fictional types of magic associated with them in literary sources are likely to be in part derived.

The Sámi paid taxes in furs to the Norwegians at least from the ninth century: in other words they were to some extent a subject and tyrannised people, but the tax system is also an indication of close and long-standing contact.

The Sámi were associated with skiing from an early date; this skill clearly impressed the Norsemen and may well have suggested power over cold. Snow was the element proper to the Sámi, as to giants. Hence the Sámi lived close to this source of life according to the creation myth recorded by Snorri (and based on earlier poetic sources), and it was natural that they should, like the giants, be seen as legendary engenderers, notably of the Norwegian kings or earls.

Apart from the Sámi, some groups of Finns also appear in the sources. The Kvenir (Kainuu) Finns were known from at least the ninth century. Bjarmaland was known and visited from at least the ninth century; it was remote and became largely the stuff of fable, but the accurate preservation of the word *jumala* indicates that some knowledge of religious matters existed.[44]

Such a protracted and intimate relationship as existed between Germanic and Finnic peoples would have given plenty of scope for the borrowing of religious and mythic ideas and motifs; yet the documentary sources present these peoples as outsiders, as "the Other", which may point to any ideas being adopted from them as being always regarded as alien. This in turn could have led Norsemen to characterise as alien any features of their own society, which may have included their magical practices, which they regarded as undermining the norms of that society; the ascription in fictional sources of such practices to *Finnar* may thus tell us rather that the practices were *regarded* as alien than that they actually were.

[44] This may be confirmed by some of the stories preserved in Old Norse sources: thus the great aurochs of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* ch. 22 that is worshipped but becomes a menace, devouring men and cattle and laying waste the land, and finally has to be destroyed, resembles the Great Ox of Finnish folk poetry (*FFPE* no. 51; *SKVR* XII, 110).

4. Shamanism in Eurasia

The Norsemen lived on the periphery of a wide northern expanse, with a sparse population which, though often scattered or nomadic, shared many features in their social and religious lives. In particular, most peoples living in this area engaged in practices involving a spiritual practitioner who maintained and manipulated contact with the spirit world. Such practitioners naturally had their own designations in each area, but are referred to in modern discussions in general as *shamans*. In this chapter, I discuss the definition of shaman(ism) and related issues, and present some of the main features of practices designated as shamanic in a small selection of different societies; this seems preferable to acquiescing in merely a generalised characterisation (and avoids a *petitio principii* of assuming there is such a thing as shamanism without arguing the case for it). Some particular points of comparison with Norse sources are picked up later in the study, but the short accounts presented in this chapter are intended to illustrate how distinct, in general, the various forms of shamanism are from what can be demonstrated for ancient Scandinavia.

Definition

Strictly speaking, only the Ewenki can be said to have had shamans, in that *shaman* (or more commonly *sama:n*) is their word for a particular type of functionary within their society who had dealings with the spirit world (Janhunen 1986: 97).[1] The Russians borrowed the word, and extended its use to similar functionaries among other tribes. The precise area within which shamanism can be said to occur depends of course on the definition adopted. My main field of reference will be the "classic" shamanism as practised in northern Eurasia from Lapland right across to the Pacific; shamanistic practices from outside Eurasia, such as those of the native Americans, I shall touch upon only incidentally, though I make somewhat fuller (but not extensive) use of southern Eurasian examples.

Since among no two peoples were "shamans" identical in their functions, problems of definition have inevitably arisen; indeed, even within

[1] According to Janhunen, the word is probably from the Sym Ewenki dialect; it can be shown to go back to proto-Ewenki **sama:n*, indicating that shamanism has a history of at least two millennia among the Ewenki. The word is formed from *sama-*, "shaman-", and a suffix *-n*; it is possibly derived from *sa:*, "know", but this would be phonologically irregular. It cannot be derived from Sanskrit *sramana*, "making effort; Buddhist monk". Janhunen reviews the terms for "shaman" in the various Siberian languages: most language groups have native words, which can often be shown on the basis of comparative philology to have a history of several millennia. The appropriation of the Ewenki word (as opposed to that of any other tribe) is fitting, in so far as the Ewenki are geographically central and one of the most widespread of the Siberian peoples: see MAP 5.

one society one shaman could differ markedly from another, as noted for example by Humphrey (1996: 183–5). Within Siberia alone there are at least ten different linguistic traditions with words for what we would call a shaman (Janhunen 1986); moreover, different types of "shaman" within one society would often have their own nomenclature. Nonetheless, a certain commonality of features adhering to so-called shamans among many different peoples cannot be denied, and the attempt to delineate these features has led to many definitions of "shaman" or "shamanism" (see Motzki 1977: 17–57 for a survey of definitions up to that time). We may of course set out a functional definition as a working tool, by selecting various features we regard as essential prerequisites for the presence of "shamanism", but we shall immediately find that all the features are scarcely ever present together at one time (for example, shamans by no means always go into trance – Eliade's *sine qua non* – nor do all their activities involve summoning spirits), which leaves us having to say the features are *potentially* present. Our sources of information, moreover, do not always allow us to determine the presence or absence of particular features – something particularly pertinent to Norse sources.

Definition of shamanism has ranged from the open proposal of Eliade (1972: 4), that it is "a technique of ecstasy",[2] to the strict complex of eight features (distilled from the practices of many Siberian peoples) whose presence Vajda (1959) demands as prerequisites. The eight features are:

1. Ritual ecstasy
2. Animal helping spirits
3. Vocation of the shaman (usually by anthropomorphic guardian spirits)
4. Initiation
5. Travels to the otherworld
6. A typical cosmology (layered universe)
7. Shamanic contests between animal spirits of the shamans
8. Shamanic paraphernalia (for example, drum).

Vajda does not absolutely demand the presence of 7 and 8; however, he writes (1959: 476, my translation): "None of the components alone suffices to determine the whole complex; each of them is *also widespread outside shamanism*; only the typical coincidence of these traits harmonised together amounts to the complex phenomenon that we call shamanism."

The approach of Siikala (1978: 14) is similar:

> I therefore consider it useful to use the term *shamanism* for the real, "classical" shamanism of Central Asia, Northern Siberia and other Arctic regions, in which the similarities of rite technique and belief system amount to more than a few basic features. Such features, elements and ideas are, on the other hand, found in different parts of the world.

Norse evidence certainly does not support the idea that such a specific

[2] Condemnation of Eliade's definition as too vague is unfair, since he offers it as a preliminary starting point, a "working definition"; he in fact is careful to point out the dangers of being too vaguely inclusive in what we regard as shamanism (1972: 3–13).

form of shamanism existed in ancient Scandinavia. Hultkrantz (1973*b*: 34) has, however, set out a brief but specific and more moderate definition:

> We may now define the shaman as a social functionary who, with the help of guardian spirits, attains ecstasy in order to create a rapport with the supernatural world on behalf of his group members.

He expands on this in a later work (*SLS* 11; cf. Hultkrantz 1978: 30):

> The central idea of shamanism is to establish means of contact with the supernatural world by the ecstatic experience of a professional and inspired intermediary, the shaman. There are thus four important constituents of shamanism: the ideological premise, or the supernatural world and the contacts with it; the shaman as the actor on behalf of a human group; the inspiration granted him by his helping spirits; and the extraordinary, ecstatic experiences of the shaman. Most definitions of shamanism disregard one or two of these constituents.

Hultkrantz's definition of shamanism is adequate for the present study; I have, however, borne in mind Vajda's categories, not so much with the procrustean aim of making Norse evidence fit this framework, but because they isolate discrete areas of the phenomenon for systematic consideration.

The degree to which closeness of any particular practice to the classic Siberian form of shamanism is demanded before it is admitted to be a form of shamanism has profound repercussions. Students of Siberian shamanism tend to disregard or disallow as shamanism other forms of practice outside this area, but students of these practices, in turn, tend to regard what they investigate as forms of shamanism, resulting in divergent ideas about what shamanism is. Things may be made clearer by designating as "classic shamanism" the (north) Siberian practices delineated by Vajda and Siikala, and using an unqualified "shamanism" to encompass classic shamanism but also other practices which fall within Hultkrantz's definitions.

In assessing Norse materials, different scholars have reacted in different ways to the problem of defining shamanism; one tendency has been to demand the presence of each of Vajda's prescribed shamanic features as a minimum requirement before discussion of Norse "shamanism" can begin;[3] this method is adopted for example by Vierck (1987), and by Fleck (1971*b*), who writes the following in his rejoinder to F. Schröder's study of *Grímnismál* (1958):

> There are in reality only two formal possibilities: 1. The "shamanism" to be found in our Germanic sources is identical with the shamanism known to and clearly defined by ethnological science; or 2. Germanic "shamanism" is a completely different matter.

This distorts the actual state of controversy in the matter of definition, and such an approach is unsatisfactory for two other reasons: *a*. Our records of

[3] An example of someone taking a more lenient approach is Lotte Motz (see various articles in the References).

Germanic religious practice are too meagre to enable us categorically to say that any particular shamanic feature was unknown; *b*. Fleck's second point does not follow from his first; it is possible that pagan Germanic religion included practices similar to but not identical with classic shamanism (as delineated for example by Vajda), and without necessarily exhibiting all its features. In such a case it is justified to undertake a comparative study: the aim is to investigate what features in Norse myth and religion are comparable with shamanic features, and on this basis to aim to elucidate the religious or mythic structure of the often meagre or allusive Norse remains. Only then will it be possible to form a picture of the extent of shamanic thinking in the Norse world.

My approach to the problem of definition is to accept the more general formulation of Hultkrantz, and then to regard further delineating features as *tendencies* – and to say that the more clearly they are present, the clearer a case of classic shamanism we have. This deliberately leaves the edges fuzzy, allowing us to place the Norse evidence on a sort of shamanic scale, rather than assigning it or not to the shamanic box; it also allows for an emphasis to be placed on differences between cultures rather than seeking only commonalities and hence over-generalising. In practical terms, an approximate correspondence will be noted between more markedly shamanistic societies in the centre, and less shamanistic ones on the periphery of the northern Eurasian (and indeed North American) area; the Norsemen fall clearly on the periphery geographically, and the likelihood (but not inevitability) will be that their "shamanism" will also vary considerably from that found at the centre.

Does the nature of a society determine the presence of shamanism?

Hultkrantz (1978: 51) expressed the view that

> It is evident that shamanism is deeply anchored in the old hunting cultures with their individualism, animal-spirit beliefs and hunting symbolism. In one or another form the shamanistic practices occur in all recent marginal hunting cultures, and particularly there; shamanism is less well adapted to the cultures of the agriculturalist and cultures with a higher level of technological and social complexity.

Shamanism may well have originated in hunting societies, at a remote prehistoric time when all human societies were hunting societies,[4] though Hultkrantz points out that its marginal presence in Africa casts doubt upon the idea of its erstwhile universality (on the other hand, it existed to some degree, including the imagery of destruction and recreation of the

[4] The most ancient cave paintings, such as those of Lascaux, are nowadays typically interpreted as displaying features of shamanic trance (for example Lewis-Williams 2002, esp. ch. 8). For a critique of the over-readiness to see shamanism as lying behind prehistoric rock art (but which nonetheless accepts that shamanism was indeed one inspiration for it), see Layton (2000).

shaman's soul in the underworld, in Australia, which was settled at least forty millennia ago: Lommel 1989). It is usually viewed as being at its purest in societies which most closely resemble these ancient ones, notably those of the far north of Siberia, as opposed, for example, to the highly ritualised form in which it occurs (if it be granted that it is shamanism at all) in Tibet. It is natural to draw conclusions such as that it originated in the far north, or that it is essentially incompatible with societies subsisting on anything but hunting (and when it occurs there, that it is adulterated) – and such conclusions have often been drawn.

This is probably a mistaken way to look at the matter, however, and Hultkrantz rather begs the question in asserting that as shamanism suits best those societies where it survives most strongly, it clearly did not suit so well those societies where it has died out. Hultkrantz notes that the strong presence of animal spirits in shamanism indicates an origin in hunting cultures, but his four premises – ideological, social, inspirational and extraordinary – do not require the presence of specifically zoomorphic spirits, nor does he demonstrate that their strong presence is anything more than the consequence of shamanism surviving precisely in hunting cultures where such spirits would be most expected. It might also be added that no argument is presented for why animal spirits should not also be expected in pastoral or agrarian cultures. The stricter definitions of shamanism such as Vajda's thus emerge rather as empirically based (that is, they reflect the shamanisms that happen to survive) than as premises on which to discern the presence of shamanism by deductive reasoning, which is how they are sometimes treated.

Shamanism is in fact a practice which can in principle (I would argue) be adapted to suit the needs of a particular society, be it hunting or agricultural, egalitarian and clan-based or hierarchical. Naturally, the wider the net we cast to catch examples of shamanism, the less tightly woven according to the elements set out by Vajda will the weave become; as the forms of sub-classic shamanism under discussion do not exist in many areas any longer, it is of course impossible to establish any empirical definition of them, but again in principle they should be included as shamanism if they fall within the premises set out by Hultkrantz, and they may be inferred to have approached classic shamanism in form according as the societies concerned approached in form, or chronological point of departure (allowing for survivals from earlier states of society), those where classic shamanism has been observed.

It is of course the case that when a society becomes more complex, relying on different means of sustenance, its ritual and religious life will reflect this complexity, so that shamanism will exist side by side with, or absorb features from, rites devoted to securing the welfare of domesticated herds or cornfields; this is a matter of adaptation, of synthesis, within the four premises, however, not of adulteration. Its strong presence among the culturally developed Buryats is surely an indication of this. Some of the different forms shamanism takes in varying societies are outlined below.

I would like to suggest a slightly different model to explain why, within

the historical record, shamanism has survived best in primarily hunting societies, and has withered in pastoral societies and even more so in agricultural ones. A glance at the map reveals a very obvious fact: shamanism has continued to exist best where it is most remote from the southern influences of Christianity in the west, Islam in Central Asia, and Buddhism in the east. The agricultural societies of southern Siberia lay closest to this influence, the hunters of the north furthest from it. It is surely this influence, rather than anything inherently anti-shamanic in pastoralism or agriculture, which saw to the demise of shamanism in these societies.

It is in fact clear that societies not primarily reliant on hunting continued a form of shamanism for many hundreds, if not thousands, of years before it was abandoned in the face of the growing influences from outside. Such is the case with Finland, which is considered below, and also of Japan.[5] Many other peoples between these two outliers can be found to have traces of shamanism indicating an earlier use of the practice: such is the case with the Udmurts and the Komi, for example, or many Turkic peoples, who, though now Moslem, practised shamanism as little as a century or so ago.[6] In rather more ancient times, we can be fairly confident that the Scyths, whose influence stretched right down into eastern Europe, practised shamanism, yet they were primarily pastoralists (with some agriculture too) from the steppe, an area where pastoralism began around 2000 BC (and agriculture a few centuries later), which may well indicate that shamanism could continue to exist quite happily in such societies given a lack of external impetus to abandon it.

Any account of shamanism's distribution and correlation with types of society is, then, bound to be warped by the accidents of history. Were we able to produce a full account reflecting the realities of a couple of millennia ago, the picture would certainly be very different, and would include both a wider area of distribution (including within Eurasia probably all of the inhabited tundra, most of the taiga, much of the steppe, and some areas to the south of the steppe) and a greater number of pastoral and even agrarian societies. Topographically speaking, it would be reasonable to expect the inhabitants of the edge of the taiga belt in Scandinavia to have similar practices to their immediate and more distant neighbours stretched in a contiguous band across to the Pacific: if they lacked such practices, it is more likely to have been due to cultural discontiguity or lack of affinity (stemming from their being Indo-European, for example) than the nature of their society. But even the degree of such cultural discontiguity is an open question, not a given premise. At the same time, the Scandinavians are at

[5] See the study by Blacker (1992), which illustrates how earlier forms of shamanism, characterised by trance and spontaneous consultation with spirits, gradually atrophied and split, under influences such as Buddhism (introduced in the ninth century), into a largely non-ecstatic and formal mediumism and a form subsumed within Buddhist asceticism (but retaining until recent times the trance practices).

[6] Thus the Turks of western Siberia converted to Islam from the sixteenth century; the Baraba Turks were noted as still being mainly heathen in 1748 (Diószegi 1978: 83, quoting Georgi, writing in 1776).

the very periphery of the taiga, and so the practices encountered would be expected to be similarly "peripheral". Such "peripherality" may be observed in Japan, at the other end of the distribution of Eurasian shamanism, where for example the notion of the world tree (and a layered cosmos) is absent, and even the concept of the world mountain seems to have crystallised only under the influence of Buddhism (Blacker 1992: 82).

A further point to bear in mind when looking at the distribution of shamanism in Siberia is that the history of the peoples of the region is both complex and only known in a rudimentary fashion. When a feature such as shamanism is found among a certain people, it may have been brought with them from some earlier area of settlement, or it may have been adopted from the indigenous people of the new area of settlement, or it may derive from a combination of these two. A case in point is the Ugrian peoples. These appear to have been a confederacy of tribes living on the steppe, in regions now long emptied of Finno-Ugric-speaking peoples, in the first few centuries AD, engaged in activities such as horse-breeding. One group (or several groups) then moved far to the north, into the taiga, where horse-breeding was impossible, and mingled with the local population of hunters/fishers, largely adopting their lifestyle, and gave rise to the Khanty and Mansi; another group moved to the south, eventually arriving in Hungary and giving rise to the Magyar people. The Khanty and Mansi have a strong tradition of shamanism; the Hungarians have only remnants or hints of it. Did the Ugrians on the steppe practise shamanism, preserved by the Khanty and Mansi but lost by the Hungarians, or did the Khanty and Mansi acquire the practice from the local hunters/fishers they mingled with, while the Hungarians in fact preserve the older situation, with shamanism scarcely present at all? Whilst the literature on shamanism sometimes considers individual cases,[7] there appears to be no overall study attempting to relate what is known of the histories of the peoples of Siberia to their shamanic (and other) practices. Without such a survey, it is inevitable that a detailed diachronic presentation of particular forms of shamanism will scarcely be possible in the present discussion, whose focus is upon Norse materials; however, in most cases such a detailed historical presentation would not, I believe, be found to alter the overall argument of the present study.

The characteristic features of Siberian shamanism

Some of the main features of shamanism will already have emerged from the discussion of definitions above. Siikala (1978: 16) notes that the tasks assigned to the shaman differed in different areas, but that

[7] Some instances are outlined by Ivanov (1978), for example, who highlights the need for a more thorough study relating shamanic practices to the histories of the peoples concerned. Other contributions in the same volume consider particular cases in more detail, for example Diószegi (1978) argues that the Baraba Turks were in origin Southern Samoyeds who adopted Turkic speech some centuries before the first records of them in the seventeenth century; his arguments illustrate the complexity of research needed to investigate such problems.

the central task of the shaman remains above all the handling of crises threatening the normal life of the tribe, i.e. the shaman is the prophet and remover of danger threatening the life of the individual and the community. One feature typical of the religious systems of shamanic cultures is that a crisis is regarded as being caused by representatives of the Beyond, various spirits, supernatural beings and demons.

Siikala (Siikala and Hoppál 1992: 4–12) sets out some of the characteristic features of Siberian shamanism as follows:[8]

Vocation often begins with the prospective shaman falling ill in such a way that the ailment can only be controlled by shamanising. A period is often spent in the wilderness. The neophyte is selected by the spirits; these may, in the north, be nature spirits, but where shamanism is inherited, the spirits tend to be ancestral, or nature spirits acting at the behest of ancestral spirits.

Initiation is common to all forms of shamanism, though it may take different forms. It involves the novice meeting the spirits, and his winning of helping spirits who assist in future kamlania; this is followed by the shaman's recognition by members of the community.

Cosmology. The shaman reinforces the community's mythic image of the cosmos through the rites performed, which for example include descriptions of the visit to the otherworld. The images of the cosmos vary widely, though the many-layered world is common in Siberia (but not necessarily elsewhere: it is not found in Japan, for example).

Dress. The shaman is distinguished by special dress in some areas, but not in all; it is most elaborate in central and southern Siberia and inner Asia, but at the far northern extreme among the Nenets, for example, the dress consists just of a special headdress. Whatever form the dress takes, it is commonly regarded as the dwelling place of the spirits.

Meeting the spirits. The kamlanie always involves a great deal of preparation. Its form varies widely, however. Whilst trance is sometimes involved, the shaman may also meet the spirits without identifying with them (as with the Chukchi); he may meet them without going into trance (especially in western Siberia and inner Asia, as with the Minusinsk Tatars); in western and northern Siberia the emphasis is more upon descriptions of the journey to the otherworld than on the dialogue with the spirits. The description of the otherworld journey and the meeting with the spirits are functionally alternative ways of demonstrating contact with the otherworld. The different roles assumed by the shaman vis-à-vis the spirits are discussed in Chapter 9.

Siikala (1978: 303–11, and Siikala and Hoppál 1992: 2–4) makes a division of types of shamanism according to the different social bases:

Clan shamanism (Yukagirs, Ewenki, Amur peoples, some Altaian peoples, and a few others, such as Selkups, Samoyeds). The livelihood relies mainly

[8] I use the present tense, but shamanism has all but disappeared in many of the areas under consideration.

on deer-hunting and reindeer-breeding, in villages or camps of related families. The shaman is one of the leaders of the clan. The shaman's group of supporters, his clients, are the clan members, and representatives of the clan supervise the selection and control the training of future shamans. As a reflection of this for example among the Selkups the audience repeats verses from the shaman's song. The shaman maintains contact between living and dead clan members, arranges calendular hunting rites, cures illnesses and infertility, prophesies, and prevents misfortune caused by spirits.

Small-group shamanism (for example the Nganasans). Owing to the scattered nomadic lifestyle, the wider clan has little significance, and each nomadic group tends to have its own shaman. The shaman will, however, sometimes act for the clan, for example on the Nganasan clean-tent festival when the sun begins to increase in February. The shaman acts, among other things, as healer, for hunting success, and as a birth guardian.

Independent professional shamanism (for example the Chukchi and Koraks). The clan system does not exist (the basic social units of the Chukchi and Koraks, who are either reindeer-breeders or sea-mammal-hunters, are hunting groups with nomadic camps of relatives and neighbours). The shaman is free to choose his clients, and competes with other shamans. The relationship between the shaman and his supporters is not as close as that in the first two groups. He functions as a healer and resolver of incidental crises. Client acquisition depends on demonstrating skills, so tricks are common.

Territorial professional shamanism (for example the Sakhas, Buryats, Tuvans, southern Altaians, Khakas, Ewenki of Transbaikal). Shamanism is highly institutionalised, and strictly controlled by a "professional body", so that for example among the Buryats many novices may take part in an initiation ceremony, demonstrating the importance of institutionalised shamanic control. Shamanism has developed a greater formal complexity under influences such as Lamaism and Buddhism. The shaman operates not within the clan but a regional entity such as the village. It is found in societies with a patriarchal feudalism that have partly gone over to farming. The shaman may be a sacrificial priest in addition to fufilling the normal shamanic roles. Thus among the Buryats the communal sacrifice *tailayan*, in honour of clan spirits of the mountains, valleys and rivers, is conducted by nine to twelve old men led by a shaman, who calls upon the spirits in whose honour the celebration is held and asks for "much success and good haul, long life, lasting luck" («olzo omog, uta pahan, udān žargal»); this is accompanied by a communal sacrifice of a mare, which is then hung on poles (Tugutov 1978: 267–8).

Siikala (2002: ch. 5) points out that the notion of a distant abode of the dead (to which a shaman would travel with much toil) is characteristic of hunting societies, which might view the abode as situated for example beyond the mouth of the clan river; stable agricultural societies tend to bury their dead fairly close to the settlement, which gives rise to a different

imagery of contact with the departed. Whereas hunting societies tended to adopt spirits of the wild as guardian spirits, in agricultural settings it is often the clan dead that take this role. Norse society clearly followed the agricultural norm: the dead, on the whole, dwelled in the grave mound; in the case of Freyr in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 10 this clan founder was buried and continued to ensure the welfare of his people from the grave.[9]

Sámi shamanism

Sámi shamanism is relatively poorly recorded, in the sense that, although we possess quite a number of accounts of it which include many details, the writers – mainly seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Norwegian and Swedish missionaries who zealously set out the beliefs they were intent on eradicating – failed to record a great many matters that more modern recorders would have taken note of. At the same time Sámi shamanism is one of the best researched; among the many studies, *SLS* offers the best overall view of the shamanism, and Mebius (2003) of the belief system in general.

Accounts of Sámi shamanism begin with the twelfth-century account of a Sámi kamlanie in *Historia Norwegie*, one of the earliest accounts of any shamanism we have. The relative merit of the various seventeenth and eighteenth-century accounts is assessed in *SLS* (39); those of Skanke, Olsen, Rheen and Lundius are the most valuable. In addition to these accounts, the last desperate cries of the Sámi to be allowed to preserve their culture can still be heard in the court cases from the time, where for example trials against those possessing shaman-drums are recorded. We possess almost no records of the shamanic beliefs and practices of the Sámi of Finland and Russia taken down while shamanism was still practised. Sámi shamanism was moribund already in the eighteenth century, and was extinct other than as a folk memory by the early nineteenth century.

The Sámi became nomadic reindeer-breeders in the course of the Middle Ages, though many were still living stable lives in fishing villages in the mid-sixteenth century (Bäckman and Hultkrantz 1985: 20). By the eighteenth century, the nature of Sámi culture had changed drastically: the importation of flour from Scandinavians allowed better population survival, which

[9] Siikala (2002: 139) sees Norse concepts such as Hel and Valhǫll as remnants of an earlier notion of the distant realm of the dead; this is unlikely: *Hel* is in origin "the covering" (Pokorny 1959, *s.v.* "k̑el-4", "conceal"; *AeW*, *s.v.* "hel"; *VA*, *s.v.* "hjel"), presumably of the grave, and as a realm it is to be interpreted merely as a collectivised form of the grave; Valhǫll, "Hall of the slain", clearly represents a particularised form of afterlife for one class of dead which cannot be associated with one settlement. These collectivised realms of the dead, far from being remnants of early belief, have all the hallmarks of late concepts formed at a time when the local community had ceased to be the main social focus and had been displaced by a larger, incipiently national community. Moreover, in the case of Valhǫll there is every indication that notions were in flux in the last century of paganism: in *Atlakviða* 2 and 14, probably from around 900, *valhǫll* appears to mean "exotic hall", without any connection with the slain or Óðinn (see *PE* I, comm. 2/3); it is only in *Eiríksmál* (954 or later) and *Hákonarmál* (962–5) that it came to mean "hall of the slain".

outgrew the ability of the sparse land to support the population; wild game decreased to the point of extinction, and furs could no longer cover the taxes levied (Kasten 1989: 116–18; Pentikäinen 1995: 105). The transition to nomadism had had little effect on their religion, which remained that of a hunting culture, by the time of the earliest detailed records in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries (Bäckman and Hultkrantz 1985: 23). More significant was an earlier change, around two thousand years ago, when Scandinavian stock-raising became a model for reindeer-breeding, alongside which it appears many figures of Scandinavian religion were incorporated into their religious pantheon (ibid. 28). Most aspects of their shamanism, however, did not relate to this pantheon, but went back to a more primitive stage of religious development; nonetheless, it is likely that the drum pictures increased during the Middle Ages as the drum came to be used more as an instrument of divination, and nomadism affected certain aspects of shamanism, such as imposing on the shaman the role of ensuring that the village (*siita*) had spiritual reindeer guardians, in which role he sought out dead relatives (ibid. 27).

Sámi shamanism was of the intense, Arctic sort, as exemplified in the call of the spirits, the deep trance, and the formalised soul-journey of the shaman (*SLS* 41). The Sámi shaman (northern *noai'di*, southern *noaidie*) exercised various functions (*SLS* 15–17):

Healer. The shaman undertook a trance journey to the otherworld to retrieve the lost soul of a seriously ill patient, as well as bargaining with the mistress of the dead, Jábbmeáhkká, who held the soul (*SLS* 44–6).

Hirer of the dead. The shaman could bring up a soul from the underworld to guard the reindeer herd, accomplished in the same way as retrieving the soul of a sick person (*SLS* 46–7).

Diviner. Divining was used by the Sámi for diagnosing the cause of a disease (with mild trance), for uncovering information about conditions in distant places, including under the sea or in the underworld (in trance), for discovering how successful hunting and reindeer-rearing would be (by asking shamanic spirits, probably in trance), and for determining future events (apparently in mild trance; little is said of this function). Divination could also be undertaken using the drum; any man could do this (without trance): the drum would be beaten with a hammer and a ring or other object laid upon it, and the direction of its movement would be noted. It is likely, but not attested, that spirits were collected in the drum during this process (*SLS* 47–52).

Sacrificial priest (exceptional). The sacrificial priest may have been a *noaidi*, but not every *noaidi* was a sacrificial priest. Sacrifice appears to have been carried out as a consequence of other shamanic rites, for example when a shaman was called in in cases of some difficulty, he would determine if the spirits demanded a sacrifice, and then carry it out (*SLS* 52–3).

Hunting magician, and diviner and charmer of animals. The evidence for this role – so common in northern hunting societies – is extremely meagre among the Sámi (*SLS* 54–6), but may have withered by the time of our

sources (Mebius 2003: 114), when hunting was already a thing of the past, at least as a staple means of sustenance (Kasten 1989: 116–18).

Retrieving distant objects is ascribed to Sámi shamans, for example in the popular tale of how a Sámi, during trance, brought a ring from a person's distant home (*SLS* 46). Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* III.17, also tells of this skill; it has clearly been a well-known folk-tale motif in Nordic regions since antiquity.[10]

The shaman was male; such women as were involved in the shaman's office took a subsidiary role ⟨SHAMANS: FEMALE⟩.

The shaman operated within small communities on the family level.

Sámi shamanism, as recorded, lacked some of the features often found in Siberian shamanism (*SLS* 36). The Sámi shaman lacked a special costume, as far as is known (Kasten 1989: 116–17 argues, rather speculatively, that some of the silver goods imported until the coming of the plague in the mid-fourteenth century may have formed part of a shaman's costume; Sámi folklore attributes the plague to these foreign goods, and the shaman costume may have been abandoned along with the silver). His vocation, although involving compulsory demands from the spirits to shamanise, did not involve a death and dismemberment. He did not use the model of the world pillar (which the Sámi certainly had) as a channel of communication with the otherworld. Sacrifice was not, as in some shamanic areas of Central Asia, integrated into the shaman's tasks (which would have necessitated visits to the upper world, for which climbing a world pillar provides a suitable imagery). It is uncertain whether the impression of the Sámi belief system as a series of *disjecta membra* should be regarded as a sign of a late withering of or indeed a failure to record properly an earlier more integrated system or as a sign of a more primitive state of affairs than is found elsewhere in Siberia, with many of the elements typical of shamanism present, but not yet adopted into a coherent system. On the whole (but not necessarily with respect to all elements) the former seems more likely, given the generally limited nature of our sources; I argue in Chapter 9 that the earliest account, the *Historia Norwegie*, acts as a witness of a livelier system of belief than is found in the later accounts.

The guardian spirits, "men of Sájva", were hereditary in certain families, or could be bought or achieved. After the death of a shaman, his spirits would offer their services to his son or close relative; those who turned them

[10] It is less clear how far it was part of the Sámi tradition. Laestadius (2002: III.20) regards Olaus Magnus's account as tale-spinning, but he also cites a recent (1840s or 1850s) example that took place in Kola Lapland, where a local Russian administrator poured scorn on the magical abilities of a Sámi woman: the woman said he would soon repent what he said, and disappeared, but came back after a few minutes. Later, the man's wife told him that the same Sámi had appeared to her and tried to force her to drink a goblet of blood; although the wife was at a great distance, it emerged that the Sámi had appeared to her in the minutes after the man had scorned her. Laestadius regards this as evidence of some skill of persuasion, akin to what we might term hypnotism today, but whatever the actual explanation, it does tend to support the idea that the Sámi used evidence of their ability to bilocate to convince outsiders of their abilities, and the ability to retrieve an object from a distance is close to this, and hence may well have been another method they employed.

away would suffer violently or die. After accepting them, the novice would learn his office in secret from them – or publicly from an old shaman. There would be an instalment ceremony when the community accepted the new shaman. The shaman contacted three sorts of spirit (known collectively as *noaidegázzi*), who were associated with the spirit realm, Sájva (*saajve* in the south, *bassevárre*, "holy mountain", in the north): *a*. Anthropomorphic spirits (*saajve/basseváre ålmmå*, "Sájva man"), who lived in the holy realm (usually in the mountains) and called the shaman to his office; the shaman could seek their counsel by sending the *basseváre lådde*, "Sájva bird". A female spirit, *basseváre niejda*, "Sájva girl", strengthened the shaman with water during the attacks of the spirits during his vocation, and later when his *basseváre sarves*, "Sájva reindeer", fought against other shamans' spirits. *b*. Theriomorphic spirits, *noaidevuoigna*, the bird and reindeer already mentioned, and the *basseváre guolle*, "Sájva fish", which guided the shaman to the underworld or watched over his life during trance. *c*. The dead, who lived underground, ruled over by an old woman, Jábbmeáhkká. The shaman had to fetch the souls of the sick back from here, either promising a sacrifice to Jábbmeáhkká, or else stealing the soul quickly before the dead noticed and making a quick get-away. He also fetched souls of the dead to act as guardians of the reindeer herd; he would either have to persuade the soul to follow him, with the promise of sacrifices, or force it by fighting it. It is uncertain if the shaman visited other realms than those of the dead (Jábbmeájmmo) and the spirits, such as those of the gods, though such a heavenly ascent is emphasised in other forms of Siberian shamanism (and its absence may be a reflection of the missionaries' attitudes).

Isaac Olsen (1910: 32) records that the spirits taught the shaman to run in the shape of wolves or bears, or to cast such forms on others; Bäckman and Hultkrantz (*SLS* 57) interpret this as a sign of how easily the concept of the free soul merges with that of the guardian or helping spirit. However, as neither the wolf nor the bear had this specific shamanic role, Olsen's statement is better interpreted as merely indicating the shaman's magical powers, such that he could shift shape at will; it is probably a reflection of a (degenerate) witchcraft notion rather than intrinsically shamanic.

Finnish shamanism

Finland has relied on agriculture for millennia; yet this bald statement belies the far more complex situation which has existed here, as in many other marginal areas on the borders of where agriculture is viable. For many hundreds, even thousands, of years, agriculture was largely confined to the coastal strip, where most of the settled population lived; it only made any inroads in the inland areas in the Middle Ages. The interior served two purposes: it was the *erämaa*, "land set aside", regarded as holy in one sense, yet in another a source to be exploited, mainly for hunting, by the settled inhabitants, the *lantalaiset*, who also practised agriculture. Its other purpose was as a homeland for the *lappalaiset*, the semi-nomadic people

who made a livelihood from its riches. The extent to which these *lappalaiset* were Sámi is an open question (Pentikäinen 1995: 22), but their presence is undoubted, as is their gradual retreat northwards as the *lantalaiset* spread inland: in the twelfth century the *lappalaiset* might be found throughout Finland bar the littoral 50 km or so, but by the nineteenth they were found effectively only in the modern province of Lappi in the far north. Hunting and fishing were the staple forms of existence for *lappalaiset*, and they formed, at all times into the twentieth century, a substantial portion of the subsistence also of the *lantalaiset*. Hence it is somewhat misleading to describe Finland simply as an agricultural nation until quite modern times. Alongside the ancient reliance on hunting survived rites such as the bear's wake (*karhunpeijaiset*) which have parallels in firmly shamanic societies such as the Khanty and the Ewenki (see Chapter 20). It is therefore hardly surprising to find that shamanism (albeit in a remnant form) also survived here until recent times, its continuance being also a reflection of the late arrival of Christianity: whilst the south-west coast and southern Karelia were Christian (Catholic and Orthodox respectively) by about the twelfth century, inland areas of Savo and Karelia were still effectively pagan in the sixteenth century (Siikala 2002: 339); thus in 1534 Archbishop Makari sent the priest Ilya to Karelia and surrounding areas to eradicate worship in groves and burial mounds, and force magicians to give up their sorcery, whilst strengthening the clergy in the area (Kirkinen 1970: 160). In the Lutheran western parts a concerted educational effort starting in the seventeenth century wiped out much of the ancient tradition, which, however, survived (even if in an attenuated form) until recent times in the Orthodox areas (Siikala 2002: 339).

The remains of shamanism among the Finns demonstrate that shamanism was once practised in a far wider area than when it was recorded in recent centuries. The point applies to less-researched areas too: it is clear, for example, that the Finno-Ugric Komi people also once practised shamanism, some hint of which is preserved in the missionary accounts (far earlier than among the Sámi and far less informative; the primary source is the life of St Stephen of Perm, who lived in the late fourteenth century) and in magical practices such as visits to the underworld, achieved in later centuries through spells rather than kamlania (Napolskikh, Siikala and Hoppál 2003: 74). Further examples might be cited, but the point is clear: shamanism cannot be regarded as always having been confined more or less to the societies in which it has been clearly recorded in recent centuries.

One of the earliest accounts of (probable) shamanism in the Finnic area is a lengthy entry, falling into two parts, recorded in the *Повѣсть временьныхъ лѣтъ* (the Russian Primary Chronicle) under the year 6579 (AD 1071); the chronicle (in its Laurentian redaction) was written down in 1377, but is based on an original of the early twelfth century, which used still older materials as sources. The stance is heavily Christian, and this distorts all depictions of pagan activities; yet some faint information about the beliefs manages to survive. The first part of the account is a protracted interchange between various sorcerers, *кудесники*, and the Russian prince

Yan in the region of Beloozero; these sorcerers claimed the prince had no power over them, and he naturally showed how wrong they were by slaughtering them. The most interesting part of the dialogue is the version of the creation of mankind ascribed to them by the chronicler: God took a sauna, sweated, wiped the sweat off with a cloth, and cast the cloth down from heaven to earth; God and Satan contended over who could make man from the cloth, and while Satan succeeded in making a human body, only God could breathe a soul into it, and hence upon death the body turns to dust, but the soul passes to God. More interesting, from a shamanic point of view, is the second part, a brief description of a sorcerer of the closely related Chuds (perhaps Veps, or a closely related Finnic tribe from slightly further east). The text according to the Laurentian version is as follows:[11]

> в си бо времена в лѣта си приключисѧ нѣкоему Новгородцю · прити в Чюдь · и приде г кудеснику хотѧ волхвованьꙗ ѿ него · ѡн же по ѡбычаю своѥму нача призывати бѣсы · в храмину свою · Новгородцю же сѣдѧщу на порозѣ тоꙗже храмины · кудесникъ же лежаше ѡцѣпъ · и шибе имъ бѣсъ · кудесникъ же вставъ р҃е Новгорьцю · б҃зи не смѣють прити нѣчто имаши на собѣ · ѥгоже боꙗтсѧ · ѡн же помѧнувъ на собѣ кр҃тъ · и ѿшедъ постави кромѣ храмины тоє · ѡн же нача ꙩпѧть призывати бѣсы · бѣси же метавше имь повѣдаша · что ради пришелъ есть · посемь же поча прашати ѥго · что ради боꙗтсѧ ѥго · ѥгоже се носимъ на собѣ кр҃та · ѡнъ же р҃е что єсть знаменьє нбн҃аго Б҃а · ѥгоже наши б҃зи боꙗтсѧ · ѡн же р҃е то каци суть б҃зи ваши кде живуть [онъ же рече] в безднахъ · суть же ѡбразо̑ черни · крилаты хвосты имуще · всходѧть же и подъ н҃бомь слушающе ваши̑ Б҃овъ · ваши бо анг҃ли на н҃беси суть · аще кто ꙋмреть ѿ ваши̑ людии то възносимъ ѥсть на н҃бо · аще ли ѿ наши̑ оумираѥть то носимъ к нашимъ бг҃мь в бездну · ꙗко̑ и єсть · грѣшници бо въ адѣ су҃ ждуще мк҃ы вѣчныꙗ · а праведниції въ нбн҃ѣмь жилищѣ водварѧютсѧ со анг҃лы ·

The translation of Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor (1953: 153) is as follows:

[11] The text is reproduced from *Die Nestorchronik* (p. 179), but I have also consulted the modern edition by Ostrowski (2003), which collates all manuscripts and offers a reconstructed paradosis (in standardised early-twelfth-century language).

> At about the same time, it happened that a certain man from Novgorod went among the Chuds, and approached a magician, desiring to have his fortune told. The latter, according to his custom, began to call devils into his abode. The man from Novgorod sat upon the threshold of that same house, while the magician lay there in a trance, and the devil took possession of him. The magician then arose, and said to the man from Novgorod, "The gods dare not approach, since you wear a symbol of which they are afraid". The Novgorodian then bethought him of the cross he wore, and went and laid it outside the house. The magician then resumed his calling of the devils, and they shook him, and made known why the stranger had come. Then the Novgorodian inquired of the magician why the devils were afraid of the cross they wore. The magician made answer, "That is the token of God in heaven, of whom our gods are afraid". Then the man of Novgorod asked who his gods were and where they dwelt. The magician replied, "In the abysses; they are black of visage, winged and tailed, and they mount up under heaven obedient to your gods. For your angels dwell in heaven, and if any of your people die, they are carried up to heaven. But if any of ours pass away, they are carried down into the abyss to our gods". And so it is; for sinners abide in hell in the expectation of eternal torment, while the righteous associate with the angels in the heavenly abode.

The shamanic background to some of the central mythological tales found in traditional Finnish folk poetry was demonstrated in a perceptive and wide-ranging study by Haavio (1950); more recently, Siikala (2002) offers an up-to-date and thorough study of Finnish shamanism. This is augmented by the valuable work of Stark (2006), which presents in detail the mental world of the early-modern Finnish *tietäjä* (lit. "knower", the successor to the shaman of earlier times) and his interaction with various powers subsisting within himself and the world around. The following section is based largely on these two recent works, where the matters under discussion are presented in much greater detail.

The *tietäjä* was a figure resorted to for example to expel illness (by calling spirit helpers to himself), who might go into a trance state to achieve his ends. Siikala (2002: part IV) argues that the *tietäjä* probably goes back to the Bronze Age, and was preceded in earlier epochs by the *noita*,[12] the shaman of a hunting society. A presentation of the Finnish shaman relies on information gathered about *tietäjät* in historical times, analysis of material such as ancient folk poetry, and comparative study involving Sámi and Siberian practices and beliefs.

The first description of the *tietäjä* rites was given in 1733 by Maxenius. They were accompanied by wild gestures, and the *tietäjä* had to be in his *luonto* ⟨QV⟩ or *haltija* to fight against disease; Ganander (1997, *s.v.* "haltio") records that *hyppii haltioissansa*, lit. "he leaps in his guardian spirits", means to be under the power of a spirit, in ecstasy (Siikala 2002: 242).[13]

[12] The Finnish word *noita*, "witch, sorcerer", is cognate with Sámi *noai'di*, "shaman". See Siikala (1990) on remains of shamanism in the practices of the *noita*.

[13] Ganander writes: «*hyppii haltioissansa* är betagen af en besynnerlig anda, wara rätt ifrig, wara utom sig, så godt som in ecstasi, såsom trollkarlar pläga wara, neml. bita tänderna tilsammans, hoppa up och bärga sig illa, at håren resa sig», "*hyppii haltioissansa*, is overcome by a strange spirit, to be zealous, to be outside oneself as in ecstasy, as warlocks are wont

The description of this state matches that of Siberian shamans in trance, where animal helpers appear and take up residence in the host, after which the shaman sometimes makes a visit to the otherworld (ibid. 245). Areas where this sort of trance occur usually view the sick as invaded by disease spirits, and their expulsion suffices as an act of healing.[14]

The majority of the *tietäjä*'s activities were the healing and prevention of illness, but also included ensuring the welfare of cattle, crops, hunting and fishing. He could expose the culprit who had ruined someone's cattle or hunting luck, and punish them. He could uncover the whereabouts of stolen goods, and put the thief into such a state that he would yield them up. He could also magically sever unapproved relationships, ensuring good fortune for a bridal couple. He would ensure the success of ventures such as new buildings or journeys. He could cause harm, for example by summoning bears or wolves to do damage. (Ibid. 79–84)

Siikala (ibid. 71–6; 1986*b*: 188) points out that in western Finland incantations followed a European pattern, tending to be verbal formulae repeated verbatim and endowed with a mechanical power irrespective of the reciter; the *tietäjä*, found more in eastern and northern Finland, by contrast improvised and combined motifs not bound to a verbatim structure (though the subjects, motifs and even lines of verse were traditional in nature), and moreover required great personal spiritual power to effect his incantations. He thus resembled more closely the shamans of many societies of Eurasia, though the degree of interaction between tradition and improvisation in the shaman's incantations must have varied from one society to another (and has not been subject to widescale investigation; Siikala 1986*b* offers such a detailed investigation of variation in the Finnish *tietäjä*'s incantations).

The *tietäjä* used various sorts of charms for healing. The *tietäjä* sought the origin of an illness with questions, divinations and dreams, and the knowledge gained represented knowledge of the illness's essential nature, and hence power over it, so that the declaration of knowledge amounted to a cure. In other cases, where there was a spirit (or rather, any undesirable force) to be expelled, a banishment charm would be used (on which see Brummer 1908). Origin charms depict the birth of the illness itself. This is not in itself necessarily shamanic, but comparable notions are found in shamanic practices: thus the Nganasan shaman ⟨16, 17⟩ would familiarise himself with the origins of illnesses and could thereafter visit their dwellings to force them to repair their damage. Thus in shamanic understanding the origin of things like illnesses exists not only in the past, but in the otherworld, where they can be visited and acted upon. (Siikala 2002: 84–91)

to be, biting their teeth together, leaping up with scant regard to their safety, so that their hair stands on end".

[14] The idea that disease can be cured by the expulsion of the demon that caused it can also be found in runic inscriptions in the younger futhark such as the late-eleventh-century Sigtuna amulet and the Canterbury Charm (McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004: O16, O17). By contrast, charms in the older futhark usually employ protective magic words. Whether Finnish influence could have effected this change cannot, of course, be determined, but must remain a possibility.

Animal helpers (such as an iron burbot or a horse of Hiisi) might take away the illness, which is sent back to its sender, who thus becomes a victim (ibid. 117). The illness might also be banished to a hole in the midst of a rock on a great windy hill, in other words the cosmic focal point connecting worlds (ibid. 119).

Stark (2006: ch. 9) describes how the physical body was not delimited in the same way as in modern thought to what lies within our skin, but was in a sense "porous", open to various spiritual forces, which could have an adverse effect upon it. The particular details of these various forces and the way the *tietäjä* dealt with them are described in detail by Stark, but just a few points will suffice in the present context. *Väki*, dynamistic force, was not an all-pervading, immanent force, but was believed to inhere in certain objects; it was of various sorts (rock, fire, water *väki*, for example), and was not equally present throughout objects in the world. Dynamistic contagion, whereby *väki* could affect (or infect) people, resulted from contacts which violated invisible or symbolic boundaries – and these boundaries were not fixed, but shifted according to ever-changing relationships between entities; hence it was crucial, in dealing with *väki*, to have the skill and knowledge to master these relationships, and it was in this area that the *tietäjä* was a specialist. *Luonto* was dynamistic force emanating from the human self and interacting with the environment; the *tietäjä* in particular made use of the power of his *luonto*.

The *tietäjä* had a wide array of helpers: the dead, nature spirits, *väki*, the god Ukko, the Virgin Mary, Jesus and animal spirits (Siikala 2002: 195). The *tietäjä* might also appeal for aid to Väinämöinen, the primordial seer who was endowed with exceptional power (ibid. 210). Animal spirits would be used to send on missions: snakes would be sent to harm people, bears to fight other bear spirits (ibid. 228). The *tietäjä* did not adopt animal form himself, but he did take on the powers of animals, such as a hawk's talons or an eagle's claws (ibid. 231, 249).

The *tietäjä* had particular items of costume: the hat, probably regarded as the dwelling of the spirits (as in Nanai shamanism), a belt, whose primary purpose was protection, and a mantle, worn for the journey to the dead, a journey which is found, however, only in poetic descriptions – as the *tietäjä* already knew the words of charms which gave power over illnesses, he had little need to travel to the otherworld to manipulate spiritual forces in such remote regions to effect his tasks (ibid. 281–9). A couple of examples from poetry are worth mentioning, however; here, it is not healing but knowledge that is the purpose of the shamanic activity.

The visit to the dead shaman Antero Vipunen involved Väinämöinen's quest for some words necessary for the completion of a boat he was making (*FFPE* nos. 28, 29; *SKVR* I_1 399 and II 161). The poet seems to have adapted shamanic themes here: Haavio (1952: 124–32; 1950: 153–66) argues that behind the account we have lies an incident in which Antero Vipunen had gone into a trance, and his assistant Väinämöinen, forgetting the words necessary to recall his now dead master, himself set out in trance to ask him. This recalls accounts from among the Sámi of a shaman whose

assistant forgets the words necessary to bring him out of trance, so that he dies; years later the assistant remembers the words, but is greeted with a voice from the grave telling him he is too late (Itkonen 1960: 27–8n.).

The other incident is explicitly a visit to Tuonela (the realm of the dead) (for example *FFPE* no. 30; *SKVR* I₁ 370). Väinämöinen breaks his sledge, or in other variants is building a boat, and sets out for the otherworld to seek tools necessary to mend or complete it. Haavio (1952: 88–91; 1950: 105–10) suggests that the tools to be fetched from Tuonela are perhaps to be interpreted as words necessary to continue the song (represented by the sleigh ride); in some variants, it is explicitly stated that Väinämöinen fetches words. Haavio (1952: 86; 1950: 103) notes that according to Ganander (1997, *s.v.* "Tuonela"; he provides similar information in *Mythologia Fennica, s.v.* "Tuonela") the expression «käydä Tuonella l. Tuonelassa, kulkea Tuonella», "to visit Tuoni or Tuonela, to go to Tuoni", is equivalent to "fall into a trance", and specifically to the expression *langeta loween* (to which entry Ganander refers the reader, *s.v.* "lowi"), which is used «de Lappis & magis, qvi in ecstasin procidunt; & extra corpus sese ambulare credunt», "of Sámi and magicians, who fall into ecstasy, and believe they walk about outside their body". The background to Väinämöinen's visit to the otherworld is therefore a shamanic trip to uncover the knowledge necessary to complete a task in hand. The verbal contest Väinämöinen has with the underworld female spirit, who challenges him to declare his reason for coming, is comparable to that undertaken for example by the Sámi shaman against underworld spirits as he retrieves the soul of a patient ⟨SOUL LOSS AND RETRIEVAL⟩.

The *tietäjä* would summon variously his or another's *luonto*, "nature", *haltija*, "guardian spirit" (a Germanic loan), or *synty*, "birth"; they appear to be largely interchangeable (or rather, they functioned as variant expressions within incantations), but must originally have referred respectively to an externalised and concretised aspect of the shaman's self, envisaged as dwelling in the spirit realm, to an independent assistant spirit (*haltija* regularly occurs in folklore in this sense, as a guardian of the farm or of a kindred: see Haavio 1942), and to a realisation of the shaman's kin, his origin, again envisaged as dwelling in the otherworld (in line with the notion of the origin of a shaman's powers as lying in the otherworld, where he was initiated). In northern areas, the *tietäjä* would summon his own *luonto*; in the south, where trance was less important, he tended to summon someone else's, such as the patient's. The *luonto* typically had to be summoned from a *lovi*, and *langeta loveen*, "fall into a *lovi*", meant to fall into a trance; *lovi* appears to mean "cleft",[15] which would reflect the common notion of a cleft acting as a passage to the otherworld (for example, the Nganasan shaman descended through a tree cleft ⟨16⟩). The notion of increasing the might of one's *luonto*, and altering its nature, by gathering

[15] Though there is some uncertainty over this; however, Koivulehto (1999a: 38) argues it derives from Germanic **law(w)ō*, "notch", cf. Old Norse *lǫgg*, "rim at the bottom of a cask".

väki of various sorts is distinctive to the *tietäjä* institution. In illness rites, the *haltija* represents something temporarily missing: it was said of a sick person that "the *haltija* has escaped from him"; it would pass down to the underworld and deteriorate if kept apart from the body too long. It was thought to have the same form as its owner, and to move around outside the person. Although this clearly comes close to the notion of soul loss, Siikala distinguishes the loss of the *haltija* from soul loss (a distinction characteristic of Finnish but not Siberian shamanism). The notions of the *haltija* show a conflation of the ideas of the distant land of the dead (typical of Siberian shamanism), and of the guardian spirits dwelling in stones and the like in the vicinity of a farm, a tradition well recorded in Scandinavia ⟨VÅRDTRÄD⟩. (Siikala 2002: 250–63)

Khanty and Mansi shamanism

The Ob Ugrian shaman – the *ńait-χum* (male) and *ńait-nē* (female) in Mansi, and *jol* (among other titles) in Khanty (Kulemzin *et al.* 2006, *s.v.*) – undertook four categories of tasks on behalf of the community (he was not permitted to use his powers to do ill, otherwise the spirits would leave him); his procedure in general consisted of uncovering the reason for the misfortune, and discerning the correct way of ameliorating it (such as prescribing offerings to particular spirits) (Kerezsi 1996: 184–93; Karjalainen 1918: 546–601; 1921–7: III, 285–9):

1. In problems in human life, illness, childbirth and death, he would turn to the gods. In matters of healing, he would, with the help of his spirits, discover which harmful spirit had kidnapped the soul of the patient and how to retrieve it. The shaman's soul would leave his body, passing through a crack down to the lower world. He would visit the lord of the lower world to ask for the soul back, passing a series of obstacles on his way (wild animals, fire, wounding, thorny scrub). Having been favourably received, the shaman passed back along the same route with the patient's soul. He rested, exhausted, for several hours afterwards. The shaman only dealt with illness as a result of soul loss; he would know a few common cures for everyday ailments but was not an expert in this field. In matters of childbirth he would occupy a neighbouring hut when a woman was suffering; he would not intervene physically.

2. In matters of livelihood, he would contact the spirits of the forest, rivers and so forth to ask them to give bounteous catches.

3. He conducted rituals and feasts, for example at the sacrifice at the beginning and end of the hunting season: the shaman would know which spirit to make the offering to, and he acted as psychopomp of the victim's soul.

4. Divination, finding lost objects and providing information about missing people. Foretelling was also practised by shamans, for example by peering at the setting sun, but this was not a practice confined to shamans or part of their main activities.

It appears from old accounts that the shaman might be bound during a kamlanie, which was conducted in the dark, and tortured by the spirits ⟨cf. FIG. 1⟩; this would be a repetition of scenes from the shaman's initiation (Karjalainen 1918: 579; Karjalainen, ibid. 596, also mentions a seventeenth-century account describing the late-sixteenth-century Yermak's encounter with south Mansi bound shamans, who were poked with sharp weapons by the onlookers).

The Ob Ugrian shaman was usually male, and shamanism tended to run in families (including through female lines). The shaman was typically called during youth, in particular by falling gravely ill; the learning of the craft was believed to come from the spirits rather than any human instructors.

The shaman would use spirits which were both local and non-local in nature (and he could use spirits other than those of his own clan). He usually had one protective spirit who chose him and assigned him his tasks; then there were less powerful helping spirits, usually animals or birds; the assistant spirits were most often seven in number. There were also certain essential spirits: the "head guardian" protected his soul during the journey to the underworld by keeping it in its breast; on this journey the shaman was also assisted by the bear-like spirit given by the guardian of the earth, and on journeys to heaven by a grey horse, "the swamp-crane-coloured animal". Another spirit, the "handled-staff-stern woman", in one account acts as the summoner of the other spirit helpers, each of whose arrivals is described in the kamlanie. When the shaman needed to retrieve a soul, it could either be undertaken by a spirit sent by the shaman – if it was a simple matter of its having been snatched by the dead, then the shaman would send a spirit in the form of a dead man, with a bear-like spirit sitting in its breast – or by the shaman himself, if the soul had been stolen by spirits, in which case his soul, *ilt*, would sit crouched in the breast of the "head guardian", sometimes travelling to the underworld "by a snake". The soul or spirit crouching in the breast suddenly leaps out and seizes the stolen soul from its astonished imprisoner. This is described in song by the shaman, who loses consciousness at the point where he meets the spirit demanding the sacrifice; the shaman describes what happens when he recovers. (Siikala 1978: 222–4, following Karjalainen 1918/1921–7)

Some spirits lived in the shaman's wooden box, and the spirit of the shaman's drum dwelt in a colourful cloth rolled into the inner side of the drum, and was given offerings before each ritual. To gain the information he needed, the shaman was believed both to summon spirits to him (but without taking them into himself and becoming possessed), attracting them by singing and drumming (or zither-playing), and to travel far and wide in soul (Karjalainen 1918: 593; 1921–7: III, 318–19).

The drum was used to call spirits, but its original purpose (so Karjalainen believed) was to induce trance; it was not used for divination (Siikala 1978: 273–4). The drum was often replaced by the zither as a means of summoning spirits (ibid. 221).

The shaman did not have a special costume, though earlier he had special headgear, gloves and other items (Kerezsi 1996: 184).

As an example of an Ob Ugrian shamanic kamlanie, the following account of a Mansi instance by N. L. Gondatti, recorded in the 1880s, will serve (cited and translated from Karjalainen 1918: 580):

> When the shamans, calling upon their gods, make powerful and swift movements, all the [drum's] baubles tinkle, and the drum itself produces a piercing sound, especially if before use it has been held close to a fire, and precisely these sounds are pleasing to the gods, and hearing them they come to announce their will to the shaman, who, dancing around, finally tosses himself about in attacks of cramp and lets out disconnected utterances. Those around listen to these sounds intently, and they present them with the opportunity to put their inventive powers to use in interpreting them and in praising their gods. Usually it is Mir-susnə-χum, World-watching-man, that is conjured, since he takes care of people, and the closest god to them. He is usually conjured at night, when he makes his rounds upon earth. For this purpose, the fire is quenched in the house of the kamlanie, and the shaman strikes his drum several times, after which everything falls into complete silence. In the silence the clattering of horses' hooves is clearly to be heard, which ends in a crash, a sign of the god stepping into the dwelling. After a little while everything is at an end, and the shaman, usually lying stretched out on the floor, begins to relate the words of the god. Very often during the time of the kamlanie some silver or at least metal plates are set in front of the house, so that the god's steed need not step on the bare ground or snow.

Gondatti (ibid.) also recorded a different sort of kamlanie:

> On a dark night people gather in the home of some wealthy individual, both men and women. The shaman places a metal disc on the ground, and on this iron-headed arrows, and begins to conjure the god by striking on the disc with the arrows. Presently the house shakes, the roof opens near to the stove and Mir-susnə-χum enters, announcing his appearance by striking on the disc with the arrows. He then often tortures the shaman, so hard that he falls down as if dead, pierced, it is said, by the arrows in every corner of his body. At this time fire may not be lit, since the unconscious shaman, suffering from cramps, would immediately die. Once an arrow passed in one shaman from his heart to his heel, but despite this he simply became even healthier than hitherto.

Daur shamanism

The shamanism of the Daurs is presented in a detailed study by Humphrey (1996), on which the following account is based. The Daurs dwell in a region between the areas of classic Siberian shamanism to their north (for example among the Ewenki), and the advanced civilisations of the Mongols and in particular the Chinese to the south. Their mode of life is agricultural, but they value hunting highly. Society is hierarchical, with a chief of each village and a strict order of priority within the clan. The elders were distinct from the shamans. The elder most concerned with ritual was the *bagchi*, who had to know the rituals and prayers, how to make sacrifices, consecrate horses, pronounce banishing spells and make divinations from

sheep's intestines. He would act as ritual adviser and helper to the shaman, but he did not embody the spirits. (Ibid. 29–30)

Essential for the *yadgan* shaman was the ability to become one with a spirit and hence to traverse the cosmos, finding out what ordinary people could not. Contacts with spirits occurred both by ecstatic and non-ecstatic means. The shaman, who might be either male or female, underwent an inner metamorphosis involving illness and being forced to accept an *onggor*, a shamanic ancestral spirit, as a new soul, after which training by an older shaman took place. The shaman was considered to cross into the world of the dead whenever he became or called down an *onggor*. The *onggor* was not an ancestral spirit in the normal sense: it had previously belonged to a shaman, but could select anyone in the lineage to attach itself to, irrespective of male line; thus shamanism was essentially subversive of the patrilineal values of the society. The shaman would sing of impossible things such as a blind lynx or a wild bull (bulls were always domesticated): the point was that the shaman had understanding of impossible existences, whereas the elders know only mundane things. (Ibid. 31)

The shaman was not regarded as master of all religious life, and moreover was not the only practitioner who could embody spirits: curers, bonesetters, midwives and sorcerers could do likewise. Each shaman had his own methods. The healing ritual of Pingguo Yadgan was a controlled re-enactment of the event that marked his first possession by *onggor*: this corresponds to many instances in Siberian shamanism, where the kamlanie refers back to the cosmology, and the otherworld journey, undertaken at initiation. Shamanic songs were dialogic, responses to subjects in the performance, but they were not dialogues, with questions directed to the spirits: this distinguishes north from south Asian shamanism (contrast much of the Japanese shamanism considered below). (Ibid. 48, 230)

In a kamlanie, the refrains repeated by the audience were necessary in order to raise the shaman's soul energy. Various ritualised elements were employed: leadership, mystical flight, heroism, to demonstrate the power of order over chaos. The impersonation of spirits, along with striking sound effects, was an important element in the performance. (Ibid. 234)

Dolbor was the shamanic journey through the dark to fetch back a soul from the otherworld; it was rarely performed. The shaman's life was in danger on the journey. It followed a set ritual, but could be followed by non-ritualised healing actions to rid the spirits attacking the patient. A goat was offered in propitiation (not sacrifice) by the shaman. The shaman only briefly assumed the identity of a spirit, whereas in other performances this was a more common occurrence. The *dolbor* ritual involved mainly a description of the journey undertaken. (Ibid. 227, 235)

The *ominan* ritual was quite different; it took place every three years, and the whole community took part (rare for a shamanic ritual). It called for the presence of a shaman from the community and a senior one from outside. Spirits would be invited down in turn; there was anxiety that one might be forgotten. Two trees were linked by a red thread, the path of the spirits, with a ring on it. When a spirit was caught, it was sent down the

thread on the ring to the junior shaman, who had to remember the spirit's characteristics. The ritual took place as part of a festival involving feasting, games and wrestling. (Ibid. 237)

Different rituals were undertaken by the female *otoshi* shamans, linked to the cult of female fertility spirits, the keepers of the souls of the unborn, which were common in this area of Asia. Further discussion of the Daur female shamans is given in Chapter 7. (Ibid. 286–305)

The shaman is to be viewed as belonging to a "third sex", though the situation is even more complex than that. The *onggor* of a shaman could be of either sex, and the shaman had to become one with both men and women in consciousness, but also with birds and animals, making the shaman, in psychic terms, a being apart. (Ibid. 203)

The Daur spirit world is broadly in line with other Siberian peoples', but this of course masks the individual features. Things are divided into animate and inanimate, but plants are included in the inanimate. Everything in the world is endowed with invisible energy (which is not the same as saying everything has a soul). The spirit master *ejin* personified the particular power of an object. Particularly majestic mountains (or people) were felt to have *suli*, a quality of might tied to physical-psychic presence, and would be worshipped. *Tengger* means three things (according to our categories): physical sky/weather; heaven, with attributes of consciousness and a cosmic regulatory function; a benevolent and ancient celestial sage. Each person has a small *tengger* in their head, with the same nature as the great *tengger*, and the small *tengger* has its counterpart in the sky as a star, which disappears at death. There is some discontinuity of concepts, however, shown for example in the idea of *endur*, the spirit of an old benevolent man when he dies, which rides round on clouds; it is not asked how this is related to *tengger* – it is a separate concept. This may act as a warning against trying to over-systematise in the realm of myth. (Ibid. 84)

Spirits could metamorphose into animals, but still retained their essential identity: hence they were not just animals. These spirits could be worshipped, but animals as such were not. But as the spirits were incarnate in this form, they were still viewed as fully animal (paradoxically). They could reveal themselves through some strange unexpected behaviour suggesting a human intentionality within. (Ibid. 102)

Shamanic spirits were *barkan*; three categories existed: those which initially attacked the shaman and then provided his power, *onggor*; those held to be ancestors of the clan, *hojjoor*, the most powerful type; a large category of others not under control, simply *barkan*, which were dangerous. Also, many *shurkul*, demons, roamed around causing harm, but were not very dangerous; they were souls, for example of those who died too young without children. All shamans had *onggor*, and these would pass from one shaman to another and incorporate the nature of each shaman along the way. (Ibid. 188–90)

The soul, *sumus*, could mean: the immortal consciousness that after death would become an ancestor; a consciousness normally extinguished during sleep but which could leave the body during dreams; an entity that

separated from the body at death, changed appearance and returned to the world in another form. A person also had life-energy, the *ami* breath, and inherent might, *suli*. A dead corpse might come alive temporarily if its *ami* breath had not departed (even if the soul had), and was called *bong*. Dead babies were put in trees, so the soul would easily pass to *tengger* and be able to find another womb. Similarly a shaman's body was put in a tree so his or her soul would soon return to the world. Ordinary people's souls joined the ancestors and were not expected to return. (Ibid. 195–8)

Japanese shamanism

Japanese shamanism is interesting from the Norse point of view since it developed in a society with a greater deal of similarity to medieval Scandinavia than the Arctic hunting cultures of the tundra (such as the Sámi originally belonged to); it was a society with well-established agriculture, with hierarchical social structures, and subject to "higher" cultures nearby (in Japan's case, mainly China). At the same time, its distance from Scandinavia effectively excludes the possibility of influences, so any similarities are likely to reflect what is endemic in the type of society considered. We are fortunate in having the detailed study by Blacker (1992 [1975]) on Japanese shamanism, on which the following account is based.

There are two sorts of spirit medium, both of whom would enter a trance state. Among the first type is the female *miko*, who is essentially a *transmitter*: the spirits leave their world and come into her, possessing and using her body to speak through.

Another type of medium is the blind *itako* girl. Her trance is nowadays just an imitation, but was once more active and genuine. It is always young girls who are picked for the role, since sexual maturity is an impediment to access by the spirits, and causes pronouncements to go awry. Her strength is built up through gruelling ascetical exercises. In each village she visits she is conducted to a private house, a room being made over for her and an altar arranged with offerings of salt, water, fish, sake; a sacred enclosure is constructed with straw rope and branches of *sakaki*.

The *noriwara*, a male village oracle, enters trance, which is achieved by loud rhythmic banging on drums, conch shells or bells, or by loud chanting, and questions are put to him from villagers through a particular man with some ascetic experience. A choir of boys, one from each family of the village, who have undergone ritual purification and seclusion in a special hut, accompany the performance. The questions put to the oracle follow a set pattern: first there is a series of questions on non-rice crops, then a series on threats to the welfare of the village, such as fires and robberies, then questions on the next rice harvest. If any questions do not relate to these matters, the deity through the medium may refer them to a special spirit. The oracle, in order to be convincing, has to act in an exaggerated manner, shrieking or writhing on the ground and so forth.

The second type is the ascetic, who has to undertake a strenuous regime

of exercises to gain spiritual power. The ascetic is primarily a healer who banishes evil spirits. In contrast to the *miko*, the ascetic leaves our world and visits the realm of the spirits, while his body remains behind. However, the visit may also be represented by mimesis: "the other world projected by means of powerful symbolism on to the geography of our own, he can make the journey through the barrier in body as well as soul" (Blacker 1992: 22). Ascetics are believed to be chosen by a particular divinity who henceforth becomes the source of the shaman's power and his patron; vocation consists either of being summoned by the deity, or of a personal decision to be an ascetic. We have no evidence for any initiation involving dismemberment, as in Siberia, though ideas of initiatory death and rebirth are evident. Three forms of contact with the spirit world take place: the deity may appear in a supernatural dream; the ascetic may undergo a sudden divine possession; the ascetic may undertake a mantic journey to the otherworld, where his soul is guided by his guardian spirit. The ascetic gives demonstrations of his power, which tend to relate to the shaman's mastery of fire and to the magical flight to heaven.

Trances are of two sorts. The *miko* enters a violent state, shaking her clasped hands, breathing stertorously or roaring, and levitating from a cross-legged position. This all indicates possession by a spirit. The other type of trance, undertaken by the ascetic, is of a deep, comatose type, necessary for the ascetic's soul to make the journey to the other world.

Buddhism, which arrived in the ninth century, affected the practice of shamanism deeply. The figure of the Buddhist ascetic appropriated the active element of Japanese shamanism, isolating the passive mediumistic element for the remaining practitioners, who thus became automata, pronouncing utterances in a mechanical fashion.

Thus over the centuries, the *miko* lost many of the original features of the office, but it seems that originally (the evidence going back to the fourth century AD) she would undergo symptoms of illness such as are commonly found in vocation episodes in Siberian shamanism, marking her out for her shamanic vocation. The powers she acquired would be used in a life set apart from blood pollution, death, sex or childbirth. She was regarded as the bride of the deity who possessed her, and in the process she became a divine figure herself. In the early period, the main sacral function in Japan was performed by a woman with shamanic powers. The *miko* performed in a cordoned-off temenos, *saniwa*. Trance oracles took place at pivotal seasons of the year, at the beginning of the year, at the rice planting and at the rice harvest; the deity would be required to prophesy on the fortunes of the community for the coming year. In addition, the spirits might be invoked on an ad hoc basis whenever any threat loomed over the community.

The Japanese spirit world has some resemblances to Siberian ones, but is fundamentally independent in structure; I give a summary in Chapter 9: essentially, spirits consisted of powerful independent entities, of ancestral ghosts, of discontented ghosts, and of witch animals.

The ideas of the cosmic structure also differed markedly in Japan from the Siberian "norm". Thus the layered cosmos, although existing as a

notion, played no part in shamanic activities. The oldest idea was probably of a horizontal axis: the land of Tokoyo beyond (but somehow also under) the sea was a land of spirits and possibly of the beneficent dead (hence resembling the Sámi Sájva). The medium would summon *kami* and *tama* thence at certain seasons to bestow their life-giving powers: the seasonal fertility aspect of shamanism was one of its most ancient. As the shoreland settlers moved inland, there developed the notion of the sacred mountain, which was regarded as the abode of spirits, including the dead (an idea going back at least to the seventh century). The sacred mountain developed cosmic aspirations with the arrival of Buddhism, being conceived as a world mountain with different cosmic realms about it. The mountains were also sources of life: the guardian divinity of birth, Yamanokami, dwelled here. There was no image of a supporting or sustaining world tree in Japanese cosmography.

5. "Shamanism" in Europe

"Shamanism", not always carefully defined, has been detected in various European traditions. In this chapter I look briefly at what is probably the most promising of such cultures, that of ancient Greece; I also consider the possibilities of some traditions originating among the peoples of the steppe who over many centuries made incursions into Europe; the last section deals with the shamanic nature of European witchcraft.

Greece

Ancient Greece offers one of the best-recorded early collections of material relating to ostensibly shamanic practices within a Western, essentially non-shamanic society. Moreover, the material is untainted by the warped misconstruals wrought by Christianity (which is not, however, to say that other influences affecting the understanding of the material were not present). There are huge differences between ancient Greece and medieval Scandinavia, but both are united in being relatively advanced civilisations confronted by primitive "shamanic" traditions of great spiritual power, alien in their nature, as well, purportedly, as in their origin, while at the same time in many respects being apparently well rooted if not indigenous to each culture. In both societies, this spirituality, perceived as alien (whether or not it actually was in ethnic or geographic terms), was taken up and exploited as a literary motif – notably, in Greece's case, in the form of Euripides's play *The Bacchae* (the earlier trilogy by Aeschylus on Dionysus, consisting of *Semele, Bacchae* and *Pentheus*, has been lost); in Greece, it also formed the basis of various cults, but this is an area for which we have much scarcer evidence in Scandinavia.

The following survey is necessarily selective (the topic deserves a book of its own), even to the point of being potentially misleading in that many central aspects of cults with shamanic features must be left out of consideration as being of little relevance either to genuine shamanism or to Norse practices (as far as we can tell). One such matter relates to cult. Burkert (1985: 278) outlines the development of ancient Greek religious practices into cults focused more on individual fulfilment. He notes that Dionysus is the god of the exceptional, and as the individual gained in independence, the Dionysus cult became a vehicle for the separation of private groups from the polis, so that alongside public Dionysus festivals there developed private Dionysus mysteries. The extent to which an original "shamanism" formed a foundation on which to build a means to personal mystical fulfilment in such mystery cults, fundamental as it is, cannot be pursued in the present context.

West (1983: 146–50) discusses the likely geographical origin of shamanic ideas in Greece.[1] To the north of Greece was the region of Thrace (Θράκη), and further afield, around the northern half of the Black Sea, dwelt the Scyths. Both Thracians and Scyths are acknowledged as being shamanic (though the evidence for Thracian religion is scant in the extreme), and indeed their areas form the southerly and westerly portion of the wide and contiguous area of classic Siberian shamanism (though in historic times, of course, this area has dwindled away from Europe). From these regions various lines of religious influence reached down into Greece at different periods. West discusses two routes: the earlier stretched down from Thrace, the homeland of the singer Orpheus, to Pieria and Olympus, the home of the Muses, who give mantic inspiration to singers, then on to Delphi, the site of a cult of the Muses, and thence to Olympia, linked by its name to the northern Olympus, near where are found the shamanic-sounding legends of dismemberment and resurrection of Pelops and the child slain by Lycaon.

The other, later, route emanates from Thrace, but also from Scythia (there were Greek colonies to the north of the Black Sea, for example at Olbia, in Scythian territory), and stretches down into Ionia and Pontus. It is from this region that almost all the primitive Greek "shamans" (those showing shamanic elements in their beliefs or practices) originate (see also Dodds 1951: 140–1, where source notes are given), such as Aristeas of Proconnesus (who went into the North at the bidding of Apollo, and returned to recount his adventures in verse: his one-eyed Arimaspians and treasure-guarding griffons appear to be genuine creatures of Central Asiatic folklore; his soul, in the form of a bird, could leave his body),[2] Hermotimus of Clazomenae (whose soul travelled far and wide, observing events in different places, while his body lay inanimate at home), Pythagoras of Samos (who claimed to be the Hyperborean – "from beyond the north wind", thus vaguely Siberian – Apollo), and Abaris (who was said to have come from the North flying on an arrow, and to have been so advanced in the art of fasting as not to need food at all; he banished pestilences, predicted earthquakes and taught the worship of the northern god, Hyperborean Apollo). In Ionia in the sixth century BC there developed an ecstatic Bacchic cult which adopted

[1] The first substantial contribution to demonstrate a shamanic element in Greek religion was made in 1935 by Meuli (1975: 817–79), and the tenor of his argument continued to be widely accepted (for example by West 1983: 146). Meuli adduces much useful information to suggest a shamanic background to various Greek writings, but his diffuse arguments need examining more systematically and critically.

[2] Aristeas is discussed in detail in Bolton (1962). He argues (132–41) against the presence of shamanic elements in his tale, but his approach is too literal-minded towards the extant sources, failing to take account both of the likely confusions that underlie the distorted traditions that have been preserved, and of the poetic creativity and license that Aristeas himself undoubtedly exercised in his original poetic composition, the *Arimaspea*, which is no longer extant but which was known to Herodotus. There need not, I think, be any serious objection to accepting that Aristeas did indeed penetrate, at some point in the seventh century BC, quite far into the steppe region above the Black Sea, and learnt of traditions both local to the area and from further north (the Hyperboreans), which he then manipulated in his verse.

Orpheus as its prophet, and this cult flourished also in Olbia, which is probably an indication of the origin of these types of cultic beliefs.

Such were the human adherents of something resembling shamanism; the main divinities involved were, as indicated, Apollo and, in a different way, Dionysus (Bacchus).

DELPHI

West (1983: 147) comments on the religiously focal point of Delphi:

> Delphi was at the centre of the world, as Zeus established by setting two eagles to fly in from the ends of the earth until they met. Earth's Navel was there, presumably marking the place where there was once a physical link with heaven; and there was also direct access from the sanctuary to the great *krater* in the underworld, according to an Orphic poem. This concept of a cosmic centrepoint where sky, earth, and underworld are all connected is important to the Asiatic shamans, who regularly journey there so that they can pass from one world to another and obtain knowledge, conduct souls, etc. The centre is marked by a mountain and a tree or pillar. At the top of the tree, in the highest heaven, sits the supreme deity, who may take the form of an eagle.

It is only natural that divination should take place at this world navel or *omphalos*; it was the responsibility of the Apolline priestess, the Pythia, to communicate in trance, like a shaman, with the god, and to convey oracles to those present. She would sit on a cauldron supported by a tripod; West (ibid. 147) sees this as representing a shamanic-type initiatory boiling, translated from hallucinatory experience into concrete visual terms, but this may be stretching the evidence too far, since cauldrons may suggest other mythic purposes than shamanic initiation.

Dodds (1951: 71) notes that the source of the Pythia's knowledge was *possession* by the god; if this was the case (and it is not clear that the evidence is sufficiently precise or accurate to be certain), she differed from most shamans, who remain in control of the spirits they converse with. This is, however, a moot point: Lewis (1971: 51–6) argues that possession and trance go hand in hand; for example, the Eskimo, Chukchi and Ewenki shamans were "possessed" by the spirits, and the shaman could be in uncontrolled contact with spirits, as at initiation, or controlled, as at the kamlanie. Lewis explicitly criticises Dodds's notion of a form of shamanism involving soul loss as a later development in Greek religion, replacing a supposedly earlier Apolline spirit-inspired oracular mediumship, as untenable, based on a false dichotomy between possession and trance. The chronological critique carries a good deal of weight; nonetheless, it is worth maintaining a typological distinction between mediumistic possession and a more frenzied bacchant mode of operating, even if the one may merge into the other. Dodds (1951: 73) argues that the Pythia's trance was autosuggestively induced, like a medium's trance, and was preceded by a series of ritual acts: bathing, probably in Castalia, and probably drinking from a sacred spring, establishing contact with the deity through his sacred

laurel tree, either by grasping it or fumigating herself with it, or possibly chewing its leaves, and finally seating herself on the tripod, creating a further contact with the god by occupying his ritual seat. This adds the details of the spring and the tree; furthermore, Delphi is of course situated below the mountain Parnasus. It thus forms a geomythical focus of elements commonly associated with the world axis (see Part IV), the link between the cosmic layers that the shaman traverses in his spirit missions to gain the knowledge he seeks. A possibly even closer parallel is found in Norse, however: it is from the lake at the foot of the world tree that three maidens, «margs vitandi», "knowing much", come and lay down people's fates (cf. the Delphic oracles) in *Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩.

The Pythia's activity is Apolline; Dodds (1951: 69) distinguishes between an Apolline mediumship aimed at securing knowledge of the future or hidden present, which was the gift of a select few, and a Dionysiac experience of a collective kind, functioning as a means of mental healing. Such a clear distinction between Apolline and Dionysiac experience is, however, questionable, and smacks more of a later process of rationalisation. Certainly Dionysus is associated with prophecy, as Euripides makes clear: for example, he says of Dionysus μάντις δ' ὁ δαίμων ὅδε, "this divine being is a soothsayer" (*Bacchae* line 298). The social aspects, however, clearly show differences: the Pythia speaks to an apparently passive audience who do not participate in any more active way than being present – though whether this was always the case cannot be said. Dionysus is always associated with followers characterised by the divine frenzy they enter into: the audience as it were itself shamanises. Both these extremes differ from the norm of shamanism, where there is an audience which does not generally itself enter trance, but which participates in various ways, such as providing assistants for the shaman, or responding vocally to the shaman's pronouncements or activities. However, the Pythia corresponds more closely to the Norse *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá*, who proclaims her message, couched, it might be said, in oracular obscurity, to a company of silent humans, as well as to Óðinn as representative of the unspeaking gods (who are addressed in the plural in the second refrain); the audience has an essentially passive role. The exception is where Óðinn pays the seeress with trinkets, and gazes in her eyes, cajoling her into speech – but, important as this is from a dramatic point of view, in narrative terms it forms one small storm in an otherwise calm sea of oracular recitation.[3] The scene is oracular also in that Óðinn has clearly come on a mission with a particular question or questions in mind (implied, but not explicitly formulated within the poem), as did the Greeks visiting Delphi. It is not clear, however, that *Vǫluspá* represents a Norse tradition unaffected by classical models, as the Latin, and perhaps earlier Greek, sibylline oracles ⟨QV⟩ may have been known to the poet.

[3] The poem presents a fictional meeting of a god and *vǫlva*, and its form is predominantly a monologue; the instances of *vǫlur* or *seiðkonur* performing *seiðr* in human settings on the whole support the notion that the poetic fiction corresponds to what the practice among humans was believed to have been – though the human practice is itself almost entirely a fiction in our sources.

DIONYSUS

It was long held, following the arguments of Rohde on the basis of a few statements by Herodotus, the paucity of Homer's testimony, and the myths of resistance to the god, that Dionysus was a late arrival, a foreign god from Thrace. Yet Dionysus has now been attested in Linear B tablets from Pylos, and the shrine of Keos, which shows an unbroken continuity from the fifteenth century BC into historical times, proclaims itself a sanctuary of Dionysus on its earliest inscription. Walter Otto in fact recognised that Dionysus is above all an epiphanic god, *der kommende Gott*, and legends about his arrival from outside are above all metaphors expressing this particular characteristic. It is true, nonetheless, that a *kommende Gott* may be specially subject to outside influences at all points of his existence, and the non-Greek origin of most of the Dionysiac nomenclature indicate this took place at an early date (elements include *-nusos, Semele, Bakkhos, thursos, thriambos, dithurambos*). Parallels both to the names, and to elements in the cult, may be found in the Near East; it is notable that Greek tradition itself associates the god with Asia and with Cybele, the Phrygian Mother Goddess. At a later date, after 660 BC, an increasing influence from the Egyptian Osiris cult may be noted. All these influences, however, do not undermine the fundamental characteristic of Dionysus as an essentially autochthonous deity who is at the same time "other": the emphasis on his foreignness is primarily a construct to emphasise this otherness. (Burkert 1985: 162–3, where references to Rohde and Otto may be found.)

One myth relating the origin of Dionysus with particularly shamanic overtones is summarised thus by West (1983: 140):

> Dionysus is born in Crete to Zeus and Kore. He is guarded by the dancing Kouretes, as Zeus was. This probably lasts for five years. Zeus installs him on his own throne and tells the gods that this is their new king. But the Titans, whitening their faces with gypsum [τίτανος], lure him away with a mirror, apples, a bull-roarer, and other articles. They kill him and cut him into seven pieces, which they first boil, then roast and proceed to eat. But Athena preserves the still living heart and takes it to Zeus in a casket. The gods grieve. Zeus discharges his thunderbolt at the Titans and removes them from the face of the earth. The residual smoke contains a soot from which mankind is created. The remnants of the Titans' feast are given to Apollo, who takes them to Parnassus (that is, to Delphi) and inters them. But from the heart a new Dionysus is made.

This myth probably represents a combination of two initiatory myths, a Cretan and an Ionian; the dancing Kouretes are reduplicated from the Cretan myth of Zeus's birth, for example (ibid. 168; for text, see *Hymn of the Kouretes*). It circulated in Orphic circles (i.e. among mystery cults which regarded Orpheus as their prophet); West (ibid. 6) notes: "There was a sacred myth about the dismemberment and renovation of Dionysus, related in an Orphic poem, which reflects [. . .] a special kind of initiation that the shaman is supposed to undergo. This suggests that Orpheus may have been linked from the start, however tenuously, with religious practices in which elements deriving from a shamanistic culture were present."

West sees two elements in the myth of Dionysus: an initiation ritual, and animal sacrifice. The particular type of initiation involved here may be open to debate. At Delphi the two great deities worshipped there, Dionysus and Apollo, both appear as seasonal gods: Apollo arrived in early spring as if returning from a sojourn abroad (among the Hyperboreans, for example), whilst Dionysus did not go abroad, but was roused up, in November (it would seem), probably originally from death: there was a tomb of Dionysus beside the tripod of Apollo, right in the heart of the sanctuary (ibid. 150). However, West (ibid. 140) rejects the idea that Dionysus was connected with agrarian rituals involving the spring-time destruction of the corn effigy, since the character slain is not resurrected, but rather replaced by the spirit of the new season (the matter is not, however, necessarily quite as straightforward as this, and the connection of Dionysus with the return of agrarian fecundity deserves a deeper consideration). He sees the closest parallel as lying in shamanic initiation, in which the novice is believed to die and be resurrected, often with new body parts (representing his new-found powers). The Titans with their whitened features – if it is anything more than a pun – are clearly spectral, and, as West notes, "correspond to the awful ancestral spirits who come to take the initiand away and kill him in the primitive rituals"; they are ancestral, in that from their remains mankind was shaped, according to the myth cited. Firmicus Maternus records an additional detail, that Zeus made an image of Dionysus out of gypsum and placed the heart in it (ibid. 163). The gypsum surely indicates that Dionysus takes on the power of the gypsum-coated Titans.

West (ibid. 160) believes that while the Titan myth was probably acted out in an initiation around the novice, an animal sacrifice was substituted for the neophyte at the moment of slaughter, and then used to provide a communion meal. The Titans' method of cooking Dionysus was an affront to proper behaviour, since roasting meat which had been boiled was tabu (for example in Orphic rites: Burkert 1985: 302); West's explanation, that the boiling belongs to the mythical scheme deriving from the shamanic initiation, and looks forward to resurrection, while the roasting points to an animal sacrifice, the other part of the initiation rite, may be correct, but is not in fact an explanation of the Titans' procedure: the point must surely be that these deathly characters break sacred tabus (a characteristic of many shamanic activities, often found for example in their sexual practices), and thereby invoke (otherworldly) power, which, we may assume, the shaman is then able to manipulate.

Whilst a shamanic background may be discernible, there are some notable differences. The fundamental one is that the initiate is here a god, not a man as in shamanic systems; this is a characteristic shared by the most shamanic of Norse gods, Óðinn, who undergoes a form of initiation by sacrifice on the world tree, as will be discussed later. Possibly related to this difference from shamanism is the way the "new body-parts" formula appears to have been inverted: it is common for the shamanic initiate to receive, for example, a new heart (thus the Eskimo Aleut shaman receives a new heart and liver at initiation, made of quartz (Hunt 2003: 26)

– comparable, perhaps, with the new white gypsum body of Dionysus), but in the case of Dionysus it is his heart which survives and is placed in a new body. This is perhaps explicable if looked at from a ritual point of view: the placing of a sacrificed animal's heart in a human image would represent the initiate reborn with a new heart (i.e. power), seen as the heart of Dionysus, the first shaman. Also, the ancestral Titans are responsible only for the god's death, not his resurrection, as they should be according to a shamanic pattern; the Titans, in fact, are part of a more complex mythic pattern of rebellion against the gods, which mankind, as their offspring, inherits; this peculiarly Greek concern naturally differs from classic shamanism. These speculations reflect the difficulty of relating a mythic narrative to ritual: the myth may well have provided a model for the ritual and reflected its symbolic values, but deducing the ritual, and the experiences of those undergoing it, from myth is fraught with difficulty.

ORPHEUS

Orpheus was a legendary singer from Thrace, renowned for reclaiming his wife Eurydice back from the underworld, and for continuing to sing after his death from his decapitated head. Dodds (1951: 147) views Orpheus as a type of shaman: he is from Thrace, the worshipper or companion of Apollo, and combines the roles of poet, magician, religious teacher and oracle-giver; he has, through his music, control over animals, like Siberian shamans; he pays a visit to the underworld to retrieve a soul, as is typical for shamans; his magical self lives in as a singing head, giving oracles, as is found in the North (Dodds rather inappropriately brings in Norse and Irish myth at this point, though more remote Siberian parallels could be adduced).

Some of the mystery cults which grew up from the sixth century adopted Orpheus as their prophet, and ascribed various writings to him (West 1983: 5). There is some continuity in these writings, but there was never such a thing as "Orphism" as a discrete religion (ibid. 2).

Ancient writers conflated Orphic and Bacchic rites; for example, in *Hippolytus* (line 953) Euripides has Theseus scornfully excoriate Hippolytus, telling him to posture and advertise his meatless diet, and Ὀρφέα τ' ἄνακτ' ἔχων βάκχευε, "with Orpheus as lord go be a *bakkhos*"; being a *bakkhos* apparently implies initiation, and group ecstasy, but not specifically identification with Bacchus (Dionysus). The sort of asceticism advocated in various Orphic writings (derived in part from Pythagoreanism) cannot originally have had a place in Bacchic rites, where at the least wine must have played a central part. The association between Dionysus and Orpheus is traced in detail by West (1983: 15–20); he concludes that Orpheus was established in "Bacchic" cults over a wide area by the fifth century.

THE *BACCHAE* OF EURIPIDES

The *Bacchae* was written around 408 BC in Macedonia, whither Euripides had retired from Athens (Dodds 1960: xxxix). It was by no means the first

Greek play to deal with Dionysus, but it is the only one to survive (albeit in a slightly corrupt and defective form). It is the greatest literary expression of the human response to this "new god" (τὸν νεωστὶ δαίμονα, line 219). Euripides sums up the overall message in his conclusion: the ways of the gods are unsuspected. Dionysus is bearer of a power that cannot be resisted: Pentheus, along with his mother and her sister, attempts to do so, but this is futile, and brings the god's vengeance crashing down upon them, with the result that Agaue, unaware of her action, kills her own son in a brutal fashion, a death to which Pentheus was led as a lamb to slaughter by the vindictive god. But Euripides's message is surely more disturbing: for Pentheus had good reason for rejecting Dionysus. To accept him without reserve was to accept disorder, the frenzied disarray of the maenad rout – and to do so would be to undermine society and the stable polis. Moreover, this disorder is attractive, indeed seductive: Dionysus's followers are characterised by elation. Mankind has no choice but to acquiesce in the unpredictable incursion of untrammelled and ecstatic indulgence, seen from the outside as moral turpitude, otherwise the order striven for is destroyed utterly.

These are scarcely concerns found in shamanic societies, even if particular elements in Dionysus's make-up have a shamanic origin. Yet Norse literature provides much closer parallels. In the first place, ostensibly shamanic narrative motifs are associated primarily with gods rather than humans (as is practically always the case in Siberia).[4] In Norse tradition recorded in some obscure stanzas of *Vǫluspá*, according to the interpretation adopted here, the "newly arrived gods" – again, a construct to encapsulate the notion of otherness which in fact is indigenous – are the *vanir*.[5] In *Vǫluspá* we see how at first the "established" gods, the *æsir*, debate whether to accept the other class of gods, but decide to fight them (as the old-guard Pentheus does against Dionysus) – in vain: the *vanir* have the power of irrepressible return (like shamans, or like Dionysus), and indeed were the originators of *seiðr*, the Norse practice most akin to shamanism. In the end there is no choice but to accept them, and their fertile rejuvenative powers become essential to the new, united group of gods. Indeed, one of the main practitioners of *seiðr* becomes Óðinn (though not within *Vǫluspá*), the erstwhile leader against the *vanir*. One of the activities of Heiðr, apparently a reflection, a human embodiment, of the *vanr* goddess

[4] This statement needs qualifying, however. For example, Heiðr in *Vǫluspá* may be seen as a "clone" of Freyja, representing the ecstatic in human form, and Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 (112) is presented essentially as a human shaman. Yet both instances present us with gods masquerading as humans, a description equally applicable to Dionysus. (It should be noted, however, that the identity of Heiðr is open to debate; Hermann Pálsson (1994: 60, 1996: 17) and McKinnell (2001) suggest she may rather be identical with the *vǫlva* who narrates the poem.)

[5] Viewed so to speak "objectively", it was probably the *æsir* that were newcomers, reflected in traditions of their coming into Scandinavia from the south (for example, Snorri, *Prologus* ch. 4–5); but the poem appears to be told from the *æsir*'s perspective, and to them the *vanir* were the new arrivals, seeking a part in their monopoly of divinity; as the lone Dionysus appears in the realm of Pentheus and overthrows it, so too does Gullveig, then Heiðr, appear among the *æsir*.

Freyja, was to wander around houses and gain the trust of women, and this activity threatened to undermine the worship due to the *æsir*, who indeed are enraged at it, and vainly attempt to destroy her; the similarity with Dionysus, wandering into Pentheus's kingdom and subverting the female populace to his following, is clear. Óðinn too appears as a wanderer. His intentions are not presented as being to reveal his divinity as such, but *Grímnismál* recounts what happened on one of his journeys among men: he was believed to be a witch, and was imprisoned between two fires by the king, an act which spurred the god on to reveal his divine knowledge – just as Dionysus comes wandering ἵν' εἴην ἐμφανὴς δαίμων βροτοῖς, "to reveal myself a god to men" (line 20) – and to destroy the king who had opposed him.

Further features are reminiscent of Óðinn: it is said in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 ⟨112⟩ that although he practised *seiðr*, such great *ergi* ⟨ǫv⟩ accompanied it that it was taught to priestesses to carry out; *ergi* implies effeminacy and possibly homosexual subservience, both of which are found associated with Dionysus: his effeminacy is mentioned constantly – he is described, for example, quite simply as τὸν θηλύμορφον ξένον, "the girlish stranger" (line 353); initiation in the rites of Dionysus apparently involved suffering a homosexual act (Burkert 1985: 292). One little-noticed passage (lines 303–4) ascribes to Dionysus a power normally associated with Pan, of causing panic in an army; with this may be compared the Norse *herfjǫturr*, "army-fetter", which seized troops with a sort of paralysis (*AR* §230; a notable example occurs in *Harðar saga* ch. 36, where it appears to be the result of actions by trolls, i.e. sorcery; see also Price 2002: 354–8);[6] given that one of the *valkyrjur* – the «nǫnnor Herians», "ladies of War Lord [Óðinn]" (*Vǫluspá* 30) – was named Herfjǫtur (*Grímnismál* 36), an Óðinnic association is likely. Finally, the sacrifice of Pentheus has an uncanny resemblance to that of King Víkarr in *Gautreks saga* ch. 7 ⟨47⟩, who was lured in good spirits into a mock Óðinnic sacrifice from a tree, only to find it turn into a real sacrifice; Pentheus is quite unaware of what is happening to him as he is raised into the tree, bent down by the god's supernatural power just as the weak instruments of Víkarr's mock sacrifice are suddenly strengthened into real tools of death; Pentheus is immediately spotted in the tree and dismembered by the maenads.

In contrast to the war-god Óðinn, Dionysus appears primarily as an epitome of *luxuria*, whereas Óðinn is Yggr, "the terrifying", yet the Greek god is, under the surface, as terrifying as the Norse ever is, as the action of the *Bacchae* shows. Whilst Dionysus and Óðinn differ markedly in many respects, they are united by madness, frenzy. It was no doubt his ancient *furor*, encapsulated in his name, "master of frenzied inspiration" (*óðr*,

[6] The *herfjǫturr* is discussed in the Íslenzk fornrit edition of *Harðar saga*, p. 87, where two other examples are cited, both in *Sturlunga saga* (I, 445, and II, 288); these are both in reported speech, and they refer to remarks made in 1239 and 1244. By this time, *herfjǫturr* seems to be no more than a figure of speech, and the same is most likely true in *Harðar saga*, which is probably from the later thirteenth century.

cognate with Latin *vates*, "seer, poet"),[7] that led to Óðinn's absorbing many other aspects of frenzy, especially prophetic ones, such as (it would seem) the practice of *seiðr*. The word in Greek which particularly characterises Dionysus is μανία, "frenzy/madness", itself related to μένος, "ardour, spirit", and signifying an intensified mental power (Burkert 1985: 162). Inspired poetry is a product of such mental power, and Óðinn becomes its guardian, retrieving the mead of poetry for the gods, just as Dionysus became the overseeing deity of the theatrical festival which has left us some of our greatest plays.

Both gods are similar too in their initiatory experience, Dionysus at the hands of the Titans, and Óðinn at his own hands (apparently, but see Chapter 16, where I suggest giants, the equivalent of Titans, may be involved), hanging on the world tree. Dronke (*PE* II, 126) has suggested, on the analogy of Indian analogues where the sacrificial post stands for the sacrificer, that Óðinn is not only the sacrificer of himself to himself (stated explicitly in *Hávamál* 138 ⟨48c⟩), but is identified with the world tree Yggdrasill ⟨QV⟩, "the Óðinn steed", on which the sacrifice is assumed to have taken place.[8] With respect to Dionysus, Burkert (1985: 162) points out the uniqueness in Greek religion of the identification of the votary, *bakkhos*, with his god, Bacchus; in addition, Dionysus is identified by Teiresias with the libation poured out to him in *Bacchae*, lines 284–5:

> οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς
> ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τἀγάθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν
>
> He, being god, is poured out to the gods,
> so that to him people owe their blessings.

In discussing this passage, Dodds (1960, comm. *ad loc.*) points to the analogy of the Indian *soma*, envisaged both as a beverage and a god, and regards the idea as probably being of great antiquity. It is not quite the same as the identification of the sacrificial post with the sacrificer, but a similar approach to the unity in essence between the different elements and protagonists of sacrifice appears to be evident in the three great Indo-European traditions, the Indian, the Greek and the Norse; it is not a particularly shamanic emphasis (but see Chapter 16): yet, in the Greek case at least, it is surely the initiatory experience, in which the neophyte re-enacts the prototype of initiation undergone by his god, and hence "becomes" the god, that gave rise to this sacrificial metaphysics. In Norse we cannot say whether Óðinn's initiatory sacrifice was matched in cult, as evidence of religious practice has all but vanished without trace.

[7] The -*n* suffix in *Óðinn* is paralleled in a number of Indo-European divine names, such as Greek *Ouranos*, "Lord of rain", Latin *Neptunus*, "Lord of waters", and indicates mastery over whatever the base word indicates (West 2007: 137).

[8] It is not proposed that the Indian example is any sort of source for the Norse, but that each tradition has built upon a shared Indo-European tradition in similar ways: the inter-identification of the participants in sacrifice is latent in the tradition, and has been explicitly realised in the Indian tradition, and, it is suggested, may also have been realised in the Norse.

This brief look at Euripides's work shows something of how a sophisticated society reacted to the perceived incursion (probably in the main a construct to express notions of otherness, even if some elements were indeed borrowed from other cultures) of a different, revolutionary type of god formed in an essentially shamanic mould, and how some of the themes were developed in a literary form; this development in fact has stronger parallels in Norse than in shamanic societies, and illustrates the often similar (though sometimes radically different) lines followed by the two societies when confronted by a powerful shamanic force derived, perhaps, from less developed societies and certainly characterised as "other". The potential for a closer comparison between Greek and Norse traditions is clearly present, but lies outside the main purpose of this book; such a comparison, like the shorter one which has been undertaken here, would necessarily be primarily typological in nature, mapping out the similarities and differences of treatment of parallel elements, but the possibility of some shared Indo-European heritage of mythic treatment, distinct from what is found in shamanism (for example), cannot be wholly ruled out.

CONCLUSION

We may reasonably draw the inference that there were indeed elements within ancient Greek religion of a broadly shamanic nature, some probably borrowed from distinctly shamanic societies, while others were more rooted in indigenous traditions which sought to express the notion of otherness; we do not, however, find anything that can be described as patently classic shamanism. It is unfortunate that so little survives about the Ionians whose lives were peppered with apparently shamanic activities; the indications are of a more vital contact with actual shamanism (perhaps stemming from the Scyths), whereas the myths of Dionysus and Orpheus represent a more ancient and distant contact and a less systematic influence. Delphi clearly has features comparable to ones found in shamanism, particularly in the cosmology, but the Pythia's activity, whilst no doubt involving trance, was confined to oracular pronouncements, which are only one part of a shaman's role. Similarly, Dionysus and Orpheus wield shamanic powers, without, however, having the panoply of fully fledged shamans.

Some aspects of Greek "shamanism" in fact have closer parallels in Norse than in shamanic records, and the discussion has, I hope, acted as a forewarning against assuming a shamanic background to features which may be better explained in other ways. The Greek evidence, compared with the Norse, suggests a similar approach by relatively developed societies to dealing with the ineluctable lure of the frenzied, mantic "Other" found in, or perceived (possibly incorrectly) as derived from, radically different neighbouring communities.

The peoples of the steppe

The steppe has been the cradle of tribes and confederacies of tribes who have swept down into the lands around, including western Europe, since the earliest times. Historical records enable us to trace such incursions back to about the eighth century BC, but there must have been many others before this. Indeed, the Indo-European languages themselves were almost certainly brought to Europe and India in a series of such incursions several millennia ago. The last example of such warrior hordes descending from the steppe was the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century AD; after this, Russia became a significant power, and the direction of incursion switched around as European Slavs conquered and in due course occupied all of northern Eurasia.

It is probably wrong to consider any of the incursions into Europe as being the undertaking of single tribes; whilst the Western historians used general terms like "Huns", within these groups were various tribes of different ethnicities and languages, who themselves may earlier have been overcome and then joined the horde as allies or subjects of its leading aristocracy.[9]

Most relevant for the present study are those groups of steppe-dwellers who came into closest contact with Germanic peoples; the primary examples are the Alans, the Huns and the Avars. The history of the interactions of these and other nomadic peoples with Germanic cultures and with the Roman Empire is very complex, and it would be of little relevance to rehearse it here; I give merely the briefest of outlines.[10]

At the time of Herodotus, the Scyths formed the main body of steppe-dwellers to impact upon the Greek world. Some of the likely shamanic influences have been mentioned above. The Scyths were succeeded (and overrun) by the Sarmatians, who were also an Iranian-speaking group of tribes. These occupied lands as far as the Danube and pressed upon the Greek and Roman world's borders for many centuries.

The Alans were closely related to the Sarmatians. From around the first to the fourth centuries AD they controlled the tribes of the steppe between the Don in the west and the Aral Sea in the east, and hence the trade routes from the Black Sea to the east; groups of them are mentioned already in

[9] This was acknowledged even in Antiquity: note for example how Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* XXXI.ii.13, records that the Alans were composed of many peoples who had been overrun and absorbed over time; the problem is of course well recognised amongst modern historians of the period; see, for example, the discussion in Pohl (2002: 21–7). For the sake of simplicity in the present argument, these problems are skated over, since the essential point remains that peoples emerged, in something like a constant stream, from steppe regions, whence they brought cultural characteristics typical of the region, which in principle were open to being passed on to those with whom these steppe peoples merged in Europe.

[10] See, for lengthy historical discussions, Maenchen-Helfen (1973) on the Huns, Wolfram (1988) and Heather (1996) on the Goths, Burns (1991) on the Ostrogoths, Bachrach (1973) on the Alans, Alemany (2000) for sources on the Alans, Pohl (2002) on the Avars, László (1970) on Migration Age art and associated myths, Curta (2006) on barbarian incursions into medieval south-eastern Europe; these sources are used as a basis for the following discussion.

Roman sources of the first century, such as Seneca, as living beyond the Danube. They were perhaps the last example of a predominantly Iranian-speaking group of peoples to invade Europe, most significantly in the fourth century AD (many lesser raids had taken place over the preceding few centuries), as a result of Hunnish incursions against them in the east; at least some Alans, subjugated by the Huns around the Don, joined with them in an alliance (Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 19). The Alans, allied with the Huns and sometimes others, moved into Europe in a complex series of migrations.

The Huns, the central core of whom were probably Turkic-speaking, though their hordes included many previously overrun peoples like the Alans (among others), posed one of the greatest threats to the late Roman empire. Their origin, and the racial and linguistic background of the tribes from which they were made up, are uncertain, but by the fifth century AD, having moved *en masse* from regions beyond the Black Sea to the Hungarian Plain, they had come to occupy, rule or at least heavily influence a huge swathe of eastern Europe, from the Baltic in the north down to the Black Sea, and as far west as the Rhine (Heather 1996: ch. 4); most Germanic peoples thus came under their suzerainty (notable is the death of the Gothic king Ermanaric in 376 which led to the Ostrogoths being so subjugated), until the death of Attila in 453, after which Hunnish power rapidly evaporated. Many Goths, and other Germanic peoples, served as forced allies of the Huns for a number of decades; the relationship was ambiguous, but close, as is indicated by the many Gothic names adopted by Huns (including Attila and his brother Bleda), by the Goths' adoption of Hunnish customs such as artificial skull-lengthening, or chieftains' hugging in public (Wolfram 1988: 257). The relationship, both close but full of contempt, is summed up in an aetiological tale of the Goths given by Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum* ch. 24, according to which the witches called Haliurunnae, "dealers in hellish secrets" (probably), were expelled by an early Gothic king, whereupon they begat the Huns upon the evil spirits of the steppe. The Hunnish rule and its overthrow left traces still to be found in the legendary poems recorded in medieval Iceland, such as *Hlǫðskviða* (the "Battle of the Goths and Huns"); it is difficult not to suspect that not only were the events of the poem (and saga based on it) rooted ultimately, if distantly, in the historical interactions between Goths and Huns, but also that some of the story motifs may have come from this contact, notably the sword Tyrfingr, symbol of the Gothic people (the Tervingi of classical sources), which stands as a parallel to the sword discovered and drawn from the earth by a peasant, which symbolised the power of the Hunnish king Attila in one of the few Hunnish stories preserved (Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum* ch. 35; cf. Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 278–80).

The Avars followed a century or so after the Huns; they too were probably predominantly Turkic-speaking (though corroborative evidence for this is almost non-existent: Pohl 2002: 223–5). By the mid-sixth century they had overrun the Ukraine, and proceeded towards the Danube. Their goal was the Carpathian basin, from which in 568 they ousted the Langobards

(who subsequently occupied northern Italy), and absorbed the east Germanic Gepids living in what is now eastern Hungary. Their advance into western Europe was halted by the strong Frankish presence, but their overlordship of the Carpathian area lasted several centuries.

The historical sources contain remarkably little relating to religion or myth, so that ultimately we can do little more than point out the inherent likelihood of the close contact with steppe peoples having resulted in the borrowing of some religious and mythic motifs or practices. A full consideration of the question of possible influences would require a deeper investigation not only of written sources, but also of archaeological evidence, and such art-work as has survived, than lies within the primarily literary and Norse-focused scope of the present work. Yet, even if such an investigation were undertaken, the results are likely to be tentative in the extreme; unfortunately, given the paucity of written source materials and the difficulty in interpreting non-written ones, it is not even possible to demonstrate that the peoples with whom the Goths and other Germanic peoples were in contact were practisers of shamanism, though, given that their predecessors, the Scyths (probably), and their successors in more recent centuries (certainly) both practised forms of shamanism, it is highly likely that Alans, Huns and Avars were all shamanic peoples while they dwelled on the steppe (and, we may assume, preserved these traditions for some time after leaving the steppe).[11]

On the other hand, the movements of peoples are disruptive events, not designed to ensure the preservation of traditions intact; this is compounded by the great mix of races which appear to have composed the steppe hordes. Thus, it is more likely that *elements* of traditions, rather than integral and complex practices such as specific forms of shamanism, would pass among the peoples brought together by these great movements. Nonetheless, not all ethnic contacts were of this disruptive kind. When the Goths settled along the Black Sea littoral from the second century, they absorbed the local population, at least some of which was Iranian-speaking, the successors of the Scyths and Sarmatians. That the Goths may have absorbed more than a little from this substrate, or from their Iranian-speaking neighbours the Alans, is indicated by the occurrence of Iranian

[11] Such a claim could be contested, of course. For example, the Alans are described as having a primitive religion which involved ancestor-worship and prophetic rites (Bachrach 1973: 21–2, 31–2: the information derives from Ammianus Marcellinus and Claudius Marius Victor), but there is nothing that explicitly suggests shamanism – though the paucity of the classical writers' descriptions scarcely precludes its presence. It is striking, and important in terms of possible passing on of steppe traditions, that Victor is describing the customs of Alans living not far from his native Marseille, who had been allies of the Goths for a good three decades without abandoning their pagan beliefs, which they moreover obviously continued within the settled environment of southern Gaul. Any specifically shamanic elements of Avar religion are not mentioned directly, but, as Pohl (2002: 199–205) discusses, it is likely to have resembled that of the Turkic peoples they were in close contact with, which was certainly a form of shamanism (and is briefly described in some early medieval sources such as Menander's *Excerpta de legationibus*, cited by Pohl 2002: 199–200); the Avar depiction from Mokrin, probably of the world tree which is so intimately connected with shamanism (albeit not an absolute proof of its presence), is discussed below.

names among some of their later leaders, such as Safrax (Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 22). We can only surmise that they may also have absorbed some shamanic practices or mythic motifs.

We may look to different sorts of source material to uncover possible influences from the steppe upon Germanic peoples. The vicissitudes of history mean that the tracing of the origin and movement of motifs such as are found within rituals or in mythic and legendary tales becomes at best challenging, and in many cases all but impossible. I would like to consider a couple of examples, to illustrate both the *possibility* of such contacts being the origin of some Scandinavian motifs, and the difficulty of *ascertaining* that they indeed are.[12]

An example which relates both to ritual practice (evidenced in archaeological remains) and to myth (the sacrifice of Óðinn upon the world tree Yggdrasill ⟨QV⟩) is horse sacrifice. This is found within several Indo-European traditions, suggesting that it was an ancient Indo-European inheritance. Yet the matter may not be so straightforward. Görman (1993) proposes that Scandinavian horse sacrifices may be influenced by Hunnish practices: in particular, sacrifices where the head, feet and tail are preserved, found in Denmark and Sweden from the second to sixth centuries, have parallels from much further east (they are found in the Altai and Yenisei regions from the fifth to thirteenth century AD), and the Huns are regarded as likely mediators of this type of offering (as suggested by similar offering sites in Slovakia and Hungary of the third to seventh centuries), along with which religious ideas are also likely to have been communicated – Görman notes in particular how the Altaian shaman acted as psychopomp for a sacrificed horse's soul, taking it up to heaven in a special ceremony (Radloff 1884: II, 20). Those responsible for importing Hunnish practices were probably the new warrior elite, found in Scandinavia from the first century BC up to the late Roman period, who served in the Roman, and later Hunnish, army and imported Roman wares; it is possible that Priscus's statement that Attila ruled the islands in the ocean refers to the Baltic (Görman 1993: 294–5). The archaeological evidence adduced by Görman would appear to support the notion that ideas originating much further east, in classically shamanic areas, may have arrived in Scandinavia during the time of Hunnish supremacy in Europe. However, as our knowledge of the beliefs of the Huns is minimal, we cannot demonstrate that the complex of motifs, ritual

[12] I consider a further, more specific example in Tolley (forthcoming), the tale recounted by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 44–7 of how Þórr visited the giant Útgarða-Loki; this contains elements found both in north Russian tales (as discussed by N. Chadwick 1964) and in Ossetian tales (the Ossetes are the descendants of the Alans), notably the resurrection of Þórr's goats, along with an injury caused by one of the bones being split when the animals were being eaten. I argue that some tale of this type may have been introduced into Europe by the Alans during their early-medieval incursions, but that the Norse tale is more likely to have been developed by Vikings plying the trade routes down to Byzantium, which passed both through north Russia and close by the Alan lands on the Don. If this was the source of the story, it illustrates the possibility of tales from a wide region of eastern Europe reaching Scandinavia during the Viking period; we need not look only to the Norsemen's closest neighbours as sources of influence.

and mythic, relating to the horse in Scandinavian belief corresponded to anything comparable among the Huns – for example, that they had notions of a dynamic relationship between horses and the world tree, such as are found, implicitly, in Norse myth. It is possible that any beliefs relating to horse sacrifice (and world trees) arriving in Scandinavia from the Huns or other steppe-dwellers would have reinforced existing ones inherited from an Indo-European (or some other) background.

The world tree, as will be seen in Chapter 13, is a widespread motif among Eurasian peoples. It is, in all likelihood, a depiction of the world tree that is found scratched into a bone (probably sixth century), found in the Avar cemetery of Mokrin ⟨FIG. 7⟩, discussed by László (1970: 112–17). The hillock (a world mountain) on which the tree rests is divided by seven lines, possibly representing levels of the cosmos (though these may be represented by the nine branches of the tree); the sun is represented by a circle, and on the other side of the tree the moon by a line; various animals are depicted, indicating that the tree was regarded as a source of life, possibly functioning in a similar manner to the Mistress of the Animals, granting hunting prey. The world tree was found in Hungarian folk tales up until recent times, which may be a heritage from Avar times, though the Magyars could also have brought such tales with them from Siberia. It is unlikely that this chance find indicates the Avars were the first to bring tales of the world tree from the steppe; their predecessors from the same approximate area are just as likely to have done so too. In principle, it would be possible for Avar (or Alan, or Hun) notions of the world tree to have made their way to Scandinavia, but if they did, they are unlikely to have done more than reinforce an existing tradition: the Norse concepts of the tree are so complex and developed that they suggest a tradition of very long standing. Parallels found in India, for example, favour the argument that, at least in some of the core details, the tree was an Indo-European heritage.

The situation, with both the horse sacrifice and the world tree, may in fact be more complex than a simple choice between Indo-European heritage and borrowing from the steppe peoples; I give here a straightforward scenario, though others of greater complexity are also possible – the intention is merely to suggest an outline, to be filled in and corroborated, or otherwise, by further research. The predecessors of the Huns on the steppe were Iranian speakers, closely related linguistically to northern Indians, who migrated from the steppe at a much earlier date, but carried with them traditions more at home there, including the concentration upon horses. The ancestors of the Iranians on the steppe were proto-Indo-Europeans: their ancient horse traditions would have been handed down to their successors, the Indians, Iranians and Germanic peoples (among others), but also, in all likelihood, to the linguistically non-related successors on the steppe, who absorbed the early inhabitants into their confederacies. The world tree concept may similarly have been an Indo-European heritage passed down among various peoples; originally, it may have been borrowed from Eurasian peoples to the north of the steppe. Thus both the horse and the tree appear rather as endemic to particular areas, the steppe

and surrounding regions, and those who have lived in this region have been able to adopt a set of beliefs and pass these on to their cultural successors, even when these have moved away to quite different areas. Thus the beliefs and practices of the steppe peoples may be distantly related in a genetic manner to those of the Indo-Europeans.

These few examples have, I hope, illustrated both the viability of the notion that ideas could, by various routes and at different times, have reached the Germanic, and specifically Norse, areas from distant regions where shamanism was practised, and the complexity of determining the nature of such contact.

Witchcraft

The magical practices encountered in Norse sources clearly bear comparison with those found in witchcraft; I present a short discussion of this topic here (again, it calls for a lengthier treatment; I am unaware of any thorough study of Norse magic placing it in a Western European context of witchcraft).

We encounter the same problems with witchcraft as we find with shamanism: great difficulty over agreeing a definition, and even greater problems in securing any reliable information about the actual beliefs and practices of witches from the distorted accounts of their persecutors. A witch may be defined loosely as someone, usually female, who believed she was able to manipulate spiritual powers for the benefit of herself or others. The descriptions of witchcraft – in so far as they may be trusted – in some respects suggest a similarity with shamanism, and the question remains open as to whether we may be justified in viewing both the underlying forms of witchcraft (divorced from the fabrications of the inquisitors) and of shamanism as variants of a common spiritual practice spread across Europe and Asia; this has obvious implications for our classification of Norse practices.

Witchcraft, however, can scarcely be examined outside its role as an antithesis to Christianity, even if its origins did not lie in this antithesis. In the earlier Christian period the Church viewed it as incorrect (even heretical) to accept that witches, or rather their supposed powers, actually existed; probably the most significant shift in the history of witchcraft took place with the issue of the papal bull *Summis desiderantes* in 1484, followed within a couple of years by the publication of the great guide to persecuting witches, the *Malleus maleficarum*. Henceforth, witches were not only accepted as real, but it was regarded as heretical *not* to believe they existed. It was only now that the cohesive image of the sabbat and the satanic rite as part of a widespread sort of anti-Church was formulated, and the great period of the witch trials began. Clearly, this whole process is of little relevance to the study of Norse magical practices, because of both its lateness and its philosophical basis. Nonetheless, certain features of genuine belief held by the witches are sometimes gleaned even in late sources, and

information relating to the earlier of these sources is sometimes relevant, because of its date and the lack of a developed inquisitorial philosophy. Before moving on to these earlier sources, however, it is worth outlining the characteristics of the later forms of witchcraft as a starting point from which to work back.

In 1487 Heinrich Krämer published his *Malleus maleficarum*, "The Hammer of Witches", which crystallised into written form many of the principles of the persecution of witches which had been developing over the previous couple of centuries; some features absent from the work which we now associate with the stereotype of the witch – the familiar spirits, the obscene kiss, the orgies of the sabbat, the devil's mark – were soon supplied by other works, such as Paulus Grillandus's *Tractatus de haereticis et sortilegis* (written around 1525), so that by the early sixteenth century an image of the devil-worshipping society of witches was formed which persisted and was ruthlessly and lethally applied – albeit in a sporadic fashion – for another couple of centuries (Peters 2002: 239).

This image included the following key features (Cohn 2005: 144–5): a pact with the devil, worship of the devil, the performance of evil magic to the harm of people and their possessions, and magic flight to attend gatherings of witches (the sabbat). The witch was usually a woman (but could be a man or child). The devil, usually in the shape of a man but sometimes an animal, would appear to the neophyte witch, most often at a time of distress, and promise money or other things, and often mate with her, and then set his mark upon her. He granted her the power to perform *maleficia* (evil magical acts), and expected her to do so: this would take the form of illnesses or death, sterility, miscarriages, impotence, sickening of cattle, hailstorms to damage crops and so forth. The witch specialised in the killing of small children, whom she ate; infants were endowed with supernatural power, so that for example their flesh was added to the salve to enable the witch to fly. The witch was required to attend the nocturnal sabbat, both the local and the ecumenical (a far larger and less frequent gathering of witches from many quarters), which she did by supernatural and superfast flight upon demonic animals or objects such as sticks, shovels or broomsticks. The sabbat was a point by point parody of the Christian Mass, presided over by the devil, who was adored both physically and spiritually. It concluded in a wild and incestuous orgy. As Cohn (ibid. 147) points out, "In every respect they [witches] represent a collective inversion of Christianity – and an inversion of a kind that could only be achieved by former Christians. [. . .] Witchcraft was regarded as apostasy – and apostasy in its most extreme, most systematic, most highly organized form. Witches were regarded as above all a sect of Devil-worshippers."

There is little here of obvious relevance to the consideration of magical practices in Old Norse records. In particular, the formulation of this image of the witch as a member of an anti-Christian order postdates, even in its inception in the early fourteenth century, most of the materials under consideration here. In large part the image is, moreover, clearly the invention of Christian inquisitors and hence of little value as comparative material

for the folk beliefs underlying Norse religion. However, this invention manipulated and distorted genuine folk beliefs, and earlier sources give us some indication of what these were like.

Many works have been written on witchcraft. Yet in some respects this is a hindrance more than a help. The vast majority deal with witchcraft in the persecution phase, with scant discussion of anything much earlier than about 1300, and moreover deal with it in a socio-historical manner, with little attention paid to the belief systems of the persecuted;[13] these are rarely taken seriously or understood, usually being dismissed or disregarded. This is due in part to the fiasco of Margaret Murray's work on witchcraft in the early twentieth century: she saw witches as an organised pagan "church" worshipping the pre-Christian god Dianus – and she distorted the evidence to prove this. The overthrowing of Murray's authoritative position from (particularly) the 1960s (by, for example, Cohn 2005 [1975]) has had the effect of confirming most historians' proclivity to avoid talking about religious belief; as Ginzburg (1991: 8) puts it: "Today almost all historians of witchcraft concur in considering Murray's book (as had its first critics) amateurish, absurd, bereft of any scientific merit. Yet this polemic, however justified in itself, has had the regrettable effect of implicitly discouraging all research into the symbolic elements of the witches' Sabbath which are alien to the scholarly stereotypes." Even when such an approach is adopted, as by Ginzburg, it is often misunderstood – Ginzburg, for example, had to defend himself against those who misunderstood him as suggesting that an organised group of witchcraft practitioners (as opposed to a widespread and coherent set of beliefs) actually existed (Ginzburg 1991: 10).[14] Nonetheless, some excellent work has been produced which takes the witches' reported beliefs seriously (not as indicating factual truths about sabbat gatherings and the like, but as, for example, reflections of mythological systems), and moreover relates them to earlier and geographically more remote records: Ginzburg is probably the best known of such writers, focusing on western Europe;[15] Éva

[13] A typical position is expressed in their introduction by Kors and Peters (2001: 5): "The problem of European witchcraft demands less the study of magic as pure folklore and the useful, but incomplete, results of anthropology than the study of the intellectual, perceptual, and legal processes by which 'folklore' was transformed into and understood as systematic demonology that required systematic prosecution."

[14] For a more extensive survey of the inadequacies of some of the main scholarly works on witchcraft from this point of view, see Ginzburg (1991, introduction).

[15] Briggs (1996: 37), whilst conceding that Ginzburg's interpretation is "ingenious", notes that it "has not found much support among other historians". This may be because Ginzburg went further than merely emphasising the importance of taking full account of people's beliefs (however irrational), and attempted to show the kinship between witchcraft and shamanism, seeking, indeed, the origin of the former in the latter. His treatment of this overarching topic is indeed disappointingly weak, being characterised by an inadequate awareness of context, and a tendency to see parallels where there is a lack of systematic similarities: his treatment of the tale of Pelops and related legends is an example of this (pp. 136, 250 and surrounding discussion). Nonetheless, Briggs's observation may also to some extent be seen as an indictment of many historians' lack of awareness of the vital role played by the imagination and the legitimacy of studying its manifestation in historical societies, which has left Ginzburg's study as too much of an isolated example of work of this type.

Pócs (especially 1999) takes a comparable approach to mainly Hungarian sources, and recently Emma Wilby (2006) has reassessed British witchcraft accounts from a similar perspective.

Apart from the bias of most writers on witchcraft and their temporal confinement, we also encounter the problem of geographical limitations. The witch-trials were entirely a Western European phenomenon, in other words they took place within the ambit of the Latin church. The Orthodox church did not engage in such organised practices (and folk beliefs have to this day remained richer in these areas as a result). Hence, not only are studies of witchcraft in the main confined to looking at the perverted notions created by the inquisitors rather than the folk beliefs which to some extent underlie them, but they also isolate the beliefs of a particular area, when there is reason to suppose there was more of a continuum in folk beliefs from western into eastern Europe.[16] There are, of course, studies of the folk beliefs of eastern Europe, but outlining the proposed continuum in folk belief across Europe would require a lengthy study in itself. Such a study would be a valuable tool for determining the extent of commonality between the beliefs of western and eastern Europe, and on into Siberia, and hence it would do much to illuminate the extent to which the antecedents of witchcraft share features with Siberian shamanism.[17]

Let us return to the image of the witch. One of the strengths of Cohn's study of witchcraft (2005) is his demonstration of how antique stereotypes such as that of the socially isolated group adhering to alien beliefs and indulging in repugnant practices such as cannibalism, originally applied by Romans to early Christians (among others), came to form part of the image of the witch, how ritual magic, an essentially intellectual rather than a folk activity, added to this picture, and how witches must be viewed overall as an (invented) sect of apostates (i.e. they have specifically rejected Christianity, rather than just being non-Christian) – actual heretical groups such as the Waldenses were defamed with the same brush, which painted but one picture of apostates of whatever ilk. The antique stereotype included the notions of cannibalistic feasts and ritual murder taking place within a conspiratorial organisation (ibid. 7). Ritual magic was believed to be used for fortune-telling, discovering hidden treasure, tracking down a thief, and similar matters (ibid. 116). When we are able to glimpse what ordinary folk, as opposed to theologically informed inquisitors, considered the particular activity of the witch, it is clear that it consisted primarily or solely of *maleficia*: for example, between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries in Lucerne there were 130

[16] Pócs (1999) to some extent deals with shamanic features in Hungarian and neighbouring witch beliefs, but does not aim to elucidate precisely how shamanic the witchcraft of the area was; in fact, many of the features considered can scarcely be regarded as particularly shamanic, which indicates that an investigation of the shamanic character of European witchcraft is bound to be a complex matter.

[17] Note, for example, the use made by Ginzburg (1992) of Croatian, Hungarian and Romanian beliefs in his analysis of the *benandanti* of Friuli. As noted, however, Ginzburg's wider attempt (1991) along these comparative lines is unsatisfactorily vague and superficial, and has not achieved an open welcome among scholars.

accusations by villagers against 32 witches, not one of which mentions the devil, but all of which mention the performance of *maleficia* (ibid. 218); as Cohn (ibid. 229) notes, "For the peasantry, until its outlook was transformed by new doctrines percolating from above, witches were above all people who harmed their neighbours by occult means; and they were almost always women."

We may now turn to the earlier sources (before the witch craze had really got under way), some of whose features are set out in the following sections under headings. Sources relating to the Germanic (including Frankish) area are used whenever possible.

THE FEMALE BIAS

Under certain circumstances the majority of people persecuted as witches were men: this is noticeable in the early trials in France, for example. But this only occurs, argues Cohn (ibid. 202), where there is a clear attempt to undermine the power of certain groups – the clergy, the landowners and so forth. As soon as the focus shifts to persecuting the peasantry, the majority of victims are women. Most mentions of magic in Anglo-Saxon sources concern women, for example (note the sources cited by Crawford 1963). It is clear that, for whatever reason, women were regarded as being particularly prone to engage in witchcraft; we may glimpse a similar attitude (though put more positively) even in Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 8: «inesse quin etiam sanctum aliquid et providum putant, nec aut consilia earum aspernantur aut responsa neglegunt», "they believe there is something sacred and foresightful in them [women], nor do they spurn their advice or ignore their answers".

MALEFICIA AND DIVINATION

Passing references to the activities engaged in by witches give something of a picture of how they were regarded: soothsaying and carrying out evil magical actions were their chief activities. Just a few examples are given here.

Around 800, the diocesan statutes of Gerbald, bishop of Liège, mention those who observe months and seasons, interpret dreams, wear phylacteries with strange words on, women who give out potions to other women (to kill the fetus) and other divinations so that husbands have more love for them (Peters 2002: 198). From England, a late-tenth-century canon condemns anyone who «piccige ymb æniges mannes lufe. ⁊ him on æte sylle. oþþe on drince. oþþe on æniges cynnes gealdorcræftum. þæt hyra lufu forþon þe mare beon scyle», "practises witchcraft concerning the love of any man, or gives him in food or drink or in enchantments of any kind anything whereby their love may be the greater". Also attacked is divination «on sunnan. ⁊ on monan. ⁊ on steorrena ryne», "on the sun and the moon and the course of the stars" (Crawford 1963: 111).

Divination clearly took different forms. Burchard of Worms, in his *Corrector, sive medicus* (the nineteenth book of his *Decreta*, *c.* 1021), asks (PL 140, 974):

> Fecisti quod quaedam mulieres facere solent, diabolicis adimpletae disciplinis? Quae observant vestigia et indagines Christianorum et tollunt de eorum vestigio cespitem et illum observant et inde sperant sanitatem aut vitam eorum auferre?

> Have you done what certain women are accustomed to do, filled with devilish learning? They observe the footprints and tracks of Christians and lift from their footprint a sod and look at it and hope to infer from it their health or life?

Ælfric, in "On auguries", connects witchcraft with pagan worship: he says that witch women teach the worship of stones, trees and wells, and are possessed of occult knowledge, brew love philtres and interpret dreams.

The earliest account of a witch-hunt in England, from a late-tenth-century charter, also provides an early instance of the maleficious moppet (Crawford 1963: 113):

> ⁊ þæt land æt Ægelespyrðe headde an pydupe ⁊ hire sune ær forpyrt forþanþe hi drifon iserne stacan on Ælsie Pulfstanes feder ⁊ þæt perþ æreafe ⁊ man teh þæt morþ forþ of hire inclifan. þa nam man þæt wif ⁊ adrencte hi æt lundene brigce ⁊ hire sune ætberst ⁊ perð utlah ⁊ þæt land eode þam kynge to handa ⁊ se kyng hit forgeaf þa Ælfsige ⁊ Pulstan.

> And a widow and her son had previously forfeited the land at Ailsworth because they drove iron stakes into Ælsie, Wulfstan's father, and that was discovered and the deadly image was taken from her closet. Then the woman was taken and drowned at London bridge and her son broke loose and became outlawed and the land went into the king's hands and the king then gave it to Ælsie and Wulfstan.

Two powers are mentioned frequently (and often in the same breath): the ability to conjure storms, and to alter men's minds. In 829 the Council of Paris mentions that there are people who through *maleficia* can trouble the air, bring down showers of hail, predict things to come, and steal the fruits and milk of some folk and bestow it on others (Peters 2002: 199). In *c.* 830, Halitgar of Cambrai mentions the conjurors of storms, soothsayers, the making of vows beside trees or springs, and wizards who take away men's minds by invoking demons (Kors and Peters 2001: 56). Burchard of Worms asks (PL 140, 961),

> Credidisti unquam vel particeps fuisti illius perfidiae, ut incantatores, et qui se dicunt tempestatum immissores esse, possent per incantationem daemonum aut tempestates commovere aut mentes hominum mutare?

> Have you ever believed or been party to that perfidy, that singers of incantations and those who claim to be senders of storms can through the incantation of demons either stir up storms or alter the minds of men?

and more fully (ibid.),

Credidisti aut particeps fuisti illius incredulitatis, ut aliqua femina sit quae per quaedam maleficia et incantationes mentes hominum permutare possit, id est aut de odio in amorem aut de amore in odium, aut bona hominum fascinationibus suis aut damnare aut surripere possit?

Have you ever believed or been party to that unbelievable notion, that there is some woman who through *maleficia* and incantations can alter the minds of men, from hatred to love or from love to hatred, or can damage or snatch away people's goods by their spells?

CONSUMPTION AND RESURRECTION

One of our most ancient sources for Germanic beliefs, the *Pactus legis Salicae* from the sixth century, indicates that the *striga* (witch) is a cannibal, who, it seems, would gather round a cauldron with her fellows (§64.1, p. 230):

Si quis alterum herburgium clamauerit, hoc est strioportium, aut illum, qui inium portare dicitur, ubi strias coccinant, et non potuerit adprobare, mallobergo humnisfith hoc est, MMD denarios qui faciunt solidos LXII semis culpabilis iudicetur.

If anyone has called another a witch-helper, that is a porter for witches, or the one who is said to carry the cauldron where they cook witches, and has not been able to prove it, let him be judged guilty to the tune of 2500 denarii, making 62½ solidi, called in the vernacular *humnisfith*, "reparation payment".

Edict 376 of Rothar in the *Leges Langobardorum* also shows that people believed a witch could consume a person from within:

Nullus presumat haldiam[18] alienam aut ancillam quasi strigam, quem dicunt mascam, occidere; quod christianis mentibus nullatenus credendum est, nec possibile ut mulier hominem vivum intrinsecus possit comedere.

Let no one take it on himself to kill another's maidservant or girl as a witch, which they call a *masca*, since for Christian minds it is by no means credible or possible that a woman should be able to consume a person from within.

The Capitulary of Paderborn from 785, directed against Saxon practices, indicates that witches (both men and women) eat people, and for that are burnt or eaten by others (*Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* §6, pp. 68–9; cf. Peters 2002: 198):

Si quis a diabulo deceptus crediderit secundum morem paganorum, virum aliquem aut feminam strigam esse et homines commedere, et propter hoc ipsam incenderit vel carnem eius ad commedendum dederit vel ipsam commederit, capitali sententiae punietur.

If anyone, deceived by the devil, has believed according to the manner of the pagans that some man or woman is a witch and consumes people, and

[18] A *haldius* (fem. *haldia*), clearly derived from the Germanic word for "hold", was a native of the land (before the Germanic incursion), now living in servitude.

because of this has burned her or has given over her flesh to be consumed or has consumed it himself, let him suffer capital punishment.

Somewhat later, John of Salisbury in the *Policraticus* II.17, *c.* 1154, reports that some are infected with an evil spirit which leads them to believe that what they suffer in spirit is actually taking place physically, as exemplified by the belief held by some in night gatherings where cannibalism of infants took place:

> Quale est quod nocticulam quandam uel Herodiadem uel praesidem noctis dominam concilia et conuentus de nocte asserunt conuocare, uaria celebrari conuiuia, ministeriorum species diuersis occupationibus exerceri, et nunc istos ad penam trahi pro meritis nunc illos ad gloriam sullimari. Praeterea infantes exponi lamiis et nunc frustratim discerptos edaci ingluuie in uentrem traiectos congeri, nunc praesidentis miseratione reiectos in cunas reponi.
>
> Hence it is that they assert that a night-dweller, either Herodias or the mistress of the night, calls gatherings and meetings by night, that varied feasts are celebrated, that the semblances of jobs with a range of responsibilities are practised, and at one moment some are dragged off to punishment as they deserve, while at another others are exalted to glory. Moreover, they assert that infants are exposed to the witches, and, after being torn into pieces and cast down a gluttonous maw into the stomach, they are gathered together and, cast up again at the mercy of the mistress, they are replaced in their cradles.[19]

Ginzburg (1991: 128 ff.) compares motifs like this with the Mistress of the Animals, a supernatural being who guards the game animals, allowing some to be caught (often only after due propitiation), and resuscitating those that are killed. But really we have no evidence to associate the theme with the Mistress of the Animals – who is, after all, characteristic of hunting, and not agrarian, societies (other than as a traditional relic, as in the case of Artemis, or as a borrowing, and whose role is quite different from anything in these cannibalistic tales.

THE SPIRIT MATE

One of the earliest clear references in medieval sources to a spirit mate is found in Hincmar of Reims (806–82), *De divortio Lotharii regis et Tetbergae reginae*, interrogatio 15 (PL 125, 725); commenting on how the priests of his time were encountering a burgeoning problem with possessions by spirits, he singles out one type of possession:

> Et maxime quando, vel viris in specie feminea, vel in virili habitu feminis apparentes, quos daemones Galli Dusios vocant, infando miraculo spiritus incorporei corporis humani concubitum petere se ac patrare confingunt.

[19] Replacing them in the cradle is to be taken as meaning that they look, outwardly at least, as if nothing has happened to them (it is not that they have died while asleep); cf. other notices of night cannibalism, such as that of Burchard of Worms cited below, in which women feast on people but then restore them to life in the morning.

> And especially when, appearing either to men in female form or in male shape to women, bodiless spirits – demons which the Gauls call *Dusii* – by an unspeakable miracle set out to seek intercourse with a human body and to achieve it.

Yet Hincmar here is merely paraphrasing Augustine, who first mentioned these lascivious Gallic spirits some four centuries earlier in *De civitate Dei* xv.23.

From Anglo-Saxon England we have a charm against «ælfcynne ⁊ nihtgengan ⁊ þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð», "the elvish race and nightwalkers and people who lie with the devil" (*Leechbook* III.61 in Cockayne 1864: II, 344).

Burchard of Worms records a slightly different belief (PL 140, 971):

> Credidisti quod quidam credere solent, quod sint agrestes feminae, quas sylvaticas vocant, quas dicunt esse corporeas et quando voluerint ostendant se suis amatoribus et cum eis dicunt se oblectasse et item quando voluerint abscondant se et evanescant?

> Have you believed what some are accustomed to believe, that there are rustic women whom they call "sylvatics", whom they say have bodies and when they wish they reveal themselves to their lovers, and they say that they have lain with them, and likewise when they wish they remove themselves and vanish?

All these texts at least give the semblance of portraying this type of belief as well-rooted in folk tradition, and we are even given the name of the spirits concerned, the Dusii, among the "Gauls", and the *ælfe*, "elves", among the English. Literary tradition has played its part, but may merely have been used to lend *auctoritas* to what was indeed a general and continuing folk belief.

FAMILIARS

The familiar is the animal helping spirit of the witch. Instances are not clearly recorded in the earliest sources, though it is likely that the belief is, again, rooted in folk tradition rather than being an invention of the inquisitors. Familiars are particularly a feature of British witchcraft; the jackdaw which informs the prophetess, the "witch of Berkeley", of her death in William of Malmesbury's tale in *Gesta regum Anglorum* II.204 may be seen as an early example of a familiar, in particular given the emphasis upon the closeness of the relationship between the woman and the bird, though the evidence is not indisputable (Kors and Peters 2001: 71), and may simply relate to the motif of birds of raven-type being prophetic:

> Mulier in Berkeleia mansitabat malefitiis, ut post patuit, [non] insueta, auguriorum ueterum non inscia [...] Haec cum quadam die conuiuaretur, cornicula quam in delitiis habebat uocalius solito nescio quid cornicata est. Quo audito, dominae cultellus de manu excidit, simul et uultus expalluit; et, producto gemitu, "Hodie" ait, "ad ultimum sulcum meum peruenit aratrum. Hodie audiam et accipiam grande incommodum."

> A woman resided in Berkeley, given to witchcraft, as it afterwards emerged, and not unfamiliar with ancient soothsayings [...] When one day she was partaking of a meal, a jackdaw which she fawned upon cawed something closer to words than usual. Hearing this, the mistress dropped her knife from her hand, and her countenance grew pale; and groaning she said: "Today my plough has turned its last furrow; today I will hear and receive a great disaster."

One of the uses of helping animal spirits is as steeds (in particular to ride to the sabbat); the canon "Sortilegam" mentions this (see below), as do subsequent accounts: for example Stephen of Bourbon (†1261) says good women ride on sticks, the evil *strigae* on wolves (Lea 1957: 174). The image of the witch's familiar only becomes unambiguous, however, in much later sources, particularly British ones from the late sixteenth century on: an example is afforded by the title of a publication from this time: *The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches, Arreigned and by Iustice condemned and executed at Chelmes-forde, in the Countye of Essex, the 5. day of Iulye, last past. 1589. With the manner of their diuelish practices and keeping of their spirits, whose fourmes are heerein truelye proportioned,* which is accompanied by a graphic illustration not only of the three hanged witches, but also of their misshapen familiars circling below their bodies.

FLIGHT

Burchard of Worms gives a clear picture of the witches' flight; there are numerous descriptions thereafter (PL 140, 973):

> Credidisti quod quaedam mulieres credere solent, ut tu cum aliis diaboli membris item in quietae noctis silentio clausis januis in aerem usque ad nubes subleveris et ibi cum aliis pugnes, et ut vulneres alias et tu vulnera ab eis accipias?

> Have you believed what certain women are accustomed to believe, that along with other members of the devil, in the silence of the quiet night, with the doors locked, you are lifted up into the air as far as the clouds and you fight there with others, and that you injure others and receive injuries from them?

This notion of aerial contests is found in Norse in *Hávamál* 155 ⟨72⟩, where Óðinn claims the power to make witches (*túnriður* ⟨QV⟩) go astray (*villar*) when he sees them up in the air "playing" (*leika*, but the connotation is probably one of ecstasy ⟨LEIKINN⟩). As *túnriða* is probably borrowed from German, the parallel of fighting in the air found in Burchard suggests the whole motif may be of German origin.

In the following, Burchard associates the flight with cannibalism and resurrection (PL 140, 973):

> Credidisti quod multae mulieres retro Satanam conversae credunt et affirmant verum esse, ut credas in quietae noctis silentio, cum te collocaveris in lecto tuo et marito tuo in sinu tuo jacente, te dum corporea sis januis clausis exire posse et terrarum spatia cum aliis simili errore deceptis pertransire

valere et homines baptizatos et Christi sanguine redemptos sine armis visibilibus et interficere et decoctis carnibus eorum vos comedere et in loco cordis eorum stramen aut lignum aut aliquod hujusmodi ponere, et comestis iterum vivos facere et inducias vivendi dare?

Have you believed what many women who have turned back to Satan believe and affirm to be the truth, that you believe that in the silence of the quiet night, when you have lain down in your bed with your husband lying in your arms, although you have a body you can exit through locked doors and have the power to cross stretches of country along with others similarly deceived, and that, without visible weapons, you kill people baptised and redeemed in the blood of Christ, and that you feast together on their cooked flesh and in place of their heart you place straw or wood or something of this sort, and that you make the consumed people live again and grant them a respite in which to live?

It is to be noted that, whilst the flight may take place in company, it is not directed to attending anything like the sabbat of later accounts.

THE NOCTURNAL GATHERING AND THE FEMALE DEITY

Clearly, as the devil, the leader of the sabbat is an imposition of the Christian inquisitors. But he is not their sheer invention. The canon "Sortilegam" (commonly known as the *Canon Episcopi*), from around 906, notes:

Illud etiam non est omittendum, quod quedam sceleratae mulieres retro post sathanam conuersae, demonum illusionibus et fantasmatibus seductae, credunt se et profitentur, cum Diana nocturnis horis dea paganorum, uel cum Herodiade, et innumera multitudine mulierum equitare super quasdam bestias, et multa terrarum spacia intempestae noctis silentio pertransire, eiusque iussionibus obedire uelut dominae, et certis noctibus euocari ad eius seruicium.

It is also not to be omitted that some wicked women, who have given themselves back to Satan and been seduced by the illusions and phantasms of demons, believe and profess that, in the hours of night, they ride upon certain beasts with Diana, the goddess of pagans, or with Herodias, and an innumerable multitude of women, and in the silence of the night traverse great spaces of earth, and obey her commands as of their lady, and are summoned to her service on certain nights.

This is quite a different practice (or belief) from, and has nothing to do with, the performance of *maleficia*, but it suited the later inquisitors to incorporate elements of this belief into their picture of the witches' sabbat.[20]

[20] It is also to be distinguished from the motif of the accidental incursion into the nocturnal parties of the dead, such as are cited by Lea (1957: 170–8). A good, and rather early, example of this is the account by William of Newburgh, writing *c.* 1200, of an event which supposedly took place a good many years earlier in the East Riding of Yorkshire, given in his *Historia rerum Anglicarum* I.28: «In provincia quoque Deirorum, haud procul a loco nativitatis meae, res mirabilis contigit, quam a puero cognovi. [...] Ex hoc vico rusticus quidam ad salutandum amicum in proximo vico commorantem profectus, multa jam nocte minus sobrius remeabat. Et ecce, de proximo tumulo quem saepius vidi, et duobus vel tribus stadiis a vico abest, voces cantantium, et quasi festive convivantium audivit. Mira-

"Diana" is an *interpretatio Romana* of various local deities – for such beliefs appear to have been widespread (Cohn 2005: 169–72). When we turn to Burchard of Worms, we find a similar scene, but instead of "Diana" there is mentioned *holda* (PL 140, 962):

> Credidisti ut aliqua femina sit quae hoc facere possit quod quaedam a diabolo deceptae se affirmant necessario et ex praecepto facere debere, id est cum daemonum turba in similitudinem mulierum transformata, quam vulgaris stultitia holdam vocant, certis noctibus equitare debere super quasdam bestias et in eorum se consortio annumeratam esse?
>
> Have you believed that there is any woman who can do that which some, deceived by the devil, affirm that they must do of necessity or at his command, that is, with a throng of demons transformed into the likeness of women, which vulgar stupidity calls *holda*, must ride on certain nights upon beasts and be numbered with their company?

Now Holda, or Hulda, is a well-known figure of German folklore, who is found mainly in central Germany; in southern Germany her equivalent was known as Perhta (see Bächtold-Stäubli 1987, *s.v.* "Perhta", for a fairly detailed account of both; also Motz 1984*a*, Heizmann 2002: 216 n. 70). She is very clearly a guardian of fecundity, and service to her can originally have had no other purpose than participation in this guardianship. The rather odd syntax of Burchard may be explained by the fact that Holda led a host of spirits, called *holden* (cf. the Norwegian *huldrer*), which were

tus quinam in loco illo solemnibus gaudiis intempestae noctis silentium rumperent, hoc ipsum curiosius inspicere voluit, vidensque in latere tumuli januam patentem, accessit et introspexit, viditque domum amplam, et luminosam, plenamque discumbentibus, tam viris quam faeminis, tanquam ad solemnes epulas. Unus autem ministrantium aspiciens stantem ad ostium, obtulit ei poculum. Quo ille accepto consulte noluit bibere, sed effuso contento et continente retente concitus abiit; factoque tumultu in convivio pro sublatione vasculi, et persequentibus eum convivis, pernicitate jumenti quo vehebatur evasit, et in vicum cum insigni se praeda recepit. Denique hoc vasculum materiae incognitae, coloris insoliti, et formae inusitatae, Henrico seniori Anglorum regi pro magno munere oblatum est.» "In the province of Deira, not far from the place of my birth [Bridlington], a remarkable event took place, which I have known since boyhood. [...] From this village a peasant set out to visit his friend who was staying in the next village, and late at night he made his way back, rather less sober. And behold, he heard the voices of people singing and apparently holding a great feast, coming from the nearby burial mound, which I have often seen, some two or three furlongs from the village. He was puzzled at who could be disturbing the silence of the late hours of the night in such a place with festal partying, and wished to look into the matter in more detail. Seeing an open door on the side of the mound, he went up and looked in, and saw a spacious house, well lit, and full of people reclining, both men and women, as if at a grand feast. One of the waiters, seeing him standing at the door, brought him a goblet. He took this, but upon consideration did not wish to drink, and so he poured out the contents, whilst keeping the container, and made a speedy retreat. There was an uproar in the mound at the theft of the vessel, and the revellers followed after him, but through the speed of his mount he got away, and got himself to the village with his splendid booty. Thereafter this vessel, of unknown material and unusual colour and shape, was offered to Henry the elder, the king of England [1100–35], by way of a great gift." This is reminiscent of a motif found in Norse sources: *deyja í fjall*, "to die into the mountain", when a dead person is welcomed into their company by feasters inside a mountain; note the provenance of William's tale – the heavily Norse-settled area of Yorkshire. (William's editor, Hamilton, notes the Scandinavian provenance of the fairy-cup motif; it is also, of course, found in *Beowulf*.)

known even where Holda herself was not, as in northern Germany. This train, however, was often identified with the Wild Hunt, the host of the spirits of the dead, and the names Holda ("Coverer") and Perhta ("Protector") point to an original connection with the dead (cf. Hel, "Covering"; Bächtold-Stäubli 1987, *s.v.* "Perhta"); Perhta is also said to be queen of dwarfs (themselves associated with the dead), and Holda's followers are said to be from the underworld. Conversely, from Holda's sacred spring or pond come children. She is closely connected with the phenomena of nature: for example, when she makes her bed and shakes out the pillows, it snows. She is protectress of animals. Her dwelling is in a spring, pond, mountain, tree or stone; she sits under a tree spinning. She rewards diligence, and punishes laziness. She is particularly associated with the Twelve Days of Christmas, i.e. the deadly depth of winter at the turning point of the year, the season of the Wild Hunt of the dead. The mention of specific nights in the passage of Burchard suggests such a calendrical link, as would be expected of a guardian of the crops. Gobelinus Persona (1358–1421), describing (on the basis of earlier sources) the Saxon pillar idol Irminsul, says in his *Cosmodromius*, ætas VI, cap. xxxiix, p. 235, that Domina Hera, called in the vernacular «vrowe here», flies through the air between Christmas and Epiphany, and the common people believed «illam sibi conferre rerum temporalium abundantiam», "that she was conferring on them an abundance of temporal/seasonal goods".[21]

That Holda or her equivalent was once not merely the object of veneration of women who imagined themselves to fly in her company on certain nights, but in fact the object of a devoted cult, is suggested by the notice in the life of the missionary St Kilian in the seventh century, when he attempted to convert the eastern Franks around Würzburg from the worship of "Diana" (*Acta sanctorum*, July II, p. 616).[22] However, in historical sources or folklore there is no indication of any festivities in honour of Holda (unlike Perhta).

The connection, under Holda, between fertility and the world of the dead is found clearly in the trial of the sorcerer Diel Breull in 1630 in Hesse (Ginzburg 1992: 56):

[21] Many of the characteristics associated with Holda and her spirit retinue are found elsewhere, for example in south-eastern Europe. The following features are taken from Pócs (1989). The witch's connection with the world of the dead is found especially in the Romanian *strigoi*, who is viewed as embodying both the living witch and the demonic power of the dead (28). The fairies (for example the Hungarian *szépasszony*) were protectors of fertility: whilst being seen as a sort of nymph, they also have characteristics of the dead, appearing to people, for example, at the "death season" at the beginning of the year, when they would promote agricultural prosperity; the fertility might also be guaranteed by conducting rites at this time, in which the dead or fairies were impersonated (29). In Romania only a special healer (*descantatore*) could cure fairy illnesses, and he or she would lie unconscious while his or her soul flew and danced with the fairies, learning how to perform magic from them and offer sacrifices (47). Fertility was also in the hands of a female figure who sat in the middle of the world on the *omphalos* stone or at the world tree (31).

[22] The Bollandist *Acta* edition dates the life to the mid-ninth century, though the existing version is not this early (but is earlier than the fourteenth).

> Breull related that eight years back, during a period of profound depression (he had lost his wife and children), he happened once to fall asleep and, upon waking, found himself on the Venusberg. The deity of the place, "Fraw Holt" – the Germanic Holle [=Holda], considered synonymous with Venus – showed him the strangest things reflected in a basin of water: magnificent horses, men feasting or seated in the middle of a fire, and, among them, people he knew who had died long before. They were there, Fraw Holt explained, because of their misdeeds. Diel Breull then realized that he was a member of the nocturnal band, a *nachtfahr* [...] Subsequently, he returned to the Venusberg four times in the course of the year during the Ember Days. That year the harvests were abundant. Here too, then, whoever had the power, after waking from a mysterious lethargy, to travel during the Ember seasons to the world populated by the dead over which Holle-Venus presided, became a guarantor of fertility.

Clearly the night-flight of Holda was one that was conceived as taking place in spirit. Breull's trial indicates a trance state. The same is implied in Johannes Nider's *Praeceptorium divinae legis*, perceptum I, ch. X and XI, a source which again is late (mid-fourteenth century) but local to the Germanic area (Augsburg), which describes those who during the Ember Days (times of transition in the agricultural calendar)[23] claim to have seen, when in trance («in raptu»), the souls in purgatory and other phantasms. Nider compares these hallucinations with the visions of those who claimed to have visited Herodias, identified with Venus, while asleep (Ginzburg 1992: 43). Ginzburg (ibid. 47) records a central European belief that the Ember Days were when the Wild Hunt appeared.

It is likely that the Norse Hulð shared some features with her German namesake, but the traditions do not explicitly overlap greatly in surviving records. Hulð was a malicious *seiðkona*, a seeress associated with the frozen and barren north, who appears in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13–14 ⟨113, 114⟩ (and is mentioned, but not named, in *Ynglingatal* 3 ⟨141*a*⟩), conjuring up a desire in Vanlandi to visit the northern land of his wife Drífa, and then, when this fails, a nightmare that tramples him to death; thereafter, she conjures up ill-luck for Dómaldi, and eternal strife among the Ynglingar. She also seems to have been the subject of a story told to the king and queen of Norway by Sturla Þórðarson in 1263 (*Sturlu þáttr* ch. 2), though Sturla regrettably does not actually relate the story (despite the comments on its great popularity – everyone tried to get in to hear it). Thus tales of Hulð, probably related in some ways to those of Holda, were in circulation by the thirteenth century in Scandinavia, and probably earlier.

THE *BENANDANTI*

The fragmentary early sources give a strikingly different picture of the activities of various practitioners of magic from the satanic and apostatic

[23] The Ember Days are Wednesday, Friday and Saturday after the first Sunday in Lent, the Feast of Pentecost, 14 September and 13 December. Their purpose, in part, is to thank God for the gifts of nature; they are, to some extent, christianisations of agricultural festivals such as were held under the pagan Roman calendar.

antichurch of the inquisitors, even though many of these images clearly derive from this older folk tradition. The picture may be further elaborated by considering a wider selection of sources. One of the best studies of the belief of "witches" is Ginzburg's *Night Battles* (1992), in which he examines the testimonies of a particular group of people known as *benandanti* from the Friuli region of northern Italy, which lay on a triple cultural boundary between Romance, Germanic and Slavic cultures. The accounts are rather late, beginning in 1575 and going on for about half a century, but it is clear that a deep-rooted folk belief is recorded in some detail in the trial records, which accords well with materials such as those presented above.

The chief purpose of the *benandanti* was declared to the inquisitor by Battista Moduco (ibid. 6):

> "I am a *benandante* because I go with the others to fight four times a year, that is during the Ember Days, at night; I go invisibly in spirit and the body remains behind; we go forth in the service of Christ, and the witches of the devil; we fight each other, we with bundles of fennel and they with sorghum stalks. [...] In the fighting that we do, one time we fight over the wheat and all the other grains, another time over the livestock, and at other times over the vineyards. And so, on four occasions we fight over all the fruits of the earth and for those things won by the *benandanti* that year there is abundance."

The fundamental purpose, the defence of the means of livelihood, the well-being of the community, accords with a common purpose of shamanism, such as among the Ewenki, where the shaman sets up a spiritual fence around the clan lands to defend it from incursions by alien shamans, who would cause illness and undermine the welfare of the community ⟨MĀRYLA⟩; contests between shamans were a frequent feature wherever it was found.

Paolo Gasparutto elaborated on the contest of the *benandanti*: "they fought, played, leaped about, and rode various animals, and did different things among themselves; and ... the women beat the men who were there with them with sorghum stalks, while the men had only bunches of fennel" (ibid. 1). This reflects the fact that the *benandanti* who took part in this contest tended to be men, whereas their opponents the witches were women.

A further aim, some *benandanti* claimed, was through their struggles to preserve children from harm from witches. The ability to recognise witches and to counter their sorcery characterised *benandanti* (ibid. 78).

There were female *benandanti*, but usually their role differed somewhat from the men's. Instead of the wild contest with the witches, they attended retinues of the dead, from whom they learnt secrets (male *benandanti* sometimes also joined these processions) (ibid. 38). The dead, however, punished the *benandanti* who penetrated the secret of their nocturnal processions, beating them with sorghum, just like the witches against whom the *benandanti* fought in the agrarian contests; Ginzburg (ibid. 59–60) argues that an originally undifferentiated horde was particularised into witches in the agrarian and the dead in the funereal vision.

The vocation to be a *benandante* began with being born with a caul, which was preserved. Later, a spiritual being would appear to the neophyte in a dream, and this acted as an initiation; Paolo Gasparutto recounted to the inquisitor on 26 September 1580 (ibid. 157–8):

> "Who led you to enter the company of these *benandanti*?"
> "The angel of God."
> "When did this angel appear before you?"
> "At night, in my house, perhaps during the fourth hour of the night, at first sleep."
> "How did it appear?"
> "An angel appeared before me, all made of gold, like those on altars, and he called me, and my spirit went out. [...] He called me by name, saying: 'Paolo, I will send you forth as a *benandante* and you will have to fight for the crops.' I answered him: 'I will go, I am obedient.'" [...]
> "How many times have you seen this angel?"
> "Every time that I went out, because he always came with me."

He gave further details on 3 October (ibid. 162):

> About a year before the angel appeared to me, my mother gave me the caul in which I had been born, saying that she had it baptized with me, and had nine Masses said over it, and had it blessed with certain prayers and scriptural readings; and she told me that I was born a *benandante*, and that when I grew up I would go forth at night, and that I must wear it on my person, and that I would go with the *benandanti* to fight the witches. [...] From the time I received the caul until the angel came to me, nothing was said to me, nor was I taught anything. [...] When that angel, which I believe is the devil,[24] called me, he did not promise me anything, but told me that he would summon me through a *benandante* called Battista of Vicenza, whom he did indeed send.

Initiation thus takes place on a spiritual plane, and is conducted by an "angel"; there is rarely any indication of tutoring by a human, though Ginzburg mentions one instance, where the instruction by an older practitioner took place while walking to a party in a neighbouring village (ibid. 77).

The spirit journeys clearly took place in trance, and there were animal helping spirits to serve as steeds; the soul was also believed to take the form of an animal (ibid. 159, spoken by Maria, Paolo's wife; 150, spoken by the local priest):

> I called to my husband Paolo [in the middle of the night] so that he would get up too, and even though I called him perhaps ten times and shook him, I could not manage to wake him, and he lay face up. So I went off without having him rise from bed, and when I returned I saw that he was awake, saying: "These *benandanti* assert that when their spirit leaves the body it has the appearance of a mouse, and also when it returns, and that if the body should be rolled over while it is without its spirit, it would remain dead, and its spirit could never return to it."

> The above named Paolo said that when they go to these games some may travel on horseback, others on a hare or a cat, on one animal or another.

[24] The inquisitor had so identified the apparition to Paolo

> [...] He told me that when he goes to these games his body stayed in bed and the spirit went forth, and that while he was out if someone approached the bed where the body lay and called to it, it would not answer, nor could he get it to move even if he should try for a hundred years, but if he did not look at it and called it, it would respond at once; and when they err, or speak with someone, their bodies are beaten, and they are found all black and blue, and he has been beaten and mistreated because he spoke with others. He told me that he would be mistreated for fifteen days for having told me these things. [...] He said that for any who wait twenty-four hours before returning, and who might say or do something, the spirit would remain separated from the body, and after it was buried the spirit would wander forever and be called *malandante*. [...] This Paolo told me that these *malandanti* eat children.

There is no evidence that the meetings of *benandanti* took place on anything other than a spiritual dream plane.[25] Nonetheless, the internalised mental landscape and activity may be the last manifestation of an earlier set of concepts, possibly realised through other channels; Ginzburg (ibid. 24) tentatively suggests that the spiritual activities of the *benandanti* may derive from earlier fertility rites realised as a sort of contest in which two groups of youths, impersonating spirits favourable and unfavourable towards the fertility of the fields, struck their loins with stalks of fennel and sorghum to stimulate their own reproductive capacity, and by analogy that of the fields. In time, the rites ceased to be practised, but continued to be realised on the mental plane by the *benandanti*. Such ritual practices are not recorded from Friuli, but many examples are found elsewhere (Ginzburg 1991: 193). Not far from Friuli, in Austria and Bavaria, youths representing ugly and beautiful *perhtas* confronted each other during the carnival – Perhta, it will be remembered, was the (night) goddess of prosperity who had a train of spirit followers (*perhtas*). The passing by of a *perhta*, it was believed in Tyrol, would ensure abundance. Such ritual contests are found along the Alpine arc; they usually take place after the harvest, but a fairly early source, Durich Chiampel, records how in the sixteenth century the *punchiadurs*, masked men of Surselva, jumped in the air and collided violently to secure a good harvest of wheat. Comparable customs are found in more ancient sources: in ancient Rome, at the festival of the Lupercalia (15 February) two bands of youths (the Luperci: the Quinctiales and the Fabiani) raced against each other round the Palatine, striking women of child-bearing age with strips of goat's skin to make them fertile; a connection with the dead is implied in the date: the festival took place in the midst of the nine-day Parentalia (13–21 February) when the dead wandered, eating food prepared for them. (See also Pauly 1964–75, *s.v.* "Lupercal"; Dumézil 1996: 348; Beard, North and Price 1998: II, 120–4, where sources are given in translation.)[26]

[25] The one possible example of a physical meeting adduced by Ginzburg (1992: 133) is unconvincing: it appears rather to have been a get-together aimed at sexually abusing an eight-year-old girl.

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The vocation to be a *benandante* began with being born with a caul, which was preserved. Later, a spiritual being would appear to the neophyte in a dream, and this acted as an initiation; Paolo Gasparutto recounted to the inquisitor on 26 September 1580 (ibid. 157–8):

> "Who led you to enter the company of these *benandanti*?"
> "The angel of God."
> "When did this angel appear before you?"
> "At night, in my house, perhaps during the fourth hour of the night, at first sleep."
> "How did it appear?"
> "An angel appeared before me, all made of gold, like those on altars, and he called me, and my spirit went out. [...] He called me by name, saying: 'Paolo, I will send you forth as a *benandante* and you will have to fight for the crops.' I answered him: 'I will go, I am obedient.'" [...]
> "How many times have you seen this angel?"
> "Every time that I went out, because he always came with me."

He gave further details on 3 October (ibid. 162):

> About a year before the angel appeared to me, my mother gave me the caul in which I had been born, saying that she had it baptized with me, and had nine Masses said over it, and had it blessed with certain prayers and scriptural readings; and she told me that I was born a *benandante*, and that when I grew up I would go forth at night, and that I must wear it on my person, and that I would go with the *benandanti* to fight the witches. [...] From the time I received the caul until the angel came to me, nothing was said to me, nor was I taught anything. [...] When that angel, which I believe is the devil,[24] called me, he did not promise me anything, but told me that he would summon me through a *benandante* called Battista of Vicenza, whom he did indeed send.

Initiation thus takes place on a spiritual plane, and is conducted by an "angel"; there is rarely any indication of tutoring by a human, though Ginzburg mentions one instance, where the instruction by an older practitioner took place while walking to a party in a neighbouring village (ibid. 77).

The spirit journeys clearly took place in trance, and there were animal helping spirits to serve as steeds; the soul was also believed to take the form of an animal (ibid. 159, spoken by Maria, Paolo's wife; 150, spoken by the local priest):

> I called to my husband Paolo [in the middle of the night] so that he would get up too, and even though I called him perhaps ten times and shook him, I could not manage to wake him, and he lay face up. So I went off without having him rise from bed, and when I returned I saw that he was awake, saying: "These *benandanti* assert that when their spirit leaves the body it has the appearance of a mouse, and also when it returns, and that if the body should be rolled over while it is without its spirit, it would remain dead, and its spirit could never return to it."

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There are, to my mind, two particularly important aspects of Ginzburg's achievement. In the first place, he has given us a far fuller picture of one particular set of instances of "witchcraft" than has been done hitherto – and without such thoroughgoing treatments, it becomes impossible to make systematic comparisons with magical practices from elsewhere.

The other significant contribution Ginzburg makes is to illustrate how over the course of half a century the unremitting application of the inquisitors' preconceptions effected a change in the *benandanti*'s own view of their office, so that it came to adhere to these preconceptions. By 1649 the transformation was complete; the *benandanti* are no longer concerned with protection of children and the crops, but with reaping the benefit of spells. The slow but sure manner in which this transformation took place should act as a salutary reminder, when considering systems of belief recorded elsewhere, that a similar process is likely to have happened: in the case of Norse materials, most of the written evidence dates from almost three centuries after the introduction of Christianity. The problem is not so much one of sorting out Christian influences as determining how an etic conception of what a non-Christian practice *ought* to consist of will have distorted the records we have of the practice.

GREAT BRITAIN

Following on from Ginzburg, Emma Wilby has recently (2006) undertaken a study of British "cunning folk" (by which she means essentially benevolent witches) from a comparative-religious point of view, stressing, in particular, the common features they share with shamanism. Wilby emphasises, at some length, the previous lack of study of British magical practitioners from this perspective, and the inclination of historians, ill-informed in matters of folk belief, to attribute many of the notions encountered in witch trials to the filtering down of elitist demonological ideas rather than perceiving their predominantly folk origin; her own study certainly makes an important contribution to remedy this. However, it can only be described as a start.[27] The section she provides on shamanism is too brief to act as a sufficient body of material for comparison, and it is presented more as an adjunct to the book rather than an integrated part of the study. Much of the analysis of "cunning folk" is not organised in such a way that the assertion of a close connection with shamanism is fully justified by the argumentation presented[28] – for example, all spirits

the μολπά, "song and dance", of his followers, performed at the shrine), and the Ionian *pharmakos* ritual for the whipping of genitals with squills and fig branches (Hipponax, fr. 5 and 10).

[27] The book's authority is also rather undermined by the many small errors, reflecting a lack of attention afforded to its checking – it is disconcerting, for example, to find Wilby unable to read a long ſ (i.e. s) in her sources (p. x).

[28] Her explicit comparisons with shamanism are also not always satisfactory; her bland linking of the layered cosmologies of the British magicians and the shamans (p. 146) masks so many differences within and between these areas as to be worthless, for example, and her comparison of the witch's suckling of the familiar with blood to the shamanic initiatory

associated with witches or cunning folk are regarded as "familiars", and there is no discussion of any difference (or the apparent lack of distinction) between anthropomorphic and theriomorphic spirits, which is an important topic within shamanism. Some points of methodology are also questionable, in particular the fundamental one of distinguishing cunning folk from witches on the basis of their benevolence;[29] there would be more grounds for making a distinction between magical practitioners who acted primarily on behalf of the community and those who worked primarily for their own benefit – this sort of distinction would be of much greater use in assessing links with shamanism, which is essentially a communal activity, but it is not employed to form the basis of Wilby's investigation.

The weaknesses in Wilby's treatment leave the links between British witchcraft of the early-modern period and classic shamanism more amorphous than we might wish; nonetheless, she does show a good many shared features, which overall appear to indicate a likeness perhaps comparable with that between the *benandanti* and shamans, though the similarities do not all occur in precisely the same areas – there is little about fighting for the fertility of the fields among the cunning folk, for example, which is a reflection of the more individual as opposed to communal sphere of their activities.

The cunning folk had various roles (ibid. 34–40). The main one was healing, which might be effected through herbal remedies (sometimes communicated by the helping spirit), charms or laying on of hands. In the evidence Wilby adduces, there is no indication that healing involved the expulsion of possessing spirits, as occurs typically in shamanism. Another important role was the identifying of thieves and criminals and the whereabouts of lost goods. Divination was quite common. Engineering emotions was also common, for example forcing a husband to love his wife. Counter-magic against witches' spells was another important function. Cunning folk also

recreation (p. 144) is inept: the one focuses upon the spirit as dependent on this world, the other focuses on the shaman as dependent on the spirit world.

[29] Wilby delves out this conceptual chasm between the two types of magical practitioner, then spends a good part of the book attempting to fill it by noting that the characteristics of the two types were in large part identical (for example on p. 53). She does not discuss how, and by whom, an act is to be described as good as opposed to evil, nor does she discuss the methodological inadequacy of imposing an etic concept of good and evil upon the evidence. Once the performance of magic per se is accepted as legitimate, any question of benevolence or malevolence becomes a relative and subjective matter, which certainly cannot be used to distinguish two classes of practitioner. Wilby's lack of awareness of these problems is manifested in many areas; for example, she asserts that Bessie Dunlop, her archetypal "cunning woman", was a benevolent worker of magic, and was only brought to trial for falsely accusing someone of theft; clearly, if she was indeed guilty of the accusation (which is another question), then she was not entirely benevolent in her actions. Wilby, as noted, does not consider larger questions of right and wrong: for example, if a witch discovered who had stolen an item (which would be regarded as a good act), is her subsequent act of casting a spell and punishing the thief any more malevolent than if the thief had been condemned in a court of law? Assuming that both the witch and the court arrived at the correct identification (which again is another question), from a moral point of view the witch could only be condemned for her use of magic as opposed to legal procedure – and this indeed was the basis of much of the invective against witches at the time, but it equally condemns "cunning women" who are "benevolent".

acted as mediators between the living and the dead, for example in cleansing a haunted house, or in conveying messages from the departed. Most of these roles are found among shamans too, but are too general to indicate more than a roughly comparable role. The shaman's role as psychopomp and as retriever of the souls of the sick from the underworld are not evident in British witchcraft, it would appear.

Although explicit mentions of familiar spirits are not numerous, they are of widespread distribution and are consistent with each other; some witnesses moreover state directly that familiars were a common attribute of witches or cunning folk (ibid. 52). There is a close connection between familiars and Elfame (Elf home), or the fairy realm, to which they in fact belonged (ibid. 50). Fairies were spirits, which might appear anywhere but were particularly associated with specific hills or other natural features. They had powers over illness, either as healers or instigators of it, for example, by shooting arrows into people: Robert Kirk (†1692), in *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (2007: 7), says that people stay in church at the quarter days when fairies are on the move, to avoid any "shots or stealth" from them; cf. p. 17, where elf-shot cattle are said to have been shot by the fairies to provide them with spirituous matter to live on. The dead were frequently conflated with fairies; thus Bessie Dunlop's familiar spirit Tom Reid was a departed relative, who nonetheless belonged to Elfame, whither he wished to convey Bessie (Wilby 2006: 3). Yet the fairies and the dead are, essentially, conceptually distinct; Kirk, for example, clearly distinguishes them (for example at 2007: 5, 51). Wilby does not analyse this matter,[30] but it would appear that certain departed souls could act as helping spirits, and were by virtue of this regarded as denizens of Elfame. We have a very similar situation among the Sámi, where the *Saivo olmak*, "men of Sájva", are essentially distinct from, but might include, the souls of the departed.

The first encounter with the spirit, equivalent to the shamanic act of vocation, usually occurred in the midst of everyday activities (Wilby 2006: 60), but often at a time of crisis, such as bereavement or impoverishment. The spirits were sometimes bequeathed by an older magical practitioner. The spirit would typically offer to amend the neophyte's hardship – and could make threats if the offer were not accepted, as with Elizabeth Bennett (Essex, 1582), who was burnt by the spirit when she rejected it (ibid. 132), so that in effect the "offer" was compulsory; this too is typical of shamanism. The familiars, or helping spirits, were sometimes the gift of another spirit (who was responsible for the act of vocation): a good example is that cited by Wilby from John Davenport's *The Witches of Huntingdon* (1646: 12–13), where an account is given of the accused Jane Wallis (or Willis) of Keiston:

[30] She simply tends to conflate the dead with fairies, without proper consideration; some of the evidence she cites is, moreover, ambiguous, since (among other things) "ghost" at this period did not necessarily mean "soul of the departed". She fails to mention Kirk's distinction between the fairies and the dead.

> The Examinate saith, as she was making of her bedde in her Chamber, there appeared in the shape of a man in blacke cloaths and blackish cloaths about sixe weeks past, and bid her good-morrow, and shee asked what his name was, and he said his name was *Blackeman*, and asked her if she were poore, and she said I; then he told her he would send one *Grissell* and *Greedigut* to her, that shall do any thing for her: Shee looking upon him, saw hee had ugly feete, and then she was very fearfull of him for that he would seem sometimes to be tall, and sometimes lesse, and suddenly vanished away.
>
> And being demanded whether he lay with her, shee said hee would have lain with her, but shee would not suffer him: and after *Blackeman* was departed from her, within three or 4. dayes, *Grissell* and *Greedigut* came to her, in the shapes of dogges with great brisles of hogges haire upon their backs, and said to her they were come from *Blackeman* to do what she would command them, and did aske her if shee did want any thing, and they would fetch her any thing: and shee said she lacked nothing: then they prayed her to give them victuals, and she said she was poore and had none to give them, and so they departed: Yet she confessed that *Blackman, Grissell*, and Greedigut divers times cames to her afterwards, and brought her two or three shillings at a time, and more saith not.

This would appear to correspond well with the shamanic anthropomorphic vocational spirit and theriomorphic helping spirits. However, in other instances cited by Wilby, such a distinction does not appear to be clear-cut, as the vocational spirit in many cases assumed animal form. Wilby does not offer any thorough analysis of the vocational spirit from a shamanic perspective.

Relationships with the familiars were usually intimate; animal familiars were treated as pets, and anthropomorphic ones sometimes entered a carnal relationship with the witch, who might even bear children to him, as in the case of Ellen Driver (Suffolk, 1645: Wilby 2006: 105); however, the relationship was not necessarily entirely normal: Mary Bush (Suffolk, 1645: ibid. 105) noted that the devil visited several times a week, but was colder and heavier than a man, and could not perform as a man. The trial of Andro Man (Aberdeenshire, 1598) stated that he had for many years had a carnal relationship with the queen of Elphen and had begotten children on her. Familiars were often believed to need feeding: Margery Simmon (Essex, 1582) had been bequeathed some familiars by her mother, and been told to feed them with milk, otherwise they would suck blood (ibid. 109).

Wilby (ibid. 179) argues that much of the witch's or cunning folk's magical activity took place in trance, but she points out that this could have been a light trance rather than the full, unconscious trance often found in shamanism. Such a light trance can be induced simply by monotonous focus on an object or sound, and can occur in the midst of conversation or other activities, and may pass almost unnoticed, but yet it enables the witch to communicate with the spirit world; thus in one example a workman simply paused in his digging for a moment and stared as a spirit army passed by. Most of the accounts do not mention trance, since they are derived from the witches' own narratives; for subjects of encounters with the spirit world, the experiences are simply real, on a par with any other experience, and are related as such without mention of any specific

mental state at the time. Hidden behind such narratives may be indications that the experience was far from being "normal", however, as when Bessie Dunlop's spirit Tom Reid, who is mainly described in very everyday terms as an ordinary man, seeks to convey Bessie away to Elfame, or when he disappears down a tiny hole in a dyke.

Witches might be importuned to travel with the spirits to Elfame, which they might resist (as did Bessie Dunlop) but which they sometimes acceded to undertake, and on other occasions they are said to have travelled for example to steal food from farmsteads. There is some debate over whether these travels took place in body or soul; again, from the witch's point of view, the experience would have been "real" and it may have been impossible to determine, from within the experience itself, whether the body or the soul was acting. Wilby points out (ibid. 102) that King James, in his *Daemonologie* (1597: 39), says that some witches «sayeth, that their bodies lying stil as in an extasy, their spirits will be ravished out of their bodies, & caried to such places. And for verefying therof, wil give evident tokens, aswel by witnesses that have seene their body lying senseles in the meane time, as by naming persones, whomwith they mette.» On the nocturnal gatherings of witches in Taunton in 1664, the records state that «They are carried sometimes in their bodies and their clothes, at other times without, and Examinate thinks their bodies are sometimes left behind. Even when their spirits only are present, yet they know one another.»

Wilby does not consider shamanic-type contests, yet evidence for them may be found in the sources. Robert Kirk (2007: 16–17) writes:

> The men of that second sight do not discover strange things when asked, but at fits and raptures, as if inspired with some genius at that instant, which before did lurk in or about them. Thus I have frequently spoken to one of them, who in his transport told he cut the bodies of one of these people [the fairies] in two with his iron weapon and so escaped this onset, yet he saw nothing left behind of that appearingly divided body; at other times he outwrestled some of them. His neighbours often perceived this man to disappear at a certain place, and then about one hour after to become visible and discover himself near a bowshot from the first place. It was in that place where he became invisible, said he, that these subterraneans did encounter and combat with him.

No particular reason for the contests is given, but it is at least clear that we have here a contest in strength taking place in trance between the seer and the spirits, which is comparable to shamanic contests; the account also presents evidence for trance-like activities undertaken in order to secure supernatural knowledge.

WITCHCRAFT AND SHAMANISM

The short survey offered above of some of the characteristic features of early witchcraft enables us to highlight a few points of comparison between witchcraft and shamanism. Some features, such as soothsaying, dream interpretation or love magic, are so universal as to be of little use

for comparative purposes. It is nonetheless worth noting the frequency with which causing storms and altering people's minds are ascribed to witches: when we encounter examples of these in Norse, we may regard them as manifestations of a widespread European witchcraft motif (with responsibility assigned to suitable locals such as the Sámi), rather than considering them in any way specific to the Norse area.

Of the eight features which Vajda demands as a prerequisite for considering any instance of spiritual activity as shamanic, practically all are encountered, particularly in well-recorded cases such as the *benandanti*, though it is probably impossible to demonstrate their occurrence together in one discrete source (or series of interrelated sources). The following summarises what is found under each point; specific examples of the shamanic features will be found later in the volume.

The visit to the meetings of witches and *benandanti*, and, it seems, to variants of the Wild Hunt (under, for example, Holda), took place in some form of trance. However, one important difference is that this trance took place privately, for example in the depth of the night, rather than ritually, and this privacy is a characteristic of all forms of witchcraft. Yet there are indications, at least in some areas, that the mental world of the witches may be a reflection of what was carried out at one time more publicly in the form of rituals to safeguard the agricultural welfare of the community; it is reasonable to suppose that any overt ritual pagan activity would be the first thing to be suppressed by Christianity, which was already well established by the time of most of our records of witchcraft. Norse *seiðr* was generally conceived as taking place in a public ritual, more in line with shamanism than witchcraft: but this is more likely to be a survival of a *modus operandi* which was more widespread in early times, rather than indicating any particular connection with shamanism. *Útiseta* ⟨QV⟩, "sitting out", on the other hand, is depicted as a lone activity more akin to witchcraft.

Animal helping spirits appear in the form of the familiars or animal steeds which witches used. It is particularly British witchcraft, where the familiar was a prevalent concept, that links with shamanism in this matter. There seems to be little distinction between anthropomorphic and theriomorphic spirits in Britain, however, though the matter requires further investigation and elucidation.

The vocation by an anthropomorphic guardian spirit is evident, especially in the case of the *benandanti*. In shamanism, this guardian spirit is sometimes also the mate of the shaman, as occurs too in witchcraft in some accounts, including the British.

Initiation does not form such a prominent feature as in shamanism, but the summoning by a drum and the first attendance at, for example, the struggle between witches and *benandanti*, as directed by the anthropomorphic spirit, constitutes a type of initiation, as do the various first encounters with spirits noted in the British records.

Travels to the otherworld clearly form an integral part of most forms of witchcraft, be it to antecedents of the sabbat, or to the processions of the dead, or to Elfame.

A specific layered cosmos is not a feature of witchcraft. We do not appear to have any evidence that witches had a concept which differed greatly from the Christian one. However, we must be cautious, since again the influence of Christianity is likely to have wiped out any individual cosmologies which differed from the Christian norm. Yet there are hints that the sabbat was sometimes conceived as taking place at a great mountain, which may be viewed as an image of the cosmos over all, realised widely throughout shamanic societies through the image of mountain, pillar or tree. Similarly, Holda's tree or spring, whence come children, is surely a variant of the image of the tree of life at the centre of the cosmos, and is particularly close to the image we find in Norse in *Vǫluspá*. Again, it would seem that Norse preserves certain features which elsewhere in Europe may well have been current at an earlier stage than our records. It would therefore be rash to conclude that the cosmology found in Norse necessarily links it more closely to Siberia than to Europe, even if Siberian materials are able to illuminate details of the Norse cosmology.

Contests in spirit again form a clear part of the activities of the *benandanti*; these do not take place in animal form in the examples cited, though there are indications elsewhere that the soul was conceived as an animal (for example a mouse). However, Ginzburg (1992: 29–31) found a close parallel to the *benandanti* in the form of Thiess of Livonia, who claimed he transformed into a wolf and fought against the devil and witches in hell for the fertility of the fields. Spirit contests in trance also occurred in Scotland, according to Robert Kirk (2007: 16–17).

Shamanic paraphernalia take many forms. The drum is the most striking, but is not universal by any means (notably, however, it even occurs in one account of *benandanti* initiation). In the case of the *benandanti* it is the stalks of sorghum and fennel[31] which act as distinctive shaman "weapons", and the caul which acts as a sign of shamanhood.

Once we pierce the bias under which most accounts of witchcraft were produced, it appears that the social purposes of shamanism and witchcraft were also similar in some core respects. Some features, however, such as soothsaying and *maleficia*, which may have characterised witches from the beginning, are essentially private activities. The main purpose of shamanism is to make contact with the spirit world (including the world of the dead) for the guardianship of the welfare of the community. This may take the form of the healing of individual members of the community, or the fighting in spirit with enemy shamans attempting to destroy the community, or the securing of luck in hunting. Whenever we can view witchcraft in its many varieties in any detail, we find similar purposes at play. The *benandanti* were resorted to as healers, especially of children

[31] Ginzburg is unable to suggest any particular reason for fennel being chosen as the *benandanti*'s weapon, but an obvious parallel is the stem of a fennel-like plant, νάρθηξ, used by Dionysus's followers, and in which, in a separate myth, Prometheus hid fire and brought it to mankind. Fire is a divine power the gods wished to withhold from man, and Dionysus's followers exerted unassailable power over their enemies when, in ecstasy, they wielded the *thursos*, whose rod was formed by the *narthēx*.

bewitched by witches, and their chief activity was to contend in spirit with evil witches over the fecundity of the communities' fields and harvests. They also believed themselves capable of contact with the dead. In the case of the German Holda we again have a fertility spirit closely linked with the dead and the Wild Hunt, who moreover is responsible for bringing children from her tree or spring.

Witchcraft cannot be simply identified as a form of shamanism, however. Whilst the points listed above indicate a close similarity in many respects (a more detailed study would be required to demonstrate this in detail), there are many holes in our picture of what the antecedents of witchcraft may have looked like before the imposition of Christianity, which can only be filled by comparison across many cultures – a process which may end up stressing the similarities at the expense of the many differences which are likely to have disappeared without trace, but which would radically alter our views. Nonetheless, it is striking that the better recorded a case of "witchcraft" is, the more we can find to accommodate the practice within the same category as shamanism as a "spiritual activity" devoted to securing the communities' sources of sustenance and the well-being of their members; the main difference, the secrecy of witchcraft as opposed to the public nature of shamanism, is most likely the result of suppression of non-Christian practices. Pentikäinen (2006: 62) notes a similar attenuation of social shamanism into private witchcraft among the Sámi:

> In the course of the active missionary period, shamanic knowledge became a private reflection of the human mind or an esoteric capacity practiced secretly to gain better luck for fishing, hunting, reindeer economy, health or happiness in marital life. In delicate affairs concerning the fortune of the clan in the painful comparison against other clans it could even be a means of attacking the members of the other clan and of disturbing their economic and other efforts.

A further point of difference from classic forms of shamanism as found in the most northerly regions is the general (but not universal) preponderance of women as practitioners of witchcraft. This coincides with forms of shamanism found in more southerly climes, in societies which are more agrarian in nature, and with Norse *seiðr*. If witchcraft is to be accommodated within a general framework of shamanism, it is probably these more southerly, non-classic forms that offer the best scope.

II. THE PLACE OF SHAMANISM IN SOCIETY

6. Purposes

Eurasian

Varous roles of the shaman were outlined in the presentation in Chapter 4. Hultkrantz (*SLS* 15–17; 1978: 33) specifies the role of the shaman in the following summary categories, whilst noting that not all shamans have all these roles or accomplishments, so that the list does not form an integrated *sine qua non*, but rather a list of the most common roles undertaken by those regarded as shamans:

Healer. Healing is often, but not always, a prime function of the shaman. Sickness has two main causes: *a.* Soul loss (of which unconsciousness is symptomatic). This involves for the shaman a trance journey to the otherworld to retrieve the lost soul, and often involves bargaining with the dead who are holding the soul, for example by promising sacrifices. *b.* Intrusion of an object or spirit (in illnesses not manifesting alterations of the consciousness). This involves for the shaman the summoning, usually without trance, of his helping spirits who help to remove the intrusion.

Psychopomp. The shaman despatches his free soul to accompany the soul of the departed to the otherworld. This role of the shaman varies in importance in different societies; among the Nanai it is a central one, for example.

Diviner. Unknown past or future happenings are revealed, lost people or objects are found. The future, for example weather, can sometimes be influenced (for example the Altaian *yadachi* shaman can alter the weather). Divining can, but does not necessarily, involve summoning helping spirits.

Hunting magician of a group, a diviner and charmer of animals.

Sacrificial priest (exceptional), as in the horse sacrifice of the Altaians, in which the shaman acts as cult leader; his role involves conducting the sacrificed animal's soul up to heaven.

In the otherworld journeys he undertakes the shaman serves as psychopomp, as taker of a sacrificed animal's soul to god, as retriever of a sick person's soul and as gatherer of information (Vajda 1959: 469).

The shaman would sometimes carry out other functions; it is uncertain to what extent such functions may have been more important than our

records indicate, since most of the accounts of shamanism are selective, reflecting the etic preconceptions of the observers about what was worth recording. It is certain, for example, that the shaman might sometimes function as a *witch*: the Sakha shaman functioned in this role, for example eating people's souls and so causing death (Alekseev 1997: 80–1).

All the functions of the shaman are drawn together in a general principle by Siikala (1978: 319):

> The shaman is thus first and foremost a supplier of information and a "negotiator", whose task is to find out the measures required to resolve a crisis that has already arisen or to prevent crises in the future. Although the tasks of the shaman vary somewhat in different communities, they do have one thing in common in that direct communication with the spirit world is always considered necessary in carrying out the shaman's duties.

Norse

In his survey of magicians in Icelandic family sagas and *Landnámabók*, Dillmann (2006: 135) lists four main functions that they fulfil:
1. Divination
2. Making weapons and their users invulnerable
3. Curing illnesses and injuries, and affecting bodily health
4. Changing the weather.

Divination is less common than the others, and economic benefit the least common motivation. Many of the uses of magic are in the service of conflict and war; but as the sources are imbued with conflict in general, this may simply be a reflection of the nature of the sources.

The instances of *seiðr* do not entirely match this overall pattern. Most instances are divinatory, and the rest (quite a large minority) are efficatory in various ways; the following sections summarise the uses of *seiðr* within the categories established for shamanism, so the degree of correspondence can be seen (Dillmann's compendious study of all categories of magician in family sagas, to which the reader is directed for discussion of individual texts, obviates the need to widen the survey here, particularly as his study does not reveal any specially shamanic features within the non-*seiðr* categories). I also bring some features from Norse myth into the discussion.

DOCTOR

There is no evidence that *seiðr* was involved with healing, beyond the fungus belt of Þorbjǫrg lítilvǫlva in *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4 ⟨87⟩, possibly used against bleeding (Dillmann 2006: 69); in Chapter 17 I discount this text as being of any value in determining the nature of *seiðr*, though individual features may well have been incorporated from folk practices (not necessarily connected with strictly magical performances). There can scarcely be any question but that healing was a significant activity in pre-Christian Scandinavia, as in any other society, but whether healers were also *seiðmenn*, and

this has simply been forgotten in our sources, cannot be determined. The *spákona* Þórdís, it is true, performs an act of ritual magical healing, involving sacrificing to the *álfar*, in *Kormáks saga* ch. 22. Yet she appears to be an all-round magical practitioner, her abilities spanning such disparate fields, apart from healing, as foretelling the future and affecting the workings of weapons. The indications from the sources examined by Dillmann (2006: 65–70) are, in fact, rather that healing was not associated with a specific group of practitioners, and this may continue an older tradition.

PSYCHOPOMP

There is little evidence for psychopomps in Norse; this may be a reflection of the paucity of descriptions of rituals in which such a role might occur, but it is striking that in Snorri's extended description of Baldr's funeral in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49 we are told nothing about Baldr's journey to Hel, though there is plenty on the subsequent ride of Hermóðr thither to attempt to retrieve him ⟨53⟩. As notions relating to the conveying of souls to the otherworld would be in direct conflict with Christianity, it is likely they would not long have survived the conversion, or if they did, would not have been committed to writing. There are some fragments of the idea, however: Óðinn – for so the "man" is to be identified – appears as a psychopomp in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 10, taking away the dead Sinfjǫtli on a small boat which could not also bear Sigmundr, thus dividing off the dead from the living. This is not linked to any context that could be described as shamanic, however.

DIVINER

A number of different forms of divinatory magic were practised, believed in or at least witnessed to in Norse sources, of which *seiðr* is just one; they are surveyed in Dillmann (2006: 37–52), from which the following brief summary is derived.

The phrase *ganga til frétta(r)*, "to go for news", means to consult a diviner to get prophecies. The prophecies were believed to come from a divinity or supernatural being, and might be communicated directly or through a medium; thus in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 4 it is said «Þórólfr mostrarskegg fekk at blóti miklu ok gekk til fréttar við Þór, ástvin sinn», "Þórólfr mostrarskegg took part in a good deal of sacrificing, and went for prophecies from Þórr, his beloved"; on the other hand, the *vǫlva* of *Eiríks saga rauða* is presented as giving prophecies to people who consulted her once she had made contact with the spirit world.

Útiseta, "sitting out", usually at night, was practised by both men and women (unlike divinatory *seiðr*, practised only by women); the aim was to get information from spirits, and it is thus placed alongside "waking up a troll" in the laws of Gulaþing, Frostaþing, *Hákonarbók* (*Járnsíða*) and *Jónsbók* ⟨78⟩. It is not mentioned in the Icelandic family sagas or *Landnámabók*.

Oneiromancy, foretelling from dreams, was widespread and not confined to magicians, nor is there any sign that professional interpreters were needed.

Divination through examining signs played, according to Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 10, a large part in ancient Germanic life («auspicia sortesque ut qui maxime observant», "they observe auspices and lots to the greatest extent"), but there is little sign of it in Norse sources (ornithomancy occurs in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 19 when Sigurðr is able to understand the speech of birds, which guides his course of action).

Sortilegium is attested by Tacitus, and by Rimbaut among the Swedes in the ninth century, and also in *Hymiskviða*, but there is no sign of it in Icelandic prose sources.

Hydromancy is mentioned by Plutarch; there is little evidence for it in Norse prose, but Bjarni Kolbeinsson (†1222) in *Jómsvíkingadrápa* 2 (*Skj* B_2 1) says: «varkak ek fróðr und forsum», "I did not become wise under waterfalls" (though whether it is necessarily the water that is affording wisdom is not clear – the setting could also merely indicate the otherworld).

Probing someone's body, *þreifa*, to make prognostications for future events occurs in the sagas.

Both *seiðr* and shamanism were used for divinatory purposes, but whereas this was a central function of *seiðr* in our records, reflecting the commonplace nature of prophecy as a poetic device, it is a less frequent and less central event in recorded shamanism, in so far as the shaman engaged in a number of other activities not specifically associated with *seiðr*, such as soul retrieval. Bäckman and Hultkrantz (*SLS* 57–8) regard divination as a secondary activity among the Sámi, possibly influenced by Norse practices and not confined to shamans.

HUNTING MAGICIAN

The role of hunting magician as such would not be expected in the more developed Norse society, and there are few descriptions of hunting in any form (Vǫlundr stands out as a «veðreygr skyti», "weather-eyed archer", in *Vǫlundarkviða*, where there is possibly some shamanic background: see Chapter 19), but an equivalent role of ensuring the success of the farming and fishing economy might be looked for. Interestingly, Dillmann (2006: 101) points out that all magic used for economic advantage assigned to a pre-Christian date in the sources he examines relates to the sea (which might be described as closer to hunting): there is nothing about increasing the fertility of fields or livestock and the like until texts such as *Grágás* (*Kristinna laga þáttr*), from *c.* 1260. Yet many of the questions asked in *seiðr* sessions are about the seasons and the year's produce; there is no suggestion that the performance of the *seiðr* affected the harvests, only that it revealed what they would be, but this purely divinatory role was possibly once also efficatory, matching what has been observed of practitioners such as the *benandanti* discussed in Chapter 5, but this cannot be demonstrated.

vanir were kicking on the plain by means of a *vígspá*, "war charm" (as Dronke translates it) – «knátto vanir vígspá / vǫllo sporna»: Dronke draws a parallel with *Oddrúnargrátr* 7–8, where, through Oddrún's incantations, two children are born – «knátti mær ok mǫgr / moldveg sporna», "a girl and a boy could kick the earth". That we may infer from this that *Vǫluspá* wishes to emphasise the continuing youthful vigour of the *vanir* (with a possible play in the word *kná*, "know how to", on *knár*, "vigorous") seems uncontentious; that there is an implication of actual death and revivification seems more debatable (Dronke does not in fact postulate such an explicit implication, though she does note that "Death became no more than the necessary condition for the renewal of life" in the union of the unfailing killing power of Óðinn and the unfailing regenerative power of Freyja which resulted from the truce after the war). Dronke also argues that the battle, *víg*, which cannot be concluded, as the *vanir* cannot be defeated, is paralleled by the Hjaðningavíg, a struggle perpetuated for ever by Hildr, "Battle", when each night she raises the slain forces of her father and of her abductor, Heðinn (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 50, based on Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*). Bragi, describing the Hjaðningavíg (*Ragnarsdrápa* 11, *Skj* B, 3), calls the person responsible for it *fordæða*, "witch", a term which also characterises Freyja (*Lokasenna* 32), the arch-witch and introducer of *seiðr* whose authority over the dead is equal to that of Óðinn (*Grímnismál* 14), but who also, as owner of the Brísingamen, is responsible for the guardianship of life. That there is a connection with *seiðr* in the *vígspá* which sustains the *vanir* is suggested by the fact that the previous mention of *spá*, "prophecy", was in st. 22, where it was the characteristic of Heiðr, the practitioner of *seiðr*. It is reasonable to infer that Freyja is the prime mover in the *vanir*'s indomitability; yet, again, it is not clear that actual death and resurrection should be supposed to be taking place. The phrase «knátto vanir vígspá», "the *vanir* knew how by a war-prophecy …", implies rather that *seiðr* was used in its familiar divinatory capacity to provide information about the future, on which the *vanir* could act, than that it was efficatory in bringing *vanir* back to life. We do not, in fact, encounter such an efficatory use of *seiðr* elsewhere. The nearest to it is in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ⟨96c⟩, where Skuld, through practising *seiðr*, is able to revive the corpses on the battlefield – though the atmosphere here is ghoulish and necromantic, rather than implying true revival. The notion of revival is associated with a seeress-type figure in Saxo ⟨108⟩, though *seiðr* is not mentioned here explicitly, and non-Norse influences are evident in some aspects of the tale. It is, then, possible to read *Vǫluspá* 24 as indicating that the *vanir* remain alive (kicking on the plain) through skill in predicting the outcome of battle and acting on this, rather than that they are actually killed and revived; this would be consistent both with the lack of evidence for *seiðr* elsewhere as a means of effecting rebirth, and with the depiction of Gullveig (whom we may infer to have been a *vanr*), who is not so much revived from death as impervious to it.

A motif of the retrieval of a lost soul may perhaps be hinted at in a myth recorded only in the most summary fashion, where Freyja searches for her

mate Óðr ⟨QV, 52⟩; it is possible that *óðr* ⟨QV⟩ may have included a sense of "soul" that could wander from the body, though this can only be inferred on very slim evidence.

WITCH

The efficatory uses of *seiðr* vary, but consist of effecting a physical change by means of magic – in other words they are spells; sometimes the spell is for good, as with Þuríðr sundafyllir, who used *seiðr* to fill a fjord with fish in *Landnámabók* ⟨101⟩, but more often it is for a sinister purpose such as murder (as when Kári is killed with *seiðr* in *Laxdœla saga* ch. 37 ⟨102⟩) or impotence in (*Kormáks saga* ch. 6 ⟨99⟩). *Seiðr* could be used to affect the weather (as in *Laxdœla saga* ch. 35 ⟨102⟩). Changing of outward form could also be effected with *seiðr* (as the *seiðkona* exchanges appearance with Signý in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 7 ⟨124⟩). Dillmann (2006: 53–64) presents the use of magic to bestow power on weapons, or on protective vestments, but this does not appear to involve *seiðr*; as a protective force in war it receives just a few mentions (*Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum* ch. 4 ⟨120⟩; *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* ch. 3 ⟨127⟩; *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ch. 19 ⟨129⟩).[3]

Mentions of *seiðr* in skaldic verse are rare, but, as far as they go, point to an efficatory role. Kormákr, composing around 960, alludes to Óðinn's use of *seiðr* to win Rindr, on whom he begat a son to avenge Baldr ⟨98⟩. Other mentions of *seiðr* are in kennings ⟨83⟩, where a "*seiðr* of spears/swords" indicates battle. Of the four occurrences, three are almost certainly essentially antiquarianisms, but the verse of Eiríkr viðsjá is likely to be a genuine composition of the early eleventh century (when Christianity was just beginning to be established),[4] and is most likely a fragment of a battle poem rather than a *lausavísa*. A *seiðr* of weapons may be a "song" of weapons, in reference to the charms sung in *seiðr*, but a more plausible sense of the image is that the weapons are, as it were, conjured into a wild frenzy against their victims – just as the destructive *gandr* ⟨QV⟩ spirit appears to have been sent on its mission by means of *seiðr*.

Some magicians, such as Þorgrímr nef or Kotkell and his household, are only recorded as performing maleficent magic, and are called *seiðmenn*. Dillmann (2006: 137) suggests that *seiðr* may originally have referred exclusively to such maleficent magic. The evidence scarcely supports this. It is apparent (as Dillmann points out) that there was particular disgust at men performing *seiðr*, but it is not reasonable to infer from this that *seiðr* in general was originally maleficent.

[3] Almqvist (2000: 257) notes that invulnerability cannot be viewed as an essential characteristic of *seiðr*, nor can the association be regarded as ancient: it is a common motif (a wandering motif) which can be associated with any sort of magic, and in this context *seiðr* means little more than "magic".

[4] It is cited in *Heiðarvíga saga* ch. 40, in a context which appears to act as a mere framework within which to cite various of the poet's verses.

CONCLUSION

The functional correspondence between *seiðr* and shamanism is minimal; several roles typical of the shaman are scarcely or not at all associated with the *seiðkona*, and both the divinatory and efficatory roles of *seiðr* are more pronounced than in shamanism. Moreover, not only is it debatable if Hultkrantz's characterisation of the shaman's function can be applied to *seiðr* to any meaningful degree, but even Siikala's (1978: 16) general characterisation of the shaman as "the prophet and remover of danger threatening the life of the individual and the community" seems scarcely the aptest way of describing the *seiðkona* – there is a general benefit to the community of her prophecies on the crops and so forth, though this is always subordinated to some prophecy about an individual, and the efficatory examples are geared towards the benefit of individuals, not the community. As will be discussed in later chapters, we certainly appear to have contact with the spirit world in *seiðr*, but the overall impression of the *seiðkona* is not of a *mediator* between the spirit and human worlds who resolves conflicts, but of a *manipulator* of the supernatural world, someone who uses what we can surmise to be basically spells (the frequently mentioned *galdrar*) to command spirits or the natural world, more often than not in a way that increases rather than decreases conflict, a characteristic that is found already in *Vǫluspá*, where it appears that *seiðr* plays an important role in bolstering the resistance of the *vanir* in their conflict with the *æsir*, and is practised by Heiðr among "evil women" in such a way as to draw the ire of the *æsir*. The efficatory aspects of *seiðr* are, in any case, subordinate to the divinatory – the practice's main purpose, as it is presented in surviving sources, is to uncover the future or gain knowledge of facts that could not otherwise be determined. The overall impression of *seiðr* is, however, built up largely from prose sources, and may very well be a distortion, in accordance with normal European expectations of the workings of the magical diviner, of more ancient ideas which in principle may have been closer to shamanism. There are hints, as noted, in some of the poetic texts that this may have been so, but the case remains rather weak nonetheless. I turn to these texts in more detail in later chapters.

7. Community and gender

Eurasian

COMMUNITY

The social aspect of shamanism is integral to most definitions of the practice: the shaman performs his office before and on behalf of the community, and only very exceptionally on his own behalf; the social status of the shaman and his interaction with the rest of the community is, however, a matter which varies from society to society.

The shaman was not usually the sole spiritual practitioner in a community. Among the Daur Mongols, for example, he was distinct from the elders who led the seasonal sacrifice, and did not take part in it, and from midwives, sorcerers, bonesetters and so forth (Humphrey 1996: 29, 51). The Ainu shaman had no part in the cult of the dead (Adami 1991: 109). The Kachin shaman was not entitled to attend all religious ceremonies, for example the "great offering to the sky" was closed to shamans associated with the lower world; the Sakha shaman officiated at sacrifices to disease spirits, but was not admitted to the ritual part of the *ysyakh* festival to common deities of tribe (Alekseev 1997: 90, 95). Among the Ewenki were found various kinds of diviners (*tolkin ičen*) and witch-doctors (*begedemnii*) distinct from shamans (Tugolukov 1978: 426). Although the shaman sometimes takes part in sacrificial rites, in areas such as India, with established priesthoods, the shaman generally remains distinct from the priest (Vitebsky 1995: 117). Similar examples of multiple spiritual offices within a community might be found from most other shamanic societies.

Vitebsky (ibid. 117) points out that Eliade misrepresents shamanism as if it existed in a political vacuum. There is always a political aspect to the shaman's role (a fact perceived clearly by Stalin, for example, who focused attention upon eradicating them in the cruellest possible manner: see for example Pentikäinen 2006: 65 on the Khanty shamans), and the shamanic cosmography is a reflection of societal hierarchies, so that, for example, the far-northern animal master of the spirit realm, exercising control over the supply of game (the mainstay of hunting societies), is replaced by a spirit Khan in southern areas.

Vitebsky (1995: 35) draws a distinction between two basic types of shaman. The first sort becomes something other than himself, for example an animal, and participates in the immanent forces of the world, whilst travelling to the sky to redress unfavourable situations such as sickness. The second sort is the clan shaman, concerned with reproduction of the family, and with the cult of the sky and the mountains leading to it; this type of shaman rarely went into trance, concentrating on prayer and sacrifice,

and did not turn into animals or travel to the sky. Vitebsky's classification leaves much to be desired when particular examples of shamanic societies are examined. The division devised by Siikala is of greater use: this classifies the types of shamanism as clan shamanism, small-group shamanism, professional shamanism of the north, and institutionalised shamanism of south Siberia. In practice, the situation could prove more complex. Thus among the Ewenki examined by Shirokogoroff (1935: 344) there were two sorts of shaman: the clan shaman, and the independent shaman. Within a clan, there could only be one shaman functioning as its official shaman, and if another arose, he would be seen as a competitor: one of them would die. Clan shamanism was generally hereditary, but not necessarily directly so, often missing a generation (the middle generation has to do ordinary work to support the father shaman); inheritance might take place across clans. Moreover, if the ambit of study is extended outside Siberia to include shamanism as found in Japan, Korea or India (for example), further categories would be needed to accommodate the different sorts of shamanism found there.

Acceptance by the community was crucial. A prospective shaman had to undertake trials imposed by the community or by himself (demonstrating that his hunting advice works, that he could find missing objects, and so forth); such testing continued throughout his life, so that for example he would be expected to see the souls of the dead and to describe how they died (Basilov 1990: 26–7). Among the Ewenki, when someone showed signs (such as trembling) of a shamanic calling, the clan did not necessarily accept it, and might call in another shaman to investigate if the spirits would pick someone else; a contest between rival candidates might be arranged (Shirokogoroff 1935: 346). Some people nevertheless attempted to function as shamans without being recognised by the community, but tended to be shunned. Amateurs could perform some shamanic acts, with or without a drum (Tugolukov 1978: 426).

Shamans sometimes had different functional grades. Among the Enets the highest grade, *budtode*, communicated with spirits dwelling in heaven, and had a full costume, drum and staff; the middle grade, *d'ano*, protected men from evil spirits, and had a drum only, while the lowest class, *sawode*, communicated with the dead and officiated at funerals, and had no attributes (Hajdú 1968: 149).

The societal aspects of shamanism also have what may appear more esoteric dimensions, but which in fact are fundamental reflections of the way these societies function. Hamayan (1992: 136) argues that hunting societies are characterised by an exchange law, making men and animals partners, and food for each other. Hunting would be unsuccessful without a shaman to broker an agreement between the community and the master of the animals, the spirit responsible for granting game to hunters. In a kamlanie, the shaman is seen to imitate animals, and his collapsing into trance, as if dead, imitates the fall of a slain animal, according to Hamayan: this is an interesting analysis, though one that does not appear to have a great deal of textual support in the accounts of kamlania (which is not to

dismiss it: such etic accounts are prone to lack elements that would be regarded as vital from an emic point of view).

The shaman may be regarded as an embodiment of his community. Kortt (1984: 292–8) traces this notion among the Sakhas and Nganasans. The native Sakha informant, Spiridon Samsonov, reported that "in the process of becoming a great shaman his entire kinship (*pog*) must die, for the life of the shaman is redeemed through his relatives". The community is embodied in the shaman's skeleton, which is dismembered and reassembled in initiation, and if a bone is lost a member of the community will die. Among the Nganasans, each relative endeavours to take part in the creation of the shaman's costume, and each put into the dress part of his or her life, which was thus protected by the shaman's helping spirits during the kamlanie; hence each member of the community is contained within the skeleton of the shaman's costume. Kortt remarks (ibid. 298):

> In putting on his costume the shaman establishes an identification with his community, that is, effects a transformation from the profane, everyday state of "me" to a situation in sacral surroundings of "us". This explains why the shaman without his costume is not distinguished from the members of his community in daily life. In the new identity, not as individual but as embodiment of the community, the shaman is recognised and supported by the (kinship) spirits.

GENDER-RELATED ISSUES

The predominance of males as shamans in many areas colours the overall image of the shaman in manifold ways, and the picture becomes skewed according to which areas are brought into consideration in any analysis of shamanism, since the ratio of male to female shamans varies geographically (and according to the nature of the society). Vitebsky (1995: 32) notes that "The classic Siberian idea of the shaman as master of spirits is very much an image of the male hunter or warrior, with his heroic style of journeying across the cosmos and engaging spirits in battle". Hunting may occur also in areas such as Malaysia where female shamans predominate or are common: but here, the shaman does not procure hunting success, which is secured instead by human skill (ibid. 106). The imagery of shamanism also alters when it is dominated by women, tending to be domestic rather than heroic (ibid. 33).

Initiation does not always involve violent dismemberment: the Indian Sora shaman begins her visits to the underworld during dreams as a child; she later marries a spirit husband (her spirit brother – the relationship is incestuous), and then will start entering trance: it is a gradual process, learnt alongside experienced shamans (ibid. 57, 60–1, 63).

Vitebsky (ibid. 33) notes that female shamans tend to be more prominent in agrarian societies such as those of South or South-East Asia. In some areas, as in eastern Asia, shamanism becomes associated with women in opposition to a male-dominated Buddhist or Confucian controlling religious order, though the status of shamanism is not necessarily seen as

inferior: in Korea, where all shamans are female or transvestite, the family gods and spirits dealt with by women are an integral part of religious and social life, an indispensable complement to those of men (ibid. 118).

Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg (1970: 209) observes that female shamanism involving possession is particularly associated with cults with a goddess of female fertility, the earth and death; the ministers of such cults are generally female. When men serve in such a cult, she notes, it is natural to think that they would identify with the goddess in the same way as the female ministers, hence giving rise to the possibility of assuming female sexuality.

Within the area of Siberian shamanism, the prevalence of female shamans varied. Among the Turkic peoples in the early twentieth century, 40% of Tuva shamans were female, of Tofalars 100%, among the Altaians and Teleuts there were several females, and among the Sakhas there were more females than males (females were believed to be better healers), and in Central Asia, among the Kazakhs, Tajiks and Uzbeks females prevailed (Dyakonova 2001: 63). Among the Buryats, female shamans existed, but were limited in various ways: Hamayan (1984: 311–14) notes that women's vocations to shamanhood were usually opposed, whereas men's were supported; most ritual shamanic performances by female shamans were merely divinatory in nature; women became shamans much later in life, often to cure themselves, and usually shamanised for themselves, not to heal others, and were not recognised by the community as shamans to whom one had recourse. In contrast, however, was the treatment of shamanesses after death: they might be glorified as ancestors and worshipped; the worship was primarily intended to neutralise their vengefulness, however. Other societies, such as the Teleuts and Ewenki, also had a female founder of shamanism or foremother of the first shaman (Nioradze 1925: 54; Anisimov 1963*a*: 97).

Nioradze (1925: 53) observes that among the Itelmens, the Chukchi, the Sakhas, the Samoyeds and others the women were entrusted with religious rites more than men, and were also protectors of the sacred relics of the home and the shamanic drum (see also Siikala 1978: 308). Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg (1970: 198) similarly notes that female shamans are important among the Yukagirs, Koraks, Itelmens and Chukchi (among others). Piłsudski (1909: 73) notes that among the Ainus a female shaman could be more powerful than a male. Almost all the peoples mentioned in this connection inhabited the far eastern region of Asia.

Where both male and female shamans exist within a society, they may well have different roles. Humphrey (1996: 286–93) describes the Daur female shaman, the *otoshi* (a man could, however, occasionally be an *otoshi*): she is concerned with the origins of life, whereas the male *yadgan* shaman is not. The female deity Ome in heaven is the patroness of the *otoshi*; in one tale, an *otoshi* is taken by Ome to the nether world and shown a flourishing and withered tree, representing fertile and barren women. The tree image emphasises flourishing leaves, growing seeds and branches for the nest-like containers of soul-eggs. Ome Ewe was an old woman,

the womb mother, living in a nine-storeyed pagoda, among nine white felt tents, with phoenixes guarding the gates, amidst gold and silver pine trees, with nine hot springs, from which eggs appeared, which Ome took: these were children whom Ome fed from her enormous breasts. Whilst this imagery seems to be related to the layered cosmos, with the tree as source of life and nourishment, women's rituals had a horizontal access, involving movement to and from rivers and so forth, not static and vertical like men's rituals, from mountain top up to the sky; this reflects the movement of women, who left one clan to marry into another (ibid. 157–8). There was also a division of responsibility for religious activity depending on the nature of the object concerned: large, inanimate objects (mountain, sky) are related to via religious activities by elders, whilst animate beings and biological processes are associated with various kinds of shaman; inbetween things, like rivers (which move, but are not alive) or trees (which are alive, but do not move on their own), are dealt with by women, or by the whole community (ibid. 57).

Among the Ob Ugrian peoples, most shamans were men; the occasional female shaman was probably credited with lower powers, reflecting the severely limiting restrictions on women in society (Karjalainen 1921–7: III, 252; Kerezsi 1996: 194). Female shamans on a par with male ones likewise do not appear to have existed among the Sámi, though the early evidence is not decisive (Mebius 2003: 127); later tradition, recorded at a time when shamanism in its classic form was but a memory, recognises them, as Itkonen (1946: 156–7) notes: the first to report on female sorcerers was J. Fellman, who told of the sorceress sister of the recently departed Pavus-Niila; Leem mentions sorceresses (*guape*), who used knives, axes, stones and belts in their magic; among the Skolt Sámi a tale was told of sorceresses from Neiden and Petsamo coming together in spirit and competing vigorously; the reindeer Sámi of Inari know of drum women (*rum'b-āhkkùh*) who ate fly agaric before using the magic drum; they were thought to be evil in intent, sending men "sorties of evil" and killing for their own ends or for others, keeping malignant *stāllu* spirits as messengers, whereas the male sorcerer had no drum, conjuring purely with spiritual power (*vuoiŋâvūimī*). The male sorcerer oversaw cult rites, which the drum woman could not do; the sorcerer went "alive into heaven", but the drum woman was an *ījâ-beäl-ōlmoš* (a person of the shadow side).

Further consideration is given to the question of female shamanism amongst the Sámi by Lundmark (1987), who analyses modern traditions about certain female shamans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He considers the fact that these shamanesses did not act on behalf of the community to be a sign of advanced decay in the traditional role of the shaman; presumably their use of the drum, which older sources indicate was tabu for a woman even to touch (*SLS* 84), is part of this decay. On the other hand, he suggests that the existence of female shamans among the Sámi is an ancient feature. They did not perform all the same functions as the male shamans, being excluded, for example, from sacrificing, but could yoik and perform soothsaying (Skanke 1943–5: 200); this is consistent with

the role of the girls acting as assistants to the *noaidi* in older accounts: thus Jens Kildal (1943–5: 140) writes of the assistant:

> Og al den tiid, Noyden ligger aande-løs, maae absolut en qvindes person idelig, og u-afladelig, giøuke paa ivrigste maade, en deel, for, at paaminde ham om hans forretning i Jabmeaymo, og, een deel, for at faae ham til livs igen.
>
> And all the time the shaman lies spiritless a female person must the whole time and continuously yoik in the most eager manner, on the one hand to remind him of his task in Jábbmeájmmo [the world of the dead], and on the other to bring him back to life.

Isaac Olsen recounts that a woman, if possible a maiden, sings and wakes the shaman up, leading him from that place, or else he dies; the shaman praises the woman, alluding to her sexual qualities and his genitals. Confusion arises, in fact, from using the general term "shaman": the women in question were what Skanke terms *guaps* (i.e. *guobas:* cf. Petrus Thurenius's *gåbeskied,* Isaac Olsen's *noide kalcko,* Lindahl and Öhrling's *qwopes, qwopeswuot, qwopestallat,* resp. "witch", "women's magic", "use magic", Lule Sámi *kuopaskui'na,* "woman versed in magic"), and this is distinct from the male *noaidi* (and variants) (Lundmark 1987: 166–7). A distinction in the types of spiritual practitioner is also made by Lundius (1905: 8), writing in the 1670s, between men, who are assisted by spirits («spådoms andar», "spirits of prophecy"), and women, who are not, but still have powers of prophecy («spådoms orden»). Within the *noaidi's* kamlanie, it appears that female assistants at times consisted of a larger group: while all those present could take part in the singing, a special choir of women would assist the shaman in later stages of the kamlanie (*SLS* 101); Sigvard Kildal and Henric Forbus mention three or four women engaged with the shaman in singing before he falls into trance.

Crossing gender

Amongst the Itelmens, the Koraks and the Chukchi, all peoples of far-eastern Siberia, in the general area where, to the south, female shamanism occurred or prevailed, the shaman's spirits often demanded that the shaman change sex: this was more often from man to woman than woman to man. Basilov (1978: 281–9) notes vestiges of transvestism in Central Asian shamanism, indicating the practice may once have been more widespread. Meuli (1975: 825) considered that it may have been present among the Scythians mentioned by Herodotus.

Bogoras (1904–9: 448–54) discusses sex-changed shamans in his reports of the customs of the Chukchi (Bogoras himself met several sex-changed shamans, though of shamans who had changed from women to men he merely heard tales); effeminacy occurred in increasing degrees: the shaman braided his hair like a woman; he wore women's clothes (a fairly common shamanic feature: Anisimov 1963*a*: 97); he took on women's habits, becoming shy and losing his masculine physique; the so-called "soft man"

felt himself to be a woman, and sought a male lover, whom he sometimes married. The shaman E'chuk boasted that he had borne two sons with the help of his spirits. The first two degrees are not confined to shamans: for example, a man might adopt female braiding and clothing on the advice of a shaman, so as to disguise him from spirits trying to harm him.

Public opinion is always against sex-changed shamans, but they are tolerated in view of their great powers; even other shamans feared "soft men" (Bogoras 1904–9: 453). In her study of homosexual and transvestite shamanism, Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg (1970: 221–2) concludes, with respect to the powers endowed by the practice, that a sex-changed shaman became capable of outstanding shamanic feats as a result of the permanent state of conflict and resultant personal affliction under which they lived. This may be restated as the more religiously oriented principle that assuming a sexually liminal position brings with it supernatural powers. Crossing gender taps into a source of sexual power, which in a more general form is recognised in charms such as the following from the Chukchi, who had trans-gender shamans (Bogoras 1904–9: 448–9):[1]

> Especially do the malignant spells acquire additional force through the performing of certain prescriptions regarding the organs of sex, male and female. Thus, a "mischievous shaman", when he desires to make an especially powerful incantation, must strip himself naked and go out of his house at night, while the moon is shining. Then he must call to the moon and make an incantation, saying "O moon! I show you my private parts. Take compassion on my angry thoughts. I have no secrets from you. Help me on such and such a man!"

Norse

COMMUNITY

It is worth recalling the points made earlier to the effect that magical activities such as *seiðr* as they appear in sagas (the main materials presenting such activities) are almost certainly largely the creation of the saga writers; kings' sagas and legal texts are perhaps more likely to reveal something closer to reality, but even here the greatest caution is needed – the kings' sagas are themselves clearly imbued with a great deal of invention, and in the field of superstitious activities legal texts reflect what people *believed* was happening around them, not what actually was. Thus, although it is possible to build up some sort of picture of the social aspects of magical activity, this picture will only reflect what people, primarily in thirteenth-century Iceland, *thought* the activity involved, usually in historical settings a couple of centuries earlier. The reality may have been quite different, and the likelihood of any accurate awareness of the social setting for the

[1] It is unclear whether exposure functions here as an assertion of the shaman's power, or rather evokes a sense of vulnerability, which is used to elicit compassion from the heavenly powers called upon for help. Either way, however, it is through the manipulation of aspects of his sexuality that the shaman increases his power.

performance of magic surviving from centuries earlier is meagre. The picture that emerges of the social context of magic is not without value: but it is far more a picture of literary motifs than an ethnographic presentation.

Dillmann (2006: 577) asserts that those involved in the performance of magic are usually fully part of the social network: thus in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 40 Þorgríma galdrakinn makes many social relationships, and it is as a result of a long connection that she performs magic for Þóroddr by blowing up a storm against his enemy, not a one-off act of a commercial nature. Yet nothing in the Norse sources marks out the practitioner of magic as an embodiment of the community, in the way noted above among shamanic societies, where the notion might be symbolised in the members of the community being seen as the bones which make up the shaman. There is in Norse sources a general coolness towards magicians, who in the main were regarded as outside the norms of society. Thus the *seiðkona* appears in literary sources both to be respected, even feared, and rejected. In *Eiríks saga rauða* Þorbjǫrg was invited to farms: she did not have to go knocking at doors, and she was welcomed in fine fashion – there is a definite sense that nothing should be done to upset her (with the implication that otherwise the fortune-telling might not prove so positive); yet not all those on the farm were happy with her presence there: it is surely likely always to have been the case in real life that certain individuals would have despised fortune-tellers, but in the fictional settings of the sagas this motif is used more narrowly for particular narrative or thematic purposes, such as to emphasise the rejection of pagan practices by Christians or ancestors of Christians (as in the case of Þorbjǫrn, and in certain respects Guðríðr, in *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4); in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* too the hero will have nothing to do with the prophetess, but here, it is rather virile heroism that is contrasted – relying on one's own might and main, rather than the amblings of a fortune-teller. *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 12 also expresses an ambiguous point of view towards the fortune-telling woman: «Kona sú fór þar um herað, er Oddbjǫrg hét, gleðimaðr, fróð ok framsýn. Þótti mikit undir, at húsfreyjur fagnaði henni vel um heraðit», "That woman went around the district who was called Oddbjǫrg, an enjoyer of entertainment, wise and foresighted. It seemed a matter of great significance that the housewives welcomed her well around the district." Oddbjǫrg is admitted to be endowed with prophetic gifts, and her ready welcome by the housewives indicates their fear of having a bad fortune told. The strained relationship that existed between client and fortune-teller is evident too in *Vǫluspá* – between supernatural beings in a divine setting, it is true, but one which surely is inspired by the reality (or imagined reality) of human dealings with fortune-tellers. Here the repeated refrain «Vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?», "Do you know yet, and what?", is a taunt to Óðinn and the gods, made more explicit in the exchange between him and the *vǫlva* in st. 28–9, where she interjects «Hvers fregnið mik? Hví freistið mín?», "What do you ask me? Why do you try me?", followed by her exultant declaration of knowing everything, in contrast to Óðinn, who, despite sacrificing his eye in Mímir's spring, has to come running to her to ask for prophecies; yet all this bravado on her

part dissipates when he presents her with jewellery, buying her far-sighted mind in the way one might buy a whore's body.[2]

In shamanic practices, audience participation is usually a central feature, reaffirming the shaman's role as representative of the community (Vitebsky 1995: 96–115). In human settings (or in divine, for that matter) we have little indication of any such interchange between *vǫlva* and audience, other than that those present come up and get individual forecasts of their fortunes (this is the scenario in the longest account, *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4 ⟨87⟩, which essentially matches other instances of *seiðr* and the activities of *vǫlur*). There was a practice of *útiseta*, "sitting out", which appears to have been an activity carried out on one's own (explicitly so in *Vǫluspá*) to undertake sorcery; *Vǫluspá* ascribes it to the *vǫlva* whom Óðinn comes to consult. That it was not a practice confined to supernatural beings is indicated in its condemnation in the laws ⟨78⟩. Magic as a lone activity is essentially a non-societal activity; this aspect of *útiseta* appears to be reflected in *seiðr*: even when undertaken at people's homes the *seiðkona* appears to act largely on her own. Several accounts do mention an assistant choir or present *seiðr* as an activity undertaken by several people at once ⟨83c, 87, 102, 106, 116, 118⟩, and a substantial piece of apparatus, the dais-like *seiðhjallr* ⟨87, 88, 89, 92, 95, 102⟩, was commonly used, which would have focused attention upon the *seiðr* practiser. It is difficult to draw conclusions on the basis of these accounts – which may be quite unreliable as witnesses of pre-Christian practices – about how the audience may have interacted with the performer, but the indications point to *separation* rather than *integration* between audience and *vǫlva*: the platform sets her apart physically, and the choir or assistant group, taking up its position around the practitioner, would similarly have been separated off as part of the distinct "sacred" entourage. The fact that the group was envisaged as a distinct party which travelled with the *vǫlva* in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ch. 3 ⟨128⟩ indicates that it was not derived from the ad hoc audience, and was obviously intended to be clearly demarcated from it. This may have been the way things were viewed in the pagan period, but we must also accept the possibility that the depiction of such arrangements derives from the church ceremonies, where the priest, clergy and choir were separated off as a professional group performing in the altar area: pagan practices may, without any basis in real tradition, have been imagined as having followed similar arrangements, *mutatis mutandis*. Unlike the shaman, the *seiðkona* does not appear as an intermediary and negotiator between the spirit world and the human world, but rather as a mere communicator of information from the spirit world.

There is no Norse evidence for a resident *seiðmaðr* or *seiðkona* regularly

[2] It might be asked why Óðinn, with his association with *seiðr*, should need to come to consult a *vǫlva* at all. But it would be wrong to ask this: the poet is interested in the god's perilous lack of knowledge as providing a framework in which a view of cosmic history can be provided, and is free to ignore any other themes which may be associated with Óðinn elsewhere. There was no obligation on this or any Norse poet to assume the mantle of systematiser.

consulted by a district, parallel to the clan shaman, unless Rǫgnvaldr réttilbeini's band of eighty *seiðmenn* in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 25 ⟨116⟩, and the band of his grandson Eyvindr kelda in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 62–3 ⟨118⟩, are instances of regular "schools" of such men maintained by a chieftain. The *seiðkona* or *vǫlva* is usually presented as a wanderer (matching Óðinn, himself a practiser of *seiðr*, who wanders over the earth as a wizard in *Lokasenna* 24 ⟨104⟩), very much on the edge of society: she is similar to the gypsy fortune-teller of later days.[3] This is not a characteristic shared particularly strongly with magicians in general; thus, to take just two examples, Þrándr in *Færeyinga saga* has a fixed abode at Gata, and Þórdís in *Kormáks saga* and *Vatnsdœla saga* lives at Spákonufell, "Seeress mountain".

The seeresses of Norse literary tradition must to some degree reflect people's notions of what was likely to exist, or to have existed, in real life, and these notions will in part have derived from traditions passed down over a long period: there is a lot of room for fact and fiction to part company in this process, but some degree of family likeness can be detected between the literary seeress and the actual pagan Germanic seeresses recorded by classical writers (though here too we must beware of bias or recasting in a classical mould). The most obvious point of similarity is that diviners are in both cases very predominantly women, and it is reasonable to conclude that divinatory, and probably also efficatory, magic was indeed in the hands mainly of women in Germanic and later Norse society (the same is likely to be true of other Germanic societies: note, for example, the tradition of the prophetic female in Old English verse, discussed by F. Robinson 1993, who relates it to Norse and ancient Germanic parallels). Yet there is also a huge difference: whereas the literary seeresses and practisers of magic in general are socially peripheral characters, this is far from the case with the ancient Germanic seeresses, who appear to have played a central role in the political life of their peoples, and to have acted as counsellors: this is particularly noticeable in the case of Veleda (Tacitus, *Historiae* IV.61 ⟨64⟩), and appears, in a different form, in the prophetic war-priestesses of the Cimbri (Strabo, *Geography* VII.2.3 ⟨69⟩). It is perilous to draw conclusions from these more southerly, and in particular temporally distant, examples of seeresses, but they at least raise the possibility that the role of their counterparts in contemporary and later pre-Christian Scandinavia may have been more central, and that all our extant sources reflect an attenuation of their role brought about by the increasing external influences, particularly of Christianity. The notion of females directly involved in directing the governance of a realm is not absent in Norse, however: but the roles of semi-divine

[3] Presumably *vǫlur* lived somewhere (in so far as they are not purely fictional) – for example, it is difficult to imagine that, were he pushed, the author of *Eiríks saga rauða* would not say that Þorbjǫrg dwelled on some farm (after all, her divinatory activities were limited to the winter, when there would be less farm work to be done). But he is not interested in this, preferring to adhere to the motif of the wandering fortune-teller, a motif which *separates* such characters from the norms of society, makes them *other*, in the way that Óðinn, an alien being from the world of the gods, wanders among men as he practises *seiðr*.

adjutrix and human seeress have clearly fissured from an originally more integral being, who as a human female diviner, particularly concerned with the outcome of battle (this is true of the Cimbri priestesses, Veleda and the seeress who foretells Drusus's death), would have been an avatar of a deity (note how Tacitus comments on how seeresses such as Veleda might be treated as goddesses), represented in Norse tradition as Freyja, mistress of *seiðr* and the slain, and also as the death-dealing, but also guardian and prophetic, *dísir*. The role of the ruler's spirit *adjutrix* is seen most clearly in the case of Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr, "bride of the Háleygjar", that is the rulers of Hálogaland in northern Norway.[4] She is mentioned in various sources (reviewed in McKinnell 2005: 81–5), all of them late but clearly, in part, containing old traditions. Of greatest interest is her relationship with the staunchly pagan Hákon jarl, who died in 995, which recalls in general outline, though not in detail, that of Veleda with Civilis (though Tacitus is unaware of the likely cult aspect of this relationship). Þorgerðr's protective function is invoked particularly in *Jómsvíkinga saga* ch. 34, where, losing a battle against the Jómsvíkingar, Hákon goes to a clearing in a wood and prays to Þorgerðr, agreeing to sacrifice his son to gain victory, and a previously hot day turns to a storm from the north, with hail lashing against the Jómsvíkingar, in which Þorgerðr is seen (and thereafter also her sister Irpa), arrows flying from each finger against the enemy. Þorgerðr's prophetic power is presented, almost in passing, in *Harðar saga* ch. 19, where Hákon jarl's relative Grímkell prays for the success of his daughter Þorbjǫrg's marriage, and it is revealed by Þorgerðr that Grímkell will not live long. However, the general role of Þorgerðr, notably in battle, is determinative; divination can be viewed as a weakened form of the determination of fate. Þorgerðr is, then, a *dís* figure, a protective family spirit determining her protégé's fate, especially in battle (*dísir* are considered in more detail in Chapter 9), and is also a *brúðr*, a sexual partner and protector, of the Hálogaland rulers (and hence of the land in general).

GENDER-RELATED ISSUES

U. Dronke (1988: 229) argues that in the war between the *æsir* and the *vanir* in *Vǫluspá* 21–4, the *æsir* seem to have been provoked by being beaten by a woman (Freyja) into attacking Gullveig (Freyja's avatar); *Vǫluspá* 22–3 intimates how a female, home-based cult led by Heiðr (the darling of the wicked bride at each house she came to) threatens to undermine the world of the *æsir*, led by Óðinn. It is natural that the home cult should be the women's domain; that it should be seen as a threat is not necessarily so natural (note the example of Korea above, where the home-based female cult is a fully fledged complement to the temple-based male religion). The antipathy may go back to pagan times, but an opposition of female home cult and male state cult occurs in *Vǫlsa þáttr*, where the home cult is

[4] Her name occurs in various forms, but, as McKinnell (2005: 84) argues, Hákon at least would have taken her name in the sense indicated here.

presented as preserving old pagan ideas in opposition to the new official cult of Christianity (the account is late, from *c.* 1380, but preserves what must have been a persistent notion about the setting for heathen customs, even if the details of the rites are fabrications). Hence gender differences in fact mask political rivalries of a sort which could only arise with the coming of Christianity; *Vǫluspá* has clear allusions to Christian ideas, and this may be a further area of influence.

Heiðr ⟨QV⟩, the *seiðkona* of *Vǫluspá*, may be inferred to have a link with fecundity: the associations of abandon (she is *leikin*, "played with", probably meaning in trance), drink and bad women identify Heiðr's performances with traditional fertility festivals.[5]

When we turn to the human setting, Dillmann (2006: 157–9) notes that the numbers of magicians (a broader category than explicit practisers of *seiðr*) are fairly evenly split between men and women, but divinatory *seiðr* is only ascribed to women (men also have visions of what will happen, but not in the ritual setting found in *seiðr*). Rǫgnvaldr réttilbeini is the only significant male practitioner of *seiðr* (and he learnt it from a prophetess in Haðaland, and was the son of a Sámi princess). Other male practitioners are Þorgrímr nef in *Gísla saga* ch. 11, 18, 21, 26 ⟨89⟩, Kolr kroppinbakr in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* ch. 3 ⟨127⟩, three *seiðmenn* under the earth in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* ch. 25 ⟨119⟩, and Grímr øgir in *Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga* ch. 3, 28 ⟨92⟩.

Rǫgnvaldr and his men are condemned in *Heimskringla*, largely on the basis of their magical practices. These can only have been an excuse, used to stir up opposition to them: Rǫgnvaldr in fact was closely related to the ruling family, being the brother of Eiríkr blóðøx, and he was simply a political threat. He does not seem to have been serving the community with his gang of *seiðmenn*, but the source of information about him is so biased that any conclusions about the nature of male *seiðr* would be built on sand – and this includes the notion that Rǫgnvaldr and his company were actually *seiðmenn* at all, which may be no more than accusation spread by his enemies: the only safe inference is that males using *seiðr* were looked upon with such distaste that the "fact" could be used as a means of political discreditation.

Bourguignon, who carried out field work in various parts of the world, distinguished between visionary trance and possession trance, and noted (1979: 254) that visionary trance is far more often reported as practised by men than women, and tends to occur in small-scale hunting or foraging societies. Possession trance, on the other hand, is more widespread, and is characteristic of stratified agricultural societies; it is a typically feminine

[5] For example, Frazer (1912: I, 62) notes with respect to the Eleusinian festival of the threshing floor "It is said to have included certain mystic rites performed by women alone, who feasted and quaffed wine, while they broke filthy jests on each other and exhibited cakes baked in the form of the male and female organs of generation. [...] These indecencies [...] were no mere wanton outbursts of licentious passion, but were deliberately practised as rites calculated to promote the fertility of the ground by means of homoeopathic or imitative magic."

phenomenon (ibid. 261). The visionary trance is physically passive, but the imagery associated with it is active (for example, the shaman visits the underworld); by contrast, possession trance tends to involve a passive imagery: the woman is possessed, mounted or ridden by the spirit. The visionary trancer remains himself and gains power from his intercourse with the spirits; the possessed woman ceases to be herself, becoming a vehicle for the spirits, and the imagery is fundamentally one of submission, and is replete with sexual imagery (ibid. 262–3). Morris (2006: 39) points out that Bourguignon's analysis is too generalised: visionary trance and possession trance may take place within the shamanic practices of a single society at different times (or even at different points within one ritual), for example, and sexual imagery may occupy a prominent place in hunting-society rites. Nonetheless, Bourguigon's analysis, based as it is on field work as well as academic study, is valuable, as long as it is not regarded as proscriptive. It is consistent with the Norse evidence: in Scandinavia, we encounter a stratified agricultural society (in the main), where the majority of practitioners of *seiðr* were female. If Bourguignon is right, we would expect these *seiðkonur* to exercise their rites primarily in a possessed state. Our sources scarcely allow for a detailed analysis of the details of *seiðr* rites, but the *seiðkona* appears to have remained still (in a chair, for example), in contrast to the northern Eurasian shaman, who typically moved around and presented a sort of dramatic performance and interaction with the audience, in a way that is not evidenced in the *seiðr* performances. A possessed state also suggests that the practitioner did not send her soul out (for which, indeed, there is no evidence in *seiðr*), but accepted spirits into or to herself. The sexual aspects mentioned by Bourguignon are explicitly mentioned in association with *seiðr*, in the form of *ergi*.

Ergi

For men to practise *seiðr* was shameful, for it was accompanied by *ergi* (*Lokasenna* 23–4 ⟨104⟩; *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 ⟨112⟩). What is implied by *ergi* in association with *seiðr*? The matter is essentially straightforward: *seiðr* was practised primarily by women, as all our sources confirm; in the fiercely patriarchal society of medieval Scandinavia, any participation by men in a predominantly female occupation would be looked at askance. It is possible to probe the matter somewhat more deeply, however.

Snorri's statement on the shame of *seiðr* is worth considering further. He writes: «En þessi fjǫlkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmǫnnum skammlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kennd sú íþrótt», "But such great *ergi* accompanies this magic when it is practised, that it was not thought shameless for men to pursue it, and the practice was taught to the priestesses". This is almost certainly an amalgamation of two traditions: that *seiðr* was the special preserve of Freyja (and the *vanir* in general, perhaps), and the opinion of Loki in *Lokasenna* 24 that Óðinn, when practising *seiðr*, was *argr*. Whilst *ergi* here may perhaps imply no more than "effeminacy", the word may certainly, as Sørensen (1983)

has amply shown, imply passive homosexuality: Snorri skates over this implication, but in the verse of *Lokasenna* which Snorri no doubt alludes to Loki appears to be railing against Óðinn for carrying out an act which is tantamount to being buggered.

Was *seiðr* accompanied by *ergi* when women practised it? There appears to be a disparity between what Snorri says and what he means. The clear implication of Snorri's statement is that *seiðr* was acceptable for goddesses/ priestesses; yet his statement associates *ergi* with *seiðr* in an absolute way (so that the two would be regarded as going together even when practised by women). A woman could certainly be *ǫrg*, as a man could be *argr* – but it had the ostensibly slightly different sense of "nymphomaniac" (rather than implying buggery): the passage on Venus – the Roman counterpart of Freyja[6] – cited by Sørensen (1983: 18, 101) from the Hauksbók text *Heimslýsing ok helgifrœði* ch. 5 illustrates this well (and is one of the few instances of a woman being called *ǫrg*): «En hon var svá manngjǫrn, ok svá ǫrg ok svá ill at hon lá með feðr sínum, ok með mǫrgum mǫnnum, ok hafðisk svá sem portkona», "And she was so man-eager, and so *ǫrg*, and so wicked that she lay with her father and with many men and behaved like a whore". In fact, a sense of "keen on men", implying a desire to be the sexually non-dominant partner, would cover both men and women who are *ǫrg*; it is the act of being penetrated, rather than specifically of buggery, that gives rise to *ergi*.

There is support for the idea of a general association of *ergi* with *seiðr* and *vǫlur* from the tradition outside Snorri. As *ergi* was shameful, to accuse someone of it was an act of insulting contumely, or *níð* (on which see Almqvist 1965 and 1974, Ström 1974, and Sørensen 1983). Thus in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 37, Sinfjǫtli engages in a flyting match with Guðmundr, saying:

Þú vart vǫlva	You were a *vǫlva*
í Varinseyio,	on Varinsey;
skollvís kona,	a wily-wise woman,
bartu skrǫk saman;	you put some tales together;
kvaztu engi mann	you said no man
eiga vilia,	would you have,
segg bryniaðan,	no byrnied warrior,
nema Sinfiǫtla!	except Sinfjǫtli!

Sinfjǫtli then claims (st. 39) to have begotten nine wolves on Guðmundr on the foreland of Sága (a name which may mean "prophecy"). The accusation here has the same tone as that directed at Loki in *Lokasenna* 23 by Óðinn,[7]

[6] Venus is identified a few sentences later as being Frigg, on the basis of the day-name, but it is clearly Freyja that is intended here.

[7] Similarly, the Norwegian laws condemned someone who accused a man of bearing children, of being sexually subjugated, or of being a woman, for example *Gulaþings lǫg* 196 (*Norges gamle love* I, 70): «Orð ero þau fullrettis orð heita. þat er eitt ef maðr kveðr at karlmanne oðrom, at hann have barn boret. þat er annat. ef maðr kveðr hann væra sannsorðenn. þat er hit þriðia ef hann iamnar hanom við meri. æða kallar hann grey. æða portkono. æða iamnar hanom við berende eitthvert», "There are words which are called *fullréttisorð*, words

to which Loki's against Óðinn, mentioned above, is a retort ⟨104⟩. Sinfjǫtli's remark is more biting, however, in that he is claiming himself to have subjected Guðmundr to sexual abasement, and to have produced a brood of monsters as a result.

It is not wholly clear from these examples what gives rise to the *ergi*. Is the man (transformed into a woman) *argr* because he acts as a passive homosexual, allowing penetration, or is the woman (transformed from a man) *ǫrg* because she allows herself to be subjected sexually (and indiscriminately)? Either way, the question arises of whether the mere act of being penetrated sexually, regardless of gender, was dishonourable; Sørensen (1983: 24) argues that "The female role was ignominious only when it was assigned to a man". Clover (1993: 77), however, disagrees:

> Scholars who try to distinguish the feminine from the effeminate by suggesting that the female role was ignominious only when it was assigned to a man and that women and female activities as such were not held in contempt are on shaky ground, for the sources point overwhelmingly to a structure in which women no less than men were held in contempt for womanishness and were admired – and mentioned – only to the extent that they showed some "pride" (as their aggressive self-interest is repeatedly characterized in modern commentaries). Again, it seems likely that Norse society operated according to a one-sex model – that there was one sex and it was male. More to the point, there was finally just one "gender", one standard by which persons were judged adequate or inadequate, and it was something like masculine.

Clover's argument is valid, to a point, and in particular her underlining of the precedence of the distinction of gender (a set of acquired characteristics) over that of sex (biological class) is illuminating – it undermines the validity of the sex-based question posed at the beginning of this paragraph, for example, since both men and women could in given circumstances belong to the female gender. Yet Clover's relatively short discussion is limited in scope, and genre-specific; her presentation relates, in fact, more to what is primarily a literary motif, and one belonging above all to the thirteenth century (for it is from literary sources of this period that it is mainly derived) – thus, for example, her point that women were only mentioned when they showed some spunk is revealing: literature can be very selective in its creation of chosen motifs.[8] Whilst the general approbation of essentially masculine virtues, even in women, must surely have had some basis in real life, it would be simplistic to suppose that this functioned as

demanding full atonement. One is if someone says to a male person that he has given birth to children. The second is if someone says that a man has been truly the object of copulation. The third is if he compares a man to a mare, or calls him a bitch or a whore, or compares him to anything that gives birth". For other similar texts, see Sørensen (1983: 100).

[8] Clover does consider a few examples from other genres, notably *Sonatorrek*; interestingly, she is confronted here with a poem by the archetypal male, Egill, which yet fits much better within the genre of female laments. While she offers arguments to accommodate it within her scheme, another approach might well see it as exemplifying a fundamentally different conceptual world with different gender models from those of thirteenth-century Icelandic prose literature.

a basis of society in all its aspects – Hallgerðr and her ilk might make for good stories, but they were disruptive of society (and there is, I would argue, an overriding implicit criticism of such characters within the sagas for that reason). Moreover, there are degrees of ignominy: even if women were regarded as generally lacking the virtues more commonly found in men, and hence being inferior, this is not tantamount to their being actually shameful by nature – the singling out of Venus as *ǫrg* illustrates that this degree of depravity was exceptional. The wisest conclusion would be that at least in some traditions women were regarded as by nature inferior to men, and this inferiority was signalled by their sexual passivity – but it would be going too far to deduce that women were *shameful* by nature.

Ergi must, I think, be viewed as meaning, in physical terms, "opening oneself up for sexual penetration by an inappropriate person" (which is not so far from simple lasciviousness) and appropriating to oneself the concomitant shame; in a man's case this means penetration by anyone, and in a woman's by anyone outside a licit relationship, and especially indiscriminately. For a man, this signifies a change in his essential nature, which ought to be one that does not allow penetration, whereas for a woman it is more a matter merely of the degree of her sexual openness.

Yet *ergi* also has a vaguer meaning of "lack of virility", as when the servant girl in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* ch. 8 utters a supposedly old proverb, «svá ergisk hverr sem eldisk», "everyone grows *argr* as he grows older" (cited by Sørensen 1983: 20), which need not be specific to men (though it relates to a male in the context where it is spoken); age marks a growing susceptibility to outside forces, and hence a lessening of resistant virility, we may surmise; in Clover's terms, it marks a shift of gender from masculine to feminine.

What, then, is particularly *argr* about *seiðr*? Clunies Ross (1994: 208–10) suggests that the *ergi* of *seiðr* stemmed from the act of being penetrated by a spirit, paralleling the way an *argr*, a passive homosexual, is penetrated: whilst this perception has much to commend it, it is, in my view, somewhat too crude a way of conceptualising the matter.[9] There is a need, to begin with, to be somewhat more circumspect, since the sources nowhere explicitly indicate that spirits "penetrated" the magical practitioner at all – they may have been called *to* the summoner, but not necessarily *into* her or him.[10] The notion of sexual penetration is also clearly irrelevant to the

[9] Heide (2006: 268–9) describes the Sámi *nåejtiendïrre*, "noaidi penis", a spiritual force which is sent to molest enemies in an act of phallic aggression; he compares this with various pieces of Norse evidence, among which the Bergen case ⟨137⟩ is particularly relevant, where *gǫnduls andar*, possibly "penis spirits", are sent against a hapless victim. However, it is not clear how such magical rituals would be relevant to the characterisation of *seiðr* as accompanied by *ergi*, since it is not the performance of acts of phallic aggression, but being subject to such acts, that is shameful (*argr*).

[10] Clunies Ross (1994, esp. 206–10) discusses *seiðr* from several angles. To consider her points fully would involve looking at the premisses, with their elements of structuralism and Durkheimianism, upon which her view of Norse myth is built, which I do not intend to do, other than to note they do not correspond to my own. Yet even within her own system, it is odd to find *seiðr* characterised as a cultural product, rather than "one of the forces of nature that can be utilised by humans": this appears out of line with her own arguments

definition of *ergi* when it is viewed as a concomitant of old age. A somewhat more nuanced interpretation is thus called for.

The Finnish notions of *luonto* ⟨QV⟩, the innate force everyone has which is put to special use by the *tietäjä*, is suggestive in light of this spectrum of meanings of *ergi*. A man's *luonto* was deemed in general harder than a woman's, and a person with a soft *luonto* could be easily penetrated by external forces and subjected, for example, to illness. Yet if *seiðr* was rather more mediumistic in its function, it may well have called for such virile resistance to be lowered to allow the spirits access to the medium. A man performing *seiðr* would therefore be undermining his own nature, his *megin* (cf. the discussion of Þórr's loss of *megin* ⟨QV⟩ as he crosses the river in *Þórsdrápa*; see also the enlightening discussion and interpretation of Clunies Ross (1981), who argues that the giantess's subjugation of Þórr makes him *argr*, until such time as he can assert his own superiority, which marks an initiatory experience of loosing himself from the control of his maternal kin); it is this more general but deeper principle, rather than merely performing something that might be compared to an act of homosexual subjugation, or to acting like a woman, that would have been regarded as shameful.

It is illuminating also to consider *ergi* in terms of *individuality* and *relationality* (to use anthropological terminology),[11] which is to say: is a person defined in terms of their distinctness from the world and people around, or in terms of their relationship to these? The self-assertiveness of the male Norse hero (at least in many literary genres, and perhaps in society in general) corresponds to the former, whereas women's roles were more defined by their relationships.[12] Individuality and relationality also relate to attitudes towards the boundary of the physical body: any penetration of the body could be said to violate its individuality, whereas it affirms its relatedness to the world and other beings. Once individuality is set up as the favoured focus of aspiration, expressions of relationality come to be despised, and when realised in extreme forms (such as acts viewed as involving *ergi*) as shameful. Hence both sexual penetration and birth-giving, as breaches of the body's physical boundaries involving intimate

about the nature of the feminine and masculine. It would make greater sense to see *seiðr* as a feminine power which the essentially male *æsir* do not possess, and to gain which they have to transgress their own boundaries. If it were a cultural product, it would already be within their ambit. (In support of the idea that female magical abilities were considered innate, and thus a force of nature, note the comment, cited more fully below, of *Ældre Borgarthings-Christenret* 16 (*Norges gamle love* I, 351): «ækki vældr hon þui siolf at hon er troll», "she does not bring it about herself that she has magical powers")

[11] Relationality is a theme discussed particularly in Amazonian anthropology: see, for example, Opas (2008: 63–76).

[12] Moreover, if we accept that the dichotomy of individuality–relationality may be realised on a social plane as a dichotomy of individualism–sociality, then we may observe that the principle of the lawcode as a basis for society, such as is often emphasised in Icelandic family sagas, is an essentially masculine, individualist, method of regulating relationships between people, demarcating the boundaries rather than asserting the links between them. This point is also made in respect of modern Western law in the sociological study of Carsten (2004: 107–8).

relationships with other beings, are viewed as at best inferior to remaining inviolate, and, when suffered by beings, namely males, whose particular natural vocation was to seek individuality, as positively shameful. When the old are described as being *argr*, there may be some notion of their vulnerability to physical violation by other people, or by diseases entering the body (this is supposition, however), but their most obvious characteristic is their dependency on others, that is on relationships rather than their own *megin*. The same is essentially true of a magical practitioner who relies on spirits for information: the practitioner is defined in relational terms as being reliant on other beings – a point that would be emphasised if the spirits in fact penetrated the practitioner, though it does not seem absolutely necessary to conclude that this must have occurred for the point to remain fundamentally valid; it seems unlikely that *seiðr* would have been conceived as endowed with *ergi* if its primary mode of operation was not one where the practitioner subjected herself to the power of the spirits, in other words acted as a medium (for example, if the practitioner was primarily concerned with sending spirits out, over whom he or she had power, the attribution of *ergi* would scarcely be applicable; the fact that *ergi* is not said to be a concomitant of other forms of magic such as "sitting out" may imply that these involved practices more attuned to the manliness of male practitioners).

To return to *Lokasenna*, Loki's retort to Óðinn surely has the same connotations of dishonourable effeminacy as Óðinn's original accusation, but there is no explicit mention of Óðinn bearing children. Yet such an assertion would be appropriate in order to balance the accusation against Loki which is being turned against Óðinn. As it stands, the second part of the stanza is somewhat unsatisfactory anyway: there seems no reason why an accusation of *ergi* should arise from being a male wizard (*vitki*). However, if «vitka» were emended to «vitku», making it a feminine, we could see a reference to the myth of the begetting of Váli, in which Óðinn, disguised as a woman named, according to Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* III.4.5, Wecha (probably Old Norse *Vitka, "Witch"), seduced Rindr (it is also possible, of course, that Saxo has made up the feminine form himself). It is Rindr who bears the child, but Óðinn achieved it through his practice of *seiðr*, as Kormákr tells us in *Sigurðardrápa* 3 ⟨98⟩, perhaps involving apparent change of sex as in Saxo.

Seiðr appears in the Rindr myth as a means to produce an avenging heir. The same is true of the tale of Signý in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 7 ⟨124⟩, a prose text based to a large extent on heroic verse (some of it preserved in the Eddic poems).[13] Here Signý changes shape with a *seiðkona* and seeks out her brother Sigmundr in order to sleep with him and beget the hero Sinfjǫtli to avenge the wrongs meted out to the Vǫlsungar; Signý is not described as *ǫrg*, but her incestuous actions are precisely comparable with those

[13] The use of magic – not specifically *seiðr* – to aid childbirth is mentioned in Eddic verse in *Oddrúnargrátr* 7, where *galdrar*, "charms", are sung for this purpose, in *Sigrdrífumál* 9, where *bjargrúnar*, "protective runes", fulfil this role, and in *Fáfnismál* 12, where the *nornir* also carry out this function.

engaged in by the *vanir*, so there is a similar coming together of *seiðr* and the breaking of sexual tabus. A *farandi kona*, "travelling woman" ⟨QV⟩, such as Signý becomes, was typically viewed as both a witch and a whore.

The generative power of *seiðr* which is implied in the begetting of heirs is echoed also in *Vǫluspá*, where it appears as the distinctive power of the *seiðr*-practising *vanir* to effect rebirth (if we follow Dronke) or at least continued youthful vigour, both of Gullveig and on the battlefield against the *æsir*. There is no clear association of *seiðr* with *ergi* in *Vǫluspá*, but it may be hinted at: why, for instance, was the (first?) *seiðkona*, Heiðr, the «angan illrar brúðar», "the sweet odour [darling] of an evil bride"? "Bride" is a term for a woman which defines her in terms of sexual relations (though it must be conceded that *brúðr* is often used in a fairly neutral sense of "young woman"), so an "evil" bride may well be one that misuses those relations (note how Venus is described as «ill» in the Hauksbók passage cited above, when she engages in incest). McKinnell (2005: 91) makes some further perceptive comments on the area of illicit sexual activity in the poem:

> It is even possible that the *Vǫluspá* poet intended a political allusion to Hákon jarl's sexual behaviour. Later in the poem, the human beings punished in the grievous currents at Nástrǫnd ("Corpse-shores") are oath-breakers, murderers and seducers of other men's wives (*Vǫluspá* 39,1–6), and the gods seem here to be punishing men for the sins of which they themselves are guilty. Their oathbreaking and murder are clear in the story of the Giant Builder (25–6), but there is nothing to associate them with the seduction of married women unless it is their acceptance of Freyja after the war with the Vanir. Hákon jarl, however, was notorious for abducting the wives and daughters of his most important followers and having sex with them for a week or two before sending them home again. It seems likely, as Richard North has suggested, that this promiscuity was "sacred", linked to Hákon's worship of Þorgerðr, and that in it he saw himself passing on her gift of fertility, both to the land itself and to human women. If Gullveig/Freyja was a goddess of the same type as Þorgerðr, the acceptance of Freyja by the Æsir may implicate them in the seductions of married women that were part of the cult of the promiscuous goddess.

Sexual licence is associated with powers of prophecy in goddesses of fertility:[14] Frigg, Freyja, Gefjun and Iðunn are all attacked for their licentiousness in *Lokasenna*, and to Frigg and Gefjun are ascribed prophetic

[14] That female *ergi* combined with powers of prophecy was not just a matter for the gods may be demonstrated (with the proviso that we cannot be sure of the degree of the group's Norseness) by the Rus funeral reported by Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān ⟨31⟩, where the slave girl may be described as being forcibly made *ǫrg* by being repeatedly subjected to sexual intercourse, and also looks over into the other world and reports what she sees (she acts as a medium, a communicator, from this world to the next, conveying the warriors' love of their lord, which is packaged in a physical act; a *vǫlva* acts as a medium to convey the messages of the spirits of the other world to this). It is true that, according to Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān, a youngster of either sex was called for. But we cannot infer from this that if a man had undertaken the ritual, it would have proceeded in the same way. Prophecy is firmly associated with females, and only exceptionally with males, in the whole Germanic world, and the Rus ceremony should be seen as exemplifying this. It might even be questioned if Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān understood the original request correctly.

knowledge (and Freyja's practice of *seiðr* implies the same). Thus Freyja, the patron of *seiðr*, is accused by Loki in *Lokasenna* 30 of sleeping with all the *æsir* and *álfar* present: although the word is not used here, she is clearly *ǫrg* in the way her counterpart Venus is in Hauksbók. Snorri informs us in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 ⟨111⟩ that the *vanir* engaged in sexual practices, such as incest, some of which would have been accounted *argr* by the *æsir*, and it would be natural to associate the practice of *seiðr*, originating among the *vanir*, with such practices (cf. the incestuous relationship of the Sora shaman: incest is, again, a breaking of *mores* which arrogates spiritual power). As a mythic entity, it would appear likely that *seiðr*, as a practice originating among the *vanir* and espoused especially by the *vana dís*, Freyja, was characterised by sexual licentiousness in some way; "licentiousness" is, however, the wrong way to view the matter: the sexual aspects would have been reflections of a fertility role, and would have had particular purposes, such as the securing of fecundity. The indications from some of the texts considered, that *seiðr* was concerned with the begetting of an heir, are consistent with this.

In *Þrymskviða* Þórr is made *argr* by dressing as a woman. By genre the poem is comic burlesque; yet the myth may derive from more archaic models which, we may surmise, dealt with *ergi* in the context of powers of fertility in a less flippant manner. The theft of the thunder god's hammer, an international motif (ATU 1148B, mainly recorded from the Baltic and Scandinavia), would have affected the fertility of the land through the effect on the weather.[15] The hammer is, in fact, almost certainly to be identified symbolically with Þórr's phallus, his tool of fertility, so that it

[15] This motif is not apparent in extant Norse sources, but is found elsewhere: in Estonian folktales, the theft of the thunder god's hammer (or other attribute) results in the absence of rain (noted in the variant presented by Loorits 1930: 60). Baltic gods of thunder were strongly associated both with weather and with fecundity/well-being (Biezais 1972: 131–50), a connection which indeed can be traced in many traditions: for example, in an Old Anatolian (probably originally Hattian) myth, preserved in Hittite, when the Storm God (of whom, in the Norse/Baltic myths, the hammer surely functions as a metonym) departed, "he carried off plenty, prosperity, and abundance", and "barley [and wheat] no longer [ripened. Cattle, sheep], and humans did not [become pregnant]" (Hoffner 1998: text 3). If the burlesque tale of *Þrymskviða* existed in an earlier, more religiously oriented form, its point of interest is likely to have been this motif of the loss of fecundity (effected through the weather). Þórr's links with fertility are clear; they are explicit, for example, in Adam of Bremen's statement in *Descriptio insularum aquilonis* ch. 26: «Thor, inquiunt, praesidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat», "Thor, they [the Swedes] say, has mastery in the air, who rules over thunder and lightning, winds and showers, fair weather and produce of the land". Several features link Þórr with the Baltic thunder god Perkūnas (in the Lithuanian form), suggesting a good deal of shared heritage or areal diffusion: both have goats as draft animals, both have a weapon whose name is based on the ancient root for "milling" (*Mjǫllnir* in Norse, *Milna* in Latvian), and Perkūnas corresponds to Þórr's mother Fjǫrgyn (the Indo-European root being **perkʷ-*, "oak", the tree sacred to the god; Fjǫrgyn, seen as equivalent to "earth" in Norse texts (thus Jǫrð, "Earth", is said to be mother to Þórr in *Gylfaginning* ch. 9, parallel to Fjǫrgyn being so described in *Hárbarðsljóð* 56), would have been in origin a goddess of the oak-grown land) (West 2007: 239–42). Masing (1944) noted both classical and Middle Eastern analogues to *Þrymskviða*, as well as further Finnic examples, but, whilst showing that the general motif of the disappearance of the thunder god's most important attribute (not necessarily a hammer) is widespread, an actual origin outside the Baltic area for the Norse myth is scarcely demonstrated.

is its loss, rather than simply dressing in women's clothes, that marks his becoming *argr*;[16] at the moment the hammer is placed on his lap in an act of nuptial blessing (st. 30–1) he regains his manhood and destroys the enemies of fecundity, the giants. Unlike for Óðinn, *ergi* opens no powers for Þórr – it opens him up to the intrusion of the might of the giants against his person, but the giants here are forces of destruction (not of wisdom, or anything desirable for the gods) – other than a power of deceipt, a ruse to lead the giant on (and this was Heimdallr's idea, not Þórr's). It is probable that Þórr's wearing of the Brísingamen, the necklace of birth and fertility of Freyja, is a late feature of the story, aimed at increasing the comedy by making the god appear even more effeminate, but possibly it reflects a notion that Þórr's mission is the return of fertility, symbolised in the necklace, to the gods. Another probably late feature is the way the poem plays upon Freyja's lasciviousness (we might say her *ergi*) in the eagerness Loki claims she showed to answer the invitation to giantland, such that she could not eat or sleep for eight nights (st. 26, 28).

Freyja's brother Freyr is presented as lascivious (but not *argr*) in *Skírnismál*, hankering as he does after Gerðr. Gerðr is threatened with «ergi ok œði / ok óþola», "*ergi* and rage and restlessness" (st. 36), just as a magical practitioner in medieval Bergen threatened to impose *ergi* and *óþoli* on his hapless victim ⟨137⟩.[17] *Skírnismál* is loosely concerned with fertility (its main theme being magical coercion to force sex upon an unwilling female), but *ergi* here is in a sense subverted into something that is not merely shameful (the girl will be forced to become lascivious), but also powerfully destructive by being made unrequitable.

The two main products of *seiðr*, inferred from the discussions above, namely knowledge of the future (often, it would appear, related to crops) and heirs, may be seen as expressions, the one abstract, the other physical, of one symbolic idea: the securing of continuing welfare. The vulnerability, indeed penetrability, of the *seiðr* practitioner was the key to her strength, her indissolubility. In *Vǫluspá* 21–4 we encounter three attempts by the *æsir*

[16] The identification of the hammer with Þórr's phallus is argued by Perkins (1994), who points out how the Eyrarland image, almost certainly representing Þórr (argued at length in Perkins 2001), presents the hammer as doubling as a phallus. Perkins interprets *Þrymskviða* 30–1 as reflecting a pagan nuptial rite, in which the hammer would be placed on the bride's lap in the manner of a penis, with the clear intention of blessing her fertility; when the phallic hammer is placed on the pseudo-bride Þórr's lap, it signifies the return of his manhood.

[17] The Bergen curse specifies the *ergi* as «ylgjar ergi», "female wolf's *ergi*"; the wolf is associated with wildness, destruction, outlawry, and hence implies a sense of "ravenous sexual desire", but it is also the steed of giants or witches – the former being explicitly mentioned in the charm (as in *Skírnismál*), the latter implicit as the executors of the magic evoked in the charm; the motifs of giantess/witch, magic (in this case prophecy), wolf-steed and sexual desire (as well as the liminal time of twilight) come together in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 35: «Reið á vargi / er rekvit var, / flióð eitt er hann / fylgio beiddi; / hon vissi þat / at veginn myndi / Sigrlinnar sonr / á Sigarsvǫllom», "There rode on a wolf, at twilight, a lady who offered him company; she knew the son of Sigrlinn would be slain on Sigarsvellir" (the prose preceding st. 31 expands this, the *fljóð* being explicitly called a *trollkona*, "troll woman", riding a wolf with snakes as reins, who offers her company to Heðinn, who refuses and is cursed for his rejection). (I thank Carolyne Larrington for reminding me of the relevance of this stanza.) See ⟨WOLF⟩.

to control the *vanir* by force, each of them rebuffed. Gullveig is speared and burned, but is "born" each time, and her name implies that these births are like the purifying of gold in fire. Heiðr, the only character explicitly said to practise *seiðr* here, is welcomed among women, and, it seems, starts a cult the *æsir* cannot contol. The *vanir* host is assailed by Óðinn's unfailing spear of victory, but remain alive and kicking on the field. We may look at these events as a confrontation between the adherents of the definitions of personhood discussed above, individuality (the *æsir*) and relationality (the *vanir*); the *vanir* thrive on accepting the Other (other people, other objects) within their very bodies – far from killing them, as the *æsir* intend, it enables them to be reborn in a yet more vigorous state. The poet implies that the *vanir* have the power to regenerate wealth (Gullveig), prophetic knowledge (Heiðr) and military invulnerability (the *vanir* host). The only way to kill the *vanir* and those like them would be to isolate them, to undermine their relationality: and this secret of course is known to the *vanir* themselves, and is used by Skírnir on Freyr's behalf in his threats to Gerðr: the god will not confront her directly, but isolate her away from society, depriving her of all contact, and cause her to wither.

There are further aspects to the practice of *seiðr*. Whilst there is no direct evidence, the practitioners of *seiðr* no doubt identified with the patron goddess; this may perhaps be reflected in the way Heiðr, in an apparently human setting, appears to mimic Freyja as she wanders and practises *seiðr* in *Vǫluspá*. For men, such an identification would imply effeminacy: but in so far as they served such a goddess they gained a feminine sexuality which may have been considered to bestow greater supernatural power by virtue of overstepping a *limen*. We may infer this to have been the motivation for Óðinn to practise *seiðr* in *Lokasenna*; in this crossing of boundaries he resembles the Siberian shamans who change sex.

To conclude this section on a salutary note, it must be pointed out that, despite the intimations of sexual activities being linked to *seiðr*, especially among the gods, we have no evidence for the integration of sexual activity into the human practice of *seiðr*, even if it was regarded as somehow *argr* to practise it. There is no reason to seek a direct correspondence between myth and ritual, though it is also likely that any actual sexual practices would have failed to make their appearance in texts from the Christian period – an inhibition not shared by the Moslem writer Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān, whose account at least hints that a greater range of such sexual acts may have taken place in human rites than the Norse sources indicate. Even if some forms of magical and divinatory practice in Scandinavia involved a sexual element, however, it is not clear that this was a characteristic shared throughout the Germanic world. In particular, the Roman and Greek accounts of Germanic seeresses do not present them as courtesans or the like; how much remained untold by such classical sources cannot, of course, be determined. The implication, in any case, is that practices such as *seiðr* could be carried out, in different times and places, by various sorts of practitioner, just as could many forms of shamanism, a practice which at various times and places involved sexual elements, but did not do so universally.

The Haddingjar

Dumézil (1973*a*) argues that the two Haddingjar heroes are representations of the divine couple of fertility gods found in several Indo-European traditions – he compares the Greek Dioskouroi and the Indo-Iranian Nāsatyau – and represented in Germanic by Njǫrðr and Freyr (whilst Freyr and Freyja represent a manifestation of the "divine fertility couple" with a different emphasis in the pair being split between the sexes).

The Haddingjar appear to be well rooted in Germanic heroic tradition. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* LXXI.12, records that the Astingoi, led by the brothers Raos and Raptos, migrated to what is now Hungary in AD 167;[18] the people were Vandals, and the Astingoi the name of the royal dynasty (Dumézil 1973*a*: 114). *Astingoi* represents Germanic **Hazdingōz*, which yields Old Norse *Haddingjar*.

The word *haddingjar* indicates a link with effeminacy: it is derived from *haddr*, "a woman's hair style".[19] Loose hair was a distinguishing feature of witches, as evidenced in a West Gotland law ⟨73⟩. Óðinn is called *fallhaddr*, "loose haired", in *Berudrápa* (*Skj* B_1 42, attributed to Egill, but probably from the twelfth to thirteenth century); he also wanders round practising *seiðr* like female *vǫlur*, taking on the shape of a wizard or witch in *Lokasenna* 24 ⟨104⟩ (cf. «i trols ham» in ⟨73⟩); could wearing a witch's coiffure have been part of the *ergi* involved here (cf. the Yukagir shaman in ⟨22⟩)?

A pattern of dual fertility deities with effeminate ministers may be observed as far back as Tacitus (*Germania* ch. 43), who mentions that the Naharvali worshipped a pair of brother gods, and the rite was presided over by a priest dressed as a woman («sacerdos muliebri ornatu»).

Dumézil concludes that the divine fertility pair in Germanic were originally served by a transvestite priest, and were associated, personally or through their human counterparts the Haddingjar, with aspects of effeminacy such as female coiffure (braiding of hair is the sign of the first degree of transsexual shamanism among the Chukchi); he notes that according to Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* VI.5.10, the hero Starkatherus was disgusted by the effeminacy of the rites of sacrifice at Uppsala, a centre of a fertility cult.

Conclusion

Female shamanism appears most strongly in societies which are not primarily based on hunting, or in areas which border such societies. It is often more associated with agrarian societies than is male shamanism, and

[18] Loewenthal (1920–1: 248–9) interprets the names as **rauzaz*, "reed", and **raftaz*, "beam"; de Vries (*AR* §499), with good argument, as "pole" (thin tree stem) and "beam"

[19] Kroesen (1987) objects to a number of Dumézil's arguments, pointing out for example that Germanic kings might sometimes grow their hair long as a token of religious dedication, and thus the *haddingjar* can be explained without reference to effeminacy. Long hair is not, however, the same as a female hair cut – though it must be admitted that the Vandal cognate of Old Norse *haddr* may not have meant the same thing. Dumézil presents a schema of evidence which accommodates the Norse and related evidence, though a good deal of uncertainty must, admittedly, be allowed.

may be subsumed within a wider spiritual system where the hierarchical religion is more male-dominated. All of these societal characteristics are found in ancient Scandinavia, where *seiðr*, the practice most comparable to shamanism, was also dominated by women (in all likelihood this is a reflection of a long-standing preponderance of women as diviners, going back into the ancient past in Germanic areas). Like shamanism in the societies discussed by Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, *seiðr* is associated with a goddess of fertility and death – Freyja as a goddess of death as well as fertility is acknowledged in her receiving of half the slain, and in the name of her home, *Fólkvangr*, "Battlefield" (*Grímnismál* 14). The shamanic societies in question tend to be concentrated at a great distance from Scandinavia, in South and South-East Asia, yet this may be an accident of history: the dominant religions of this region were able to accommodate the female-based cult in a way that Christianity could not. The same basic societal characteristics nonetheless existed also in Europe, suggesting that a female-dominated form of shamanism could equally well have existed there too: moreover, as I have argued in Chapter 5, it is possible to see European witchcraft as a severely attenuated form of such a practice. The Norse practice of *seiðr* (in particular) may thus be a sort of outlier, a fragment which owing to its remoteness managed to retain some archaic features, of a European counterpart to the female-dominated shamanism of the agrarian societies on the other side of Eurasia.[20] An examination of the gender-related issues in *seiðr* has also revealed that at least in certain circumstances the practice was linked to motifs of (re)birth: the explicit and mainly late accounts of *seiðr* considered in Chapter 6 did not bring this out as a purpose of the practice, but it may well have fallen outside the conceptual framework within which later prose authors wished to confine the practice; it is, moreover, a broadly shamanic feature (but, again, not specifically a classically shamanic one), in that *seiðr* would be employed to ensure the welfare and continuance of the "clan". We do not know how *seiðr* would have been conceived as helping with (re)birth – it is possible that a notion existed of fetching a new soul to be born, or fetching back one that had departed, both of which notions exist in various forms of classic shamanism, and which are comparable with the widespread shamanic function of retrieving the souls of the sick. However, the Norse evidence is simply insufficient to provide an answer to this.[21]

[20] DuBois (1999: 121–38) sees *seiðr* as a borrowed practice, its characteristics largely determined by Sámi and perhaps Finnish influence, which was then adapted into the female-dominated prophetic practice we find recorded. I find the evidence does not support this hypothesis. Apart from the fact that there is little that specifically links *seiðr* to Sámi practices, the very maleness of Sámi shamanism is a determining factor to rule out any fundamental connection between it and *seiðr*. Once it is explained away as being "adapted" to a female-dominated prophetic practice, there is scarcely anything left upon which to make valid comparisons. Of course, *seiðr* and magic in general is often ascribed to the Sámi in the fictitious sources, but this is nothing more than a use of the motif of the Sámi as outsiders, gifted in magic: it is not valid evidence that they actually practised the distinctly Norse *seiðr*.

[21] In my discussion of *Skírnismál*, however, I suggest that a notion of the visit to the otherworld to retrieve a soul may underlie the wooing of Gerðr, a motif that might be described as broadly shamanic.

III. METAPHYSICAL ENTITIES

Concepts of souls and spirits are what I have termed "meta-shamanic": the presence of shamanism is not determined by the existence of any particular set of spirit notions, yet shamans in the practice of their craft relied on whatever such notions existed in their community. A consideration of shamanism therefore calls for an examination of these concepts. I have spread this examination over two chapters: any distinction made between souls and spirits is bound to be somewhat arbitrary, particularly when a person's soul may wander free from the body and become a de facto semi-independent spirit, whilst the souls of the dead merge with non-human spirits. Nonetheless, despite this difficulty, the first chapter presents concepts of those spiritual entities which are part of, or reflections of, the human being, whilst the second deals with spirits conceived as primarily independent beings and the semi-independent fetch.

8. Souls

Concepts of the soul are invariably fluid and difficult to apprehend. The researcher's own preconceptions of what a "soul" is are bound to play into any attempt to delineate a particular culture's notions, and this is made worse by producing mere summaries of information divorced from a consideration of the culture, and language, concerned. The following outline attempts to be reasonably comprehensive of the words for "soul" and related concepts in Norse sources, along with parallels in other Germanic languages (especially Old English, which has a wider array of sources than Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Frisian or Gothic), without, however, going into detail of all occurrences of the words concerned. The presentation of the many Siberian notions, however, is far more selective and reliant on secondary sources, but nonetheless, I hope, sufficiently detailed to give a useful idea of the range of particularities of the various traditions against which to compare the Germanic evidence.

It is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss the philosophy of language, but to prevent misunderstanding of the treatment of metaphysical entities such as the soul it is, perhaps, worth highlighting one of the chief changes in the development of modern Western thought, namely the separation of the physical from the metaphysical. There is every reason to believe that the division was not so clear-cut in earlier times; we have a few relics left of a more holistic approach, for example in the way *heart*

can mean both a seat of the emotions and a physical organ, but on the whole it is difficult to express such a union of what to us seem wholly different things within one word, and we therefore tend to think that the ancients too separated off the concrete from the emotional or spiritual, and that emotions and thoughts must be conceived as abstracts, when in fact they were almost certainly conceived primarily as substantial entities. The evidence of a close link between organs and emotions and thoughts which are presented here is a strong indication that no dichotomy was felt between these two sides until the arrival of Christianity. An example is the Old Norse word *fjǫr*; we are forced, in modern language, either to say that this means "life" or that it means "blood"; but here, as with many other words considered in this section, the ancient word appears to encompass both the concrete and the abstract within one concept.[1]

Eurasian notions of the soul

Paulson (1958: 212) notes that in northern Eurasia soul dualism – the notion that an individual has both a "life-soul", often identified with the breath, and a "free soul" (or "shadow soul"), able to wander free from the body – is universal. In practice, the notion is realised in a multitude of slightly varying forms, and in many areas there also exists the idea of an "ego-soul", the bearer of psychic life functions. The wandering free soul may appear in animal form, or a real animal may represent the free soul (concepts so close as to be in practice difficult to distinguish) (ibid. 286); sometimes, the life-soul is also thought able to wander from the body (thus among the Altaians and related Sakhas the body-soul may be sent out, even when awake: here a system of body-souls appears to have developed, where the breath-soul stays with the body, but other body-souls are sent out: Hultkrantz 1984: 33).

The shaman, when intervening in matters relating to the soul, is usually thought to send his free soul in search of a lost free soul of the patient;

[1] The observations in this paragraph are derived from analysis of the sources, but also reflect a philosophical position such as is set out by Owen Barfield (1928). Barfield argues that mankind has undergone a development – one might say evolution – of consciousness from one in which certain things are perceived as one whole to one in which they are conceived as separate or at most related entities, for example the original unitary concept of breath–wind–spirit becomes split into the three or more concepts we recognise. This development is directly reflected in the words used to denote these percepts (ibid. 86): "The language of primitive men reports them [relations between things] as direct perceptual experience. The speaker has observed a unity, and is not therefore himself conscious of *relation*. But we, in the development of consciousness, have lost the power to see this as one. Our sophistication, like Odin's, has cost us an eye; and now it is the language of poets, in so far as they create true metaphors, which must *restore* this unity conceptually, after it has been lost from perception." I consider Barfield's ideas more fully, as they relate to a tradition of poetic composition encompassing Sidney, Pope, Tolkien and others, in Tolley (2002*b*); at the same time, I am aware that positions such as that of Barfield are part of a philosophical discourse which has gone on for centuries, and will continue to do so, but which cannot be entered into in further detail in the present context (I am conscious that these observations are, from a philosophical perspective, fairly naive, but I am merely seeking to establish a basic point in a study which is fundamentally not concerned with philosophy).

searching for a lost life-soul is less common, and instances of a shaman sending out his life-soul in search of a patient's life-soul are difficult to pin down, though it seems to occur among the Altaians, who had a developed system of secondary souls; the shaman could also seek out a patient's lost free soul (for example among the Buryats) or body-soul (for example among the Sakhas) without sending out his own soul (Paulson 1958: 339, 343, 345–7, 350–1).

The relationship between the souls of the living and those of the dead are complex and varied; Paulson (1960: 111–12) summarises the situation as follows:

1. The free soul survives as the soul of the dead, and the life-soul perishes at death; this is the most common concept (Sámi, Mari, Udmurt, Mansi, Khanty, Samoyed, Ewenki, Negidal, Orochi, Olchi, Buryat, Mongol, Kalmyk, Sakha, Chukchi).
2. Both free soul and life-soul survive:
a. The free soul goes to the otherworld, while the life-soul becomes an independent spirit (southern Samoyed, Ket, Ainu, Buryat, Altaian, Abakan Tatar, Soyot, Yukagir);
b. Besides the free soul, one or more life-souls survive in the otherworld, so the individual may be represented both in heaven and the underworld; it is usually the free soul which is thought to go to the underworld, and the life-soul to heaven (Mordvin, Nenets, Nganasan, Selkup, Ewenki, Altaian, Abakan Tatar, Soyot, Yukagir, Korak).
3. The free soul survives in separate forms, partly as grave ghost, partly in the otherworld (Buryat).
4. The body-soul survives in separate forms (Selkup).
5. The free soul and one or more body-souls unite to form one soul of the dead (Komi, Nivkh, Soyot, Sakha, Nanai).
6. In some areas earlier conceptions have been overlaid, for example by Christian ideas, to such an extent that they cannot be clearly discerned (all the Baltic Finnic peoples).

A few more detailed presentations of the beliefs of individual peoples are now given, working roughly from east to west.

Chukchi. It appears the life-soul is eaten by spirits at death; the free soul passes to the underworld (ibid. 110).

Korak. The chief soul, *uyi'cit* or *uyi'rit* (from *uvik*, "body"), originally a life-soul but recast to some extent as a free soul, comes from heaven at birth and returns there at death; the "shadow", *wu'yll-wu'll*, a material double of the owner, goes to the underworld at death (ibid. 110–11).

Ainu. The ego-soul, *ramat* (from *ram*, "mind, understanding, intellect"), has taken over the function of the free soul, and becomes the soul of the dead living on in the underworld (ibid. 99).

Nanai. People are possessed of three souls. In heaven, *boa*, there is a soul tree, *omija-muoni*, where human spirits in the form of birds flit about, and may fly into a woman on earth, impregnating her. The shamanic rite for childless women involves the shaman flying up to heaven and selecting a strong spirit, *omija*, to bring back down for the woman. The *omija* exists for

the first year of an infant's life. It has the appearance of a small bird. If the infant dies, the *omija* does not go to the world of the dead, *buni*, but flies straight back to heaven, without funeral rites. The mother may pray for the *omija* to return to her; hence she may give birth to the same child several times. In the second year the *omija* is replaced by the *yergeni*, "sparrow", which has the form of a small person but can transform itself into a sparrow and fly away. If the *yergeni* falls ill, so does its owner. At death, the *yergeni* is transformed into the *fania*, which may hover around the dead for a while, or else flee away. It cannot depart from the world until an elaborate funeral wake, *kaza*, is carried out, involving the shaman acting as psychopomp to take the soul to the world of the dead. (Lopatin 1960: 28–30)

Nivkh. The small soul (i.e. the free soul), *tarn*, resides in the head of the great soul (the life-soul), but becomes a great soul at death, with the form of the deceased (Paulson 1960: 98).

Yukagir. People have one free soul (Kolyma Yukagir *a'ibi*, Tundra Yukagir *nu'ññin*), a body-soul (*eheren*) in the heart, and another body-soul (*ono* or *ana'*) of an undetermined nature which may function as a ghost at the grave, or else go up to heaven; the free soul goes to the land of the dead, whence it returns to be reborn (Paulson, Hultkrantz and Jettmar 1962: 121–2; Paulson 1960: 107–9).

Sakha. The life-soul, *tyn*, perishes at death, while the free soul, *sür*, lives on, becoming a *yör*, an otherworld form; one source relates that the *yör* is compounded of the *sür* and the *kut*, the child soul which also functions as an adult body soul with secondary free-soul characteristics (Paulson 1960: 107).

Ewenki. The life-soul, *erikše*, perishes at death, while the free soul, *chanjan*, lives on in heaven or the underworld. It is also reported that the body-soul, *bejen*, stays by the body until it rots away, and then passes, guided by a shaman, to the underworld. The free soul goes to the *omiruk*, or soul reserve, in heaven, whence the *omi* soul of new-born children originates: thus the *chanjan* is reprocessed as a new *omi*. (Ibid. 96)

Buryat. Reflecting their formal and hierarchical society, the Buryats believe people have a multiplicity of souls, arranged into systematised categories. Among the main notions are that man has a body, *beje*, a life-soul, *amin*, and a soul, *hünehen*, which in turn is divided into three; the lowest is an image of the skeleton, and injury to the skeleton causes injury to this soul; the second soul, anthropomorphic in its natural state and dwelling in the innards (heart, liver, lungs, blood), can leave the body and transform itself into a flying being, undertaking activities with the owner unawares, and by a shaman can be manipulated to undertake particular activities; the highest soul is not distinguished from the second soul, other than that at death it passes to the highest heaven. (Krader 1978: 193)

Altaian. The breath soul, *tyn*, perishes at death, but under Christian influence has developed into a soul of the dead that must answer for its sins in the otherworld. The ego-soul, *süne*, continues its existence near the corpse or around relatives, becoming a wandering spirit. The free soul, *sür*, "form, picture", remains by the corpse for forty days then passes to

heaven or the underworld; it is the *sür* more than the *süne* which continues the personality of the deceased. Some souls come into being only at death: the windy *üzüt* is a greedy soul in the shape of the departed which appears at the grave, but may go back to the departed's house, and may enter the living, causing stomach pains. The *yäl salkyn*, "light air", lives in the other world with a life better than here; this must in origin be the free soul of the departed. (Paulson 1960: 102–4)

Soyot. The breath-soul, *tyn*, goes at death to heaven or the underworld, or may remain on earth; the ego-soul, *sünä*, goes to heaven or the underworld, but it can die there and be reborn into this world after forty-nine days. One source relates that the *tyn* and *sagüt* soul form a united *sünesün* soul after death. (Ibid. 105–6)

Ket. The free soul (*ulwej*, *ulbij*, "shadow, soul") lives on after death; also the life-soul returns to the otherworld, but is reincarnated in plants or people (ibid. 96).

Nenets. The free soul (*sidan*, *sidrjan*) lives on in the otherworld, but remains for some time in this world after death before departing. The breath (*jind*, *jinte*, "breath, steam, air, soul") also goes to heaven if a person is good, but for most people the free soul eats the life-soul. (Ibid. 94)

Enets. The free soul (*sidogko*, *siddoggo*, "shadow, fetch") becomes the soul of the departed. Among the Nganasans people have a free soul (*sedanka*, "shadow"), but a unitary soul passes to the otherworld, and is then reused, as each clan has only a limited number of souls. The body, on the other hand, passes to a cold underworld; this, however, probably represents an earlier concept of the free soul, conceived materially. The reincarnated soul is the life-soul, reworked into a unitary soul. (Ibid. 94)

Selkup. The free soul (*ilsat*, "shadow") goes to the underworld after death, but the life-souls are also believed to live on: the *kuei* (a unitary life-soul or ego-soul) lives on in the underworld, and another life-soul remains around the corpse for some time, before wandering off and provoking misfortunes (ibid. 95).

Ob Ugrians. People have a life-soul ("steam, breath soul, life, soul, ghost", Mansi *lili*, Khanty *lil*), and a free soul ("shadow soul", Mansi *is*, Khanty *is*, and variants) which becomes "lost" in illness and which the shaman sends out on journeys in trance; the "shadow form", *is-xor*, or soul of the dead, can also appear in the likeness of its erstwhile owner (Paulson, Hultkrantz and Jettmar 1962: 114). Under Christian influence, the *is* has come to be conceived more as a free soul in life, and as forming a unitary "soul of the departed" in death (Paulson 1960: 93). The Mansi *urt* is in a sense a free soul, but it functions more as a fetch or guardian spirit, accompanying a person throughout their life; it lives in the forest, and has wings like a bat, and manifests itself in various forms; similar ideas obtain for the Komi *ort*, Mari *ört* (Pettersson 1957: 65). Kulemzin *et al.* (2006: 49–53) set out a more detailed presentation of Khanty beliefs, differing somewhat from one area to another; the concepts were subject to myriad variations on a basic theme. I note just a few points here. The Vasyugan belief is that the vital force is concentrated in the *iləs*, "shadow", which dies when a person dies;

when someone for example makes an impression by lying in the snow, he is said to leave (part of) his *iləs* there (which could result in death). People also have a shadow image, *kor*. People, animals and trees, as well as water, thunder, fire, also have *lil*, breath soul. The *lil* leaves at death, but may also do so temporarily when someone faints. The *lil*, unlike the *iləs*, is invisible. On the Vakh river, the *ilt* (from the same root as *iləs*) was said to wander in sleep. It does not necessarily resemble the creature in which it lives – it could take the form of a lizard, mosquito or spider, for example; it was visible to shamans. It was the master of the person in which it dwelled, so if someone hanged himself, it was at the urging of the *ilt*. Every woman has another woman, *aŋki*, inside her, who gives *ilt* to the new baby, which thus has both a physical and a spiritual mother. Trees, mountains and whirlpools do not have *ilt*, but if they are sacred they have *luŋk* (spirit) in them, and this has *ilt*. In several areas it was believed that *noməs*, "intellect", resided in the head, and if it departed, a person went mad.

Komi. People have two souls: *lov*, situated inside the body during life ("soul, spirit, breath, life": cf. *lolavny*, "breathe", *lovja*, "alive, animated"), and *ort*, which is separate. When the *lov* leaves, death follows immediately. The *lov* lives in the house of the dead for forty days, then flies off away from this world, or in other accounts is reincarnated into an animal or a tree (cf. *lov pu*, "alder"). The *ort* is a person's double, dwelling outside the body in the air, visible usually only to those about to die: the *ort* reveals itself in order to warn of impending death. It may act as a poltergeist, throwing pots and other objects around. It may be seen doing the same work as its human double. After death, the *ort* walks about all the places frequented by the deceased, until the funeral, when it disappears. (Teryukov 1989: 136–6). Paulson argues (1964: 217–21) that, owing to Russian influence, the original body-soul (*lov* or *lol*) has been recast as a free soul, and the original free soul (*ort*) as a guardian spirit; still in the nineteenth century, however, many believed the *lov* perished at death, corresponding more closely to the life-soul (Paulson 1960: 91).

Udmurt. The life-soul is *lul* and the free soul *urt*, which is also the name for the soul of the dead. The *lul* disappears at death. The *urt* can be lost, causing illness; the lost soul is also sometimes called *lul*, pointing towards the development of a unitary soul concept. The *urt* outside the body can assume animal form, especially that of a bat, and the *urt* of the dead often appears as a grey bat. (Paulson 1964: 222–7)

Mari. The life-soul (breath-soul) is *šüləš*, which never leaves the body before death, when it departs through the mouth. Among the southern Mari the life-soul is *iäŋ* (cf. Finnish *henki*), which in other dialects means "person". The life-soul is also called *tšon* (from Chuvash *tšun*), which moves about the body: if someone dies from a blow, it is because the *tšon* happened to be in that very place. The free soul is called *ört*; the shaman sends this out in trance, and it can depart from anyone and wander when the person is unconscious or after a sudden shock; its loss causes illness. The wandering *ört* may appear in human form, and, especially the *ört* of the dead, as a bat. (Ibid. 228–31)

Mordvin. The life-soul is *ojm'e* (Erzä) or *vajm'ä* (Mokša) (cf. Finnish *vaimo*), "breath, spirit, soul, living being"; the original sense may have been "heart", the seat of the life-soul. It does not leave the body before death. It may pass over to a child born at the moment of death, or into a womb. The free soul is *tšopatša* (Erzä) or *šopatša* (Mokša), "form, shadow", a word applicable to any spiritual being, including the soul of the dead. The free soul may appear in the form of a person, for example in dreams, or a bird (which is ominous). It lives on in the shape of its owner in the realm of the dead. The free soul is once called *es*, "self" (cf. Finnish *itse*). (Ibid. 232–7)

Sámi. Whilst it is clear the Sámi believed people had both a life-soul and a free soul, the names for the spirit and soul are not entirely clear; the soul has different names in different areas, with a basic meaning of "shadow" (Paulson 1958: 36–7). It is not always clear which soul the shaman sends out; usually it is the free soul, but among the Samoyeds, the nearest people geographically to the Sámi, the body-soul (*nüm*, identified with breath, and which has the shape of a small bird) is explicitly stated to leave the shaman, and must be brought back by an assistant beating the drum close to the shaman's ear (Paulson 1958: 346–7; Pettersson 1957: 47). The descriptions of Sámi shamanism are not precise enough to furnish an answer to the belief there, partly because none of them are in Sámi. However, terms such as *aandelos*, "spiritless", and descriptions of the shaman lying "dead" during the trance suggest the possibility that the body-soul was believed to leave the body (it would hence become a sort of *de facto* free soul) (Paulson 1958: 345–7). Later tradition enables us to be more specific about Sámi soul beliefs. According to Itkonen (1946: 161) the Skolt Sámi best preserved ancient traditions about the soul. The "spirit", *jieɢ'ɢa*, dwelled in the breast near the heart; the Kola Sámi spoke of "spirit", *jiŋk*, and "heart" as one thing. The sign of life was blood and breath, *vuoi'ŋanâs*. Laestadius (2002: II.40), himself of Sámi descent, wrote in the mid-nineteenth century that "soul" in Sámi is *hägga*, "life", and *vuoigna*, "breath" (southern Sámi *hiegke* and *vuojkene*). The "breath" is also an independent supernatural being (cf. the shamanic spirits, Skanke's *noideswoeigni*). Paulson interprets Skanke's *sjæl* and *aand*, which he ascribes to the soul-notions of the Sámi, as two differentiated life-souls (Mebius 2003: 192). When a person falls ill and the soul wanders, or when a shaman sends out his soul, it is clear that it is the *hiegke* that is the "soul" in question (Mebius 2003: 193). It appears that the free soul lived on after death, and was known as "shadow", *suoivanis* (Jokkmokk); the Finnish Sámi believed that the *ov'dâsâš*, "shadow", lived for ever (Paulson 1960: 87).

Baltic Finnic. Ancient Finnish and Estonian beliefs about souls do not survive into modern times, and have to be reconstructed on the basis of comparative religious and linguistic evidence. In modern Finnish, "spirit" is *henki* and "soul" *sielu*. The latter is borrowed from Swedish (and ultimately from West Germanic), and represents Christian notions. *Henki* is, in origin, "breath" (cf. the cognate Sámi *jieɢ'ɢa*). This word (and its cognates) has a variety of meanings throughout the Baltic Finnic languages (Viires 1989: 142; on Estonian beliefs see also Loorits 1949: 182–90):

1. breath (Finnish, Karelian, Estonian, Livonian),
2. life (Finnish, Karelian, Estonian, Livonian, Sámi),
3. (human) soul (everywhere; in Estonian, only a human has *hing*: an animal has *toss*, "steam", which goes out at death),
4. individual person (everywhere),
5. ghost, apparition (Finnish, Karelian, Livonian, Sámi),
6. heart (Karelian, Veps),
7. mind, mental life (Finnish).[2]

In Finnish, a series of words, not connected to soul concepts in modern Finnish, hint at wider ancient traditions (Siikala 2002: 125). *Itse* ("self" in modern Finnish) is cognate with Mansi *is*, "shadow", a guise of the living, a ghost. *Itse* developed from "guise" to "consciousness", and represented a head-soul, which could leave the body during sleep. The body-soul was represented by *löyly* ("sauna steam" in modern Finnish, but cf. Estonian *leil*, "spirit, life", Hungarian *lélek*, "soul, spirit", Mansi *lil*, "breath, spirit", Sámi *liewl'la*, "sauna steam, breath, spirit, soul"). Paulson (1964: 87) regards Finnish *haamu*, "spook", and *hahmu*, "form", as originally representing the free soul.

Ancient Greek notions of the soul

A full investigation into Germanic concepts of the soul which sought to place it within an Indo-European cultural continuum whilst at the same time endeavouring to uncover elements comparable with non-Indo-European Eurasian notions would require a consideration of all the many Indo-European traditions, as well as those of Eurasia. Such a huge task lies well beyond my scope. Nonetheless, it will, I hope, be found valuable to consider some aspects of just one Indo-European tradition outside the Germanic, namely the Greek. This has the advantage of excluding one set of external influences to which all the Germanic records are subject, namely Christianity (needless to say, other external influences upon Greek thought did exist, however). The following survey is based primarily on the detailed investigations of Onians (1951) and Bremmer (1983), which focus upon Homer.[3]

The ψυχή is mentioned by Homer as part of a living person only at moments of crisis. Without a ψυχή it is impossible to survive (IX.322, XXI.569, XXII.161). It leaves the body during a swoon (V.696). At death, the

[2] Closely related to *henki* is *vaimo* (*vaim* in Estonian). The original sense was "vital force" (preserved in Estonian); *henki* encroached on this sense, whilst *vaimo* acquired new meanings. In Estonia in the sixteenth century, any peasant over twelve able to work was called a *vaim*; the sense "bondmaid" was a specialisation of this, and the Finnish sense of "wife" (the only meaning of the word in modern Finnish) is a further specialisation of this sense. The original sense is preserved in a few instances, such as Finnish *vaimas* for an involuntary muscular tremor, and Estonian *käe vaim* for "pulse" (lit. "hand force"). (Viires 1989: 143–5)

[3] I give the references to the *Iliad* (book numbers in roman figures) and *Odyssey* (book numbers in arabic figures), as cited by Bremmer and Onians, but without quotation, given that Greek concepts are not the main focus of the present study.

ψυχή leaves for good and goes to Hades (xiv.518, xvi.856, xxii.362, 10.560, 11.65); the dead was also said to become an εἴδωλον, a "likeness", of the living (xxiii.72, 104–7, 11.476, 24.14, 11.83, 20.355). The ψυχή leaves the body through the limbs (xvi.856, xxii.362), mouth (ix.409), chest (xvi.505) or a wound (xiv.518). The ψυχή does not represent a person's individuality in dreams or unconscious states, as far as Homer's testimony goes. Bremmer (1983: 21) compares the ψυχή of Homer to the free soul as defined by Arbman (1926, 1927); there are six points of comparison: *a*. both are located in an unspecified part of the body;[4] *b*. both are inactive when the body is active; *c*. both leave the body during a swoon; *d*. neither have any physical or psychological connections; *e*. both are necessary for the continuance of life; *f*. both represent the individual after death. The indications, therefore, are that by the time of Homer, the ψυχή was conceived much along the lines of the widespread conception of the free soul. However, ψυχή is clearly related to ψύχειν, "blow, cool, dry": the original sense is thus likely to have been "breath-soul", which by Homer's time has already developed towards a more unitary, modern-type, concept of "soul", and may well have displaced an earlier term for the free soul (Bremmer 1983: 23–4).

With ψυχή is associated αἰών, life force (Bremmer 1983: 16, 74; Onians 1951: 201–16). Only the young possess this in full force (xvi.453, 9.523) – indeed, the word may be related to *young* (Bremmer 1983: 16, cf. *AeW*, *s.v.* "ungr", which may derive from Indo-European H_2*eiw-*, "possessing life force"; *VA*, *s.v.* "ung", is sceptical of this). Death is the departure of αἰών (v.685, xix.27, xxii.58, 7.224). αἰών is conceived as a liquid (cf. αἰονάω, "moisten, foment, apply liquid to oneself"),[5] which could flow out as tears or as longing or grief (v.151), and which diminishes with age, leaving the old dried-up and shrivelled; later writers use the word to mean "spinal marrow". αἰών as a period of time, "lifetime" and later "age of the world", is a later development.

The θυμός is active only when the body is awake. It urges people on (xx.174), and is the source of emotions (vi.326, vii.95, xiii.163). It resides mainly in the chest, in the φρήν, "midriff", though it is occasionally associated with the limbs (11.201). The θυμός does not normally wander

[4] However, this observation needs qualifying by Onians's analysis (1951: 95–122), which presents a case for a strong connection between the ψυχή and the head. The ψυχαί in Hades are four times called νεκύων ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα, "passionless heads of the dead" (10.521, 536, 11.29, 49); the distinctive appurtenance of Hades was a κυνέη, a helmet enclosing the head, that is the ψυχή, and affording it invisibility (Onians 1951: 99). That life resided in the head is illustrated graphically in the legend of Orpheus, whose head sang on after his body was gone. The generative power of the ψυχή within the head may be indicated by Athena's birth from Zeus's head, and is reflected in the extraordinary Orphic and Pythagorean saying ἴσον τοι κυάμους τε φαγεῖν κεφαλάς τε τοκήων, "to eat beans is equal to eating the heads of parents": beans (κύαμοι) are regarded as eggs, vessels of generation (κυέω, "be pregnant") in the same way as parents begat (τίκτω, whence τοκῆες, "parents") from the generative ψυχή in the head.

[5] The notion, according to Onians, is that of replacing the αἰών which has flowed out. Onians (1951: 177) sees the connection of "knee" (γόνυ) with generation (γίγνομαι, "be born, become") as deriving from the noticeable presence of liquid around the knee, identified as part of the body's (generating) life force.

(though v.697 implies it may actually leave the body), but it is affected by a swoon, resuming its activity when the swoon is over (xxii.475), suggesting that it may have dispersed about the body and needs to be collected into the φρήν again (iv.152). At death, the θυμός is lost (xiii.654), blown out (xii.386), departs (v.155), is taken out (vi.17); it is unclear what happens to it, but it does not go to Hades. The word θυμός is most likely related to Latin *fumus*, "smoke", and was originally probably conceived as a substance that could be brought into motion.

The νόος is the mind, an act of the mind, a thought, a purpose (xvi.688, 5.23, 6.320), but is not viewed as solely intellectual. Someone can "rejoice in his νόος" (8.78), and his νόος can be "fearless" (iii.63). It is located in the chest (iv.309), but is not conceived in a material fashion – it cannot be blown out, for example. It is not mentioned what happens to it at death.

The μένος is not a physical organ, but a momentary impulse of one or several mental and physical organs directed to a specific activity; it is situated in the chest (xix.202), in the θυμός (xvi.529), or in the φρήν (i.89). It can only be influenced by the subject to a limited degree (i.282, xvi.529, 24.520). It may represent a warrior's fury (vi.101); Bremmer (1983: 58) cites Dumézil as comparing it with the fury of the *berserkir*, but points out that a better comparison is the Homeric λύσσα, "wolf fury" (a derivative of λύκος, "wolf") (ix.237–9). The μένος is not said to leave the body at death, but to be "loosened, unharnessed" (v.296, viii.123, 315). Bremmer (1983: 60) notes that the cognate Indian *manas* and Persian *manah* have developed a sense of "free soul", which is not the case in Greek.

Various organs function as rudimentary seats of the ego. The φρήν, or plural φρένες, means, physically, the lungs and diaphragm. It is the location of emotions of joy and grief, fear and anger, as well as intellectual capacity (cf. φρονέω, "think"). The νόος is more concerned with noticing present facts or picturing future ones, whereas the φρήν reasons about them (vi.61, x.4). The πραπίδες, with a similar physical reference to φρένες, are a seat of the intelligence (i.608), desire (xxiv.514) and grief (x.43). The heart, καρδία, κῆρ or ἦτορ, is the seat of a spectrum of feelings, without intellectual content (v.670, vi.523, vii.428, ix.646, 7.308, 18.344). The least physical of these terms is ἦτορ, with an original sense of "vein", which is situated in the chest (ii.188), in the φρήν (viii.413) or the καρδία (xx.169); κῆρ also seems to have been moving away from its original physical sense.

Germanic notions of the soul

The table below illustrates the distribution of words connected to the concept of "soul" in Germanic languages. Where related words exist but are used in a purely physical sense (as Old English *oroð*, "breath", related to *ǫnd*), they are excluded.[6]

[6] The *fylgja* is not considered in the present chapter, even though it is often viewed as a "soul", as by Strömbäck (1975) in his investigation of later folk beliefs, for it is clear that the *fylgja* (or *hugr*) is a *harbinger* of a person, often unseen, but sometimes powerful enough to

Old Norse	Old English	Old Frisian	Old Saxon	Old High German	Gothic
(*sál, sála*)	*sapol*	*sele*	*seola*	*sela*	*saiwala*
	gast/gæst	*gast, jest*	*gest*	*geist*	
					ahma
ǫnd					
fjǫr	*feorh/ferhð*	*ferch*	*fer(a)h*	*fer(a)h*	*faírlvus*
móðr	*mod*	*mod*	*mod*	*muot*	*moþs*
sefi	*sefa*		*sebo*		
munr	*myne*			*mun*	*muns*
hugr	*hyge*	*hei*	*hugi*	*hugu*	*hugs*
geð	*giedd*				
hamr					
óðr/œði	*pod* (adj. "mad")			*wuot*	*woþs* (adj.)

Terms for the soul and related concepts in Germanic are dealt with in longer studies by North (1991, focusing on Old English and Old Norse), Godden (1985, Old English), Becker (1964, Old Saxon and Old High German), Eggers (1973, Old Saxon), Reier (1976, Old Norse).[7]

SÁL

The Norse word *sál* or *sála*, "soul", is borrowed from Old English (*AeW, s.v.* "sál"; *VA, s.v.* "sjel"). The presence of the word throughout West and East Germanic suggests it was once present also in North Germanic, but must have been lost at an early stage. The most likely etymology of the word is that suggested recently in *VA* (*s.v.* "sjel"), which sees it as a variant, with initial "floating" *s-* (it is a common Indo-European feature to find variants with and without initial *s-*), of the root seen in Old Norse *ævi*, "age, eternity" (see *VA, s.v.* "æve"), which is also found in Greek αἰών, "life force", discussed above; the soul was thus originally the life-force, or the part of a person endowed with life-force.[8]

assume an outward form (a *hamr*), but which does not justify Strömbäck's loose identification of this harbinger as a person's soul.

[7] On Old Norse, the work of la Farge (1991) should also be mentioned, but it is not primarily concerned with pagan concepts of the soul, and does not consider several terms relevant to the present discussion, such as *hugr*. Reier (1976) is neither comprehensive nor particularly analytical in his approach. Less lengthy works are mentioned as relevant. Some treatments of the topic in Old Norse are far from satisfactory; for example, Motz (1983*a*), following Arbman (1926) rather loosely, proposes that the Norse *fjǫr* was the body-soul, while the *hamr* and *fylgja*, along with (modern Swedish) *vård*, represent the free-soul, and the *hugr* the ego-soul. Such interpretations are nothing more than forced attempts to make the evidence fit a crudely comprehended conceptual framework.

[8] Attempts have been made (dismissed in *VA*) to connect "soul" with "sea" (Weisweiler 1940, with etymology on p. 43), deriving *soul* from proto-Germanic **saiwalō*, "something coming from the *saiwaz*", **saiwaz*, "lake", being the antecedent of *sea*. Jente (1921: 115) proposed that the underlying root behind both "sea" and "soul" words in Germanic is *sei-*, "set in motion"; given that the primary meaning of words such as Gothic *saiws* is "lake", i.e.

Remarks on the meanings of the "soul" word in the German area need to be prefaced with the observations that as the conversion of the area was undertaken to a considerable degree by English missionaries, there may well be influence from Old English *sapol* on the cognates in Old Saxon and Old High German.

In Old Saxon, *seola* corresponds only partly to Latin *anima* in the sense of a person's transcendent and eternal core. It does not mean "life", represented by *ferah* and *lif*, and does not relate to the life of the psyche. In Old High German, where *ferah* has almost disappeared, *sela* corresponds more fully to *anima*, though Tatian, attempting to render one Latin word with one German, translates *anima* as *ferah* (not *sela*) when it means "life", and Notker's usage of *sela* lacks a sense of "life" altogether. *Sela* is set over-against the body (*lichamo*), but in areas of virtue or sin it is not *sela* but *muot*, *gedank* or *herza* that is opposed to the body.

In the *Heliand*, the *seola* is used of living men and of immortal souls in heaven or hell; *ferah* by contrast is not used in this theological context. The *seola* is said to sink to hell (3357).

Sela/seola is primarily used to render *anima* in the sense of the spiritual part of a person which continues after death. *Sela* was appropriated to this specifically Christian notion from its apparent pagan usage, according to which it undoubtedly referred to the nebulous ghost of the dead.

In Old English, Alfred's translation of Boethius shows interesting differences from the Latin original.[9] Whereas the Latin keeps "soul" and "mind" distinct, Alfred conflates them, using *sapol* and *mod* interchangeably; *mod* is also used to render *ego/me*, "I/me". Boethius's comment (III.xi) «quod in

precisely a body of water which does *not* move, and that movement does not appear to be a defining characteristic of departed souls, there seems little reason to lend credence to this etymology. The Sámi word *sájva*, "lake realm of supernatural beings and souls of the dead", is adduced as further evidence for this etymology, as the Sámi word is, arguably, derived from Germanic **saiwaz*, with the spirit beings hitching an etymological lift along the way. There are many problems with this scenario. The Sámi *Sájva* does not refer exclusively to lakes, but also (depending on the area) to spirit realms in the mountains; even granting that the original sense was "(supernatural) lake", the beings who dwelt there were primarily independent spirits, not the souls of the dead (though through confusion of the different classes of spirit beings, souls of the dead were sometimes conceived as dwelling in *Sájva*, though the primary abode of the dead was beneath the ground, in Jábbmeájmmo) (Mebius 2003: 81–8). The second major difficulty is that **saiwalō* does not occur in North Germanic, precisely the area where the Sámi are supposed to have borrowed the idea of "souls" dwelling by lakes, and in the area where **saiwalō* was used (West and East Germania) there is no particular notion of sacred lakes to be found. Moreover, there appears to be no tradition associating souls with lakes within the Germanic area, though, as I consider elsewhere, there were traditions within the Nordic area associating water with prophecy and supernatural prophetic beings (not souls of the dead, particularly), which might allow us to see the image of the sacred lake, inhabited by prophetic spirits, as characteristic of northern Scandinavia, though it is far from clear that the Norsemen need be the originators and the Sámi the borrowers of this image (the possible borrowing of the word *Sájva* from Germanic being insufficient in itself to demonstrate that the religious understanding of the lake was also borrowed). Weisweiler's ideas of borrowing in fact reflect a trend, almost universal until recently, of always seeing the Sámi as culturally inferior borrowers of advanced ideas from the Norsemen. Such a view is now rejected, and suggestions of borrowings are treated much more circumspectly, as Mebius (2003, *passim*) goes to some lengths to demonstrate.

[9] This analysis is taken from Godden (1985: 274–9).

somno spiritum ducimus nescientes», "for in sleep we draw breath unawares", is given a quite different sense, in which the spirit is said to wander (xxxiv.xi): «spa eac ure gast bið spiðe pide farende urum unpillum ⁊ ures ungepealdes for his gecynde, nalles for his pillan; þ bið þonne þonne pe slapað», "so too our spirit travels widely without our consent and without our control over its nature or its desire; that happens at the time when we sleep". Alfred uses *gast,* rather than *sapol,* since the wandering is unwilled, and hence is not an action of mind (which in his usage is conflated with "soul", as noted). Alfred is presumably reflecting popular notions of soul wandering, the existence of which is indicated also by Ælfric's insistence, in "Nativitas Domini nostri Iesu Christi" (lines 142–3), that «gif seo sapul forlæt þonne lichoman þonne spælt seo lichoma», "if the soul leaves the body then the body dies". In the *Old English Martyrology* too the word *gast* is used when St Fursey's "soul" was removed from his body at night, and then taken back by an angel (noted by Hultin 1979: 41; edition: Herzfeld 1900: 20–1).

Ælfric, in *De temporibus anni* x.7, rejects the notion that our soul, *sapol,* is breath: «nis na seo orðung ðe pe utblapað ⁊ innateoð ure sapul, ac is seo lyft þe pe on lybbað on ðisum deadlicum life», "the breath we blow out and take in is not our soul, but is the air that we live on in this mortal life". It is conceivable that this insistence could derive in part from a tendency which may have existed among converts in the Danelaw to equate *sapol* with the Norse *ǫnd.*

Beowulf and other poems appear to invoke *sapol* with reference to death and the afterlife but do not assign it any psychological powers or activities; to express the inner mind responsible for thought and emotion, other words such as *hyge* or *mod* are used (Godden 1985: 289).

It is unclear why a counterpart to Old English *sapol* does not exist in Old Norse; no other term appears to answer to the sense of "departed soul". Leaving aside Christian sources where the borrowed *sál* is used, when the dead in the other world are referred to, they are called *dauðir menn,* "dead people", as of those who had ridden over the bridge to the underworld in the account of Hermóðr's visit to Hel in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49 ⟨53⟩, or else *náir,* "corpses", as in *Vǫluspá* 38: «Þar saug Níðhǫggr / nái framgengna, / sleit vargr vera», "There Níðhǫggr sucked the corpses of the departed; the wolf tore up men". The ship Naglfar, which brings its cargo of dead to fight at *ragnarǫk* (*Vǫluspá* 47), is ostensibly "Nail farer", but de Vries (*AeW, s.v.* "Naglfar") views the word as meaning "vessel of the dead", *nagl* being related to *nár,* "corpse".

ǪND/ANDI

Old Norse *ǫnd* and *andi* are variants whose essential meaning is "breath". As a term for "spirit" they are in complementary distribution with the West Germanic word represented by Old English *gast,* and the East Germanic *ahma,* both of which derive from a basic sense of "breath" or "gaping". The sense "spirit" in Old Norse, however, occurs solely in explicitly Christian contexts, the earliest being in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's *Óláfsdrápa* (from

1001), st. 29 (*Skj* B$_1$ 157: «kœns hafi Kristr enn hreini / konungs ǫnd ofar lǫndum», "may Christ the pure keep the soul of the wise king in the lands above [heaven]"). A more basic sense of "life-soul" may be discerned in many of the uses, however (*Lexicon poeticum, s.v.* "ǫnd 2"), and this must represent a tradition going back to pre-Christian times; for example, in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 37 Helgi «ǫndo týndi», "lost his spirit", where the meaning is "died" (cf. English "lose one's breath", which is certainly not the meaning in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar,* but which reflects the total absence of any spiritual dimension to *breath,* unlike *ǫnd*).

In *Vǫluspá* 18 (38) three gifts are bestowed on the helpless forms of man and woman by three gods: Óðinn gives *ǫnd,* breath, Lóðurr is responsible for the external qualities of good looks and life-force (*lá*),[10] and Hœnir gives *óðr,* "spirit which affords intellectual inspiration".

In Old High German/Old Saxon *gest/geist* is used to translate Latin *spiritus* where an underlying connection with "breath" is perceptible, but when *spiritus* is used in a psychological or mental sense the word *sin* is used to render it in Old High German.

FJǪR

Fjǫr and its counterparts are fairly uncommon in all the Germanic languages by the time of our records, though the number of derivatives in Old Norse shows an erstwhile prominence: words for "man/men" (possessor of a *fjǫr*) include *firar, fjǫrn, fjǫrr, fjǫrvar, fyrðar, fyrvar,* and for "gods" there exists *fjǫrg;* possibly related is *fjǫrnir,* "helmet" (protector of the *fjǫr*). The Gothic cognate *fairlvus* means "world" (but Crimean Gothic *fers,* presumably the same word, means "man"); how this shift in meaning took place is uncertain, but comparable is Greek αἰών, shifting from "liquid life force" to "lifetime" to "age of the world". The verb *waifairlvjan* in Gothic (in which *wai* is "woe"), meaning "lament, weep", exhibits a more clearly connected sense of the base word, where the "spirit" is affected by woe. The etymology of *fjǫr* and its cognates is uncertain, but a connection with Sanskrit *párśu,* Avestan *parəsu, pərəsu,* "rib" (from Indo-European *perk-,*

[10] The meaning of *lá* (*lǫ́*) is obscure: *a.* it may indicate "lock of hair" (with cognates elsewhere: *AeW, s.v.* "lá 3"), as taken by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 69, but possibly (as argued by Dronke, *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 18/3) merely as a reflection of his surmise of the meaning of *lá* in *Vǫluspá; b.* it may mean "liquid" (in skaldic verse), apparently a generalisation of the sense of the line of water along the shore, edged by the surf; in modern Icelandic it has been recorded with the sense of a film on the surface of a liquid. From these senses, Dronke argues for a meaning of the covering of skin; the problem with this "film of flesh", however, is that it ignores the liquid aspect of the word, which always seems present, including in cognates in other Norse dialects and further afield (*AeW, s.v.* "lá 1"). It seems that the poet intended something parallel to *ǫnd,* "breath", something that showed the person was alive and no longer a lump of wood, someone with blood and the force of life animating them. I suggest we have a close parallel in the Greek αἰών, discussed above, a "life force" which was thought of as a liquid, which could ooze out (not just as blood), and which was linked with ideas of vitality and youth. In *Húsdrápa* 1, discussed below, *lǫ́* is juxtaposed with *geð* in the phrase *geðfjarðar lǫ́,* "liquid of the mind-fjord", where a more redolent sense of "life-force liquid" may be implied, parallel to *geð,* and to *óðr,* stirred by the inspirational mead.

"enclose"), or with Greek πραπίδες (roughly "diaphragm"; see above), seems the most likely; this would reflect a physical organ as a seat of the spiritual organ, as noted above with Greek examples. Whilst the word frequently appears to mean little more than "life", a physical sense for *fjǫr* (as reflected in Dronke's translation below) is preferable in *Vǫluspá* 40, where the giant wolf ravages the world:

Fylliz fiǫrvi	It fills itself with the life-blood
feigra manna,	of fated men,
rýðr ragna siǫt	reddens the powers' abodes
rauðom dreyra.	with crimson gore.

Lexicon poeticum notes that the poetic uses of the word *fjǫr* tend to point to a concept of it as a concrete entity, though many of the instances are debatable in this respect; *Lexicon poeticum* suggests "blood", though, as noted above, the physical and abstract in the concept that *fjǫr* represents should not be separated off. The concreteness of *fjǫr* is suggested in *Fáfnismál* 32, where Sigurðr eats the dragon's heart, referred to as *fjǫrsegi, "fjǫr* flesh", perhaps suggesting that the *fjǫr* was thought to inhabit the heart, and also by the term *fjǫrrann, "fjǫr*-house", used by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld for the body in *Óláfsdrápa* 15 (*Skj* B, 153): «sverð bitu feigra fyrða / fjǫrrǫnn», "swords bit the *fjǫr*-houses of doomed men" (Finnur Jónsson translates it specifically as "breast" in *Skj*, but nothing in the poem allows us to be so specific). A similar directness is indicated in Egill's *Hǫfuðlausn* 10 (*Skj* B, 32): «fleinn sótti fjǫr», "dart sought out *fjǫr*".

In Old Saxon *ferah* is "life-force", something seemingly material within the living body (*Heliand* 4035, where the resurrected Lazarus is filled with *ferah*), which is lacking in the corpse («ferah uuas af thēm fleske»); someone alive is *ferahes full*, and to die is *ferah* or *līf forlāten*, "to forsake/lose *ferah*/life". In *Heliand* 3350–3 a wretched man's *ferah* is taken by the angels, and his *seola* is set in Abraham's bosom, implying that the *ferah*, departing from the body, becomes a *seola* – though no doubt such a systematisation may be a reflection of Christian notions. As noted above, *ferah* in Old High German is largely moribund.

MÓÐR

Old High German *muot* and Old Saxon *mod* translate Latin *cor, spiritus, voluntas, anima, animus, mens*. It represents a person's inner being, conceived as a substantive part of a person, not merely as an abstract ability or strength. It was conceived as a more active, effective and independent being than the *hugu/hugi*, a being that could be obeyed, and could be said to have a will (*muotwillo*). Eggers (1973: 276) perhaps goes too far in describing it as being conceived as an independent "Dämon" overcoming a person and tempting them to do evil.

In Old English, *mod* corresponds closely to the Old Saxon and Old High German usages. It is the commonest word for "mind", the locus or instrument of thought and imagination, but it also signifies "courage, pride"; it

appears to represent an inner passion or wilfulness, an intensification of the self that can be dangerous – a patient man is one that controls his *mod* (*Gifts of Men* 70). *Mod* appears not to be used in poetry for the wandering soul, or the soul that survives death, but *mod* is used for thought and emotion. (Godden 1985: 287–90)

In Old Norse, *móðr* similarly represents an intensification of self, of one's determination, mettle and reactive force: it is typically described as swelling, as in *Haustlǫng* 14 (*Skj* B, 17): «móðr svall Meila blóða», "passion swelled in the blood-kin of Meili [Þórr]"; in *Vǫluspá* 26 «Þórr einn þar vá, þrunginn móði», "Þórr alone smote there, swollen with wrath", where it is the god himself who is pictured as being squeezed («þrunginn») by the swelling *móðr*. Over all, probably most of the uses of *móðr* in a mythic context relate to Þórr. The notion of swelling is also found in Old High German in Otfrid, and in *Beowulf* the compound *bolgenmod*, "with swollen *mod*", means "enraged"; this indicates an ancient linking of swelling and *móðr* in Germanic tradition, whereas *hugr* and its cognates is associated with the idea of sharpening in Otfrid and in Eddic poetry, as *Lokasenna* 64, «mik hvatti hugr», and *Fáfnismál* 6, «hugr mik hvatti», "*hugr* whetted me" (Beck 1988: 139–40).

The *móðr* seems to have stayed within the breast, and not wandered out of the body; certainly by the time of Snorri (*Gylfaginning* ch. 44) "going off" of the *móðr* meant "subsiding", not literally leaving: «en er hann [Þórr] sá hræzlu þeira þá gekk af honum móðrinn ok sefaðisk hann», "but when he [Þórr] saw their dread, his wrath (*móðr*) left him, and he calmed down".

MUNR

The essential meaning of Old English *myne*, Old Norse *munr* is "desire", but one which exhibits a certain independence of action.[11] North compares *myne/munr* with Homeric μένος (see above), passing from one person to another to influence their behaviour, as *Iliad* xvi.527–31, where Apollo casts μένος into Glaucus, and Glaucus "knew it in his mind". Whereas μένος relates mainly to courage, *myne/munr* connotes love or desire. The Germanic examples certainly show a certain independence to *myne/munr*, but it is questionable that it attains the level found in the Homeric examples.

Andreas 1537–8 shows the *myne* going out of the person: «Þæs him ut myne / fleon fealone stream, poldon feore beorgan», "Out went their desire, to flee the yellow torrent, they wanted to save their lives". Similarly in *Beowulf* 2570–2: «Scyld pel gebearg / life ond lice læssan hpile / mærum þeodne þonne his myne sohte», "The shield protected life and body for a shorter time for the famed prince than his desire sought"; here again, *myne* appears as something acting on its own, seeking. Both these texts link *myne* closely with life: a desire to continue life. *Riming Poem* 33 shows *myne* as able to act emotionally: «mod mægnade, mine fægnade», "passions grew stronger, *myne* rejoiced".

[11] The analysis of *myne/munr* is based on North (1991: 29–38).

In *Hamðismál* 15, Hamðir and Sǫrli draw their swords «at mun flagði», "through the impulse of a hag-spirit", where *munr* seems to be an external force; they later say they were prompted by *dísir* (28), «hvǫttomk at dísir». In *Hávamál* 94–5, which North dates to the late twelfth century, it is said:

heimska ór horskum gørir hǫlða sonu, sá inn mátki munr.	Love the mighty makes the wise sons of men into fools.
Hugr einn þat veit, er býr hiarta nær, einn er hann sér um sefa.	That only mind knows, which lives near the heart, in his feelings he is alone.

Again, *munr* is conceived as an outside force.

ÓÐR

Óðr is discussed more fully in connection with the mead of poetry in Chapter 16. Cleasby and Vigfússon (1957) gloss *óðr* as "mind, wit, soul, sense", and, in a second sense, "song, poetry". The latter occurs widely in verse (*Lexicon poeticum, s.v.*), and although all supposedly early examples are in *lausavísur* and hence suspect, the etymology of *óðr* confirms an archaic link with poetry; moreover, the word is contained in the name Óðrœrir, "Spirit rouser", for one of the vats holding the mead of poetry. It was probably through kennings such as *Vellekla* 5 (*Skj* B_1 117), «Óðrœris alda [...] hafs», "wave of the sea of spirit-rouser", for "poem", that *óðr* was able to transfer its sense from "spirit" to what the roused spirit produced, namely "poem" (North 1991: 45). *Óðr* might be defined simply as "poetic inspiration, intellect", but it would probably be closer to the mark to consider it as a sort of spirit endowed with these qualities (in line with the expectation for generally more concrete realisations of what we consider abstract qualities): this seems to be implied in one early use of the word in poetry, in *Vǫluspá* 18 ⟨38⟩, where the gods give the lifeless forms of man and woman their human attributes, Hœnir giving *óðr* (while Óðinn gives *ǫnd*, "breath of life"). Whether this spirit was viewed as one that could survive death and be reborn is open to debate; certainly, Óðinn retrieves the mead of poetry, Óðrœrir, "Rouser of *óðr*", from a deathly realm, and it is possible that Hœnir ⟨QV⟩ acts as an overseer of the passage into the post-*ragnarǫk* world when he reappears at the end of *Vǫluspá*, but we have no clear evidence for *óðr* acting as an equivalent to the Old English *sapol*.

GEÐ

North relates Old English *giedd*, "song", to Old Norse *geð*, "disposition". He argues that an original idea of "spirit" developed into "expression of spirit", i.e. "song", and that «uncer giedd geador» of *Wulf and Eadwacer* 19 could mean more than just a poem, rather "the song of our love together". In Old Norse, *geð* is used in sexual contexts to express (the woman's) sexual

affection or passion, for example *Hávamál* 99, where Óðinn gained the favour of Billingr's girl whom he had seduced, «geð hennar allt ok gaman», "all her affection/inclination and pleasure"; similarly in *Hárbarðsljóð* 18 Óðinn sleeps with seven sisters «ok hafða ek geð þeira allt ok gaman», "and I had all their affection and pleasure"; in *Lokasenna* 20, the white lad is mentioned who laid his leg over Gefjun and «er þik glapði at geði», "who fooled you in your affections". In non-sexual contexts, the sense is more "disposition", as in *Hávamál* 46, warning against someone when «þér er grunr at hans geði», "you suspect his disposition"; *vera vel í geði til eins* is "to be well disposed towards someone". In *Hávamál* 18 the meaning is more "sense": only the widely travelled and experienced man knows «hverju geði stýrir gumna hverr», "what sense every man possesses", and similarly *Hávamál* 13–14 ⟨48*a*⟩ recounts how through drink the heron of forgetfulness steals one's *geð*, and how the narrator was fettered in that bird's feathers at Gunnlǫð's (that is, when Óðinn gained the mead of poetry and drank it to take back to the gods); the best thing about drinking is getting one's *geð* back afterwards. There is thus a poetic irony: drinking takes away *geð*, but Óðinn remembers a time when the more he drank, the more *geð*, wisdom or poetic inspiration contained in the special mead, he got. This liquid poetic inspiration is again referred to as *geð*, the spirit that the poetic mead rouses to compose, in *Húsdrápa* 1 (*Skj* B_1 128), where it is called «hjaldrgegnis [. . .] Hildar [. . .] geðfjarðar lǫ́», "Battle's roar-encounterer's [Óðinn's] mind-fjord's current", i.e. the liquid of Óðinn's *geð*.[12]

SEFI

Old Saxon *sebo* occurs only in the *Heliand*, and is not found in Old High German, which does, however, have the verb *intseffen*, "perceive, notice". The *Heliand* poet may have been using what was an archaic word fast disappearing from the language. Parallel usages indicate that it never occurs where some other word would not have sufficed. It is linked to the soul's capacities rather than the soul itself. It is particularly linked with emotional buffeting: it is associated with (for example being said to be full of) sorrow or unhappiness on many occasions (608, 2918, 4042, 5792, 5968, 5918); for example (606–8):

> Thō warð Ērodesa innan briostun
> harm wið herta, bigan im is hugi wallan,
> sebo mid sorgun

Then arose for Herodes within the breast pain by the heart; his *hugi* began to well up, the *sebo* with sorrow.

Sebo is also linked with weakening of resolve (1898), though it can also be said to be fierce (*hrē*: 2448: the meaning is that it is unreceptive to the

[12] The interpretation in this paragraph is essentially North's (1991: 39–49), but I differ somewhat in my translation of the Norse terms.

divine message) or wrathful (*grim*: 2668; *slīðmōd*: 4266). From the verbal root *-sebbian* the meaning of *sebo* can be inferred to correspond to Latin *sensus*, which is rendered in Old High German as *sin* (found also in Old Frisian, but not Old Saxon), and thus to be "skill of perception".

Old English *sefa* glosses *sensus* thirteen times, according to North (1991: 70),[13] including «sensum qui te intellegat» (skill to understand someone) and «in sensu manuum suarum» (i.e. skilfulness) – though deducing meanings, particularly when they are isolated, from glosses is precarious, as glossing was a largely mechanical process. It was believed to dwell close to the heart (*Christ* 499–500, *Andreas* 1251–2). *Sefa* represents a person's disposition: in *Beowulf* 1853, Hroþgar likes Beowulf's "disposition" – «Me þin modsefa licað»; in *Beowulf* 349–50, «Pæs his modsefa manegum gecyðed, / pig ond pisdom», "his disposition was known to many, his valour and his wisdom". Phrases such as «sefan geþanc pitan», "know the thoughts of the *sefa*", express the knowledge and liking of a lord for an inferior. By contrast, *hyge cunnan* (*Genesis* 385) expresses how God "knows the mind" or intention of Satan, and by «higes cunnian», "finding out his mind" or courage (*Beowulf* 2045), an old warrior incites a young one to reopen a feud. Whereas *sefa* is a feature of personality, *hyge* is an instrument. *Sefa* is also memory of a sensory kind, and it can be searched for purposes of recollection (*Elene* 474, 1148, «on sefan secean»), and the *sefa* may bring such memories out: *Daniel* 144, «soðan spefnes, þæs min sefa myndgað», "the very dream my *sefa* reminds me of". By contrast, ideas rather than images are held in the *hyge*, as when Daniel finds the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in his *hyge* (*Daniel* 542). The *sefa* stores information, but the *hyge* makes use of it. The *sefa* is a person's "senses" through which the outside world is perceived, and the *sefa* "shuts down" in sleep, as *Genesis* 1568 notes: «spiðe on slæpe sefa nearpode», "his sense swiftly narrowed into sleep". In the *sefa* the mind is hidden, *Daniel* 130–1:

> Hu magon we spa dygle, drihten, ahicgan
> on sefan þinne, hu ðe spefnede?

How, lord, can we think up things so secret in your mind, as to how you dreamed?

In contrast *hyge* is what reveals a man's mind from his appearance, *Andreas* 1212–14:

> Cyð ðe sylfne,
> herd hige þinne, heortan staðola,
> þæt hie min on ðe mægen oncnapan.

Make yourself known, harden your purpose, fortify your heart, so that they may acknowledge me in you.

The same revelation from appearance occurs in Old Norse, in Eyvindr Finnsson's *Hákonarmál* 15/4–6 (*Skj* B_1 59):

[13] The analysis of *sefa*/*sefi* is based on North (1991: 70–96).

> Illúðigr mjǫk
> þykkjumk Óðinn vesa,
> séumk vér hans of hugi.

Ill-willed in the extreme Óðinn appears to us; we fear his intentions.

In Old Norse, *sefi* was clearly already archaic by the eleventh century, being replaced by *hugr*, for which Snorri says *sefi* may serve as a poetic equivalent or *heiti*. Again, it indicates "feelings, disposition": *Hávamál* 105: «ill iðgjǫld / lét ek hana eptir hafa / síns ins heila hugar, / síns ins svára sefa», "a wicked recompense I let her have in return for her sincere heart, her heavy feelings"; *Hávamál* 161: «hugi ek hverfi / hvítarmri konu / ok sný ek hennar ǫllum sefa», "I turn the thoughts of the white-armed woman, and altogether change her feelings". In *Sigrdrífumál* 27, however, *sefi* indicates the perceptive sense: witches on the roadside are said to be «þær er deyfa sverð ok sefa», "those who blunt swords and senses". As these examples indicate, *sefi* appears particularly associated with women, and women's sexual feelings, perhaps reinforcing its emotional connotations (as opposed to *hugr*).

HUGR

The basic meaning of *hugr* and its cognates is "thought, mind, intention".

In the Old Saxon *Heliand*, *hugi* is the most often used "soul" word, but is not, Becker argues (1964: 159), the central word for "the inner person" (which is represented by *mod*), relating rather to "sentiment, conviction, disposition"; Eggers (1973: 301), however, defines *hugi* as "die seelische Gesamtpersönlichkeit" (collective soul personality). Of the soul words, *hugi* alone is said to be "in the breast", and associated with the heart. The *hugi* could be weakened with wine (*Heliand* 2052). The *hugi* could also swell in the breast, *Heliand* 4865–9:

> Thō gibolgan uuarð
> snell suerdthegan Symon Petrus:
> uuell im innan hugi, that hie ni mohta ēnig uuord sprecan:
> so harm uuarth im an is herten that man is herron thar
> bindan scolda.

Then Simon Peter, brave sword-thegn, was blown out with rage: purpose welled up within him in such a way that he couldn't say a word: such grief was in his heart that his Lord should be bound in that place.

In Old High German, verbal derivatives are more common than *hugu* itself, which does not occur at all in many documents.

Old English usages of *hyge*, in so far as they contrast with *sefa*, have been mentioned above under "*Sefa*". It is to be noted that *hyge* is far more active: it occurs with seven active verbs of suffering joy or adversity (as opposed to one in the case of *sefa*), and *yrre*, "anger", occurs three times in association with *hyge*, but not with *sefa* (North 1991: 87).

Hyge, along with its poetic parallels *modsefa* and *hreþer*, is pictured in *The Seafarer* as wandering over the sea in the form of a bird:[14]

> Forþon nu min hyge hpeorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
> min modsefa mid mereflode
> ofer hpæles eþel hpeorfeð pide
> eorþan sceatas; cymeð eft to me
> gifre ond grædig, gielleð anfloga
> hpeteð on hpælpeg hreþer unpearnum
> ofer holma gelagu

> Therefore my *hyge* now wanders beyond the enclosure of the *hreþer*,[15] my *modsefa* with the sea-flood, over the whale's land, wanders wide over the corners of the earth. It comes back to me, eager and greedy; the lone flier calls out, urges my *hreþer* irresistibly on the whale-path, over the expanse of the oceans.

In Old Norse, *hugr* was used in a wide variety of meanings, one of which, many scholars have argued, is "free soul" (see for example *AR* §160, Ström 1947: 51–5). The *hugr* is, as Paulson (1958: 253–5) points out, more of an ego-soul than a straightforward free soul; the ego-soul is typically regarded as the seat of thought, will and emotion.

A suitable starting point will be to consider uses of the word in later tradition, much of which may be seen as reflecting what is implicit in the earlier sources. Alver (1971: 7–22) traces the uses of *hugr* in later Norwegian tradition (mainly recorded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries);[16] these uses are bound up with the *hamr*, considered in more detail below. The *hug* is the soul in the sense of thought, wish, desire, temperament, which can free itself from the body for shorter or longer periods. A *hug* can take on a shape, of the possessor, of an animal with some significance to the owner, or of an indefinite object such as fog or light; this shape is a *ham*, and the *hug* in such a form is called a *hugham* or just *ham*; along these lines de Vries (*AR* §160) mentions a saying from Setesdal, «hugen tok ham på», "the *hugr* took on a *hamr*". Someone who behaves abnormally is said to be *hugstjålet* (their *hug* has been taken). A person's favour can be turned

[14] Hultin (1979: 40) points out that the soul leaving the body at death was pictured as a bird in Gregory's *Dialogues*. Hultin argues that the imagery of the wandering soul in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* is not mere metaphor for memory or the wandering mind, but reflects the widespread folklore belief in the wandering soul. The concept of the soul as a bird is, of course, widespread; see, for example, Söderholm (1980), who discusses the Karelian folk-poetry motif of the soul of the departed being called upon in mourning songs to return from the otherworld to the places it knows in the form of a bird.

[15] Although *hreþer*, from which *hyge* breaks out (and which therefore it presumably customarily occupies), is usually translated "breast", in fact the core meaning must have been "innards": cf. *midhriðre*, "membrane around intestines", Old High German *herdar* and Gothic *hairþa*, "intestines", and the related Old English *hærþan*, "testicles" (North 1991: 71). "Thought" was believed to be resident around the heart, for example *The Seafarer* 33–4: «forþon cnyssaþ nu / heortan geþohtas», "for now the thoughts of the heart strike".

[16] Alver presents a number of original sources, mainly derived from folk-material collections, in translation; as the present paragraph is designed to orient the study towards the main consideration, Old Norse concepts, it seems superfluous to repeat the precise details of these later sources here.

towards or away from someone by magic, and this is called a *hugvending*, "a turning of the *hug*". Injuries suffered by the *hug* are reflected on the owner's body. When it wanders, a *hug* can be either invisible or visible, and its owner either conscious or unconscious. The *hug* can have a strong effect in the world, which is expressed by the derivative verb *hugse*: for example, the *hug* of someone who desires the food of a diner can so *hugse* the diner that they choke, and the dead who are missed too greatly suffer because the longing *hug* of the mourner so afflicts them. The *hug* can even affect inanimate objects, for example making barrels leak. If someone who is absent is suddenly seen or just felt to be present at home, only to disappear after a moment, this is taken as a foreboding of an accident or death; it is the *hugham* of the person that has been observed, attempting to bring a message (a *hugbod*). By contrast, when someone is expected and their presence is sensed before their arrival (often through some sound), it is said that their *vardøger* has gone ahead of them; this is a version of the guardian spirit rather than the person's soul, as such. The conscious sending out of the *hug* occurs with witches, who do this to steal butter; the *hug* is clearly seen as somehow resident in this butter, since if it is cut in a particular way, it bleeds, and the witch may die. Sometimes the *hug* sent out by a witch is visible: if butter will not churn, it is necessary to check around the churn for an animal, which if found has to be picked up with tongs and burned: it is the witch's *hugham*. The witch is also said to send out a *trollkat* (magic cat), often conceived as a sort of ball of yarn, which passes among the cows and sucks milk from them to take back to the witch; if the *trollkat* is injured, it shows on the witch's body (but destroying the *trollkat* does not affect the witch). There seems to be some vacillation between the notions of *hugham* and helping spirit in this case.

The conscious control of the *hugr*, apparently a characteristic ability of witches such as is in evidence in the material assembled by Alver, serves to explain the Old Norse kenning for *hugr* reported by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 70: «huginn skal svá kenna, at kalla vind trollkvenna», "a kenning is to be made for *hugr* by calling it 'a wind of witches'"; a good number of kennings exist to illustrate this, in which *hugr* is called "wind of a giantess" or "wind of a witch" (Meissner 1984: 138–9), though nearly all are fairly late (twelfth century or after), or in *lausavísur*; one of the earliest reliable instances is *gífrs veðr*, "giantess's weather", in the mid-eleventh-century *Magnúsdrápa* 3 of Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld (*Skj* B, 312). Weiser-Aall (1936: 77) argues that this refers to a belief that the breath of a witch, carried on the wind, could cause harm to people, which is consistent with the later folk beliefs; she compares the Middle High German use of *aneblasen* and *anehucchen* of a disease-causing *alp*.[17] The idea that the whirlwind

[17] Motz (1988) argues that the kenning shows giants (*troll*) as controllers of natural forces, and the idea is to perform an act of "sitting out" (*útiseta*) to "summon up giants" (*at vekja troll upp*) for this purpose. The argument is unconvincing, and the comparative material drawn from Greenlandic sources is too vaguely similar to be of use. The *troll* of the kenning refers to nothing more than witches. As noted in the discussion of *troll*, the term did not refer specifically to giants, even if many giants were *troll*.

encapsulated the power of the witch is widespread; for example, it is found in Estonian folk belief (Loorits 1949: 192–5), and in England in *The Witch of Edmonton,* a play from 1623 by Thomas Dekker, William Rowley and John Ford, the witch, Mother Sawyer, says (Act IV, scene 1):

> She on whose tongue a whirlwind sits to blow
> A man out of himself, from his soft pillow
> To lean his head on rocks and fighting waves,
> Is not that scold a witch?

A much earlier possible reference to the same idea, also from England, is found in the *Pontifical* of Egbert (eighth century, preserved in a tenth-century manuscript) (p. 118):

> ubicumque sonuerit hoc tintinnabulum (vel haec tintinnabula) longe recedat virtus inimicorum, umbra phantasmatum, incursio turbinum, percussio fulminum, lesio tonitruorum, calamitates tempestatum, omnis spiritus procellarum.

> whenever this bell (these bells) ring(s), let the power of enemies withdraw far away, the shades of phantasms, the invasion of whirlwinds, the striking of lightning bolts, the damage of thunder, the destructions of storms, every spirit of blustering winds.

However, the text is ambiguous: while "enemies" and "phantasms" suggest animate forces at work, «omnis spiritus procellarum» may simply mean "every gust of blustering wind".

The implication of Weiser-Aall's argument, though it is not made explicit in the Norse kenning, is that the witch's breath becomes a wind – as is clear in the case of the seventeenth-century English play (which must be relaying a common conception of the time). The kenning implies that the *hugr* is breathed out and travels on or as a wind. Among the Sámi was to be found the belief that a shaman could travel in a whirlwind,[18] suggesting that a similar belief underlies the Norse kenning. It seems clear that behind the kenning is the belief that a witch could send out her *hugr* in a controlled manner to achieve missions at a distance; it therefore functioned as a free soul, and its manipulation here is parallel to that orchestrated by a shaman (whose control over it distinguished him from the uncontrolled wanderings of the free soul experienced by ordinary people).

Hamr and *hugr* are found together in *Hávamál* 155 ⟨72⟩. The speaker proclaims his power over *túnriður,*[19] "witches", sending them *villar,* "astray",

[18] Itkonen (1946: 159–60) records that in Kainuu there is a belief that in "Fire Lapland" lived the greatest shamans, who dived in a fire of dried pine wood in order to procure wisdom, or to fall into trance; an assistant woke the shaman by singing. These shamans rushed about in whirlwinds in the form of fiery arrows. In contrast, in Estonia, a woman who had been causing mayhem to her neighbours through whirlwinds was detected by throwing fire into a whirlwind, and observing who in the district was burnt (Loorits 1949: 195–6).

[19] *Túnriða* is glossed as "fence-rider" in Cleasby and Vigfússon. However, *tún* does not mean "fence" in Old Norse, but rather the farm buildings and yards; the natural way to understand the word would therefore be that the witches are riding on the rooftops of the buildings, just as Glámr does in *Grettis saga* ch. 32. This suggestion, made by B. Olsen (1916:

as they *leika*, "play, go into ecstasy", up in the air; its allusion to efficatory magic is enforced by the use of charm-metre, *galdralag*, in the concluding lines «sinna heimhama, sinna heimhuga», "from their home shapes, from their home souls". This stanza is difficult to interpret; as it appears to require at least the emendation of gender from «þeir villir» to «þær villar», it is possible that further corruption has taken place. Evans (1986: 139–41), taking *-huga* here in the sense "free souls", notes the problem in the implication of two souls, the wandering one being separated from the home one, but suggests that the last line is intended to repeat the sense of the penultimate line, and does so in a clumsy way. The juxtaposition of *hamr* and *hugr* here may hint at what was possibly by the time of composition a commonplace, that the *hugr* could take on a *hamr*; the *heimhamr* then is the "home shape", that is the normal form of a person with their *hugr* "at home" within – the expression is indeed clumsy, but the essential idea must be that the speaker has the capability to prevent witches' *hugir*, which are playing up in the air (cf. the kenning above, a *hugr* is the wind of witches), from returning to their bodies. There must also lie behind this verse the idea of preventing someone reassuming their normal form, which they have abandoned for a while; this is a widespread folktale motif, for example the swan maiden who abandons her swan costume to bathe, and is obliged to remain in human form until the costume is found again (such a motif forms part of the background to *Vǫlundarkviða*, *PE* II, 258, though the poet has chosen not to adopt this motif from his sources).

In *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*[20] ch. 19–21, Þorgrímr (a magician) and his men attack the farm of Atli, and Atli dreams he sees a pack of wolves advancing, and before them a sly fox, and as they approach the farm, he wakes up, and says «ok veit ek víst, at þat er manna hugir», "and I know for sure that it is men's *hugir*". On the way, Þorgrímr had had to dismount from his horse because he was overcome by sleep:

> Þorgrímr sofnaði ok breiddi feld á hǫfuð sér [...] Þar er nú til at taka, at Þorgrímr vaknar; var honum orðit heitt. Hann mælti þá: "Heima hefi ek

71), is rejected by Evans (1986, comm. *Hávamál* 155) on the grounds that *tún* cannot mean simply the farm building, and in any case it is only ghosts that ride on rooftops; the latter point seems to carry little weight (witches and ghosts may be viewed as belonging to the same class of being), but there does seem to be a degree of unsatisfactoriness in the *tún* as a object to ride upon. However, the word is almost certainly borrowed from German, and understood just as "witch" without reference to the lexical elements contained within it; in German a term (without linguistic ambiguity) for witch was *zûnrite*, "fence-rider" (it occurs, no doubt as a traditional term, in the fourteenth-century *Münchener Nachtsegen* line 14 in the form «zcunríten» (dat. pl.), which can be either feminine or masculine; in Middle Low German *tûnride* occurs as a plant name: von Grienberger 1897: 347); this illustrates clearly how witches were conceived to operate liminally, on the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds, a notion which is found in Norse too: cf. the Swedish law ⟨73⟩, where the witch sits on a *kvígrindr* (cattle fence) when day and night are equal, i.e. she works at a dividing point both in space and time. The same liminality is evident in the terms *kveldriða*, "evening rider" (for example Hallfreðr, *Óláfsdrápa* 6, *Skj* B, 149), and *myrkriða*, "murk rider" (*Hárbarðsljóð* 20).

[20] The extant saga is fourteenth century, but is based on an earlier version antedating *Landnámabók* (Dillmann 2006: 243).

> verit um hríð á bœnum, ok er svá villt fyrir mér, at ek veit eigi frá mér, en þó munum vér heim ganga at bœnum. Ætla ek, at vér skulum brenna þá inni."

> Þorgrímr fell asleep and spread a cover over his head [...] It is to be mentioned here that Þorgrímr wakes; he had become hot. He then said: "I have been away for a while at the farm, and I have become so bewildered that for my part I know nothing, but still we shall make for the farm. I intend that we shall burn them in."

What is going on here? Dillmann (2006: 243) sees this is an instance of free soul (*hugr*) wandering, in which Þorgrímr's spiritual reconnaissance mission to the farm was thwarted by the opposing soul of Atli, indicated by *villt*, "disturbed, led astray"; the account in fact approaches the motif, found among the Sámi, of a fight between contending opponents in their animal-form free souls, the trance being represented by the sleep, and the inception of the rite by the spreading of the cloak (as the Sámi shaman did in the *Historia Norwegie* ⟨138⟩). On the other hand, North (1991: 109), speaking of the vision of Atli, argues that the sense of *hugir* here is not "souls" but "[shapes of] intentions"; the wolves are to be associated with "wolfish thoughts". In fact the passage appears to play on both these notions – which, indeed, may be seen as simply different perspectives along a continuum between the concrete and the abstract. It seems clear that a basic concept of a wandering *hugr*, such as is found in later Norwegian tradition, underlies the account, but the author, writing in the Christian era, may have wished to ambiguate this reference in such a way that *hugr* – whose basic sense, after all, is "mind, thought" – can be interpreted as "intention", realised in a physical form, *but only in a dream*, allowing for an interpretation by which the *hugir* (whether souls or minds) do not literally wander. We also see a reflection of the idea evident in later tradition that someone's disposition and desires may be so strong as to affect their object (whether or not they are conceived as actually leaving the body). Aspects of this interpretation are found in other literary works (to which, if the interpretation of the author's intentions is accepted, he may be alluding). The "wolfish intentions" are reflected, essentially, in *Atlakviða* 8, where Hǫgni, receiving a ring from his sister Guðrún, wife to the tyrant Atli who has invited her brothers to visit (in order to slay them), says (trans. Dronke):

Hár fann ek heiðingia	I found a hair of the heath-ranger
riðit í hring rauðom.	twisted round the red ring.
Ylfskr er vegr okkarr	Our way is wolfish
at ríða ørindi.	if we ride on this journey.

Here we see the motif of the wolfish premonition, warning of danger which the recipient nonetheless ineluctably falls into; *Hávarðar saga* infers logically that the intentions of the attackers, *hugir*, are wolfish. The phrasing of the *Hávarðar saga* passage also suggests a more specific link with that from *Hávamál* 155 ⟨72⟩, in particular in the use of *villt* in reference to the magician

Þorgrímr. The basic meaning of *villr* is "astray"; in *Hávamál* the speaker is in effect claiming to be a greater magician than the *túnriður*, whose *hugir* he is able to lead astray from finding their way back to their bodies. In *Hávarðar saga*, it is Þorgrímr's purpose (again, his *hugr*, though this is not mentioned explicitly) which is led astray: in other words, his spirit mission is foiled, and he fails to discover any useful information, possibly, as Dillmann suggests, because the power of Atli, a greater magician, "disturbed" him, as the speaker does in *Hávamál*. It seems that the author of *Hávarðar saga* alludes to traditional notions of the wandering *hugr*, conceived as a sort of free soul or ego-soul sent out for an investigative purpose, but at the same time through his use of the dream settings distances himself somewhat from these ideas, enabling the reader to interpret *hugir* as symbolic representations of more abstract qualities such as intentions.

Two other mythic instances pointing towards a free-soul sense to *hugr* may be mentioned. The visit of Þórr to the castle of Útgarða-Loki is told only by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 44–7 – we have no poetic version. One of the contests between the gods and giants consisted of Þórr's servant Þjálfi running against the giants' appointed athlete, Hugi; of course, Þjálfi loses, but it is only afterwards that it is revealed that Hugi is "Thought" (the name is a variant of *hugr*), than which nothing is swifter. The source is late, and deliberately fabulous: we need not see Hugi as anything more than a personified abstraction, exactly as is Þórr's opponent in the wrestling match during the same series of contests; she is Útgarða-Loki's old nurse, named Elli, "Old age". Yet Hugi, running free, may be built upon a traditional notion of *hugr* being able to operate independently of the body.

The other instance is Óðinn's ravens, Huginn and Muninn (roughly "endowed with *hugr*/*munr*"), mentioned in *Grímnismál* 20:

Huginn ok Muninn fliúga hverian dag iǫrmungrund yfir; óumk ek of Hugin at hann aptr né komit, þó siámk meirr um Munin.	Huginn and Muninn fly each day over the mighty earth; I fear for Huginn, that he will not return, though I am more anxious about Muninn.

De Vries (*AR* §382) notes that by Muninn and Huginn could be meant the apparitional forms of the psyche, such as could wander free from the body in shamanic tradition (de Vries hence implies a link with shamanism here); this calls for further comment. The notion of the *hugr* and *munr* as semi-independent entities, able to act outside the body, no doubt forms the basis of the mythic image; the widespread image of the soul as a bird (as noted in some of the Eurasian examples above) would be in accord with this idea. Ravens are chosen because they are the birds of battle, one of Óðinn's particular fields of activity – and hence we are presented with the idea that the ravens, clearing the carnage of war, embodied the war god's "intention" and "desire" to cause this carnage. Yet the poet opposes the birds to the god's own thought and desire for their return, so that *hugr* and

munr apparently exist both within Óðinn at home, and embodied in the wandering birds – which is a very different picture from that presented by Snorri in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 ⟨112⟩, where Óðinn lay in a trance as his free soul wandered. To some extent the birds therefore appear in the poem as helping spirits – if we wish to use shamanic terminology at all – rather than embodied manifestations of aspects of the psyche. In that they are birds, the closest parallel would be the Sámi *basseváre lådde,* "(helping) spirit bird"; a shaman could have more than one of these; one of their functions was to summon the "supernatural men" when the shaman wished to find something out, i.e. the bird is involved in the gathering of information, like Óðinn's ravens. The relationship to Óðinn, apparently something between a free soul and an animal helping spirit, is better paralleled by the Sámi *basseváre sarves* reindeer, which had a closer relationship to the shaman than the other animal helpers, being effectively an *alter ego*.[21] The most powerful shamans could have more than one *basseváre sarves* (Jens Kildal 1943–5: 139). Over all, however, the Norse picture of Muninn and Huginn does not correspond in any systematic way to what is found among the Sámi; even though such shamanic ideas may, arguably, have played some part in the formation of their image, it would be to force the issue to see any specific connection; rather, the birds are primarily philosophical constructs, and the poet's focus is not upon them so much as upon Óðinn as god of intellect, a god who, as so often (as is seen for example in his determination to consult a *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá*), is wracked by doubt over the stability and reach of his mental powers.

To sum up: there seems reason to believe that the idea of the wandering *hugr*, a sort of free soul or ego-soul, existed in medieval sources; the Eurasian parallels provide good grounds for regarding this as an ancient heritage from pre-Christian times. Nonetheless, the evidence is not unambiguous, and to some extent relies on interpretations based on later folk beliefs, where the notion of the wandering *hugr* seems clearer. It is also worth pointing out that *hugr* does not occur in some instances where we would most expect it if it functioned as a common designation for the free soul. It is striking that neither *hugr* nor any other word is used to designate the soul of the person who takes on animal form in cases where it is clear that some concept of soul-wandering is involved, as with Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 ⟨112⟩ or Bǫðvarr bjarki in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 50 ⟨96⟩.

HAMR

The basic meaning of *hamr* is concrete: it is an animal or bird pelt (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.* 1); we may compare Gothic *gahamon*, "get dressed", or Old High German *hamo*, "skin, shell, clothing"; in the Old Saxon *Heliand* 5800, the compound *federhamo*, "feather pelt", occurs, describing an angel

[21] Thus the shaman's fate was bound up closely with the reindeer spirit's ⟨23⟩. It belongs among the bull or reindeer-bull *doppelgänger* that Vajda (1959: 462) distinguishes as specific to shamans; see also *SLS* 65.

coming down from heaven. This concrete sense is illustrated in Old Norse by the expression *hleypa hǫmum*, "to change *hamir*", used of a snake sloughing (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.* 1, cited from *Konráðs saga*). As *hamr* is not used of prosaic external objects like clothing in Old Norse, when the word is used in reference to humans it almost invariably indicates something out of the ordinary, something affecting the skin or appearance.

Even when *hamr* has an ostensibly basic sense of "pelt", there is always an implication that the nature of the animal whence the pelt came is contained in it, and communicated to any wearer. Thus in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 8 Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli find some wolf pelts (*úlfahamir*) and put them on, which necessitates their becoming wolves and acting savagely for some time before the skins will come off them. The same concept of a concrete *hamr* as a sort of magical pelt that changes the wearer into an animal, at least in some sense (but without necessarily suggesting their whole form was altered),[22] is implied in *Þrymskviða* 3–4, where Loki borrows Freyja's *fjaðrhamr*, "feather pelt", to fly to Jǫtunheimr; the similarity to the flight of the Old Saxon angel in the *Heliand*, noted above, perhaps suggests that this was an attribute of divine beings in ancient Germanic tradition.[23] In other instances the change into an animal does not make the use of a *hamr* as a pelt explicit, as in the case of Askmaðr in *Þorskfirðinga saga* ch. 10, who escapes in disguise as a pig from a burning house and is struck by a brand, but is subsequently found in human shape.

Hamr need not imply the existence of a physical pelt at all, but may exhibit a sense of "the outward form assumed by a being", which certain people were able to change, assuming the forms of animals; the verb *hamask* is sometimes used in such a literal sense of "change outward appearance", as in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 5 pr., where it is stated that «Fránmarr iarl hafði hamaz í arnar líki», "Jarl Fránmarr had changed into an eagle's form" (for a general survey of shape-shifting, see *KLNM*, *s.v.* "ham(n)skifte").

People (or anthropomorphic beings) changing *hamir* almost always take on animal form, but the word is sometimes used of people exchanging their outward appearance with each other. One instance is found in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 7, where Signý exchanges *hamir* with a *seiðkona* in order to seduce her own brother ⟨124⟩. Another is mentioned in *Grípisspá* 43, where the deceitful wooing of Brynhildr is described, in which Sigurðr took on Gunnarr's guise: it is said «þá hǫmom víxlið / er it heim komið», "you will change back your *hamir* when you come home", which refers back to st. 37, where the equivalent phrase is «þvíat litom víxla / er á leið eroð / Gunnarr ok þú», "since you will change appearances when on the way, Gunnarr and you". What this change involves is specified in st. 39: the taking on of the other's *litr* and *læti* (appearance and voice or behaviour), but the retention

[22] Tradition no doubt varied on such details: cf., for example, the depictions of Vǫlundr on the Ardre VIII stone on the one hand, where he appears as fully avian, and on the Leeds cross on the other, in an essentially similar iconography, but in human form, with wings and tail tacked on (see Bailey 1980: 105). Loki is, of course, fully recognisable once he arrives at Þrymr's.

[23] I thank Frog for bringing the Saxon parallel to my attention.

of one's own *mælska* and *meginhyggjur* (eloquence and power of thought). Both of these sources are late derivative works based on earlier Eddaic poems, and even if the narrative elements may be of some antiquity, the particular forms of expression may not be.

Whilst the sense of *hamr* was in origin physical, many uses focus rather upon mental change. The terms *hamslauss* and *hamstolinn* refer to being "deprived of *hamr*", resulting in mental unrest. Thus in *Egils saga* ch. 72 the girl Helga could get no sleep at night, «ok var sem hamstoli væri», "and was as if she were *hamstolinn*": the term is parallel to *vitstolinn*, "deprived of wits". *Stolinn* is probably to be taken metaphorically, indicating that a person does not look or act their normal self, rather than someone or something having literally "stolen" the *hamr*, though Cleasby and Vigfússon (1957, *s.v.* "hamslauss") point to Icelandic folktales where a person has to search for their lost "skin" or form. The verb *hamask* more often has an abstract sense than the literal one noted above, signifying "to burst into sudden fury": the idea again reflects a state of mental unrest resulting from a change in one's *hamr*, which may be inferred to have a sense closer to "disposition, temper" than anything physical.

Many of the disparate senses of *hamr* can be brought together if we take it to have a fundamental sense of the outer physical skin or pelt of an animate being, accompanied by a particular inalienable disposition symbolised by or contained within that skin. In the course of the word's semantic development, the physical aspect was in some usages downplayed, so that it often indicates an appearance rather than a skin; in other usages, it was the fixed disposition that was focused upon, so that changing *hamr* meant changing one's behaviour and personality (this sense is further developed in modern Icelandic, where for example *að vera í góðum ham* means "to be in a good frame of mind": Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.* "hamr II"). By the time of *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 7 and *Grípisspá* the *hamr* is not even accompanied by a fixed disposition (as Gunnarr and Sigurðr each retain their own character within), and the word becomes synonymous with a combination of mere *litr* and *læti*.

The dual senses of *hamask*, to change outward appearance, but also to change mood and go into a frenzy, has implications for our understanding of the notion of the *berserkr* ⟨QV⟩. The name probably implies a change of *hamr*, the warrior adopting the form of a bear, but more important was that in a *berserksgangr* he acted like a bear, took on its character; the physical and mental changes were reflections of each other, and should not be divorced from each other. The word *einhamr*, "having one *hamr*", also relates to this; it occurs almost solely in the negative, to describe people like *berserkir*, who change their *hamr* and hence may be said to have more than one of them. Thus in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 28 it is said: «Berserkirnir gengu heim um kveldit ok váru móðir mjǫk, sem háttr er þeira manna sem eigi eru einhama, at þeir verða máttlausir mjǫk er af þeim gengr berserksgangrinn», "The *berserkir* went home in the evening and they were very weary, as is the way of those people who are not *einhamir*, that they become very weak when the *berserkr* rage leaves them". The saga-writer hovers here between a purely

natural explanation and a spiritual one: the physical exploits during a frenzied battle rage leave a man very weak – but there would be no need to mention the *hamr* to say this, so there is an implication that a change of physical form, *hamr*, has resulted in a change of disposition (also *hamr*), from strength to weakness.

An alternative way of describing someone who was not *einhamr* was to call him *hamramr*, "*hamr*-strong". An example, cloaked in an air of mystery, occurs when Dufþakr and Stórólfr, both described as *hamramir*, fight in animal form at night in *Landnámabók*, but in a way which is visible only to someone with second sight ⟨75⟩ (the narrative also illustrates the motif of magicians' association with twilight, the liminal time between day and night).

Hamhleypa was a term for "witch", derived from the ability to "shift *hamr*", as the word indicates. An instance of a *hamhleypa* turning into a bird and clucking all night at the window is found in the case of Gunnhildr in *Egils saga* ch. 60.

An understanding of the *hamr* is implicit in some instances where it is not actually mentioned. In *Kormáks saga* ch. 18 Kormákr encounters a sea beast, a *hrosshvalr*, coming alongside his boat; this was, as Dillmann shows (2006: 251), a mythical large-eyed monster given to attacking ships furiously. The sailors thought they recognised the eyes of the crone, Þorveig; the scene represents the threat they are under from Þorveig. Kormákr pokes the monster with a pole, and it sinks; Þorveig dies a few days later. The *hamr* is not mentioned here, but the clear implication is that Þorveig has assumed a *hrosshvalr*'s *hamr*. A similar case of harm resulting for someone in an assumed form (again, *hamr* is not specifically mentioned) occurs with Ostacia in *Þiðreks saga* ch. 352–5 ⟨126⟩, who changed herself using *seiðr* into a dragon, which was struck in battle, resulting in Ostacia's death a little later. It is tempting to see a parallel in the Sámi belief that any injury to a fighting helping spirit would be reflected on the shaman who owned it; however, there is no indication that Þorveig or Ostacia were present anywhere other than as the sea monster or dragon, so the correspondence proves imprecise.

Most instances of people assuming a *hamr* imply that they are only in one place at a time, even if their form is other than usual. However, some instances of bifurcation occur, where a person's body stays in one place, while their conscious self wanders off, often in a changed form, elsewhere. This notion is found in the late *Friðþjófs saga frækna* ch. 5, 7 ⟨88⟩, where two *hamhleypur* perform *seiðr* but then appear out to sea riding on whales and attacking the hero, who strikes at them, with the result that the women performing *seiðr* fall from their dais, their backs broken. This comes close to the Sámi concept just mentioned – though with the difference that the witches here are not transformed into animals. Rather, it is probably a reflection of continental ideas of witches supernaturally riding on steeds (some of which have been described in Chapter 5), such as are found in *Postola sǫgur*, which reports that *hamhleypur* could travel long distances riding on animals ⟨76⟩. The lateness, and likely foreign influences, in

these accounts make it unsafe to infer that earlier Norse tradition had the developed notion of a person bifurcating, their body and soul occupying different physical locations.

Some instances are ambiguous on the issue of bifurcation in connection with the *hamr*. When three *Finnar* are sent on a mission to spy out his future home in Iceland by Ingimundr in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 12 ⟨123⟩, it is clear that they remain in their tent for three days while they carry out this mission. It is not said in what form they reached Iceland, or that they "shifted their *hamir*" to do so. The same episode is described in *Landnámabók* ⟨100⟩, however, where the journey is described as a *hamfǫr*, "*hamr*-journey", i.e. one undertaken in an assumed shape. This account lacks the detail that the *Finnar* remained in their tent, however, and *hamfǫr* is thus to be read in line with the other instances of people acting with assumed forms, namely that their shape changed, but they did not bifurcate in the way intimated in *Vatnsdœla saga* (which avoids the use of *hamr*). This is very similar to the tale related in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 33, where, after a dispute between Iceland and Denmark following the disgraceful treatment by the Danes of a wrecked Icelandic ship, the Icelanders *en masse* calumniate the king, Haraldr Gormsson, in verse. Haraldr decides to take action by sending a spy out to Iceland:

> Haraldr konungr bauð kunngum manni at fara í hamfǫrum til Íslands ok freista, hvat hann kynni segja honum. Sá fór í hvalslíki. En er hann kom til landsins, fór hann vestr fyrir norðan landit. Hann sá, at fjǫll ǫll ok hólar váru fullir af landvéttum, sumt stórt, en sumt smátt.

> King Haraldr ordered a wizard to go on a *hamr*-journey to Iceland and find out what he could tell him. He went in whale shape. When he came to the land, he went westwards along the north of the land. He saw that all the mountains and hills were full of land spirits, some huge and some tiny.

The land spirits deliver a cold welcome to this intruding spy, and scupper his mission. Again, it is not mentioned that the wizard's human body remained behind.

An instance where someone's presence is clearly bifurcated is in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 50 ⟨96⟩, where the hero Bǫðvarr sits in his tent during the battle, while a great bear is seen fighting on the field. Again, *hamr* is notable by its absence in this account.

It therefore appears that evidence is lacking for the specific notion that a person could remain physically in one place, while their conscious self took on animal or other form, *hamr*, and acted elsewhere. If we ignore the absence of precise evidence to confirm a connection between trance journeys and the *hamr*, and read the accounts of *Vatnsdœla saga*, *Landnámabók* and *Hrólfs saga kraka* as implying that someone could lie in trance and send their soul out to distant places in animal form (*hamr*), it is noticeable that in the first two cases it is explicitly Sámi who are the subjects, and in the third there is likely to have been Sámi influence upon the tale, as discussed in Chapter 20; the tale in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* is possibly influenced by that of the Finnar in the other sources mentioned. Thus a reasonable

inference, if not the only possible way of interpreting the evidence, would be that this particular exercise was characteristic of Sámi, but not Norse, magical practice (I discount the trustworthiness of *Friðþjófs saga frækna* in this respect).

The examples of *hamr* discussed above show, over all, a consistent understanding of it as a form, a shape, rather than a disembodied soul; where this concept exists, the word *hamr* does not occur, other than in the obscure passage in *Hávamál* discussed earlier. Whilst the use of *ham* or *hugham* for a wandering free soul is found in later Norwegian tradition, as noted above, such a usage does not occur in Old Norse. The only exception – which therefore appears questionable as a witness to traditional beliefs – is Snorri's account of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 ⟨112⟩, where the god is said to change his *hamir*, becoming various animals as he wandered over the world, whilst his body remained behind. Here, whilst *hamir* are mentioned, as is the *búkr*, the physical body, it is notable that the soul is given no designation such as *hugr*. Indeed, it appears that Snorri is deliberately avoiding any spiritual dimension in this description of the euhemerised Óðinn; even the use of the plural *hamir* with respect to a single individual is odd, indicating the word is being used in a prosaic sense – Óðinn changed his "appearances", rather than his personal "outward form" with its inalienable disposition, of which each person could have but one. The exceptional nature of this account is grounds for suspecting its authenticity as part of received tradition, which I come back to in Chapter 17.

It is probably fruitless to try to pin down concepts as fluid as those of the *hamr* and *hugr*. Traditions, and the texts representing these traditions and their authors' individual notions, are not necessarily consistent in their understanding of the terms; we have no reason to believe that there was any systematised set of beliefs in ancient Scandinavia on these matters any more than on any other religious concepts. Yet we may say that there appears to have been on the one hand a notion that the *hugr* could wander from the body, and on the other that a person might be seen in an assumed form, a *hamr*, different from his normal everyday form and generally endowed with a distinct disposition too; questions such as "Did the *hugr* assume a *hamr* when it wandered?" or "If a person is seen in a *hamr*, does it mean his *hugr* has wandered and assumed this form?" may sometimes have been asked in later traditions, but appear to have been essentially alien to the original simple and discrete concepts.

Conclusion

The Greek and Germanic evidence makes it clear that what we think of as abstract qualities of a person were earlier conceived as more or less concrete entities, that to a certain extent could be envisaged as acting independently of their owner, including acting outside the body to which they belonged (a more detailed examination of the Eurasian concepts would certainly reveal the same, but the secondary materials used here

are unsuitable for demonstrating this in detail). In Norse, the *hugr* comes closest to what we would term a soul, but it would be wrong to divorce it from other "abstract" entities such as *munr* considered here; the various spiritual qualities examined here are all parts of the necessary make-up of a human being. Paulson's (and others') analyses of Eurasian concepts are useful as far as they go, particularly in demonstrating the almost universal presence of the concepts of life-soul and free soul; however, the Greek and Germanic evidence certainly suggests that talking of soul duality would be misleading – multiplicity of souls would be more accurate. Within this multiplicity is always found the free soul, able to wander from the body. Such a concept is effectively a prerequisite for shamanism, since without it it would be difficult to conceive of a shaman as much more than a medium. However, whilst such soul multiplicity appears to be a prerequisite for shamanism (or least occurs wherever shamanism occurs), it does not determine the presence of shamanism. The soul beliefs of ancient Greece can be accommodated very well within the Eurasian system, yet they do not explicitly relate to such hints of shamanism as were present within the religious beliefs there (see Chapter 5), as far as the evidence goes. It is clear that the Norse concepts of the soul also accord well with the Eurasian model, and thus provide the necessary framework for shamanism to have operated – which is not the same as saying that it did operate there. One of the defining characteristics of a shaman was not that his soul wandered (anyone's could), or that he had strong innate powers, but that he could control these wanderings or powers. Within some of the Norse records discussed above we do find the idea that the witch or magician, of either sex, could effect this control, which presents us with an *a priori* reason for regarding them as shamans; yet this one feature on its own can scarcely justify such an identification – it is necessary to examine a range of other evidence before drawing such a conclusion.

9. Spirits

The term "spirit" is intended to convey the idea of an entity independent of the beholder, with some level of consciousness, which is not merely human or animal; a spirit may or may not be conceived as ethereal in its nature. Spirits, on the present understanding, include a wide range of beings, both benevolent and malevolent, from the most powerful gods down to supernatural guardians of the home and night spooks. As with many areas in the present work, the vastness of the topic precludes anything but a survey of the most salient features (and of research upon them), such as are of greatest relevance to the discussion of shamanic elements in Norse myth and religion; only a selection of shamanic societies' spirit concepts is used for illustration. By no means all "spirits" have any connection with what might be construed as shamanic in Norse records – though the lateness and sparseness of these records render it impossible to determine if a wider range of spirits was once so connected – but it seems appropriate to provide a wider context for those spirits that are so involved.

Eurasian notions of spirits

THE SHAMAN'S INTERACTION WITH THE SPIRITS

Across those parts of Eurasia where traditional belief systems survived well a belief in a wide variety of spirits was the norm; these spirits impinged on people's lives in various ways. The shaman was distinguished from others in his ability to maintain contact and to enter into dialogue with certain types of spirits with a view to changing their interactions with members of his community. There are two situations in which the shaman is especially deeply involved with spirits: during his initiation, and during subsequent trance contacts with them. During his initiation the spirits he meets are generally anthropomorphic, and tutelary. During his later trances, when he visits the other world, and during other experiences such as consulting the spirits, he is helped by spirits usually of animal form, though ancestral shaman figures – sometimes themselves in animal form, such as the ancestral shaman spirit of the Ewenki, which appeared as a loon (*SLS* 19) – also feature in this role (Vajda 1959: 461–5). The two sorts of spirits were not distinguished in all societies, for example the Nenets (Khomič 1978: 251).[1] Spirits would sometimes abandon their shaman as he grew older,

[1] Eliade (1972: 88–95) distinguishes divine beings, often invoked in the kamlanie, for example by the Altaian peoples, but petitioned rather than controlled by the shaman, from helping spirits, over whom he has control, which usually appear in animal form. The anthropomorphic spirits are more akin to such divine beings, in that the shaman does not control them but is guided and directed by them, in particular at his initiation; divine

for example among the Selkup (Basilov 1990: 25).

Shamanic spirits were of various origins and types. Bulgakova (1995) recounts how among the Nanai a new shamanic spirit could arise after the shaman saw some notable object, if this object then appeared in a dream: thus Gara Geiker had a helper called "my child" after producing an unusual afterbirth, which then appeared to her in a dream as a small girl, declaring herself to be the shaman's daughter. Such spirits do not die with the shaman, but go into a sleep, awaiting a descendant to attach themselves to. Bogoras (1904–9: 300) notes that among the Chukchi many things could be shamanic spirits (FIG. 12 illustrates one): one old man summoned his penis when shamanising, another a fox turd. Chukchi shamanic spirits were very ill-tempered and hated each other. Among some shamanic peoples, such as the Nanai, the Chukchi, the Sakhas, the Shors, the Selkups and the Teleuts, the shaman was believed to have a protecting spirit of the opposite sex with whom he or she would sleep (Siikala 1978: 259–61, an account of a Nanai initiation, and 316; Bogoras 1904–9, 452); there is no evidence for this among the Sámi.

The shaman sometimes imitates, and sometimes describes, the activities of the spirits. The spirits act as escorts during the trance journey, or as riding animals (generally birds for the air, reindeer for the land, and fish for the sea). Encounters with the spirits can take place in this world (Chukchi, Korak, Yukagir), in the otherworld (Yukagir, Khanty, Nanai, Orochi, Ewenki, Tatar), or in both (Chukchi, Nenets, Selkup), and can take a number of forms (Siikala 1978: 322–37; Siikala and Hoppál 1992: 35):

1. *Role identification*. The shaman identifies completely with the spirit, which may be inhaled (central and eastern Siberia, for example Yukagir, Ewenki, Sakha, Manchu, Nanai, Orochi); the role of shaman as mediator is unfulfilled, and an assistant takes on this role. This mode largely coincides with the area where an ancestral spirit is the main initiator of the shaman, and where the ancestral spirit may also remain as the shaman's chief spirit helper. The spirit of the ancestor enters the shaman and speaks through him. The Yukagir shaman identifies with the ancestral spirit and disease spirit alternately. The shamanic journey type also occurs in these areas, however. Trance varies, coming in waves; interaction with the audience also varies.

2. *Dual role*. The shaman manifests his role as shaman and as spirit without identifying with them fully, communicating via a dialogue; thus the Chukchi shaman through ventriloquism attempts to manifest several spirits at once. This mode is also found in western Siberia, but here it is more like successive possession. Trance is light; interaction with the audience is high.

3. *Description of the counter-role*. The shaman creates an image of the role performances of the spirits only verbally, so only the shaman is regarded as seeing or hearing the spirits. This is more common in northern and

beings, of course, need have no such specifically tutelary role with respect to the shaman.

western Siberia than in central and eastern, especially in the rich song tradition of the Samoyeds with visionary themes. The type of kamlanie in northern Siberia always involves the shamanic soul journey. Trance is deep; interaction with the audience is minimal. Siikala (2002: 46) points out that the form of shamanism which climaxes in the shaman falling unconscious is found primarily in small hunting/fishing groups of the Arctic, where religion is archaic and nature-oriented.

It is worth emphasising that a ritualised contact with spirits may be found in many traditions remote from classic shamanism; the following note about Scottish seers acts merely as one such example, in which spirits provide information, and the seer adopts a position reminiscent of the shaman in trance in some Siberian kamlania (MacInnes 1989: 19–20: *taidhbhse* means both an appearance, phantasm, and the faculty of seeing phantasms):

> Yet one informant told me of a famous seer in the Hebrides who died around the turn of the century and who was so well acquainted with his *taidhbhsean*, and they with him, that they habitually came into whatever house he happened to be visiting after dark and plucked at his sleeve. He would thereupon rise and go outside to talk to them. [...] But this Hebridean seer always spoke to his ghostly visitants lying prone on the ground: without that contact with the earth he would be in danger.

THE MISTRESS OF THE ANIMALS

A characteristic of certain shamanic societies, in particular those where primitive hunting lifestyles prevail (and hence absent, for example, from most of the Turkic peoples), is the animal mother. The Sakhas believe each shaman has such an *iie-kyyl*, considered to be the shaman's double; any injury to the animal mother is reflected on the shaman. Such beliefs are also common among the Ewenki (beside whom the Sakhas dwell) (Alekseev 1997: 103). In Greenland the Mistress of the Animals is Sedna, an old woman residing at the bottom of the sea: from a large vessel she sends out animals to serve as food, but can also withhold the supply, causing famine. Some of the dead are believed to go to Sedna's house. The notion of a Master or Mistress of the Animals, responsible for affording the hunters a supply of game as long as these acted with propriety in all aspects of the hunt and towards the animals' master or mistress, survived even in more advanced societies where hunting continued to play an important role, notably among the Finns, where Tapio and his mistress fulfilled this function, being invoked for example in bear-hunting rites (see Pentikäinen 2007: 68–71). In certain regions, such as among the Chukchi, the notion of spirits of specific individual animal species is developed (Paulson, Hultkrantz and Jettmar 1962: 69). The following features of animal spirits are found generally in northern Siberia (ibid. 64–100):

1. Animals are often regarded as sacred, in particular the bear, and killing them may be accompanied by special ceremonies;

2. Animals are often thought to have souls like people, including a free soul which acts as a guardian;
3. There is often a collective species animal spirit;
4. There is often a master spirit of each animal species;
5. There is also often a local spirit of a river, mountain and so forth, which may have animals under its control;
6. The master of the animals has to be offered sacrifices to ensure hunting luck.

SÁMI SPIRITS

Attendant spirits

Itkonen (1946: 162–4) discusses Sámi spirits. The Inari Sámi believed everyone had a *fārrosâš* (< *fārru*, "journey"), "journey attendant". This was a *doppelgänger*, who could protect against evil; it was not normally seen: to see it was a foreboding of something ill. When a *fārrosâš* was seen apart from its owner, he was said to be doomed, *vāigâs* (< Old Norse *feigr*). The *fārrosâš* was immortal and remained on earth; it could also pass over to the son of its departed owner. The *fārrosâš* may be the same as the *ȯassi*, "part, portion, lot, luck", which was seen as a man's personified luck.

Among the Skolt Sámi it was believed that every clan had a protecting spirit, *kȧᴅ'ᴅz*^{e}, "companion". This was passed from father to son, mother to daughter. Individual members of a family could also have their own *kȧᴅ'ᴅz*^{e}. Only at the age of twenty was anyone worthy to receive a *kȧᴅ'ᴅz*^{e}. It appeared in animal form. It was visible only in sleep, though some, especially shamans, could see it whilst awake. The helping spirits of the shaman were also called *kȧᴅ'ᴅz*^{e}; the shaman would send these spirits to fight each other.

Hultkrantz (1987) has analysed the information about non-shamanic guardian spirits among the Sámi. Johan Randulf (1903: 45), writing in 1723, reported that in the Trondheim area the Sámi had sacred mountains where spirits dwelled who were able to protect them in all their doings, and each Sámi chose several of these spirits as protectors, and could summon them by singing yoiks. Likewise Thomas von Westen, describing the southern Norwegian Sámi, wrote that each Sámi had a sacred mountain inhabited by large numbers of *spiritus familiares* (*saivo olmak*). Skanke (1943–5: 191), in the 1720s, reported that each adult Sámi had numbers of guardian Sájva spirits. A sort of contract existed with the guardian spirits: they would protect and give luck with the reindeer, and with fishing and hunting, and take vengeance for injuries, and could expect reindeer sacrifices in return. Before death a Sámi would divide his spirits among his children. Sources relating to the Swedish Sámi indicate that not everyone had guardian spirits, but only those who had inherited them or achieved them through means of shamanism, either themselves or from *noaidis*. Hultkrantz (1987: 118–19) reaches the following conclusion:

Apparently not only shamans but also other Saamis formerly owned guardian spirits that were handed down in the family. Among the western Saamis these spirits were anthropomorphic (if we may believe the sources), among the eastern Skolt Saamis they were zoomorphic. There is also some information on the purchase of guardian spirits. It seems, furthermore, that some persons – not just the shamans – could achieve guardian spirits through their own efforts.

Shamanic spirits

Everyone was accompanied through life by various spirits (*SLS* 41–3); the shaman was distinguished from others by his ability to contact and make use of these spirits (Bäckman 1975: 160). They were of three sorts (ibid. 41–3), known collectively as *noaidegázzi*, "shaman companions":[2]

1. Anthropomorphic spirits. The *basseváre ålmmå*, "holy mountain man", lived in holy mountains and called the shaman to his office. The shaman contacted him by sending his *basseváre lådde*, "holy mountain bird". The *basseváre niejda*, "holy mountain maiden", strengthened the shaman with water during his initiation when he suffered from the attacks of his prospective spirit helpers, and also when the shaman's *basseváre sarves*, "supernatural reindeer", fought so as to exhaust him.

2. Theriomorphic spirits, or animal helping spirits: a spirit was called *noaide-vuoigna*, "shaman's spirit". They carried out the shaman's bidding on his trance journeys, and might act as escorts or steeds. The shaman sometimes imitated, and sometimes described, these spirits' activities. They were of three main sorts, each with a predominant function:
a. Basseváre lådde, "holy mountain bird" showed the shaman his way during the trance journey; the shaman also had a hideous bird called *vuorneslådde* or *vuokko* which would be sent against rival shamans: it is probably identical with the *basseváre lådde*;
b. Basseváre guolle, "holy mountain fish", guided the shaman to the underworld of the dead, and watched over his soul during this journey;
c. Basseváre sarves, "holy mountain reindeer", was bidden to fight against the reindeer spirit of a hostile shaman; the fate of the animal spirits was reflected in that of the shaman.

The functions varied within the living tradition, however; Jens Kildal (1943–5: 138–9) in the 1730s noted how any of the helping spirits, and indeed the anthropomorphic, could be involved in contests, though the reindeer spirit was the usual combatant. Vajda (1959: 462) notes that the Siberian shaman is often distinguished by possessing an alter ego in animal form: it is this spirit which takes part in shamanic fights ; this suggests that the Sámi *basseváre sarves* reindeer, or in the case of the Sámi of the *Historia Norwegie* ⟨138⟩ the water-beast (presumably a type of *basseváre guolle*), may have been this sort of spirit, but the evidence is not decisive.

The shaman himself is often conceived as taking on the forms of beasts.

[2] The following analysis is based on *SLS* (41–3). Sájva is used in the south in place of *básse-várre.*, but I standardise to the northerly forms here.

Isaac Olsen (1910: 32) records that the *noaidegázzi* teach the shaman to take on the shape of wolves and bears, as well as casting the form on others.[3] Itkonen (1946: 120) records the tale of Päiviö from Peltovuoma, who is supposed to have swum as a pike to heal the king of Sweden, and returned as a whitefish, narrowly avoiding being caught in a net on his return.

3. The dead, *jamegeh* or *jabmek*, dwelling underground in a realm ruled over by a powerful old woman, *Jábbmeáhkká*, "Crone of the dead". The shaman had to fetch the souls of the sick from this realm.

This categorisation masks a great deal of conceptual fluidity, however; in particular, the dead were often merged with anthropomorphic spirits, and the shaman's own soul with the zoomorphic spirits: for example, the shaman himself is often conceived as taking on the forms of beasts. In similar vein, Hultkrantz notes that the entire set of actions necessary to retrieve a soul from the underworld seems to have been carried out by the shaman's assistant spirits, rather than by him. One source says that the shaman travelled to the underworld *in* the *bassevárre guolle*. There is clearly a basic identity between the shaman and his spirit helpers (*SLS* 100). Hultkrantz comments (*SLS* 18):

> We have here, in the world of religious imagination, an oscillation between the conception of spirits in animal guise and the conception of the shaman's own extra-corporeal form of appearance, his zoomorphic free-soul. The free-soul often shows itself in animal form and can, moreover, assume the same distance to his owner as the helping spirit [. . .] Thus there is a mutual attraction between the spirit and the free-soul ideas. To make a clear distinction of these concepts in action would purely be an academic undertaking.

Hultkrantz's observation may give rise to different approaches when examining the accounts of shamanism: one would be to ignore the conceptual distinction altogether and equate soul and spirit; the other, which is adopted in the present study, is to keep the concepts distinct, whilst acknowledging that one merges into the other, so that we are often confronted with varying degrees of emphasis within the sources, rather than clearly demarcated and distinct conceptual entities.

TURKIC SPIRITS

Alekseev (1984) traces the spirit beliefs of the Turkic peoples of the Altai region. The supreme deity Ülgen sends the shamanic helping spirit, *djajük*,

[3] In later folk beliefs, the most able shamans were held to be those that could fly as a bird; the next most able could take on the forms of beasts whilst in trance; the least able could use only the power of words, or objects, in their sorcery (Itkonen 1946: 113–20). The bird form that the shaman took on was called by the Skolt Sámi *kuoᴅᴅâlv* (from *kŭ̆ᴅ'ᴅed*, "carry", as it was believed to carry people away), "griffon". The *vaakalintu*, "griffon bird", that the Mistress of Pohjola turns herself into in Finnish myth (*FFPE* no. 12; *SKVR* I, 54) is clearly of the same sort; notice that the word *vaaka* is cognate with Sámi *vuokko* (Toivonen 1931: 432), indicating that the *kuoᴅᴅâlv*, into which the Sámi shaman turns himself, is probably to be regarded as identical with *vuokko*, again reaffirming the close connection between the shaman and his helping spirits.

to protect people on earth against evil; without the help of this spirit the shaman cannot ascend to heaven. During the kamlanie, the shaman is assisted by *sujla*, the earthly protector of humans, who accompanies the shaman on journeys to the upper and lower worlds, protecting him against misfortunes, and, along with *djajük*, leads the sacrificial animal to the appropriate world. Sujla has his own helping spirit, *karlik*, who accompanies the shaman during the sacrificial ceremony. Ülgen sends the spirit *utkuchi* to meet the shaman when he ascends to heaven: *utkuchi* negotiates with the shaman and his assistant spirits at the fifth level of heaven, where he accepts an animal sacrifice, and listens to the complaints related to him; he takes the sacrifice to Ülgen and relates the high god's decision to the shaman. On visits to the underworld, the shaman is helped by the children of Erlik, master of the underworld: they assist with the sacrifice, and serve as mediators between the shaman and Erlik. To fight against evil spirits, *körmöses*, of the lower world, the shaman is protected and helped by *aru körmöses*, the pure spirits into which deceased shamans turn; the shaman usually only appeals to the spirits of his own clan. These spirits cluster round the shaman, sitting on his shoulders, head, arms and feet. Their numbers depend on the strength of the shaman. In some southern Altai areas, the shaman's helping spirits, which may appear at will during a kamlanie, take the form of bears, wolves or snakes. In the northern Altai the patron spirits (which may mean the initiatory spirits, but they also assist at the kamlanie) are ancestral spirits of the clan, or spirits of the clan's sacred mountain. Great shamans possess special horses or camels to ascend to the sky; lesser shamans do not possess these animals, and can only descend to the lower world or move in this world. *Pajana* is a spirit inherited in both male and female lines, which assists the shaman. The shaman is also assisted by spirits of the hills and various messenger spirits which the shaman can send out. During a kamlanie, the shaman can also call upon the protecting spirits of those present if he is suddenly attacked (Alekseev 1997: 86), and, among the Kumandins, he can call upon the inhabitants of the upper and lower worlds to become his helping spirits during a kamlanie.

EWENKI SPIRITS

Shirokogoroff (1935), in his detailed presentation of the (southern) Ewenki, discusses concepts of spirits. All things have what he terms an *animus* (there is no native term), which is lost when an object is broken: the departed *animus* goes with the dead. *Buga* means heaven, earth, locality, supreme being, but it is not anthropomorphic, and is not a "spirit" like other beings, but rather almost a "law of nature" which regulates relations between humans and animals (ibid. 122). The principal spirit controlling all others is the anthropomorphic *Apkai enduri*. He lives in an evergreen setting in heaven, and has seven daughters. He is often invoked at many of life's turns. Many regions, groups of animals, individual animals and humans are believed to

have guardian master spirits, called *ojan*, "master, ruler, husband". *Banaca* is the spirit of the taiga and hunting; he is an old man, with a wife and two children, and he grants *mahin*, hunting luck. *Om'is'i* is a spirit regulating the distribution of souls, dwelling in the southern portion of heaven and endowed with a horse on which souls are sent down to earth. *Golomta* is a spirit of fire, an old woman with two assistants who help the shaman on visits to the lower world. There are many *endur'i*, spirits of thunder, utensils, gold, mountains, moon, streams, carpenters, fields, fog, lightning, stones, doors, stars and so forth, which are very variable over time and place; some are malevolent or dangerous. *Arenk'i* are spirits formed from souls which have not reached the underworld; they are numerous in forests and marshes. They take up residence in trees, and scream when they are felled. They are miserable, hungry and mischievous, but not specially dangerous. Some become masters of rivers or mountains. Their mischief consists of acts such as chasing all the animals away in front of hunters, or kidnapping people and keeping them for long periods in caves in the wild. The *Ajin'i burkan* is a circumambulatory spirit with many manifestations which spreads disease from place to place. The clan has its own spirit, *malu*, and there are also *nadjil burkan* which are *malu* brought by a woman from her clan at marriage. The spirits, *seven*, mastered by the shaman are very varied, and not all are benevolent: a failure to master them results in madness (ibid. 160). *Seven* spirits fight each other (though those under the control of one shaman more or less cooperate with each other), causing trouble for people who come in their way. Some *seven* spirits are traditional, some are imported from other cultures, some are met with accidentally, some are souls of the dead. Spirits may assume animal form, or possess an animal, though animals per se do not form shaman spirits.

JAPANESE SPIRITS

Blacker (1992: 34–51) presents beliefs about spirits in Japan. Four types of spirit being exist, two higher than man, two lower. The most powerful spirits are *kami*. They may cross the barrier into our world easily, either spontaneously or when summoned. Trees, especially pines, and rocks, especially large phallic ones, are favoured sites of the hierophany. They may be summoned by music such as the *koto* or drumming. They often appear as an old white-bearded man, most frequently in dreams. The second group of spirits are the *tama*, quiet ancestral ghosts. In life the *tama* dwells in humans, plants, animals, even words and sounds, imparting a magical aura to them; if the *tama* departs the host will sicken and die. The *tama* can wander as a free soul from the body. Once the *tama* leaves the body in death, it needs nourishment to attain its proper rest. After about thirty-three years it is subsumed within the general Ancestor. The Ancestor and the *tama* can cross the boundary into our world and possess a medium, for example, but unlike the *kami* these spirits are not offended by the pollution of blood or death. The third category is the discontented

spirits of the dead, who punish neglectful families who fail to render them due honours; if they have no family, they will waylay any passing stranger. Most dangerous are those who have died a violent, lonely or untoward death. The fourth class is witch animals, usually conceived as a sort of fox. These can penetrate the body and cause suffering; this may be initiated by a witch. Fox spirits are believed to run in families and to be inherited.

Norse notions of spirits

Among various ways that Norse spirits might be categorised I would suggest a four-fold classification, according to where the main focuses of their action lay, as being useful, though any categorisation is apt to mask the considerable degree of conceptual fluidity that clearly existed.

1. *Divinity*, defined by whether the spirits received offerings, *blót*. Working from the framework of the wider community down to the local and family level, this category includes: *æsir, vanir, álfar, dísir* and *verðir* (and may include *landvættir*, though these are general guardians of the land rather than particular ones in most instances). The first two are usually thought of as "gods", but to separate them off in this manner is almost certainly incorrect: there was a continuum from their community-based worship down to that of the very local spirits of individual farmsteads.

2. *Fate*. Some spirits are particularly connected with the fate, and death, of individuals and families. These include: *nornir, dísir* (and female *fylgjur*), *valkyrjur* (probably a later development of the *dísir*), and animal *fylgjur*, though these fall into a separate category, as being rather symbolic premonitions than actual spirits. It would appear that in origin there were two categories of spirits, *nornir*, concerned primarily with the setting of a person's fate, and *dísir*, possibly ancestral female spirits, who oversaw the passage into the world of the dead.

3. *The land and its fertility*. This category ranges from spirits concerned with the primordial creation of the world and its structure, to those that ensured the continuing well-being of the local farmstead: *æsir, vanir*, giants, *dvergar, álfar, dísir, landvættir, verðir*. Giants and *dvergar* physically formed parts of the cosmic structure, but did not appear to exercise a role of guardianship over it in a way beneficial to humans.

4. *Magic*. Some spirits were involved in the practice of magic: (*æsir*), *vanir*, giants, *troll, álfar, verðir, mǫrur, gandar*. Of the *æsir*, essentially Óðinn is alone in any extensive practice of magic; the *vanir* practised *seiðr*. It seems that giants and *álfar* practised magic. The last three spirits did not practise magic, but were evoked as helping spirits by magical practitioners (as probably were *álfar*). *Troll* appears to have designated anyone or anything involved in magic, both the spirit summoned and the person summoning. The last two, *mǫrur* and *gandar*, appear to have had no function outside that of magical helping spirits.

ÆSIR

Áss (pl. *æsir*) was the main term for (a particular class of) "god"; other, more general, terms for gods also occur, such as *bǫnd* and *hǫpt* ("bonds, fetters" (cf. Latin *religio*, "binding"), always plural; *AR* §342; Marold 1992), or *regin*, "powers". The *æsir* were clearly in pagan times the recipients of cult worship, an area that falls outside the present study, but they also took part in certain activities of an arguably shamanic nature, which are considered at appropriate points in other chapters. Moreover, the distinction between *æsir* and other spirits was not necessarily firm.

The etymology of *áss* is not wholly certain. De Vries (*AR* §346; *AeW*, *s.v.*) favours an etymology of *áss* (< proto-Germanic **ansuz*) which relates it to an earlier **ans-*, "breathe", found in Avestan *ahura*, "lord", which, in his view, supports the idea of *æsir* being ancestor figures, embodiments of "life force". Yet nowhere else in Germanic does this root manifest itself in any words related to souls or life force (*VA*, *s.v.* "ås 3", is sceptical of the derivation). Another etymology (Lorenz 1984: 95) relates the word to *áss*, "beam" (< proto-Germanic **ansaz*). There are several religious entities in Germanic that this might be related to: the Irminsul ⟨QV⟩, the *ǫndvegissúlur* ⟨QV⟩, and most notably the world tree (Chapter 13); gods are on several occasions also the offspring of women with (arguably) tree names ⟨NÁL⟩. Among the Vandals, it appears that two ancestral leaders were brothers named Raos and Raptos (Dio Cassius, *Roman History* LXXI.12), which may mean "pole, slender tree stem" (*rahu*) and "beam" (*rafts*); the names may suggest a personification of a fire-making implement involving a pole suspended between two beams, and hence a connection with the (sacred) hearth (*AR* §499, incl. fig. 22 of the apparatus). Yet the link between divine being and beam may be a reflection of the similarity of terms. The most perceptive comments about the etymologies of *áss*, *álfr* and *vanr* have been offered by Huld (1998): surveying all the forms in Germanic languages, he concludes that the *u*-stem affiliation of the Norse *áss* is a later feature, and that it belonged originally to a heteroclitic declension, *a*-stem in the singular and *i*-stem in the plural (cf. Old English *os*, gen. pl. *esa*), which was also found in *álfr* (this has been levelled to an *a*-stem in Norse, but Old English forms show an *i*-stem plural); he notes that *i*-stem plurals of this sort characterise ethnonyms, such as Old English *Dene*, "Danes", and implies the concept of *æsir* and *álfar* living in human-type communities. Huld sees *áss* as an Indo-European *so*-derivative from the stem *H_2*en*-H_1-, "breathe", hence "spirit". As an *a*-stem, the ancestral Germanic form of *áss*, **ansaz*, would be homophonically identical to the word for "beam", at least in the singular.

The earliest mention of *æsir* is in Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum* ch. 13: «Gothi proceres suos [...] non puros homines, sed semideos, id est Ansis, vocaverunt», "the Goths called their ancestors [...] not merely men, but semi-gods, that is Ansis". As de Vries admits (*AR* §345), this may be a reflection of the euhemerising tendencies of the Christian author, who did not want to condemn the Goths' ancient beliefs utterly. If we take the

statement as having any basis in the Goths' beliefs, it still remains unclear whether we see here an elevation of ancestors to the level of divine beings, or rather whether it was a matter of regarding gods (pre-existing as a class of beings) as ancestors to royal houses.

The *æsir* are rarely associated with anything that could be described as shamanic; the main exception is Óðinn, whose performance of *seiðr* (discussed elsewhere), however, appears to be a practice he adopted, learning it from the *vanir*: it is one of many areas in which he encroached on the ambit of others. Óðinn also undertook various deeds which may be interpreted as initiatory; these are also considered elsewhere. Loki also features in some of the myths considered in association with *seiðr*; his position within the community of the *æsir* to which he belongs is usually to undermine and threaten his fellows, and his acts, such as effeminacy, set him apart from the norms of that community.

VANIR

The *vanir* were a class of gods concerned with fertility[4] (but also with socially prohibited practices like incest), equal in status to the *æsir*,[5] with whom they formed a perpetual bond after a primordial battle recounted (in a highly cryptic manner) in *Vǫluspá* 21–4. Only Njǫrðr, Freyr and Freyja, and on one occasion Heimdallr, are explicitly said to belong to the class (for example *Gylfaginning* ch. 23–4) – though it cannot be ruled out that others, such as Ullr, were also thought to belong to the group. The etymology is obscure (*AR* §471), and this is probably an indication of the antiquity of the class of beings so named; possibly the most promising is to derive *vanr* from an Indo-European root **wen-* (in the *o*-grade ablaut form **won-*), which may occur in Latin *Venus*, the goddess of love, and (in zero-grade) in Old English *pynn*, "joy"; Old Norse *vin*, "meadow", Gothic *winja*, "pasture, fodder", may also derive from this root (with an original emphasis on the fresh growth affording good sustenance for beasts), which would underline the notion of fecundity inherent in the word class (see Kluge 2002, *s.v.* "Wonne, gewinnen"; Old Norse *vanr* is not, however, cited here). Huld (1998: 139–41) does not consider the word's Indo-European derivation, but makes some pertinent comments in other respects: noting (see above) that both *æsir* and *álfar* appear originally to have been heteroclitic

[4] The fertility connections of the *vanir* have been questioned, but are fully set out by de Vries (*AR* §§448–75); it would be superfluous to repeat these points. It is possible that the fertility aspects, renewing *ár* (good harvest and abundance) for the people, may (as is likely at Uppsala) have been focused on the person of the king, of whom the gods may be divine counterparts, as Motz (1996: 16, 124) suggests, but this does not undermine the essential role of these gods.

[5] Clunies Ross (for example 1994: 58, 78) regards the *vanir* as an inferior class to the *æsir*, and to have been defeated by them (and upon this status she builds a theory that the *vanir* could intermarry with giants, whereas *æsir* could not); the sources, however, do not indicate any such inferiority, and the point which the poet of *Vǫluspá* (our only poetic source to deal with the matter), as well as Snorri (in the creation of Kvasir, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G57), appears keen to make is that the two divine groups concluded a truce and formed a unity.

a/i-stems, he asks whether the *i*-stem *vanr* may not also have belonged to this class originally (in Norse, short-syllable *a*- and *i*-stems fell together in the singular). This would mean searching for an Old English cognate in the form *þon*, which had not been undertaken hitherto; the word does appear, argues Huld, in names such as *Þonræd*, where taking *þon* as "pale" is unlikely (only *beorht* among hue-related words commonly appears as the first element of names, and adjectives in general are rare in this position). The frequency of occurrence of *álfr/ælf*, *áss/os* and *vanr/þon* would correspond between Old Norse and Old English, with the first being by far the most common, the second rare, and the third far rarer still.

Hall argues (2007: 26, 35–6) that *vanir* and *álfar* are more or less synonymous. There is some force to his argument over all, but the sources scarcely allow for a simple identification of the two classes (which, indeed, Hall does not explicitly suggest). Hall notes (ibid. 26) that *vanir* are not often mentioned outside Snorri's *Gylfaginning* and *Ynglinga saga*, and that their presence may reflect Snorri's systematisation of the divine pantheon. Yet Snorri's emphasis upon the class of gods called *vanir*, particularly in *Gylfaginning*, stems directly from his major source, *Vǫluspá*, which alludes to the war between *æsir* and *vanir* (st. 23–4) and contrasts the two groups. Moreover, the *vanir* are mentioned sufficiently often in other poetic sources to put beyond doubt their existence as a recognised group of gods, at least within certain traditions preserved within Iceland. Thus *Alvíssmál* distinguishes the *vanir* from *álfar*, assigning different designations for individual objects to each group: this is, of course, a literary construct, but it would not be possible if the two groups were indistinguishable in tradition. Other mentions of *vanir* stress their knowledge or wisdom: Heimdallr is said in *Þrymskviða* 15 to have good foreknowledge, "like the other *vanir*";[6] in *Skírnismál* 17 (echoed in 18) Gerðr questions who the arrival at her homestead is, whether of the sons of *álfar* or *æsir*, or of the wise *vanir* – a clear terminological distinction being made between three classes of divine being. *Sigrdrífumál* 18 similarly brings together *álfar*, *æsir* and "wise *vanir*", to which is added "human beings" («mennzkir menn») as the destination of the runes which have been carved and shaved off: it would appear that a traditional poetic formula linking the three classes of divine being lie behind these instances. *Vafþrúðnismál* 39 gives the only poetic narrative mention of *vanir* outside *Vǫluspá*:

Í Vanaheimi	In Vanaheimr, "Home of the *vanir*",
skópo hann vís regin	the wise powers shaped him
ok seldo at gíslingo goðum;	and gave him as hostage to the gods;
í aldar rǫk	at the end of the world
hann mun aptr koma	he will come back
heim með vísom vǫnom.	home among the wise *vanir*.

[6] This does not necessarily identify Heimdallr as a *vanr*, however: the sense may be "like the *vanir* too": see *KLE*, comm. *ad loc.*

This return home of Njǫrðr at the *eschaton* may be a macrocosmic representation, on a mythic level, of a rite closely related to that recounted by Tacitus concerning Nerthus, who came from her island sanctuary, spending time among her peoples, then returned at the end of the season, encapsulating the principle of the ebb and flow of the land's productivity. One odd fragment of a story, and a few Eddic lines of verse, are given by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 35 concerning a goddess Gná, a messenger girl of Frigg who rode through the air into different worlds for her; on one of her rides, she was spotted by "some *vanir*", who asked what was flying up in the air. It seems impossible to determine what the purpose or wider context of this story may have been (even the name Gná is impervious to analysis: see *AeW, s.v.*), but it surely illustrates that there was once a broader range of verse involving the *vanir*.

Skaldic mentions of *vanir* are scarce:[7] the eleventh-century Þórðr Særeksson mentions Njǫrðr as a *vanr* in a *lausavísa* (*Skj* B, 304); Freyja is referred to as *vana brúðr*, "bride of the *vanir*", by the twelfth-century Einarr Skúlason in *Øxarflokkr* 5 (*Skj* B, 450). Yet Snorri's kennings mentioning the *vanir* are unlikely to be anything other than genuine, though undatable as he does not cite his sources (except Þórðr): he records (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 6, 7, 20) «vana goð/guð», "god of the *vanir*" (Njǫrðr, Freyr, Freyja), «vana niðr», "offspring of the *vanir*" (Njǫrðr, Freyr), «vanr» (Njǫrðr, from Þórðr Særeksson; Freyr), «vana dís», "*dís* of the *vanir*" (Freyja). Suggested reasons for this paucity are bound to remain speculative. One is surely chance: only a small proportion of early skaldic verse is extant. The retort might be that we would therefore expect a similar paucity of references to *æsir* – and an examination of the early verse does not, in fact, reveal a great number of references to *æsir* either. In *Haustlǫng*, for example, the gods are referred to a number of times, but in general terms such as *ginnregin* (st. 13) and *bǫnd* (st. 17); in st 9 the term *áss* is used in reference to Iðunn, the «mey [...] þás ellilyf ása [...] kunni», "the girl who knew the elixir of age of the *æsir*", which may distinguish the *æsir* as in need of this elixir, as opposed to the *vanir*, who already had the secret of eternal life. Given that a large proportion of the early skaldic corpus is broadly heroic in tone, it is anyway unsurprising to find that *æsir* are better represented than *vanir*; the *æsir* undertake heroic exploits, and hence also *áss* is sometimes used in kennings to indicate "warrior" (see *Lexicon poeticum, s.v.* "ǫss"). As the *vanir* were – to infer from the myths – worshipped in a cult which involved sexual practices that were found disgusting, in particular to later generations of Christians, it is scarcely to be wondered at that verse relating to this cult, in which the term *vanr* might be expected to occur, does not survive. In contrast to *vanr*, the term *álfr* is common in skaldic verse, in particular as a *heiti* for a warrior. This suggests a widespread folk belief in these supernatural beings as entities on a par with humans, whereas the

[7] The reading of *vanir* in *Eiríksmál* 2 (*Skj* B, 165) from *c.*950 is less acceptable than Finnur Jónsson's reading of *vánir*, "expectations", that is of men coming from the world into Valhǫll, mentioned in the previous stanza.

vanir would have been regarded as higher in the hierarchy, on a par with the divine *æsir* and unsuitable to use as a term for humans for this reason, and for their lack of warrior characteristics (which justified the use of *áss* in reference to men). As a term for divine beings, *vanr* appears to have referred only to one particular group of gods, whereas *áss* came to include all deities, including the *vanir*: hence *vanr* lacked the generality of reference which is so often called for in skaldic diction.

There seems, then, no well-founded reason to reject the traditional view, based upon Snorri's interpretation of inherited Norse poetry, that the terms *æsir* and *vanir* were used to designate two classes of divine being, both of which could be distinguished from *álfar* in certain respects. Yet this is not to reject Hall's argument totally. He notes for example that *Grímnismál* 5 declares that Freyr, one of the *vanir*, was given Álfheimr as a *tannfé* (a "tooth payment" on the appearance of his first tooth as a baby): he is presented as ruler of the world of *álfar*. This does not necessarily equate Álfheimr with Vanaheimr, but a good deal of conceptual overlap is implied. To this may be added the term for the sun, *álfrǫðull*, "elf wheel"; as Freyr is said by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 24 to control rain and sunshine («ræðr fyrir regni ok skini sólar»), there is an implied connection again between Freyr and the *álfar*; Hall (2007: 38) raises the question of whether *álfr* may have been used as a cognomen of Freyr (he would then be **vana álfr* in the way his sister Freyja was *vana dís*, *Gylfaginning* ch. 35, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 20). The many collocations in verse – with parallels in the Old English charm *Þið færstice* (Hall 2007: 2) – of *æsir* and *álfar* tend to point to these two classes as being the main spirit categories evoked in traditional lore; even *Vǫluspá*, which contrasts *æsir* and *vanir* in st. 23–4, uses the traditional formula of *æsir* and *álfar* in st. 49 («Hvat er með ásom? Hvat er með álfom?», "What troubles the *æsir*? What troubles the *álfar*?") – though as the next mention is of Jǫtunheimr, the realm of giants, and then (after another mention of the *æsir*) of the *dvergar*, it might be inferred that the point is to mention all the distinct realms of the cosmos as being perturbed, the whole community of the gods, both *æsir* and *vanir*, being now subsumed in the class of *æsir*, from which the *álfar* remain distinct in a way the *vanir* no longer do. Less ambiguous, however, is *Lokasenna*. Here the assembly of gods is referred to as a group of *æsir* and *álfar*: thus Loki accuses Freyja of sleeping with each member of both these groups (st. 30), and if the *álfar* are taken as equivalent to *vanir*, the accusation is the more pointed, as indicating incest, of which Loki accuses Freyja in st. 32 (sleeping with her brother). It would certainly appear that *vanir* are included among or designated by the term *álfar* here. Yet the example of Freyja, which Hall seizes upon, in fact illustrates the difficulty of a simple identification between *álfar* and *vanir*. Hall devotes much argument in his book to showing that *álfar* were originally male, and that female elves are a late-medieval invention. Freyja can therefore scarcely, *stricto sensu*, have been an *álfr*. The nearest class of females to the male *álfar* were the *dísir*, and Freyja is indeed called *vana dís*, "*dís* of the *vanir*". The sexual exclusivity of the terms *álfr* and *dís*, as opposed to the inclusivity of *vanr*, already militates against a simple identification: at best, the *vanir*

would have to be considered as encompassing both groups. Yet the very title *vana dís* illustrates that a *vanr* was not the same as a *dís*, otherwise the title would be pointless: among the class of *vanir*, Freyja is the one who has the particular qualities of a *dís* (whatever those qualities may be).

Most of the problems disappear if we remember that we are dealing with traditions, necessarily amorphous in their metaphysical reference, which were subject to variation over time and place. It is not, in my opinion, even very helpful to analyse these concepts in terms of sets and subsets (considering the *vanir* as a subset of the *álfar*, for example). On the one hand, we encounter a group of divine beings, the *vanir*, with names, responsible for fertility and characterised as wise; on the other we have two groups, the *álfar* and *dísir*, distinguished by sex, also responsible for various aspects of fertility or well-being, but who are treated as unnamed groups, and whose cult seems to have been conducted on a very local level: these *álfar* and *dísir* appear to be far more local guardian spirits than do the *vanir*. The overlap in function ensured that *vanir* could be considered, in certain circumstances or traditions (such as that lying behind *Lokasenna*, perhaps), as types of *álfar* or *dísir*. This is not the same as equating the groups as a general principle; the varying extent of distinctiveness is a reflection of the particularities of given sources or traditions.[8]

If we turn to non-literary evidence for a cult of the *vanir* in ancient Scandinavia, we find very little direct attestation. The temptation to infer from this that there was no such cult should be resisted, however. In the first place, the paucity of material such as runic inscriptions mentioning gods is such that the survival of any god's name must to a large extent be a matter of chance (and controversy: McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004: 45). Secondly, we cannot say whether any particular god was viewed irredeemably as an *áss* or a *vanr* – the tradition is highly likely to have varied over time and place. If there were no cult of gods designated *vanir* in the pagan period, the only way to explain their occurrence at all in the literary sources would be as a post-Christian-conversion invention; the onus of explaining what possible sense this would make would indeed be a heavy one. Whilst the survival of material objects is random and scarce from the pagan

[8] If taken to extremes, this line of argument would, of course, mean that any given term could not be considered outside its particular literary or cultural context, which may be a single poem (or even a portion of a poem). In practice, the assumption behind my approach over all is that poets were working within a tradition, which itself would vary over time and place, but that there was a good deal of cultural contact within Scandinavia and beyond, so that poets would be understood across a fairly wide community, and could allude to each other's work or to traditional verse. It is possible that the *vanir* were known only to a small part of the Scandinavian community which happened to produce the *Vǫluspá* poet and a few others; more likely to me seems the possibility that our sources happen not to have preserved much information about them, the reason most plausibly being that this information was archaic by the time the texts we have were composed – in other words, the *vanir* as part of a living cult may have disappeared in many parts of Scandinavia well before the end of the pre-literate period; cf. the arguments of North 1997: 305 (and *passim* throughout the book, which focuses on the worship of Ing, Norse Yngvi, in pre-Christian England); he sees the *vanir* as having been displaced by Óðinn-worship moving up from the south, resulting in a near monopolisation of divinity by the *æsir*.

period, place names are ubiquitous and their survival rate much greater. The fairly dense scatter of theophoric place names throughout Scandinavia associated with the *vanir* Njǫrðr, Freyr and Freyja seems to present good circumstantial evidence for their worship, even if it does not guarantee that they were known in all settings as *vanir* (*AR* §§468–70, but for a more accurate recent consideration of theophoric names, see Brink 2007, including maps). It is possible too that other gods were at times included among the *vanir*, as they share the same associations with fertility: the prime example is Ullr, whose occurrence in place names points to such an association (*AR* §447; Brink 2007). Ullr is not only widely attested in place names, but is also (probably) found in a third-century runic inscription from Torsbjerg, Angeln, in the personal name **owlþuþewaʀ**, «Wulþuþewaz», "servant of Wulþuz [>Ullr]" (*DR* 7; *AR* §446). Ultimately, it will not prove possible to demonstrate irrefutably that beings known as *vanir* were worshipped in pre-Christian Scandinavia, but the absence of evidence for such a cult does not constitute evidence of its absence, particularly when the non-literary evidence for any pagan worship of named beings amounts to such a meagre offering.

There can, I think, be little realistic doubt either that the *vanir* were, at least within certain Norse traditions, an ancient class of gods (or divine beings, at least), or that the particular function of this class was the field of fertility and abundance, but also of mastery in battle (even if these fields were not reserved exclusively to them). Snorri says in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 ⟨111⟩ they were appointed as overseers of sacrifice, the general purpose of which is renewal (consistent with their fertility role). *Vǫluspá* is the only surviving poetic text which presents the *vanir*'s role in the community of the gods (and by inference, of men); Dronke's reading (1988) of the difficult stanzas concerning the *vanir* remains the most compelling and perceptive interpretation.[9] She accepts and builds upon Dumézil's understanding of the war between *vanir* and *æsir* and subsequent formation of an insoluble union, a guild in which both groups are wedded into one, as a mythic representation of the union of two conceptually distinct forms of protection which the human society called for from the gods.[10] In the contest, "the

[9] Dronke's interpretation of the significance of the *vanir* draws upon analogues from other Indo-European traditions: she elaborates on two Indian parallels adduced by Dumézil, and adds the example of the Greek Dionysus as depicted by Euripides. The rich illumination cast upon the extant Norse information on the *vanir*, in itself so sparse and difficult to interpret, by such parallels demonstrates the usefulness of such an approach.

[10] The dual origin of the society of the gods, encompassing and mirroring two areas of power and activity within human society, is matched in other traditions: a notable example is the union of the Romans and Sabines (discussed as a parallel to the Norse myth by Dumézil 1995: 290–2 and 1996: 66–73), in which Romulus, the founder of Rome, initially had strength and the gods to support him, but the Sabines had wealth, and women (Dumézil emphasises that the legend is in fact the result of the imposition of a myth upon pseudo-history – it has (probably) no real historical basis). Duality in foundation myths is found also, in a different form (but one which still implies the principle of a cooperative sharing of functions), in the twins or partners of the ancient legends of various Germanic (and other) peoples (*AR* §§496–500), such as Hengest and Horsa, Raos and Raptos, Ibor and Aio, Ambri and Assi, the two Haddingjar (with Vandal antecedent, the Hasdingi); these "heroes" are

unfailing killing power of Óðinn meets the unfailing regenerative power of Freyja" (ibid. 231), and it is these powers that finally are united. Success and renewal call for sacrifice, however – as when Jarl Hákon's protective (and gold-bedecked) female deity Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr grants success in battle once he has sacrificed his son to her. The sacrifice in *Vǫluspá* is likewise of the war-leader Óðinn's son, Baldr. As Dronke points out, the sacrifice can only be for the renewal of the world, marked by Baldr's return (noted by the poet in st. 59) and foreseen through the masterly focus of the *vǫlva* upon the mistletoe which killed him, but which signified his rebirth – a liminal plant, existing between worlds, green through the death of winter.[11] This sacrifice, it is inferred, becomes possible within this new union of the *vanir* and *æsir*, in which *vanir* are able to oversee sacrifice.[12] The practice of *seiðr* is said to have originated among the *vanir*, and to be associated in particular with Freyja in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 ⟨111⟩; this is Snorri's statement, but it is

Dioscuran, and hence *vanir*-like (and the *vanir* too are characterised by divine pairings: Njǫrðr and his unnamed (but perhaps synonymous) partner, Freyr and Freyja), paralleling the two Indian Aśvinau. On the divine twins as founders, and in other roles, as a Germanic heritage from Indo-European tradition, see Ward (1969).

[11] Attempting to interpret the Baldr myth does, of course, open a can of worms. In the most thorough full-scale recent study of Baldr, Lindow (1997) emphasises primarily the aspect of vengeance as central to the understanding of the myth or heroic legend, at least at the time of its recording in the thirteenth century by Saxo and Snorri. Yet it is clear that the extant versions of the myth are the result of accretions of vastly differing interpretations by different poets or tellers, probably over a number of centuries; the result is that the myth in fact has no meaning: rather, it has a series of meanings, some of which have receded into the background or been distorted. As far as *Vǫluspá* is concerned, the aspect of vengeance, while clearly present, does not emerge as the poet's main focus of interest, in my opinion. For Saxo, in *Gesta Danorum* III, the myth has become more of a heroic legend, with a decidedly martial aspect to it, in which the theme of vengeance is clearly to the fore, and is marked by details such as the replacement of the deicidal otherworld weapon, the mistletoe, with a sword. Yet this reflects a feature of Germanic heroic literature, which at times made use of earlier myths connected more with the areas of agriculture and fertility, and reinterpreted them in a new light (see Tolley 1996 for a discussion of the prooemium of *Beowulf* from this point of view). The degree and manner in which Baldr's supposed connection to fertility operated is open to debate; de Vries (1955*b*) viewed his being an *áss* rather than a *vanr*, and the fact that he is not reborn, as militating decisively against any fertility aspect, yet nothing dictates that *æsir* may not, in some traditions, have been associated with fertility, and rebirth is decidedly not a feature of the older strata of Middle Eastern myths of dying fertility gods, as Schier notes (Hoops, *s.v.* "Balder"). De Vries's proposal that the myth involves the first appearance of death in the world may, nonetheless, have been one of its meanings at some point in its evidently long exploitation by Norse poets, and may, indeed, be one strand of the meaning intended in *Vǫluspá*, where Baldr's death is the first among the *æsir*, presaging all those to follow at *ragnarǫk* – but it is a death which is ultimately overturned in his return in the new world.

[12] The interpretation of the primordial war in *Vǫluspá* followed here differs markedly from other readings; there can scarcely be said to be any consensus on the issue. For example, Schultz (2004: 108–10), following a line of interpretation with a long history, reads the war as taking place between the gods (*æsir* and *vanir* functioning as synonyms for this group) and giants, and interprets Gullveig as a giantess, whose maltreatment at the hands of the gods must be recompensed by sending Freyja to the giants, according to a demand which the gods are not willing to meet, which sets the war in motion. Whilst such a reading is possible, it seems weaker than that proposed by Dronke; it also involves assuming Snorri was deeply mistaken in his interpretation of the poem. It would be out of place to make a lengthy analysis here, but some of the points in support of Dronke's argument have been mentioned in the discussion of the war presented here.

clearly based on his (undoubtedly correct) reading of the use of *seiðr* in the war between *æsir* and *vanir* recounted in *Vǫluspá* 21–4. Within the succinct and allusive verses of the *Vǫluspá* poet, it is difficult to believe that *seiðr* was not also part of the integrated powers of the *vanir* which ensured their invincibility; the implication is that it may somehow have been connected with rejuvenation, but no other source confirms this.

In Indian tradition, the *vanir* are matched by the Aśvinau or Nāsatyau, the twin gods of rejuvenation. These were healers, who wandered among humans to the disgust of the gods (as did Heiðr in *Vǫluspá* – the analogue may suggest what the poem may be inferred to indicate, that *seiðr* had an efficatory role, not merely a divinatory, when practised by Heiðr); when the gods tried to stop them, their ally, who wished them to receive honour like gods, performed magic and prevented this (just as Heiðr performs *seiðr* which the *æsir* are powerless against). The Aśvinau were also the experts on sacrifice, and were eventually appointed to oversee sacrifices.

ÁLFAR

Elves form the topic of a recent extensive study by Hall (2007); Hall concentrates on Old English *ælfe*, but also discusses Old Norse *álfar* in some detail, and I make frequent reference to his work in what follows. The connection of *álfar* with *vanir*, and hence some of the sources relating to *álfar*, have been given above in the discussion of *vanir*.

In skaldic verse, *álfr* occurs almost exclusively in kennings for human warriors, and the usage suggests *álfr* could only denote males (ibid. 28). Hall (ibid. 29) notes that other terms for supernatural beings, such as *dvergr*, *jǫtunn*, *mara* or *þurs*, do not appear in kennings for human beings, suggesting that *álfar* were close enough to human males to form a poetic metaphor for them, a characteristic shared by *áss* and (for females) *ásynja* and their synonyms, and (again for females) *dís* and *norn*. The distribution suggests that *álfr* was to *dís*/*norn* as *áss* was to *ásynja*, that is the male counterpart. Hall (ibid. ch. 3) shows in some detail that the notion of female elves was a later innovation within the Germanic language area. The parallelism between *álfar* and *dísir* is reinforced by the similarity between the *blót*, "sacrifice", devoted to each: *álfar* and *dísir* are the only type of supernatural beings (apart from gods) with a *blót* dedicated to them (ibid. 31).

In *Austrfararvísur* 3–8 (*Skj* B$_1$ 221) Sighvatr mentions an *álfablót*, "sacrifice to *álfar*", taking place in the early eleventh century in Edskogen in Götaland, Sweden. It took place in late autumn. He wanders round the district, but nowhere lets him in, as they are all celebrating the festival. Clearly this was a private, home-based cult. Ström (1954: 16–17) compares later festivals: in *Gulaþingslǫg* (*Norges gamle love* I, 6) Christmas is similarly centred on each farm, where beer is brewed individually, though he views the autumn festival as one of *samburðarǫl*, where three farms would join together in celebrating. De Vries (*AR* §184) argues that the implication of Sighvatr's verse is that such a festival did not take place in Norway, as it is regarded as something alien; this may be no more than a reflection of the

recalcitrant paganism of the Swedes, however, which the Norwegians (at least in Sighvatr's understanding) had grown out of.

Eyrbyggja saga ch. 4 relates how Þórólfr mostrarskegg settled in Þórsnes in Iceland. A great deal of pagan cult is referred to in the chapter, such as the throwing overboard of the *ǫndvegissúlur* ⟨QV⟩, "high-seat pillars", dedicated to Þórólfr's patron Þórr, to determine where to establish a new home, and the naming of Helgafell, "Holy mountain", into which Þórólfr believed he and his kin would pass when they died. Where Þórr, in the form of the pillars, came to land, Þórólfr established the district *þing*, which was held so holy that «eigi skyldi þar álfrek ganga», "no one should relieve himself there", and a special cliff, Dritsker, "Shit cliff", was set up for this purpose. The phrase for defaecate, *ganga álfrek* (which also occurs in ch. 9 of the saga) means literally "go to drive the *álfar* away". It is clear both that *álfar* were beings who were thought likely to dwell in places frequented by humans, that is they were local spirits, and also that they were disgusted by human filth (a feature found with many spirits: cf., for example, the Japanese highest class of spirits, the *kami*).

Some sources indicate a link between *álfar* and the dead. In *Kormáks saga* ch. 22 blood is spread on a mound in which elves live as an offering to bring good fortune. Elves in later Icelandic folk belief lived in mounds (Jón Árnason 1862–4: I, 1–130). Von Unwerth (1911: 30) records that in Sjælland the folk belief was that elves would appear especially where someone had had a fatal accident. The evidence most often adduced for a connection with the dead is the tale of Óláfr Geirstaða-álfr, recounted in *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaða-álfs* within *Flateyjarbók*: when this king died, he was buried in a mound in which, at his earlier foresighted instigation, offerings of treasures had been amassed; a dearth hit the land (as he had predicted), and «var þá þat ráð tekit at þeir blótuðu Óláf konung til árs sér ok kǫlluðu hann Geirstaða-álf», "then that plan was followed that they sacrificed to King Óláfr for a time of abundance for themselves, and they called him the *álfr* of Geirstaðir". Similarly, Hálfdan hvítbeinn was buried in Skíringssalr and is called by Þjóðólfr in *Ynglingatal* 30 a *brynjálfr*, "byrnie *álfr*" (*Skj* B, 12) – though this may indicate little more than "warrior". Similar too is the case of Bárðr Snæfellsáss, "the *áss* of Snæfell", who was worshipped after his death: here, though, the connection is with the *æsir*.

However, the connection with the dead is probably merely due to a conflation between two types of spiritual beings regarded as able to influence the life of the living. As local spirits, elves would naturally be associated with features such as mounds (where the dead also lay), but this does not identify them as spirits of the dead. The time of the *álfablót* was autumn, but it was not identical with Yule, when there is a strong tradition of the presence of the spirits of the dead.[13] The worship of Óláfr certainly appears to equate the dead with *álfar*, but Hall (2007: 26) argues

[13] Thus the *dísablót* and Bede's *modranicht* (*De temporum ratione* ch. 15), which honoured female ancestors, seem also to have been celebrated either at Yule or, for example in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 6, at *vetrnætr*, which is glossed by Fritzner (1886–1972, *s.v.*) as occurring around 14 October.

against the identification of Óláfr Geirstaða-álfr as an actual elf: the *álfr* in his nickname could simply indicate "being", i.e. man, as it does often in skaldic verse – as Óláfr is mentioned in the *þáttr* as being particularly handsome this would be a further reason for the epithet, as elves are also so described in *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum* (*c.* 1300); it could also be an epithet of Freyr, from whom Óláfr is descended; furthermore, Óláfr's mother was from the district Álfheimar, and *álfr* could indicate merely an inhabitant of this region. The most likely solution, however, I suggest is to draw on the analogue of Bárðr Snæfellsáss, which surely indicates that terms such as *álfr* and *áss* were used in a metaphorical way – these dead leaders were able to bring welfare to their people in the way the *álfar* or *æsir* did;[14] as already noted, Freyr, Óláfr's ancestor, was the supreme *álfr*, and it is Freyr's fruitful entombment (*Ynglinga saga* ch. 10) that is imitated here. The point mentioned by Hall, namely Óláfr's family origin in Álfheimar, is ambiguous: the writer lays it on so thick – apart from the mention of the place, Álfheimar, Óláfr's mother's father is named as Álfarinn, also known as Álfgeirr, and his son was Álfr, also known as Gandálfr – that we are prompted to think the lady doth protest too much: the account reads suspiciously like deliberate fabrication (these people are surely fictional in any case, at this early period of history; it was to Óláfr's son that Rǫgnvaldr that *Ynglingatal*, one of the earliest poems to survive, was dedicated); the kernel of all this could well have been simply the title "Geirstaða-álfr" that was attached to Óláfr as a result of his affording *ár* – as if he were an *álfr* – to his people (the main point of the story).

Vǫlundr is described in *Vǫlundarkviða* 11 and 14 as *álfa ljóði* and *vísi álfa*, which Hall (2007: 39) argues mean "of the people of the *álfar*" (showing English influence in its terminology: cf. Old English *leode*) and "wise one of the *álfar*". St. 2 of the poem contains an implicit gender reversal, in that the three swan maidens are the grammatical subjects and active partners, each selecting her match, one of them enfolding the white neck of Vǫlundr, where there is a distinct feeling that *he* should be encircling *her* white neck according to traditional expectations; his white neck therefore implies an effeminate submission, and presages his later submission to Níðuðr and his wife. *Álfar* are also white, or bright, according to Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 17, thus arguably effeminate. The Old English word *ælfscyne*, "elf-beautiful", is applied to women (Sarah and Judith) in *Genesis* and *Judith*: Hall (ibid. 88–92) discusses the term, highlighting how beauty and lightness (connoted by *scyne*) were the reserve of females (and otherwise only of angels) in Old English (and Germanic) tradition: this compound illustrates how *ælfe* were archetypically regarded as possessed of this beauty and lightness (even though they were male). Yet, Hall points out, the instances

[14] I am assuming that *æsir* and *álfar* were at all times regarded as races separate from humans, otherwise the terms cease to be used as metaphors and become merely designations, for example for any being which offers supernatural help. There is a natural and constant seepage in language from metaphor to designation, but I will not seek to trace it in the case of these terms (while acknowledging that it may not only have taken place, but may have done so at different rates and in different ways in different areas).

of *ælfscyne* have the further implication of dangerous seductiveness.

Snorri is an unreliable source of information about *álfar*. Hall (ibid. 24) argues that Snorri's "dark elves", the *døkkálfar* and *svartálfar* (esp. *Gylfaginning* ch. 17), are dwarfs under a new name: their function corresponds to that of dwarfs, as when Þórr demands that Loki have *svartálfar* make new gold hair for his wife Sif. Snorri's division into "light" and "dark" elves is almost certainly not traditional, being influened by Christian notions of angels and devils.[15]

Two other associations of Old English *ælfe* are worth presenting here. The first is "elf-shot". Hall (2007: ch. 4) objects to the interpretation of elves as shooting missiles in Old English. One of the main texts seeming to support the notion is *Gif hors ofscoten sie*, but Hall points out that *ofscoten*, though derived from the verb meaning "shoot", has the meaning "distended and in pain" (here and elsewhere in Old English), and although *ælfe* are mentioned in the remedy, they are explicitly only one possible source of the problem (and are not said to have shot missiles). Yet – and Hall rather ignores the problem – the notion of shooting must have existed when *ofscoten* was first applied to illnesses, and the many folklore analogues, both Germanic and from elsewhere, for missiles (often sent by spirit beings) as a source of illness, amply documented and analysed by Honko (1968), makes it all but certain that a similar belief is of long standing in English tradition too; as "elf-shot" is commonly found in Scandinavian folk tradition,[16] there seems every reason to maintain the generally accepted opinion that elves have long been seen as the agents, through shooting, of illness,[17] while acknowledging Hall's point that the evidence of the prime text previously used for this argument has been distorted. It is clear, at least, that illnesses exhibiting internal pain were viewed as caused in some way by *ælfe*: Hall discusses *ælfadl* and *ælfsogoða*. The charm *Við færstice* certainly indicates a missile, *gescot*, of *ese* or *ælfe* or *hægtessa*, but Hall believes there is a play on the senses of "shot" and "sharp internal pain" here. Hall (ibid. 112–14) argues that just as the *hægtessan* are identical with «ða mihtigan wif», "the mighty women", of the beginning of the charm, so the *ælfe* are identical with the smiths who make the weapons (used to harm the patient: singing the origin and history of something in a historiola gives power over it, a point not made by Hall, but nonetheless a commonplace of charms: see for example Honko 1968: 126–8).

[15] Holtsmark (1964: 37) proposes that Snorri's distinction between light and dark elves was influenced by the account of the angels in *Elucidarius*, a twelfth-century compendium of Christian theology available in Icelandic by 1200, where they are described (1.54–5) as «ólíkamlegt ljós ok pryddir allri fegrð», "disembodied light and adorned with great beauty", whilst devils are typically described as black in hagiographical writings.

[16] Von Unwerth (1911: 51) notes many illnesses ascribed to elves. Elf-shot in Norway caused pussy boils (on legs), from which it is to be understood that elves had shot poisonous matter into the body, or lameness. Elf-shot also caused internal injury to cattle in Norway. In Skåne *ellaskud* is an illness. A variant on missiles is blowing: in Swedish dialect *elvblåst* meant nettle fibres, and in Norway *alvgust, alvblaaster* was a skin disease.

[17] Honko (1968: 100) shows that the missiles tend to be ascribed to whatever spirit being happens to be prominent in the culture in question.

The word *ælfsiden* occurs in three Old English remedies in Bald's *Leechbook* III, §41, and *Lacnunga* §29 (Hall 2007: 119; texts in Cockayne 1864: II, 334, and III, 10). The contexts provide little help in offering an interpretation, but *siden* is likely to be related to Old Norse *seiðr* (see Hall 2007: 119 for the etymology and further references). A further related word in Old English is the noun *sidsa*, also found in an *ælf*-remedy in Bald's *Leechbook* II, §65, *Þið ælfe ond þiþ uncuþum sidsan* (Cockayne 1864: II, 296). Hence a type of magic related to that found in Norse sources is here associated with *ælfe*, just as in Norse *seiðr* is particularly associated with the close counterparts of the *ælfe*, the *vanir* (Hall 2007: 155). Hall devotes a whole chapter to *siden/sidsa*, comparing it with *seiðr*, but the complete lack of evidence outside what the charms themselves tell us (which is scarcely more than that a type of illness was caused by this apparently elven magic) for Old English beliefs about this magic prevent us determining how close the connection between the Norse and English practices and beliefs was. One small piece of extra evidence afforded by the charms, however, is the association between *ælfsiden* and Lent-illness, which elsewhere denotes fevers (ibid. 121). The charms preceding and following Leechbook III's charm against *ælfsiden* are for when someone is «monaþseoc», "made ill by the moon" (epileptic, according to Hall), and to heal a «gepitseocne man», "mentally ill person". The inference is that *ælfe* could alter people's minds through *siden*, an idea reinforced by the uses of the adjective *ælfisc*: a rendering in Junius 83 of Fulgentius's *Expositio sermonum antiquorum ad grammaticum Calcidium* uses «eluesce wehte» apparently in the sense "daydreams, delusory beings, delusions", and in Middle English worldly glory is described as treacherous and elvish («a sliper þinge and an elvich») in a sermon in Oxford, Bodl. Lib., Bodley 649 (Hall 2007: 122–3). Hall (ibid. 130) also argues that the effects of *ælfsiden* could be that a *mære* (Old Norse *mara*), a female spirit which pressed down on people, would ride the victim (against which a further charm is found in *Leechbook* I: Hall 2007: 125).

DÍSIR

Dísir appear to have been female tutelary spirits specific to individual neighbourhoods and families (Turville-Petre 1964: 221). *Dís* is either cognate with or influenced by Old English *ides* (without any recorded spiritual sense) and Old High German *idis/itis*, "lady". The German *idis* appears with magical power in the *First Merseburg Charm*, dating from the tenth century or earlier (text and translation from McKinnell 2005: 199, where the verse is discussed):

> Eiris sazun idisi sazun era *m*uoder.[18]
> Suma hapt heptidun, suma heri lezidun,

[18] Emended from «hera duoder», "their daughters", which does not alliterate, and is unparalleled in its mention of daughters; *matrona* is glossed as *itis* in an eighth-century text from Reichenau, and equating the *idisi* with the earlier *matronae* makes good sense (McKinnell 2005: 199, following Eis).

suma clubodun umbi cuoniouuidi.
Insprinc haptbandum, inuar uigandun!

Long ago the Idisi sat down, the honoured mothers sat down. Some bound bonds, some held back the army, some split around the fetters. Spring out of imprisoning bonds, escape from warriors!

The martial activities of the *idisi* are consistent with the *dísir* and *valkyrjur* in Norse sources; the bonds which appear to fetter the army probably parallel the *herfjǫturr* ⟨QV⟩, a supernaturally paralysing "army fetter", of Norse tradition. The cult was probably of great antiquity: the *modranect*, "mothers' night", is mentioned by Bede in *De temporum ratione* ch. 15 (written in 725) as a pagan winter festival of the Anglo-Saxons, which may be connected to the cult of the *matres* or *matronae*, fertility goddesses often associated with a specific tribal name, or characterised by titles indicating their fertility-granting role, such as *Alagabiae*, "Givers of fortune", found in the Germanic/Celtic area in the first century AD (*AR* §§522–7; Simek 2003: 117–24); Tacitus, *Annales* II.16, moreover mentions the name *Idisiaviso*, "meadow of the *dísir*", as a site of a battle fought between Germanicus and Arminius (the form is emended, following Grimm, from «Idistaviso»).

In Norse texts *dís* occurs fairly frequently, often in verse: it appears to have borne an archaic flavour by the time of the main prose compositions. I present some of the main examples here; further instances may be found listed in Mundal (1974: 65–71). In saga tradition, the *dísir* were the objects of cult, including sacrifice (the *dísablót*), on the winter-nights; it is mentioned in *Egils saga* ch. 44, but little information is given; *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 6 states: «þar var veizla búin at vetrnóttum ok gert dísablót, ok allir skulu þessa minning gera», "a festival was prepared there on the winter-nights, and the *dísir* sacrifice performed, and everyone had to carry out this commemoration". The festivals appear to have been primarily private affairs on farms, not great public events. Ström (1954: 19) regards it as likely that the winter-nights festival was dedicated in general to securing a bounteous year (*til árs ok friðar*); this appears to have been the case with the Swedish *dísaþing*, held after the full moon between 21 January and 20 February in Snorri's time, but in earlier times in the month of *gói* (23 February to 31 March), agreeing with the scholion in Adam of Bremen, which places the festival at Uppsala at the spring equinox (ibid. 53). Freyr was also sacrificed to at the winter-nights in saga tradition: *Gísla saga* ch. 15 relates that «Þorgrímr ætlaði at hafa haustboð at vetrnóttum ok fagna vetri ok blóta Frey», "Þorgrímr was minded to hold an autumn feast at the winter-nights and to welcome the winter and sacrifice to Freyr". Freyr's female counterpart Freyja was known as *vana dís*, "*dís* of the *vanir*" (*Gylfaginning* ch. 35, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 20).

Sometimes *dísir* appear to be identified with *landvættir*, the guardian spirits of the land: in Ísafjarðarsýsla were to be found *landdísasteinar*, "stones of the land-*dísir*" (Turville-Petre 1963).

Dísir on many occasions have a distinctly morbid connotation. In *Hamðismál* 28, composed before 897 (*PE* I, 214–17), Hamðir claims that *dísir*

prompted him to kill his half-brother Erpr. In *Atlamál* 25 the women who come to call the hero to them are called *dísir*; they are probably ancestral spirits. In *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 35 Glaumvǫr tells her husband Gunnarr of a dream she had, which is a premonition of his death: «Enn þótti mér hér inn koma konur, ok váru daprligar, ok þik kjósa sér til manns; má vera, at þínar dísir hafi þat verit», "And it seemed to me that women came in here, and they were dismal-looking, and they chose you as their man; it may be that it was your *dísir*". *Reginsmál* 24, speaking of the misfortune of stumbling in battle, says: «tálar dísir / standa þér á tvær hliðar / ok vilia þik sáran siá», "deceitful *dísir* stand on both sides of you and wish to see you wounded". In *Grímnismál* 53 Óðinn says to Geirrøðr: «þitt veit ek líf um liðit; / úfar ro dísir, / nú knáttu Óðin siá», "I know your life is passed; ruffled are the *dísir*, now you can see Óðinn".

In *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 11 Sigmundr is protected from injury by *spádísir*, "*dísir* of prophecy" (no prophecy is involved, however: the term appears to be an alternative to *nornir*, who have a protective but also prophetic role; see below). A protective function is also seen in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* ch. 15, where a flyting match takes place between Útsteinn and Úlfr; Útsteinn proclaims his intimation of victory against Úlfr's sons (which proves to be well founded) by saying his *dísir* are supporting him:

Hygg við hjálmum	I believe against the helms
hingat komnar	hither are come
til Danmerkr	to Denmark
dísir várar	our *dísir*.

but his opponent answers:

Yðr munu dauðar	All your *dísir*
dísir allar,	will be dead,
heill kveð ek horfna	good luck I declare is gone
frá Hálfs rekkum.	from Hálfr's braves.
Dreymði mik í morgin,	I dreamt in the morning
at megir várir	that our sons
efri yrði,	came out on top,
hvars ér mœttisk.	wherever they clashed.

The *dísir* thus appear to have a protective role, with a dual association with both the abundance of the land and with violent battle, and the obverse of this protection is the engineering of calamity; precisely the same areas of concern are assigned to the goddess Freyja, the *dís* of the *vanir*. *Dísir* are mentioned several times in one of the oldest of Norse poems,[19] *Ynglingatal*, which concerns the dynasty descended from Yngvi (another name for Freyr). Ström (1954) argues for an underlying presence of Freyja behind these *dís* references. *Ynglingatal* 7 mentions a *jódís*:

Kveðkat dul,
nema Dyggva hrør

[19] There is a minority view that the poem is not old: Krag (1991) argues for a mid-twelfth-century date.

Glitnis Gná
at gamni hefr,
þvít jódís
ulfs ok Narfa
konungmann
kjósa skyldi,
ok allvald
Yngva þjóðar
Loka mær
at leikum hefr.

I call it no secret that the Gná of Glitnir has Dyggvi's corpse as a plaything, since the *jódís* of the wolf and Narfi was to choose the kingly man, and Loki's girl has the ruler of all the realm of Yngvi for sport.

The stanza's terminology is obscure; it is noticeable that even Snorri had nothing to say about Dyggvi beyond the fact that he died of illness. Gná is a goddess, and the name must be used here in a general sense of "woman" or "goddess", but why the reference to Glitnir, "Glittering", otherwise known as the name of a hall and as a horse *heiti* (designation), should refer to Hel (as it clearly does) is unclear, though it may refer to the horse as a psychopompic animal (Marold 1983: 119–20); similarly, *jódís*, "horse *dís*", must amount to "sister" (but it does not denote "sister"), as Hel is the sister of the wolf Fenrir and Narfi, and daughter of Loki, but its origin is uncertain: it clearly contains *dís*, which relates to the gloomy image of *dísir* as harbingers of death; a "horse *dís*" may be a *valkyrja*, though it is not clear why Hel should be thought of as a *valkyrja*.

Ynglingatal 10 tells of the death of Agni at the hands of his new bride, the Sámi Skjǫlf:

Þat telk undr,
ef Agna her
Skjalfar ráð
at skǫpum þóttu,
þás gœðing
með gollmeni
logadís
at lopti hóf,
hinn's við taur
temja skyldi
svalan hest
Signýjar vers.

I count it a wonder if Agni's host thought Skjǫlf's plan well-formed, when with golden chain the wedding *dís* [bride] heaved aloft the prince, who had to tame with treasures the cool horse of Signý's husband.

As Ström (1954: 40) points out, Skjǫlf stands here for Freyja: the name relates to the Skilfingar, the Swedish kings, but is also a name for Freyja (*Skáldskaparmál*, *Þula* 435). Skjǫlf with her *men*, "necklace", here represents Freyja with her Brísingamen. Like Freyja, Skjǫlf is called a *dís* here, a term which again underlines her murderous intent (Ström connects *logadís* with

Gothic *liugan*, "to marry", though it could also be *logi*, "lie, deceit" (*AeW*, *s.v.* "logi 2") – cf. the «tálar dísir», "deceitful *dísir*", of *Reginsmál* 24, noted above). Signý's husband was Hagbarðr, who was hanged on the gallows (Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* VII.7.15), here referred to as his horse.

Ynglingatal 21–2 ⟨141⟩ relate the death of Aðils by a creature of magic («vitta véttr»), which took place at Uppsala; the *Historia Norwegie* 9.26 specifies the site of this death as Diana's (i.e. Freyja's) temple, and according to Snorri it took place «at dísablóti [...] um dísarsalinn», "at the *dísir* sacrifice [...] at the hall of the *dís*", which must similarly refer to the hall (temple) of the great *dís*, Freyja: Aðils perishes while carrying out (or about to carry out) a sacrificial function (the *Historia Norwegie* says «dum idolorum sacrificia faceret», "while he was performing the sacrifices to the idols": on the text, see edition, comm. *ad loc.*). The "creature of *vitt*" most likely refers to Freyja herself, acting again as a death-bringing spirit.

VALKYRJUR

Valkyrjur are also female spirits who determine fate, in this case by selecting warriors to die in battle (*AR* §193): the word ostensibly means "choosers of the slain". They appear in troops of nine (*Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 5 pr., *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 18 pr.), and ride over *lopt ok lǫg*, "air and water" (*Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 9 pr., *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 4 pr., 13 pr.). They bear names which represent them as personifications of battle – Gunnr, Hildr, Hlǫkk, Herfjǫtur (see Price 2002: 344–5 for full tabulations of *valkyrja* names). In the heroic paradise of heaven they serve mead to Óðinn's choice warriors, the *einherjar* (*Grímnismál* 36), and are so represented on some Gotland picture stones (for example, it is presumably a *valkyrja* who welcomes Óðinn, seated on Sleipnir, on the tenth-century Alskog Tjängvide I: Lindqvist 1941–2: II, 15–17). Eyvindr Finnsson's *Hákonarmál* (*Skj* B1 58–9) represents them as appearing to the king in battle, who asks why he has not been granted victory, and they tell him that they have brought about his past victories, and that they will ride back to Óðinn to tell him the king is on his way. In *Darraðarljóð* the *valkyrjur* weave, which determines or corresponds to the outcome of the battle.

In later sources, a *valkyrja* could also be an individual maiden like Sigrdrífa who loves or is attached to one hero; other examples are Sigrún (with Helgi Hundingsbani), Sváfa (with Helgi Hjǫrvarðsson), Kára (with Helgi Haddingjaskati). It would appear that the traditional, somewhat impersonal, spirit beings have been used as a basis upon which to build an image of the more personally characterised fighting "shield-maiden"; de Vries (*AR* §193) regards this motif as primarily a borrowing from Irish motifs.

It is likely that the *valkyrjur* were variants of *dísir*, who similarly appear as harbingers of violent death; the *valkyrjur* lack the gloomy sombreness of the *dísir*, so the term *valkyrja* may have developed to separate off one aspect of the *dís* and give it a slightly less morbid connotation (the individuation

of *valkyrjur*, for example by giving them names, also contrasts with the probably earlier custom of leaving such female spirits as an amorphous group, as is generally the case with *dísir*). In *Guðrúnarkviða I* 19, what are clearly *valkyrjur* are called «Herians dísi», "Óðinn's *dísir*" (without any morbid connotation), and in *Krákumál* 29 (*Skj* B, 656) it is *dísir* who lead Ragnarr to the hall of Óðinn (again called Herjann).

The *valkyrjur*, like the *dísir*, also have a fertility function, as the comments on Helgi's *valkyrja* mate Sváva by the giantess Hrímgerðr intimate (*Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 28):

Þrennar níundir meyia,	Three times nine maidens,
þó reið ein fyrir,	though one rode before,
hvít und hialmi mær;	a maiden white beneath helm;
marir hristuz,	the steeds bristled,
stóð af mǫnom þeira	and from their manes
dǫgg í djúpa dali,	fell dew in the deep dales,
hagl í háva viðo;	hail in the high woods;
þaðan kømr með ǫldum ár,	thence comes for men good harvest:
alt var mér þat leitt er ek leitk.	all that I saw was loathsome to me.

WOMEN *FYLGJUR*

The *fylgja*, "fetch" (derived from *fylgja*, "follow"), is the topic of a detailed study by Mundal (1974), on which the following analysis (and that on the animal *fylgja*) is largely based. Mundal distinguishes two clear classes, the animal *fylgja* and the woman *fylgja*, which have quite different functions and merely have the designation *fylgja* in common. She lists texts referring to animal *fylgjur* – around twenty-five instances (ibid. 26–8), and to women *fylgjur* – around sixty instances, only twenty-four of which use the actual word *fylgja*, however (ibid. 63–5). I consider the animal *fylgja* in a separate category below.

The existence of Mundal's second category, of *fylgjur* appearing in the form of women, rests on somewhat insecure foundations. She has selected a series of incidents from Old Norse texts where the supernatural being is called by various designations and has chosen to classify them all as *fylgjur*, whilst making a sharp distinction between this group and the first group, of animal *fylgjur*.

Many of Mundal's examples in fact designate the being as a *dís*. Despite various difficulties, such as the fact that a cult of *dísir* is recorded, whereas none to *fylgjur* is, Mundal (ibid. 79–86) regards the two terms as more or less synonymous, *dís* being older and more poetic (and wider in reference, including various other supernatural females such as *valkyrjur*). There may be some justification in this argument, but rather than begging the question in this way, I prefer to classify instances of *dísir* as *dísir*, rather than *fylgjur*. When we examine the cases where the being is actually called a *fylgja*, it emerges that very few actually specify that the *fylgja* was a woman, and many do not give sufficient information to enable us to place the *fylgja* in

any particular category of being, other than a vaguely metaphysical one. The instances of women appearing, for example in dreams, to give information or warnings, where they are called simply "woman" or "dream woman", function as literary devices with insufficiently precise nomenclature to enable us to classify them as *fylgjur* (or anything else so specific).

Thus in *Ljósvetninga saga* ch. 20, Finni attributes Eyjólfr's stumbling over to his enemy Þorvarðr's *fylgjur* being mightier than his and laying enmity upon him; this tells us that the relative strength of families was reflected in that of their *fylgjur*, but gives no information on what the *fylgjur* are. A similar inference may be drawn from *Þorskfirðinga saga* ch. 6, where Kjallakr tells Steinólfr to get on with Þórir, «þar sem þínar fylgjur mega eigi standask hans fylgjur», "since your *fylgjur* won't have the strength to stand up to his". In *Njáls saga* ch. 12 Svanr yawns[20] and declares that «Nú sœkja at fylgjur Ósvifrs», "Now the *fylgjur* of Ósvifr are attacking", which tells us that *fylgjur* can make hostile attacks, but again does not define them. Similarly in *Þórðar saga hreðu* ch. 7, «Þórðr kvað sér svefnhǫfugt ok kvað sœkja at sér ófriðarfylgjur», "Þórðr said he was getting drowsy and said that *fylgjur* of discord were attacking", an observation which is followed by a great fight. In *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 6, the *jarl* says to Hrollaugr «leggja fylgjur þínar til Íslands, þar muntu auka ætt þína ok mun gǫfug verða í því landi», "your *fylgjur* lie out in Iceland, where you will increase your family and be successful in that land", which indicates a connection between *fylgjur* and family fortunes, but not much else.

These and other examples lead rather to the conclusion that *fylgjur* were conceived as embodiments of a person's strength and luck, without specifically being female spirit beings. Nonetheless, such forces might sometimes be personified (or equated with *dísir*, who were certainly female spiritual beings). We have one clear example, in *Hallfreðar saga* ch. 11, where the dying Hallfreðr sees his massive *fylgjukona* traversing the waters, and declares their relationship to be at an end; the woman then asks who will take her up, and Hallfreðr's young namesake accepts her, upon which she disappears, and the older Hallfreðr dies. The appearance of the *fylgjukona* here is intended to heighten the effect of this scene depicting the passing of a great man – and the hope is expressed that the young Hallfreðr will accede to the greatness the *fylgja* represents by inheriting this family spirit.[21]

The scene is comparable with that in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 9, where the idea of fortune inherent in some of the examples of *fylgjur* cited above is expressed in a personification of *hamingja*, "family fortune" (though the

[20] The drowsiness mentioned in the two instances cited here of *fylgjur* attacking is no doubt a reflection of the spiritual battering inflicted by the *fylgjur*; there is no reason to connect it with the tiredness experienced by shamans, which, instead of being a passive affair as in the Norse instances, is part of a controlled direction of a kamlanie.

[21] Mundal (1974: 118–20) interprets the scene as a parting with paganism, represented by the *fylgjukona* dismissed by Hallfreðr; if the writer did intend such a religious message, he may be said to have rather undermined his point by then allowing the pagan *fylgjukona* to be adopted by Hallfreðr's heir.

accompanying verse calls her a *dís* – no doubt a deliberate archaism; the stanza does not appear to be particularly old):

> Þat er sagt, at Glúm dreymði eina nótt: hann þóttisk vera úti staddr á bœ sínum ok sjá út til fjarðarins. Hann þóttisk sjá konu eina ganga útan eptir héraðinu, ok stefndi þangat til Þverár; en hon var svá mikil, at axlarnar tóku út fjǫllin tveggja vegna. En hann þóttisk ganga ór garði á mót henni ok bauð henni til sín; ok síðan vaknaði hann. Ǫllum þótti undarligt, en hann segir svá: "Draumr er mikill ok merkiligr, en svá mun ek hann ráða, at Vigfúss, móðurfaðir minn, mun nú vera andaðr, ok myndi kona sjá hans hamingja vera, er fjǫllum hæra gekk. Ok var hann um aðra menn fram um flesta hluti at virðingu, ok hans hamingja mun leita sér þangat staðfestu, sem ek em." En um sumarit, er skip kómu út, spurðisk andlát Vigfúss.
>
> It is said that Glúmr dreamed one night. He seemed to be stood outside his farm, looking out to the firth. He seemed to see a woman walking inland along the district, and she made her way to Þverá; and she was so large that her shoulders reached out to the mountains on both sides. And he seemed to walk out of the yard to meet her and invited her to him; and then he awoke. Everyone thought this a marvel, and he declares: "The dream is great and significant, and this is how I interpret it, that Vigfúss, my mother's father, must now be dead, and that woman must be his *hamingja*, walking higher than the hills. He was distinguished above other men in most things, and his *hamingja* must be looking for somewhere here like me to take up residence in." And in the summer, when the ships came out, news was brought of Vigfúss's death.

Whereas the scene in *Hallfreðar saga* focuses upon the passing of the old poet, that in *Víga-Glúms saga* concentrates upon the young hero inheriting the family spirit, a notion the writer clearly felt was better conveyed by the word *hamingja*, which has none of the implications of doom inherent in the word *fylgja*; moreover, Hallfreðr's *fylgja*, while it could be said to have brought him greatness, would not best be described as having brought him good fortune, such as is implied more clearly in *hamingja*. *Hamingja* designates the luck that accompanies a person or family; it is effectively the same as *gæfa*: thus in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 69 Hjalti asks the king «at þú leggir hamingju þína á þessa ferð», "that you set your *hamingja* on this journey"; in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 3, Þorsteinn declares that «hann mun treysta á hamingju fǫður síns», "he will rely on the *hamingja* of his father", rather than try to find his own *hamingja* to favour him. As *hamingja* is concerned primarily with concepts of luck (on which see Gehl 1939: 47–80), it would take us too far afield for further consideration here.

One further example of personal *fylgjur* will suffice. In *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls* (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, pp. 148–9), Síðu-Hallr goes outside at night and sees nine women clad in black with swords in their hands, opposed by nine women in white; the dark ones reach him first and he lies dying. These are said to be the *fylgjur* of his relatives, whereas the white women were the *dísir* of the new faith. Clearly in this instance *fylgjur* and *dísir* are equivalent terms (as Mundal argues). The scene is, however, unparalleled, and smacks of accommodation to Christian notions: the nine light and nine dark spiritual beings contending with each other over a

person's life, and over the new faith, call to mind the nine orders of angels and their fallen counterparts.

In short, the evidence for a category of *fylgja* (leaving aside animal *fylgjur*) is flimsy, boiling down to only two examples, those in *Hallfreðar saga* and *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls* (or three if we count the *hamingja* in *Víga-Glúms saga*); all are in thirteenth-century texts, and only the woman in *Víga-Glúms saga* is mentioned in a verse (which moreover calls her neither *fylgja* nor *hamingja*); rather suspiciously, the scene in *Hallfreðar saga* includes two stanzas, in neither of which does Hallfreðr refer to the *fylgjukona*.

NORNIR

The *nornir* are female beings present at birth, in which they appear to assist; as such, they appear as *determiners* of a person's fate (*AR* §192). *Fáfnismál* 12–13 presents these roles, Sigurðr asking, and Fáfnir replying:

"Hveriar ro þær nornir er nauðgǫnglar ro ok *leysa*[22] mœðr frá mǫgom?"	"Who are those *nornir* who are assistants in need and loose mothers from sons?"
"Sundrbornar miǫk hygg ek at nornir sé, eigot þær ætt saman; sumar ero áskungar, sumar álfkungar, sumar dœtr Dvalins."	"Of very different births I believe the *nornir* are, they have no race in common; some are of *áss*-kind, some of *álfr*-kind, some are daughters of Dvalinn [i.e. dwarfs]."

A similar role appears to be assigned to *dísir* in *Sigrdrífumál* 9; in this case, *dísir* would appear to have taken on the role of the *nornir*, as *dísir* are not otherwise presented at birth (but rather at death: see above):

Biargrúnar skaltu kunna, ef þú biarga vilt ok leysa kind frá konom;	Protective runes you must know if you wish to offer protection and loose the child from the woman;
á lófa þær skal rísta ok of liðo spenna ok biðia þá dísir duga.	on the palm they must be cut and clasped round the joints and the *dísir* must be asked to be propitious.

The *nornir* are parallel to the Sámi birth assistants and determiners of fate, Sáráhkká, Juoksáhkká and Uksáhkká (Mebius 2003: 117–23); the individual roles of the Sámi spirits is better recorded than that of the *nornir*, which is likely to be a reflection of the lack of Norse evidence. The Sámi

[22] The manuscript *kjósa*, "choose", here would be unparalleled and of little sense (and to see in it a reference to magic is unfounded): the sense must be that the *nornir* are responsible for separating mother and child at birth, and hence of forming a new individual with his own fate, and the reading of *leysa*, as in *Sigdrífumál* 9 in this sense (cited below), is orthographically a small emendation.

concepts may have been influenced by the Norse, or vice versa, but the notion of supernatural women appearing at birth and determining a person's fate is widespread, so the traditions may be largely independent.

Nornir could bestow both good and evil fates, but it tends to be misfortune that is commented on: note the runic inscription from *c.* 1200 from the stave church of Borgund in Sogn (McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004: P2):[23] «Bæði gerðu nornir vel ok illa; mikla mœði skǫpuðu þær mér», "the *nornir* worked both good and ill, great trouble have they wrought for me"; the *nornir* by this stage may be no more than a figure of speech (the context is entirely Christian), but literary sources, some of them far more ancient, paint a similar picture, in which the *nornir* were doubtless considered originally as real agents of fate. When the sons of Granmarr fall, Helgi says the *nornir* have brought this about (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 26); no one lives beyond the decree of the *nornir* (*Hamðismál* 30). The *norna dómr*, "judgement of the *nornir*", signifies ill-luck (*Fáfnismál* 11) or death (*Ynglingatal* 32). *Hlǫðskviða* (the "Battle of the Goths and Huns") concludes (st. 34) by saying that what will remain true is that «illr er dómr norna», "wicked is the decree of the *nornir*", which has brought about ill-fortune for Angantýr in his slaying of his brother (*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* ch. 14). Hallfreðr (*Skj* B, 159, *lv* 10) describes the «fornhaldin skǫp norna», "the fate of the *nornir* determined of yore". As an expression of their general association with ill-luck, the *nornir* are called wretched and ugly (*ljótr, aumligr*) in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 7 and *Reginsmál* 2.

In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 2–4 the *nornir* appear at the birth of Helgi, and determine a great fate for him. The reach of his power is explicitly symbolised in the image of the threads which the *nornir* fasten in different directions; the image may derive from classical ideas of the threads the fates weave – it is not, in any case, found elsewhere in Norse, and cannot be regarded as a fixed part of the imagery of the *nornir*, particularly as the threads are used as an image of the *extent* of Helgi's power, not of his *fate* as such.

Perhaps the best-known case of the *nornir* determining a hero's fate is in *Norna-Gests þáttr* ch. 11 ⟨77⟩, where Gestr recounts what happened at his birth: some women, called *vǫlur* and *spákonur*, were travelling the district recounting people's fortunes, and they came to Gestr's father's abode, where they foretold the fate of the young child in the cradle (Gestr); however, an argument broke out among the women, now referred to as *nornir*, so that the youngest determined that the hero would live no longer than the candle which burnt over him; this was then snuffed and kept carefully so that Gestr would not die. Clearly, the traditions here are somewhat mixed, with a conflation between *vǫlur*, who foretold (but did not determine) fates, and the more supernatural *nornir*, who did determine fates.

[23] The runes are transcribed thus (I do not mark the bind-runes): **bæþegerþonorner · uæl · ok · illa · mikla møþe / skapaþu · þærmer**

DVERGAR

Dvergar, "dwarfs", are essentially subterranean beings, associated, like giants, with barren rocks, and hence with death; they stand in contrast to *álfar*, who have no such associations in the most ancient sources.[24] *Dvergar* were not the object of any cult, so far as can be discerned.

The association with stone is seen in *Vǫluspá* 49:

Stynia dvergar	Dwarfs groan
fyr steindurom,	in front of stone doors,
veggbergs vísir.	wise about the cliff face.

The implication here is that as the world comes to an end, the dwarfs emerge from their mountain homes which they know so well – so well, indeed, that they recognise their imminent collapse. In *Ynglingatal* 2 a dwarf leads King Sveigðir ⟨qv⟩ into a rock, never to be seen again. In other skaldic verse we find further references to the association of dwarfs with stone: the dwarf Litr is «holmleggjar hilmir», "lord of the mountain" (Hallar-Steinn, twelfth century, poem on a woman, st. 1, *Skj* B_1 534); a *dvergrann*, "dwarf house", is a stone (Játgeirr Torfason, *lv* from 1222, *Skj* B_2 93); *dvergmál(i)*, "dwarf voice", is an echo, the dwarfs being believed to answer from the stone dwellings (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.*; the source is a mid-thirteenth-century historical romance, *Alexanders saga*, p. 36 in Finnur Jónsson's edition; cf. *DONP*, *s.v.* "dvergmáli"). *Alvíssmál* illustrates a theme typical of later folklore, that a dwarf would turn to stone if it encountered the sun.

According to Snorri, in *Gylfaginning* ch. 14, dwarfs originated as worms in the flesh of the primordial giant Ymir, which again pictures them as underground denizens of the rocks (represented as the body of the giant); *Vǫluspá* recounts that they were formed from the blood of Brimir (i.e. the ocean giant whose blood is the sea) and the limbs of Bláinn ("Dark", a reference to the corpse of Ymir, whose limbs form the earth, and hence signify rock) (see *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 9/7, 9/8).

The association with rocks or mountains may have given rise to the notion of four dwarfs, named after the directions, holding up the firmament (*Gylfaginning* ch. 8); only Austri is recorded in skaldic verse (*Skj* B_1 321), and de Vries (*AR* §181) is inclined to see the four directions pictured as dwarfs as late systematisation. However, a somewhat different realisation of the idea may arguably be found in the four harts with dwarf names that stand on Valhǫll in *Grímnismál* 33 ⟨37⟩. Also, *dvergar* are the four pillars in a house supporting the beams and rafters (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.* "dvergr"; *DONP*, *s.v.* "dvergr 2"), of which the direction dwarfs would be

[24] I discount sources such as *Jarlmanns saga*, where a crowd of dwarfs and elves emerges from a mountain. There was clearly some scope for confusion between elves and dwarfs from the earliest times, however; such confusion may be apparent in names such as *Gandálfr*, found in the Dvergatal interpolation in *Vǫluspá*, where an avowed dwarf's name indicates he should be an elf: yet, as Hall (2007: 38) points out, *álfr* need not be taken literally in such names – it is an element used in many kennings to indicate human beings, and may have been used in a similarly metaphorical sense in the dwarf names in question.

macrocosmic realisations, supporting the beams of the world *heimr*.

Dwarfs are associated with death, dwelling as they do in a subterranean world: this is apparent in their names (analysed by Gould 1929): *Nár, Náinn*, "Corpse", *Dáinn, Dáni*, "Dead", *Búinn*, "Prepared for burial", *Eggmóinn*, "Slain by the sword", *Bumburr*, "Swollen", *Brúni*, "Dark brown", *Bláinn*, "Black", *Haugspori*, "Tomb stepper", *Aurvangi*, "Soil cheeks"; others are not explicitly concerned with death, but suggest at least torpor: *Barri*, "Awkward", *Dulinn*, "Ambling", *Tóki*, "Blockhead", *Liðskjálfr*, "Trembling limbs", *Lofarr*, "Bent over", *Þulinn*, "Mumbler", *Dúfr*, "Nodder", *Dúri, Dúrinn, Dúrnir*, "Sleeper", *Dvalinn*, "Torpid", *Lóinn, Lóni*, "Lazy", *Ánarr, Ónarr*, "Starer", *Uni*, "Calm". Sometimes dwarf names reflect those who lie in the tomb (*Ái*, "Great-grandfather", *Nefi, Billingr*, "Twin brother", *Buri(nn)*, "Son"), yet there is little indication that they were viewed as the ancestral dead: they are simply independent beings possessed of the characteristics of the dead.

Dwarfs also appear as smiths, which may again be a reflection of their underground dwellings, similar to the cave-like (and often remote) smithy, and also the source of ore. Names indicating shining, gleaming, glowing include *Brísingr, Dellingr, Fáinn, Fár, Glói, Glóinn, Glóni, Litr, Ljómi, Mjǫklituðr, Blǫvurr*. The dwarf Ívaldi's sons build the supernatural ship Skíðblaðnir (*Grímnismál* 43), and dwarfs create treasures for the gods (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 35): Freyr's ship Skíðblaðnir, Óðinn's spear Gungnir, Þórr's hammer Mjǫllnir, a wig for Sif, a golden-bristled boar, the golden ring Draupnir. These traditions of the gods' reliance on dwarfs' craftsmanship to provide them with treasures is probably reflected in *Vǫluspá* 8, where the gods, losing their original abundance of gold when three giant maidens appear, immediately go on to create dwarfs, presumably to furnish them with what they could previously provide themselves.

GIANTS

We have scant reliable evidence for any cult of giants.[25] The range of names for "giant" (*(hrím)þurs, jǫtunn, troll, (berg)risi*) and "giantess" (*flagð, skessa, skars, gýgr, mella, fála, hála, mǫrn*) in Old Norse must originally have designated separate types of being, or at the least one type of being differently conceived in different contexts; I consider the terms as subsumed within "giant" in the treatment that follows (for a detailed discussion on Norse giants see Schulz 2004). It is difficult to perceive any such distinction being maintained by the time of our records; at best we can observe certain tendencies (to all of which exceptions can be found) – *troll*, for example, appears to refer more to beings conceived as magically powerful (hence *trolldom* comes to mean "magic" in Scandinavian tongues); *risi* is relatively rare, and is probably borrowed from German (cf. modern German *Riese*,

[25] Some Scandinavian burials of the Viking Age include pieces of stone deliberately mixed with the bones. Frog (2007) proposes that the stones represent the "bones of the earth", and the ritual implies an identification of the individual interred with the first giant (from whose bones the world's mountains, its structure, were made: *Vafþrúðnismál* 21).

the main word for "giant"); *jǫtunn* and *þurs* may relate primarily to giants as large beings and directors of massive forces of nature, *þurs* in particular emphasising their bumbling, oafish nature (as found in derivatives of the word in later Scandinavian languages). The etymologies of all the words are uncertain, and therefore do not help in determining any more ancient senses (possibly *jǫtunn* is related to "eat" – giants do appear as consumers of men – but *AeW*, *s.v.*, points out difficulties in the derivation). The distribution of the terms varies in different types of source (see the table in Schulz 2004: 39): *þurs* is rarer than other terms in most sources (about five times less common than *jǫtunn* in Eddic verse); it would appear, over all, to be a more archaic term which was diminishing in general use. *Troll* occurs only once in Eddic verse, along with *trollkona* once, but is common in prose sources. *Risi* occurs only once in Eddic verse, in the late *Grottasǫngr*, but becomes common in *fornaldarsögur*, many of which are fairly late compositions. (See Motz 1987 and Schulz 2004: 30–7 on the classifications.)

Whatever the original significances of the different terms for giant, they are in essence possessors of mighty powers which, however, are viewed as non-productive; this principle is realised through at least the following chief characteristics:

1. They are primordial beings: *a.* they are demiurges in cosmic creation; *b.* they are progenitors of the later race of gods.
2. Their primordiality endows them with great wisdom and (magical) powers.
3. They are mighty (and hence physically large) directors of the forces of nature, and in general of ineluctable forces which man can hardly, if at all, control.
4. They are denizens of the wild and of the cold – in short, of a world antithetical to that of mankind (or the gods); hence they constantly strive to act as thieves of goddesses and other guarantors of well-being, such as the poetic mead.
5. Giantesses (young ones, at least) are desired by gods, a converse of point 4; this may represent a desire by the gods to possess the strengths of points 2 and 3 and make them productive (thus in *Hávamál* Óðinn frees the mead of poetry and wisdom from its sterile and deathly mountain fastness by seducing Gunnlǫð; in *Skírnismál* 31 Gerðr is threatened with wretched sterility if she does not accept Freyr).
6. They appear as clumsy, ill-mannered and stupid, living in the far north and often consuming human flesh; these are most likely common folklore elements in the overall depiction.
7. Many other characteristics of giants are comic hyperbole relating to their huge size (for example their breath causes a storm).

Primordial beings

The giant as primordial being is no doubt an ancient concept: already in Old English ancient ruins, presumably Roman or prehistoric, are imagined as *enta geweorc*, "the accomplishments of giants" (whether as being

supposedly built by them, or, more likely, as having assumed their ruinous state, like a rock field, as a result of giants' activities); an ancient sword is imagined in *Beowulf* as being of giant make or heritage: «ealdspeord eotenisc» (1558, 2616, 2979) (*AR* §174). Their origin lies far further back than the common Germanic period, however: they correspond for example to the Greek Titans, the giant antecedents of the Olympian gods, by whom they were overthrown. As noted in Chapter 5, Titans appear as spectral ancestral figures in the initiation of the god Dionysus.

The chief primordial giant in Norse is Ymir, from whom the world was fashioned (*Vafþrúðnismál* 21):

Ór Ymis holdi	From Ymir's flesh
var iǫrð um skǫpuð,	the earth was fashioned,
en ór beinom biǫrg,	and from his bones the hills,
himinn ór hausi	the sky from the skull
ins hrímkalda iǫtuns,	of the rime-cold giant,
en ór sveita siór.	and from his sweat the sea.

As an ancestral being, however, it is Aurgelmir who is presented as the primordial giant in *Vafþrúðnismál* 30–3; he is clearly a distinct entity, perhaps from a different mythic tradition, despite Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 5 being unable to resist conflating him with Ymir, forming a composite whom he regards as the forefather of the race of rime-giants. *Vafþrúðnismál* makes Aurgelmir the begetter of a girl and a six-headed boy under his arms, as well as the father of Þrúðgelmir, father of Bergelmir. Interpretations of this myth, and the names of the beings involved, vary. Fulk (1989) sees it as an agricultural myth, with *aur-* being related to English *ear* (as in ear of corn), and *ber-* as "barley", while the six-headed son would be a sheaf of corn (the typical variety of which apparently had six ears in the Iron Age). The productive ability of giants, though not a trait that is commonly emphasised, is found in the person of Ægir, who brews the drink for the great feast of the gods in *Lokasenna*. Yet Ægir feels exceptional, scarcely a giant except in name, as his friendly relations with the gods indicate. Giants are above all creatures of the wilderness, of unproductiveness – though they may be in possession of material which would be productive in the right hands. This is seen in the myth parallel (at least in its primordiality) to that of Aurgelmir, namely of Ymir: as a giant, he was useless until killed, but it was the gods that put the potential of his productive body to use in creating the world from it. It is thus more likely that *Aurgelmir* is "Mud roarer", *Þrúðgelmir* is "Power roarer" and *Bergelmir* is probably for *Berggelmir*, "Mountain roarer" (Fulk's senses by contrast are almost unparalleled in Norse), which encompasses three facets typically associated with giants. Aurgelmir's origin, in *eitrdropar*, "poison drops" (or perhaps "frozen drops"), links him with the usual giant associations with all that is antithetical to productive society. Aurgelmir appears, from the information given in *Vafþrúðnismál*, to be simply the founding father of giant kin; if this was the case, it is not clear why Snorri should regard him as the same as Ymir, whose role as *materies* from which the world was formed

appears wholly different. It is possible that *aurr*, mud thrown up by a river like the *eitrdropar* of the Élivágar from which Aurgelmir coagulated, was seen as originating from Aurgelmir viewed as a primordial contributor of some of the world's *materies* (here, fertile mud) in a similar way to Ymir, but this can scarcely be inferred from *Vafþrúðnismál*.

Possessors of wisdom and magical powers

Because giants are beings of the primordial time of the world, they are also considered wise, for example Hymir is called *hundvíss*, and the *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá* derives her knowledge of the world and its future from her fostering by giants in the first age of the world (*AR* §174). Primordial knowledge is related to that possessed by the dead; the giant Vafþrúðnir has visited the nine worlds below Niflhel (*Vafþrúðnismál* 43), just as the *vǫlva* remembers nine worlds below (and the *vǫlva* of *Baldrs draumar* is indeed raised from the dead). The knowledge possessed by giants is, however, different from that of mythic *vǫlur* (as seen in *Vǫluspá*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð*), as Quinn (2002: 251–9) points out, in that giants' knowledge is sapiential, whilst the *vǫlur*'s is experiential, and the narratives of presentation of this knowledge also differ, with giants giving essentially lists of facts, whilst *vǫlur* tend to present their knowledge and vision of the future in terms of a history.

The mead of poetry ⟨QV⟩ was in the possession of giants, emphasising their role as keepers of wisdom (but not users of it). The wisest giant is Mímir, who has a spring of mead beneath the world tree in *Vǫluspá*: again, he possesses it, but does not appear to use it.

Óðinn got his wand from Hlébarðr, and learnt magic from his giant uncle (*Hárbarðsljóð* 20, *Hávamál* 140). In *Bárðar saga* ch. 1 Dofri passed on to his foster-son the sorcerer's craft and magic songs. In *Gylfaginning* ch. 43–8 Skrýmir/Útgarða-Loki outwits Þórr.

A number of giants appear as eagles. Suttungr and Þjazi take on eagle form, and Hræsvelgr, "Carrion swallower", has the form of an eagle; the names *Arngrímr* and *Ǫrnir* contain *ǫrn*, "eagle". Eagles are associated with the calling of the shaman (Motz 1987: 225); yet we need seek no further than the chief characteristics of the eagle to discern the reason for their connection with giants: their far-sightedness, their skill, and their propensity to eat carrion (a race which eats carrion is marked out as an anti-society from the human point of view).

Giants are particularly associated with iron, which signifies magical power (Motz 1987: 226–7). A giantess gives birth in an iron forest, Járnviðr, in *Vǫluspá*. Geirrøðr has an iron pillar in his hall and hurls pieces of molten iron at guests (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18). Iron names are common among giants: *Járnsaxa*, *Járnviðja*, *Járnglumra*, *Járnnefr*, *Járngrímr*, *Járnskjǫldr*, *Járnhauss*. Iron is also common among shamans as being bestowed with special spiritual power; Motz gives various examples: pieces of iron might represent parts of the body removed in the initiation ritual and replaced by the spirits; the Altaian shaman wears a head-band with iron antlers; an

iron staff was said to represent the world tree; the Sakha shaman had on his costume an iron plate representing the world, through which he was said to travel; the world tree was the "iron-pillar man" among the Khanty ⟨1⟩; a Sakha hero wishing to reach the other world had to traverse an iron forest, and an iron forest played an important part in Ket traditions of the primordial shaman Doh. Iron appears to represent the ethereal substance upon which the ephemeral mundane objects are modelled. Yet is there any connection with Norse notions, as Motz would argue? Iron is clearly regarded as symbolising strength in both types of society, but whereas in many Siberian societies iron was a rare substance, and was therefore viewed as representing *otherness* and supernatural power, it was a common substance in Scandinavia, and we have no evidence of its being regarded as having special spiritual powers. The association of giants with iron is a variant of their association with rocks (from which iron derives), with the additional nuance that, as in other matters, it emphasises their being possessed of potentially useful substances, which they do not make effective and civilised use of.

Directors of the forces of nature

Giants are closely associated with – indeed, are sometimes practically personifications of – natural forces. Nature, however, was viewed as essentially hostile in this pre-Enlightenment, pre-Romantic age (a point made forcefully by Clunies Ross 1994: 68); in contrast to the civilised world of men, it was undeveloped, threatening, and generally monstrous, and its denizens reflected these characteristics. At the same time, the wild was a source of benefits, and this is represented in the many myths in which something of use has to be wrested from the giants (such as the mead of poetry, the kettle of Hymir, or Gerðr).

The primordial connection of giants with nature is exemplified in the myth of the giant Ymir, who was sacrificed and from whose body-parts the cosmos was formed. The notion of giants as formers of the landscape is commonplace in Germanic folktales; in Old Norse it is found in *Grottasǫngr*, where the two giantesses Fenja and Menja hurled boulders which were subsequently taken by men and turned into quernstones.

As civilisation consists of the taming and exploiting of nature, of creating order out of chaos, it is natural that the gods, the upholders of society, develop out of the primordial representatives of nature, the giants, and out of the cold which the giants are associated with; this is represented in the descent of Óðinn and his brethren from the giant Bolþorn and from Buri, who was licked out of an ice-block (*Gylfaginning* ch. 6). The origin legend of Norway recounted in *Fundinn Nóregr* and *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk* is a human-scale version of the same idea: here, the sons of the giant Fornjótr[26] give rise to the royal house of Norway, and hence its civilised

[26] These sons are represented by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 27 as elemental forces of Fire, Wind and Water, though this is probably his own systematisation of more general destructive natural forces; see Clunies Ross (1983).

status. Fornjótr's descendants bore names such as Jǫkull, "Glacier", and Snær, "Snow", and the family is placed in Lapland or Finland: the Finno-Ugric neighbours of the Norsemen represent euhemerised versions of the giants, and are similarly associated with the cold.

As warmth, for men, beasts and crops, is an essential foundation upon which to build society, it is natural that the primordial time of chaos was characterised as cold, and that giants, as the antitheses of civilised beings, should continue to be associated with the cold (a characteristic that would be reinforced particularly in Norway, where the wastelands were also the high rocky uplands, always much colder than the farmed areas).

Giantesses are nymphomaniacs (examples are given by Motz 1984*b*: 184): Hrímgerðr wants to be with Atli in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 24; Arinnefja is consumed by a need for sex in *Egils saga einhenda* ch. 12; Geirríðr yearns for a kiss from Grímr in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* ch. 2; the giantess name *Flannhildr* contains *flanni*, "penis" (the sense recorded in modern Icelandic: *Íslensk orðabók, s.v.*). Unbridled sexual desire in women is regarded as against the norms of society (and hence is typical of giant society).

Motz (1984*b*) compares giants to Siberian masters of animals and localities, spiritual beings who exercised guardianship over a particular species of animal or a locality. Motz's examples certainly show giants as herders of flocks, and as taking on the forms of various animals; she also shows that giants often had a close association with a particular locality. Thus we find a giantess, Arinnefja, as herder of goats in a lonely valley in *Egils saga einhenda* ch. 5, Egill keeps Þórr's goats in *Hymiskviða* 7, and Hetta in *Bárðar saga* ch. 8 promises a good catch of fish. Hymir returns from hunting in *Hymiskviða* 10 in regions so cold his beard grows stiff, and Ketill finds the stored meat of wild beasts in a giant's cave in *Ketils saga hœngs* ch. 2. Giants use wild animals as steeds, for example Hyrrokin rides to Baldr's funeral on a wolf (*Gylfaginning* ch. 49). The names of giants often link them to animals, for example *Kráka*, "Crow", *Hyndla*, "Bitch", *Geit*, "Goat", *Hvalr*, "Whale", *Úlfr*, "Wolf", *Ǫrnir*, "Eagle". Giants often have animal features, for example Skjáldvǫr is covered with a shaggy hide in *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts* ch. 9.

The local nature of giants is reflected in skaldic designations such as *nesja drótt*, "lord of headlands", *bergstjóri*, "mountain ruler", and tales such as that found in *Bárðar saga* ch. 14 where a giant asserts he rules a particular valley illustrate the motif of local rulership. Giantesses represent personified rivers in *Lokasenna* 34, where they are called «Hymis meyiar», "daughters of Hymir" (Hymir being a giant), who piss into the mouth of Njǫrðr, god of the sea; in *Þórsdrápa* the river Þórr is obliged to wade is caused by a giantess urinating.

Despite the many examples cited by Motz, from which those above are taken, no convincing identification of Norse giants as guardian spirits of nature, in the manner of the Siberian masters of animals or places, can be made. The Siberian masters are not merely closely associated with animals or places: they safeguard the animals, and, more importantly from a human point of view, they bow to supplications to allow some of them to

be hunted for the benefit of humans, and they punish those who transgress the careful balance between conservation and exploitation that they regulate (the instances cited by Motz of giants stealing animals, indicated by names like *Hrossþjófr*, "Horse thief", and, for example, by Kolbjǫrn's theft of Þorbjǫrn's sheep in *Bárðar saga* ch. 14 merely illustrate giants' general ill-will to men without any systematic foundation). The view of nature in such predominantly hunter-gatherer societies is wholly different (and less negative, if not necessarily less threatening) from that found in the more agrarian Norse society. We have no indication of giants functioning as part of a dynamic relationship between man and nature in Norse sources, and there is scarcely any evidence of cult (Motz cites just one example, of Surtr of Surtshellir being offered horses and oxen at Yule with the supplication to grant *ár ok friðr* to the livestock, in a verse in *Hellismanna saga* ch. 13 – a saga which is an antiquarian fabrication from 1830 by Gísli Konráðsson) such as is typical of societies with well-developed notions of masters of animals; if giants did once have such a role of guardianship, it is no longer evident in our sources.

Practically all the many examples of giants cited by Motz in fact fit into a different and simpler pattern: giantkind maintains an "anti-society", a travesty of human society, ruling over barren rock fields, herding in the unproductive wilds, hunting in areas too cold to afford game, rogering in an unbridled fashion, and so forth. Occasionally we do find giants commanding power over productive nature, as in the catch of fish afforded by Hetta. Yet such instances as Motz adduces are predominantly from (very) post-medieval sources, and the earlier examples could just as well be interpreted as illustrating giants' well-recognised *magical* abilities as any intimate and dynamic link with the good forces of nature in the Siberian manner.

Directors of the ineluctable forces of the cosmos

Clunies Ross (1994: 51, 53) argues for the existence of a separate class of being representing natural forces not susceptible to social control, who are ubiquitous in that they affect all classes of being – gods, humans and giants – and cannot be pinned down to any particular world. Such beings are for example Útgarða-Loki, or the three offspring of Loki the *áss*, namely the wolf Fenrir, the serpent of Miðgarðr, and Hel, the mistress of the dead. It may be conceptually useful, but whether the distinction from "ordinary" natural giants is founded in Norse perceptions is somewhat questionable. What, for example, do we make of Surtr, a fire giant whose name is related to *svartr*, "black", and whom de Vries (*AR* §177) sees as a personification of underground fire (and hence in origin a fairly everyday sort of being, at least in volcanic areas), but who essentially plays no part in the world until its collapse, when he is responsible for its conflagration?

TROLL

De Vries (*AR* §173) suggests that the primordiality, the notion of giants as ancient beings inhabiting the world, was probably derived from the observation of natural phenomena such as glacial rock fields displaying the apparent results of battles using massive boulders as weapons. Much more speculatively, he proposes that the origin of the notion of immense (nature) spirits may have arisen in visions, brought on by intoxication or hunger, in which giant beings typically appear; this might suggest a close connection between giants and practices related to shamanism, where such visions are focally important and are codified (*AR* §172). Such an explicit connection cannot be traced in our records, however, nor is there anything to suggest a particular connection between giants and shamanic initiatory spirits, though I do argue in Chapter 16 that such a connection *may* be found in Óðinn's initiation.

It is nonetheless true that giants played a part in pagan magical practice. They occur in a number of runic charms, which offer direct evidence of magical practice: D12 (eleventh century) casts an affliction off the patient and onto a giant, Ámr, "Dark"; P6 (fourteenth century) relates that runes are carved against *álfar*, *troll* and *þursar*; P8 (thirteenth century) names a stone by a giant name, Ími, "Sooty", and forms a charm against cooking being successful; R1 (*c.* 1300) similarly calls a stone out in the water Svartr, "Black", another giant name, on which rest nine *nauðir*, "needs" or "afflictions", and to which it seems the present suffering is banished. (References are to McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004.)

The chief word used in connection with magic is *troll*. Whilst giants are included within the category of *troll*, it is incorrect to simply equate *troll* with a type of giant (even if that is typical of later folklore): *troll* also included humans (women, at least) who practised magic, and a number of other categories of beings. The etymology of the word most likely indicates a being who practises delusion (deriving from the base sense of "cause to roll"), as argued by Wilbur (1958). In his survey of occurrences of *troll*, Ármann Jakobsson (2008) lists thirteen meanings or usages in thirteenth-century Icelandic literature, which are consistent with Wilbur's etymology. *Troll* may refer to a giant, an otherworldly creature of the wilderness, humanoid but ungainly: this is particularly found in *fornaldarsögur*, and foreshadows the usage in later Icelandic folktales. However, it can also refer to ordinary people with magical powers. Indeed, any malignant being may be called *troll*, including ghosts, spirits, monsters and heathen demigods like Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr. Moreover, animals may be called *troll*, indicating they have been conjured up or possessed by magicians or evil creatures (the dragon (ch. 35) and the boar which King Aðils conjures up to terrorise Hrólfr kraki and his men (ch. 43) in *Hrólfs saga kraka* are *troll*). *Troll* may be used descriptively or metaphorically to indicate great force, strength or size, and may refer to characteristics of behaviour, such as immunity to iron, or biting people in the larynx. The word is used of *berserkir* and those who change their nature in battle, often in the form of the derived

verb *trylla*; thus of Rǫndólfr in *Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga* ch. 30 it is said «Rǫndólfr var hamaðr, ok grenjaði sem troll þegar hann reiddisk», "Rǫndólfr had changed form and bellowed like a *troll* when he grew angry", the bellowing being typical of *berserkir*. Of all supernatural beings, it is only *troll* that are associated with shape-shifting and have an associated verb, *trylla* (and reflexive *tryllask*), "to turn into a *troll*".

Ármann's conclusion is that *troll*, as used in thirteenth-century sources, can be defined as "evil being", which is always Other, and always disruptive; neither "giant" nor "witch" is the primary meaning – the term was applied to these beings (and to others, as noted) when they fitted into the wider meaning of the term. It is clear, nonetheless, that many of the usages are essentially metaphorical: a person becomes a *troll* by acting like one, or having some characteristic typical of them; in the case of giants, there was such an overlap between their normal nature (hostile and Other) and the "evil being" of the *troll* that the terms almost became synonymous in certain circumstances. Ármann notes that both the magician and the magical being conjured can be designated *troll*; again, this is because, conceptually, the witch becomes an "evil being" when performing the sorcery, or is by her very nature a *troll* because she is able to perform such sorcery, and the spirit or animal conjured is a *troll* because it acts in accordance with the evil magic controlling it. Thus, when the laws ordain that it is forbidden *at vekja troll upp*, "to raise a *troll*" ⟨78⟩, it is actually impossible to be specific about what is meant: it could indicate the summoning of giants, of ghosts, of bewitched animals, of dead *vǫlur*, an act which is fictionalised in *Baldrs draumar* (and may perhaps be implied in the earlier *Vǫluspá*), or anything else the witch wished to use for nefarious purposes, which may have included both finding out arcane knowledge and effecting some mission.

In Eddic verse, *troll* occurs only once, in *Vǫluspá* 39: in the east, in Járnviðr, "Iron wood", resided "the old one", clearly a giantess, who bred the races of Fenrir (the wolf that will swallow the sun); from these will come one to be «tungls tiúgari / í trollz hami», "snatcher of the moon in the shape of a troll"; this being, of the race of the wolf Fenrir, is named Mánagarmr, "Moon hound", by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 12. What the implications of calling it a *troll* are are not wholly obvious, but Ármann's arguments allow us to discount the necessity of seeing the wolf as in some manner specifically a giant: it is simply involved in some way in evil enchantment. One of the chief characteristics of the wolf is that it serves as a witch's (a *trollkona*'s) steed, and is thus magically controlled by the witch: as such, it could be termed *troll*. In this case, a witch is not said to be riding the wolf, but it may nevertheless be under the control of one, namely *in aldna*, "the old one", who reared it for this very purpose of cosmic destruction; as she is clearly a giantess, we do indeed see the giants as responsible for this part of the *eschaton*, but as directing it rather than one of them actually *being* the wolf. The word *hamr* used of the wolf's shape itself suggests a connection with shape-shifting and thus with magical activity: the wolf has the shape into which it has been enchanted, and is thus a *troll*. It is also, however, possible to interpret the *troll* here as the giantess-witch who had done the

enchanting, through breeding the animal in the first place for the nefarious purpose of destroying the moon: in this sense, the meaning would be "in the shape imposed by the *troll*" (and the *troll* would then, indeed, be a giant, but only in so far as the giant was carrying out evil magic).

The magical aspects of *troll* are emphasised in related words. *Trylla* ranges in meaning from the literal "turn into a troll" to "charm, enchant", and even simply "become furious" (act like a *troll*); *tryllskr* is "being a *troll*", which interests the laws only in the sense of "being a witch" as in *Ældre Borgarthings-Christenret* 16 (*Norges gamle love* I, 351): «Ef kono er trylzka kend i heraði. þa skal hon hava till .vi. kuenna vitni at hon er æigi trylsk», "If a woman is charged with sorcery in the district, she is to present the testimony of six women that she is not a sorcerer", and if this is not possible, she can simply be asked to up and leave the district, since «ækki vældr hon þui siolf at hon er troll», "she does not bring it about herself that she has magical powers" – or, if *troll* refers to the object of sorcery, it may mean that it was not her fault that she became bewitched. *Trollaukinn* is "made magically powerful"; *trollriða* is like *kveldriða* or *túnriða*, that is a witch (a "troll(ish) rider"), or else the victim of trollish magic, "troll-ridden" (see Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.vv.*).

Troll could well be seen as comparable to the spirits employed by shamans to find out information and help in the shaman's supernatural activities, particularly if we regard *troll* as originally having a somewhat narrower focus, indicating independent spirits that could be put to use in magic. The wholly pejorative connotations of *troll* scarcely correspond to the attitudes towards the shaman's helping spirits, but the possibility of the word having changed its connotations since the pagan period cannot be excluded – if magic had earlier had a more central and approved role, so too the attitude towards spirits in it would have been more positive. The link between *troll* and shape-shifting may also be significant: the shaman's own soul tends to merge with his helping spirits, and it becomes difficult to assign a specific boundary to the self that takes part in shamanic activities. However, this is not quite what we have in Norse: rather, the word *troll* was so open to extending its field of reference that the mere performance of magic made someone a *troll*, and "becoming a troll" therefore had such a general significance that it becomes meaningless to compare it specifically with shamanic concepts.

MǪRNIR

The only known figure to be named a *mǫrn* is Skaði in *Haustlǫng* 6 and 12 (*Skj* B, 15, 16; cf. North's edition): Þjazi is «mǫrnar (*or* marnar) faðir», "father of the *mǫrn*". Similarly, in *Þórsdrápa* 7, Þórr is designated «þverrir barna mǫrnar», "waster of the *mǫrn*'s children"; the river he is trying to cross at the time is caused by a giantess in the mountains, so again, *mǫrn* functions as equivalent to "giantess". It is possible that a *mǫrn* was originally a particular type of giantess; it could also be an alternative name for Skaði, which came to be used in *Þórsdrápa* as a generic term to stand for

"giantess". The word does not occur elsewhere in early verse. The word appears to be related to *mara*, "nightmare", and to *merja*, "crush" (*AeW*, *s.v.* "Mǫrn"); possibly it alludes to giantesses crushing rocks (note how in *Þórsdrápa* Þórr is beaten by crashing rocks cast down by the giantess). Its application to Skaði may perhaps be a pun on an assumed etymology of Skaði as "destroyer" (see *AeW*, *s.v.* "skaði 2").

In the verses of *Vǫlsa þáttr*, found within *Óláfs saga hins helga hin mesta* in the late-fourteenth-century Flateyjarbók, the word *mǫrnir* occurs; Steinsland and Vogt (1981) argue that this is the same word, and means "giantesses", to whom a rite involving a preserved horse penis (a *vǫlsi*) is dedicated. I have argued elsewhere (Tolley 2009) that the whole description is a fabrication containing almost no genuinely pagan elements; hence it cannot be used as evidence of a cult of giantesses (and indeed, the word *mǫrnir* is better interpreted as a masculine singular, meaning "sword" with the metaphorical sense of "penis").

ANIMAL *FYLGJUR*

The animal *fylgja* was a sort of "mirror", appearing at special moments in animal form, of the person it belonged to. It could not affect its owner any more than its owner could affect it; seeing a scene (usually in a dream) involving a *fylgja* was like watching a film, but one that recounted the future. It was not a free soul with any existence independent of the person it belonged to. The *fylgja* is to be distinguished from people undertaking a *hamfǫr*, a journey in an assumed animal form, and also from *hugir*, which might take on the form of animals (as discussed in the previous chapter).

The animal *fylgja* could be seen by its owner or by someone else, in a waking or sleeping state. The type of animal a *fylgja* manifested itself as indicated the nature of the person it belonged to, and any injury to or activity by the *fylgja* indicated what lay imminently in store for its owner. The *fylgja* usually acted as a premonition of death, as when Þórðr in *Njáls saga* 41 saw a goat covered in blood, but which was invisible to Njáll: Njáll tells him he has seen his *fylgja* and is doomed (*feigr*). Sometimes, however, it is premonitory in a different way: thus in *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts* the hero Þorsteinn's polar bear *fylgja* walks in front of him, becoming visible to an onlooker, the old man Geitir, who concludes Þorsteinn is of greater parentage than had been supposed – the purpose of the scene is to reveal the hero's true nature. Many of the visions of *fylgjur* are more extensive, and relate to a series of events culminating in the main point of what is being foretold.

VÆTTIR

Vættir, "wights, beings", was a general term in Old Norse for spirits (see Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, s.v. "vættr", for instances of the word being used of any supernatural being, including gods). The term *vitta vættr* used twice in *Ynglingatal* (st. 3, 21 ⟨141⟩) of a witch relates to the spirit world both

through the mention of *vitt* ⟨QV⟩, a type of instrument used in sorcery, and by calling her a *vættr*, a supernatural being.

Later Scandinavian folklore records *vættir* specifically as spirits found on the farm; as long as they were treated well, all would go well, but if they were maltreated they would bring calamity upon the farm (*AR* §185). An Old Norse example (though the term *vættr* is not used) is found in *Kristni saga* ch. 2, where an *ármaðr*,[27] who secured the welfare of the farm, dwelled in a stone: «At Gilјá stóð steinn sá er þeir frændr hǫfðu blótað, ok kǫlluðu þar búa í ármann sinn», "At Gilјá stood that stone that the kinsmen had worshipped, and claimed that their *ármaðr* dwelled in". The story is also told more fully in *Þorvalds þáttr víðfǫrla I*, ch. 3, where the spirit is called a *spámaðr*, "fortune-teller"; Koðrán says of him: «Hann segir mér fyrir marga óorðna hluti; hann varðveitir kvikfé mitt ok minnir mik á hvat ek skal fram fara eða hvat ek skal varask, ok fyrir því á ek mikit traust undir honum, ok hefi ek hann dýrkat langa ævi», "He tells me many things beforehand which have not happened yet; he looks after my cattle and he reminds me of what I ought to proceed with and what I should be careful about, and for this reason I put great trust in him, and I have worshipped him for a long time".

The word *vættir* occurs in the medieval records chiefly in the form *landvættir*, guardian spirits of the (whole) land. It was forbidden as a sign of heathendom in the laws to believe that *landvættir* dwelled in graves, mounds or waterfalls[28] (cf. how in *Guta saga* people believed «a hult oc a hauga, wi oc stafgarþa»,[29] "in groves and in mounds, sanctuaries and fanes"). Various stories occur in more literary sources concerning *landvættir*: for example, in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 33 when King Haraldr

[27] Freyr is similarly called *árguð* (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 7), in reference to his securing of *ár*, good harvests; for the farmstead stone being worshipped in later Scandinavian folk practice see Olrik and Ellekilde (1926–51: I, 219–29). For a survey of *ár* in the sense of "good year, harvest", see Hultgård (2003); whilst most of the occurrences of the word occur, naturally, in texts from the Christian period, there can be no doubt of the antiquity of this sense (it may, indeed, go back to proto-Indo-European): it occurs in various runic inscriptions in the older fuþark, for example (as *j* standing for *jara*) on the mid-seventh-century stone from Stentoften, Blekinge (McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004: C5), and then in early literature, such as *Ynglingatal* 5 (*Skj* B, 8), «þás árgjǫrn / Jóta dolgi / Svía kind / of sóa skyldi», "when the offspring of the Swedes, keen for *ár*, sacrificed the enemy of the Jutes", which also implies (even if it does not directly state) the notion of human sacrifice for the sake of *ár*.

[28] *Nyere Gulathings Christenret* (*Norges gamle love* II, 308): «En þæsser luttir hœyra till villu ok hæidins atrvnaddar. Galdrar ok gerni(n)gar ok sa er kallar nokkorn mann trollridv spadommar ok at trva a landvættir at se j lvndum æda havgum æda forsom sva ok vtti sættor at spyria orlaga. ok þæir er segia afhendes ser gud ok hæilaga kirkiu till þess at þæir skollu i haogum finna æda adrar læidir rikcir verdda æda visir sva ok þæir er fræista draugha vpp at væickia æda haugbua», "But these matters pertain to error and pagan superstition: charms and spells and he who calls someone a troll-rider, fortune-tellings and to believe in land spirits, that they are in groves or mounds or waterfalls, and also sitting out to ask after fate, and those who reject God and Holy Church so as to find [things] in mounds or in other ways to become rich or wise, as also those who attempt to awaken corpses or mound-dwellers".

[29] See note to p. 4/18 in *Guta saga*: the *stafgarðr* appears to have been an old Iron Age settlement used as a place of worship; the connection with "stave" is uncertain, but may relate to cult pillars raised within the ruins.

Gormsson sent a magician to Iceland to spy it out, he found it was filled with *landvættir* on all the hills and mountains, and was attacked by a fearsome array of beasts such as dragons and griffons when he attempted to land (whether the beasts are the *landvættir* in assumed forms, or independent entities sent by the *landvættir* is not clear). While Haraldr's agent was clearly unsuccessful in seeing off the *landvættir*, it was nonetheless thought possible (but undesirable) to frighten the *landvættir*, as is clear from the provision in the so-called "Úlfljótr's Law" that dragon-heads are to be removed from ships' prows before they come within sight of land, so that the *landvættir* will not be frightened (mentioned for example in *Landnámabók* H268; cf. also *Egils saga* ch. 57, where Egill sets up a *níðstǫng*, "post of insult", with a horse's head on it to drive the *landvættir* astray until they drive Eiríkr and Gunnhildr out of Norway).

De Vries (*AR* §185) points out that *landvættir* covers a range of spirits that in later folklore are named *skogsrå, bergsrå* or *fossegrimen* (among others).

VERÐIR

The *vǫrðr* ⟨QV⟩, "guardian", acted as a "guardian spirit" (for example of the homestead) in later Scandinavian folklore, but almost certainly this concept stretches back to the medieval period and beyond – though the likelihood of conceptual change having taken place over the course of many centuries of Christianity must be borne in mind. Thus a *vård* (Swedish) or *vord* (Norwegian), deriving from Old Norse *vǫrðr*, was a tutelary spirit of the home (Pering 1941: 131–4); one particular abode of such a spirit was the *vårdträd* ⟨QV⟩ or guardian tree of an establishment, but Aasen (1873, *s.v.*) records *gardvord* as «Nisse, Vætte (*genius*), som tænkes at opholde sig stadigt paa en Gaard», "a wight (*genius*) which is believed to maintain itself continuously on a farm", and a *tunvord* as «Gaardens Skytsaand», "protective spirit of a farm". Hyltén-Cavallius (1864–8: I, 356–7) describes the *vård* as a personal being, a spirit, which follows a person everywhere (and thus differs from the locale-bound *gardvord*), occasionally manifesting itself, especially as a light or in the form of a person; the presence of the *vård* might be felt at times by its owner and by others, for example when wandering alone at night. The *vårdträd* of a farm or homestead found a particular use in childbirth: the woman would embrace the tree in an attempt to ease the birth: presumably, the guardian spirit of the homestead would wish to ensure the well-being of those in its charge, and the furtherance of the family it was associated with.

Alver (1971: 23–5) also traces occurrences of *vord* (and *fylgje*) in Norwegian tradition. The *vord* is close, if not identical, to the *fylgje* in the traditions presented: an accompanying spirit, originally probably protective, though this idea of protection has been lost. Whereas the *hug* can (sometimes) be controlled, the *vord* and *fylgje* are passive, and cannot be directed. Like the *hug*, the *vord* could appear in various shapes, though it was often invisible but still perceptible. It was sometimes believed to follow a person closely,

so a door would be left open long enough to let it follow someone out, and a door was also left open when someone died so the *vord* could exit. The idea of accompanying the owner appears to have grown over time, to the extent that the *vord* becomes identified with the dead person's spirit; the following was recorded in Telemark in the late seventeenth century: the *vor* is the spirit of the departed, which reveals itself at the moment it leaves the body, like a thick, narrow, long, whitish cloud, at times extinguishing candles, at times entering animals, which become enraged; it seeks to continue accompanying the body, and remains uncontrollable until the lid is nailed to the coffin. There are some ailments with *vord* in their name, such as *vordklyp* ("*vord* pinch") or *vordrisp* ("*vord* scratch"), for inexplicable marks on the body believed to be caused by the dead. The *vord* appears as a sort of free soul in a witchcraft trial in Namdalen in 1660 (*AR* §160), where the accused woman, Karenn Erichsdaatter, said (Østberg 1925: 84):

> att der er it word i mennischens bryst, som faar ude om natten, naar dj soffer. Och dersom der da kommer en vnd and offuer den, saa den iche kommer igien till mennischen, saa bliffuer det mennische aff med sin forstand igien, vden det schier strax paa en dag eller 2.

> there is a *word* in a person's breast, which goes out at night when they are asleep, and if an evil spirit comes over it so it does not come back again to the person, that person will lose his mind unless it returns in a day or two.

Her next utterance parallels *word* with *forstand*: «thi Gud Fader schall maane dig dit word och forstand igien», "for God the Father will conjure you up your *word* and wits again". This strongly resembles the Sámi notion of soul loss as causing illness, a concept which may have been more widespread in Scandinavia even outside the firmly shamanic Sámi areas.

It is difficult, given the variance in later tradition, to determine how the *vǫrðr* was conceived in more ancient times. As a protective spirit of the farmstead, it would be regarded as an essentially independent entity, but when a person was believed to have their own *vǫrðr*, it would be but a small step to regard it as belonging to that person in a more essential manner, as a sort of free soul.

MǪRUR

Mara is a nightmare; the word is related to *merja*, "crush" (*AeW*, *s.v.* "mara"); it also occurs in Old English as *mære* (occurring in Bald's *Leechbook*, §64, *Gif mon mare ride*, "If a *mære* rides someone": see Hall 2007: 125). The most striking example of this deadly being is found in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13 ⟨113⟩, based closely on *Ynglingatal* 3 ⟨141⟩: Vanlandi takes to wife Drífa, a princess of the Finnar, but fails to come back for her; she takes vengeance by engaging a *seiðkona* to work *seiðr* against him; this creates in Vanlandi a desire to return to Finnaland, but his advisers persuade him against this. Then, when Vanlandi goes to sleep, a nightmare tramples him to death.

The *mara* thus appears as a sort of spirit that could be controlled through magic: Þjóðólfr does not explicitly make a connection, as does Snorri, either with *seiðr* or with Sámi practices (but he ascribes the act to a "creature of magic", «vitta véttr»), but the tradition of Vanlandi's Sámi wife Dr��fa probably antedates Snorri (it is possible that the characterisation of the magic employed as *seiðr* may be a later supposition).

GANDAR

The complex topic of the *gandr* and related spirits has recently received an extensive and thorough treatment by Heide (2006), the scope of which goes well beyond the shorter treatments I have previously published. My own approach has, indeed, been much informed and revised by Heide's research, and the following discussion in part summarises Heide's findings, but it also offers my own interpretation of some of the key texts, reiterating points where I differ from Heide.

It is worth stating at the outset where certain aspects of my approach to the topic are at variance with Heide's. All such terms as *gandr*, *hugr* and *fylgja* relate to subjective metaphysical experiences filtered through a varying tradition in which each term was apt to expand its range of reference; but whereas Heide is inclined to see similarities between the concepts expressed by such terms, and then more or less to conflate them as variants of one idea, I view the concepts as essentially distinct, yet inclined to overlap. Heide's approach indeed facilitates a cohesive and comprehensive understanding of *gandr* and related concepts, through the expedient of regarding many of the problems of conceptual definition as non-existent. I would not wish to downplay Heide's success in carefully documenting, both in Old Norse and later folk traditions, the usages of *gandr* and other "soul/spirit" terms and in presenting persuasive arguments about their interpretation, but neither do I find his conflationist approach in the end wholly convincing. I also reject any a priori assumption that any two writers held the same view of what these fluid concepts precisely encompassed, which means that any individual testimony may be aberrant from the "norm" (if indeed there was a norm), and cannot by itself undermine an overall picture gained from other sources.

Etymology

The etymology of *gandr* remains obscure, despite many suggestions, including most recently the extensive discussion of Heide. The uncertainty over the original sense of the word, which (among others) may have been either "stick" or "magic", compounds the difficulty of establishing an etymology.

De Vries argues that *gandr* derives from a root *gan-*, an ablaut variant of *gin-* found in *Ginnungagap*; the basic sense would be "magic". In corroboration, he notes the early (fifth century) runic *ungandiʀ* "against sorcery"

(discussed below). The name of the prophetess of the Semnones, *Ganna*, mentioned by Dio Cassius ⟨65⟩, is likely to be from the same root (*AR* §229; not considered by Heide). The sense of "staff", de Vries argues (1930–1: 53), derives from later traditions (the witch's broomstick motif). Heide (2006: 112) objects with some reason to aspects of de Vries's etymology (such as the interpretation of *Ginnungagap*), but the objection that de Vries does not show that the verb **gan(n)-* existed, still less that it was strong (as required by the presence of the derivative suffix *-dr*), might as well be levelled, *mutatis mutandis*, to the etymology Heide (2006: 65) supports (proposed by Hellquist, Lidén, and others), which sees an Indo-European root **g^wh^en-*, "strike", as the root; while the root and its meaning are well recognised by Indo-European philology, there appears no forceful argument to identify its presence in *gandr*, particularly when to do so necessitates the assumption of an unparalleled instrumental derivative (**g^wh^on-d^h^-*, presumably) – a form of derivative which *AeW*, citing Uhlenbeck, questions – with the supposed (but unargued) meaning "stick" or "stake". Lid (1927: 332), it is true, cites other Indo-European words with the appropriate forms and meanings, such as Old Irish *geind*, "wedge", Sanskrit (?) *ghana-*, "club, stick", but the etymology still remains unsystematically investigated and hence unconvincing. Moreover, the assumed sound change is probably incorrect anyway: initial g^{wh} is now believed to yield Germanic *b*; the derivative of the root **g^wh^en-* in Old Norse is thus *bani*, "killer" (Ringe 2006: 105; Watkins 1995: 423).[30] Whatever meaning we assign to *gandr* in its most ancient detectable form, there is, in fact, no compelling reason to believe that it is an Indo-European word at all. It may be possible – if it is assumed the "stick" sense is original – to relate it to Baltic Finnic words: Finnish *kanta*, "tree trunk" and *kansi* (*kante-*), "lid" (the basis too for the term for a Sámi drum, *kannus*) spring to mind. It may equally well be impossible to trace any etymology for it.

Heide (2006: 113) argues the case for "stake" being a primary meaning of *gandr*. Though he notes there is no certain evidence that the word could have this meaning in modern Norwegian (the apparently exceptional Vestfold example cited by Aasen in 1873 deriving from Old Norse **gani*, not *gandr*), a sense of "stake" occurs at the peripheries of the word's distribution, as well as in Norwegian place-names, suggesting it is an ancient meaning (ibid. 124): in Finland (in the Åbo area) the meaning "dry fir tree" occurs for *gander*, and in Ostrobothnia it means a stake raised as a marker, for example in water (ibid. 59–60), and in modern Icelandic *gandur* is found in the sense "stave". It is far from clear, however, how a sense of "magic spirit" could evolve from "stake", if indeed we are not dealing with two independent, but homophonic, words.

[30] The root **g^wh^en-* (with its Germanic nominal derivative, *ban-*) constitutes the basic term for "slay" in the formulaic phrase meaning "the hero slays the dragon", which is the focus of the lengthy study of comparative Indo-European poetics by Watkins (1995).

Occurrences

Place names

Heide (ibid. 32–3, 115–21) offers a valuable survey of the occurrences of *gandr* in place-names; the main examples are: *Gǫnd* (Rogaland, 1298); *Gandaruð* (Østfold, 1344); *Gandastaðir* (Vestfold, *c.* 1400); *Gandsstaðir* (Sør-Trøndelag, 1430s); *Gandr* (Romerike, 1446); *Gandsvágr* (Troms, *c.* 1400). Heide argues that the sense of *gandr* (or *gǫnd*) here must be "stave, wedge", describing a stretch of water thrusting into the land. He dates the majority of names to the pre-Viking period (noting, for example, that *staðir* is agreed to be a Viking Age element, which the *Gǫnd* of *Gandastaðir* must antedate). Heide acknowledges that some of the names are not associated with places with anything like wedge-shaped lakes; given the rather small number of names over all, there must remain, in my view, some uncertainty over the interpretation of the toponym *gandr/gǫnd*, even if "stave, wedge" appears the most likely.

Simplex

Gandr occurs in various skaldic verses. The phrase «Nú rekið gand ór landi», "Now you drive the *gandr* from the land", is found in an isolated fragment of Hildr Hrólfsdóttir's verse, possibly from *c.* 900 (*Skj* B₁ 27). The man, Hildr's son Gǫngu-Hrólfr, referred to as a *gandr* in the first *helmingr* is called a wolf in the second, but this does not mean that *gandr* means "wolf" (as Finnur Jónsson translates in *Skj*); both *gandr* and "wolf" may be metaphorical terms for outlaw (imposed wrongly, in Hildr's view), and may both imply a retribution to come, but it is unlikely that the poet would refer to her son by a term which was especially or unavoidably sinister in connotation. «Selju gandr», "willow *gandr*", is found in an ostensibly tenth-century *lausavísa* of Egill Skallagrímsson (*Skj* B₁ 47). Similar is «storðar gandr», "*gandr* of a young tree", in Sturla Þórðarson, *Hrynhenda* 12, 13, from 1262 (*Skj* B₂ 115–16). The meaning of the kennings is "storm". In «hrótgandr», "roof *gandr*", in *Þula* IV pp 1/7 (*Skj* B₁ 674), and «hallar gandr», "hall *gandr*" in Sturla Þórðarson, *Hrynhenda* 10, (*Skj* B₂ 116), the sense is "fire". In all these skaldic instances, a basic meaning of "harmful, damaging spirit" fits *gandr*. The connection with strange atmospheric phenomena as portents of evil, as noted below, may also be implicit in the skaldic instances: the *gandr* would then be associated with causing natural disasters such as storms and fires, and referring to a prince as *gandr* would mark him out as a harbinger of ill-fortune (to his enemies, potentially, rather than his own men).

The undesirable aspects of the *gandr* which the skaldic instances exhibit reflect being on the wrong end of the stick, so to speak. Other cases take the perspective of the users of *gandar* and view it more positively. Thus *Vǫluspá* 22 ⟨125⟩ relates the actions of a seeress called Heiðr, coming to houses and telling good fortunes, of whom it is said «vitti hon ganda»; in st. 29, Óðinn pays the seeress and gains information from her:

Valði henne Herfǫðr	War Sire chose for her
hringa ok men.	rings and necklaces.
Fe[kk] spiǫll spaklig	He got wise news
ok spáganda:	and *gandar* of prophecy.
sá hon vítt ok um vítt –	She saw far, and far beyond –
of verǫld hveria.	over every world.

The preterite verb *vitti* is obscure: Heide (2006: 194) takes it as deriving from *vita*, "to point in a particular direction" (the normal preterite of which, *vissi*, appears to have been altered from **vitti* on the analogy of the preterite *vissi* from *vita*, "know", the present-infinitive homophone of *vita*, "direct"), in which case it would be parallel to *hrinda*, *renna* and *hrœra* noted below as another verb referring to the setting of *gandar* in motion to perform their task. The other alternative is to see it as derived from *vétt*/*vitt*, an unidentified object used in magical ceremonies, the beating of which is associated with *vǫlur* in *Lokasenna* 24. In this case, the *gandar* would be sent about their business through the use of this object, in much the same way as a Sámi shaman beats his drum to effect the whole episode of the kamlanie, during which helping spirits go about their tasks. Both interpretations seem to weigh in the scales of likelihood with equal balance, and it is futile to decide between them.

In *Vǫluspá* 29 we have the problem of interpreting «fe»; Heide comes to no conclusion, but Dronke's solution, given in the cited version above, is both elegant and eminently likely from a scribal perspective: the form «fe» as an error for *fekk* requires simply the missing of a single grapheme (representing *kk* as transcribed), turning "got" into "money" under the influence of the rings and necklaces just mentioned. The stanza moves swiftly: Óðinn pays the seeress, he gets news, in particular of the future, from *gandar*, communicated through the seeress, who, informed by the *gandar*, sees over the wide worlds.

Vǫluspá thus associates the *gandar* firmly with gathering information from distant worlds, and in particular with prophecy (emphasised by the compound «spáganda», "prophecy *gandar*"), and they serve a *vǫlva*, who is performing *seiðr*, apparently at the behest of whoever will pay her.

In the thirteenth-century[31] *Fóstbrœðra saga* ch. 23 ⟨132⟩, Þórdís sleeps badly one night; her son prevents anyone from waking her, as something may appear to her in her dream, and when she awakes, he asks if this has been so:

> Þórdís svarar: "Víða hefi ek gǫndum rennt í nótt, ok em ek nú vís orðin þeira hluta, er ek vissa eigi áðr."

> Þórdís answers: "I have run *gandar* far and wide in the night, and I have now become wise about matters which I previously didn't know."

The matters she has become clear about are that her sons' killer Þormóðr is alive and is holding a meeting at Eiríksfjarðarbotn, which enables her

[31] The Hauksbók manuscript is early fourteenth century.

son Bǫðvarr to direct his attentions to dealing with the matter. *Renna gǫndum* must mean "make *gandar* run" (it cannot mean, for example, "ride *gandar*").[32] Thus the *gandar* appear to be sent out on a mission (of discovering information), which implies they are envisaged to be a sort of spiritual entity under the control of their owner.[33]

The idea of setting *gandar* in motion is found also in the mid-thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga* ch. 352 ⟨126⟩, where Ostacia «hrœrði sinn gand», "moved her *gandr*", which is glossed as meaning that she performed *seiðr*. This mirrors *Vǫluspá* in aligning (and indeed identifying) the setting in motion of *gandar* with the performance of *seiðr*. It is possible that the summoning of numerous beasts through the performance in *Þiðreks saga* reflects a distorted understanding of the *gandr* assuming various animal forms, but this suggestion must remain speculative.

Heide (2006: 167) points out that in Shetland Norn *gander* means "nausea". This he relates to the notion of a spirit attacking a person, entering them through an orifice, in the same way as is recorded of the *hugr* (he cites the verb *hugse* from Dalarna, "make someone ill through one's thoughts"). Another Shetland sense is "strong wind"; this relates to the *gandferð*, considered below.

In Icelandic, *gandur* is recorded in the sense "stave", as noted above. The additional sense "penis" can readily be derived from this, and should be viewed as a secondary meaning (though it could no doubt easily arise at any period when *gandr* had a sense of "stave").

Compounds

1. *Gandvík*, "*gandr* bay", apart from being a farm name (Telemark, *c.* 1400), is often mentioned as a term for (approximately) the White Sea; the oldest is Eyjólfr Valgerðarson (late tenth century), where it is a diffuse northern area. It remains uncertain whether *Gandvík* is based on Finnish *Kantalahti* (*lahti* translates as *vík*), the name for a portion of the White Sea, or *vice versa*, or if, indeed, the similarity of names is coincidental. As the White Sea was in the heart of Sámi/Finnish lands, it is likely to have been viewed as a centre of magical activities, and hence of *gandar*, from an early date.

2. *Gandálfr*, "*gandr* elf", occurs as a dwarf name in *Vǫluspá* 12, in the interpolated section of the poem known as the Dvergatal. In Fagrskinna (the manuscript of which is post-1220, though much of the material appears a good deal older), the sons of Gandálfr, a legendary king, are mentioned. The name does not indicate any particular connection between *gandr* and elves (as Heide argues, 2006: 229); the very presence of a character

[32] Heide (2006: 130) compares *renna hug sínum til einhvers*, "to think about someone", lit. "to run one's mind to someone".

[33] Heide (2006: 146–55) attempts to equate *gandr* with *hugr* and with *fylgja* as equivalent terms for a spirit/soul that is sent by or goes out from a person for various purposes, including finding things out. He ignores (and indeed explicitly rejects) the distinction between conscious controlled emission and unconscious wandering, and between affective and non-affective entities (the animal *fylgja*, as noted above, being of the latter type). As noted already, Mundal's analysis of the *fylgja*, on which he relies, is in need of revision.

designated *-álfr* in a list of dwarfs indicates that the term is being used in a general sense of "being", as occurs in skaldic verse (as noted by Hall 2007: 28). More pertinent is the Dvergatal context: the name points to a connection between *gandr* and dwarfs, who are typically associated with the dead; as noted below, in later Scandinavian tradition there is an association between *gandr* and the train of the dead. It appears that the *gandr* may have been characterised as a "dark" spirit from the beginning.

3. Two of Loki's three monstrous offspring are referred to as *gandr*. *Jǫrmungandr*, "mighty *gandr*", is the term given to the serpent of Miðgarðr in the late-ninth-century *Ragnarsdrápa* 16 (*Skj* B_1 4) as Þórr drags it onto the sand, as well as in *Vǫluspá* 47 and Snorri's *Gylfaginning* ch. 33 and *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 16.[34] *Vánargandr*, "*gandr* of Ván" (Ván, "Hope" (?ironic for "despair"), being a river produced from Fenrir's slaver, *Gylfaginning* ch. 34), occurs in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 16, where Snorri says this is a term for the wolf Fenrir. In both cases the meaning of *gandr* is likely to be "(malicious) spirit", but the animal forms of these two *gandar* (as well as the parallel between *gandr* and wolf noted in the verse of Hildr Hrólfsdóttir) suggest that it was natural to think of the *gandr* as theriomorphic, and indeed as having such forms through magical means, since Loki's offspring resulted from an unnatural mating and had forms so at variance with their father (*Gylfaginning* ch. 33).

4. *Gandrekr*, "*gandr* tossing", i.e. wind, may occur in weather *heiti* in *Þula* IV oo 2 (*Skj* B_1 674), though *Skj* reads the word as *ganrekr* (cf. *gan*, "frenzy"); cf. the kennings for storm along the lines of "*gandr* of a tree", considered above.

5. *Gandreið*, "*gandr* riding". This term appears to have various applications.

In *Þorsteins þáttr bœjarmagns*, an apparently late-thirteenth or fourteenth-century source, but the manuscripts of which are suspiciously late (late fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries), Þorsteinn requests: «fá þú mér út krókstaf minn ok bandvetlinga því at ek vil á gandreið fara», "get out my crooked stick and my woollen gloves, as I want to go on a *gandreið*" ⟨134⟩. The sense of *gandreið* here is "witch's journey" (as to the sabbat),

[34] Heide (2006: 260), following his thesis that *gandr* is connected with spinning, suggests that *Jǫrmungandr* is the "great thread". This would accord with the designations «jarðar reist», "twist of the earth", of *Ragnarsdrápa* 14, and «allra landa endiseiðr» of *Ragnarsdrápa* 15 (*Skj* B_1 3), if Heide (ibid. 238) is correct in interpreting *seiðr* here, and in the kenning «seiðr jarðar», "*seiðr* of the earth", in a verse of Eysteinn Valdason from *c.* 1000 (*Skj* B_1 131, st. 3), as "cord", rather than a saithe fish (the sense "cord" is found in Old English *sada* and Old High German *seito*); the kenning, following *Lexicon poeticum*, means "the encircling saithe of all lands", but this appears to stretch the meaning of *endi*, "end", unprecedentedly; "the cord of the end of all lands [sea]" would read better (cf. «endi elgvers», "end of the elk sea [land]", meaning "coast, sea", in Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's *Sexstefja* 34 from *c.* 1065, *Skj* B_1 346). However, whilst the sense "cord" for *seiðr* appears well reasoned, the argument for this sense of *gandr* is not particularly forceful, since the world serpent naturally gave rise to different poetic descriptions without any need for these descriptions to be related to each other; since it was recognised as twisting round the world, the characterisation as a thread would be natural, without the need to see *Jǫrmungandr* as being an example of this particular characterisation.

and clearly reflects later-medieval European notions of witchcraft. The journey combines elements of a visit to the underworld with one to Faery; the elf-queen, for example, is a reflection of the late and non-traditional nature of the tale.[35] It is not wholly clear if the *krókstaf* is going to function as Þorsteinn's steed, in which case the *gandreið* could be interpreted as a "riding on a *gandr* staff", a notion that may be due to European influence (witches riding on staffs), but could also predate such influence (thus in some shamanic societies the staff is ridden by the shaman: Oinas 1987: 330); it is more probable that *gandr* here is to be taken in only a vague sense of "witchcraft", and *reið* as the supernatural ride which witches go on.

A similar sense occurs in the thirteenth-century *Ketils saga hœngs* ch. 5 (but whose manuscript is only fifteenth-century), where a gathering of witches goes to a *trollaþing*, and these journeys are called *gandreiðir* ⟨135⟩.

However, *gandreið* occurs in other senses, which appear more traditionally Norse. In the late-thirteenth-century *Njáls saga* ch. 125 ⟨136⟩, a striking phenomenon is described; it is said to be a *gandreið*, and functions as a premonition of important matters: a great noise is heard, and a ring of fire is seen in the distance, along with a man on a grey horse within it, who comes riding by, brandishing a fire brand, reciting a verse, and saying that Flosi's plans go like the brand, which he casts into the east, where a great fire erupts, into which he rides.

Gandreið occurs in a kenning, «gandreið grœnna skjalda», "the ride (movement) of the damaging spirit of green shields", in Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonarkviða* 23 (from 1263–4) ⟨131⟩. The sense, or at least construal, of *gandreið* here is somewhat complex. On the one hand, it probably refers to the portentous storm such as that of *Njáls saga*, so that the sword is characterised as a (fatal) storm against shields. On the other, the phrase may be construed as "the movement of the *gandr* of green shields", where the specific mention of green recalls the kennings in which a *gandr* of willows or young trees is, again, a storm. A typical skaldic image of the clash of battle is evoked, but here it is additionally characterised as a supposedly magically potent storm of weapons.

6. **Gandferð*, "*gandr* journey": Norwegian *gandferd*, Orkney Norn *gamfer*, Shetland Norn *ganfer*. In Norn the word referred to any atmospheric sign or phenomenon, interpreted as a portent of evil or of bad weather, in particular to the sun setting in a cloud and causing a halo; in Orkney the term also meant "ghost, spook" (Heide 2006: 55–6). Clearly the *gandferð* is a variant of the *gandreið* as found in *Njáls saga*. In the Icelandic saga, the weather phenomenon is still associated with a supernatural being, whereas in Norn the weather and the spirit have become separated into two meanings (in two areas of Norn speech). In Norwegian the *gandferd* is a "train of witches or evil spirits thought to ride in the air", or, according to others, the souls of the dead; it is parallel to the southern Norwegian *oskoreia* (ibid. 201). The

[35] Elves were always male in early sources; see Hall (2007: ch. 3), for detailed arguments for the lateness of the elf-queen, and female-elf, motif in Germanic sources: thus in Old English, *ælf* moved from not being used to gloss *nympha* in the eighth century to being applied to female elves in the eleventh.

modern Icelandic *gandreið* is similar, but is thought of more as a procession of witches than the dead (ibid. 211). It appears that an ancient tradition of spirits – *gandar* – travelling in the wind (and causing strange weather phenomena) to perform their sender's bidding has become conflated with ideas of the souls, of the living or the dead, sweeping over the world in the train of the "Furious Host".[36]

7. **Gandreyðr, "gandr* whale/trout". In the early-thirteenth-century *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* occur the manuscript forms «gandreiþr, -reyd, -reikr» (*Skj* A, 602); Guðrún Helgadóttir in her edition of the saga suggested emending to *gandreyðr*, and mentioned that the term may refer to the world serpent; Heide (2006: 262) follows this, interpreting it as

[36] For a succinct (but far from exhaustive) survey of mentions of the Furious Host and Wild Hunt, see Gundarsson (1992). The Furious Host is widely mentioned in north European sources from at least the eleventh century on, and was believed to consist of the souls of those slain violently, and those whose souls could not return to their bodies (in the late sixteenth century Martinus Crusius, in *Annales Suevici, s.a.* 1544, describes various troublesome groups of people, including those who called themselves *volatici* or *erratici scholastici*, "flying *or* wandering scholars", who cheated common people with supposedly protective spells, and claims of powers over witches; among their claims was that «Se potestatem habere in Furias, vel exercitum furiosum: in quo essent omnes infantes non baptizati: omnes in pugnis cæsi: omnes ecstatici, in quorum corpora animæ, quæ euolassent, non redissent», "They had power over the Furies, or the furious army, in which were all unbaptised infants, all those slain in battle, all the ecstatics into whose bodies the souls, which had flown out, had not returned"). The tradition may be very ancient: it is likely, *pace* Rives (1998: 308), that Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 43, in describing the Harii (cf. proto-Germanic **harjiz*, "army", the term used in later tradition to describe this wild host), is actually relaying folklore rather than reality (Harii, "army", can scarcely be the name of a tribe, as Tacitus seems to infer, and their fighting tactics would seem guaranteed to bring rather more confusion than success): «ceterum Harii, super vires quibus enumeratos paulo ante populos antecedunt truces, insitae feritati arte ac tempore lenocinantur: nigra scuta, tincta corpora; atras ad proelia noctes legunt ipsaque formidine atque umbra feralis exercitus terrorem inferunt, nullo hostium sustinente novum ac velut infernum aspectum: nam primi in omnibus proeliis oculi vincuntur», "Then the Harii, going beyond the savage strengths in which they surpass the peoples just listed, pander to their innate wildness by artifice and timing: their shields are black, their bodies stained; they choose dark nights for battles, and thus inspire terror with the horror and shades of a ghostly army. None of their enemies can withstand that strange and so to speak hellish sight: for in every battle the eyes are overcome first." The Wild Hunt is a somewhat different phenomenon, related to the fairy rout (see Flasdieck 1937 on the Wild Hunt as a literary motif); the first English mention, to take but one striking example, is found in the *Peterborough Chronicle, s.a.* 1127, where it appears as a sort of supernatural phenomenon expressing the greed and wastefulness of a new abbot that had been imposed on the community of Peterborough – the day that he turned up, many people saw and heard a great hunt: «Ða huntes pæron sparte ⁊ micele ⁊ ladlice, ⁊ here hundes ealle sparte ⁊ bradegede ⁊ ladlice, ⁊ hi ridone on sparte hors ⁊ on sparte bucces. Þis pæs segon on þe selue derfald in þa tune on Burch ⁊ on ealle þa pudes ða pæron fram þa selua tune to Stanforde; ⁊ þa muneces herdon ða horn blapen ꝥ hi blepen on nihtes. Soðfeste men heom kepten on nihtes; sæidon, þes þe heom þuhte, ꝥ þær mihte pel ben abuton tpenti oðer þritti hornblaperes. Þis pæs sægon ⁊ herd fram ꝥ he þider com eall ꝥ lententid onan to Eastren», "The hunters were black and large and loathly, and their hounds were all black and broad-eyed and loathly, and they rode on black horses and on black bucks. This was seen in the very deer park in the town of Peterborough and in all the woods from this same town up to Stamford; and the monks heard the horns being blown at night. Reliable people observed them at night; they said that it seemed to them that there might well be about twenty or thirty horn-blowers. This was seen and heard from the time that he came here right through Lent up to Easter."

"thread whale/trout", though again the sense of "(malicious) spirit" will fit well enough without recourse to the supposed meaning of "thread" for *gandr* which Heide advocates.

Derivatives

1. **Úgendr*. The earliest occurrence of a word related to *gandr* is possibly the runic inscription from Nordhuglo, Hordaland, dating to the fifth century (McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004: C3): **ekgudijaungandiʀih**, «Ek gudija ungandiʀ i[n] H[uglo]», "I the priest without magic, in Huglo". The word *ungandiʀ* should yield Old Norse **úgendr*, with a possible meaning "not subject to *gandr*" or "not working *gandr*" (Heide 2006: 17). Any interpretation must remain speculative, but it is likely that the inscription bears witness to *gandr* in its magical sense, at a time at least as early as, or earlier than, any of the place-names with a possible sense of "stave", noted above.[37]

2. *Gǫndul*, a *valkyrja* name, occurs in *Vǫluspá* 30, and in the tenth-century *Hákonarmál* 1 of Eyvindr Finnsson (*Skj* B, 57): «Gǫndul ok Skǫgul / sendi Gautatýr», "Óðinn sent Gǫndul and Skǫgul". The name is usually found in kennings for war, such as «Gǫndlar él», "storm of Gǫndul". In *Sǫrla þáttr* Freyja calls herself Gǫndul when she brings about strife between Heðinn and Hǫgni, reflecting her *valkyrja* nature (cf. *AR* §§528, 536). Heide (2006: 216) argues that the name Gǫndul reflects the connection between *valkyrjur* and the *gandreið*, the supernatural weather phenomenon viewed as a manifestation of spirits: *valkyrjur* rode through the air, and are associated with dew and hail in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 28; Heide, citing Price (2002: 345), points out that Gǫndul occurs most often in kennings where battle is described as a storm, pointing to a connection with the violent weather phenomena (the *gandreið*) with which *gandr* was associated (however, the instances collected by Price in fact show only a slight preponderance of the meaning "battle" for kennings mentioning Gǫndul, as opposed to "shield" and so forth, so the argument is not conclusive). *Valkyrjur* were also directly associated with the dead, and the *gandferð* was probably viewed as a train of the dead. In Old English the cognate *pælcyrge* meant "witch, sorceress", just as Freyja was called *fordæða*, "witch", in the Norse *Lokasenna* 32.

3. *Gǫndlir*, an Óðinn name, is found in *Grímnismál* 49. As Heide argues (2006: 218), this most likely derives from the *valkyrja* name Gǫndul: Óðinn is the commander of the *valkyrjur* (as in the lines cited in 2. above by Eyvindr Finnsson).

4. *Gǫndull* has several usages. In the fourteenth-century *Bósa saga* ch. 11 ⟨133⟩ the word occurs in a punning section, where it communicates the

[37] Interestingly, the next inscription given by McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004: C4), from Gårdlösa, Skåne, *c.* 200, reads «ek unwod[i]ʀ», which they translate as "I the un-raging (or: the one without ecstasy)": in both these inscriptions someone is keen to declare they have no association with magical uses of *gandar* or of frenzy (becoming *óðr*), which may indicate that even in these very early times, well before any christianisation took place, the magical practices whose literary echoes are examined in this volume were regarded as something to be eschewed.

sense "penis". Yet "penis" is unlikely to be the primary meaning, since then the series of punning *doubles entendres* would be broken. It is likely that *gǫndull* was much the same as *gandr* (both terms are used for "penis" in modern Icelandic: Heide 2006: 267), with a basic meaning of "stave". Heide considers that *gǫndull* may have indicated some sort of steed, paralleling the foal (again standing for "penis") just mentioned; possibly, the "stave" was already assimilated into the motif of the witch's broomstick (resting between her legs).

«Gonduls ondu» are mentioned in a court case from Bergen in 1325 ⟨137⟩; Ragnhildr tregagás, the defendant, had tried to disturb the matrimonial relationship of her lover Bárðr with his wife Bergljót, and she used a spell against Bárðr for this purpose. In the midst of the Latin account, the words of her spell are cited in Norwegian, which in standardised form appear thus:

> Hrind ek í frá mér gǫnduls ǫndu[m], æinn þér í bak bíti, annarr í brjóst þér bíti, þriði snúi uppá þik hæipt ok ǫfund. Ok síðan þessi orð eru lesin skal spýta uppá þann, er til syngst.
>
> I thrust from me *gǫndull*'s breaths, one to bite you in the back, another to bite you in the breast, a third to turn harm and evil upon you. And then when these words have been read shall he be spat upon that is being sung against.

The closeness of Ragnhildr's formula to that from Basel in 1407, cited by Ohrt (1935–6: 202), is to be noted:

> ich sich dir nâch und sende dir nâch nün gewere wolffe, drîe die dich zerbyssent, drîe die dich zerryssent, drîe die dir dîn hertzlich bluot uss lappent und sûgent
>
> I look towards you and send towards you nine werewolves, three to bite you up, three to cut you up, three to lap and suck out your heart's blood.

Clearly, the *gǫndull* breaths are ferocious spirits in the manner of these werewolves, and they have hence traditionally been interpreted as spiritual wolves, yet nothing in the Norwegian text actually justifies such a precise identification. More to the point are the medieval German analogues to the belief in the witch's breath as a carrier of harm, noted by Weiser-Aall (1936: 77–8). Related ideas are apparent in many Nordic traditions; these are outlined by Heide (2006: 196–204). The oldest explicit example is perhaps Snorri's comment (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 70) that *hugr* could be called a "wind of witches" ⟨QV⟩, which implies that witches could send out their *hugr* in the form of wind, something found later in both Scandinavian and Finnish folk sayings. Naturally, the wind originates in the breath expired by the witch, which sends her *hugr* out, so that wind and breath in this context are more or less synonymous. In Ostrobothnia a whirlwind could be a manifestation of the ill-will of an envious enemy. In Setesdal a whirlwind was called a *gan*; Laestadius (2002: III.26) noted that the *tyre* (an equivalent of the projectile *gand*) could travel as fast as a whirlwind, and might be set

into a small whirlpuff (presumably representing a whirlwind in which it was imagined as travelling). The Shetland *gander* in the sense of strong wind is also to be linked to this idea of the wind being the manifestation of a malevolent *gandr* spirit. This notion also lies behind the *gandreið* or *gandferð*, considered above. Clearly both *hugr* and *gandr* could be conceived as carried on, or manifesting themselves as, the wind; whilst the distinction between a person's mind/soul and a spirit under their command seems to me (unlike Heide) worth maintaining, in this case the effect is the same: a witch is able to communicate her ill-will in a destructive form over great distances (whether she was conceived to do this herself "in spirit", or through independent spirits).

The witch's wind is also to be traced in the phrase «gýgjar gǫndull», "giantess's/witch's *gǫndull*", which occurs in the fifteenth-century "Sálus rímur ok Níkanórs" (*Rímnasafn* II, 750): «Gýgjar er svó gǫndull hvass í Greipar láði». Here *gǫndull* appears to mean either "wind" or "breath": the "wind/breath of a witch" is *hugr*, "mind" (believed to be sent on the (whirl)wind on errands of enmity, M. Olsen 1942: 10 n.), so that the line means "so sharp is the giantess's (i.e. witch's) wind/breath [thought] in the land of Greip [mind]" (see Heide 2006: 197, for discussion of the context of this line). It is likely that *gǫndull* is here short for *gǫnduls ǫnd* (or equivalent), with the element "wind/breath" shifted onto the first part of the expression (cf. "vacuum" for "vacuum cleaner"), so that it is not necessary to postulate a wholly different sense for *gǫndull* on the basis of this one line.

The sexual element in the Bergen account is particularly important, as has been analysed by Mitchell (1997*b*). The very nickname, *tregagás*, given to Ragnhildr, may mean "difficult cunt" (ibid. 25), perhaps in reference to the goings on for which she was tried. The sword which Ragnhildr also used as part of the spell has the additional meaning of "penis". Mitchell (ibid. 21) points out a parallel from *Njáls saga* ch. 6–7, where Gunnhildr curses Hrútr so that he cannot consummate the relationship with his bride Unnr; she explained to her father that much as they might want to, Hrútr would swell up so much that it became impossible to have sex, and yet he ejaculated before they were finished trying. This illustrates, some forty years before the Bergen text, the same notion of a jealous woman cursing a man's genitals to prevent consummation with her (maritally legitimate) rival. Heide (2006: 176) objects that the formula does not actually state that it aims to make Bárðr impotent, but to stir up discord; yet the later comment (not given in Norwegian) that Bárðr's sexual organs are bewitched supports the interpretation favoured by Mitchell and others.

Given the sexual emphasis, and also the meaning of *gǫndull* in *Bósa saga*, the most likely interpretation of *gǫndull* in the Bergen case is, again, "penis" (possibly as an adjunct meaning of a word whose base meaning was "staff"), as supported by *KLNM* (*s.v.* "Impotens I"). Ragnhildr would then appropriately be sending penis breaths/spirits to render Bárðr impotent towards his wife. The use of penises in magic is well documented in the *Malleus maleficarum*, as noted by Mitchell (1997*b*: 20), where, for example, they are kept writhing in boxes and fed on oats (Part II, qu. 1, ch. 7). Heide

(2006: 264–74) offers a valuable discussion of the Sámi *nåejtiendïrre*, "*noaidi* penis": South Sámi *dïrre* and Finnish *tyrä* meant both magic shot and penis, and was thus a variant of the *gand* fly which was sent out to harm others; Heide (ibid. 269) cites Skanke as saying that the *nåejtiendïrre* was equivalent to the reindeer helping spirit (which was chiefly used for attacking the rival reindeer spirits of other shamans), and it should thus be viewed as a sort of helping spirit. Phallic aggression – the sexual subjugation of an enemy – makes good sense not only among the Sámi, but also in societies such as the Norse, where passive homosexuality, *ergi*, was regarded as shameful (Sørensen 1983: 27; cf. Vanggaard 1972: ch. 8). The inference is that the *gǫnduls ǫnd*, and by terminological extension the *gandr*, may be viewed as a sort of aggressive helping spirit; in the Bergen case it was certainly sexual in its nature, but this need not be more than one of its manifestations (the other instances of *gandr* do not support the notion that the sexual element was essential to its nature).

As an analogue to the proposed development of "staff" to "penis" with an association with biddable spirits (in this case the "penis spirits") we may note the example of *vǫlr*, "staff", from which derives the word *vǫlsi*, used as a designation for a deified horse's penis in *Vǫlsa þáttr*. It is feasible – though evidence for this precise supposition is lacking – that the *gǫndull* was at one stage the staff used for summoning the *gandar*;[38] once a meaning of "penis" became firmly attached to *gǫndull* (and *gandr*), the spirits associated with the staff might well become limited to "penis spirits" such as appear in the Bergen case. There could have been a strongly sexual element to the *gandar* from the start, in fact: the *gandar* were associated with *seiðr* already in *Vǫluspá*, and st. 22 hints at the unacceptable practices involved in *seiðr*, for its practitioner was the darling of evil women: this is to be connected with the sexual anarchy typical of the *vanir* (for example their incest, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 ⟨111⟩), and associated with *seiðr* in the form of *ergi*, "effeminacy" (for example in *Lokasenna* 24 ⟨104⟩). Sexual licence is found in shamanism (for example among the Chukchi: see Bogoras 1904–9: 448–54), as well as in the Rus funeral described by Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān ⟨31⟩ (where the girl to be sacrificed both has visions into the afterlife and undergoes several bouts of sexual intercourse);[39] the summoning of *gandar* may have constituted one of the unacceptable sexual practices that *Vǫluspá* hints at as linked with *seiðr*.[40]

An unconnected meaning occurs in Icelandic *göndull*, "yarn", and the derivative *göndla*, "twine" (Heide 2006: 109). Heide (ibid. 235–62) makes much of these meanings, and builds a whole interpretation of *gandr* and

[38] Compare the Ket shaman's staff, provided with a cross bar on which summoned spirits could rest (Nioradze 1925: 79).

[39] Schjødt (2007: 139–40) points out that the sexual intercourse is undertaken as a form of communication with the dead: the girl is to take the message to her dead master that his men are passing on their love to him; the combination of fertility symbolism and communication with the dead is found elsewhere, the examples Schjødt gives being Signý and Sigmundr in *Vǫlsunga saga* and Freyja and Óttarr in *Hyndluljóð*.

[40] Shamans in many regions had a spirit mate of the opposite sex with whom they slept, and who provided the shaman with spiritual knowledge (Eliade 1972: 72–3, 77, 79–81).

seiðr upon them. Yet the senses are surely secondary: given that the base word *gandur* can mean "stave", a sense of "distaff", and hence "spin", "spindle", "yarn" and so forth, will readily arise for derivatives such as *göndull*.

Gandr used in reference to Sámi magic

The Historia Norwegie: gandr and Sámi shamanism

The earliest account which gives us any extensive information about the *gandr* is also the earliest account of Sámi shamanism, recorded in the third quarter of the twelfth century by a Norwegian historian in the *Historia Norwegie* 4.13–23. Whilst the author has used earlier literary works in his history, the geographical section relating to Norway, which includes his description of the Finni, must derive from his own and his informants' knowledge of their own land.

As the account explicitly describes a spirit which is *not* Norse but Sámi, yet uses a Norse term, *gandr* (latinised as *gandus*), to describe it, we cannot simply lift the information about the *gandr* given here as if it automatically applied to native Norse traditions – the use of a Norse word for a Sámi entity suggests a conflation of ideas, but to establish this requires detailed analysis, which is attempted in what follows. The text is presented in ⟨138⟩.

Apart from what it tells of the *gandr*, the account is, ostensibly at least, of value to students of shamanism both for its age and its apparent reliability as what we might term an ethnographic document. This reliability stems in part from its particularity: unlike most of the later accounts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which are generalised descriptions of the shaman's activities, the *Historia Norwegie* merely presents what was seen by certain Norwegians on one particular occasion (if we trust the narrative). Nonetheless, despite the vividness of this description, it is only right and natural to question the reliability, or at least the bias, of the account. My aim here is to present an analysis which will attempt to give a balanced picture; the most natural assumption to jump to – but one which I eschew – is that the account is largely unreliable as being an etic, Norwegian, view of a foreign culture, tainted by assumptions imposed by the Norwegian observers or writers. Of course, in one sense the account is by definition purely a Norse perception of Sámi shamanism, but every account of shamanism, including those given orally at a kamlanie by the shaman himself, is one of perception rather than "reality" – in fact, the "reality" of shamanism *is* the deliberate creation and manipulation of perceptions of the spirit world. The question to ask is, rather, how far do the Norse perceptions and the description of the event (and these are two different strands in the account) represent something that is recognisably consistent with what we know of Sámi shamanism from elsewhere (largely, it must be admitted, from later accounts also written on the whole by Scandinavians), on the basis of which a picture, albeit only a partial one, has been built up of how the Sámi themselves perceived their shamanic activities?

The chief role of the shamans of *Historia Norwegie* matches that found elsewhere, where the shaman functions as an intermediary between this world and the spirit world and acts to resolve a critical situation (Siikala 1978: 321). Some of the more specific roles of the shaman do not appear in *Historia Norwegie*, namely psychopomp, hunting magician and sacrificial priest, since the particular purpose of the kamlanie here does not match these. The account mentions two other roles of the shaman without exemplifying them in the events described. *Foretelling* is recognised as a shamanic role in many societies, but amongst the Sámi seems to play a minor role; the emphasis on foretelling in *Historia Norwegie* is perhaps influenced by the role of *vǫlur* in the author's own society. *Retrieving distant objects* is ascribed to Sámi shamans in various sources. Neither of these two roles, whilst they are consistent with the activities of shamans of later times, can be regarded as specifically Sámi as opposed to general Scandinavian characteristics.

The main part of the *Historia Norwegie* account presents the shaman as *healer*. Sickness, or disablement, has two main causes in shamanic understanding: *soul-loss*, involving for the shaman a trance journey to the otherworld to retrieve the lost soul, and *intrusion of an object or spirit*, involving for the shaman the summoning, usually without trance, of his helping spirits who help to remove the intrusion. It is striking that both types of disablement are exemplified. The hostess (or rather her soul) is stolen by rival shaman spirits, and has to be retrieved. The first shaman dies as a result of a spirit transformed into a stake piercing him.

The shaman as *contender*, where one shaman fights another through his helping spirit (which in this case acts very much as an alter ego of the shaman himself), is also illustrated by the *Historia Norwegie* account: rival shamans contend, through helping spirits (or perhaps in assumed forms, if the *gandus* represents the shaman's free soul), over the rescue of the hostess's soul.

The *Historia Norwegie* account appears to follow, in outline, the sequence of the Sámi kamlanie as deduced from later accounts, with the shaman preparing, falling into trance and undertaking activities in the spirit realm, recovering, and recounting what has happened; there is, allowing for local and temporal variation, arguably nothing in it which contradicts this norm.

In general, therefore, both the purposes and the course of the kamlanie described by the Norwegian historian are consistent with Sámi shamanism as recorded in later accounts, to the extent that it is likely that the account presents reasonably accurately an actual course of events. Yet a closer look at the details of the *Historia Norwegie* reveals a series of small differences unparalleled in other accounts, as well as various difficulties of interpretation, arising partly from the complexity of the particular kamlanie described, and partly from the bias of perception and lack of understanding on the part of the Norwegian observers.

The preparation. The *Historia Norwegie* shaman prepares himself under a cloak, though not for a whole day, as the situation was one of urgency – a

circumstance which from the start marks this kamlanie out as exceptional and unparalleled in accounts of Sámi shamanism. We are not told of a drum being brought from anywhere; it is probably already present with the shamans. We are not told of any intoxicant being taken, but the participants begin by sitting at table. It is uncertain, in any case, how ancient the tradition of inebriation was. The shaman does not appear to sit naked, but rather to use a cloth in some fashion to begin the kamlanie. This is not met with in later accounts of male shamans; however, Leem (1767: 476) notes that the women helpers of the shaman wore a "linen hat" on their head, and modern traditions of the shamaness Rijkuo-Maja mention her spreading a veil over her head when shamanising (Lundmark 1987: 160). The nearest shamanic neighbours to the Sámi, the Samoyeds, used a handkerchief to cover their eyes while shamanising, since this was believed to increase spiritual sight (Mikhailovskii 1894–5: 81). That a similar practice once existed among the Sámi seems wholly credible. Nonetheless, the closest parallels are found in Norse sources: Þorgrímr in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* ch. 19 spreads a cloak over his head before going into a sleep in which he makes towards his enemy Atli's farm, apparently in the form of a fox; the lawspeaker Þorgeirr covers himself in a cloak and rests in his booth in order to come up with a solution to the difficulty of accepting Christianity in Iceland in *Íslendingabók* ch. 7. On balance, it seems most likely that the ritual of spreading a cloak over oneself to invoke magical inspiration was common to Norsemen and Sámi; it is probably an areal feature rather than something clearly borrowed by one or other community. The shaman beats a drum and sings for some time; these incantations correspond to the *juoigos* singing of later accounts (*SLS* 101). There is no indication of any accompanying choir or participation by others present (this may simply be unnoted), unless this was the intended role of the "hostess".

The performance. The shaman jumps about, as is well evidenced in later accounts (*SLS* 97). He turns black and collapses, the first shaman indeed dying, not just seeming to be dead. The description of the shaman's trance given by Graan ⟨18*b*⟩, written in 1672, is particularly close to the *Historia Norwegie*, for he tells us that the shaman turned black before falling into trance – a natural occurrence, given the restricted breathing involved. The lifting up of the arms before going into trance is mentioned by Leem (1767: 477). The trance itself has to be inferred – trance falls outside the Christian Norwegians' metaphysical framework – but appears to have taken place in the case of the two shamans. The second shaman recounts what happened on the spirit journey once it is completed (cf. *SLS* 102).

The destination of the spirit journey is somewhat difficult to determine, and this may reflect Norwegian ignorance of these details. However, a soul is normally stolen down to the world of the dead, and the shaman would customarily be accompanied by a fish helping spirit on his journey thither. The fatal encounter in the water therefore probably took place on the way to the underworld.

The roles of the participants appear to have eluded the Norwegians to some extent – at least, there is reason to doubt that they were precisely

as described. In fact, the very purpose of the meeting, to make trading agreements, may be only part of a more complex motivation for the gathering. The set-up of the meeting is odd: the gathering, devoted to trade, is hosted by a woman, who is unlikely to have had a trading role, but may have had an essential assistant role in a shamanic kamlanie, corresponding to the girl who wakens the shaman from trance, such a role remaining unfulfilled, in that she is seized too early in the events: given the evidence from later accounts that the female assistant is likely to have gone into some sort of trance when leading the soul of the shaman back from his spirit journey, it is possible that the hostess in fact fell into such a trance too early in the proceedings (for example, overcome by the preparatory rhythmical accompaniment); lacking the skills of a trained shaman in the otherworld, she would then be particularly vulnerable to hostile spirits, which indeed are stated to have stolen her. There are two shamans present – spiritual practitioners, not tradesmen; while soul-loss was a recognised phenomenon among the Sámi, it is fortuitous that it occurred precisely when the Norwegians were visiting; the soul-loss of the hostess occurred in an unusually sudden manner, and that of the shaman in an even more dramatic fashion – the latter in particular is almost too good to be true: it is known that the Sámi believed that injuries, even death, would be seen on a shaman in trance whose spirit combatant suffered whilst fighting, but the *Historia Norwegie* appears to be the only documentary evidence for this actually happening, suggesting that it was rather an act of trickery to fulfil ritual expectations – though the possibility that the shaman actually died, under the firm expectation that this might happen to him, cannot be completely dismissed: indeed, it is to be compared with the Ewenki belief that if a shaman proceeded too far along the shamanic river, passing the last rapids, he would die, which was used as an explanation for sudden deaths of shamans at the tensest moments of the kamlanie (which it is reasonable to assume did occasionally happen: ⟨DEATH OF SHAMAN⟩).

Several possibilities suggest themselves. *a.* The events took place precisely as described, and the fortuity of the four points above was just that – chance. *b.* The Norwegians deliberately attended a shamanic kamlanie out of interest, then misinformed the writer of the history about their intentions, pretending it was for trade. *c.* The whole account is fabricated, being based on information gathered about Sámi shamanism from various sources, and compounded into an invented scene which seeks to incorporate as much information as possible about these practices. *d.* The scene described did take place approximately as described, but the Sámi deliberately, but perhaps surruptitiously, arranged the kamlanie for their Norwegian visitors; the aim would be a demonstration of their superiority in the field of magic (and their ability to inspire terror through their practice of it), the only area in which they were recognised as excelling their otherwise more powerful overlords, with a view to securing a better trading deal.

The last scenario seems the most likely; this does not, however, exclude the possibility that the kamlanie did not go entirely to plan for the Sámi,

and some of the actions may indeed have been emergency measures. However, these reservations about the honesty of the performance, far from calling into question the authenticity of the account, in fact suggest all the more strongly that the Norwegians reported exactly what they saw, or rather, under the Sámi prestidigitation, were supposed to see, even if we concede that their interpretations may sometimes reflect Norse beliefs.

Two shamanic events, as evidenced in later accounts, are intertwined in, or have influenced, the sequence of the twelfth-century kamlanie, which the later, simplified, accounts keep apart: *a.* shamanic journeys aimed at retrieving souls taken to the otherworld, which always involve the shaman's own soul, and usually involve a helping spirit in fish form, as noted by Skanke (1943–5: 192); *b.* shamanic contests: here, it seems, the shaman went into trance, during which he sent out the helping spirit (usually a reindeer, but Skanke, ibid., notes that the fish could also fulfil this role) to fight that of the enemy shaman (his own soul not being involved, though the helping spirit acts effectively as an alter ego). However, the distinction between soul and helping spirit is fluid, and many of the later accounts confuse their roles to some extent; it is perfectly conceivable that the spiritual entity involved in the action would at the beginning of the kamlanie be viewed as the shaman's free soul, leaving his body as he fell into trance – a deduction based primarily on the observations of those around the shaman – but then later be viewed as a spirit helper, whose activities are seen only by the shaman himself and reported to the audience later, so that from the shaman's point of view the spiritual entity undertaking the action may feel somewhat independent of himself and thus not be counted as wholly identical with his free soul. The *Historia Norwegie* in fact may well be witness to an earlier tradition where the soul journey and the contest were more integrally connected; it is noticeable from the later accounts both that the retrieval of a soul might involve a sort of contest anyway, namely with the (shamanic) denizens of the world of the dead who seek to hold on to the lost soul, and also that the shamanic contest (often in reindeer form) is not assigned any convincing religious purpose (it is merely a display of power), suggesting that in earlier times it may have had a deeper significance and role in the shaman's main range of activities, including the retrieval of souls.

Yet we are still left with problems of interpretation. Rival shaman spirits («gandi æmulorum») were responsible for the hostess's soul loss; it is usually the dead or evil spirits that were believed to steal people's souls in later Sámi belief (*SLS* 15). However, such activities on the part of rival shamans are met elsewhere, for example among the Ewenki (Anisimov 1963*a*: 107), and there is no reason to doubt the general authenticity of this perception. It is possible that the hostess was still conceived as residing in the world of the dead once her soul was taken, but it is also possible that her soul was thought to be somewhere else, in enemy hands, and the shaman setting out after her may have expected to have to look for her elsewhere than among the dead. Nonetheless, the water-beast appears to have been the usual means of transport, or animal helping spirit, for journeys to the world of

the dead, so this is the likely initial destination of the first shaman.

The obstacle of the stakes is unusual; no parallel appears to exist in the extant records of Sámi shamanism. However, in the Finnish story of Lemminkäinen's shamanic visit to the feast at Päivölä, "Sunland", three obstacles are set in his way, the last of which is an iron fence (*FFPE* no. 34; *SKVR* I_2 716); this is probably a variant of the iron fence reaching from earth to heaven which the Finnish *tietäjä* raises as a protective barrier when he works in the spirit world to banish illnesses (Siikala 2002: 105). Comparable too is the spiritual *mārylа* fence set up by the Ewenki shaman to protect the clan lands against incursions by spirits sent by enemy shamans (Anisimov 1963*a*: 107) – the posts of the fence were in fact mobile spirit guardians; if an enemy spirit penetrated it, it would bring disease and death:

> Alien shamans called up their clan shamanistic spirit-helpers and sent them to another clan (hostile to them) to bring to its people disease and death. The spirits sent by the shaman penetrated into the territory of a given clan and began to eat the souls of the people. In order to avoid an unexpected attack by such spirits, each clan shaman fenced in the clan lands with a special mythical fence (*marylya*) consisting of the shaman's spirit-watchmen. To penetrate into the territory of an alien clan, hostile spirits had to force their way through the mobile shamanistic *marylya* surrounding it, or they had to fool the spirit-watchmen and steal through unnoticed by means of some clever stratagem. In case they succeeded, illness and death occurred among the clansmen. The clan shaman and his spirit-helpers entered into a struggle with the trespassing spirits, expelled them, re-erected the clan *marylya*, and set out to avenge themselves by the same means on the clan of the shamans hostile to them.

The *mārylа* is also discussed by Suslov (1983: 15); it was composed of *etān*, shamanic spirits taking the form of birds, fish, animals, snakes, lizards, which would sit in the trees, rest in the water or stride in the woods, on the look-out for any hostile spirit, which they would grab while other *etān* would run off to inform the shaman. At a kamlanie, *etān* in the form of large pike would swim in the shamanic river and guard the souls of those present (ibid. 45). At a shaman's death, all the *etān* followed him, and the *mārylа* collapsed.

A similar idea to the *mārylа* surely lies behind the *Historia Norwegie* account, and hints at the complexity of shamanic belief among the Sámi which has left no record in later accounts. It is likely that, rather than being the transformed shaman himself (or his personal helping spirit), who in later accounts never appears in inanimate guises such as stakes, the stake marks the boundary of the world of the dead, so that the events may be interpreted as a version of the retrieval of a sick soul from the underworld, where the dead shaman's spirit, rather than the visiting live shaman, is in the first instance victorious; in this case the stake would be conceived as endowed with a guardian spirit (and hence its description as a *gandus*), like the otherworld boundary fence, composed of iron and bone spirits, across the shamanic river Engdekit ⟨qv⟩ among the Ewenki. One might well imagine the spirit stake of the *Historia Norwegie* as part of such a

defensive fence, which needed to be pierced by the shaman to retrieve a soul from beyond it. But there is no indication of this in the account, which states rather that it is rival (presumably live) shaman spirits that are the problem – they have stolen the hostess, and presumably want to hold on to her and so set up a defensive stake fence around their territory, in the manner of the Ewenki *mãryla*. In this case the first shaman's *gandus* adopted fish form not necessarily to visit precisely the underworld on this occasion, but rather any alien shamanic territory where the stolen soul might be, and in readiness for a contest with the guardians of that territory, but failed to penetrate the equivalent of the *mãryla*. It would appear impossible to determine with certainty the exact nature of the shamanic journey undertaken in the *Historia Norwegie*, however.[41]

The only area where we clearly see Norse conceptions muddying what from a Sámi point of view was actually going on is in the matter of the *gandus*. According to Sámi belief the events described in *Historia Norwegie* must have involved the loss or sending out of three souls (the hostess's, and the two shamans'), yet the writer does not show that he is aware of the sending out of the free soul during trance taking place at all: indeed, he talks of the shaman "sending out his spirit" only in the sense of dying, and this at a point into the trance when according to Sámi belief he would already have sent his soul out (not, of course, to die). The writer seems rather to see the kamlanie as a magic ritual for the sending of the *gandus* on its mission: and this is just what appears to have been the purpose of a *seiðr* session, and the function of the *gandr*, in native Norse practice. The events may be elucidated by considering Sámi beliefs about the soul and spirits, and how the Norwegian writer has recast the events into something more comprehensible to him.

On the basis of the fluidity in Sámi conceptions of spirits noted above, it is safe to say that even from a Sámi perspective the precise nature of the spirits involved in the *Historia Norwegie* kamlanie would be hard to pin down; it is scarcely surprising to find the Norwegians recasting what they beheld in their own terms. Behind the *gandus* we may see something vacillating between the shaman's free soul wandering during trance and his accompanying helping spirit. The Christian author, however, clearly regards the *gandus* as an evil spirit quite independent of the shaman (or his soul). His picture of the *gandus* may be summarised thus:

1. It is an unclean spirit;
2. It functions as a helping spirit to the shaman, telling him future and

[41] Heide sees the whole event simply as a visit to the underworld to retrieve the hostess's soul, and a struggle there to wrest the soul from underworld shamans that wanted to hold on to it. Whilst Heide is quite correct to point out the element of contest between rival shamans in the underworld over the retrieval of souls, it is impossible, as I have shown, to come to any firm conclusions over the interpretation of the account at this point; the details are, moreover, filtered through a Christian understanding, and, more importantly, we appear to have no precise parallel to the *gandus* as a sharp stake among the Sámi in later tradition, and certainly nothing to indicate that a dead shaman could take this form, which precludes making firm identifications with shamanic activities specified in later accounts.

present happenings, and enabling him to retrieve distant treasures;
3. Harm to it resulted in harm to its owner;
4. It can steal people (i.e. their souls, since the body clearly remains stationary);
5. It would travel by means of animals, ships, snow-shoes;
6. It could assume the shape of whales/water-beasts and other objects.

In points 1–3 it corresponds to the Sámi animal helping spirits, though it was anthropomorphic spirits that were consulted for information (*SLS* 43). In point 4 it corresponds to Sámi helping spirits or the dead. In point 5 it may represent the Sámi shaman's own soul, which could travel on the animal spirits as steeds; ships and snow-shoes are not recorded as spiritual vehicles, and these depictions on the drum may have served a different purpose from that assigned by the Norwegian writer. Point 6 either represents a distortion of the animal spirit, which had animal form, but not as a result of transformation, and did not assume other forms, or it may represent the shaman himself, who in later tradition could transform himself, and take on the form of various beasts (not just those of the helping spirits), though not, as recorded, stakes.[42] A more sophisticated concept may have underlain this feature, in which the (spiritual) stakes are guarded by shamanic spirits, as in the case of the Ewenki.

Heide (2006: 127–42) analyses the functions of the *gandus* (categorising them slightly differently from the tabulation given above) and traces parallels in Norse and Sámi traditions in some detail.[43] The *gandr* is associated with prophesy twice in *Vǫluspá*; the Sámi *noaidi* is said to prophesy with help from his assistant spirits, though it is usually simply said that he gained the information he desired – Lundius (1905: 6), however, specifically calls the spirits *spådoms andar*, "spirits of prophecy". Heide claims that bringing treasures from afar similarly belongs to both Norse and Sámi tradition, but the only clear instance of this from Norse sources depicts the Sámi doing it (in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 12 ⟨123⟩, where they fail in an attempt to retrieve a figure of Freyr), other than the case of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 ⟨112⟩, which I argue is influenced by traditions of the Sámi; similarly, Heide cites an instance where as a show of skill a shaman brings back some object (a motif occurring already in Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*

[42] In Ewenki shamanism, however, a shamanic helping spirit in the form of a split stake is responsible for seizing an escaped disease spirit and bringing it back to the shaman to deal with (Anisimov 1963*a*: 104).

[43] Heide (2006: 129) rejects the idea that the account presents certain types of problem which need to be analysed, objecting that the writer himself clearly did not see any inconsistency in his account, and that in accounts of Sámi beliefs and practices the free-soul and helping spirits are so confused as to make their separation a nonsense. I reject both points. The writer's own obliviousness to what is going on in the metaphysical world of the Sámi tells us nothing about the Sámi's own views, or even about native but pre-Christian Norwegian views; it is only by "reading between the lines" that we may hope to approach a real perception of what is going on from a Sámi point of view. On the soul/spirit issue, there was certainly confusion between them among the Sámi, but to assert that there was confusion is also to assert that there were fundamentally two distinct categories; it is the task of analysis to tease out the level of distinction or confusion at any given point, not to fudge the issue by denying the distinction at all.

III.17 ⟨RETRIEVAL: OF DISTANT OBJECTS⟩), but notes that the best sources for Sámi beliefs do not have this tale, which, presumably like that in *Vatnsdœla saga*, is best interpreted as a fixed outsider view of Sámi skills. However, later sources relating to Sámi tradition have comparable (if not identical) motifs: for example, the shaman could uncover and so return stolen goods (Itkonen 1946: 117–20). Thus the "treasure from afar" motif is most likely a stereotypical Norse perception of Sámi skills, based, but only very loosely, on some actual shamanic practices (such as that noted by Itkonen).

The notion that harm to an external representation of a person is reflected on the person himself or herself is found in Norse: Heide cites the Ostacia episode in *Þiðreks saga* ch. 352 ⟨126⟩, and the Þórveig episode in *Kormáks saga* ch. 6 ⟨99⟩; in *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ǫlvis* ch. 20 King Hundingi dies at the same instant as a large whale. The notion may well be indigenous, but the evidence is somewhat weakened by the lateness or, in the case of *Þiðreks saga*, the foreign origin of the sources cited. In Sámi belief the notion is well established, such as in Jens Kildal's notice about the reindeer sent out to fight each other by shamans ⟨23⟩. In Norse, contests in animal form occur, notably in the case of Dufþakr in *Landnámabók* ⟨75⟩, but there is no indication of trance.

Nothing in Norse tradition relates to the theft of souls by the *gandr*, though the word *hugstolinn* may, in Heide's view, indicate some notion of the soul (*hugr*) being stolen (but not by the *gandr*); in records of Sámi belief the theft of souls is frequently encountered: sickness is often viewed as caused by the passing of the soul into the underworld, whence the shaman has to rescue it (it is not said that the dead had stolen it, however, even if they are keen to hold on to it). Heide cites instances of death or illness being caused by sending a *gan* against another (Isaac Olsen 1910: 78–9, 88), but it is far from clear that this is parallel to the *Historia Norwegie* account: *gan* can as well be interpreted, at this much later date, as simply meaning something like "spell" or "malicious magic". Clearer examples can be found in better-recorded shamanic societies, such as the Ewenki, where, as noted above, if the spiritual *mãryla* fence were pierced by enemy shaman spirits, the clan would suffer illness and death.

Heide (2006: 137–8) offers no clear parallels to the stake motif, though he adduces rather less clear ones. He sees the later *gand* fly, and other *gand* missiles, as analogous to the sharp stakes: yet the *gand* fly appears rather to be a self-contained bearer of malice, than a vehicle or assumed form of a spirit, nor do the objects of the *gand* fly's ire appear to be anything other than physically present people. There is no parallel here to a contest taking place in assumed form in the spirit realm between rival shamans. Heide's proposal to see an analogue in the *nåeitiendïrre*, "*noaidi* penis", mentioned by Skanke (1945: 206–7, "Noiden-dirri"), is also open to question; Heide's view that this powerful tool, used according to Skanke by a shaman on his visit to the underworld against the shaman spirits there, was sent to penetrate a rival, the achievement of which marked victory, is his own supposition and not Skanke's – it is possible that the magical power was communicated in some other way than this.

Although I have outlined above how the motif of the stake may reflect a native shamanic tradition, it is also possible that, through some misunderstanding and reinterpretation of what was actually presented at the kamlanie, the stake represents the second meaning of *gandr*, "stake": the Norwegian writer would thus be concerning himself with amalgamating the varying senses he knew *gandr* to have in his own language into one coherent whole and imposing this upon the Sámi. It is particularly notable in this context that *gander* in Ostrobothnia could mean a stake set up as a marker in water, which could well reflect a meaning more widespread in earlier times.

It appears that the Norwegian writer has recast and amalgamated various Sámi spirits, as well as the shaman's free soul and maybe the dead, into a spirit he calls a *gandus*. He was led astray by his knowledge of the traditional function of *gandar* in Nordic society into presenting the kamlanie as one in which the shaman performed certain rites to induce the *gandus* into effecting particular things, rather than one in which trance took place, during which the shaman sent his free soul out of his body, accompanied by his helping spirits. Indeed, the points where the Norwegian fails to understand the Sámi concepts of souls and spirit helpers may be useful indicators of areas in which native Norse magical practices differed from the shamanism of their neighbours – though of course the earlier, pagan understanding of such practices may well have been attenuated or lost with the coming of Christianity. Yet, even taking heed of this caveat, it is notable that one of the main functions of the *gandr* was to gather information and impart it to the seer(ess) who has summoned it, an emphasis which I believe furnishes a reason for placing this role at the beginning of the description of the skills the Sámi *gandus* conferred in *Historia Norwegie*, whereas in later tradition this is not foremost among the shaman's roles, and is in any case often performed by the shaman's own soul wandering rather than by the helping spirits.

The Norwegian writer (and probably his informants) did not understand all that occurred in the Sámi kamlanie, the most fundamental matter being the Sámi concepts of the soul and spirits, which have been partially understood and partially recast under the influence of the Norse *gandr* spirit. Nonetheless, a close examination largely vindicates the details of the description, and often enables us to reconstruct the Sámi conceptions when they have been distorted. The *Historia Norwegie* account not only confirms much that occurs in later accounts, produced at a time when Sámi shamanism was moribund and probably depleted, but adds to them and hints at a more vital tradition; the detail it reveals is invaluable as a witness to the complexities of shamanism in practice. To find parallels to some of these details, for example to the fatal spirit stake, we have to turn to forms of shamanism recorded in more recent years and more fully than Sámi shamanism, such as that of the Ewenki. The account moreover provides a valuable snap-shot (even if one seen through a glass darkly) of an actual kamlanie, as opposed to the usually generalised accounts of later centuries. The misunderstandings shown by the Norwegians are

important pointers to the differences between the Norse and Sámi magical traditions, whereas the closeness of observation hints at the possibility, in earlier, pagan periods, of Sámi influences on Norse religion.

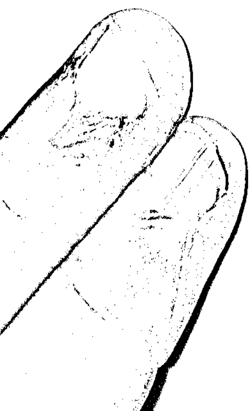
Later sources

In later sources relating to Sámi magic, *gand* generally has meanings at various points along an abstract to concrete line between "Sámi magic" and "magic fly sent on a mission" ⟨FIG. 13⟩. Thus Clausson Friis (1881: 400–1) in *Norriges Bescriffuelse*, composed in 1613, writes:

> blaa Fluer, huilke vare Finnens Gann oc Trolddom, som hand dagligen udsende. [...] De ere allesammen grumme Troldfolck [...] oc deris Gann gaar i Arff, saa at en Slect er rammere oc sterkere i deris Troldoms-konst end en anden, oc [...] kand Finnen icke trifuis, uden hand huer Dag sender en Gann ud, det er en Flue eller Trold aff sin Ganneske eller Gannhiid, det er en Skindpose, som hand hafuer dem udi, oc naar hand icke hafuer Mennisken at forgjøre oc sende sin Gann udi (huilcket hand icke giør, uden hand hafuer nogen Sag met hannem), da udsender hand den i Vær oc Vind, oc lader den ramme paa Mennisker, Queg eller Diur, eller huor den kand, oc stundum sender hand sin Gann i Fieldet, oc sprenger store Field ud, oc for en ringe Sags Skyld skuide de deris Gann i Mennisker oc forgiøre dennem.

> dark flies, which are the Sámi's *gann* and magic, which he sends out each day. [...] They are all of them wicked magicians [...] and their *gann* is inherited, so that one family is bolder and stronger in their magical arts than another, and [...] a Sámi cannot thrive unless he sends a *gann* out each day, that is a fly or enchanted object of his *gann*-ship; there is a leather pouch he keeps them in, and when he has no one to bewitch and send his *gann* upon (which he does not do unless he has some point of argument with him), then he sends out bad weather and wind, and lets it buffet people, cattle and wild animals, wherever it can, and sometimes he sends his *gann* into the open countryside and razes great fields, and for the sake of some small matter they direct their *gann* into people and bewitch them.

In the seventeenth century, a Kirsti from Vadsø was accused of having «sadt gand», "set *gand*", against many people, and of claiming that a Sámi could «tage gand ud aff», "take *gand* out of" them (Heide 2006: 39). Setting a *gand* on someone occurs in later sources too: the Sámi Anders Paulsen, in 1693, claimed to be able to remove a *gand* set upon someone and send it back upon the sender (here, as in some other cases, it appears possibly to be concrete, like the spherical object bearing malice which ends up inside someone, described clearly by Hansen Lønborg, 1685–1730) (Heide 2006: 42–4). An abstract sense of "maleficium, Schwartzekunst" is given by Erik Schröder in *Lexicon Latino-Scondicum* (1637) for *tyre*, which Schefferus (1673: 148) says is the name given by other "Lappones" for what is known as *gan* among the Norwegian Sámi. He describes what it is in concrete terms, a sort of projectile ball, which could go in the form of a whirlwind:



> Est autem Tyre nihil aliud, quam pila rotunda, nucis juglandis aut pomi mediocris magnitudine, ex tenera lanugine, sive animalis alicujus, sive musci conglomerata, levis, ubique æqualis, ponderis exigui, ut quæ intus

videatur cava, coloris ex flavo, viridi, & cinereo quasi compositi, ac mixti, sic ut flavus pallide prævaleat [...] Hanc Tyre ajunt animatam arte peculiari atque mobilem, vendi à Lapponibus, ut qui eam sibi compararit, cui fuerit libitum, ei possit immittere. [...] Pergere porro Tyre hunc itinere celerrimo, instar turbinis, aut emissi teli, sive globi.

The *tyre* is nothing other than a round ball, in size like a walnut or smallish apple, of thin down, as of some animal, or of moss, stuck together, light, even on all sides, of small weight, such that it appears hollow inside, in colour a mixture of yellow, green and grey, such that the yellow sallowly prevails. [...] This *tyre* they say is animated by a particular skill and made mobile, to be sold by the Sámi, so that whoever prepares it for himself, into whom he fancies he can send it. [...] The *tyre* proceeds on its way by the swiftest route, in the form of a whirlwind, or a shot weapon, or a ball.

Other forms taken by the *gand* include a strange type of mouse, so clearly its form could vary in some instances from the norm.

The vacillation between abstract and concrete senses for *gand* continues in the eighteenth century: Jens Kildal (Reuterskiöld 1910: 91–2) writes in 1730 that when a *noaidi* «setter gan ud paa andre», "puts out *gan* onto another", he uses the shamanic animal helping spirits. Here the sense is likely to be approximately "bewitchment". Yet at about the same time Randulf (1903 [1723]: 29) in Nærøy (Namdalen) records, and provides a picture of

deris Gann-Fluer, som de udsender ved Dievels Besværelser til at skade Mennisker eller *Creaturer*, af disse Fluer pleie de gjerne at have en stor Æske fuld, som gaar i Arf blant dem, og agtis for et stort Liggendefæ.

their *gann*-flies, which they send out at the devil's behest to harm people and creatures; of these flies they are usually happy to have a great container full, which is inherited among them, and accounted a great treasure.

As serious illness was mainly regarded as caused by intrusion of malignant spirits, the *gand* fly may be regarded as a sort of shamanic helping spirit specifically geared to this purpose. This may be regarded as being in the tradition of the *Historia Norwegie* account, but would appear to reflect a far more attenuated tradition of the functions of the spirit named by the Norwegians *gandr*.[44]

Conclusion

The Norse conceived of a complex spirit world with many different beings performing a range of functions; within this, there was clearly scope for interaction between humans and spirits that could potentially be classified as shamanic. The degree to which shamanic elements may be discerned varies across this spectrum.

[44] Heide (2006: 156–8) discusses the problems of what the Sámi term for the *gand* fly may have been; he notes for example that in different descriptions of one drawing the Norwegian *gandfluge* corresponds to Sámi *nåejtiendirre*.

The main class of gods, the *æsir*, are not much connected with anything shamanic, except in the case of Óðinn, whose performance of *seiðr*, however, probably reflects an encroachment on the field of the other class of gods, the *vanir*. These were particularly associated with aspects of fertility, and the profusion of their sexual actitivities reflects this. *Seiðr* originated among them, and was focused on the goddess Freyja. The other aspect of the *vanir* is their association with death, which is plain in the case of Freyja, who receives half the slain with Óðinn (*Grímnismál* 14). It also emerges in the case of the *dísir*, female spirits who were guardians of fertility, but also of violent death; Freyja is called the *dís* of the *vanir*. Some classes of female spirit, the *valkyrjur* and probably the *nornir*, appear to be specialised variants of the *dísir*. The *vanir* are also close to (and in some traditions synonymous with) the class of male spirits called *álfar*, similarly associated with fertility; these are not associated with *seiðr* in Old Norse, but they appear to be in Old English sources, where related terms such as *ælfsiden* occur.

Dvergar were underworld, deathly beings, most nearly akin to giants (though they are distinguished from them); they do not appear to have any connections with shamanic practices.

The giants formed a group of beings, probably an amalgam of various spirits perhaps kept distinct in (unrecoverable) earlier tradition (judging by the profusion of different terms). They were particularly associated with wild nature, but the attempt to see them as parallel to the Siberian masters of the animals proves unfounded. Among giants' many facets were their roles as ancestral beings, and as keepers of wisdom. The *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá* says she was brought up among giants: they therefore function as instructors of the magical practitioner, in a similar way to the anthropomorphic spirits in many shamanic traditions, though we have in Norse nothing like the detailed descriptions of such initiations among shamans, and the parallel may well be fortuitous: the poet wishes merely to stress that the *vǫlva*'s knowledge stretches right back to the beginning of things, a time already associated in Norse tradition with the giants.

The term *troll* was used of giants and other beings that were involved in malicious supernatural activities, and came to be applied not only to the object of this magic, but also to the practitioner (so that it sometimes becomes synonymous with witch). It is clear that *troll* could be summoned in ritual magic, presumably to impart information, but perhaps also to carry out tasks, as this is explicitly condemned in the Norwegian laws (*at vekja troll up*, "to wake up *troll*", ⟨78⟩).

The *mara* was a death-dealing night spirit that could be sent against someone; Snorri says this was achieved through the use of *seiðr*.

The animal *fylgja* can scarcely be classed as a spirit; it is really a premonition in concrete (but still visionary) form, and is used solely for this purpose: there is no interaction with it. The female *fylgja* is more or less a personification of luck, of a family or individual.

The *vǫrðr* was a guardian spirit; most of the information on it is derived from later folk traditions, where it appears as both an independent guardian, for example of a farm, and as a guardian of a person, in which

case it becomes subsumed into the concept of the free soul. I consider its role in *seiðr* in Chapter 17.

The main spirit of a shamanic nature is the *gandr*, a word which was also applied to Sámi shamanic spirits by the Norsemen, and must have been seen as the nearest equivalent. It was a spirit which could be sent out during the practice of *seiðr* to gather the information the *vǫlva* needed to communicate, or to cause harm. It appears that it was conceived as taking animal form. It was also regarded as dangerous and a causer of damage, and hence is associated with various violent natural phenomena. By whatever means, *gandr* could also indicate a stake, and this meaning interweaves with the spirit sense; some of the sexual element involved in the actions of the *gandr* spirit may stem from the sense of "penis" derived from "stake", though given the connection of *seiðr* with the *vanir*, this may not be the whole explanation. Clearly the *gandr* comes close to the Sámi (and other) helping spirits, and the ritual of its use may be reasonably described as shamanic; it does not, however, exactly correspond to the Sámi practice: the *Historia Norwegie* author regarded the kamlanie he wrote about as a ritual to send the *gandr* on its mission, and is unaware of free-soul wandering (as well as, apparently, confusing various other aspects of the kamlanie), so that if we describe the ritual concerning the *gandr* in Norse tradition as a form of shamanism, it should be distinguished clearly from the shamanism of the Sámi.

IV. COSMIC STRUCTURES

[. . .] your speeches [. . .] were such [. . .]
As, venerable Nestor, hatched in silver,
Should with a bond of air, strong as the axle-tree
On which the heavens ride, knit all Greeks' ears
To his experienced tongue.

Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida* (Act I, Scene 3)

Ulysses's great speech on order and the observation of degree, as necessary among men as in the heavens, grows out of the image of this mighty axle-tree: and in these few and weighty words Shakespeare expresses much of the essential character of the legendary support of the cosmos – the tree invisible as air, yet strong enough to knit the whole world together and maintain order in the heavens that ride upon it.

Conceptually, this support is realised in its most basic form as a pillar, post or pole. Different aspects of its role as support and sustainer of the cosmos might be emphasised by realising it in imaginatively varied manners: as a mountain, to emphasise elements of strength, size and endurance; as a mill, when the turning of the firmament and the regular progression of the seasons with the life-giving harvests was to the fore; as a living tree, when the element of the world's continuing and renewing life was stressed. The cosmic support could itself be regarded as alive, as a sentient and thinking being, a notion which naturally tends to occur as an extension of the animate realisation of the support, namely the tree.[1]

The cosmic support is a central element in many forms of shamanism, since the shaman must travel between different layers of the cosmos, and the tree or some other medium provides a means of passage between them. The shaman's dwelling, in which the kamlanie took place, was a microcosm of this world, the pole or tree stem representing its cosmic counterpart, and the smoke hole being the connecting hole between the layers of the universe (Eliade 1972: 261, 264–5; *BL* 30). Yet, here as elsewhere, shamanism is not characterised so much by the mere belief in the cosmic support (which is widespread), as in the dynamic use to which it is put by the shaman. Journeys via the tree are usually upwards to heaven, the notches or branches of the tree representing the layers of heavens through which he climbs. However, there are several instances of the shaman descending to the underworld via the tree roots, for example the Nganasan initiation

[1] This is meant as a *conceptual* analysis of the image, not a historical one; it is not necessarily the case that the tree is a "more developed" version of the pillar, for example; Hultkrantz (1996: 38) argues that the images of pillar and tree were probably distinct in origin, later merging to form variants of the motif of the world centre or *omphalos*.

⟨16⟩, or the visit of the Ewenki shaman to the clan mother to ask her to release animals for the hunt (Anisimov 1963*b*: 176–7); the shaman also sent his animal double (*khargi*) via the tree on visits to the underworld to consult ancestral shaman spirits on forthcoming events (Anisimov 1963*a*: 86, 101).

All of the main realisations of the world support – pillar, mountain, mill, tree – occur in Norse to varying degrees, as they do widely in many areas of the world. The aim in this chapter is to establish a typology of the cosmic support as found in Norse sources by comparison with Eurasian parallels, and to investigate how far the Norse texts exemplify any shamanic aspects.

10. The pillar, post or pole

The concept of a pillar sustaining the universe, holding up the firmament above the earth, is a widespread motif; a few examples will suffice. The Egyptians had a god Shu who held heaven and earth apart; in early representations he is a pillar (*BL* 20; Hart 1986, *s.v.* "Shu"). The Sumerian "mooring pole" kept heaven and earth apart (Black and Green 1992, *s.v.* "Cosmology"); this pole was also called the "boundary post", and temples considered as places of communication between heaven and earth were named after it. In the Indian *Ṛg Veda* VIII.41.10, heaven and earth are separated by a pillar, and in X.89.4, heaven and earth are pictured as fastened on either end of an axle, like wheels; the Vedic North Star was "the pillar of sacrifice in the sky" which supported the star system: the heavenly bodies were attached by means of aery cords (Viennot 1954: 76).

Eurasian

Most of the peoples of northern Eurasia imagine there to be a post (or variant thereof) holding up the sky; the tree tends to be the favoured image further south. Hultkrantz, in his study of the northern world pillar, noting that of thirty-six circumpolar peoples only four lack the image, while nine have the world tree (five of these coinciding with the pillar), even opines (1996: 31): "If, in addition to shamanism and its numerous manifestations we seek a more characteristic feature of Circumpolar religions this could be the concept and cult of the world pillar". Hultkrantz (ibid. 39) notes that besides symbolising the world's centre, the pillar signifies the carrier of the sky, just as the main post of a house bears the roof – the house post as a microcosmic form of the world pillar is well recognised: for example, Eliade (1972: 261) notes that among the Eskimos the house pillar symbolised the world axis; the sky is a sort of arching lid over the earth, and those who wish to move into the other world at the sky's rim have to be quick to pass under. The pillar, or its tip, was identified with the North Star; the

pillar was believed, in a more restricted area of Eurasia (including among the Sámi), to be topped with an iron nail around which the heavens turned. The North Star was thus known variously as the "golden pillar" (Mongols, Buryats, Kalmyks, Altai-Tatars, Uigurs), "the golden post" (Orochi), "iron pillar" (Kirgiz, Bashkirs, some Tatars), or "unique pillar" (Teleuts) (cf. also *BL* 12; Harva 1933: 27). The North Star is also a pole at which the high god or other gods tether their steeds (Hultkrantz 1996: 41). A common feature of representations of the world pillar is the carving of notches up their length, representing the levels of the cosmos (*BL* 27).

The way between the worlds was also represented by the smoke hole in the tent: thus the Chukchi, for example, believed there to be a hole round the North Star, and similar holes between each of the heavens beneath it, through which shamans and heroes could fly, borne on eagles or thunderbirds (Bogoras 1904–9: 331).

The firmament was also at times represented on the image of the world pillar. The Dolgan ritual pillar, called *tüspät turū*, "the never-collapsing pillar", whose prototype stands before the dwelling of the High God, culminated in a covering, representing the sky (*BL* 15); among the Buryats and Altaians a tent, representing the firmament, would be raised for the performance of shamanic ceremonies around a birch tree (*BL* 28). The Dolgan pillar sometimes had four lesser poles attached, representing the directions (for pictures, see *BL* 16). An eagle sits on the covering of the Dolgan pillar (*BL* 14).

KHANTY

The Khanty set up a pillar, representative of the world pillar, in their villages; it was a focus of cult, and prayers were offered to it ⟨1⟩. This "iron-pillar father" may perhaps be influenced by the Tatar "Iron Pillar" (Harva 1933: 30). Some of its most notable features are its personification as a father, its cult status, offerings being made especially for progeny (Karjalainen 1975: 127–8, 132), and its function as a watchful guardian, to symbolise which it was often topped by representations of eagles or other (sharp-sighted) birds, as were equivalent pillars among neighbouring peoples like the Dolgans and Samoyeds (*BL* 14); the Khanty eagle was called *numsives*, "heaven eagle".

SÁMI

Representations of the world pillar were found among the Sámi. Jens Kildal gives an account of a sacrifice of a reindeer to the high god Maylmenradien, "World ruler", to ensure he will prevent the world collapsing, a "world prop", a cleft stick signifying his support of the world, being set up at the sacrificial site and smeared with blood ⟨2⟩. Forbus writes of a pillar raised at the sacrificial altar to the ruling "world man", Radien (Raedie), with which he will hold the world up and maintain it in order; this too is said to be smeared with blood ⟨3⟩. Leem gives an account of a Sámi pillar near

Porsanger which he had visited himself ⟨4, FIG. 5⟩: there were two high rocks facing each other, one covered in moss; the Sámi held festivities in honour of the god there. Various sticks, made of dried fir to preserve them against rotting, were arranged around the stones; the sticks had symbols on, repeated thrice in a line, and thrice at an angle. In addition, there was a beam, rammed into the ground, and leaning to the east, with its top pierced with an iron nail, from which Leem conjectures the Sámi were worshipping Þórr, even though the name of Þórr was unknown to them.

Schefferus (1673: 105) describes an image of "Thor"[1] among the Sámi (quoting the words of an anonymous authority): «i afgudabelætens hufrud [*sic*] slao the en slaonagel eller spiic och itt styke flintsten, thermed Tor skall slao eld», "they strike into the idol's head a striking nail or spike and a piece of flint, for Thor to strike fire with". Striking fire from the head of "Thor" may be compared with the Finnish tradition that fire originated on the summit of the world mountain (a variant of the world pillar), for example in the following verse (*SKVR* VII$_3$ 1407, from Rautavaara, recorded 1885):

Missä on tulta tuuvitettu	Where was fire rocked,
vaaputettu valkeeta?	the white one cradled?
Tuolla taivahan navalla,	There at the navel of heaven,
kuulun vuoren kukkulalla.	on the peak of the famous mountain.

That the Sámi pillar indeed represents the world pillar (Leem's account, it is true, does not assign any cosmic aspect to the pillar, but this is probably mere omission) is also confirmed by various names for the North Star; clearly the nail in Leem's account is to be linked with the *bohinavlle* (Inari *poahi-näv'li*), or North Star. Folklore about the North Star holding up the world against collapse, such as is found in the older accounts cited above, is also found in the twentieth-century Sámi writer Turi (1910: 266), who relates many traditional Sámi beliefs: «Boahje-naste holder himlen oppe, og naar paa den sidste dag Favtna med sin bue skyder Boahje-naste, saa falder himlen ned, og da knuser den jorden, og da kommer hele verden i brand, og da faar alting ende», "Boahje-nasti [North Star] holds up the sky, and when Fáudna on the last day shoots the north star, then the sky will fall, and crush the earth and then the whole world will burst into flame, and everything will end". Other names include *veralden tšuold*, "world pillar", or *ġlmᵉ-tšuol'ᴅᵃ*, "heaven pillar"; *tšuold* is defined by Lindahl and Öhrling (1780, *s.v.* "tjuold") thus:[2] «*tjuold, tjuolda,* palus, påle. lt. stella polaris, cynosura, nordstjerna. Ita dicta, quia immobilis manet et fixa. *Wäralden tjuold*, palus sive axis mundi, id.», "*tjuold, tjuolda,* pole, pole. Polar star, cynosura, North Star. So called, because it remains immobile and fixed. *Wäralden tjuold*, pole or axis of the world". Itkonen (1946: 196) notes that in later recorded belief the earth was thought of as an island supported by the

[1] This refers to the south Sámi god of thunder Hovrengaellis, whose name – and no doubt characteristics – derives from Old Norse *Þórr karl*.
[2] The words *navlle* and *veralden* are early Norse loans; *tšuold* is not a Germanic loan; it derives from proto-Sámi *ćōltę* (Lehtiranta 2001, *s.v.* "195. *ćōltę*").

world pillar (*mäilmi-tšŭŏl'dâ*); the North Star was the nail at the head of the pillar. The heavenly bodies were believed to turn about this pillar.

The leaning of the pole may well reflect the position of the North Star, which is not directly overhead except at the pole; hence the pole is depicted as leaning towards it. The leaning to the east is surely also connected with the sun; on Sámi drums the sun was often depicted in a central position on the world pillar (Pentikäinen 1987: 147; see also Lundmark 1983 on the Sámi sun cult).

FINNISH AND ESTONIAN

The erstwhile Finnish and Estonian belief in a world pillar is witnessed in idiomatic sayings. In Finland, of a very long-lived person it was said «hän elää maailmantolpaksi/maailmanpatsaaksi», "he is living to be a world pillar". In Estonian, someone who had outlived several generations was known as an *ilmasammas*, "pillar of the air [i.e. world]", or *maasammas* "world pillar", and a saying existed «ega ta või ilmasambaks jääda», "he can't stay to be a world pillar [i.e. he can't live for ever]" (*BL* 18–19).

The Sámi, Finns and Estonians also had the concept of the North Star as a nail, fixing this pillar to the firmament (the notion appears across northern Eurasia, though in widely separated regions: the Samoyeds called the star "nail of heaven" (*BL* 10), the Koraks "nail star", the Chukchi "nail star" or "pole-stuck star"). Holzmayer (cited in *BL* 10) notes how the Estonians imagined the firmament as an inverted pot, the bottom (*põhi*) being pierced with a nail (*nael*) around which the pot turned, causing the movement of the stars; the North Star, at the centre point, is called *põhja nael*, "nail of the bottom". Harva (*BL* 10) points out that in Estonian and Finnish the word for "bottom" also means "north", so the star is in fact additionally "nail of the north"; as the term is present also in Sámi as *bohinavlle*, "north nail", it must have been borrowed from Finnish (where it no longer exists). Some recognition of the term in Finnish is found in an obscure Finnish poem, *Couvon pääliset* ⟨30⟩, one of the most archaic preserved (originally recorded in the seventeenth century), which calls upon the great shaman figure Väinämöinen «nouva naula pohjolasta», "to fetch the nail from the north", which most likely means to fetch down the North Star, an act which is parallel to his fetching the *sampo*, the guarantor of fertility, from Pohjola, "Northland" (Setälä 1932: 544–7); the *sampo*, which I consider below in the section on the mill, probably originated as a form of the world pillar topped by the North Star and the starry firmament, the *kirjokansi*, "speckled lid".

Germanic

IRMINSUL

In 772, Charlemagne undertook a campaign in Germany and razed a Saxon sanctuary; the event is recorded in several chronicles; the statement of the *Annales Fuldenses* is typical: «Karolus Saxoniam bello aggressus,

Eresburgum castrum cepit, et idolum Saxonum quod vocabatur Irminsul destruit», "Karl waged war on Saxony, and took the fort of Eresburg, and destroyed the Saxon idol called Irminsul".[3]

Two sources, Rudolf of Fulda and Widukind, talk of the worship of Irminsul. Rudolf writes *c.* 863–5 in *Translatio sancti Alexandri* ch. 3 ⟨32⟩ that the Saxons worshipped a wooden trunk raised up high, named *Irminsul,* which he translates as «universalis columna», "world pillar", as if supporting everything. In a somewhat garbled fashion Widukind relates *c.* 968 in *Res gestae Saxonicae* I.12 ⟨33⟩ that the Saxons set up a column for victory, which it is implied is connected to the name Hirmin, but it is also said to imitate Mars in its name.

From these accounts, which may not be wholly independent of each other, the following points may be summarised or inferred. *Irminsul* was the name of a sacred column. In at least one case Irminsul was a large trunk of wood. The only locatable *irminsul* was worshipped on a hilltop (Eresburg), suggesting a link with the related concept of the world mountain.[4] Widukind's account suggests that a sacred pillar may have been set up ad hoc on different occasions; "Mars" would be the god honoured in a battle situation. Wodan, or perhaps an equivalent war god such as Tiu, was probably the god worshipped with a pillar in this instance. In Norse, Óðinn is named *Jǫrmunr* (the Norse form of *Irmin*) in *Þula* IV jj 8/1 (*Skj* B$_1$ 673). The *aquila* said by Widukind to be set up in the east is probably just an (eagle) standard, rather than an image of an eagle (found atop the world pillar: see above), though W. Müller (1975: 92–4) associates it with the eagles found represented at the top of the Gaulish Jupiter pillars. The worship of the column seems to have taken place facing east, and was perhaps directed at the rising sun: cf. the Sámi pillar in Leem's description ⟨4⟩.

Irminsul as a name has three possible interpretations. The most basic sense is "great column" – this is supported by later German usage, where the term appears as a common noun, "mighty column" or "obelisk" (Schuchhardt 1904: 247): thus in the twelfth-century *Kaiserchronik,* line 602, Julius Caesar's ashes are placed on an *irminsul* («ûf ain irmensûl begruoben»), and at line 4213 Simon Magus comes and sets himself on an *irminsul* («ûf ain irmensûl er staich») in full view of all the people. A similar significance probably also lies behind *irminsuwel,* used to describe great persons (*BL* 19 n.: in a thirteenth-century sermon the apostles are called

[3] The sources to mention the destruction of the Irminsul, all *s.a.* 772, differ slightly in the details of the form of the names Irminsul and Eresburg, in the description of the Irminsul (*idolum,* "idol", *fanum,* "shrine", *locus,* "place", *lucus,* "grove"), and the word used to describe its destruction (*destruo,* "destroy", *succendo/comburo,* "burn", *subverto/everto,* "overturn"): *Annales Mosellani* (Irminsul, –, fanum, destruxit), *Annales Petaviani* (Ermensul, Erisburgo, locum, succendit), *Annales Laurissenses (maiores)* (Ermensul, Aeresburgum, fanum, destruxit; it also mentions the taking of gold or silver from the site), *Annales Fuldenses* (Irminsul, Eresburgum, idolum, destruit), *Annales Einhardi* (Irminsul, Aeresburgum, idolum, evertit), *Annales Laurissenses minores* (Irminsul, Aeresburg, fanum et lucum, subvertit), *Annales Iuvavenses minores* (Irminsul, –, idolum, combussit).

[4] The site of this *Irminsul* is known relatively accurately: Löwe (1941: 3) locates it at Peterskirche on the Obermansberg. W. Müller (1975: 93 n. 14) also adduces evidence that there was once an Irminsul near Hildesheim at the village Irmenseul.

«fursten und irmensuwel der christenheit», "princes and mighty pillars of Christianity"). *Irmin* is used as a reinforcing and magnifying prefix in other words: *irmingot* is "highest god" in *Hildebrandslied* 29, *irminthiod* is "mankind" in the *Heliand* (*passim*). There is, nonetheless, a sense not merely of size, but of (magical) potency in all these uses of *irmin*.

Rudolf, no doubt sensing this quasi-religious aspect to the word *irmin*, defines the Irminsul as «universalis columna», with the further inference "as if supporting everything". The Sámi examples provide analogues to Irminsul as a world-sustaining column, though it is possible that Rudolf's description is his own surmise; thus Palm (1948: 87–8) viewed the Irminsul as a sacrificial altar, and dismissed Rudolf as an unreliable source. However, there seems no reason why, writing a century after the events, there should not have been a reliable tradition for him to have recorded. Moreover, evidence is lacking for a sense "altar" for *sul*. No association with any specific god would be implied for this "mighty pillar".

A further possibility is to see the name of a god in Irminsul, and interpret it as "column of Irmin". Irmin, or an earlier form of the word, appears to have been one of the three sons of "Man" (Mannus), the ancestral founders of the Germanic peoples: this is to be inferred from Tacitus's name of the Herminones as one of their three divisions (*Germania* ch. 2).[5] Irmin thus appears as a demi-god as well as an ancestor; cf. the statement of Jordanes that the Goths worshipped their ancestors and called them Ansis ⟨QV⟩ (cognate with Old Norse *æsir*), which may possibly be related to the word for "beam". The divinity associated with the Sámi pillar and the designation of the Khanty pillar as "iron-pillar father" provide analogues for regarding the world pillar as an animate ancestral figure. It therefore seems possible that the Saxons would have looked upon the Irminsul not merely as the "world pillar", but also as the embodiment of their demi-god ancestor. It is possible – but the matter is far from certain – that Irmin has analogues in other Indo-European traditions, notably the Indian in the form of the Vedic god Aryaman, whose role appears to have been to regulate social order and marriage, but whose name is related to Sanskrit *aryá-*, *árya-*, "trusty, honourable, worthy", a term which the proto-Indo-Europeans also used to designate themselves (a cognate is also found in Irish *Éremón*) (West 2007: 142–3).

Also to be linked with the Irminsul are the Jupiter pillars, erected in the first couple of centuries AD in the Roman-occupied area of Germany. Hertlein (1910: 70) considered these to represent Germanic beliefs in their carvings, but W. Müller (1975, esp. 49) argues that they are in fact Gallic, and are to be regarded as honouring the divinity Tarannis, the god of thunder (cf. the *ǫndvegissúlur*, dedicated to the Norse god of thunder, Þórr, considered below). Whilst a Germanic origin is not now accepted, the Germanic tribes living in this border area between Celts and Germans are likely to have been influenced by these cult objects; indeed, the linguistic

[5] Much (1967: 534) notes that Germanic names in *e-* regularly have an initial *h-* added in Tacitus; it does not represent a Germanic *h*.

boundary may not have marked a firm cultural boundary at all. The Jupiter pillars were all demolished by the fifth century, as a result of Christian reaction against pagan worship; the Irminsul was destroyed three centuries later, but was doubtless of ancient origin.

Hertlein (1910: 75) also links the Irminsul to a feature of ancient German houses, arguing that the architecture of the Germanic house influenced the concept of the Irminsul: just as the house commonly had one central column (called for example *firstsul*, "roof column", in the *Lex Baiuvariorum* x.6–7),[6] so too on a macrocosmic level a similar column would have been imagined as supporting the roof of heaven in the midst of the world seen as a home. A similar idea is implied in the Norse *barnstokkr* ⟨QV, 46⟩; the *ǫndvegissúlur* ⟨QV⟩, "high-seat posts", may also be regarded as a variant of house pillars apparently symbolising the world pillar.

ÞÓRR

The *ǫndvegissúlur*

The *ǫndvegissúlur* were carved wooden posts forming the supports of the high seats; tradition relating to the time of the Icelandic settlement, set out most fully (and several centuries after the events described) in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 4 ⟨34⟩, asserts that the Norsemen took them from their homes when they moved, and, as they neared the land they were to settle, they threw the posts overboard.[7] The new house would be built where the pillars were found. The account in *Eyrbyggja saga*, however, associates the posts with temples, and it is in the new temple at Hofsvágr that Þórólfr sets up his *ǫndvegissúlur*; it is here that the *reginnaglar*, "divine nails", are said to have lain in the pillars.

The account has certainly been influenced by Christian ideas; there is no evidence that pagans built special edifices as places to worship at all, and the *hof* set up, supposedly, by Þórólfr is clearly based on later Christian churches. Thus the mention of raising the pillars in the temple calls to mind the description in *Hungrvaka* ch. 9 (composed shortly after 1200, though preserved only in post-medieval manuscripts) of Bishop Klængr, importing specially felled timber from Norway to adorn the new churches of Iceland:

> Á tveim skipum kómu út stórviðir þeir, er Klængr byskup lét høggva í Nóregi til kirkju þeirar, er hann lét gera í Skálaholti, er at ǫllu var vǫnduð fram yfir hvert hús annat, þeira er á Íslandi váru gør, bæði at viðum ok smiði.

[6] Graff (1834–42, *s.vv.*) glosses *first-* or *furstsul* as "Hauptsäule" (main pillar); *first* is "culmen, summitas montis", the top, ridge, roof, ceiling of a chamber.

[7] For a consideration of the settlement narratives of sagas, and of the cult of Þórr, with particular reference to *Eyrbyggja saga*, see Böldl (2005, esp. 163–76), who surveys (in rather less detail than here) the world pillar and world tree background. Böldl (ibid. 175) concludes that the high-seat pillars are rather more connected with fertility than the world pillar, but the well-being of a district depends on its defence, which is the implicit role of Þórr, so the ideas are not contradictory. Nor is it necessary to suppose that the original religious purpose of the pillars was fully known to the saga author, who uses them to create a flavour of antiquity.

> On two ships came out those great timbers which Bishop Klængr caused to be felled in Norway for the church which he had made in Skálaholt, which in all respects was elaborately worked over and above every other building that was worked on in Iceland, both in carpentry and craftsmanship.

Despite the Christian background to much of the description in *Eyrbyggja saga*, it is not necessary to suppose that *nothing* derives from a tradition going back to pagan times. In particular, and in spite of general similarities such as that just noted, the *ǫndvegissúlur* and the *reginnaglar* appear to have no obvious specific counterpart in Christian churches, so the likelihood is that they do indeed relate to pagan tradition.

It is not clear that the *ǫndvegissúlur* could not be dedicated to gods other than Þórr; *Landnámabók* S197, H164, the only other source concerning *ǫndvegissúlur* which names any god, however, again implies a connection with Þórr:

> En er þeir komu í landsyn, gekk Hreiðarr til siglu ok sagðisk eigi mundu kasta ǫndvegissúlum fyrir borð, kvezk þat þykkja ómerkiligt at gera ráð sitt eptir því, kvezk heldr mundu heita á Þór, at hann vísaði honum til landa.

> But when they came in sight of land, Hreiðarr went to the mast and declared he would not cast the *ǫndvegissúlur* overboard, saying it seemed undistinguished to conduct his affairs according to that, but said that he would rather call upon Þórr to guide him to land.

A more primitive version of the *ǫndvegissúlur* may have survived in folk practice into the nineteenth century in mainland Scandinavia; Olrik (1910: 8; Olrik and Ellekilde 1926–51: I, 200–14) notes examples of wooden idols in various farms, at least one of which was connected to Þórr by name: "Torbjørn" in Fladeland in Vrådal sogn, Telemark, was "large and thick at the bottom, had neither arms nor legs, but a head like a person, along with eyes cast in tin"; "Hernos" at the farm Rikje in Valle is described as a wooden head on a platform; "Fakse" at Rygnestad, Valle, was a round, hollowed, aspen trunk, with just the head carved out, and with brass eyes fixed in; the arms lay tight to the body ⟨FIG. 6⟩.[8] Of at least some of these figures it was reported that they were placed on the high seat (the *ǫndvegi*) on ceremonial occasions such as Yule (Birkeli 1944: 26). Such pillar gods, which functioned as guardian spirits, no doubt lay behind the high-seat pillars of the Norse sources.

The *ǫndvegi* or high seat was the seat of the *húsbóndi*, the head of the household, and it was a focus of respect and almost certainly of religious awe; Birkeli (1944: 19–29) traces later traditions of prayers being offered here, and even offerings of ale, which are likely to be christianisations of earlier customs. The *húsbóndi* was the defender and maintainer of the house and household, representing on a microcosmic level Þórr, the protector of mankind, named «miðgarz véorr», "sanctuary protector of the middle realm", in *Vǫluspá* 53 (see *PE* II, comm. 53/6), a title which appears

[8] These and further examples of such wooden idols, with original descriptions, are given in Birkeli (1944: 79–108).

to identify the world as a sanctuary, in the way that the sacred pillars must have formed a divine focus in the home, making a sanctuary of it.[9]

The *reginnaglar*

The *reginnaglar* are presented as an ancient part of the pagan hall-pillar traditions in *Eyrbyggja saga*, but the saga writer gives no indication that he understands their purpose, other than conceiving them to be in some sense "divine".[10] They may relate to the metal eyes of the idols described by Olrik (if indeed the interpretation of these metal appendages as eyes is not the result of more modern rationalisation), but this does little to explain their original symbolism. One plausible explanation is that the nails correspond to the nail noted by Schefferus as being in the Sámi representation of the world pillar dedicated to the local version of Þórr, and from which fire was struck; this nail in turn is to be seen as a representation of the "nail of the north", the North Star (the mythic origin of fire). It is possible, if this is indeed the significance of the *reginnaglar*, that they were borrowed from Sámi beliefs and rites, though the concept of the North Star as a heavenly nail may have been an areal Baltic feature whose precise origin cannot be determined, but which happens to be better preserved in Finnic sources. If the *reginnaglar* – perhaps one nail per pillar – did symbolise the North Star, the case is strengthened for seeing the *ǫndvegissúlur* (or at least the one on which Þórr was depicted) as standing for the god in the guise of a pillar reaching up to heaven and supporting the cosmos.

Pillars

Þórr himself may be characterised as a world pillar in *Þórsdrápa* 9 (*Skj* B, 141). In st. 7 he had threatened to let his *megin*, "strength", grow up to the roof of the world if the river he was crossing did not ebb; then in st. 9, still

[9] *Véurr* is obscure. De Vries (*AeW*, *s.v.*) compares the ninth-century Swedish Rök stone's «uiauari», "protector of the sanctuary" (i.e. Old Norse **vévǫrr*), and Danish «wigiþonar» (i.e. Old Norse **vé-Þórr*): thus Þórr appears as active defender of the sanctuary. But «miðgarz véorr» equates the world of men with the sanctuary that is being protected; possibly a similar notion lies behind the obscure (and emended, «jaðar» from an impossible «jarðar») «alda vés jaðar», "edge of the sanctuary of men", in *Hávamál* 107 (48*b*), the context of which is the bringing of Óðrœrir, the mead of inspiration, from the realm of the giants by Óðinn (see comm. *ad loc.* in the Evans edition). However, de Vries (*AeW*, *s.v.* "vé 2") lists a second meaning of *vé* as "home", with variant derivation (but based on the same root of proto-Indo-European **wei-*); hence «alda vé» may be "home of men", and «miðgarz véorr» may be "defender of the home of middle-realm". Yet even if *vé* is in origin two separate words, "sanctuary" and "home", it is inconceivable that an interplay between the two meanings would not have been exploited by poets, so that the world of men is conceived as a sanctuary, and Þórr, the defender of mankind against giants, is seen as protector of the home of men by virtue of his role as defender of sanctuaries.

[10] The *reginnaglar* are also mentioned in Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða* 10, *c.* 1032 (*Skj* B, 300–1), where the sense is not wholly clear, and in *þulur* in AM 758 I 4to are mentioned *heiti* for nails, *regingaddi* and *veraldarnagli*, "divine spike" and "world nail" (Simek 2006, *s.v.* "reginnaglar").

crossing the river, he is named *himinsjóli*. *Himin-*, "heaven", here refers to the sky to which his strength may grow (we may dismiss any idea of it evoking a Christian-type divine paradise); the word *sjóli* is conventionally taken as "prince" (for example *AeW, s.v.* "sjóli"), and while this covers the overall purport of the term, it is colourless: a more satisfactory solution to its specific sense was suggested by Davidson (1983: 605), who noted that the form may be interpreted as an *e*-grade ablaut form of the root that appears in the *o*-grade in Gothic *sauls*, "pillar", and also in Old Norse *súl*, "pillar" (for the ablaut, see Noreen 1970: §166):[11] Þórr is thus a pillar stretching up to heaven, a title he earns through his power to grow high and overcome the obstacle of the river, a motif which was not confined to *Þórsdrápa* – compare the verse quoted by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18 in which Þórr addresses the swelling river Vimur: «ef þú vex at, þá vex mér ásmegin», "if you swell up, then my divine power will swell up". Davidson (ibid.) relates Þórr as *himinsjóli* to his role as guardian of the *ǫndvegissúlur*.

The *ǫndvegissúlur* may also be related to another type of cult pillar. De Vries (*AR* §§499–500) notes how the names of founding brothers of Germanic clans may imply a connection with the making of fire: as noted above, in particular Raos and Raptos ⟨QV⟩, may allude in their names to a form of apparatus designed to produce flame. The apparatus effects the defining feature of a home, the hearth, so, on a wider social scale, the human representatives of this apparatus function as establishers of the clan. The implication would be that the *ǫndvegissúlur*, probably as we have seen connected with the generation of fire through the *reginnaglar*, symbolised the establishment of a new home by bringing with them the means of re-establishing the hearth of the home from which they were brought, just as in *Guta saga* ch. 1 Þieluar inaugurates the settlement of Gotland, establishing it as a habitable place by the bringing of fire (which prevented it henceforth bobbing up and down). The patron of the pillars, Þórr, emerges as the divine overseer of the foundation of new settlement, protecting men on their sea passage as he did in myth.[12]

[11] However, it must be acknowledged that Davidson's interpretation of *sjóli* as "pillar" is a minority view. Yet Cleasby and Vigfússon (1957, *s.v.*) note the likelihood of its being related to *súl*, "prop, stay", and also point out that *Þórsdrápa* marks its only early occurrence; the other poetic uses are late medieval and modern, and probably derive ultimately from a reading of the word in *Þórsdrápa*. A general sense of "prince" is clear, but tells us nothing of the original base meaning of the word; de Vries (*AeW, s.v.*) seeks to relate it to *sif*, "relation(ship)", but without any good evidence; the *súl* connection is more plausible. Harva (*BL* 19 n.) cites a thirteenth-century German instance of *irmensuwel*, where *suwel* is cognate with *súl*, used in the sense of "prince".

[12] The correspondence is not, of course, total: whilst the *ǫndvegissúlur* were plural, presumably two, and Þórr is explicitly said to be carved on only one of them, implying that the other was dedicated to someone else, we do not have any indication of a twin brother for Þórr to match the Germanic dynastic founders, who, additionally, were thought of as human heroes rather than divinities. It is not suggested here that the ritual of the *ǫndvegissúlur* is a direct variant realisation of the twin-brother foundation myths, but that it has been infused with at least some of the symbolism of that tradition.

Þórr, the whetstone and Aurvandill

If an *ǫndvegissúl* dedicated to Þórr had a nail at its top, we would expect to find some reflection of this in myth, yet we do not. It is nonetheless striking that we do have a myth of Þórr where he ends up with something in his forehead, but it is a sliver of whetstone, a chip from the weapon of the giant Hrungnir, which shattered in combat with the god, as described by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17 and by Þjóðólfr in *Haustlǫng* 19–20 (*Skj* B, 18), where the whetstone is described as "red", possibly suggesting a link with fire (if it points to more than Þórr's blood). A whetstone cannot simply be regarded as equivalent to a nail, yet the two in fact seem to complement each other: in order to strike fire from a nail, a flint or some hard stone is needed (the hardness of the whetstone being emphasised in the myth); a whetstone is also associated with iron in that it is designed to whet it. In practical terms, it would be necessary to strike iron (or steel, rather) with a stone, rather than the other way round, so the iron would have to be mounted and the stone kept separate; whilst the myth may, for whatever reason (including probably the emphasis of Þórr's gaining of authority through possessing the whetstone),[13] have concentrated on the stone, if it was considered as part of a device to start fire, the stone and steel would have been regarded as two halves of one whole, united at the time of striking fire, at which point the stone would indeed have been flying into Þórr's head (represented by the top of the nail-mounted pillar) as it did in the myth. That Þórr was indeed associated with the striking of fire in the Viking period is indicated by the discovery of fire-striking sets of steel and stone alongside Þórr's hammers (see Koch 1990 and references there).

Snorri's account of the myth of the whetstone continues:

> Þórr fór heim til Þrúðvanga ok stóð heinin í hǫfði honum. Þá kom til vǫlva sú er Gróa hét, kona Aurvandils hins frœkna. Hon gól galdra sína yfir Þór til þess er heinin losnaði. En er Þórr fann þat ok þótti þá ván at braut mundi ná heininni, þá vildi hann launa Gró lækningina ok gera hana fegna, sagði henni þau tíðindi at hann hafði vaðit norðan yfir Élivága ok hafði borit í meis á baki sér Aurvandil norðan ór Jǫtunheimum, ok þat til jartegna at ein tá hans hafði staðit ór meisinum ok var sú frerin svá at Þórr braut af ok kastaði upp á himin ok gerði af stjǫrnu þá er heitir Aurvandilstá. Þórr sagði at eigi mundi langt til at Aurvandill mundi heim, en Gróa varð svá

[13] Mitchell (1985) shows that the whetstone is a symbol of authority in Anglo-Saxon culture, as represented by the finds from the Sutton Hoo burial, and in Old Norse literature – the confrontation using whetstones between Þórarinn and Glúmr in *Víga-Glúms saga*; the whetstone given by Neri to Refr, which Refr then slips into King Gautrekr's hand, and is rewarded in such a way that he eventually becomes jarl, in *Gautreks saga* ch. 9–11; the "reward" of the whetstone from Óðinn to the hay-workers in the myth of the mead of poetry in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G58, resulting in their mutual murders; the contest between Þórr and Hrungnir, where Þórr's hammer outdoes the giant's whetstone, but Þórr ends up with a chip of it in his forehead in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17 (based on *Haustlǫng*, which is quoted); "whetting" signified control over blades, hence the means to securing power, but it also applied to mental sharpness, which was the other prerequisite of successful kingship. Þórr thwarts Hrungnir's bid for authority with a whetstone by using his even more powerful weapon, yet the god continues as a perpetual possessor of (part of) the whetstone, perhaps symbolising (among other things) his own continued authority.

> fegin at hon munði ønga galdra, ok varð heinin eigi lausari ok stendr enn í hǫfði Þór; ok er þat boðit til varnanar at kasta hein of gólf þvert, þvíat þá hrœrisk heinin í hǫfðu Þór.
>
> Þórr went home to Þrúðvangar, and the whetstone was stuck in his head. Then the *vǫlva* called Gróa came up, the wife of Aurvandill the brave. She sang her charms over Þórr until the whetstone became loose. But when Þórr realised that and there seemed a hope of getting the whetstone out, he wanted to pay Gróa for her healing and make her happy, and he told her the tidings that he had waded from the north over the Élivágar and had carried Aurvandill in a basket on his back from Jǫtunheimar, and as a proof one of his toes had stuck out of the basket and was frozen, so Þórr broke it off and threw it up into the sky and made the star out of it which is called Aurvandill's toe. Þórr said it would not be long before Aurvandill was home, but Gróa became so happy that she couldn't remember any charms, and the whetstone came no looser, and still stands in Þórr's head; and there is a warning against throwing a whetstone across a floor, since then the whetstone in Þórr's head moves.

The derivation of *Aurvandill* is not clear, and is, I would argue, obfuscated by repeated reinterpretations of the myth in which he features over many centuries. However, his name clearly relates him to Old English *earendel*, "Morning Star" (Venus), and the first part of the name is more remotely linked to Latin *Aurora*, Sanskrit *Uṣas*, "Dawn". I suggest that a proto-Germanic **Auza-wandalaz* was formed from the word for "dawn" combined with a derivative from the root **wand-*, "go, turn, circle" (for the formation, see Meid 1967: 84–8): hence he was the one that hovered around the sky at dawn (a precise description of the Morning Star). His toe may have been conceived as the Morning Star itself, if this feature of the Norse myth is ancient. The association with Þórr can be explained by reference to the interpretation of Þórr as the world pillar, topped by the North Star, represented here by the whetstone in his forehead; the setting is thus an astral myth. Gróa is bound not to remove the stone – the North Star remains fixed in its position. In *Svipdagsmál*, Gróa, "Growth", is mother to Svipdagr, "Sudden day", whose father was Sólbjartr, "Sun bright"; Sólbjartr is to some extent equivalent to Aurvandill, in that the Morning Star presages the sun.

Yet the myth appears at various stages to have been adapted to accommodate different motifs. **Auz-* probably ceased to be understood as a word for "dawn" fairly early in the history of the Germanic languages; however, this part of the name may well have been reinterpreted in the light of similar words. The myth, as recorded by Snorri, has an obvious connection with waters: while *aurr* does not clearly mean this in recorded Old Norse (though see *AeW*, *s.v.* "aurr 2", for some possible instances), in Old English *ear* could mean "ocean": hence Aurvandill may have been interpreted, still at a fairly early stage, as one who wandered the ocean or cosmic rivers like the Élivágar. Saxo, in *Gesta Danorum* III.6.3–4, records Horwendillus as father of Hamlet, whose name (Amlóði) has been interpreted as referring to the wild and tossing ocean (Krause 1969: 94). The normal meaning of *aurr* in Old Norse is shingle or mud, as deposited by a river, and once a

water connection was established for Aurvandill, it would be a small step to see this meaning as contained in his name; the second element, *vandill*, may have been viewed as a variant of *vǫndull*, "wisp of hay", or a derivative of *vǫndr*, "wand" (cf. Puhvel 1987: 202–4). Reinterpreted along these lines, the drawing of fertile mud, with a wisp of a plant, from the frozen river Élivágar and uniting it with Growth forms a re-realisation of the creation myth recounted in *Vafþrúðnismál* 30–1, where Aurgelmir, "Mud roarer", emerges from the poison drops dripping from the frozen Élivágar (with a stress on growth – «óx»), and whose subsequent engendering of a boy and girl is emphasised (and, conversely, his *absence* of *gýgjar gaman*, "enjoyment of a giantess", by being specially mentioned, parallels the *presence* of this feature in the case of Aurvandill and Gróa). The connection with water could well have been strengthened by probably fortuitous similarlities to other lexemes, yet the parallels between Þórr and Indra, discussed below, indicate that Þórr's struggle against cosmically significant waters was of extreme antiquity.

The line of argument presented above is, of course, tenuous. Yet such fragments and adaptations of tradition at least suggest a foundation in astral myth, and a connection between certain stars and fertility; Aurvandill is brought from the deathly realm of the Élivágar, "Poison waves", to the life-giving presence of his wife, Gróa. Before their conversion, the English worshipped a goddess Eostre, according to Bede, *De temporum ratione* ch. 15, especially in the time around Easter; she can scarcely in origin be anything but "Dawn" (West 2007: 227), which suggests that the year is viewed as a macrocosm of the day, springtide marking the increase in light, and of growth spurred on by it, as Gróa becomes excited at the approach of Aurvandill. It is, however, difficult to proceed far in determining any precise explanation for the myth of Gróa and Þórr; nonetheless, the myth of how the Finnish shaman Väinämöinen fetches the "nail" from the north, paralleling his forceful retrieval of the fertile *sampo*, may be built from similar elements (perhaps a shared Baltic areal heritage), including the forceful securing (and, in mythic terms, the physical acquisition) of the North Star and its fertility-generating properties.

Þórr and the waters

The casting of the *ǫndvegissúlur* overboard is a striking part of the ritual recounted in *Eyrbyggja saga*. In the context, its explanation seems plain: it allows the god to determine the best place for settlement. However, since the pillar as an object of Þórr worship finds an explanation in myths of the god, it is likely that the floating on the waves also reflects a divine event. Þórr is associated with the safe crossing of water in known myths: he wades the rivers Kǫrmt and Ǫrmt and two Kerlaugar to reach the gods' judgement seat in *Grímnismál* 29 ⟨37⟩, and the Élivágar when he carries Aurvandill from Jǫtunheimr (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17); *Þórsdrápa* juxtaposes the crossing of a great river by Þórr with the ascription to him of the title *himinsjóli*, "heaven pillar" (possibly), and Þórr goes on to kill Geirrøðr with

a lump of molten metal: hence there is at least a coincidence of pillar, water and cast fire in this myth (*Skj* B$_1$ 140–3; *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18). The association between fire, seen as something cast down, and water presumably derives from the natural association of lightning and rain; as noted, however, this natural event appears to have been realised in myth – certainly Finnic and probably Norse – by envisaging the deity as the world pillar topped by the North Star, from which fire originated. Þórr also appears to have been appealed to to send following winds (among other pieces of evidence, Adam of Bremen, in *Descriptio insularum aquilonis* ch. 26, says he governs the winds, "ventos [...] gubernat"; Perkins 2001 demonstrates the likelihood that images of Þórr blowing into his beard were intended as talismans to raise a wind), and thus was responsible for ensuring safe arrival, as was the case with the *ǫndvegissúlur* and as is reflected in the myth of Aurvandill.

It is possible that a myth of Þórr underlying the floating of the *ǫndvegissúlur* may have been borrowed[14] and survived in some fashion among the Sámi: a hint of such a myth is found in a note by Paulus Samilin on the Sámi god Hovrengaellis (Horagalles), who matches Þórr in many particulars (Reuterskiöld 1910: 13):

> I deras fabler och sagor talas mycket om denna Horagalles, och säjes, då synda-floden gick öfwer den förra *werlden*, at han då blifwit conserverat på en ruten ståck, på hwilcken han sutit till des flodzens watn förtorckades af jorden.
>
> In their fables and stories much is told of this Horagalles, and it is said, when the Flood went over the former world, that he was saved on a rotten stake, on which he swam till the water of the flood dried from the earth.

This myth bears some resemblance to that of Þórr saving himself from the swelling River Vimur by holding on to a rowan tree (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18); it is possible that both are variant realisations of a more basic mythic motif of Þórr saving himself from drowning with a piece of wood, and directing his course to a new land, which may indeed have been told within some narrative framework no longer extant.

Also to be compared is the apparent origin of man from the Norse world tree, in the form of pieces of driftwood ⟨CREATION OF MAN⟩: on this understanding of the myth, mankind originates materially from the world tree, or pieces of it which have drifted over the waves, and, given life by the gods, the first man and woman people the new world they find themselves in – though such a direct identification between man and tree is nowhere in fact made in the sources. Similarly, Þórr, represented by pillars drifting over the waves, is given a new sort of life in the cult afforded to him in the new land, and appears in the role of peopler of new worlds, signified in the overall settlement rite of the pillars as described in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Thus U. Dronke (1992*a*: 680) writes: "Behind the Þórr cult of the high seat pillar

[14] The maritime setting of the Sámi myth indicates that it is probably not of Sámi origin, and hence may represent a borrowed version of a Norse myth of Þórr.

can be seen the outline of a cosmogonic myth. [...] It would seem that the primordial material of life, in the form, not of a living tree, but of a piece of drift wood, was imagined as coming to a 'shore'. That shore is the 'house' of the earth". She compares a Greek legend of Hermes's wooden statue, washed ashore, where a temple to the god was built. Samilin's tale possibly forms a comparable mythologem, in that the Flood in biblical tradition (to which the Hovrengaellis story is related) resulted in the peopling of the emptied world (as did the myth of Bergelmir as Snorri reports it in *Gylfaginning* ch. 7: he is the salvation of giant-kind). Compare too how the association of Þórr with fire, discussed above, also relates to the motif of the founding of a new home.

Þórr and Indra

Many of the features of myths concerning Þórr which have been discussed above can only remain tentative: the evidence is too meagre to be able to secure any certain interpretation. Nonetheless, some confirmation comes from a different source. Þórr shares so many features with the Indian Indra that there can be little doubt of their origin in one Indo-European prototype.[15] The main motif that Indra does not share with Þórr is his involvement with the securing of the divine *soma*: this corresponds to the mead of poetry, and it is Óðinn who has taken on this role in Norse; nonetheless, even here some comparable elements persist in Norse in the tale of Þórr's retrieval of his hammer from the giants in *Þrymskviða*.

Waters. One of Indra's main acts is the slaying of the serpent Vṛtra and the release of waters from its belly (*Ṛg Veda* I.32). These waters are regarded as beneficial (no doubt reflecting the climate of India), whereas in Norse the waters Þórr encounters are always hostile. Yet myths of Indra and of Þórr are both suffused with associations with waters, which is clearly an archaic feature, stemming originally, no doubt, from the natural association between thunder and rain. The slaying of Vṛtra is a primordial act of creation, and corresponds to the slaying of Ymir (in which Þórr is not involved), but the motif has been developed in Norse into the encounter between Þórr and the ocean-dwelling Miðgarðsormr (once when fishing, and then at *ragnarǫk*).

Saviour. Þórr saves, directly or indirectly, both Þjálfi and Aurvandill from threatening waters, and his own mastery over the menace of waters is seen in the myth of his crossing the Vimur, and his wading the streams to attend the meeting of the gods, and is implicit in the practice of throwing *ǫndvegissúlur* overboard. It is suggested that the drifting of the wood from which mankind's ancestors are made is parallel to the drifting of Þórr's pillars. Indra in *Ṛg Veda* II.15.5 stays a mighty flood and carries over those

[15] The best modern and thorough-going study of the myths of the *Ṛg Veda* is Oberlies (1998). It is, regrettably, not possible to pursue this rich vein of material in its relation to Norse myth in the present study, but it seems essential to point out a few matters concerning Indra to illustrate the antiquity and the Indo-Europeanness of many of the main motifs related to Þórr.

who could not swim, and they attained riches; in IV.30.17 he carries the human founders of various Aryan clans, who fear the flood, safely over; I.32.8 alludes to a myth of Manu, the ancestor of mankind, alone being saved by Indra from the flood.

Pillar. Indra and Soma are said in *Ṛg Veda* VI.72.2 to have propped up heaven with a supporting pillar; in VI.17.7 Indra has spread wide the earth and, high himself, has propped up heaven. In IV.16.5 Indra, the impetuous, has grown immense, and his vastness has filled earth and heaven. In I.52.11–12: Indra's power grows as great as heaven when he slays Vṛtra, and he reaches up as high as the sky. In I.165.8 Indra declares in the first person, as does Þórr in the verse cited by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18 which is directed against the growing power of the River Vimur, how he slays Vṛtra, having grown mighty in his fury.

Dawn. The suggested connection of Þórr with dawn, as echoed in the name Aurvandill, and with astral concerns more widely, has counterparts in the Indra myths. Yet Uṣas, Dawn, is rather a sinister character whom Indra must defeat, rather than help, and she in fact corresponds more to the giantess Gjálp and her menacing stream. Thus in *Ṛg Veda* II.15.6 Indra, with mighty power, has made a stream flow upwards and crushed with a thunderbolt the carriage of Uṣas; in IV.30.8–9 Indra crushes Uṣas, daughter of heaven, when she raises herself in pride, and in IV.30.12 he resists with magic power the overflowing stream spreading its waters over the land. In I.32 and I.51.4, Indra is presented as raising the sun. A further astral myth is alluded to in *Ṛg Veda* X.49.6, which suggests Indra placed part of Vṛtra in the sky as the moon (see Oberlies 1998: 312–13 n. 796); this suggests that Aurvandill is likely to have been a giant opponent of Þórr, who originally was made use of by having part of his body placed in the sky.

Details. Some smaller points of comparison are also found. For example, in *Ṛg Veda* I.32.9, Indra casts a bolt against Vṛtra's mother, as Þórr does against the giantess Gjálp who causes a river to rise against him (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18); Indra is a staff-bearer in *Ṛg Veda* II.15.9, as Þórr is carrier of a special staff, Gríðarvǫlr (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18).

ANOTHER REFERENCE TO THE WORLD PILLAR?

The eleventh-century Hallfreðr háreksblesi's *Knútsdrápa* 7 (*Skj* B, 294) reads:

> Esat und jarðar hǫslu
> orðbrjótr Dǫnum forðar
> moldreks, munka valdi
> mæringr an þú næri

There is no famous man under the hazel-pole of the world nearer the realm of the monks [heaven] than you; the distributor of the word of the soil-ruler [giant > gold > generous prince] protects the Danes.

The implication of «und jarðar hǫslu» remains somewhat unclear, though the general sense of "on earth" is patent. *Hasla* was specifically the pole,

made of hazel, used to mark out the site for a battle (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.*). There is an implication of the great prince wielding his sway in the arena of the whole earth, seen as a battlefield. Yet might not the *hasla* here represent (additionally) the cosmic support, usually conceived as a tree in Norse sources, under which the prince operates? The implication again is the breadth of his fame, stretching throughout everything lying below this mighty support. As *hǫslur* specifically marked out the boundary of a contest, there may be the further implication that the macrocosmic version referred to in the verse is a boundary between worlds: three rulerships, or realms, are referred to – that which the prince rules and *forðar*, "protects, prospers", that of the «munka valdi», "realm of monks", that is heaven, and that controlled by the giants, the underworldly «moldrekr», "soil-ruler"; this could well be a christianisation of earlier notions of the boundary between levels of the cosmos. Admittedly, given the explicit Christianity in the verse, it is impossible to rule out influence from outside traditional Norse beliefs, yet it is notable that Hallfreðr adopts a studied paganism in the rest of the few stanzas of the extant poem, mentioning, for example, Ullr, Hǫðr, Yngvi and Freyr, so a reference to the world tree or pillar of Norse tradition is not unlikely.

A YET MORE OBSCURE REFERENCE

In an ostensibly tenth-century list of kennings (perhaps by Bragi) for a *troll* occur (in the accusative) the designations «vílsinn vǫlu, / vǫrð nafjarðar», apparently "companion of the *vǫlva*'s toil, guardian spirit of the poled earth" (*Skj* B, 172, II B 7): the *nǫf* was a clasp at the corner of a timber house which held the structure in place, and was also used metaphorically for the earth's pole (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.* "nöf 3"); *víl* is glossed "misery" by Cleasby and Vigfússon, but the phrase *við víl ok erfiði* clearly means "with toil and trouble", and bondsmen are *vílmegir*, "sons of toil". As one of the tasks of a *vǫlva* was *útiseta* (*Vǫluspá* 28 ⟨38⟩), which, according to the laws ⟨78⟩ might involve awakening (summoning) a *troll*, we may infer that the *víl* of a *vǫlva* was the toil of *útiseta* (or similar activities), in which her "companion" was the *troll* summoned. This companion is here also characterised as a *vǫrðr*, a guardian, but also a spirit (or inner force) known elsewhere to be involved in *seiðr* (Chapter 17), as well as being the designation of Heimdallr, whose connections with the *axis mundi* are considered below: the *troll* thus appears as a type of spirit summoned from the cosmic *omphalos*, here represented as a pillar (and by inference from the standard meaning of *nǫf* also the structural lynch-pin of the world). The interpretation is admittedly too uncertain to place overmuch weight on (and the verse is of uncertain date), but it is both consistent with what is argued elsewhere in this volume, and goes beyond the *Lexicon poeticum*, which can find no sense in either designation.[16]

[16] Faulkes (1998: 83, verse 300a) includes the stanza under discussion in his edition of *Skáldskaparmál*, and reads «vilsinn» as "willing companion", and «vǫrð náfjarðar», which he translates (1987: 133) "guardian of the corpse-fiord". He offers no explanation of what

Conclusion

The small amount of evidence we have suggests that at least some Germanic peoples had a concept of a world pillar; this is the most reasonable reading of the German *irminsul*. The cosmic pillar – if such it was – was represented in cult, as the *irminsul* appears on various occasions as a cult object. It is likely (but far from certain) that the Saxon pillar was regarded as sacred to a deity Irmin, who was also a founder of the tribe or race. There are some points of similarity with the Norse *ǫndvegissúlur*, though how far the Scandinavian and continental pillars were built upon a common foundation of tradition is difficult to say. The *ǫndvegissúlur* formed part of the structure of a house or temple, though this can only be traced in antiquarian sources of the thirteenth century, even if the notion of the *ǫndvegissúlur* being sacred may go back to pagan times. The pillars were particularly associated with Þórr. There is an emphasis in the pillar imagery on might (note too the military connotation of Hallfreðr's *Knútsdrápa*) – the Irminsul holds up everything, and also secures victory, and Þórr, the warrior god, swells as high as heaven and becomes a "heaven pillar" (in one interpretation of *himinsjóli*) when his *ásmegin*, "divine might", is evoked. The notion of divine origins in the guardian of the pillar (implicit in Irminsul) is perhaps reflected in Norse in the origins of mankind as pieces of driftwood, which parallel the floating *ǫndvegissúlur* sacred to Þórr. Þórr would thus emerge as fulfilling the role of *guardian of mankind* (in an active sense, as distinct from the role of Heimdallr, considered below, who is a guardian more in the fashion of the guardian tree of a homestead) – which is consistent with other characterisations, summed up in his description as «miðgarz véorr», "protector of the middle realm", in *Vǫluspá* 53. The pillars representing Þórr were adorned with "divine nails", and later idols seem to have continued this practice. In view of Sámi and Finnish notions about the origins of fire on the summit of the world mountain or pillar, with a cultic realisation in Sámi tradition, where fire was struck from the top of the representative world pillar, it is likely that the "divine nails" originally represented the North Star (called in Finnic tradition "nail of the north"), and that fire was imagined as originating there; as a thunder god, Þórr would naturally be seen as the originator of fire in the form of heaven-sent lightning. There was also in all probability an ancient Germanic myth of the origin of fire associated with twin pillars, representing the two founder brothers of the

a "corpse-fiord" may be (presumably a grave); we may imagine the image to relate to the River Gjǫll around Hel, or the river (probably again Gjǫll) by which was the "Corpse shore", Nástrǫnd, in *Vǫluspá* 37, but we lack any other indications of a role for trolls involving guarding this river; if a "corpse-fjord" is simply a grave (without any reference to any mythical waterways), then the *troll* may be a *vǫrðr* of it in the way that, in later tradition, a *gardvord* would be a spirit attached to a farm; this would identify the *troll* as, effectively, a spirit of the dead, whom the *vǫlva* is imagined as summoning (which could be inferred to be the meaning of "waking a *troll*", condemned in the laws). Another interpretation would be to see the *nǫf* not as a pole, but as a nave (a hub of a wheel), in which sense it is also recorded: this would link the image rather with Mundilfœri and the notion of the world axle rather than a static pole (I thank John McKinnell for this suggestion).

tribe, which may be reflected in the *ǫndvegissúlur* myths of Þórr and in the myth of Askr and Embla, the founders of the race of mankind.

Seeking an origin for the Norse concepts is complex, and probably impossible. Whilst the world pillar is characteristic of circumpolar mythic beliefs, there are too many connections with continental Germanic traditions to postulate a simple borrowing from circumpolar societies, even if some aspects may have originated there (such as, arguably, the association of the pillar with the North Star, if indeed that is what the *reginnaglar* indicate). The notion of a cosmic pillar may, indeed, be found more widely in Indo-European traditions, such as the Indo-Iranian Dhruva (see below), and indeed the Finnish *sampo* (see below) most likely represents a linguistic, and possibly to some extent a religious, loan from Indo-Iranian at an early date. From the many close parallels with Indra it is also clear that myths relating to Þórr are to a considerable degree part of an Indo-European heritage. Over all, therefore, most of the more obvious links of the Norse pillar point to an Indo-European and Germanic heritage, rather than a circumpolar one.

11. The mountain

A mountain stretching up to heaven is found in many mythologies, Olympus being an obvious example. Probably the earliest indication of the concept is found among the Sumerians (and their successors), though there is some doubt over interpretation.[1] The names of ziggurats demonstrate their cosmic significance: *Etemenanki*, "the house of the foundation of heaven and earth", was the name of the ziggurat at Babylon; *Ehursağkalama*, "house of the mountain of the land [of Sumer]", was the ziggurat at Kiš; *Ekur*, "mountain house", was the principal temple at Nippur, sometimes described as having the role of the "mooring pole" of heaven and earth; beside it was the ziggurat known poetically as *Duranki*, "the bond of heaven and earth". On the top of ziggurats shrines were constructed to leading deities (Black and Green 1992, *s.vv.* "Ekur", "Tower of Babel", "ziggurat").[2]

Eurasian

Harva (*BL* 39) notes that the idea of a mighty mountain in the midst of the earth, rising to heights unreachable by men and affording the gods a dignified dwelling-place, is common in Central Asia; the mountain is regarded (by Turkic peoples) as having grown with the world from a small hillock. The summit of the mountain is at the North Star, as made explicit by the Buryats (*BL* 41). It thus appears that the mountain is an alternative manifestation of the concept of the world pillar; this is confirmed for example by the Khanty belief that the mountain is "seven-storeyed" (cf. the Khanty text ⟨1⟩, where the representation of the world pillar is seven-notched).

The world tree is often believed to grow on the world mountain, for example the Tatar seven-branched white birch on the iron hill in the middle of the world (*BL* 52). In Central Asian myth two mountains rose from the primeval waters, one of which had temples on it, the dwellings of the gods, and at its foot grew the Zambu tree, its crown stretching over the mountain (*BL* 62). In Persian myth the *haoma* tree grew on the central mountain (the origin of all other mountains) Harā Bərəzaitī, "High watchpost" (*BL* 64); cf. also the Mordvin texts ⟨12–14⟩, where the tree grows on a hill.

[1] Lambert (1975: 61) notes that there is no firm evidence that the Babylonian universe was conceived as a kind of ziggurat reaching up to a peak, but he concedes that there are allusions to the concept of a cosmic mountain in literary and poetic contexts, which speak of a mountain in the east from which the sun-god rises every morning; this implies a poetic concept of a mountain on the edge of the world, rather than at its centre.

[2] Dr Black distinguishes, however, between the concepts of the "mooring pole", which may be compared with the world pillar, and the primordial cosmic mound, not specifically to be identified as a central world mountain forming the home of the gods (private communication).

In Finnish myth, fire originated on the summit of the world mountain, as noted above. The "copper mountain" functioned as a place of origins and demises generally: it was thither that illnesses would be banished, for example – thus in one charm (*SKVR* VII$_4$ 28, Nurmes, 1891), an infection is ordered «Mee vuoreen vaskiseen; / Rautaseen kallioon», "Go to the copper mountain, to the iron hill", back to its father and mother (i.e. its place of origin), and make them weep instead! Siikala (2002: 119, 151, 186) demonstrates that this "mountain of pains" is a variant of the cosmic mountain, a cosmically focal place acting as a sort of interchange between worlds; it has various designations, such as the "stony hill of Pohjola", "snow mountain", "bronze mountain".

Norse

Norse sources show almost no parallel to any of the ideas of the world mountain found in Eurasian traditions. A few occurrences of mountains will illustrate their connotations in Scandinavia and the Germanic area.

It appears that one *irminsul* of the Saxons was situated on a hill, Eresburg; what, if any, symbolic value this siting suggested cannot be ascertained.

Mountain-tops were thought of as divine dwelling-places in Norse tradition: Ælfric, in "De falsis diis" (line 138), reports that heathens worshipped Mercury in high places, a god he immediately identifies with the "Danish" Óðon; the same information is echoed in Wulfstan's "De falsis dies" (lines 69–70).[3] In England, the hill name Roseberry Topping in North Yorkshire derives from Old Norse, with a meaning "Óðinn's mountain" (Watts 2004, *s.v.* "Roseberry Topping"). The many instances of the name *Helgafell*, "Holy mountain", also probably indicate a similar notion of mountains being dedicated to deities.

In Norse, some names associate the sky with mountains: *Himinbjǫrg*, "Heaven mountains", is the dwelling place of the god Heimdallr; in one of his aspects Heimdallr appears to represent the world tree (considered below), which may have been viewed as growing on a (world) mountain. The concept of "heaven mountains" is not in itself, however, a very particularised notion, and it is one that may be found realised in comparable names elsewhere, such as Ben Nevis, "Heaven mountain", the highest mountain in Scotland. A general notion of high mountains, without any particular mythic connotation, is implied in the name Himinfjǫll, found in *Ynglingatal* 26/1–4 (*Skj* B$_1$ 11), which tells of the death (by a rocky avalanche) of King Ǫnundr "under Heaven Mountains".[4] Similarly, in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 1, the Heaven Mountains simply lend majesty to the birth of the hero:

[3] See the comm. *ad loc.* in the editions of Ælfric and Wulfstan.

[4] *Himinn* may indeed have suggested simply "high ground" in place names, which (despite Bede's Christian interpretation) is likely to have been the case in the English "Heavenfield", the site of Oswald's victory in Northumbria in the seventh century (Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* III.2), which is an extensive raised piece of open land.

Ár var alda	It was in ancient days
þat er arar gullo,	as the eagles cried
hnigo heilǫg vǫtn	and the holy waters fell
af himinfiǫllom;	from heaven mountains
þá hafði Helga	that Borghildr bore
inn hugomstóra	great-hearted
Borghildr borit	Helgi
í Brálundi.	in Gleaming grove.

Another myth involving a mountain is that of the acquisition of the mead of poetry. Whilst the mountain may be said to possess cosmic significance, however, the stress is on the underworld depths of the mountain, rather than its reaching up to the heavens. I consider this myth in Chapter 16.

Conclusion

The only hint of a world mountain in Norse is found in the name of Heimdallr's dwelling, Himinbjǫrg, and even here, it is impossible to be certain that anything more than a divine dwelling situated on majestic heights was intended. The connotations of mountains elsewhere are mostly mundane.

12. The mill

One of the objects central to Finnish myth was the *sampo*. Just what the *sampo* was had already been forgotten by the time the traditional poems were committed to writing, but it appears as a mill-like object, grinding out welfare for its possessors. Among Norse sources, the quern-mill Grotti, grinding out wealth for King Fróði, forms the focus of the poem *Grotta-sǫngr*. In this chapter I consider the Finnish and Norse traditions, and investigate whether the image of a cosmic mill may be discerned in Norse tradition.

Finnish

The Finnish *sampo* is never described in detail in the traditional poems, nor is its precise function determined; as a mystical component of various tales, the way it was perceived doubtless changed over the generations from one poet to another, so, as Anttonen (2000: 166) points out forcefully, the meaning of the image cannot be reduced to a single idea, nor can the origin of the symbol determine its meaning within the individual contexts in which it appears. My purpose here, however, is not to investigate the meaning of the *sampo* in any particular poem, but, for the sake of comparative mythology, to try to uncover something of its origin and the significance it may have had in far earlier times.

Many versions of the Finnish/Karelian *sampo* poems have been recorded (four are given in *FFPE* nos. 12–15; *SKVR* I_1 54, VII_5 10, VII_1 679, I_1 441; excerpts of one of the finest *sampo* poems are given in ⟨5⟩). Kuusi (1949, esp. 350–2) has carried out a thorough analysis of the poem's variants:[1] he argues that by the twelfth century three poems of different age (but going back at least to around AD 800) — "Maailman synty", "Sammon taonta" and "Sammon ryöstö" ("The Creation of the World", "The Forging of the *Sampo*" and "The Theft of the *Sampo*") — had become established in a fixed sequence. This group of poems, forming the so-called "*sampo* epos", had three main redactions in different geographical areas (Häme, Ostrobothnia, Karelia).[2] In summary, the three main episodes of the *sampo* epos were:

[1] See also, in English, Kuusi (1994*b*), which discusses some of the geographical distribution of themes in the *sampo* poems, and assesses the *sampo* as a mythic object, supporting Harva's interpretations, discussed below.

[2] Kuusi's analysis has not been seriously challenged since it was produced, which in part is a reflection of the care he took in formulating it. Taken as a whole, his conclusions probably do not call for great revision. Yet some elements may be ripe for reconsideration. Kuusi (1949: 326–7, 331) mentions factors such as the hostile relations and cultural disparity between Karelia and Finland from the twelfth century, and culminating in the treaty between Sweden and Russia of 1323, as affecting, by isolation, the forms the variants took in different areas, which is a reasonable conclusion, but may not be a necessary one. Kuusi

The Creation of the World.[3] Väinämöinen, the primordial sage, is shot by an enemy and drifts wounded for several years at sea where he performs various acts of creation.

The Forging of the Sampo.[4] Finally, he is washed ashore at Pohjola, whose mistress undertakes to return him to his own people on condition that he forges[5] her a *sampo* (which is not defined). He promises that his fellow hero Ilmarinen will do this and is allowed to return home. Ilmarinen agrees to forge the *sampo*, in return for which he is told he will receive the daughter of the mistress of Pohjola. Thus the *sampo* is made and provides the inhabitants of Pohjola with great wealth.[6]

The Theft of the Sampo. Jealous of this, Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen sail to Pohjola and steal the *sampo*. They are pursued and a furious battle takes place at sea, during which the mistress of Pohjola changes into a *vaakalintu*,

(for example ibid. 348–50) also takes account of the antiquity of elements in the poems – thus, for example, the "mythic" nature of the *sampo* is taken as an indication of an earlier date than poems such as those about the death of St Henry (which took place in the twelfth century, marking a likely date for the original composition of such poems); again, while this is reasonable, it nonetheless might be questioned. Stylistic judgements, for example that adventure stories are likely to have originated in the Viking period, are particularly open to question. The presence of elements that hark back to a different culture, and become obscure in the course of transmission by bards that no longer understand, in terms of the original intention, what they are singing of, is, I would argue, more promising as a criterion of antiquity; this certainly applies to the *sampo*, which is clearly an ancient word which the poets did not really understand, yet knew was important. However, antiquity is relative – a century can be enough to obfuscate the meaning of a cultural artefact; yet in the case of the *sampo* we are probably dealing with a word borrowed in very ancient times, millennia ago in fact, from Indo-Iranian (see below), which can be related to cosmological concepts antedating Christianity and widespread in northern Eurasia.

[3] "The Creation of the World" was also sung as a separate poem: motifs vary in the different redactions (*FFPE* nos. 2–5; *SKVR* IV_2 1821, V_1 541, VII_1 18, I_1 305). *a.* The common motif is that of the bird (duck, swallow, eagle) which lays its eggs, either on a hummock (Väinämöinen is not present in many versions of the myth), or on Väinämöinen's knee; the eggs are broken (for example by a storm) and from them are formed parts of the world (for example the sun from the yolk, the firmament from the upper half of shell, the earth from the lower). *b.* Another motif often found is that of the bird diving down to the sea-bottom to bring up mud, from which the world is formed (see Schier 1963 on this common Siberian mythologem, and its analogues in Norse). This motif can be combined with *a*; for example, in *FFPE* no. 2 the bird dives down to find pieces of the shattered eggs, which are used to create the world. *c.* Only in some versions does Väinämöinen appear; he is presented floating on the ocean, often as a result of shooting by a *lappalainen* (an inhabitant of the wild, possibly a Sámi; the motif, not necessarily in this poetic context, may originally have related to the coming of death into the world: Kuusi 1963: 228), and his function (other than to offer his knee as a nesting place for the bird) is to fashion the sea-bottom (i.e. possibly a variant of *b*). In surviving versions of the *sampo* epos Väinämöinen's creative activities are not usually stressed: for example, in *FFPE* no. 12 ⟨5⟩ (one of the fullest versions) the only remaining sign of creative tasks is Väinämöinen's successful prayer to the god Ukko to raise lumps of black slime on the waters, which reflects the motif of *b*.

[4] In the Karelian redaction of the cycle "The Forging of the Sampo" is replaced by a version of *Kosinta*, "The Courtship" (*FFPE* nos. 16, 17; *SKVR* I_1 492, VII_1 435), in which Väinämöinen woos the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola, and is set as his task the forging of the *sampo*.

[5] The *sampo* is not clearly of metal, but the Finnish word *takoa*, used for the fashioning of the *sampo*, is usually translated as "forge"; its maker, Ilmarinen, is chiefly a metal-smith in Finnish mythology. In the folk poems vaguer phrases are often used to describe the forging, such as *saada sampo valmihiksi*, "to get the *sampo* ready".

[6] In some versions explicitly by grinding (*jauhaa*), for example *FFPE* no. 12; *SKVR* I_1 54, lines 165–70.

"griffon", the *sampo* is smashed and the pieces are lost in the sea. These and some fragments that are washed ashore bring fertility to the land and sea.

The cycle was sung at the spring sowing (though we have only one attestation of this fact).[7] The epos is believed to have been sung in a rigid form for as long as it retained this ritual sowing function, but outside this context it began to fragment and diversify, with other poems, such as *Kultamorsian*, "The Golden Bride" (*FFPE* nos. 21, 22; *SKVR* I_1 529, III_3 4033), being incorporated into the epos.

In the surviving poems, the *sampo* is a guarantor of well-being for the community which holds it; generally it most resembles a mill, and is called a mill in some variants, for example *SKVR* I_1 34:

Laai sampu valmeheksi,	Get a *sampo* ready,
Laai laitah jauhomylly,	a grain mill on one side,
Toisell' laiall' suolamylly,	a salt mill on another side,
Kolmanelle rahamylly	and a money mill on a third.

The loss or shattering of the *sampo* acts as an explanation of why there is no longer the unending fecundity which this artefact once produced.

The word *sampo* has no obvious meaning in modern Finnish. The mill-like aspects of the object may have been strengthened by a perceived (but probably false) connection with *sammakko*, the base of a mill (Haavio 1967: 197–200 proposed, indeed, that *sampo* was "an object fitted with a *sampa*", a *sampa* being, he suggested, the same as *sammakko*; the argument does not bear close scrutiny, but highlights how, in popular imagination, a connection with mills may have arisen or been strengthened through chance lexical similarities). The probable meaning of *sampa*, from which *sampo* derives, is "pillar", as Setälä (1932: 479) and Harva (1943: 29; 1944; 1948: 47) argue; this would place the Finns in the well-documented class of peoples who realised the support of the world under this image (see *BL* 9–33).[8] The word *sampa* was almost certainly borrowed from proto-Indo-Iranian **stambʰas*, "pillar" (Koivulehto 1999*b*: 230, 232); it is one of several words borrowed into Finno-Ugric languages from Indo-Iranian,[9] a significant number of

[7] Jyrkiñi Iivana explained (*SKVR* I_1 88b): «Kevätkylvöjä tehtäessä laulettiin ensin kylvösanat ja sitten laulu Sammon taonnasta ja ryöstöstä, sekä Pohjolan emännän takaa-ajosta», "when the spring sowing was done, first the 'sowing words' were sung and then the song of the forging and theft of the *sampo*, and of the driving back of the mistress of Pohjola"; the "sowing words" are recorded in *SKVR* I_4 1743.

[8] *Sampa* is actually recorded occasionally in the sense "pillar": Lönnrot (1958, *s.v.* "sampa") notes a saying «eihän tuo toki eläne maasammaksi» which he glosses as «icke må denne lefva till jordstolpe, till Methusalems ålder», "he cannot live to [be a] world pillar, to Methusalem's age"; thus *maasampa* is used in the sense "world pillar". Turunen (1979, *s.v.* "sampo") notes that *sammas*, a derivative of *sampa*, is used in compounds such as *rajasammas* in the sense "(border) stone" in Finnish, but in Vote and Estonian the same word means "pillar".

[9] The prehistory of the Indo-Iranian languages is, naturally, speculative, but it is clear that they were spoken over a vast area to the north of where they now occur (and indeed there is historical evidence for this, from later times than that of the postulated loans into Finno-Ugric), an area which probably stretched across the Russian steppe and beyond,

which relate to religious concepts, such as *taivas*, "heaven". It thus becomes likely that the *sampo* was from the beginning (probably a good four millennia ago) a mythic object, and specifically a version of the world pillar; it would thus be appropriate to compare it with the Indian and Iranian concepts of the world axis, such as the story related in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* IV.8, where Dhruva, "Fixed", who is to be transformed into the North Star, is told that he will stand immobile "like the mill-post round which the oxen go to thresh the corn" (West 2007: 352). The oxen here indicate a connection with well-being and fecundity, but also represent constellations circling the North Star; fecundity, world-pillar, North Star and mill-like nature come together here as they do in the *sampo,* which suggests these aspects may go back to the time of contacts between the Finnic and Iranian peoples. It is not necessarily the case, however, that the *sampo* should be viewed as simply an integrated loan from Indo-Iranian; the presence of the world pillar as a concept in northern Eurasia suggests its local presence for a considerable time, and amongst the possibilities is that the ancestors of the Finns accommodated indigenous beliefs to whatever was implied by Indo-Iranian **stamb^has.*

Harva (1943: 42) points to sayings such as «seisoo kun taivaan pönkkä», "he stands like the pillar of heaven" (from Värmland) to show that the world pillar was regarded as unmoving. Whilst the *sampo* itself may have been fixed, however, a mill-like motion is not precluded: with the *sampo* is closely associated the *kirjokansi*, "speckled lid"; *kansi*, "lid", is used to mean "sky" in folk poetry, and the *kirjokansi* or *taivaankansi*, "heaven lid", most likely stands for the sky, speckled with stars and the other heavenly bodies (*BL* 11; Harva 1943: 52); Harva (1943: 97) notes some evidence that the *sampo* was thought of as having a nail in its head, around which the heavens turned, the rotation being called *sammasjauho*, "pillar/*sampo* grinding". The notion of a productive milling motion may be secondary, however: the Indian world pillar (such as the *skambha* found in *Atharva-Veda* X.7 and 8) was not a mill-like object, though the notion of cosmic churning, of the primordial milk ocean, formed a prominent Indian myth,[10] and could conceivably have been passed on in some form in the proto-Indo-Iranian period to the ancestral Finns. As the world pillar, the proper place for the *sampo* is clearly Pohjola, "Northland": the Finns once called the North Star *pohjan naula*, "nail of the north" (*BL* 10). The *sampo* pillar would be fixed to the firmament, the *kirjokansi*, at this astral nail. The reason for the

where they would have been in contact with Finno-Ugric speakers (Mallory 1991: 48–56, 149; cf. Mallory 2001). It is also worth bearing in mind that the presence of Indo-Iranian speakers in Iran and India does not necessarily indicate ancient invasions: the languages may have been used as *linguae francae* in trade with areas further north and been adopted more widely later.

[10] The myth is recounted in the *Mahābhārata* (see the translation of van Buitenen 1973); I have consulted O'Flaherty's translation (1975: 274–80). She gives the passages translated as being from the *Mahābhārata* I.15/5–13; I.16/1–40; I.17/1–30; 7 lines after I.61/35; 3 lines after I.61/32; 3 lines after I.16/36; 3 lines after I.16/40; 3 lines after I.17/7. For a study of this myth alongside Scandinavian analogues (but not involving consideration of any cosmic-mill aspects of the Scandinavian myths) see Dumézil (1924, esp. ch. 2–3).

sampo's presence in Pohjola in the folk poems is, as Setälä (1932: 535) suggests, that Pohjola was specifically the "land at the North Star", where the world pillar is nailed to the firmament. As the centre of cosmic rotation, it would be from Pohjola that fertility spread; the jolting of the *sampo* from its home resulted in the uneasy progression of the seasons along with a loss of unending fertility.

The fertility aspects are clearly fundamental to the *sampo*. The *sampo* songs were originally sung as accompaniments to the ploughing and sowing of the land. The myth of the theft and shattering of the *sampo* explained why the fertility of the land was not boundless. As Kuusi (1968) notes, the actual shattering of the *sampo* may be influenced, within a fluid poetic tradition where motifs could readily be borrowed or influence others, by the shattering of the egg in the myth of creation (recounted in *FFPE* nos. 2–5); the earlier conception may have been of a broken, but not shattered, world pillar (perhaps indicated in the fact that it leans, as the North Star is not seen directly overhead): clearly there is still the seasonal return of fertility, but it is not as great as it may be imagined to have been originally, when the *sampo* was in place. The concept is one of a lost "golden age".

If the notion of the firmament turning about the fixed pillar and producing well-being (harvests and produce) is indeed ancient, then the *sampo* would readily have been thought of as a type of mill (once mills appeared amongst the ancestors of the Finns), particularly when the nomenclature of mills included words which could be viewed as related to *sampo*. In this understanding of the image, the world pillar and the firmament nailed to it act as an integral unit; whilst this idea is not explicit in any Finnish traditional poetry (Kettunen 1940–1: 38–9),[11] it may be surmised to have been the original mechanism, on the basis both of the internal evidence presented here, and of pillars with coverings representing the heavens, and hence equivalent to the *kirjokansi*, amongst other peoples (*BL* 15).

Norse

THE WEALTH MILL

Grotti in *Grottasǫngr* and Snorri's *Edda*

The myth of the mill Grotti is told by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 43 and in the poem *Grottasǫngr*,[12] which is quoted in two manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda* (and the opening stanza in a third). The elements of the myth may be summarised thus:

> *The mill of wealth.* King Fróði of Denmark is renowned for his peace and his wealth (Snorri). He buys two strong slave girls Fenja and Menja (*Grottasǫngr*) from Sweden (Snorri). The quernstones that are to form Grotti are found in

[11] Kettunen dismisses the evidence of Kaisa Vilhunen, a "forest Finn" (a descendant of the seventeenth-century Finnish settlers of Värmland), as her talk of the sky "grinding" was, he believes, prompted by her questioner.

[12] For a presentation and more detailed discussion of the poem see my edition (2008).

Denmark and are given to Fróði by a man with a giant's name (Hengikjǫptr) (Snorri). In *Grottasǫngr* 10–12 Fenja and Menja claim to have discovered these millstones long ago. They caused earthquakes and avalanches when they dislodged the stones from the earth. Grotti will produce whatever the grinder asks. No one but Fenja and Menja is strong enough to turn it. Fróði makes the giantesses grind gold, peace and prosperity. He grants them almost no rest. They sing *Grottasǫngr* as they work. Furious at Fróði's cruelty to them they grind out an army, and a sea-king Mýsingr comes and slays Fróði (Snorri); in *Grottasǫngr* there is merely a foretelling of Fróði's overthrow. The quern breaks, and the milling must stop (*Grottasǫngr*). The end of Fróði's reign is marked by thunderings and lightnings, earthquakes, the disappearance of the sun, and the upsetting of prognostications (*Skjǫldunga saga* only, pp. 39–40). Thus Fróði's peace comes to an end.

The salt mill. Mýsingr takes Grotti, Fenja and Menja. He bids them grind salt. They grind until the excess of salt sinks the ship. This causes the sea's saltiness.

The whirlpool mill. There is now a whirlpool where the sea falls into the eye of the quern.[13]

Of the three motifs, the poem contains only the first; the salt mill and the whirlpool mill may be later additions of common folk tales to the myth. Yet the poem focuses on the demise of Fróði after the cracking of the stone, and may have excluded these elements deliberately.

A *lausavísa* (*Skj* B, 201) attributed to Snæbjǫrn, probably from the late tenth century, describes a terrifying whirlpool which is made vivid by using the metaphor of a sunken mill, identified by metonymy with the mythical Grotti; clearly this relates to the last part of the legend recounted by Snorri, which is not present in *Grottasǫngr*. Snæbjǫrn's imagery may also relate to traditions of the Mælström off the coast of northern Norway, a huge whirlpool which has been looked upon metaphorically as a submarine mill. I present Snæbjǫrn's verse, and consider the details of its interpretation, in ⟨35⟩, and texts relating to the Mælström in ⟨36⟩.

Three mythological elements are present within the poem *Grottasǫngr*: the peace of Fróði and its demise, the giantesses, and the mill Grotti. I discuss these elements in detail in Tolley (2008). In short, the peace of Fróði may be described as a legendary version of the golden age, such as the gods are said to have enjoyed at the beginning of the world in *Vǫluspá* 8, when «var þeim vettergis / vant ór gulli», "there was no lack of gold for them"; this peace was shattered, it would seem, by the appearance of three giantesses. In a similar way, Fróði's golden reign is overturned when he mistreats the giantesses he has in thrall, and they turn against him, shattering the mill which was the provider of his wealth. The poem is essentially in the legendary-heroic tradition rather than the mythic, and the mythic element derives mainly from allusion to themes such as the golden age.

Grotti shares many characteristics of the folktale wonder-working mill, but differs in that it is worked by slaves rather than simply milling on its

[13] According to manuscript AM 748 I 4to (see *SnE* 259) this is in the Pentland Firth (cf. how Snæbjǫrn places his whirlpool "out on the rim of the world": ⟨35⟩). Comparable are traditions about the Mælström, which was regarded as a "grinder of ships", if not a mill ⟨36⟩.

own. There is nothing about Grotti which would justify elevating it to the status of a cosmic mill, other than the allusive connection, through Fróði, to a golden age of the gods (which, when described directly as in *Vǫluspá*, does not involve anything like a mill – though the gods are said to meet on *Iðavǫllr* ⟨QV⟩, which may mean "Eddying plain", the notion being that the turning is productive). In this respect it differs, if the arguments presented about the original identity of the *sampo* are accepted, from the Finnish myths considered in this section.

The *sampo* and Grotti

It is clear that the *sampo* once formed an integral part of traditional Finnish cosmology, whereas the mill in Norse occupies a peripheral place in myth. Kuusi (1963: 223–5; summarised in English in *FFPE*, pp. 527–8), following Lid (1949), argues that some episodes of the *sampo* cycle have been influenced by Norse tales, citing in particular *Bósa saga*. It is likely, of course, that folktale elements would occur as wandering motifs within the Nordic region and be adopted by poets or saga composers regardless of their linguistic background, but I have argued against the specific sort of relationship Kuusi proposes (Tolley 1995, where, however, I did not make clear that Kuusi derived his ideas from Lid). To summarise my conclusions: a close comparison of motifs between *Bósa saga* and the *sampo* cycle reveals many of the motifs to bear only an approximate resemblance. Moreover, the two texts are radically different in type: the events of *Bósa saga* form a startling narrative full of interlace with no more than arbitrary motivation for many of the exploits, the objects of which lack any significance comparable to that of the *sampo*, whereas the Finnish tale is coherent and well-constructed, and functions within a recognised mythic framework, with the *sampo* being, in origin, a central feature of the Finnish cosmology; *Bósa saga* in contrast can by no means be seen as reflecting any central aspect of Norse religion or mythology. An example is the *vaakalintu*, which the mistress of Pohjola transforms herself into, which may be a fictionalised form of shamanic helping spirit (Oinas 1985: 151; Toivonen 1944: 127); this corresponds in the *Bósa saga* to grotesque fairy-tale monsters (the *gammr* and the dragon), with no part in Norse religious life. The likelihood of the Finnish tale having borrowed from *Bósa saga* is affected by how old the *sampo* poems in question are believed to be, but for this specific influence to be accepted it would be necessary to suppose the poems did not originate, in their recorded forms, before the fourteenth to fifteenth century, which investigation of the *sampo* poem variants has shown to be too late a date (see above).

MUNDILFŒRI

Vafþrúðnismál 23 is difficult to interpret.[14] We are presented here with the image of the turning heavens, and possibly a "handle", a variant of the

[14] The interpretation given here is based on that of Dronke (*PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 5/1–4).

world pillar. The fruitful turning of the heavens renders the image mill-like, though there is no actual grinding here:

Mundilfœri heitir,	He is called Mundilfœri,
hann er Mána faðir	the father of Moon
ok svá Sólar it sama;	and also of Sun;
himin hverfa	they are to turn heaven
þau skolo hverian dag	every day
ǫldom at ártali.	for the reckoning of seasons for men.

The obscure name *Mundilfœri* occurs only here and in Snorri's *Edda* (*Gylfaginning* ch. 11, based on this stanza). The majority reading of the manuscripts is *-fœri*. Related to *fœra*, "move, carry", *-fœri* could signify "mover, carrier", or "device, instrument, equipment designed for a special purpose" (see Fritzner 1886–1972, *s.v.* "fœri n. §3"); or as a weak adjective, "effective, capable". *Mundil-* may be related to *mund*, "hand", or, especially in view of the conclusion of the stanza, to *mund*, "time"; there may even be a play on both senses, accounting for the uniqueness of the name. Cleasby and Vigfússon (1957, *s.v.* "Mundilföri") suggest that the name is "akin to *möndull* [mill-handle], referring to the veering round or revolution of the heavens".

The movement of Sun and Moon is described as *hverfa*: this can scarcely mean "traverse", since the use of *hverfa* without a preposition in this sense would be unparalleled (cf., with a preposition, *Grímnismál* 27/8: «þær hverfa um hodd goða», "they [the rivers] turn about the hoard (? habitation) of the gods"); the meaning must be transitive, "turn".

The regulation of time through a turning motion in order to produce welfare (*ár*) is paralleled in *Vǫluspá* 6–8, where the gods meet on Iðavǫllr, "Eddy field", and apportion the times of day before enjoying their riches (on this interpretation of Iðavǫllr, see *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 7/2; the meaning of *iða-* is, however, a matter of debate: other readings are "eternal" or "repeated").

If Cleasby and Vigfússon are right, the name *Mundilfœri* has been designed to signify the mill-like device that turns the heavens by means of a "handle". Sun and Moon are, according to this genealogical fiction, his children who operate the device for him or by means of him. This turning of the cosmos, pictured as a hand-mill with handle, is the diurnal and yearly movement of the heavens.

In the Indian myth of the Milk Sea, the sun and moon arise as a result of the churning of the milk ocean, just as in Norse they are the children of the turner of the cosmos.

A very similar image to that suggested for the Mundilfœri myth occurs in a Mordvin text ⟨14⟩. Here, the sun, moon and stars are said to be on the handle of a ladle which rests in a honey drink at the foot of the world tree; as the sun wends across the sky, the handle of the ladle turns likewise. The ladle clearly represents the firmament, turning with the sun. No one seems to be responsible for the turning here, a feature shared with the Finnish *sampo*, but differing from the Norse myths of Mundilfœri and of Grotti.

CONCLUSION

We do not find in Norse sources any clear image of the world support as the pivot of the cosmic mill, as arguably is the case in Finnish. If the myth of Mundilfœri is correctly interpreted as the turning of the sky by a handle-like device, then this would represent an adaptation of the cosmic mill, in this case to express a concept of time. The "handle" could be a version of the world support. The turning of the world like a mill, the proposed interpretation of the myth of Mundilfœri, is comparable with the turning of the heavens about the *sampo* (if such an interpretation of the Finnish myth is accepted). This feature is not apparent in the other Norse myths.

Grotti is supernaturally productive, but this productivity is not related by the sources to acts of cosmic creation. Grotti produces both beneficent objects (gold) and maleficent (an army) – here may be seen the development of a concept of a "wheel of fortune" out of the basic idea of the fertile mill; the Finnish *sampo* does not churn out maleficent produce. The myth of Mundilfœri is not concerned with creation, but with the determining of time, the seasons.[15] The concept of a golden age is more stressed in the myth of Grotti than in the Finnish *sampo* poems. The time of earthly paradise under Fróði also mirrors the early time of the gods recounted in *Vǫluspá*.[16] Grotti is stolen, like the *sampo* and the *soma*; however, in Norse the mill-stone is not desired — its theft is presented as incidental to a viking attack, whereas in Finnish the possession of the *sampo* is the object of the attack. Grotti breaks (but, in one variant, causes the sea's saltiness); the *sampo* shatters (but its fragments endow earth and sea with fertility). According to Snorri, Grotti ends up in the sea, like the *sampo*; however, this is connected with the folk-tale motif of "why the sea is salt" (ATU 565), not with fertility as in the Finnish myth. The myth of Mundilfœri shows no connection with fertile waters.

It is clear that the cosmic mill was not, in extant Norse sources, a widely developed mythologem. Grotti was certainly a wonder mill, but had few cosmic aspects to it. The myth of Mundilfœri *may* have related to what may be termed milling, but its interpretation is so uncertain that caution is needed before asserting that the notion of cosmic milling was ever an image which held wide sway within Norse myth.

[15] *Ártal*: *ár* implies primarily time, but can also mean "abundance".

[16] In *Vǫluspá* 7 the gods forged wealth in plenty, and were happy (cf. Fróði creating gold with Grotti); three mighty giantesses arrive (cf. Fenja and Menja); it seems that the maidens deprive the gods of the game of chequers they have been playing, possibly by overturning it, and the pieces are lost (they turn up again in the new world in *Vǫluspá* 58), signifying the loss of the prosperity that relied on gold (cf. the wrecking of Grotti by Fenja and Menja, and the loss of Grotti in the sea, signalling the end of Fróði's golden age). See van Hamel (1934*a*: 220–1), whose interpretation I follow, on the "golden age" of the gods in *Vǫluspá*, and *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 8).

13. The tree

The symbolism of the tree is immense. Eliade (1996: 266–7) lists the following main categories:

1. There is a pattern of stone–tree–altar which constitutes a microcosm of the world in most ancient religions (Australia, China, Indo-China, India, Phoenicia, the Aegean).
2. The tree is an image of the cosmos (India, Mesopotamia).
3. The tree is a site of cosmic theophany (India, Mesopotamia, the Aegean).
4. The tree is a symbol of life, inexhaustible fertility, absolute reality, connected with the symbolism of water identified as the fount of immortality.
5. The tree is the centre of the world and a supporting prop of the universe (Altaians, Scandinavians).
6. Mystical bonds exist between the tree and man (it gives birth to men, is a repository of the souls of ancestors, is used in wedding and initiation rites).
7. The tree is a symbol of the resurrection of vegetation, and of spring (as used in May processions).

Whilst the main point of consideration here is 5, the tree as a cosmic support, all the above imageries typically overlap, and it is impossible to leave aside these other aspects of the tree, many of which are, moreover, directly interdependent. The distinguishing feature of the tree as world support is that it is alive and growing: hence it is readily conceived as the father and protector of life, while itself subject to time and fate. The basic concept of the tree as supporting the cosmos and watching over its welfare is open to elaboration into many different specific mythological manifestations – for example, the image of world tree readily merges with that of tree of life – and several aspects are usually combined in any particular representation.[1] Worship of trees in some form is probably characteristic of almost all ancient folk religions (a theme traced *in extenso* by Mannhardt 1904–5 for the Germanic and Classical realms), and it is impractical to attempt to make a clear segregation of those trees whose significance was regarded as cosmic, but the examples cited in this section have been selected on the basis of their ostensible cosmic significance (as opposed to mere sanctity).

[1] I use the term *world tree* to signify the tree conceived as the support of the universe, and *tree of life* for the tree conceived as bestower of life (for example through the presence of life-giving springs or honey on its leaves); the *felled tree* refers to the tree conceived as felled for the purpose of making a soul bridge to the otherworld. Other specific types of tree are found: for example the tree growing at the house of the high god, the life-tree of the shaman, and trees particular to each level of the cosmos.

Eurasian

Cosmically significant trees – not always classic world trees – are found widely in shamanic and other societies in northern Eurasia and further afield; they were sometimes depicted on drums (⟨FIG. 8⟩ shows a Sámi example, and ⟨FIG. 9⟩ a Selkup).[2] Hultkrantz (1996: 42) points out that whereas the pillar represents more the notion of simple support, and is connected with the stable North Star around which the sky turns, the tree functions rather as a means of communication between worlds (the shaman climbs it, representing his passage between worlds). The idea of passage leads to the tree being identified as a road for the souls of the dead, and may be identified with the Milky Way, seen as a two-forked tree. Just as it is a passage for the dead, so too it is the perching place of souls yet to be born.[3]

Clearly the concepts of world pillar and world tree are close. The representative world tree may be made to resemble a pillar: for example, the Altaian shaman ascends to heaven via a notched birch tree whose lower branches have been removed (*BL* 31). In some areas the place of the notches is taken by that of branches: thus the Abakan Tatars believed a seven-branched birch to stand on an iron mountain in the middle of the world (*BL* 33). The Dolgan pillar sometimes took the form of a branched tree (Harva 1933: 30–2; *BL* 33). The pillar of Sakha tales, called the "iron tree", was said to have grown with the world, like the world tree (Harva 1933: 27; *BL* 12); the Sakhas represented the world axis variously as a tree and a pillar in their tales (Eliade 1972: 37 n. 6: the Sakhas had a legendary tree Yjyk Mas reaching into the ninth heaven – it was without branches, again recalling the pillar – and shamans' souls rested in its knots).

It is notable that the classic world tree, represented in physical form in shamanic ritual, is found in areas remote from Scandinavia, whereas the Norsemen's Finno-Ugric neighbours' cosmic trees do not fulfil this role. I look first at just two examples of classic shamanic world trees, and then move on to some Finno-Ugric trees.[4]

[2] Harva has presented a thorough survey in *BL*, of which I make widespread use in comparing features of the Norse tree. The motif might easily be traced over a much broader area: for example, the Sora female shaman in eastern India descended to the underworld via a cosmic tree (Vitebsky 1993: 18).

[3] However, the Nenets "tube of heaven", the Milky Way, is, according to Lehtisalo (1924: 13), to be linked to the world pillar, though seven iron larches are to be found upon it (the Nenets world tree being a larch); in the underworld is another such path along which souls of the dead and shamans passed.

[4] Harva devotes one chapter in *BL* (133–46) to the representative world tree as part of the shamanic ritual of ascent to higher worlds, noting that the Altaians, the Buryats, Sakhas and Dolgans make use of such a tree. The Altaian shamanic ascent begins on the birch tree specially erected, on which nine notches have been hacked (steps for the shaman, representing the levels of the cosmos). The Buryat shamanic initiation involves raising nine trees outside the tent, and up to these the novice is carried; he springs into the outmost tree and climbs to its crown, turning round three times, and hence proceeds from tree to tree (*BL* 139). Here, each level of the cosmos is represented by a separate tree, and the shaman demonstrates his ability to ascend to each level and to see around him (gaining knowledge) at all turns.

EWENKI

The Ewenki developed a complex imagery of the world tree, which was deeply connected to their shamanic rituals; Anisimov (1963*a*: 85–6) notes:

> The shamanistic tree, *turu*, was an inseparable attribute in any shamanistic performance, whether it was held in an ordinary tent or in a special structure, the *shevenchedek* [*sheven* = spirit helper; *che* = action; *dek* = place]. The *turu* was a tall young larch. It was placed in the center of the shaman's tent, with its top drawn through the smoke hole, or laid over the tent with the top covering the smoke hole. It played, on the one hand, the role of guardian-spirit of the tent and, on the other, served the shaman as a larch tree ladder for his journey into the upper world. During intervals between shamanistic activities, the shaman's spirit-helpers rested on its branches and gathered strength. In the shaman's concepts, the *turu* larch symbolized the shamanistic world-tree.

Anisimov (1963*a*: 87; *b*: 184) gives further details on the shamanic rites:

> To the east, opposite the entrance to the tent, the *darpe* was set up – a long row of living young larches and various figures of shamanistic spirits. At the opposite end of the tent the *onang* was set up. If the first, the *darpe*, symbolized the head of the river, the upper world, and the tent the middle world, then the *onang* embodied the lower world, the river of the dead, and accordingly it was constructed from dead wood – a wind-fallen tree. Around the *darpe* stood the *nelget*, small poles made of young larches torn out of the earth with their roots pointing upward. In this position they represented the shamanistic tree of the upper world, which, in Evenk concept, grows with its roots upward, in the upper earth, and with its top pointing towards men (toward the middle world). [...] In the opposite row, the *onang*, the *nelget* stood with roots downward because the shamanistic tree of the lower world was thought to be located below the middle earth and hence must grow with roots pointing downward. All this is explained by the fact that besides the one principal shamanistic tree which, like the shamanistic clan-river, connected all three worlds in a unified mythical shamanistic world of the spirits (the roots of this tree, according to the shamans, were in the lower world, and its top reached the outermost part – the sky – of the upper world), the Evenks also recognized the existence of shamanistic trees, specific and proper only to each of the three worlds. Under their roots, it was thought, the shaman rested and gathered strength and knowledge, whenever he happened to be in one of the other worlds. In this respect, the significance of these trees is similar to that of the great shamanistic tree.

Anisimov (1963*b*: 185) elaborates on the shaman's *turu*, "support, pillar", in the middle world:

> In the middle world the shamans have a middle *turu*. By this is implied that specific larch tree from which they splinter wood for the preparation of the rim of the shaman's drum. In the concept of the shamans, their external soul dwells in this tree, i.e. their animal-double *khargi*, which comes at the time of shamanizing at the call of the shaman and withdraws from him after the end of the performance. With this tree is linked the sojourn of the shaman in the middle world, that is, the shaman's life: if this tree dies, the shaman dies.

In the *turu* of the upper world float clouds and the heavenly bodies, and at its base live the supreme spirits, benevolent towards mankind; it is this tree that the shaman ascends when he treats the sick, transferring the care of the patient's soul to the spirits, taking it away from the afflicting illness.

Complex as the Ewenki imagery delineated by Anisimov may seem, in fact the situation is still more involved than this, as Suslov (1983: 1) demonstrates: many of the shaman's activities take place in the lower world, which thus becomes an *ersatz* middle world for him, and a further world below this is conceived, a "lower shamanic world". The various *turu* are subsumed within an overriding concept of one world tree, however (Anisimov 1963*b*: 185): "In the concepts about the *buga* (universe), these shamanic *turu* form one world (cosmic) tree, of which the roots correspond to the lower (underground) world, the middle of the trunk to the middle (land), and the crown to the upper one (the sky)."

Whilst the macrocosmic world tree is realised microcosmically as the shaman's own tree, it may also be realised at other levels, notably as the sacred clan tree, under which the mistress of the clan lands is believed to dwell, bestowing animal prey from beneath the earth for the clan. The shaman passes down through the roots of this tree when he beseeches the mistress to grant animals for the hunt (ibid. 176–7). On the branches of the clan tree also dwell the spirit ancestors, guarding the well-being of the clan; the shamanic spirit ancestors come and compel their closest living kin to become shamans. The shaman novice is seized, and taken to the underworld beneath the tree, and the animal mistress, in the form of an elk or reindeer at the roots of the *turu*, replaces his soul with that of his new *khargi*, a theriomorphic soul (*khargi* could have other meanings too: wild reindeer, taiga, spirit and master of the forest, man-eating evil spirit): the world tree is thus essentially a place of destruction and rebirth (Anisimov 1963*b*: 182–3).

Thus the development of a relatively complex religious system such as that of the Ewenki entails the "splintering" of the concept of the world tree into different trees, according to particular purposes, whilst still retaining an overall conceptual unity. This has implications for the analysis of the Norse concept of the world tree, likewise relatively complex – though in the case of the Ewenki the complexity derives from ritual considerations, in the Norse from poetic manipulation of traditions (themselves no doubt relating to diverse ritual practices).

SAKHA

The Sakha shamanic ceremony, like the Buryat, also involved raising nine spruce trees, with their lower portions stripped, along with a pole on which a sacrificial animal was tethered, and three bird-headed poles; the first bird pole was connected to the others with a white thread, indicating the shaman's ascent to heaven behind the birds (*BL* 144). Emsheimer (1946: 175) records the following from among the Sakhas. The lord of light, Ajȳ

Tojōn, lives in the ninth heaven with his wife Suolta Ijä and their children. He creates the world, mankind and the first shaman. He causes a holy tree, *tüspät turū*, "the never-falling support", with eight crotches to grow up opposite the door of his dwelling; between the branches live the creator's children, the bright spirit people. At the same time he has three trees spring forth on earth, and, sitting at their foot, he prepares all the implements of conjuring for the shaman and teaches him how to use them in his struggle against hostile spirits. In memory of this every shaman here on earth has his own *turū*, "support", his shamanic tree, that springs forth when he is called to be a shaman, and perishes at his death. Clearly the world tree here takes on differentiated manifestations, according to the particular purpose. Thus the world tree which the shaman climbs up into the heavens is represented by the particular tree which also acts as his life-tree. The three trees on earth are earthly counterparts to the spirit tree in heaven. The reason for there being three may be deduced from the belief, recorded for example among the Nanai, that there are three "world trees", one in heaven, on which the souls of the unborn perch, one on earth, and one in the underworld (Anisimov 1963*b*: 185).

The Sakhas also told of a tree which is closer to the tree of life type ⟨10⟩; Harva was of the opinion that the exuberance of the myth indicated a southern origin (India or Middle East), since it did not reflect the harsh northern life of the Sakhas – it is possible that the Sakhas brought the myth with them when they emigrated from the Baikal region.[5] The tale begins with a description of the first man, the paradise he lives in, and his house, then moves on to a description of the "king of trees" growing near the house, in the midst of a meadow; it is inestimably old, its roots reach down to the underworld, and the crown has thrust through all nine heavens. Everlasting waters flow from below its roots. The sap and resin of the tree restore the vigour of any animal that licks it. The man addresses the spirit of the tree, calling her "grandmother"; and asking her to be a mother to him, as if she had given him birth, he requests of her to tell his future. After his prayer, the world is rocked with thunder and quakes, and an aged goddess speaks from the roots of the tree, which has now shrunk to waist-height: she tells him that she knows everything, and that his father is the king of gods, and his mother the goddess of fate; they lowered him into the world to beget a race of humans. She sends him on his way to accomplish his fate, giving him a flask of the tree's water to serve him in his direst need. She then increases in size, and becomes again the king of trees. Kübäi-xotun, goddess of fate, with whom the high god begot the first man in the third heaven, is identical to the tree goddess (*BL* 57; U. Holmberg 1927: 358).

SÁMI

Sigvard Kildal, writing of the autumn sacrificial festival, recounts that a three-branched tree, holding the world up, is dedicated to Veralden Rad, the

[5] The date of this is uncertain: Levin and Potapov (1964: 245) suggest the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries AD, but note that others prefer a much earlier date.

high god; sacrifices were offered to him to keep the world in order ⟨6⟩. Carl Solander writes that a reindeer is sacrificed to the high god Veralden Ollma (Vearelden ålmaj) to hold up the world; a tree is dug up, around which the Sámi would leap and sing (⟨7⟩, and depicted on a drum in FIG. 8).[6] Henric Forbus says the "sign" (*tekn*) of Kjewa Radien (Tjåervieraedie), "Horn ruler",[7] is "a tree split in two or of two branches, to support the world and hold it in order in its place, so that it should not age and fall from its former nature" ⟨8⟩. Sigvard Kildal says that he has seen "a tree to Veralden Rad, the root of which turns upwards" ⟨9⟩; the inverted tree is also mentioned by Forbus as the "sign" of Veralden Rad (Vearelden raedie) ⟨8⟩. Inverted trees are found elsewhere in Siberia, for example among the Ewenki (Anisimov 1963*a*: 87): the explanation is that the tree represents one growing in heaven, where the "ground" is the plain of the firmament, and hence, viewed from earth, the tree would appear to grow upside down with its crown towards us.[8] No Norse analogues appear to exist for the inverted tree.[9]

Thus the high god, or the god responsible for growth in the world, held the world up with a tree. This was represented by a tree either with two/three branches, or cleft in twain, and (at least sometimes) inverted. To ensure that the high god fulfilled his office of sustaining the cosmos through the tree, sacrifices were made to him on the tree.

However, the Sámi examples emphasise the tree's supporting function rather than its life-giving properties, and is in essence a mere variant of the world pillar (for Sámi examples of which see Chapter 10).

FINNISH

The major mythological tree in Finnish poetry is the Great Oak ⟨11⟩. It does not essentially answer to the sort of tree found in Norse, with a cosmically sustaining function, though the element of connecting worlds is nonetheless present. The Great Oak is regarded as a threat to be dealt with, rather than a benefit to the world (at least until it is felled).

Like all Finnish mythological poems, that of the Great Oak exists in several versions; I have given one considered to be close to the original

[6] There is a good deal of variation in the name of the god (apart from typographical variation as found in the citation given here). *Veralden* is originally a Norse word for "world"; the form *maylmen* (cf. Finnish *maailman*, "of the world"), also occurs; *Rad(ien)* "ruler" (from Old Norse *ráð(r)*) alternates with forms of *olmai*, the Sámi for "man".

[7] Jens Kildal distinguishes Kirvaradien as a god of growth, less powerful than Maylmenradien, and to Kirvaradien is set up an inverted young burgeoning tree (Reuterskiöld 1910: 94).

[8] An inverted tree is also sometimes mentioned in Finnish folk poetry (*BL* 54); on the Indian inverted tree, which Brahmā uses to descend into the cosmos, see Coomaraswamy (1977*a*).

[9] However, an extraordinary remnant of a clearly religious prehistoric site emerged from the coastal sands off Holme-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, England, in 1998, consisting of a large inverted tree stump surrounded by an oval ring of fifty-four trunks (reported in *The Sunday Times* 10.1.1999; full report in Brennand and Taylor 2003). This far antedates the Viking period – it was constructed in 2049 BC – but clearly indicates a widespread ritual use of the inverted tree in more primitive societies. Precisely what the worshippers thought the tree represented cannot, of course, be determined.

form, recorded in Archangel Karelia in 1872 (for an Estonian example, see Franssila 1900: 29). The tree is not presented as a primordial entity, but as resulting from the actions of people, mowing a meadow, then burning the hay to ash, which appears to have given the necessary fertility to grow the great tree on a mountain-side; it became so big that it blocked out sun and moon, so that nature, and people's livelihoods, were direly affected. A dwarf came from the sea – his size and provenance identify him as an otherworld being (from the edge of the world where the firmament almost touches the ground) – and he fells the tree so that it becomes a bridge for those passing to Pohjola, the otherworld, a «sillaksi ikusijahe», "bridge to the eternal place", as the poem terms it. The particular version cited was used as part of a charm for curing diseases; the opening eight lines are taken from a charm directed at curing sudden internal illnesses, and the concept behind the conclusion (lines 42–51) is that of persuading a personified sickness to leave a person's body for a better existence in the otherworld, whither the bridge leads. This disparity in origin of the various sections of the poem may be inferred to lie behind certain inconsistencies, notably that Pohjola/Pohjoinen is presented as the otherworld to which the bridge reaches in lines 36, 39, but then a source of death before departure to the otherworld in line 46.[10] In some variants the tree is said to grow at the boundary of three seas.[11] In other versions the cosmic significance of the tree is lost sight of, and the focus is upon the use made of the felled tree,[12] such as the manufacture of beer mugs, reflecting a ritual use of the poem in brewing rituals perhaps comparable to those of the Balts, centred round an oak tree. The tree is said to grow from various sources, depending on the variant; in one variant (exemplified by *SKVR* IX$_1$ 110, recorded from 76-year-old Eeva Liisa Hirkmanska from Sääksmäki in 1879) the tree, here a bird-cherry, grows from the slobber left by a thirsty sweating elk in a spring it drinks from.

Toivonen (1947) analysed variants of the Finnish tree, and established the Great Oak as exemplifying a felled-tree type, analogues to which he cites from around the world.[13] Harva (U. Holmberg 1918: 31) also saw

[10] Pohjola is primarily conceived in folk poetry as a human realm, the antipathy of normal human society, but it often takes on the characteristics of the otherworld (called *Tuonela* or *Manala* elsewhere), as in this poem.

[11] For example *SKVR* VII$_4$ 2655/18–21: «Jäi poroja vähän / meren synkkähe syväh, / meren kolmen kuohuseh, / tuoh taidoi tammi kazvoi, / tazaladva taiputtel», "a little of the ashes remained in the sea's cheerless deep, in the swell of three seas: there an oak managed to grow, with even crown, on a neck of land"; 2656/32–6: «Sihbö kasvo suari kaunis / kolmen meren kuohuvilla, / lainehen rabahumilla, / suareh on tasane tammi, / tammeh on tasane latva», "a beautiful island grew there at the swell of three seas, at the striking of the billows; on the island is an even oak, on the oak an even crown".

[12] In Estonian variants, the singing of which had become the preserve of women, the focus is upon the betrothal gifts that will be made from the wood. Another use, found in some Finnish variants, is to make magical darts for causing illness; Haavio (1967: 355–6) sees this beginning of evil as reflecting the breaking of the link with heaven.

[13] The biblical cedar of Lebanon described in Ezekiel 31, which Pharaoh and his host are compared to, was the fairest of trees, nourished by waters that flowed around it, birds nested in it, beasts bred beneath it, nations dwelt under its shadow, but it was proud, so God gave it into the hands of foreigners to fell, and it was cast down to Hades, and the nations

the Great Oak as belonging to a separate category of mythological tree, and he identified it as the Milky Way; he developed the idea further in a later publication (1948: 70–3): thus according to a tradition from Teisko the Milky Way, when examined, is observed to be like a tree, whose trunk lies towards the east. He notes (ibid. 70) that the terminology of "trunk" and "crown" for the heavenly tree must have arisen from the fact that one end of the Milky Way is undivided whereas the other forks. He also notes (ibid. 73) that just as the Great Oak is seen as a soul bridge, so too is the Milky Way in a Sámi belief: if in cloudy weather the sky suddenly clears from east to west along the Milky Way, it is said "the door of heaven is opening"; the souls of the dead are taken into heaven at that time. Toivonen (1947: 19) notes that the tree of life or world tree grows by a spring at the centre of the world, whereas the felled tree grows at the edge of the world beside a sea. This reflects the position of the Milky Way at the edge of the world, between heaven and earth. The identification of the feller of the tree as a dwarf indicates that he is an inhabitant of *lintukoto*, "bird home", the realm at the edge of the world, where the roof of the firmament dips so low that it prevents anyone growing beyond dwarf stature. The dwarf emerges from the sea, where the tree is said to grow: both he and the tree stem from the same mythical realm at the edge of the world (ibid. 31–3). Harva was inclined to see the felled tree, as representing the Milky Way, as solely a Finnish motif; Toivonen's analogues, however, justify regarding this as an international motif.

The myth of the Great Oak therefore explained the origin of the Milky Way, and told how the pristine link between earth and heaven was broken.[14] The concept of the soul bridge ⟨QV⟩ is arguably found in Norse, but it is not imagined as a felled tree. Conversely, the Norse world tree does not have a counterpart in Finnish myth, where it is more likely that in ancient times the cosmos was regarded as sustained by a pillar, as among the Sámi; I have considered its possible reflection in the mythic entity of the *sampo* above.

quaked at the sound of its fall. In a verse connected with Romanian funerary customs the departed soul comes to a tree growing by a stormy ocean, and begs it to bow down to allow passage over the sea. The tree refuses several times, saying it has birds nesting in it, or serpents at its roots, but it eventually yields when the soul threatens to fetch its brother who will fell it and make a bridge from it (in Estonian versions of the Great Oak it is often the brother of the singer who takes on the role of feller of the tree: Franssila 1900: 102). In Indo-Chinese myths a liana grows so huge that it blocks out the light, and the gods have to be asked to remove it. This is done, and the tree's gourds are opened, from which, among other things, emerge the forefathers of the tribes. But the felling of the plant signified the severing of the link between heaven and earth (Roux 1924: 446–7).

[14] In the version of the Great Oak poem given above the otherworld is more of a hell than a heaven – though in the concluding passage a more paradisal picture of the otherworld is painted, indicating that the character of the world the tree leads to could vary considerably. The Indo-Chinese analogue indicates explicitly that while the tree was threatening, blocking out the sun so that an embassy was sent to the gods to request its felling, its collapse nevertheless marked the severing of the link with the world of the gods. Clearly the ambiguity in the character of the felled tree derives from the fact that while it leads to the otherworld, it does so through death.

THE MORDVIN GREAT APPLE/BIRCH

Three examples of cosmically significant Mordvin trees are given in ⟨12–14⟩. Features of all three types of tree – sustaining world tree, tree of life, and felled tree – are apparent in these Mordvin texts; clearly in practice the concepts are rather fluid, allowing considerable influence between them. The emphasis on size, stretching through the whole world; its centrality (growing in the middle of the wood); its acting as a way up to the high god Niške-pas for the bee mark the tree out as a world tree.[15] The correspondence between the ladle and the heavenly bodies in the second Great Birch forms an interesting analogue to the suggested interpretation of Mundilfœri ⟨QV⟩. None of the trees are explicitly stated to be sustainers of the universe, however. In other respects, the Mordvin examples appear as trees of life: the nourishing spring; the honey; its being an apple tree (cf. Iðunn's apples of youth in Old Norse, *Gylfaginning* ch. 26). The Mordvin examples also show some features of the felled tree. The first Great Birch is clearly a nuisance to the workings of the cosmos, like the Finnish Great Oak, though whether the poem can be interpreted as an aetiological myth of the Milky Way conceived as a soul bridge, as in Finnish, cannot be ascertained from the passage, which is given without context. As the Mordvin tree texts were produced in a society long Christian, they may have acquired a moral message. The bee of the first text may be a soul,[16] in which case the tree functions as a soul bridge, like the Finnish felled tree.

The Mordvins, like the Finns, had not practised classic shamanism for many centuries (if they ever did), so the trees did not fulfil any shamanic ritual role. It is possible that the felled-tree type was a distinctive Finno-Ugric motif (the Mordvins and Finns are now separated by vast tracts no longer Finno-Ugric-speaking, but this was not the case a millennium ago); this may have been linked to the notion of a soul bridge, but this is a distinct motif with only vague connections to anything found either within shamanic or Norse traditions.

CONCLUSION

The world tree appears in a ritually developed form particularly among shamanic peoples such as the Ewenki or Sakhas. Hence the examples which are most promising for comparison with Norse myths are unlikely to have acted as a source for them, though the possibility cannot be wholly discounted, since the origins of some of the steppe peoples who made incursions into Europe in the early Middle Ages lay far to the east. None-

[15] The association of bees with the world tree or tree of life is natural once the identification of the nourishing liquid that flows from the tree as honey is made. A bee is found in the tree of life in India (Coomaraswamy 1977*a*: 384 n. 22). In Old Norse the dews that fall from Yggdrasill are said to be honeydew, and bees feed on it: this information is given only by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩, but he may be recounting a well-recognised association here.

[16] Eliade (1972: 256 n. 124) notes that a shaman's soul often takes the form of a bee; thus Pettersson (1957: 50) records that the Buryats believed the soul could appear as a bee.

theless, these examples illustrate the complexity of the imagery which may develop around the tree, and suggest ways of approaching the Norse myths (for example, the splintering of the concept of one world tree into several trees, representing different aspects of the overall concept, appears to be found in both areas). Among the closer Finno-Ugric neighbours of the Norsemen, such as the Sámi, the Finns and the Mordvins (whose territory was not far from the Viking Rus trade routes), the image of the tree either does not appear to have been so developed, or else it took distinctive forms such as the felled tree, which diverge markedly from the classic image of the world tree, and appear less relevant to the Norse myths.

Norse

Descriptions of the Norse world tree or trees reveal many traits in common with those found in Eurasian examples, such as have been adduced above. This justifies the inclusion of both Norse and Eurasian examples within a common typological category. To take just the Sakha tree for comparison: its extent matches that of Yggdrasill the *mjǫtviðr*, "tree of the measure", of the universe: it stretches through heaven and hell; its branches spread through all nine heavens; its roots have grown through the underworld; it is old beyond measure. The goddess manifests herself at the tree, as Óðinn makes his epiphany at the *barnstokkr*, "child stock", in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 2–3 ⟨46⟩. The goddess appears to be a hypostasis of the tree itself; this forms an analogue to the figure of Heimdallr as hypostatised world tree, expressed in less overt terms. The goddess is the goddess of fate, and reveals the first man's fate to him; in *Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩ men's fates are determined by Urðr and her two companions at the tree. The liquids offer many points of comparison. With the refreshing golden liquid falling from it may be compared the dew that falls from Yggdrasill, which Snorri identifies as honeydew in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩, and that which feeds the human couple in the wood of *hodd*-Mímir in *Vafþrúðnismál* 44–5 ⟨41⟩. Not only are the golden liquid from the leaves and the spring of water rejuvenating, but also the milk of the goddess; cf. the healing properties of the tree Mimameiðr in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 22 ⟨39⟩. Whiteness, standing for purity and fecundity, is presented straightforwardly in the goddess's milk, but more unusually in the white mud drawn, apparently, from the spring of Urðr (*Vǫluspá* 19 ⟨38⟩); Snorri says that everything in this spring is turned white owing to its holiness (*Gylfaginning* ch. 16). Everlasting water wells from beneath its roots; cf. the springs of Urðr and Mímir at Yggdrasill ⟨38⟩, and the tree of *Vǫluspá*, which, standing over the spring, is «æ grœnn», "ever green", indicating a life-giving quality to the water. The emphasis upon the origin of mankind is found in both traditions. Iron, fire, and water will not destroy the first Sakha man; cf. Mimameiðr, which fire or iron will not destroy (*Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 20/6). The first man is the son of Kübäi-xotun, the goddess of the tree; cf. the overseeing by Heimdallr of the engendering of the three classes of men in *Rígsþula*, and the emergence into the new

world of Líf, "Life", and Lífþrasir, "Striver for life", from the wood of *hodd*-Mímir in *Vafþrúðnismál* ⟨41⟩, and the relationship, identified by his name and his being made from wood, of Askr ⟨QV⟩ with the world tree. Stress is laid upon the role of the man as peopler of the world; cf. Líf and Lífþrasir's similar role.

A somewhat different outcome results from making a comparison with the traditions of the Norsemen's neighbours, the Finns. There are several points of similarity with Norse trees, but also striking differences. The Finnish tree grows at the edge of the world ⟨QV⟩: possibly as Yggdrasill does, and Heimdallr. It grows beside the sea (the cosmic ocean, the boundary between heaven and earth): waters surround Yggdrasill, and Heimdallr is born from the ocean. It grows on a hillock (cf. the world mountain): possibly so too did the Norse world tree (on the basis of later traditions), and Heimdallr's dwelling is on Himinbjǫrg, "Heaven mountains". It is presented as sinister, blocking the life-giving sun and moon from the earth: this point has no analogues in Norse. It is felled by an inhabitant of the dwarf realm at the perimeter of the world, the same region the tree grew in: this point has no analogues in Norse. From it is made a bridge, visible in the form of the Milky Way, between heaven and earth: Heimdallr guards a bridge, which might have been at some time identified as the Milky Way ⟨QV⟩; no examples of Eurasian felled trees being guarded, however, seem to occur. It is broken, being accessible since its felling to souls and not ordinary mortals: cf. the name *Bilrǫst/Bifrǫst*, "the broken/trembling way" (possibly to be identified as the Milky Way). In some variants, arrows are made from the tree, to cause illness; these are examples of the widespread motif of "elf-shot", sharp weapons made by supernatural beings, such as are found, made from iron, in the Old English charm *Wið færstice* (Hall 2007: 1–3).[17] The overall conclusion must be that while both mythologems exhibit some widespread motifs such as the association of the tree with waters, they belong to distinct types.

Clearly a more thorough investigation of the significance of the tree within Norse tradition is called for, in order to make any meaningful comparison with Eurasian parallels.

SACRED TREES

Actual sacred trees, which may have been viewed as representing the world tree, are described in a number of Germanic sources. Such trees have many shared features, such as the reverence and defensiveness of their worshippers, their size, their situation beside a spring, well or lake, and their association with divination. The Uppsala tree, considered below, is the most prominent example in the Norse area. From Germany, the best known is perhaps the oak of Geismar, felled by Boniface (Willibaldus, *Vita Bonifatii*, p. 31):

[17] This motif must relate to the sinister aspect of the tree; the reason for the version of the Great Oak poem given above being appropriated as a charm against illness is also presumably related: the cause of the illness (i.e. the tree) is sung to expurgate the sickness.

> alii etiam lignis et fontibus clanculo, alii autem aperte sacrificabant; alii vero aruspicia et divinationes, prestigia atque incantationes occulte, alii quidem manifeste exercebant; alii quippe auguria et auspicia intendebant diversosque sacrificandi ritus incoluerunt; alii etiam, quibus mens sanior inerat, omni abiecta gentilitatis profanatione, nihil horum commisserunt. Quorum consultu atque consilio roborem quendam mirae magnitudinis, qui prisco paganorum vocabulo appellatur robor Iobis, in loco qui dicitur Gaesmere, servis Dei secum adstantibus, succidere temptavit. Cumque, mentis constantia confortatus, arborem succidisset – magna quippe aderat copia paganorum, qui et inimicum deorum suorum intra se diligentissime devotabant – sed ad modicum quidem arbore praeciso, confestim inmensa roboris moles, divino desuper flatu exagitata, palmitum confracto culmine, corruit et quasi superni nutus solatio in quattuor etiam partes disrupta est, et quattuor ingentis magnitudinis aequali longitudine trunci absque fratrum labore adstantium apparuerunt. Quo viso, prius devotantes pagani etiam versa vice benedictionem Domino, pristina abiecta maledictione, credentes reddiderunt.

> Some indeed clandestinely, some openly sacrificed to trees and springs; some carried out soothsaying and divinations, magic tricks and incantations secretly, others did so in the sight of all; some were intent upon auguries and auspices, and practised various rites of sacrifice; others, possessed of a saner mind, and rejecting all this pagan profanation, committed none of these things. On their advice and counsel he attempted, with the servants of God present with him, to fell a certain oak tree of extraordinary size, which in the ancient tongue of the pagans is called the oak of Jupiter, in a place called Gaesmere. When, strengthened by his constancy of purpose, he had cut into the tree from below – for there was a huge crowd of pagans present who among themselves diligently cursed the enemy of their gods – but had made only a little headway with felling the tree, suddenly a huge mass of the oak, stirred into movement by a divine gust from above, collapsed, once the crown of young branches had shattered, and as if with a comforting nod of approval from on high, was broken into four parts, and four logs of immense size and equal in length appeared without any work on the part of the brothers who were present. Once they saw this, the pagans, who were previously cursing, did a *volte face* and, casting aside their earlier maledictions, rendered blessings in faith to the Lord.

This parallels the information about the mythic tree Yggdrasill in *Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩, where the fates carve men's destinies at the tree, and no doubt reflects the essence of the oak of Geismar being regarded as a microcosm of the great world tree, regarded as the source of destiny for the world.

Another example (cited by Mannhardt 1904–5: I, 57 n.), from a Slavonic region bordering the Germanic area, is found in Herbordus, *Vita Ottonis episcopi* II.31; here, in 1124, the inhabitants of Stettin, using an intellectual ruse, were more successful in their attempts to save their fine tree from the evangelical mania of the local bishop:

> Erat praeterea ibi quercus ingens et frondosa, et fons subter eam amoenissimus, quam plebs simplex numinis alicuius inhabitatione sacram aestimans, magna veneratione colebat. Hanc etiam episcopus cum post destructas continas incidere vellet, rogatus est a populo ne faceret. Promittebant enim nunquam se ulterius sub nomine religionis nec arborem illam colituros nec locum, sed solius umbrae atque amoenitatis gratia, quia hoc

peccatum non sit, salvare illam potius quam salvari ab illa se velle. Qua suscepta promissione, "Acquiesco", inquit episcopus, "de arbore; sed illud unum, vivum numen sortium vestrarum, de medio tolli oportet, quia nec augurium nec sortilegium exercere christianis licet".

There was also a huge and leafy oak there, and a most pleasant spring beneath it, which the simple folk, believing it to be sacred because of some divinity dwelling in it, worshipped with great veneration. This too the bishop, after destroying the temples, wished to cut down, but he was requested by the people not to. They promised they would nevermore worship in the name of religion either the place or the tree, but that for the sake of shade from the sun and for its pleasantness, which is no sin, they wished to save it, rather than be saved from it. Receiving this promise, the bishop said: "I acquiesce in the matter of the tree; but that living spirit of your divinations must be removed from its midst, since neither divination nor casting of lots is to be practised by Christians."

SOURCES FOR THE MYTHICAL WORLD TREE

The Norse mythical world tree is described at length in four sources (other sources are mentioned in the course of discussion): the Eddic poems *Grímnismál*, *Vǫluspá* and *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, and Snorri's *Edda* (much of it based on the poetic sources mentioned). Texts of these sources are provided in ⟨37–42⟩.

Grímnismál

Immediately after the description of Valhǫll as a vast hall for eight hundred warriors, two stanzas (25–6) tell of a goat Heiðrún, "Bright [mead] rune/secret" and a stag Eikþyrnir, "Oaken horntips",[18] who stand on or by (*á*) Valhǫll and provide ample mead and the waters of the world, by feeding on the branches of a tree called Læráðr ⟨37⟩. This would seem to be an image of the world tree as tree of life providing vital sustenance. After two stanzas naming the rivers of the world, the poet returns to the gods, the link being that Þórr wades through Kǫrmt and Ǫrmt and the hot pools (*kerlaugar*) to the place of judgement beside Yggdrasill (st. 29), since the godbridge is all aflame and the holy waters seethe. A list of the gods' steeds is then given, which they use to ride to the judgement place. Information centred on the tree Yggdrasill is presented over six stanzas. Of these, the first two (29, 30) place Yggdrasill in relation to the gods' judgement place – a special site to which they proceed formally each day: compare the *rǫkstólar*, "seats of fate", in the refrain of *Vǫluspá* 6, 9, 23, 25, where the gods gather to discuss important affairs. St. 31 places Yggdrasill in a (perhaps central) place whence three roots reach, under each of which a different realm is situated: men thus have as neighbours Hel and the frost-giants. St. 32 shows Yggdrasill as a line of communication, from the eagle (up in the branches) to the dragon Níðhǫggr, "Malicious striker", at or under its

[18] Or "with horns bent like an oak's branches": both interpretations are given as possible in *AeW*, *s.v.* "Eikþyrnir".

foot; the squirrel Ratatoskr, "Gnawing tooth", runs between them, taking the words of the eagle to the dragon. The next three stanzas (33–5) are concerned with the eating away of the tree, by four stags (Dáinn, Dvalinn, Dúneyrr and Duraþrór), by worms or serpents (Góinn, Móinn, Grábakr, Grafvǫlluðr), by another stag, by the dragon Níðhǫggr, and by rot on its side (perhaps the negative obverse result of the nourishing waters that it is splashed with in *Vǫluspá*). The tree suffers hardship "more than men know".

The designation «askr Yggdrasill/Yggdrasils» thus relates to a context of gods ruling, judging at the heart of the cosmos, with the tree alive with "news", and with the tree as being steadily eaten away, and suffering because of it. This harmonises with the sacrificial implication of the name *Yggdrasill* ⟨QV⟩, and the fact that in *Vǫluspá* 45 ⟨38⟩ the tree is associated in its tremulous age with the dying of the cosmos. Thus *Vǫluspá* follows a concept already linked with the tree in older tradition such as *Grímnismál* preserves.

Grímnismál is not the most cohesive or integrated of poems, and reflects traditional lore which was full of variants: for example, stag(s) eating from the tree are referred to three times in the poem (st. 26, 33, 35) (though they are mentioned with slightly different purposes).

Vǫluspá

Vǫluspá is far more selective and pointed in the information it gives on the world tree. The poet has clearly manipulated existing traditions about the tree's role as sustainer of the universe to make of it a means of reflecting the central theme of the work, the cyclic rise and decay of the world and the gods through time and fate. (See in particular Steinsland 1979 on the thematic use of the world tree in *Vǫluspá*.) I consider this further below.

Fjǫlsvinnsmál

Fjǫlsvinnsmál calls the tree Mimameiðr ⟨39⟩; it is described as a *barr*, an evergreen tree, which spreads its branches over all lands; no one knows from what roots it rises. Neither fire nor iron will fell it. Something is carried from it onto fire for sick women. It is described as "fate" (*mjǫtuðr*) for men. A golden cock, Viðópnir, probably meaning "Tree screecher", sits in its boughs (it could also be Viðþófnir, "Tree presser": see P. Robinson 1991: comm. 18/2).

Fjǫlsvinnsmál is a late poem (*c.* 1200–50), which manipulates pagan material, often derived from identifiable sources, in a creative manner (P. Robinson 1991: 399–400, 407 and discussion throughout the edition). Hence although it may reproduce archaic information about the world tree, it commonly does so in a fragmentary and reworked fashion. Thus the evergreenness (implied in the epithet *barr*, a word used also by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩ as a gloss of *Grímnismál*'s *hœfingar*) and the huge measure of Mimameiðr are inferred from *Vǫluspá*'s information

about Yggdrasill (it stands ever green over Urðr's spring, is *hár*, "high", its dews drop into dales, and it is a *mjǫtviðr*, "tree of measure"). The name *Mimameiðr* is probably invented on the basis of information in *Vǫluspá* (see below). The phrase «en þat manngi veit, / af hveriom rótom renn», "and no one knows from which roots it runs [i.e. rises]", betrays its origin in the *lectio difficilior* of *Hávamál* 138, «er manngi veit, / hvers hann af rótum renn», "[about] which no one knows, from the roots of what it runs [i.e. rises]". The use of the word *mjǫtuðr*, "fate", to describe Mimameiðr most likely derives from *Vǫluspá*'s description of Yggdrasill as *mjǫtviðr* (2/8), which implies both "fate tree" and "measure tree", and from the use of *mjǫtuðr* later in the poem (*Vǫluspá* 45 ⟨38⟩).

The application of the fruit of Mimameiðr for the treatment of sick women – the precise form of sickness is not clear – is not found in other sources, but is in line with a theme found elsewhere in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, that of plants healthy for women: compare the Lyfjaberg, "Herb hill", which heals women. It is possible that in the field of popular medical superstition, which is likely not to have changed much since the pagan period (note how Old English medical works preserve hints of pagan background), material may be reproduced in the poem from a preserved pagan context: in particular, this may apply to *kvellisjúkar* women healed by the fruits of the tree (on the emended form *kvellisjúkar* see P. Robinson 1991: 121–2).

Snorri on Yggdrasill

Snorri's account of Yggdrasill in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15–16 ⟨42⟩ is very largely based on passages from *Grímnismál* and *Vǫluspá*. In addition he mentions the following, most of which are likely to be his own systematisation and inferences. *Grímnismál* presents a picture of the tree in which, it is implied, it grows among or beside the *æsir* in the upper world, with its roots in the worlds below this, among giants, men and the dead; Snorri has altered this picture: he has a root going to the frost giants, like *Grímnismál*; he has dispensed with the root among men (presumably on the grounds that it could not exist there, as no one has seen it), and given it instead to the *æsir*; the root to Hel is replaced by one going to Niflheimr, "Mist realm", which played a significant part in Snorri's version of the creation (*Gylfaginning* ch. 3). Snorri has thus presented the tree as sending its roots into three important *mythical* realms, eschewing *Grímnismál*'s stress on the connection of the tree to the world of men, living and dead (a connection which implicitly emphasises the *religious* significance of the tree).

Snorri has systematised the siting of the springs: Mímir's spring lies beneath the root of the frost giants; Urðr's spring lies beneath the root among the *æsir*; Hvergelmir in *Grímnismál* 26 ⟨37⟩ stands beneath the world tree (there named Læráðr), but Snorri portrays Hvergelmir as a primeval spring in the midst of Niflheimr, and hence, to complete his picture of a spring beneath each world-tree root, sites it beneath the root to Niflheimr.

The three maidens of *Vǫluspá* 19 ⟨38⟩ come, in Snorri's version, from a hall rather than a lake; this involves reading *sal* for an original, and more unusual, *sæ* (on Snorri's reading here see *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 20/3). These three maidens are identified as *nornir*, on no extant authority: it is probably Snorri's inference based on their determining of men's fates in the way *nornir* are elsewhere said to do. These three *nornir* are identified as responsible for sprinkling the tree with white loam (an inference from *Vǫluspá* 19, and from remnants of traditions of offerings to trees, probably still a current folk practice ⟨VÅRDTRÄD⟩).

The eagle that sits in the tree has a hawk *Veðrfǫlnir*, "Weather pale", sitting between his eyes. As this information is given amongst a series of other facts, all of which derive from *Grímnismál*, this almost certainly originates in a now lost stanza of the poem, where in its present form the eagle associated with Veðrfǫlnir is mentioned quite incidentally, as if already discussed.

Bees are nourished on the dews that fall from Yggdrasill, the dew in fact being honeydew.

Glasir

The only surviving information on what he describes as a *lundr*, "grove" (or possibly "tree": *lundr* is regularly used in the sense of "tree" in skaldic verse), Glasir, "Gleaming", is given by Snorri, who quotes from a lost poem in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 34 ⟨40⟩, which tells us that Glasir stands with golden leaf before the hall of the victorious god (Óðinn); Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 45 also cites a verse, supposedly from *Bjarkamál*, listing terms for "gold", which includes the expression «Glasis glóbarri», "Glasir's shining foliage" (*Skj* B_1 170, st. 4). Glasir, like Læráðr, but unlike Yggdrasill, is thus associated with Valhǫll. The golden leaves of Glasir may be compared with those of the Zambu ⟨QV⟩ tree, that are consumed when they fall into the sea by a dragon. There is a general implication of wealth around the dwellings of the gods.

The *barnstokkr*

The *barnstokkr*, "child stock", of *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 2–3 ⟨46⟩ is situated among men, in the hall of the clan of the Vǫlsungar, but it takes on a divine aspect through its association with Óðinn. In summary, we are told:

> Rerir and his queen pray for a child, and Óðinn bids his handmaid take an apple to the king; she delivers it into the lap of the king, who gives it to the queen; she eats it and becomes pregnant, giving birth to Vǫlsungr. The king establishes a hall, and in its midst grows up a great tree, with its crown growing above the hall: this tree is called the *barnstokkr*, "child stock". Later in the legend Óðinn appears, and thrusts a sword into the trunk, promising it as a gift to the one who can withdraw it. Sigmundr, Vǫlsungr's son, withdraws the sword, thereby accepting the fate meted out to him by Óðinn.

The "sword in the stock" is clearly a variant of the motif of the "sword in the stone" of Arthurian legend, and need not be considered in connection with the world tree motif. In other respects, however, the *barnstokkr* appears to be a representative of the world tree or tree of life: I consider this further below.

THE NAMES OF THE WORLD TREE

Siberian sources have little to say about the name of the world tree (cf., however, the names of the world pillar in Chapter 10). At least three names for individual trees with a cosmic significance can be identified from Old Norse sources, *Yggdrasill*, *Læráðr*, and *Mímameiðr*.

Yggdrasill

The commonest name for the world tree appears in two forms: *a.* «askr Yggdrasill», "the ash-[tree] Óðinn-steed": *Vǫluspá* 19 ⟨38⟩, «Ask veit ek standa, / heitir Yggdrasill», "I know an ash stands, called Yggdrasill". *b.* «Yggdrasils askr»: *Vǫluspá* 45 ⟨38⟩; «askr Yggdrasils»: *Grímnismál* 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 44. This may mean either "the ash-[tree] Óðinn-steed", i.e. the genitive is appositional (cf. *Fenrisúlfr*, "the wolf Fenrir"), as is clearly the sense in *Vǫluspá*, since the phrase is used as an equivalent to *askr Yggdrasill*; or (less probably) "the ash-[tree] of Óðinn-steed".

The name *Yggr* for Óðinn (for example, *Grímnismál* 54) associates him with the world tree; as *Askr* is the name of the first man – and *askr* is used in skaldic verse in the sense "man" – who is placed in close relationship to «askr Yggdrasill» in *Vǫluspá* 19 ⟨38⟩, this relates the world tree to its role as progenitor of mankind, a role assumed also by Heimdallr in *Rígsþula* ⟨60⟩.

Læráðr

The name *Læráðr* is given in *Grímnismál* 25–6 ⟨37⟩ as that of a tree growing at Valhǫll; the name makes no obvious sense, and the manuscript forms vary between «leraðr» (*SnE* 43), «lęraþs» (CR) and «læraþs» (A), and either *e* or *æ* could be the original vowel underlying these forms.

The second element is likely to be *-ráðr*, "furnisher, provider" or "controller" (*AeW*, *s.v.* "Læráðr").

Læ suggests various interpretations. *a.* It could be "fraud, wicked skill, woe". An association with evil is inappropriate for the tree as depicted in *Grímnismál* as a source of beneficence; the only known myth depicting the world tree as providing "woe" is Óðinn's sacrifice in *Hávamál*, where the tree is, however, unnamed. Sturtevant (1952: 1150) interprets *Læráðr* as "Furnisher of woe" in reference to this sacrifice, but there is nothing to suggest that Læráðr was associated with Óðinn's sacrifice beyond its name (if correctly interpreted) and its association with Óðinn's hall, Valhǫll. *Læ* is also associated with Loki in *Vǫluspá* 25 and 34 (he is said to have polluted the air with *læ*, and to be *lægjarn*, "eager for *læ*"), which perhaps suggests

the tree could have been a "fraudulent plan" of Loki, a gift to the gods comparable to those he obtained deceitfully from the sons of the dwarf Ívaldi (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 35);[19] it is perhaps worth noting here that Loki's mother was Laufey, "Leaf island" (and hence "tree", presumably). *b. Le* could be a form of *hlé*, "shelter". Pipping (1925: 32), argues that the form *lé* is East Norse for West Norse *hlé*: initial *h* disappeared in this position in East Norse already by *c.* 1000 (Noreen 1904: §312), and in Norwegian (not Icelandic) during the eleventh century (Noreen 1970: §289); the loss is recorded sporadically in Icelandic manuscripts. Thus the actual form (in standardised Old Icelandic) could be **Hléráðr*, though the alliteration with the following *limom* would have prevented the restoration of this form (and possibly made the word obscure to Icelandic speakers at the time). Pipping (1925: 32–3) argues that **Hléráðr* signifies "controller of the firmament", the firmament being a shelter (*hlé*) for the world. Yet *hlé* is not recorded in any but an abstract sense in Old Norse (Fritzner 1886–1972, *s.v.*). Over all, this suggestion calls upon too many unlikelihoods to be credible (and is a reflection of Pipping's determination to uncover supposed East Norse forms in Icelandic myth, and to see in Læráðr a form of the world tree). *c. Læ* is listed as a lexeme by Cleasby and Vigfússon (1957, *s.v.* "læ II") meaning "sea", a variant of *lá* – though it is not recognised by Fritzner (1886–1972) or by *Lexicon poeticum*. There is no indication that Læráðr was seen as connected with the sea directly, but Hvergelmir, the source of all waters, lies beneath it. I suggest that Cleasby and Vigfússon may have been correct to recognise *læ* as a separate lexeme (though not necessarily in the instances they cite), derived from *lá*, and that it is present in *Læráðr*. I have argued that when it occurs in the account of the creation of mankind in *Vǫluspá*, *lá* has a sense of the liquid life-force within people ⟨LÁ⟩, and it plays upon the more widely recorded sense of "sea, sea-shore", where the first humans are found, still inanimate. Læráðr provides sustenance, or life-force, to two animals, who in turn produce life-giving liquids, mead and the spring Hvergelmir; if the name of the tree reflects its function as depicted in *Grímnismál*, we find a similar concatenation of life-force and waters or liquids as, I have suggested, we find in *Vǫluspá* with *lá*, of which *læ* may be seen as a variant not merely in form but also in meaning, a meaning which provided the material for a poetic pun in the name *Læráðr*.

Læráðr was at Óðinn's hall, Valhǫll; if we take the description of the animals as being «á hǫllo Heriafǫðrs» literally, as "on the hall of the Father of Armies" (as opposed to simply "at the hall"), then it implies the tree was growing up through the hall, with its crown spreading out above, in the same way as that other Óðinnic tree, its earthly counterpart the *barnstokkr* ⟨QV, 46⟩. Analogues of the tree which grows in heaven at the house of the high god are frequent (for example in Sakha tales, Emsheimer 1946: 175), and the shamanic tree is often set up inside the hut, its crown thrust through the smoke hole (as in the Ewenki example ⟨SHEVENCHEDEK⟩, and the Buryat ⟨PORTER GOD⟩). Nonetheless, no other text supports the notion

[19] I thank John McKinnell for this suggestion.

of a tree in the midst of Valhǫll, and the presence of animals on a roof was something to be avoided: in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 27 Þorvaldr is lured out of his house by his enemies driving cattle onto his roof, which he then has to chase off.

It is not wholly clear that Læráðr should even be regarded as a variant of the world tree. The chief point that suggests it is is the parallel between the stag Eikþyrnir biting on its leaves and the unnamed stag which bites upon Yggdrasill in *Grímnismál* 35 ⟨37⟩; in addition, the waters of Hvergelmir, the source of all rivers, are fed by drips from Eikþyrnir, so the tree occupies a cosmically focal point above this spring; also, the vessel of mead filled by the goat Heiðrún as it bites on the tree is parallel to the spring of mead which Mímir drinks beneath Yggdrasill (*Vǫluspá* 28 ⟨38⟩, where it is implied, as inferred by Snorri, *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 ⟨42⟩, that the mead spring lies beneath Yggdrasill). The description of Yggdrasill in *Grímnismál* in fact follows directly on from that of Læráðr, other than the long list of the rivers which come from Hvergelmir, so the stanzas may easily be read as referring to one tree under different names. The two stanzas mentioning Læráðr identify its purpose as to nourish the goat Heiðrún and the stag Eikþyrnir, so its role – as far as it is delineated – is more of a tree of life.

Mimameiðr

Mimameiðr, "Mimi's tree", is the name of the world tree described in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 20; the name is probably the invention of the author:[20] in *Vǫluspá* 27–8 ⟨38⟩ Mímir is closely associated with the world tree, having a spring nearby, and the name of the wood (or perhaps tree) which shelters the last human couple of the world in *Vafþrúðnismál* 45 is *hodd-Mímis holt*, "wood of hoard-Mímir".

THE TREE IN TIME AND SPACE

The site of the world tree

Whilst Læráðr is clearly stated to grow at Valhǫll, i.e. within the realm of the gods, Yggdrasill's position in *Grímnismál* is unclear, other than that it is at the site of the gods' *þing*, whither they travel to make judgements. The most straightforward interpretation of st. 29–30 is that Þórr is away from Ásgarðr, for example fighting giants, and returns over the waters to the river-girt *hodd goða*, "hoard [i.e. habitation][21] of the gods", as it is called in

[20] The form *Mímir* occurs in *Vǫluspá* 28, *geir-Mímir* in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 14 (where it stands as a kenning for Hundingr) and *søkk-Mímir* in *Grímnismál* 50, and *Mímr* occurs in *Vǫluspá* 45, *Sigrdrífumál* 14. It is possible that *Mimi* is an otherwise unrecorded ancient variant, preserved only in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*: but in view of the creative use of sources such as *Vǫluspá* in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* the variant *Mimi* could be a variant formation of *Mímir*, *Mímr* coined by the author of *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, as argued by P. Robinson (1991: 360).

[21] By *hodd goða* is presumably meant the dwelling of the gods, conceived as a palace/temple filled with treasure.

Grímnismál 27/8, to attend the *þing*. He is unable to use the *ásbrú*, which it is to be inferred links the *þing* place with the outside world, because it is all aflame, and he must wade the rivers – *Þórsdrápa* witnesses to his skills at wading over boundaries between realms.[22] The other gods, on the other hand, simply ride to the *þing*. Yggdrasill is associated with cosmic waters and a cosmic bridge, like the Finnish felled oak, but the association is only loose. A closer idea of the position of Yggdrasill may be gained on the basis of *Vǫluspá* 7/2, which states that the meeting place of the gods was on Iðavǫllr. The implication of the name is not certain, but Dronke (*PE* II, comm. *ad loc.*) offers a plausible interpretation of the word *iða*, "eddy", that is a swift, returning, repeated motion, as forming the first element; the stanza plays upon the sense of "industry" in related words such as *ið*, relating how the gods settled down to forging all sorts of things there. A variant sense is also apparent in *Iðunn*, the goddess responsible for the apples which afforded eternal youth – she is the "renewer". Dronke argues that the implication of Iðavǫllr in *Vǫluspá* is one of cosmic return, of an ever-renewing world. Yet the poet is surely using a traditional term, which need not have had such a lofty implication in traditional understanding. I suggest that the plain which eddies, turns round, where the gods assemble, is the firmament, which clearly turns in a circle about the North Star each night.[23] The world pillar in several Eurasian cultures (including the Sámi) is believed to culminate in this star, which thus forms a cosmically focal point; the hints of similar images existing in Germanic sources have been examined above. Moreover, we may draw the inference from *Grímnismál* that, as the gods are riding their horses to the *þing*, they must tether them somewhere: the world pillar or tree is in several Eurasian analogues stated to be the tethering post ⟨QV⟩ of the gods. It would thus appear that Yggdrasill was envisaged as located in a central position in heaven, just as Siberian world trees are most often pictured as growing in the centre of the world, for example the Mordvin examples, the Kalmyk Zambu ⟨QV⟩ tree or the Altaian tree (*BL* 52).

The poet of *Vǫluspá* is not interested in the mundane matter of Yggdrasill's physical position. Yet he stresses the centrality of the tree in the growth and life of the universe, including its fate, poignantly and undistractedly siting it, in the *vǫlva*'s visions, at the spring of Urðr (*Vǫluspá* 19 ⟨38⟩).

The tree at the centre of things (physically and metaphorically) unites worlds. The centrality of the *barnstokkr* in the hall in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 2–3 ⟨46⟩ may reflect this uniting aspect of the world tree, as de Vries (1954: 97) notes, emphasising that the layers of the cosmos stand united wherever a symbol of centrality is found (as in every dwelling or temple).

[22] The riding of a horse through flames represents the motif of passing into the world of the dead; its presence in connection with the "god-bridge" indicates that the bridge is at a cosmographical boundary, and indicates too that, as with the Milky Way, the bridge may also have been seen as a soul bridge.

[23] This is not to imply that the gods were habitually thought to dwell in the sky, but rather to suggest that the turning point of the world, the North Star, formed a focus for the judgement place of the gods in this particular mythologem.

The landscape of the Norse world tree

The halls

Læráðr grows over or near the hall of Óðinn, as with several Siberian world trees, and the *soma*-dripping tree of Indian myth which stands, according to *Chāndogja Upanishad* VIII.5/3, in the third heaven by the lake Airaṃmadīya, "Affording refreshment and ecstasy", before the hall of Brahmā (*BL* 62); Glasir also grows near Óðinn's hall. The tree which grows at or beside a home is probably intended to act as a "guardian tree" of the home, as recorded in later Scandinavian folk practice ⟨VÅRDTRÄD⟩. The situation of Yggdrasill is somewhat unclear; it may well have varied according to the particular context. If, as argued below, Yggdrasill is, in one of its guises, the gallows ⟨QV⟩, then it would be situated away from the settlement. The manuscript tradition is ambiguous on Yggdrasill's association with a hall. The Hauksbók manuscript of *Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩ talks of a «sal, er á þolli stendr», "a hall, that stands at the tree"; the more reliable Codex Regius reads «sæ, er und þolli stendr», "a lake, that stands below the tree"; Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 ⟨42⟩ reads «sal, er und þolli stendr», "a hall, that stands under the tree". The change of "lake" to "hall" has the mark of Snorri's systematising mind, as a hall is a more logical place for three maidens to emerge from than a lake (see *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 20/3); this would mark a move away from a more traditional mythical landscape in which the tree grew beside a lake or spring. He may have been influenced by the tree Læráðr reaching over Óðinn's hall.

The bridge

The *askr* of *Grímnismál* 29 ⟨37⟩ grows near a blazing "god-bridge" (*ásbrú*), which passes over seething hallowed waters below. Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 ⟨42⟩, quoting *Grímnismál* 29, names the *ásbrú* as *Bifrǫst*, "Tremulous way"; *Grímnismál* 44 names it *Bilrǫst*, "Broken way" or "Failing way" as the "best of bridges"; in *Fáfnismál* 15 Bilrǫst is explicitly said to break as "they", probably the giants, as Snorri interprets these lines (*Gylfaginning* ch. 13), ride onto it at *ragnarǫk*.

In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 49 the dead Helgi says:

Mál er mér at ríða	It is time for me to ride
roðnar brautar,	the reddened ways,
láta fǫlvan ió	let the pale steed
flugstíg troða;	tread the flying path;
skal ek fyr vestan	I must be to the west
vindhialms brúar,	of the bridge of the wind-helm [sky]
áðr Salgofnir	before Salgofnir
sigrþióð veki.	wakes the triumphant people.

Thus he must away before dawn, when Salgofnir, the cock of Valhǫll (see *KLE*, comm. *ad loc.*), wakes the *einherjar*; here the "bridge of the sky" functions as a path for souls from earth to heaven. Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch.

49 ⟨53⟩ presents another explicit example of a soul bridge, Gjallarbrú, the bridge over the underworld river Gjǫll; this is found only in Old Norse Christian texts, and may be a later concept.[24]

Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 13 identifies Bifrǫst as the rainbow, a bridge from earth to heaven. Ohlmarks (1941), however, argues that the *ásbrú* is the Milky Way, a proposal with which de Vries (1935; *AR* §582) concurs.[25] Ohlmarks (1941: 35) notes some points from later tradition: in northern German beliefs Wotan leads the Wild Hunt over the Milky Way; in Swedish the Milky Way is called by names such as *vinterbråta*, "winter way", *bråta*, "way", and *broa*, "bridge". *Bila* can mean either "fail, give way" or "break". The implied sense of "failing way" could be the same as *Bifrǫst*, either "a bridge that gives way (when the giants cross it)" or "a bridge whose appearance is tremulous, a shimmering bridge": *bil* also means "moment", possibly implying "bridge that only appears temporarily/sporadically" (for example, on clear nights; or when viewed out of the corner of the eye). *Bifask* means "shake, tremble". The names *Bilrǫst* and *Bifrǫst* could both be suitable designations of either the rainbow or the Milky Way: both shimmer, are only sometimes visible, are insubstantial, and either could be conceived as the bridge that breaks at *ragnarǫk*.[26]

The *ásbrú* corresponds to the Milky Way functioning as a soul bridge ⟨QV⟩ in Finnish and Sámi belief. The *ásbrú* is broken, and is associated with the world tree; the Milky Way was a bridge made from a felled tree in Finnish belief. The *ásbrú* is a path for gods, as well as for souls going to Valhǫll; the Milky Way is a path for souls.

Fire

In *Grímnismál* 29 ⟨37⟩, as Þórr wades the rivers to judge with the gods, the *ásbrú* «brenn ǫll loga, / heilǫg vǫtn hlóa», "is all on fire, and the holy waters seethe".[27] In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 49 the sky-bridge is described as

[24] It is mentioned often in the *Draumkvæde* (for example p. 184: see index, pp. 214–15, for full references). De Vries (1935) argues that the Gjallarbrú is to be distinguished from Bilrǫst, but it is reasonable to see both as variant developments of a common motif.

[25] For a synopsis of further interpretations, see Lorenz (1984: 204–5): there is a fair amount of support for the proposal that Bifrǫst/Bilrǫst referred originally to the Milky Way. Holtsmark (1964: 53–4) notes how the rainbow (but not the Milky Way) has a role in Christian theology, being set up by God after Noah's flood, its three colours reminding us, according to Hauksbók, of the Flood, of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of Doomsday (Snorri too ascribes three colours to the rainbow).

[26] Ohlmarks (1941: 31–2) argues that *Bifrǫst* is Snorri's reinvention of the name, since it suits the rainbow, whereas *Bilrǫst* does not (it is not broken); he also points out that the Milky Way can be viewed as in one world, whereas the rainbow clearly has its roots in the mundane world, and the notion that the gods should ride each day to counsel from earth to heaven is scarcely credible. The argument against *Bifrǫst* as a term for the Milky Way does not seem especially strong to me; the forms *Bifrǫst* and *Bilrǫst* may just as well originate in manuscript variants, *f* and *l* being so easily confused. Ohlmarks's point about crossing the *ásbrú* carries little weight, since *Grímnismál* does not say the gods in general crossed the bridge: it is only presented in connection with Þórr's attendance.

[27] Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 ⟨42⟩ describes the red of the rainbow as burning fire, no doubt on the influence of *Grímnismál* 29 ⟨37⟩.

«roðnar brautir», "the reddened ways".[28] The holy waters in flames in *Grímnismál* can most easily be interpreted as Northern Lights hovering about the Milky Way; they hardly fit the rainbow (Ohlmarks 1941: 36) – the Milky Way may be totally "on fire" during the Northern Lights.

Fires ⟨QV⟩ mark off the world of the dead: their presence on the *ásbrú* signifies it is a barrier between worlds, parallel to the soul bridge, which only select individuals can pass (the dead, gods, shamans and so forth, according to local tradition). In Sámi (and Finnish) belief a fiery river separated the world of the dead, just as Ásgarðr is separated by the fiery rivers in *Grímnismál*. The Northern Lights in Sámi belief are linked with death or the souls of the dead (Itkonen 1946: 201): when the lights grow red, glowing as it were with blood, it is a premonition of war; the Skolt Sámi reported that the Northern Lights were composed of blood that flowed from the foot wound of the mythical figure Nāinâs; another explanation sees the lights as formed from the souls of those slain in war or murdered, who continue their strife in heaven. In Norse tradition, it was particularly the slain that had their home in Óðinn's hall, Valhǫll (others going, for example, to Hel, outside the realm of the gods), perhaps suggesting that the *ásbrú* may also have been a passage for warriors, paralleling the Sámi tradition.

The *ásbrú* is said by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 27 ⟨62*a*⟩ to be guarded by the watchful Heimdallr, looking out for giants crossing over it; their doing so will mark the end of the world. As will be discussed below, Heimdallr fulfils the role of watchful guardian tree of the realm of the gods: the bridge leads to him just as, in *Grímnismál*, it appears to lead to Yggdrasill and the judgement seat of the gods.

Groves

There is no explicit evidence that the world tree as a mythic entity was conceived as growing in a grove, and words for "grove" in Norse generally also mean "tree", so certainty on the matter can be elusive. Near Valhǫll grows the *lundr*, "grove", named Glasir; Líf and Lífþrasir emerge from a *holt*, "coppice", into the new world. In *Vǫluspá* there appear the "iron wood" and "gallows wood" of the gods' enemies, which might be seen as mythical antitheses of the sacred grove.

As cult sites, sacred groves certainly existed in the Germanic area. At Uppsala, where the great tree clearly represents the world tree, there was, according to Adam of Bremen, in addition a grove ⟨45⟩. The most ancient sacred Germanic grove recorded (by Tacitus) is that of the Semnones ⟨43⟩.[29]

[28] The implication here may simply be that the sun is on the point of rising: Helgi must hasten away before daybreak.

[29] Archaeological evidence for groves seems, unsurprisingly, to be scarce. A recently excavated probable instance of one from the appropriately named Lunda, near Strängnäs in central Sweden, is discussed by Andersson (2006), who notes, however, that it differs from literary descriptions; for example, scatterings of fragmented burnt and worn bones, pieces of burnt clay and drops of resin, as well as beads, were uncovered (Andersson's interpretations are sometimes inept, however – such as the suggestion of a link of the worn (and thus supposedly ground) bones with Grotti as some sort of cosmic mill).

In Indian myth the world tree is called *Vanaspati*, "Lord of the forest" (Sauvé 1970: 182–3), just as the Sakha tree ⟨10⟩ is called "king of trees", titles suggesting the tree is conceived as "greatest among many". The Ewenki shamanic ritual involved setting up a number of trees ⟨DARPE⟩; likewise in the Nganasan shamanic initiation ⟨16⟩ the novice encounters several different trees; the Tatar underworld tree grew among woods (*BL* 53). Whilst these examples do not exactly constitute groves, the idea of the world tree existing among several others (of ritual significance) was clearly familiar among Eurasian and other peoples, with which the evidence for a similar notion among the Germanic peoples is in line.

Waters

Eurasian cosmic trees generally grow beside water: seas, lakes, rivers and springs are found: thus the Nganasan tree in ⟨17⟩ is said to grow on an island in the midst of one of nine lakes; in Khanty belief the world tree grew at a sea in the midst of heaven (*BL* 56); the Mordvin text ⟨14⟩ affords an example of a well at the foot of the world tree. Seas are rare, however; as noted above, it is usually the felled tree which is seen as growing beside a sea on the edge of the world, explicitly marking the passage of the soul from this world to the next. In Norse, Heimdallr is born at the edge of the world from the sea in *Hyndluljóð* 35 ⟨59⟩. The Kalmyk tree of life, Zambu (so called from the sound made by its fruits falling into the water below it), grows at the centre of the world beside a lake which is the the source of four great rivers (with many tributaries), which wind round seven times and return to their source; each main river is pictured as an animal representing a cardinal point; the fruits of the tree are carried in the water to the ocean, where the dragon Lu-khan consumes them (*BL* 63–4, 73). This image, clearly to a great extent biblical in origin, is in part reminiscent of that in *Grímnismál*, where Þórr crosses mighty rivers to reach the judgement seat of the gods at Yggdrasill. The four cardinal animals compare with the four stags at Yggdrasill; a similar interpretation for them seems plausible. Lu-khan recalls Níðhǫggr beneath the tree. In Norse, the fruit of the world tree is mentioned in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 22, but not directly to emphasise any aspects of fruitfulness, but rather as a cure for sick women (probably for infertility), and without any association with any waters by the tree. Fruitfulness is implicit in the image of the spring of mead, though in Norse this has developed into signifying fruitful knowledge rather than fertility.

The Norse world tree was associated with various waters and springs. The position of the world tree beside water may have had a cult basis: apart from the spring at Uppsala, Olrik (1917: 53–4) notes an example of a large ash tree growing on an island in Norway, the name of which, *Veøy*, indicates that it was a sacred site (*vé*).

The mythical tree has beside it ⟨38⟩: *a.* the *brunnr*, "well/spring", of Urðr (*Vǫluspá* 19); *b.* the *brunnr* of Mímir (*Vǫluspá* 28), which is of mead; *c.* the *brunnr* Hvergelmir, "Cauldron roarer" (*Grímnismál* 26 ⟨37⟩), which seems to originate in the drips from the horns of the goat Eikþyrnir

standing on the tree; the rivers flowing from Hvergelmir (which is said to be the source of all rivers) are given a destination, thus an element of geography: they flow round the *hodd goða* and conclude with Kǫrmt and Ǫrmt and the two Kerlaugar, "Vat baths" (presumably hot springs – in which case the feature is a late, Icelandic innovation or adaptation), which Þórr wades to reach Yggdrasill; *d.* the *sær*, "lake", from which three very wise women – Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld – come to alot fate (*Vǫluspá* 20): no origin for this lake is suggested; *e.* the *á*, "river", with loamy torrent that flows from Mímir's *brunnr* (*Vǫluspá* 27). To a large extent these waters are likely to be varied realisations of the basic motif of a spring or other source of water beside the world tree. Thus the presence of Urðr links *a* to *d*; *a* is linked to *b* and *e* in that the tree is said to be spattered by *aurr* in *Vǫluspá* 19 just before Urðr's spring is mentioned, implying the spring is the source of the mud, and the river which flows from Mímir's spring is described as *aurugr*.[30]

The waters in Norse tradition appear to have two primary associations: *fate* and *fertility*. The association with fate or foreknowledge is widespread elsewhere (see Bächtold-Stäubli 1987, *s.v.* "Brunnen"). Urðr, "Fate", resides at the tree; lottery-sticks are inscribed with men's fates by the three women coming from the lake beneath the tree (*Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩); the liquid is identified as mead: unlike milk, or the honey found for example on the Mordvin trees, this stresses the theme of inspiration, of wisdom, rather than fertility: the association is quite explicit in *Vǫluspá* ⟨38⟩.

There is no explicit statement, as there is in Eurasian texts, that the water under the tree bestows fertility (or rejuvenation). This is, however, implied. Thus the tree is «æ grœnn», "ever green", above the *brunnr* (*Vǫluspá* 19 ⟨38⟩); *brunnr* is associated with fertility, expressed in the name of the goddess Iðunn's home *Brunnakr*, "Corn-field with a spring" (named in *Haustlǫng* 9/5 (*Skj* B, 16); *Iðunn* ⟨QV⟩ itself apparently means "renewal"); dews fall upon the earth from Yggdrasill after it has been laved (as in libation: *ausinn*) with "white mud" (*Vǫluspá* 19),[31] such as flows from the spring at the foot of the tree (cf. «á […] aurgom forsi», "a river […] with muddy flood", *Vǫluspá* 27 ⟨38⟩), and the moisture that drips from the horns of the stag into Hvergelmir, to provide all the rivers of the world, is probably to be taken as dew; cf. the dew-spangled calf («dýrkálfr / dǫggo slunginn»), whose horns shine brightly up to heaven, in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 38 (and on the fertilising/nourishing powers of dew, cf. *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 28/4–8, *Vafþrúðnismál* 45/4 ⟨41⟩). The white mud is to be compared with the milk lakes of Asian tales: both represent a way of associating the waters at the world tree with purity, and with fecundity. Since it is poured on the tree it clearly fulfils

[30] *Aurugr* is used only of the stream which flows from Yggdrasill and of Heimdallr. *Aurr* is mud as deposited by a river, cf. *eyrr*, "gravelly river bank", and (probably) the Finnish river name *Aurajoki* (*joki*, "river"). Connections with primordial fertility are possibly seen in the name *Aurgelmir* ⟨QV⟩.

[31] The sprinkling with white loam may represent a cult practice, as argued by Steinsland (1979: 125).

a fertilising purpose, but also a sanctifying and life-giving one: Snorri's statement in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 that the water is so holy that everything that touches it becomes white, and that it is spattered on the tree to keep it from decaying, may well preserve an authentic attitude (cf. the libations – notably of milk – to the "guardian tree" ⟨VÅRDTRÄD⟩, of which Snorri could have had experience). Whiteness is universally equated with heaven/sky in religious symbolism,[32] and it is thus natural to find an association of the tree, stretching up to heaven, with whiteness. Whiteness is well developed in the related branches of Indian and Iranian myth. The Milk Sea ⟨QV⟩ of Indian myth – which produces a tree – is a fertile source of natural and mythical phenomena in the primordial world; *soma*, the nourishment of the gods, was derived from the Milk Ocean, and was sometimes conceived as milk (for example *Ṛg Veda* IX.51.2, "the milk of heaven, the *soma*'s juice"), but was also equivalent to the *kuṭha* plant, embodiment of endless life, which the gods sought at the *aśvattha* tree in heaven (*Atharvaveda* v.4/3). In Iranian myth, the first man, "the white man", is born beside the white Hom (Indian *soma*), the tree of life and healing which grows on the central mountain, and from which the water of life flows down to a lake (*BL* 71; Viennot 1954: 30).

The tree and the mountain

A common feature of Eurasian world trees is that they grow on a hill or mountain, representing the world mountain (*BL* 52, where a Tatar example of a seven-branched white birch is given, growing on the Iron Mountain in the midst of the world). The Norse sources do not state that the world tree grew on a hill; several pieces of evidence suggest that such a setting may have been envisioned, however, at least on some occasions within a no-doubt varying tradition. The dwelling of Heimdallr, who is closely associated with (and perhaps even a hypostasis of) the world tree, was on "Heaven mountains" according to *Grímnismál* 13 ⟨56⟩. The Saxon world pillar Irminsul was set up on a hill, Eresburg.

In the seventeenth century Hans Nielsen Strelow recorded traditions of an evergreen ash, purportedly historical, in his *Cronica Guthilandorum* (p. 215):

> Aar 1452, lod Herr Ifuer Axelsøn flytte it Esketræ, som stod paa Bahrebierg grønt, saa vel om Vinter som om Sommer, kaldis endnu denne Dag Bare Asken, at det skulde staa paa Viszborrig Slot, men er strax efter visznet. Oc paa samme sted formeentis stor Helligdom at være, bleff opreist et stort Ege Kors paa Bierget, til huilcket de gjorde deris Offer, naar deris Faaer eller Fæ var bortkommen, oc strax skulde være kommet dennem tilhænde igien.

[32] This is so even in Africa: there air is identified as white, and men are conceived of as having been white while dwelling in heaven before they come into the world: and the whiter a child is at birth the more splendid he is; white is the colour of initiates who have reached the final stage of initiation, when they are considered to have been born anew into life in heaven, and to have become like gods: white takes on the significance of union with God (Zahan 1974: 380, 385, 393–4).

> The year 1452: Lord Ivar Axelsøn had the ash tree moved which stood on Bahrebierg, "Needle hill", green just as well in winter as in summer, called to this day the Bare Ask, "Needle ash", so that it should stand at Visborg castle, but it withered straight after. And in the same place where there is deemed to be great sanctity, a great oak cross was raised on the hill, to which they made their offerings when their sheep or cattle got lost, and they would come straight back to them again.

The mountain setting of this exceptional holy tree is clear. The tree in question was, like Yggdrasill, an evergreen ash, and is characterised by the term *barr* which means "needles" as of a pine, and which Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩ says Yggdrasill had (rather than *laufar*, "leaves").[33] The tree appears as a guardian (of flocks), and is thus to be compared with the *vårdträd* ⟨QV⟩. The cross clearly replaces the tree as the object of offerings; this is comparable with the offerings made to the guardian tree, and perhaps alluded to in the complex punning epithet *heiðvanr*, "used to honour", applied in *Vǫluspá* to Yggdrasill (*PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 27/3, 22/1). The site of the Visborg ash is described as holy (cf. how Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 ⟨42⟩ says that the chief *helgistaðr*, "holy place", of the gods is at the ash tree Yggdrasill): it is probable that this sanctity derived from the tree itself – cf. Adam of Bremen's description of the Uppsala grove, where the individual trees were holy by virtue of the offerings hung upon them ⟨45⟩; in this case the tree is to be compared with Yggdrasill, called "holy" (*Vǫluspá* 27 ⟨38⟩). Clearly a cult representation of the great ash tree existed in Visborg well into Christian times. Like the Uppsala tree (which by contrast patently was not atop anything resembling a mountain), it is surely to be understood as a local cult representation of the world tree of Norse myth.

The compass of the world tree

How far the compass of the tree is stressed is dependent on the extent to which it is conceived as a world tree rather than a tree of life; for example, nothing is said about the size of the tree which Gilgamesh comes to at the edge of the world, which is connected with the rising sun, and hence with (ever-renewing) life (Wensinck 1921: 3).

[33] There is some evidence that, at least in Icelandic, *barr* had a wider meaning than just "needle": three sources are noted by Lindroth (1914: 219–21) which give a meaning "bud" (Guðmundr Andreæ †1654, Jón Árnason in 1738, and Björn Halldorsson in 1814); *barr* also means "barley": thus a basic meaning of "spiky (new) growth" could underlie all three significances; de Vries relates the word to Latin *fastigium*, "spike", and Old High German *barrēn*, "stand up rigid" (*AeW*, *s.v.* "barr"); cf. *nál*, "needle [the tool]", but also "the first sprouts of grass in the spring" (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.*), "(pine) needle" (in Norwegian); *Nál* is the name of Loki's mother (*Gylfaginning* ch. 33), where it stands alongside her usual name of *Laufey*, "Leaf isle" (i.e. perhaps "tree"), and means "tree with needles" (Lorenz 1984: 407–8). Either of two significances for *barr* would suit both the passage from Strelow and Snorri: *a.* "bud", which would characterise the trees as "(always) in bud"; *b.* "non-deciduous", derived from the observation that trees with *barr*, "needles", do not (generally, other than larches) drop them in winter, and then applied to mythical trees of (normally) deciduous type which are conceived as not losing their leaves.

Yggdrasill is characterised as taking in the measure of the world in *Vǫluspá*: it is *mjǫtviðr*, "tree of measure". This aspect of the world tree is also mirrored in the Uppsala tree, which is described as spreading its boughs far and wide ⟨45⟩: I take this to imply a reference to, or partaking in the nature of, the tree's mythic prototype, rather than being a mere prosaic description of the tree's size.

In *Vǫluspá* 2 ⟨38⟩ nine worlds are mentioned, and are paralleled with the tree itself "beneath the ground". *Vafþrúðnismál* 43 also mentions nine underworlds; the concept of nine heavens is found only later, in *Þula* IV ff (*Skj* B_1 671). The tree, it would seem, is presented as "growing out of", or consisting of, the nine worlds of the cosmos.[34]

In *Grímnismál* 31 ⟨37⟩ three roots extend from the ash tree: the poet may have intended to embrace the whole corporeal world, which is essentially the same notion as in *Vǫluspá*, which, however, perhaps communicates the idea with greater poetic finesse, and the world is, so to speak, seen from the tree's perspective, born at the beginning of time and connecting all the worlds together, geographically and chronologically, whereas *Grímnismál* looks upon the tree from outside, as something growing in the heavens, but with roots stretching down to different realms; no interest is shown in the tree's origin, so it is not related so dynamically to the fate of the world as in *Vǫluspá*.

The extent of the world tree in Eurasian sources is often stressed. For example, the Altaian peoples believed that at the mid-point of the earth grew the highest of trees, a great pine stretching up to the house of the high god, Bai-Ülgön (*BL* 52). The number of worlds varies throughout Eurasia, seven and nine being the commonest. The world tree is pictured as stretching through them; for example, in the shamanic songs of the Vasyugan Khanty, in which Tatar concepts are clearly evident, it is said that this tree, like heaven itself, has seven storeys; according to one legend this tree pierces through the various levels of heaven and also stretches its roots into the subterranean depths, just like the central mountain of the world (*BL* 52). The world tree, and its extent, is symbolically represented in the shaman's tree; the Ewenki tree described by Anisimov in the citations above illustrates this principle. A tree representing the world tree is thus central to many shamanic rituals; the branches of the tree or the notches cut in it represent the different worlds to be passed through, or else a line of trees is set up, each representing a different heaven (*BL* 135–7; Eliade 1972: xiv).

[34] As noted, the *vǫlva* may, however, be intending to stress longevity, seeing the nine worlds as successive in time; however, if this is the case, she does so by alluding to a mythic scene which is primarily cosmographic in nature. Whilst a detailed consideration of archaeological evidence is beyond the scope of this volume, it is worth noting that the notion of nine worlds may be reflected in architectural monuments: thus Andrén (2006: 36) argues that the fort of Ismantorp, Öland, dating from around AD 200, with its nine gateways and central post, at which a cache of weapons was deposited, represents the world tree with nine worlds around it.

The growth of the world tree

The idea of growth is implicit in the image of the tree; sometimes it is mentioned specifically; for example, among Turkic races the tree is said to reflect the structure of the universe, and to have grown from a bud as the universe grew (*BL* 52); similarly the "iron tree" of the Sakhas declares "when heaven and earth began to grow, I grew with them" (*BL* 12).[35]

Sophisticated symbolic use is made of the tree's growth by the poet of *Vǫluspá*, where it matches the development of the world as a whole. No other Norse source relates time to the world tree, though *Grímnismál* emphasises how the tree suffers the ravages of various animals and rots on one side: hence it is subject to being worn down over time. *Vǫluspá* refers to the tree at important junctures of the poem: at the primordial beginnings of the world (st. 2) the tree is remembered by the *vǫlva* as "under the earth", not yet sprung.[36] An identification between the tree and the world is implied by the poet in his use of the epithet «mæran» (accusative), "famous", to describe both (2/7 and 4/4). It is called a *mjǫtviðr*, "tree of measure", as encompassing the whole measure of the universe; "measure" implies "fate", the term for which, *mjǫtuðr*, the poet plays upon here, and which he uses in st. 46 in reference to *ragnarǫk* – indeed, the term *mjǫtviðr* was probably his invention, a deliberate reading of *mjǫtuðr*, "fate, what is meted out" (borrowed probably from Old English *meotod*), as a reduced form of *mjǫtviðr*, "tree of measure". The tree is bound up with the fate of the universe: the water beneath it is a well of fate (Urðr) – fate nourishes the tree; also from a lake beneath the tree emerge the three maidens who give men their destiny. The tree is itself subject to fate, to measure. In st. 19 the tree appears in full vitality, above ground, high in the air, ever green,[37] and dripping dews into the earth's dales; the tree is presented here in juxtaposition with the formation of the first human couple, and the inauguration of human fate. In st. 27 the hearing of Heimdallr, the *vǫrðr goða*, "guardian of the gods" (and hence of the whole world), is mentioned as hidden beneath the tree, and Óðinn's eye, which he forfeited to gain knowledge, is in the spring beneath the tree:[38] the gods have signed over their distinctive powers to the tree and those, like Mímir, who guard the tree/spring complex. In st. 47, as the end of the world draws near and the alarum sounds, it is «it aldna tré», "the aged tree", which quakes, and again Heimdallr and Óðinn appear, the one blowing on his horn, the other consulting Mímr's

[35] Compare Heimdallr's declaration of his own birth in *Heimdallargaldr* (55); this is the only place a god announces his birth in Old Norse.

[36] "Under the earth" also implies that the tree was envisioned as encompassing the nine underworlds.

[37] Such as would nourish all the beasts of *Grímnismál*, of which, however, the poet of *Vǫluspá* has eschewed any mention. The perpetual greenness is a feature it shares with the sacred tree at Uppsala (45).

[38] Puhvel (1987: 194 n.) notes a curious coincidence of the meanings "well/spring" and "eye" in a single lexeme both in Semitic and Indo-European languages (for example Latvian *aka*, "well", corresponds to Russian око, "eye"); thus the motif of the eye in the spring may have originated in a pun – but if so, it must be of great antiquity, since no such coincidence of senses can be traced in recorded Germanic terms.

head, apparently an allusion to the powers they had forfeited in st. 27, in a vain attempt to rebuff the engulfing collapse of the world.

There is an ambiguity in the poet's description of the beginnings of the tree in st. 2 of *Vǫluspá*. The *vǫlva* establishes her credentials by declaring she remembers four things from primordial times: the giants born in ancient time who brought her up; nine worlds (*heimar*); nine *íviðjur*; the famous *mjǫtviðr*, "tree of measure/fate", beneath the ground (before it had grown). The question arises of how far the worlds, the *íviðjur* and the tree are completely separate entities (and, as the *íviðjur* were of giant kin, these may furthermore be intended to correspond to the giants that brought her up).

Íviðja is altogether a puzzling word. As far as its derivation goes, de Vries (*AeW*, *s.v.* "íviðja") suggests it could be formed from *ívið*, "deceit"; *ívið* occurs only once in Old Norse, in *Vǫlundarkviða* 28/8, where it may, however, be a borrowing from Old Saxon, or, more likely, Old English *inpid* (McKinnell 1990: 7–8; *PE* II, comm. *ad loc.*). Even if this is the actual historical etymology, the word, particularly in the hands of poets, could readily have been viewed, following a folk etymology, as being formed from *í* and *viðr*, something that lives in or is associated with trees. The word occurs in two other places in Old Norse, neither of which yields any conclusive meaning. *Hyndluljóð* 48 presents a threat of fire and immobility:

Ek slæ eldi	I will set fire
of[39] íviðio,	around the *íviðja*
svá at þú ei kemz	so that you will not get yourself
á burt heðan.	away from here.

It is not wholly clear who is threatening whom at this point, but most editors have taken Freyja to be addressing the *vǫlva* Hyndla, who is thus identified as an *íviðja*, the meaning of which can, this being so, scarcely be other than "ogress".[40] The other occurrence is in *Forspjallsljóð*, a poem long

[39] Emended from «af».

[40] However, Quinn (2002: 264–7) argues against previous editors' emendation of *af* to *of* and the ascription of the stanza to Freyja, seeing the threatened fires as parallel to those of *ragnarǫk*, and the forced immobility of the victim as a threat to keep Freyja where Hyndla herself is, by a cave on the road to death, preventing her return to the gods. Yet we are left with problems: Quinn's translation, "I will cast fire from the troll-woman", is rather impenetrable (why would the poet not just say "the troll-woman will cast fire"), unless, indeed, *íviðja* does not mean an ogress, but a piece of wood used to start a fire (even then the syntax would be odd, however). "Cast fire" also masks a difference, not discussed by Quinn, between *slá eld* and *slá eldi*, the first meaning "strike fire", to start one, and the latter meaning "set fire to": the slight change of *af* to *of* (readily explicable, as *of* was archaic by the time of Flateyjarbók and could easily be misread or misinterpreted as *af*) gives an idiomatic meaning of "I will set fire [to the area] around the ogress". Quinn's argument that the threat is more meaningful if it applies to Freyja, who would be held in a half-deathly region, is appealing, but it might be questioned if a *vǫlva* would make a threat which she could not, presumably, fulfil against a more powerful goddess; rather, Freyja may be seen as simply ensuring that Hyndla will not rise up to bother anyone else again, and the fires set around her are those of death (as seen on howes, for example). The threat is empty, since Hyndla clearly does not wish to be bothered any more anyway, but since it is bound to be fulfilled, Freyja can walk away with a sense of satisfaction at being seen to have the upper hand (to

regarded as an antiquarian product of perhaps the seventeenth century, but now believed to be essentially medieval, lending greater value to its content (Lassen 2006).[41] In st. 1 a list of different types of being is given, along with a verb describing what they do (the *vanir* «vitu», "know", the *nornir* «vísa», "direct", and so forth); among these statements is «elr íviðja». The meaning is regrettably not clear, given the complete lack of context, since *ala* can mean "beget", but also "produce, give rise to" and "nourish, raise". The reference is likely to derive from *Vǫluspá*: *ala* perhaps corresponds to *fœdda* of st. 2, which most probably indicates that the *vǫlva* was brought up among giants, among whom it is possible to infer were included the *íviðjur* mentioned there; however, it is also possible to see a reference to *Vǫluspá* 39, where a giantess «fœddi» the broods of Fenrir; here, a meaning of "begat" is more likely. Either way, the *íviðja* appears as an anthropoid being responsible for some aspect of rearing offspring.

Whilst in *Vǫluspá* the meaning "ogress" thus appears certain, these nine giantesses are never mentioned again, and cannot be related to any known myth of primordial time, so their mention seems pointless, unless they can be related to the other entities referred to in the context, namely the nine worlds and the unsprung tree. Such a relationship may be inferred, if we take the poet as deriving a significance for the ogresses from a pun upon *íviðjur*, seeing it as derived from *viðr*, "wood" (cf. *viðja*, "withy", from *við*, "withy"). Giantesses and woods were associated, and specifically through the element *-viðja*: Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 12 states that in Járnviðr, "Iron wood", live *trollkonur*, "troll women", called *járnviðjur*. *Járnviðja*, "Iron-wood [ogress]", is also the name given to Skaði in *Háleygjatal* (*Skj* B_1 60): Óðinn begets on her a son (Sæmingr or Yngvifreyr).[42] The poet appears to be intimating, in *Vǫluspá* 2 ⟨38⟩, that the famed tree, *mjǫtviðr*, was given being by nine wood-ogresses, *íviðjur*, just as it encompassed (and in a sense derived its being from) nine worlds. In a similar way, Heimdallr, who in one understanding is a personification of the world tree, is said to have nine mothers in *Hyndluljóð* 35 ⟨59⟩, who are both waves and giantesses (daughters of the giant Ægir): the god is there born from the sea (unlike the tree in *Vǫluspá*). The reason for bringing in giantesses to the origin of the tree is suggested by analogues elsewhere: Anisimov (1963*a*: 97) notes that ancestral spirits among the Ewenki were conceived as female beings living at the roots of the (symbolic) world tree – stressing the ideas of origins and engendering; with this notion is to be compared that of the divine mistress of the clan fire, at the foot of the tree, who, as guardian of the clan's souls, was responsible for reincarnation. Giants are the ancestral beings of Norse myth, giving rise to the *æsir* (*Gylfaginning* ch. 6), as well as

all appearances). (*KLE*, comm. *ad loc.*, also dismisses Quinn's arguments.)

[41] Lassen notes that there is still debate over the poem's date, particularly as it contains forms which can only be post-medieval, but the manuscripts are all late (an earlier, possibly medieval, manuscript is known to have existed but has perished), which probably suffices to explain these forms. Lassen, following essentially Jónas Kristjánsson, dates the poem to the late fourteenth century.

[42] Davidson (1983: 60) argues that Yngvifreyr is intended.

to the wise *vǫlva*. The tree is similarly placed at the origin of the world, and it is later juxtaposed with (and by implication as a cause of) the origin of mankind (*Vǫluspá* 17–19 ⟨38⟩); the god Heimdallr, closely associated with the tree, is also mentioned as the origin of man at the opening of *Vǫluspá*, and is the engenderer of the estates of mankind in *Rígsþula*.

Fate and the world tree

The description of the Sakha tree ⟨10⟩ gives a striking instance of the appearance of a goddess of fate at the world tree.

In *Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩ three allegorical maidens determine fates for men in past, present and future,[43] by incising slips of wood, such as would be used in augury or lottery; the inscribing suggests a special mark for each man, to be picked from a pile as in lottery. Van Hamel (1934*a*: 227–9) argues that this represents a shift from the earlier situation in the poem in which the gods controlled fate, through their control of the game of chequers which three giant maidens, we are to understand, overthrew:[44] the tree proves insufficient to withstand the conflagration at *ragnarǫk*, which only the golden chequers manage to resist. As noted above, the tree is, however, very much linked with the fate of the world from its first mention as a *mjǫtviðr*.

Fate, in the person of Urðr, is associated with a spring: the earliest record, *c.* 950, is in Kormákr's *Sigurðardrápa* 4 (*Skj* B_1 69), «komsk Urðr ór brunni», "Urðr brought herself from the spring". A connection between mantic powers – the power to declare fate – and a spring is probably an archaic and widespread motif: it is found at the Greek *omphalos* of the world,[45] Delphi, in Pausanias's *Description of Greece* x.24.7:

> Ἰοῦσι δὲ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸν ναὸν αὖθις μετὰ τοῦ λίθου τὴν θέαν ἐστὶν ἡ Κασσοτὶς καλουμένη πηγή· τεῖχος δὲ οὐ μέγα ἐπ᾽ αὐτῇ καὶ ἡ ἄνοδος

[43] The poet has perhaps himself coined the names Verðandi and Skuld on the basis of the old name Urðr (cf. Old English *þyrd*); *verða* is "become", but also "must": Urðr is perceived as deriving from the past tense of this verb (pl. *urðu*), with the implied meaning "what had to be", and *Verðandi* is its present participle "what has to be"; *Skuld* is derived from *skulu*, meaning "what will have to be".

[44] The gods are, it is to be noted, not defeated in the chess match (if that is the correct interpretation) by giants, whose significance is almost always entirely negative, but by giantesses, who, whilst being opponents of the gods, are generally possessed of something the gods want, and therefore represent (ambivalently) positive forces. The *vǫlva* narrator, brought up among giants (and perhaps of their kin), herself one of several *vǫlur* in the poem, possesses knowledge Óðinn is keen to possess; a threesome of powerful female entities, from outside the realm of the *æsir*, is found in the three fates who control the course of the world; there is an implied threesome of alien and powerful females in the form of Freyja and her avatars Gullveig and Heiðr, who between them possess the power of gold and renewed life. The game of chess may, as in van Hamel's analogues, imply control of the movements of the cosmos, which the gods are therefore seen as losing, the first step in a series of diminutions of their powers on the route to *ragnarǫk*. The three giantesses may also be seen as foreshadowing the later female threesomes, and hence their appearance marks the first warning knell of the alienation of the *æsir*'s powers which is traced in the rest of the poem.

[45] Bächtold-Stäubli (1987, *s.v.* "Brunnen §4") documents the ancient belief that wells were linked with the (underworld) sources of prophetic knowledge.

διὰ τοῦ τείχους ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τὴν πηγήν. ταύτης τῆς Κασσοτίδος δύεσθαί τε κατὰ τῆς γῆς λέγουσι τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ τοῦ θεοῦ τὰς γυναῖκας μαντικὰς ποιεῖν· τὴν δὲ τῇ κρήνῃ δεδωκυῖαν τὸ ὄνομα τῶν περὶ τὸν Παρνασσὸν νυμφῶν φασιν εἶναι.

Coming back to the temple after the stone, there is the spring called Cassotis. Beside it is a wall, not large, and the way up to the spring is through the wall. It is said that the water of this Cassotis sinks under the ground, and inspires the women in the shrine of the god. She who gave her name to the spring is said to have been a nymph of Parnassus.

It is probable that the complex of world tree and fate (fatal springs) results partly from a placing of whatever is most significant to the structure of the cosmos at its *omphalos*, so the tree comes to be associated with fate; this may easily arise independently in numerous traditions.

The tree as a medium of communication

The world tree is the means by which the shaman ascends into other worlds; this aspect is central to most Eurasian realisations of the world-tree concept.

The ash of *Grímnismál* 32 ⟨37⟩ is a communication line: a squirrel messenger takes «arnar orð», "the eagle's words", down to the serpent at the bottom. Far from being shamanic, however, this probably implies news of battle (see below).

Vǫluspá 27 ⟨38⟩ presents the tree as a sort of keeper of the hearing of Heimdallr and the sight of Óðinn; it could be inferred (though the poem does not say so) that the tree itself takes on a role of watchman (cf. the guardian tree of folk traditon ⟨VÅRDTRÄD⟩).

Given that the world tree is the connection and means of communication between the different levels of the cosmos, it is appropriate that in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 3 Óðinn makes his epiphany at the *barnstokkr* ⟨46⟩ (de Vries 1954: 99), just as the goddess appears at the Sakha tree above: both deities appear as inaugurators of the fates of chosen heroes.

The tree appears as a passage between the worlds of the living and the dead in the myth of Óðinn's sacrifice upon it (considered in detail in Chapter 16). However, we have no parallel to the ritual use of the Norse tree in the way the shaman would climb upon its representation to signify his passage between worlds.

The tree as the seat of god as ruler and instructor

The Norse world tree is never itself stated to be the dwelling of a god: nevertheless the concept seems to be implied. It is possible that Mímir's dwelling in a spring in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 ⟨42⟩ encouraged the extension to the tree beside it in later legend such as is reflected in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 20, where Mimi (god or genius of the tree and well) has his own tree, Mimameiðr; Heimdallr would seem to be immanent in the "holy tree" of

Vǫluspá 27, since his hearing or ear is couched beneath it; Óðinn is lodged – hanging – on the tree for nine nights only in *Hávamál* 138–9 ⟨48c⟩: it is his sacrificial home, and there he effects benefits (for the gods, or men, or himself) through sacrifice. Tacitus states that in the grove of the Semnones was thought to be the «regnator omnium deus», "ruling god of all" ⟨43⟩.

The Norse tree is connected with counsel, knowledge, determining of fate: it is the nourisher of Heiðrún, the provider of the wisdom-bestowing mead; at the tree is the seat of fate (*Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩); the *askr Yggdrasils* is the place of the gods' assembly, where they resort every day to discourse and exercise their judgement (*Grímnismál* 29–30 ⟨37⟩). De Vries (*AR* §265) notes that the holy area, such as was designated for an assembly (*þing*) among men, was set up around a spear, stone or tree.[46] The assembly was centred around a tree (or trees) in the case of the sacrificial gatherings both of the Semnones and of the Swedes at Uppsala (as described by Tacitus ⟨43⟩ and Adam of Bremen ⟨45⟩): in both cases it is clear that the meetings were political as well as sacrificial (*AR* §328; note for example how Tacitus stresses that it was *legationes*, "embassies", that gathered in the grove of the Semnones); the sacrifices were no doubt directed at the renewal of the nation.

Eurasian sources are sometimes more explicit than the Norse. The tree itself appears as the residence of a divinity in the case of the Sakha tree, which houses the mother goddess. The world tree is often pictured as either culminating in the dwelling of the high god, for example the Altaian tree reaches to the house of the high god Bai-Ülgön ⟨QV⟩, or as growing at the court of the gods. The tree is sometimes presented as reaching up to the dwelling of the gods for purposes of instruction or the divulging of information: the Mordvin poem ⟨12⟩ has a bee going up the tree to find Niške pas, the high god, to find out if it is allowed to carry away honey. The Sakha high god Ajÿ Tojōn ⟨QV⟩ has a tree, the "never-falling support" (hence a manifestation of the world tree), growing at his court, corresponding to the shaman trees on earth. From the Sakha tree ⟨10⟩ the mother goddess emerges to reveal the fate of the first man (the son of the god who lives at the summit of the tree).

[46] The *dómhringr* was the "judgement ring" of stones marking the sacrosanct area within which courts sat and judgement took place (*AR* §265; *DONP*, *s.v.*). De Vries notes that the Swedish *domareringar* often consisted of nine stones set around a central stone; they were originally ancestral graves from AD 400–500, but were later used as *þing* and judgement places: the number of stones may then have been conceived as representing the nine worlds, i.e. judgement took place at a site symbolically uniting the worlds and their wisdom, as seems to be implied in the gods meeting at Yggdrasill. However, whilst such a symbolic interpretation is possible in some cases, the number of stones in fact varies considerably, and nine by no means predominates. Thus at the seventh-century site of Björketorp, Blekinge, there are three, and at the later site of Hunnestad, Skåne, the earliest accounts indicate there were eight, though one may already have been removed (Moltke 1985: 141–3, 250–4). Sahlström (1924), in his investigation of the *domareringar* of Västergötland, notes that about half the circles had seven stones, and a third nine, and the preponderance of seven or nine was geographically determined, suggesting that different areas may have applied different symbolisms (or none at all) to the circles.

The hardships of the world tree

Norse sources provide a relatively full record of the tree's sufferings, and this would appear to mark a distinct feature of the Scandinavian tradition. Three stanzas of *Grímnismál* (33–5 ⟨37⟩) describe the consumption of the tree – which *Grímnismál* 35/1–3 alludes to as hardship that it suffers – by four named stags eating the *hœfingar* (perhaps "new buds")[47] from below (they are *gaghálsir*, "with necks thrown back"); one stag eating from above; snakes/worms continually eating its twigs; the dragon Níðhǫggr wearing away its base from below; wet-rot rotting its side.

Yggdrasill is a *mjǫtviðr*, "tree of measure", in *Vǫluspá*: the implication could be the same as for the eating beasts that cause the tree *erfiði*, "hardship", in *Grímnismál*, that time will cause hardships; the shaking of Yggdrasill at *ragnarǫk* in *Vǫluspá* 45 is possibly the final result of the ravages of time.

Eurasian evidence for the suffering of the world tree is rare: one example is a heavily christianised tale recounted by a Nenets shaman of Obdorsk, in which a holy seven-branched birch is said to have grown in a holy place in the south called Nadje; everyone journeyed to the tree to make offerings, but the tree's roots began to rot, and once the seventh had succumbed the birch fell, and blood flowed from under it, but the blood was in fact fire, and this was followed by holy water, which caused a flood, so that people had to build a craft and gather one of each type of animal onto it (Lehtisalo 1924: 11).

Animals at the world tree

As the centre of physical life in the world the tree is seen as populated with animals.

Stags

A number of stags are found. In *Grímnismál* 26 ⟨37⟩ the stag Eikþyrnir is nourished by Læráðr's boughs, and drips from its horns fall into Hvergelmir, the source of all waters: the stag, like the goat Heiðrún, thus associates the tree with the *origin of beneficence*. In *Grímnismál* 33 four stags, and in st. 35 another stag, gnaw on Yggdrasill; the purpose is to establish the *consuming of the tree*, and the hardships it undergoes.

Several other ancient traditions may have determined the presence of stags at the world tree. The stag is a symbol of royalty; one of Óðinn's names was *Elgr*, "Elk" (*AR* §257): Egill in *Sonatorrek* 15 (*Skj* B, 36) speaks of the «alþjóð / Elgjar galga», "population of the gallows of Elgr": "the gallows of Elgr" is interpreted by Nordal (*Egils saga* p. 252) as Yggdrasill, and its

[47] The meaning of *hœfingar* is highly obscure. De Vries (*AeW, s.v.*) supports an interpretation as "hoofed animal" (cf. *hœfir*), but this makes little sense in context. In his summary of this stanza Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩ glosses *hœfingar* as *barr*. The word *barr* ⟨QV⟩ itself is problematic, but probably means "buds". The sense "shoots, buds" for *hœfingar* suits the context well; the word could derive from *hefja*: *hœfingar* would be the "heavings", i.e. the buds shooting out. Lorenz (1984: 260–1) takes both *hœfingar* and *barr* to be "buds" here.

population as all living beings, giants, gods and men, which Egill feels to be against him. Thus the name *Elgr* occurs in connection with the world tree, itself inhabited by stags. Hence the presence of the stag, a symbol of the god himself, at Óðinn's hall would be felt appropriate. In the Old English *Beowulf* the name of Hroþgar's hall is *Heorot*, "Hart", where a similar intention to emphasise the royal splendour of the edifice may be inferred (whether any lingering pagan association with Woden may have been apparent to the earliest audience of the poem is impossible to determine).

The four grazing stags may symbolise middle earth, between the heavens (represented by the eagle) and the underworld (represented by the dragon). More specifically, they may symbolise the four directions. This function is elsewhere assigned to dwarfs,[48] and the four stags bear dwarf names, Dáinn, Dvalinn, Dúneyrr and Duraþrór. In Kalmyk myth the four directions are personified in the form of four animals representing the rivers about the world tree ⟨ZAMBU⟩. The Gallic Jupiter pillars ⟨QV⟩, which may have influenced the Saxon Irminsul, although not endowed with four animals, were nonetheless oriented to the four directions, the pillar symbolically occupying a cosmically central position (W. Müller 1975: 44–5).

The four stags could additionally represent stars or constellations about the pole star, in which the world pillar culminated in Eurasian examples.[49] This is suggested by several analogues. In Sámi, *sarva* means "reindeer", but it is also the name of a constellation (Kulonen, Seurujärvi-Kari and Pulkkinen 2005, *s.v.*), and is glossed by Friis (1887, *s.v.* "Sarva") as «fire Stjerner til venstre af Karlsvognen», "the four stars to the left of the Great Bear". The Kirgiz and the Tatars viewed the Great Bear as seven animals bound to the North Star with a rope (*BL* 23). The Mongols saw in the constellation a herd of horses, looked after by Tšolbon (the planet Venus) and his knave Dogedoi or Toklok (*BL* 23). The Sakhas believed seven reindeer were tethered to the "iron tree" trying to get away (Harva 1933: 28).

These analogues relate to the cosmic support as pillar more than tree, as the pillar is commonly associated with the North Star, about which the "animals" (the constellations so perceived) clearly circle, and to which they are readily perceived as being tethered. There is some tenuous evidence that the world support might be conceived as a pillar in Germanic tradition (Chapter 10), and the tree here approaches close to this conception (assuming the suggested interpretation of the animals is accepted). Nonetheless, the animals are fully adapted to their home in the tree, chewing upon it and dripping liquid (relating to the tree as the site of springs, which is not a feature of the world pillar).

[48] Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 8 says that four dwarfs, North, South, East and West, were placed by the sons of Borr at the four corners of the earth; *Vǫluspá* 11/2–3 mentions the dwarfs' direction names; Arnórr speaks of the «erfiði Austra», "hardships of East" (i.e. the firmament he is holding up) in *Þórfinnsdrápa* 24 (*Skj* B₁ 321).

[49] As the firmament appears to turn continuously about the North Star, the use of constellations as markers of cardinal points also requires a correlation with time. The connection between heavenly bodies and the measuring of time is possibly alluded to in the myth of Mundilfœri ⟨QV⟩.

The goat

According to Eliade (1996: 279) the goat can be a symbol of divinity; on a relief from Assur a goat is depicted feeding off the leaves of a tree out of which a god is emerging and beside which water is being poured from an inexhaustible vase. Similarly, the vessel of mead filled by the goat (*geit*) Heiðrún is said to be inexhaustible (*Grímnismál* 25 ⟨37⟩). The he-goat (*hafr*) appears as the draught animal of Þórr's car (*Þrymskviða* 21, *Gylfaginning* ch. 21, 44, 48), probably because it is the archetypal beast of steep rock slopes, the home of the giants whom Þórr was devoted to culling; the god's association with the world pillar is discussed above (Chapter 10).

The eagle and serpent

In *Grímnismál* 32 ⟨37⟩ an eagle is found atop Yggdrasill, and at its bottom the serpent Níðhǫggr along with many other snakes or worms. A squirrel travels between the eagle and Níðhǫggr, according to Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩ stirring up enmity between them. *Vǫluspá* mentions Níðhǫggr (st. 39, 66) though without associating it with Yggdrasill, only with human corpses.

The eagle. Images of birds are found at the top of some images of the world pillar, such as *numsives*, "heaven eagle", on the Khanty pillar; Lehtisalo (1924: 69) notes that the eastern Samoyeds had images, probably influenced by more easterly examples, of holy birds which were kept on top of world pillars at holy tribal sites, as well as at home; the bird assisted the shaman in ascending to heaven. The Samoyed eagle thus appears as a sort of shamanic helping spirit. Among the Sakhas the Lord of the World dwelt at the top of the tree and was sometimes pictured as an eagle (Eliade 1972: 70). The double-headed mythical eagle of the Kets was said to be all-seeing (*BL* 14). No doubt reflecting the bird's knowledge, Eliade (1972: 70) notes that among the Khanty, Teleuts and Orochons the first shaman was believed to have been instructed by an eagle or born from one. The eagle is therefore regarded as endowed with supernatural knowledge.

In Norse, Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩ describes the eagle as «margs vitandi», "knowing many things" – presumably stemming from his lofty position overlooking the whole world (cf. the Ket eagle). As a likely reflection of the motif of the eagle's knowledge, *Grímnismál* portrays the eagle as the source of «orð», "word(s)", borne by the squirrel to the denizen of the tree roots, Níðhǫggr, "Malicious striker" (cf. the dragon of *Beowulf* 2273, called «niðdraca», "malicious dragon"). We have no evidence about the use made of this information by the serpent in Norse, though a carrion bird's "news" is usually of war:[50] Níðhǫggr is associated with the last battlefield

[50] Compare *Beowulf* 3024–6: «sceall [...] ac se ponna hrefn / fus ofer fægum fela reordian, / earne secgan hu him æt æte speop», "and the dark raven will speak many things eagerly over the doomed, say to the eagle how he has sped at his meal", and in Old Norse Þorbjǫrn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði* 2–3 (*Skj* B, 22), from *c.* 900, where the ravens, «arnar eiðbróðir», "sworn brothers of the eagle", are asked their news: «Hvat es yðr hrafnar? / Hvaðan eruð komnir / með dreyrgu nefi / at degi ǫndverðum?», "What is it, ravens? Whence have you

in *Vǫluspá* 62, and bears away the corpses. Giants – the custodians of supernatural knowledge (Motz 1987) – sometimes appear as eagles, notably Þjazi, who, like the eagle of Yggdrasill, is depicted in *Haustlǫng* 2 and 6 as sitting in a tree when hovering over the gods' meal; Holtsmark (1946*a*: 62) goes so far as to identify the trees; also the giant Hræsvelgr is «í arnar ham», "in eagle form"[51] in *Vafþrúðnismál* 37. There is not, however, any specific association of eagles with wisdom in these instances. In *Vǫluspá* 56 an eagle appears in the new world, hunting for fish in the mountains: the image is one of the renewed natural cycle, rather than wisdom (and contrasts with the eagle's normal role as bird of carrion in battle).

The eagle is thus associated with knowledge in various traditions; this is merely a development of its natural keen-sightedness from high places, and must have developed independently in different traditions. Where shamanism existed, the eagle naturally becomes the communicator of (supernatural) knowledge to the human shaman, but this has no parallel in Norse, where instead, as a bird of battle, the eagle sends news of strife down the tree.

The serpent. The serpent in many mythologies is found at the navel of the earth; a clear example is the Python at Delphi. In the Python is represented the possession of subterranean knowledge, later acquired by Apollo (and thus by his representative, the mantic priestess) through his defeat of the serpent (Pauly 1964–75, *s.v.* "Python 1"). In some myths the serpent also has the role of guardian of the tree, for example the Garden of the Hesperides, the Golden Fleece, and to some extent the tree of life of Genesis (Eliade 1996: 288–90). In Kalmyk myth a dragon lurks in the lake at the bottom of the Zambu tree, waiting for the golden leaves that fall from the tree, which it devours (*BL* 67). In a Central Asian Turkic tale the dragon twines round the world mountain several times, and hence by implication round the world ⟨Otširvani⟩, like the Norse serpent Miðgarðsormr (*Gylfaginning* ch. 47).

In Norse, in *Grímnismál* 32 and 35 ⟨37⟩ the serpent Níðhǫggr resides at the bottom of the tree; that this is a cosmically focal point (like the *omphalos* where the Python is found) is suggested by the tradition drawn upon by the poet of *Vǫluspá* in associating the (waters at the) foot of the tree with fate. It appears that, as at Delphi, the serpent is found at a place of *revelation*; in addition, Níðhǫggr is the recipient of "words" from the eagle in *Grímnismál* 32. The dragon Fáfnir shows his wisdom in *Fáfnismál*, and is described as "wise" (*fróðr*) in st. 12 (and tasting his heart gives Sigurðr ability to understand birds' talk: 32 pr.). The Old English gnomic *Maxims II* 26–7 characterises dragons: «draca sceal on hlæpe, / frod, frætpum planc», "a dragon will be on a burial mound, wise, proud in treasures". There is no evidence that Níðhǫggr had any guardian role. However, other dragons appear as guardians – or at least as (jealous) guarders of their treasure, as with Fáfnir (*Fáfnismál* 9, 20, *Grípisspá* 13) or the dragon of the Old English

come with gory beak at the break of day?", to which they reply they have been following the young prince, Haraldr Hálfdanarson, in battle.

[51] Or specifically, "in an eagle's feather coat".

gnomic verse; the dragon of *Beowulf* 2212 «hord beþeotode», "guarded the hoard". The treasure guarded by dragons is treacherous, leading to the downfall of those who try to acquire it: «It gialla gull / ok it glóðrauða fé, / þér verða þeir baugar at bana», "the ringing gold and the glowing red money, these rings will be your death", says Fáfnir to Sigurðr (*Fáfnismál* 9, 20); the treasure found at Beowulf's death is «eacencræftig, / iumonna gold galdre bewunden», "made powerful with spells, gold of ancient men swathed in magic" (*Beowulf* 3051–2). Níðhǫggr is not said to dwell in the lake found at the foot of the world tree (in *Vǫluspá*); another serpent, Jǫrmungandr, the snake of middle-earth, dwells in the ocean (but is not associated with the world tree).[52] The dragon of *Beowulf* dwells near the water (*Beowulf* 2241–3).[53] Níðhǫggr, the "Malicious striker", is perhaps an allegorical characterisation of the worm of death (the word *ormr* encompasses the semantic field of English *worm, serpent, dragon*); comparable is the association of dragons with death in the Old English gnomic verse. In *Grímnismál* 35 Níðhǫggr strikes at the tree from below; in *Vǫluspá* 38 and 62 he appears as devourer of corpses, whereas in contrast the eagle appears as a symbol of the renewed life of the cosmos, fishing in the mountains (*Vǫluspá* 56).

Eagle and serpent as contending partners. The eagle and serpent as contending partners, often in association with a tree, form a widespread motif; a well-known example occurs in the Aztec legend of the foundation of their capital, Tenochtitlan, the chosen site for which was revealed to the Aztecs when they saw an eagle with a snake in its mouth on a nopal cactus in the midst of a lake; all the elements here have analogues in Yggdrasill (for Nahuatl text with Spanish translation, see *Crónica Mexicayotl*, 62–6, and for an English version, Soustelle 1964: 26); another example is found in pre-Islamic southern Arab marble carvings, where the serpent apparently represents the moon (one of the chief divinities), whose speed, greater than that of any other heavenly body, is symbolised by the swift eagle that holds it (C. Nielsen 1904: 109). A further instance is the Babylonian tale of Etana (Dalley 2000: 189–202), in which an eagle nests upon a great tree with a serpent at its root; the two contend with each other in various ways, until the serpent overcomes the eagle, at which point Etana turns up and helps the eagle, in exchange for being provided with the herb of birth to enable him to beget a son. The symbolism may vary; a Carnutan (Gallic) coin depicts an eagle below a sun symbol, holding a wheel of the seasons with a snake beside it (W. Müller 1975: 70) – a combination suggesting the most straightforward symbolism of the motif, with the eagle representing heaven and in particular the swift movement of the sun, while the serpent stands for the mutability (it sheds its skin) and decay of earth (cf. how the Norse serpent Níðhǫggr destroys the tree from below).

[52] Snorri (*Gylfaginning* ch. 33 and thereafter *passim*) is the first to use the name *Miðgarðsormr*, "snake of middle-earth"; in *Vǫluspá* 47 and *Ragnarsdrápa* 16 (*Skj* B1 4) the serpent is called *Jǫrmungandr* and in *Vǫluspá* 53 simply "serpent" (*naðr*). *Hymiskviða* 22–3 calls it *ormr*.
[53] The site of the dragon fight is *Earna Næs*, "Eagle ness" (*Beowulf* 3031), implying a traditional association of dragons and eagles in Old English.

From within the Central Asian area, where Indian influence is clear, in Buryat poems the dragon Abyrga lived in the Milk Sea at the foot of the tree, and coiled round the tree itself; it was harassed by the eagle Garide in the crown of the tree (*BL* 67); another example from Central Asia recounts how Otširvani (based on the Indian Indra) in the shape of the Garide eagle (Garuḍa) grasps at the head of the serpent Losum, which lives in the sea and vomits destructive poison, and winds three times round Mount Sumer; it is so big that its tail rests in the water while its head lies on the summit of the central mountain (*BL* 94).

Wensinck (1921: 46) explains the symbolism of the eagle–serpent myth thus: the eagle symbolises immortality and the sun, the serpent the ocean (thus presumably the night of death); the struggle represents the rising of the sun from the ocean, *sol invictus*.

In Norse there is too little evidence to trace any specific meaning to the myth, other than to note the presence of the motif of the contention between the upper and lower worlds (and hence by implication between life and death) represented by the eagle and serpent respectively.

The squirrel

Siikala (2002: 117, cf. 293) notes an instance of the squirrel appearing as a Finnish shamanic messenger. Yet nothing suggests such a role for the Norse squirrel. Ratatoskr's role is to communicate news along the world tree, but, as noted, this is probably news of strife. The squirrel's name, "Gnawing tooth", suggests that it should be aligned with the other animals that are said to chew upon the tree, causing it hardship. On the other hand – though this is not a motif apparent in the extant myths – squirrels are also responsible for burying nuts, ensuring the continuance of their own life, and also that of the trees which spring from the forgotten seeds, which relates the animal to the theme of renewal seen in several other animals of the world tree.

Cocks

Vǫluspá 41–2 presents three crowing cocks: Fjalarr, "Concealer",[54] among the giants in *gálgviðr*, the "gallows wood/tree" (the reading of the Hauksbók manuscript: CR has *gaglviðr*, "goose tree"), Gullinkambi, "Gold crest", among the gods, and "another" below the earth in Hel's halls: the role of the cocks seems symbolic, to summon the denizens of the various realms to battle as *ragnarǫk* approaches. The "gallows tree" (*gálgviðr*) could be a version of the world tree, in reference to Óðinn's hanging upon it, but this cannot be determined from the evidence. The cock Viðópnir, "Tree screecher"

[54] *Fjalarr* appears in *Hávamál* 14 ⟨48*a*⟩ as the name of the giant Suttungr; the meaning "Concealer" there must refer to his concealment of the mead of poetry; in *Hárbarðsljóð* 26 the name applies to Skrýmir. As a title for a cock of the giants, the name is presumably borrowed from those of the giants among whom it lives. Suttungr, in the myth of the theft of the mead of poetry, took on bird form – becoming an eagle, according to Snorri – to pursue Óðinn as he fled with the mead ⟨49⟩.

(or "Tree presser"), sits on the boughs of Mimameiðr in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 24, but its significance is even less easy to determine; it may be an invention of the poet (P. Robinson 1991: 373–4, 399). Cock sacrifices took place at the Rus oak, discussed below, and a hen is sacrificed by the Rus in Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān's account ⟨31⟩. The cocks may thus loosely associate the world tree with sacrifice, and with rebirth ⟨QV⟩.

The world tree as steed

Yggdrasill is literally the "Óðinn steed"; it is the "steed" on which he "rides" to death, which must relate to his hanging himself upon it: it functions as a gallows. The metaphor of the gallows being ridden is common: it is found for example in *Beowulf* 2445–6, and *Ynglingatal* 14 (*Skj* B, 9) where Jǫrundr, when hanged, is said to be borne on Sleipnir. Yet the connotations in myth are somewhat broader. There is a notion of riding a steed from the world of the living to that of the dead – Óðinn's horse Sleipnir is used particularly for journeys to the underworld (*Gylfaginning* ch. 49 ⟨53⟩).[55] The horse also functioned as a sacrificial animal, thus passing from one world to another. The idea of passage between worlds is inherent in the image of the tree, spanning the various worlds.

Direct parallels to the world tree seen as a steed are lacking – probably because it does not double as a gallows elsewhere. The motif of the steed, however, relates to the tree's function as a means of communication between worlds; the tree is also associated with steeds in less direct ways than the actual identification implicit in the Norse name.

Its function as the medium of communication between worlds (into the realm of death) is shared with that of the psychopompic steed, and with the shamanic drum (itself made from the world tree), which is often called a steed (Hultkrantz 1991: 16), as among the southern Altaians, where it was a horse or camel (Alekseev 1984: 271).

For the Nganasan shaman Dyukhadiye Kosterkin the world tree was identical to a reindeer (see ⟨17⟩); the reindeer is not seen here as a steed, but as a means of sustenance; it guaranteed the ongoing life of the tribe, just as the world tree was a symbol of the bounty of the earth and its people. The shaman's drum was one entity, but was made both from reindeer hide and wood from a symbolic world tree, both of whose life-giving powers it clearly embodied.

The tree or pillar is sometimes pictured as the tethering post of the high god's horses. For example, the Buryats believed the nine sons of Bošintoi, the guardian of heaven, had made a horse post from the North Star; they also saw the Great Bear as a herd of horses (cf. the parallel Mongol view ⟨TŠOLBON⟩). The Sakhas called their world pillar the "horse-pole lord" (*BL* 23). The Tatar gods dwelt in a tent before which was a pillar for this purpose (Harva 1933: 28); a similar idea is found in a Tatar tale, where the hero,

[55] The eight-legged horse appears on picture stones, apparently as a bearer of the slain to the world of the dead, as in the Tengelgårda stone, Gotland, from the Vendel period (eighth century) (illustration and discussion in Andersson and Jansson 1984: 68–9).

making a journey to Irle Khan, the ruler of the dead, is advised to continue his journey to the bank of a river flowing below a mountain; beside the river he will find a house with forty corners, where Irle Khan lives, before which stand nine larches growing from one root, the pillar on which the nine Irle Khans tether their horses (*BL* 53; cf. 58, where it is stated that the Sakha tree was the tethering post of the high god Ürün-ai-tojōn). Such a concept is perhaps implied in *Grímnismál* 30 ⟨37⟩: the gods ride various steeds to judgement at Yggdrasill, and the tree would offer the most obvious place to tether them, though this is not stated.[56]

The multiplicity of trees

The multiplicity of trees within traditions such as that of the Ewenki presented above, all subsumed within an overarching concept of "the world tree", suggests that Læráðr is most plausibly seen as the world tree, but under a particular aspect (as has been argued on internal evidence). Læráðr, as the tree of Valhǫll, is to be compared with the tree growing outside the dwelling of the gods, for example in a Sakha account ⟨AJȲ TOJŌN⟩, and the heaven tree of the Ewenki.

The presence of a heaven tree implies the possibility of a hell tree. Steinsland (1979: 131) proposes that the *gálgviðr* (Hauksbók form), "gallows tree", of *Vǫluspá* 41 is an underworld tree, mirroring that in heaven:[57] the crying of the cock Fjalarr in the *gálgviðr* explicitly corresponds to that of Gullinkambi in st. 42 among the gods, arousing the warriors in Valhǫll; Eggþér plays on his harp at the *gálgviðr*; Heimdallr blows on Gjallarhorn as a sign of the approach of *ragnarǫk*, hence both appear as summoners of the forces of the two worlds to battle. On the other hand, Yggdrasill is presented in *Vǫluspá* as fully a world tree: in particular its roots implicitly reach down into the nine underworlds, and it takes in the measure of the world. It might be argued that the presence in the poem of a separate underworld tree would detract from the all-encompassing role given to Yggdrasill, in terms both of space and time (i.e. the *rǫk* which in large part is the subject of the poem). The word *viðr* is more readily interpreted as meaning "wood", though it can also mean "tree"; the primary image is probably of amorphous woods in the different worlds, but the ambiguity of the word may be deliberate, in order to suggest particularisations of the world tree in different worlds, without, at the same time, suggesting too precisely that other cosmic trees existed in "competition" with Yggdrasill.

[56] Eiríkr Magnússon (1895: 55–6) takes *Grímnismál*'s «askr Yggdrasils» as "ash of Óðinn's steed", in which *Yggdrasill* would refer to Sleipnir, and Sleipnir would signify the wind. Neither this interpretation nor that whereby *askr Yggdrasils* is taken to mean "ash [for the tethering] of Sleipnir" are convincing, since, apart from the lack of evidence for either contention, *Yggdrasils* is most naturally taken as an appositional genitive.

[57] *Vǫluspá*, which does not mention Læráðr, offers only Yggdrasill as a possible "heaven tree", hence Steinsland does not identify the heaven tree as Læráðr (though she regards Læráðr as a "parallel" to the *gálgviðr*). Once the concept of "world trees" particular to individual worlds was accepted, there would be scope for poetic variation in the application of the concept to individual named trees.

The *gálgviðr* is not the only *viðr* to be found among the gods' enemies. In *Vǫluspá* 39 a brood of giants is engendered in a *járnviðr*, "iron wood". Again, one tree could be intended – "iron tree" is a name for the world tree among the Sakha (*BL* 12) – or at least implied as a subsidiary meaning, in order to draw a parallel with the association of man with the world ash (*Vǫluspá* 17–19 ⟨38⟩), and the begetting of Heimdallr by nine giantesses/ roots (*Hyndluljóð* 35, cf. *Vǫluspá* 2 ⟨59, 38⟩).

However, over all within Norse concepts the individual realms are distinguished not so much by being given individual trees, as by being specified as the destinations of the *roots* of the one tree: *Grímnismál* 31 ⟨37⟩ places three realms (of Hel, of the frost giants, and of mankind) under the three roots of Yggdrasill; *Vǫluspá* 2 ⟨38⟩ connects the tree with nine underworld realms (cf. *Vafþrúðnismál* 43: Vafþrúðnir has travelled the nine worlds below Niflhel). In Eurasian sources the idea of the tree's roots reaching into the underworlds also exists (for example, in a Khanty tale noted in *BL* 52, ⟨16, 22⟩), but is not developed in detail.

The other proposal made by Steinsland (1979: 146), that the *hlautviðr* of *Vǫluspá* 60 is a new cosmic tree chosen for the new world, seems unlikely. Steinsland cites no analogues for this concept. The poet is more likely to have intended a link to be made with the slivers of wood – themselves probably to be understood as derived from the world tree – on which men's fates are inscribed at the beginning of the (old) world (*Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩) (note also the augury sticks mentioned by Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 10). Hœnir, the god responsible for picking the *hlautviðr*, is not elsewhere associated with the world tree, whereas he is associated with the offering of counsel, or rather with a failure to offer it (*Ynglinga saga* ch. 4), with which the picking of lots is comparable.

THE TREE AND MAN

Man's birth from the tree

Folk beliefs from around the world often relate a person's life to a particular tree; we sometimes encounter the specific idea that a person originates from a tree (Eliade 1996: 299–303). According to Hesiod, *Works and Days* 143–6, the third race of men were made from ash trees (or perhaps born of ash-tree nymphs: cf. West 2007: 375). In Finnish there are fragments of a myth of man being created from a tree trunk: in *Orpo*, "The Orphan", occur the lines «halkeis kanto kaheksi / syntyi kaksi poikalasta», "the trunk split in two, and two boys were born" (*FFPE* no. 41/7–8; *SKVR* III$_2$ 1284); cf. the Ket tale of the "son of earth", a semi-divine shamanic guardian, who was born of a block of wood (Alekseenko 1978: 256–8).

In areas of Eurasia where shamanism is practised, the tree in question may be the world tree, or a tree with a central role in shamanic practice. In the Sakha account ⟨10⟩ the first man is found beside the world tree, and is revealed as being the son of the goddess of the tree; she tells him that he is fated to establish a race of men. In the Nganasan account ⟨16⟩ several trees

are encountered, including one from which shamans "grow" (quite what this means is not made clear); another is the protecting spirit of children; another is the tree of birth; another is the guardian tree of the family, and another the guardian tree of the flocks (cf. the Norse *vårdträd* ⟨QV⟩); the other Nganasan account ⟨17⟩ presents the peoples of the shaman's world as originating in the crown of the world tree. Among the Nanai, Ewenki and Dolgans the souls of the unborn were believed to perch on the branches of the world tree until the shaman fetched them (Eliade 1972: 272). It is noticeable that the connection between birth and the tree in many of these instances is directly linked to intervention by the shaman, a feature absent from any Norse account, unless we take the roles of the various gods discussed below as fulfilling this role.

The emphasis within tales of mankind's origins from the tree is often on the origin of the races rather than of individuals. The Nganasan shaman Dyukhadiye sees the various races of men in the crown of the world tree, from which he is told to make his drum (Emsheimer 1946: 173–4). Among the Altaians a myth is recorded in which God, seeing a lone tree growing without branches, declares it to be unsightly, and commands nine branches to grow on it, and beneath the branches nine people, from whom descend nine races (Harva 1933: 84).

In Norse (and more widely in Germanic) sources the motif of man's birth from the world tree is to be inferred, though the references are often allusive, and hence the interpretation of the evidence may be elusive. There appears to be a general emphasis upon the tree as the origin of mankind as a race.

The Germanic peoples already seem to have had the concept of mankind originating from a wood in Tacitus's time; he records the Semnones as having the *superstitio* that in their sacred wood were the «initia gentis», "the beginnings of the race". There is no direct statement in Old Norse that humans were formed from the world tree itself; however, the existence of this concept is suggested by a number of points.[58] In *Vafþrúðnismál* 45 ⟨41⟩ a *holt*, "wood" (or "tree", or "coppice"), at the end of the world sheltered the human couple Líf and Lífþrasir who were to people the new world, implying that mankind originated in a comparable way in the present world. In *Vǫluspá* 17–18 ⟨38⟩ the first human pair, Askr and Embla, are mentioned just before Yggdrasill: it is implied – as Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 9, no doubt correctly, infers (U. Dronke 1992*a*: 680 supports the correctness of Snorri's interpretation of this myth) – that they were animated from pieces of wood, most likely derived from the world tree itself,[59] on the sea-shore («á

[58] The common skaldic convention of referring to men as "trees" could owe something to this concept (see *Lexicon poeticum, s.v.* "askr 1c").

[59] Hultgård (2006: 61) argues that Askr and Embla may in fact have been trees (or one tree) which are then anthropomorphised, rather than lifeless chunks of driftwood; he cites Persian and Phrygian myths in support of this notion. Such a myth would emphasise the continuing life of the world tree in its human realisations, just as the offspring of Heimdallr – a generative hypostasis of the tree – mentioned at the beginning of *Vǫluspá* directly continue the god's life, and as, somewhat more remotely, Líf and Lífþrasir's continuing life derives from the *holt* in which they shelter (which may be a metaphor for death and rebirth) – a *holt* suggests a wood from which parts are coppiced to be made into something

landi»).[60] *Askr* means "Ash": he thus bears the same designation as the ash tree Yggdrasill, and an identity between tree and man is implied.[61] Askr's "birth" corresponds to the prototypical birth of the god who appears to be a hypostasis of the world tree, Heimdallr: Askr is "born" on the sea-shore; Heimdallr is born from the sea at the rim of earth in *Hyndluljóð* 35 ⟨59⟩. In *Rígsþula* Heimdallr, appearing in the role of guardian of the human generation of the forefathers of the three social classes, walks along the shore (according to the prose introduction ⟨60⟩) before lying between the engendering couples (cf. the Indian *gandharva* ⟨QV⟩ tree spirit in a similar role). Heimdallr is unique among the gods in describing the details of his birth; *Hyndluljóð* 35 moreover describes him as a *maðr*, "human being", implying a close correspondence with (mythological) human birth. In *Sonatorrek* 21 (*Skj* B, 37) the son of the family is called «ættar askr», "ash of the clan", implying that the ash was a symbol of human procreative continuity; cf. the Old English *Æsc*, the founder of the Kentish dynasty the *Æscingas (AR* §578).[62]

Man's birth from the tree seems to mirror that of some of the gods, at least in their maternal descent: various goddess names may derive from

new and useful, which could imply the branches are turned into people, settlers of the new world. On the other hand, *Vǫluspá* scarcely suggests that Askr and Embla had any life in the form of trees when the gods first encounter them; also, the casting overboard of *ǫndvegissúlur* as a means of beginning a settlement in a new land – if indeed we are to link this with human creation myths, as I argue – tends to suggest the primordial human pair were not regarded as developing directly out of living parts of the world tree. Nor, as I have noted, do all the analogues support Hultgård's contention. It is, in any case, likely that the tradition may have varied over time, place and poetic tradition, though this can remain only a supposition.

[60] The world tree is not said to grow by the sea in Old Norse; however, it is possible that variations of the recorded tradition existed in which the tree was sited by the sea: Yggdrasill has a lake (and other waters) closely associated with it; Heimdallr is born from the sea; and Eurasian analogues exist where the world tree grows beside the sea.

[61] A potential difficulty with the interpretation offered here is that only the man, Askr, shares his name with the generic name of the world ash tree; the woman's name, Embla, is unconnected – though it still associates womankind with plants, either the elm or a type of vine (*AeW, s.v.* "Embla"). I suggest that this difficulty arises from the long history of the tradition, within which the identification of man with the world tree was only one stage. Conceptually, it may not have bothered the original audience that only the man had a specific link through his name to the world tree; for an age oblivious to gender-equality, the woman is so to speak subsumed within this relationship. Yet the two names may, at an early stage of the tradition, have referred not to man and woman as founders of the human race, but to two brothers as founders of the tribe (see *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 17/4–8), a motif which is found several times over in different Germanic traditions (Ward 1969): thus the *Origo gentis Langobardorum* reports the two leaders of the Scandian Vandals, at the time of the founding of the tribe of the Langobards, as Assi and Ambri, possibly "Ash" and "Elm" (Ward 1969: 52 discusses several possible etymologies), a tradition which is likely to have had parallels which fed into that found in Norse myth. The giving of life to blocks of wood by the *æsir* may itself rely on an ancient pun: the **ansīz* give life to **ansōz* (in proto-Germanic forms).

[62] Whilst *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (I, 12–13) has forms with *æ*, Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* II.5, has the forms *Oisc, Oiscingas*, suggesting a derivation from **ansiskaz*, formed from **ansaz*, "god" or "beam". A traditional association of progeniture and trees in Old English is perhaps suggested by *Maxims I* 23–6, where the statement that «sceal þif ond þer in þoruld cennan / bearn mid gebyrdum», "a man and woman will engender children in the world by birth", is immediately followed by a presentation of a personified tree, mourning the loss of its leaves and limbs («Beam sceal on eorðan / leafum liþan, leomu gnornian»).

names of trees (although the etymologies are all contentious). Thus Óðinn's mother *Bestla* may derive from "bast" (but could be "wife": *AeW, s.v.*), and her father's name *Bolþorn* signifies "Tree-bole thorn";[63] Váli's mother *Rindr* may come from "ivy" (but *AeW, s.v.*, offers several other possible derivations); Loki's mother is *Laufey*, "Leaf isle" (and thus probably "tree") or *Nál*, "Needle" (hence presumably "Pine tree"); Freyja is known as *Mardǫll*, with the variant form *Marþǫll* also occurring, possibly meaning "Sea tree" (but it could be "Sea bright", if *dǫll* corresponds to Old English *deall*); in Finnish the goddess *Rauni*'s name derives from Old Norse *reynir*, "rowan" (*AeW, s.vv.*). Hunke (1952) relates Óðinn's birth from his tree-mother to his rebirth in the initiatory hanging on the tree, when he "began to grow and thrive" like a new-born infant.

In *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 22 the world tree is a source of medicine for sick women; given the known resorting to trees as an aid in child-birth, particularly by clasping onto the tree – an ancient example is Leto resting on a palm as she bears Apollo (the earliest version is in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, line 117), this suggests a reference to a popular folklore association of the world tree and the birth of men: this leads on to the theme of the "birth tree".

Man's life and the tree

Beliefs in "life-trees" are found in shamanic societies. Thus among the Ewenki the fate of the clan was bound up with that of the symbolic world tree: the souls of the clansmen were believed to live in the world tree in the form of birds and to eat the tree's buds (Anisimov 1963*a*: 96; also Eliade 1972: 38, 40, 272, 480 for other examples of the soul as a bird in the world tree).

Folk practices from the Germanic area similarly reflect a belief in a "life-tree" or "fate tree". Bächtold-Stäubli (1987, *s.v.* "Geburtsbaum, Lebensbaum") records the common German belief that the fate of a child is bound up with that of the tree planted at its birth;[64] sometimes the fate of a whole community was bound up with a communal tree, planted for example in the village square; this merges with the idea of the guardian tree ⟨VÅRDTRÄD⟩. In Sweden two fir trees were erected before the church during a wedding, these being the life-trees of the couple, representing their fortunes together (Mannhardt 1904–5: I, 47, and the section on the life-tree, 45–51, in which a number of examples are given).

[63] Snorri (*SnE* 14, *Gylfaginning* ch. 6) has the form "Bolþorn", which could stand for either *Bolþorn* or *Bǫlþorn*; CR at *Hávamál* 140 ⟨48*c*⟩ has a form which can only be read as *Bǫlþórr*, but which could well be a misreading of an earlier orthography where "o" could represent either *o* or *ǫ*; the *-þórr*, with its implied, but unwanted, connection with Þórr, itself presents difficulties of interpretation. On the whole, Snorri's form seems more likely to be authentic, but the reading of the first element remains uncertain; the fact that his daughter has a name connected with trees, however, surely weighs the argument in favour of reading *bol* rather than *bǫl*, "evil".

[64] In Old Norse a closely comparable idea of a person's fate being tied to that of an external object is found in *Norna-Gests þáttr* ch. 11 ⟨77⟩, where, however, the fate of the child depends on that of a taper rather than a tree.

The concept of the life-tree appears in at least two mythical settings in Norse:

The *barnstokkr* of *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 2–3 ⟨46⟩ may be regarded as a life-tree. The implication of the account is that the *barnstokkr*, as an apple tree,[65] grew from the apple sent by Óðinn; the tree is thus associated with progeniture both in its first function (the begetting of Vǫlsungr), and in its name. As Vǫlsungr is the eponymous founder of his family the Vǫlsungar, the progeniture emphasises the family more than the individual. As a support of the hall – which symbolises its role as a guardian tree of the family – it possibly reflects the prototypical Læráðr ⟨QV⟩ supporting Óðinn's hall, Valhǫll; it is also analogous to the *ǫndvegissúlur* ⟨QV⟩. The sword of Óðinn, drawn out of the *barnstokkr*, proves to be the sign of fortune of the Vǫlsungar:[66] in particular Sigmundr places his fate in Óðinn's hands by accepting the sword out of the tree. The symbolic act of Óðinn, when he makes the *barnstokkr* the receptacle of the sword, identifies the guardianship that the *stokkr* now offers the family (cf. the family guardian tree ⟨VÅRDTRÄD⟩) as a military one.

Yggdrasill may represent a life-tree extended onto a macrocosmic level to encompass the fate of mankind in general. I have considered above how Yggdrasill's encompassing of the world implies the encompassing too of the world's fate. The tree is characterised as sharing fate with man: the tree is nourished from Urðr's spring, and Urðr and her two female companions lay down men's fates, in the form of a lottery carved on wood (*Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩): the growth and ageing of Yggdrasill directly mirror the unfolding fate of the world, and man is given his *ørlǫg*, "fate", when he receives life itself (cf. st. 17/8).

Rebirth and the tree

The practice of tree burial is found widely, as shown abundantly by Meuli (1975: 1083–1118, esp. 1106–7). The human corpse might be left suspended on a bier high in a tree, or else placed in a chest made from a tree trunk. Meuli supposes that this is done in the belief that the dead will return to life, as the tree "returns to life" each year after winter.

The practice is found commonly among Siberian peoples. Among the Sakhas, Ewenki and Yukagirs, the dead were deposited in reindeer skins and hung on trees from which the branches had been removed, to prevent

[65] The choice of the apple here is no doubt influenced by the fact that apples are the fruit which Iðunn vouchsafes to the gods to preserve their youth (*Gylfaginning* ch. 26; cf. *Haustlǫng* 9 (*Skj* B, 16), where Iðunn is the «mey [...] þás ellilyf ása [...] kunni», "maid with skill in the gods' medicine for old age", and *Skírnismál* 19–20, where «epli ellifo», "eleven apples", may be a *lectio facilior* for «epli ellilyfs», "apples of the medicine for age"; see *PE* II, comm. *ad loc.*).

[66] It saves Sigmundr from prison and death (ch. 8); it marks the end of his life when Óðinn breaks it against his spear (ch. 11); it enables Sigurðr to avenge his father (ch. 17), to kill the dragon (ch. 15, 18), to kill the treacherous Reginn (ch. 20), to cut the *valkyrja* from her hauberk (ch. 21), to place it between himself and Brynhildr (ch. 29), and to avenge his killing (ch. 32).

the soul perishing (the soul was believed to remain with the body) (Nioradze 1925: 14). Among the Buryats a shaman would select a spruce before dying, and his body would be placed in a wooden coffin on one of its branches (Sandschejew 1928: 984). The Sámi formerly placed their dead in a hollowed-out tree trunk, and buried them beside water, for example on an island, or out in the woods (Itkonen 1946: 164); Tuderus (1905: 17) records that previously the Sámi had deposited the dead between trees (so that they tended to be consumed by animals or lightning).

There are no direct statements in Norse sources of the practice of tree-burial. Some indications that the practice was once recognised survive, however. In *Þiðreks saga* ch. 61, Vélent escapes in a boat made from a tree trunk, in which he totally conceals himself, after fleeing from the underground realm of the dwarfs (suggesting symbolically the realm of the dead). Archaeological finds also illustrate the Danish early Bronze Age practice of burial in tree-trunks, apparently coupled with the idea of resurrection (indicated, as Glob 1973: 94 argues, by the presence of hazel twigs), though whether there was any direct connection with the ideas from this long ago might be questioned.

The re-emergence of man from trees after the "great winter" at the end of the world is found in the myth of Líf and Lífþrasir,[67] recounted in *Vafþrúðnismál* 44–5 ⟨41⟩: the human race of the new world will originate from a *holt*, "coppice", just as the ancestors of the Semnones did, and as Askr and Embla originated, it would appear, from the world tree in the present world. The word *holt* may also allow for interpretation as "tree", paralleling the proposed interpretation of the origin of Askr and Embla more closely.[68] However, as noted above, the world tree may in any case have been conceived as part of a grove, so no firm conceptual distinction between tree and grove need be drawn. Líf and Lífþrasir are imagined as taking refuge in their woody shelter until the great winter is over and the dews of fertility are unfrozen. The concept of rebirth is implicit in that the *fimbulvetr* is an image of total death, which Líf and Lífþrasir survive: their hidden life in the tree/wood is their "death", a period of waiting between two lives.[69] The concept of death as a period lived, by Líf and Lífþrasir, within the tree/wood, points to a parallel concept of death by sacrifice on a tree, which leads to renewed life.

[67] Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 53 has the form *Leifþrasir*, which could mean "one who strives to leave [an inheritance, i.e. children]" (Lorenz 1984: 645), an interpretation in accordance with the stress on the peopling of the new world found in *Vafþrúðnismál* 45 ⟨41⟩.

[68] The analogous *viðr* regularly means either "wood" or "tree", and *lundr* means "grove" but in skaldic verse also "tree".

[69] Fleck points out (1971*a*: 387) that as the *fimbulvetr* was to be three times the length of a normal winter, a period of nine months, i.e. the gestation period, may be implied. It is not, however, clear that winter was ordinarily conceived as lasting three months; nor does Snorri's phrasing (*Gylfaginning* ch. 51) – that there would be three winters with no summers in between – necessarily indicate 3 x 3 months.

THE TREE AND SACRIFICE

Eurasian

In Eurasian religious practice a significant association between sacrifice and the world tree occurs in the form of the initiatory sacrifice of the novice shaman; I consider this in Chapter 16, but it should be emphasised that the tree does not appear as the *means* of sacrifice in such traditions. Sacrifices of a less dramatic nature occurred at representations of the world tree; for examples from the Sámi, see ⟨2–4, 6–9⟩, and from the Khanty ⟨1⟩. Lehtisalo (1924: 67) notes that among the Nenets small idols and food offerings were left against one sacred tree he encountered, situated in a holy place with its branches lopped off, representing the world tree; another larch nearby was used for hanging offerings from: animal skulls and cloth bands with rings and metal disks hung from its branches. On this tongue of land was supposed to live the *ngyjjevai* grandfather, who made his journey to heaven with the bird at the top of the world pillar, named the sun tree.

The grove of the Semnones

The earliest mention of trees in a context of sacrifice in Germanic is Tacitus's information about the grove of the Semnones ⟨43⟩. The people of one name and blood would gather here and celebrate the origins of their rite, sacrificing a man. They believed that the origins of their race lay there, and that the ruling god of all resided there. The human sacrifice of the Semnones cannot be divorced from the awe in which they held the grove – which Tacitus states derived from the belief that the race had its origin there. The sacrifice has been interpreted as a re-enactment of a mythical first creative sacrifice, believed to have inaugurated the Semnones' present sacrificial rite. In Norse, the first sacrifice was that of the primordial being Ymir, slaughtered (we are to infer) to create the world (*Vafþrúðnismál* 21); Merkelbach (1984: 193–5) argues for a connection between the «horrenda primordia" of the Semnones' rite and the sacrifice of Ymir. Ymir is not connected with a wood or tree, yet his body provides the *materies* from which the world is formed, just as the tree (which is not sacrificed, but nonetheless suffers *erfiði*, "anguish") appears to provide the *materies* from which man is formed. The two myths, the anthropomorphic sacrifice and the primordial sacred wood, seem to be combined in the grove of the Semnones, as they are combined, in a different realisation, in the sacrifice of Óðinn on the tree (see below).

Groves as sacrificial sites are found elsewhere in Norse; an echo of the rite celebrated among the Semnones, or one directly parallel to it, is found in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 30, where another "fetter grove" (*fjǫturlundr*) is the scene of the ritual slaughter of Helgi, "Holy" (*AR* §§342, 366; U. Dronke 1992*a*: 659; *KLE*, comm. *ad loc.*).[70] Perhaps the most startling scene of ritual sacrifice in a grove is that held by the Swedes at Uppsala.

[70] Also, the grove Glasir grows near Valhǫll, the hall of those chosen in battle, but the few extant lines dealing with Glasir do not relate it to sacrifice.

Uppsala

The temple at Uppsala is described by Adam of Bremen, *Descriptio insularum aquilonis* ch. 26–7, and in scholia appended to his text, in the late eleventh century ⟨45⟩. In summary:

> The Swedes have at Uppsala a noble temple adorned with gold; a grove; a huge tree, of unknown sort, spreading its branches wide, and green in winter and summer; a spring, in which a man is offered alive. A festival takes place there of all the Swedish districts, compulsory for everyone: it is held every nine years; it takes place around the spring equinox; it lasts nine days. Nine male individuals of each species of animal – dogs and horses are mentioned specifically – are offered to appease the gods each day, thus numbering 72 animals (plus, presumably, the nine men) by the end of the festival. The bodies are hung in the grove near the temple: the individual trees are held to be divine by virtue of the offerings placed upon them. Dirges of a degrading nature are sung.

In his study of Adam and the Uppsala temple, Hultgård (1997) makes a number of important points. The text of Adam has not been subject to a great deal of scholarly discussion (ibid. 12). The date of the scholia is sometimes uncertain, but the oldest manuscript, A2, dating to around 1100, contains most of the scholia relating to Uppsala. They were possibly written by Adam himself. The information given by Adam has to be examined carefully, since he had a tendency to distort some matters. For example, he germanicises the names of the gods worshipped, and misrepresents them (ibid. 20): thus Óðinn becomes "Wodan", which he glosses «id est furor», which is a reference to the German word *wod*, "furious, mad", a meaning which does not quite match that of the Norse cognate *óðr*, which is more "frenzied, frantic, vehement, eager" (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.*). The practice of submerging a victim in a spring in the manner described is a medieval custom attested elsewhere (the *purgatio aquae frigidae*), not an ancient pagan one (Hultgård 1997: 28); this does not necessarily indicate that it did not take place at Uppsala, but rather that the whole complex of ideas involved in the pagan worship there may have been in certain respects artificial – a recreation of pagan practices rather than a continuing ancient tradition, though Hultgård notes that Uppsala appears, on archaeological evidence, to have been a place of importance since at least AD 200; also, as Näsström notes (Hultgård 1997: 90), ritual drowning is mentioned already by Tacitus in connection with the rites of Nerthus, and this may have continued in some fashion, becoming adapted to medieval practices in due course. Snorri informs us in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 77 that a *þing* and market took place alongside the cult activities at Uppsala; this is probably a reference to the *dísaþing*, which took place in the month of *gói* (February to March). Hultgård (1997: 30) argues that the scholion that places the festival at the spring equinox is in a manuscript dating only from 1434, and is probably an attempt to accommodate the festival to the Christian calendar – but since the spring equinox occurs during *gói* there is hardly a contradiction with the other traditions. Hultgård (ibid.

33–9) presents archaeological evidence for animal – but not for human – sacrifices at a number of sites, indicating that this element of the Uppsala festival was based on well-recognised cult practices in northern Europe and Scandinavia.

Adam's is not the only description of a Scandinavian festival involving human sacrifice. As Näsström points out (Hultgård 1997: 88), Thietmar's *Chronicon*, written in 1012, describes a similar festival some eighty years earlier than that at Uppsala taking place at Hleiðr in Denmark ⟨44⟩. Everyone came together every ninth year in January, and sacrificed ninety men to the gods, and as many horses and hounds. As in Adam, this was an atonement sacrifice. As atonement sacrifices are not bound to the calendar, Näsström suggests that both authors manifest a Christian preconception about how pagan worship worked, rather than the reality. I would object that the element of atonement is not necessarily the main point of the festivities (and itself may be the result of a Christian understanding of events), and in any case we do not know sufficient about pagan practices to say how far such practices would necessarily have taken place in a crisis situation divorced from calendrical considerations.

Following on from Hultgård, Sundqvist (2002: 112–35) offers a critical appraisal of Adam's description of the temple complex and rites at Uppsala, and adduces a wide range of parallels to the individual features. Adam indicates that at the time of writing Uppland was a mixed community of pagans and Christians; he is disgusted at how Christians had to try to buy themselves out of the obligation to attend the pagan rites at Uppsala. This picture is borne out by the evidence of contemporary runestones: essentially, these are concentrated in the southern part of Uppland, focused on the Christian see of Sigtuna. Christianity did not penetrate to the northern parts of the region until the mid-twelfth century. The runestones at Uppsala indicate there were Christians in the vicinity, but the stones were probably brought there later at the establishment of the church: they do not indicate a Christian presence at Gamla Uppsala itself in Adam's day. As Sundqvist notes (ibid. 115): "The ancient noble families of Uppsala, with support from the farmers of the northern part of the area, used the pagan cult to preserve their political power in Svea society." In broad terms, Adam's description of the Uppsala temple appears to be reliable, though some elements are the result of exaggeration or misunderstanding. In particular, the concept of a temple is probably the result of Adam's *interpretatio Romana* (which also leads him to compare the gods concerned with classical counterparts); the "temple" was in fact probably a hall, some part of which was devoted to worship, but where feasts would also be held (ibid. 120); there is archaeological evidence for suitable halls from various periods from the third century AD onwards (ibid. 121), and halls at Uppsala are mentioned several times in literary sources (ibid. 122). The libations made to the three gods, and the gods' functions, are consistent with what is found in other literary sources (notably Snorri); there is also evidence for the existence of idols of gods elsewhere, as Adam mentions their being destroyed by various individuals, and there is some indication

that several gods might be worshipped in one place (ibid. 123–4). The divine triad reflects a Dumézilian tripartite Indo-European system, but also has parallels in the eastern Baltic, as noted in a Prussian chronicle of the sixteenth century (the area had only recently been converted, and was thus in a comparable position to Sweden in Adam's day) (ibid. 127–8). There is widespread evidence for pagan rites taking place in groves, so Adam's information on this is probably reliable; Sundqvist notes that there is even some suggestive archaeological evidence, in the form of raised phosphate levels, implying animal remains, for the grove between the eastern and middle mounds, as well as in the lake, Myrby träsk, where offerings may have been drowned (ibid. 128–9). Some have argued that the description of the tree and well have been influenced by Norse myth, as found in the Eddic poems; yet archaeological evidence supports the existence of sacred trees within groves, as at Frösön, Jämtland, where the remains of six bears were found around a stump; similarly, although there is no actual sign of the well at Uppsala, many other examples of sacred wells are known (ibid. 130–2). The number nine occurs in Adam's account, for example in the recurrence of the festival every nine years; nine ⟨QV⟩ is found repeatedly in Norse texts as a number associated with sacred activities, and is hence likely to have had its place at Uppsala as Adam indicates (ibid. 133–4).

Sundqvist's careful and detailed analysis, summarised briefly above, renders impossible the notion that Adam's description could be his, or someone else's, fantasy (other than perhaps in some peripheral details). Yet we cannot fail to be struck by the *completeness* and *consistency* of the rites and sanctuary as reflections of religious and mythic images and concerns exemplified in Norse texts. It is as if someone had set out to deliberately systematise and encapsulate Norse myth and religion into one cultic ritual site. We need not ascribe such a process to Adam (it is inherently unlikely on various levels), but we may well suspect that Uppsala represented an ordered rejoinder to the systematised cult of Christianity which threatened to overturn it. In this sense, it was a late and somewhat artificial flowering of paganism forced on by external factors, rather than growing spontaneously out of earlier pagan tradition, even if all the elements within it are well grounded in pagan traditions. This reading must of necessity remain on the level of speculation, yet parallels may be drawn: a striking instance (though recounted in less detail) is that of the Rus king Vladimir, who usurped the throne in Kiev around 980. He is best known for his establishment of Orthodox Christianity as the religion of Russia in 987, but this was the culmination of a long series of religious swings. *Повѣсть временьныхъ лѣтъ* records how, before this (*s.a.* 6488 [980] and 6491 [983]), Vladimir established upon a hillock within his citadel a public cult of Slavic and Indo-Iranian deities, Perunŭ, Dazhĭbogŭ, Stribogŭ, Khŭrsŭ, Sěmarĭglŭ and Mokoshĭ, which involved human sacrifice (one instance of a Christian Varangian living in the city being sacrificed with his son is dwelt upon). The event is discussed in the context of Vladimir's religio-political policy by Franklin and Shepard (1996: 155–61); whilst the gods were local to the

area, the notion of such a state-run public cult was not, nor is there any evidence for human sacrifice among the Slavs. Vladimir was surrounded by nations which were either Christian (or one of the other religions of the Book), or were in the process of adopting it (such as Denmark shortly before and Norway shortly after Vladimir's own conversion), and many Christians already lived in Russia; indeed, Vladimir's own grandmother, Olga, had converted and attempted, unsuccessfully, to convert her people. At this stage, it would appear that Vladimir was deliberately manufacturing a public cult to act as a rival to the established religion of the realms around him, and which was so to speak also welling up underneath him in his own realm, just as was to happen in Uppland a century later. It is uncertain how old the cult of Uppsala as described by Adam was, but Vladimir had spent time in exile in Sweden, and usurped the throne with the help of a team of Varangians from there (whom he then betrayed), so it is possible that he may have received some notions of the political use of mock-traditional cult from there. Christianity was soon to sweep away the last ebullient show of paganism in Rus, just as it did at Uppsala soon after Adam wrote: Vladimir himself converted to the religion of the Greeks, though not without weighing up whether to choose Judaism, Islam, Byzantine Christianity or Rome (the charming story recounted in the *Повѣсть временьныхъ лѣтъ*, *s.a.* 6495 [987] of how the envoys, returning from Constantinople, recounted to the king how they did not know if they were in heaven or on earth, so beautiful were the divine services they heard, and that someone who has tasted sweetness can never return to bitterness, reveals something of what later generations valued in their Orthodox belief, but in fact masks the more realistic reasons for Vladimir's choice, which was for the markets and political assistance of the strong Byzantine empire, as against adopting a religious position which might strengthen the Moslem trade links to the east, or assist in collaboration with the Jewish Khazars controlling the steppes to the south and east).

Bearing in mind the critical points made, in particular on the possible level of artificiality to the Uppsala rites, which could mean that elements of the rite had been simplified and systematised in fairly recent years, as well as being influenced by non-local traditions (such as literary works like *Vǫluspá*), it is nonetheless reasonable to suggest that the Uppsala tree should be interpreted as a representation of the Norse world tree, its branches spreading wide like those of Yggdrasill, filling the world and matching its size.

Like Yggdrasill (*Vǫluspá* 19 ⟨38⟩), the Uppsala tree is believed to be evergreen; attempts have been made to identify its genus, but they are unconvincing. Thus there is no reason to accept Läffler's proposal (1911) that the Uppsala tree was a yew or that the yew has played any part in the concept of the world tree among the Norse. Clearly the Uppsala tree, as an actual tree, must have been of some genus: Läffler argues that the yew had disappeared from Sweden, leaving only a few ancient examples such as that at Uppsala, so that the name of this species was forgotten (and hence the record of the scholiast in Adam that the tree was of unknown

type). This is unconvincing: the common origin of the Germanic words for "yew" – including the Swedish *í* (modern Swedish *idegran*) – and the fact that it gave its name to the rune *ýr* in Old Norse speak emphatically against any such theory. I am informed by Roland Moberg, director of the Botanical Museum of Uppsala, that the spread of yew in Sweden was probably the same a thousand years ago as now, i.e. all round the coastal districts as far as northern Uppland. Läffler moreover fails to appreciate that the remark about the Uppsala tree being of unknown kind derives from religious awe: it is a mythological motif to stress the unusualness and hence holiness of the tree. Läffler argues that the Uppsala tree has influenced the picture of Yggdrasill in that the ash has *barr*, "needles" rather than leaves (*Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩); however, the ascription is most easily explained on the basis of Yggdrasill's evergreenness. Pipping (1926: 61–3) takes Läffler's arguments even further, making some highly unlikely suggestions: he proposes that Yggdrasill was a yew, and makes the extraordinary suggestion that the "problem" is most easily solved by assuming that a yew could be called an ash (*askr*)! He seizes on manuscript forms of the name Yggdrasill such as «Ydrasill» in which *y* could be a form of "yew". The white loam (*aurr*) that the tree is spattered with he takes to be the white flowers of the yew. The *íviði* of *Vǫluspá* 2 he takes to be "yew twigs"; it has now been shown that *íviði* is an unacceptable manuscript reading (Stefán Karlsson 1979).

The description of the tree being of unknown sort is, then, less of a factual statement than an attempt to communicate a sense of mystery; clearly the same atmosphere existed in the grove of the Semnones – for we need not ascribe the substance of what Tacitus says merely to the careful artifice of his language. A similar awe is suggested in the statement that the tree on which Óðinn hanged sprang from unknown roots.

It appears that there was one particular tree among many at Uppsala, each of which was regarded as holy; this implies that the mythological world tree may similarly have been pictured as growing in a grove. The complex of temple, tree, grove, spring found at Uppsala corresponds to Óðinn's hall Valhǫll, the tree Læráðr, the grove Glasir, and the spring Hvergelmir, or, using a different set of motifs, the judgement seat of the gods beside Yggdrasill, the tree Yggdrasill, and Urðr's spring. Such systematisations of the disparate information about the mythic realm, however, are not evident in the poetic sources, and it is not to be inferred that a fully systematised mythological landscape existed other than at Uppsala; as the Uppsala complex was described well after the arrival of Christianity in Sweden,[71] it may itself represent a systematisation of elements found elsewhere associated with the world tree but not there integrated in this fashion.

The human sacrifices hung on the trees at Uppsala, taking place over nine days, and recurring every nine years, correspond to Óðinn's nine-

[71] The Swedes were particularly recidivist: Christianity began to be introduced by Ansgar in the 820s (*KLNM*, *s.v.* "Trosskiftet").

day self-sacrifice. The sacrifice in the spring at Uppsala corresponds to Óðinn's sacrifice of his eye in Mímir's spring; Steinsland (1979: 135–6) suggests that since Óðinn's eye is called a *veð*, "forfeit", it is a *pars pro toto* sacrifice. The Uppsala sacrifices took place at the beginning of spring: cf. Líf and Lífþrasir "reborn" after the mighty winter at the end of the world, *Vafþrúðnismál* 45 ⟨41⟩. The hanging of the sacrifices on the newly sprouting trees at Uppsala implies the intention to promote analogous rebirth. Thus, as with the Semnones, the sacrifice is a killing designed to stimulate new creation: the sacrifice of the various animals presumably is aimed at a general rejuvenation of the productive world. The sacrificial celebration is one in which different clans (the different *provinciae*, "districts") took part: this may be related to the tree as the originator of races or families, a motif found with for example the Ewenki clan tree, and also in the person of Heimdallr in *Rígsþula* ⟨60⟩.

Óðinn's sacrificial tree in *Hávamál*

Óðinn's act of self-immolation is recounted in *Hávamál* 138–9 ⟨48c⟩ (see Chapter 16), where the god declares that he hung for nine nights on the tree of unknown roots, wounded with a spear and given to himself; he took up runes, and fell back from there.

The tree of unknown roots is in contrast to what is said about Yggdrasill's roots in *Grímnismál* 31 ⟨37⟩; *Grímnismál* may represent a later elaboration, but the difference could be a matter of emphasis: the mystery of the tree is thus emphasised; the primary reason, however, is that a "tree of unknown roots" is, as Eiríkr Magnússon (1895: 24–5) suggests, a kenning for the gallows, an object conceived as a tree, yet obviously lacking roots.

The tree is described as windy:[72] this too relates to the image of the gallows – cf. the gallows in *Hamðismál* 17, «vargtré vindkǫld / vestan bœiar», "the wind-cold gallows [wolf, i.e. outlaw, tree] to the west of the settlement".

Beyond indicating that it was the gallows, *Hávamál* does not name the tree on which Óðinn hanged himself, but there is little doubt that it was Yggdrasill, in view of the implications of this name: it refers on the one hand to Óðinn under the name Yggr (recorded in *Grímnismál* 54), and on the other to the "terrible steed" of the gallows,[73] which must refer to the god's sacrifice. Yet "Óðinn steed" may possibly even suggest an identity between the god and the steed; such an idea is found in Indian myth, where the world tree was called *aśvattha*, "horse abode", and is thus potentially a

[72] There is no need to reject the manuscript form at this point, as does Eiríkr Magnússon (1895: 38), claiming that *vindugr*, "windy", is a form that has never existed in Icelandic or Norse; clearly the scribe of CR did not share Eiríkr's views on this.

[73] "Yggr's steed" should be *Yggs drasill*, and "terrible steed" *yggr drasill*: the form *Yggdrasill* would appear to be a deliberate attempt to encompass both these meanings. Other etymologies (see *AeW*, *s.v.* "Yggdrasill") which see variants of primitive Old Norse **īhwa*, "yew", in the name derive from Läffler's theories about the identity of the world tree, which I discuss and dismiss above.

shared Indo-European feature (note how, by way of parallel, horse sacrifice is associated with the symbolic world tree at Uppsala): *a.* the fire god Agni made himself into a horse and lived for a year in the world tree; the tree is even conceived as a large, shadowless, leafless horse (Sauvé 1970: 182, 187); *b.* Prajāpati longed for his body to become fit for sacrifice; it became a horse, which he recognised as suitable, and after a year he sacrificed the horse for himself: thus there is an identification of sacrifice and sacrificer (ibid. 190; cf. 185–6).[74]

The horse sacrifice, *aśvamedha*, was an important part of Vedic tradition, and it has clear parallels both in Irish and Roman customs (discussed in Puhvel 1970*a*). In all these cases, the ritual served as an affirmation of kingship and sought to ensure continued fertility. The Indian rite is summarised thus by Puhvel (ibid. 160–1):

> The main ritual took three days. On the principal, second day of the sacrifice the king drove in a war chariot drawn by the sacrificial stallion and three other horses. The victim was anointed by the three foremost wives of the king, and its mane and tail were fitted with 101 pearls. The sacrifice took place at twenty-one stakes [...] The stallion was smothered to death, whereupon the *mahiṣī* or chief queen symbolically cohabited with it under covers, while the entourage engaged in obscene banter. Then followed the cutting up of the victim, disposal of the parts, further blood sacrifices, ablutions, and disbursement of priestly honoraria.

The Roman *October equus*, known from Festus (190 L), was sacrificed to Mars and then dismembered; its tail was brought on the run from the Campus Martius to the Regia to sprinkle its fire altar with blood. The Irish analogue is reported in the late twelfth century by Giraldus Cambrensis in *Topographia Hibernie* (p. 168):

> Est igitur in boreali et ulteriori Vltonie parte, scilicet apud Kenelcunil, gens quedam, que barbaro nimis et abhominabili ritu sic sibi regem creare solet. Collecto in unum uniuerso terre illius populo, in medium producitur iumentum candidum. Ad quod sullimandus ille non in principem sed in beluam, non in regem sed exlegem, coram omnibus bestialiter accedens, se quoque bestiam profitetur. Et statim iumento interfecto, et frustatim in aqua decocto, in eadem aqua balneum ei paratur. Cui insidens, de carnibus illis sibi allatis, circumstante populo suo et conuescente, comedit ipse. De iure quoque quo lauatur, non uase aliquo, non manu, sed ore tantum circumquaque haurit et bibit. Quibus ita rite, non recte completis, regnum illius et dominium est confirmatum.
>
> There is in the northern and very remote part of Ulster, namely around Kenelcunil, a tribe which is accustomed to make itself a king with a most barbarous and disgusting ritual. The whole populace of that district gather together, and a white draft horse is led into their midst. To this animal he who is to be raised, not to be a prince but a beast, not a king but a criminal,

[74] See the important article of Sauvé (1970) comparing Vedic and Norse horse sacrifice; the article covers many important aspects of this theme of central religious importance. In particular, he demonstrates, on the basis of more clearly documented Indian analogues, that Óðinn's death is indeed a sacrifice, not merely a martyrdom.

> steps up in the presence of everyone in the manner of a beast, and shows himself as a beast too. At once the horse is slaughtered, and cooked in gobbets in water: in the same water a bath is prepared for the man. He steps in and himself consumes pieces of the flesh offered to him, while the people stand around him eating. It is also the law that he should gulp in around him and swallow what he is bathed in using his mouth alone, without any vessels or hands. When these matters are completed according to rite, but not right, his rule and dominion are confirmed.

The existence of horse sacrifice, with connotations of royalty and fertility, within several Indo-European traditions suggests that it was an ancient Indo-European inheritance.[75] As noted in Chapter 5, there is some indication that Hunnish modes of horse sacrifice may have been adopted in Scandinavia, but this provides insufficient grounds for assuming that traditions of horse sacrifice do not, in part, go back to earlier traditions related to those of India. Simpson (1967: 201) also notes the similarity between Scandinavian sacrifices and the Altaian horse sacrifice, noted by Radloff, which involved impaling the horse, while its flesh was consumed at the accompanying festival. Simpson draws on Arab writers who describe Norse sacrifice, and notes that most descriptions are united in describing the sacrifice as taking place on a pole. Thus Aḥmad ibn ʿUmar ibn Rustah, writing in the 920s, says that the Rus have wizards (*attiba*) who order people to make offerings of men, women and cattle; the victim has a rope tied round its neck and is hung from a pole, while the wizard proclaims "This is an offering to God". In the 950s, the Spanish writer Ibrahim at-Tartushi visited Hedeby: he reports that the inhabitants hold a feast in honour of their god, and whoever kills a beast as a sacrifice sets up a pole at the door of his house and fastens the animal to it, so all know he has made an offering to his god. How far the similarity to Altaian practices extends seems questionable, as the main point of comparison is the presence of a pole, which is explicable as a convenient object to use when sacrificing an animal such as a horse; it is found in other traditions too, notably the Indian (the *yūpa*). Whatever its origin, the presence of both pole and horse in the sacrifice would have provided the ritual background for the close association, indeed identification, between tree (a variant of the pole) and sacrificial horse such as is implied in the name Yggdrasill (the further identification with the officiand adding an additional layer of complexity to this).

[75] The condemnation of the eating of horse flesh in Iceland at the time of the conversion to Christianity (*Íslendingabók* ch. 7) only makes sense if such consumption was associated with pagan sacrifice, such as is indicated from other sources, mentioned below. Loumand (2006) poses the question of why in particular the horse was the favoured animal of sacrifice, and, citing work by Hastrup and Schjødt, proposes that its liminality between domesticated animals and wild serves as a basis to explain its sacrificial function as a mediator between worlds, such as is found as the (live) horse's role in most of its occurrences in myth. Whilst I would not seek to deny this liminality, it does not suffice to explain all (or even many) of the aspects of horse sacrifice which can be traced in the various traditions. For instance, it is worth noting details such as the term Giraldus uses in his description of the Irish regnal ceremony for the horse, *iumentum*, which indicates a work animal, union with which presumably may be inferred to indicate, as one element of the ritual, a union of the king with the land producing the crops and welfare which he furthers through his reign.

Neither the theme of kingship, nor that of fertility, is pronounced in the case of Óðinn's sacrifice in *Hávamál* – though its effect is to make the god «frævask ok fróðr vera», "thrive and be wise/fecund", and Óðinn is elsewhere a guardian of kingship (*Grímnismál*, *Vǫlsunga saga*). Yet the rites of Uppsala perhaps manifest a more basic imagery (out of which, perhaps, that of Óðinn's sacrifice was refined): the horses here at least are the most important of the animals sacrificed, and Adam particularly notes the crude verses which accompanied the Uppsala rites; as Uppsala was the traditional centre of royal power, the rites must be supposed to have acted as an affirmation of this power (even though, in Adam's time, there was an ongoing conflict between Christians and pagans in the realm, so the more immediate purpose of the rites at this time may have been to affirm allegiance to the traditional religion). The horse takes on a prominent place also in the death of King Aðils at Uppsala, recorded in its oldest form in *Ynglingatal* 21–2 ⟨141*b*⟩, where he fell from his steed, *drasill*, as the result of the actions of magical spirits (see Sundqvist 2002: 225–8 for later traditions concerning Aðils); this took place while performing sacrifices, according to the *Historia Norwegie* 9.26.

There is, perhaps, insufficient evidence to make a direct link between the rites of Uppsala and the *aśvamedha*; yet horse sacrifice, connected with nobility (and probably kingship), appears to have formed an important aspect of pagan Scandinavian cult. Sundqvist devotes a chapter to this topic (2002: ch. 9). There are remains of horses in some of the mounds at Gamla Uppsala, as well as in the male burials at nearby Valsgärde, dating to the period 600–1000; remains of horses, interpreted as sacrifices, have been found from the Iron Age elsewhere in Sweden (ibid. 230–1). Kingship and horse sacrifice are linked in the tale of Blótsveinn in *Hervarar saga* ch. 16, who, upon accepting the kingship of the Svear, has to participate in a horse sacrifice. The horse appears to have been associated above all with Freyr; this is indicated in the literary monuments, such as the horse Freyfaxi in *Hrafnkels saga*, the collocation of horses, Freyr and a fertility cult in the tale of Gunnarr helmingr (*Flateyjarbók* I, 337–9), and the tale of Óláfr Tryggvason seeing a stallion in a sanctuary (*hof*) in Níðarós, destined for sacrifice, in an episode in which he contends with the inhabitants over their worship of Freyr the *skúrgoð*, "shower god" (*Flateyjarbók* I, 401). Horse fights, which are mentioned in literary sources, and were also found in folk tradition (in Norway up to the eighteenth century) as well as being depicted on picture stones from *c.* 500 (the Häggeby stone from Uppland), may have formed part of a festival intended to ensure good crops (reflected, for example, in the Norwegian custom of leading horses round farms at Yule to water them at springs that never froze) (ibid. 231–2).

Sundqvist (ibid. 233–5) argues that the death of Aðils is in some way linked to augury – though it is not clear exactly how. He cites the account found in *Hauks þáttr hábrókar* of a rite connected with the god Lytir, performed in the hall at Uppsala (the text is fourteenth century, but Sundqvist regards it as likely to preserve ancient elements). King Eiríkr needs to provide divine support for two servants he is sending after his enemy

King Haraldr hárfagri's men. He holds a feast, and brings two carriages to a place where he sacrifices to Lytir; a carriage stays there over night, and Lytir is expected to appear. Eventually, after sufficient sacrifice, he does so, and the carriage becomes so heavy that the draft-horses («eykirnir») break down before they get to the hall. It is placed in the middle of the hall, and the king drinks a libation to the god, wishing to decide on a matter («máli skipta») and take advice about the journey. Lytir derives from Old Swedish *luter*, "lot used in divination". It would appear that divination lies at the heart of this fable. The horses cannot be said to play a major role in the recorded story, but Sundqvist points to evidence for a divinatory connection of horses elsewhere, in particular practices among the Slavic Wends recorded by Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* xiv.29.9–10, who describes a white horse, sacred to Svantovit, whose enmity the animal was believed to bear in battle against hostile forces, and which was used in a rite of augury to determine what battle plans to make; and the observation by Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 10, that the Germani paid particular attention to omens and warnings furnished by horses.

It seems reasonable to view the connections with augury which Sundqvist seeks to elicit as reflections of a wider theme of *frœði* (attained, as noted, by Óðinn on the tree), encompassing both fecundity and wisdom, which are the dual aspects of successful kingship (Mitchell 1985; success in war secures the community's welfare and thus fecundity as a race). Óðinn's securing of runes, and thus wisdom, through sacrifice may be viewed as a variety of augury, achieved by riding the *drasill* which is the world tree.

The Rus oak

In *De administrando imperio* (I, 60–1), the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, writing *c.* 944, recounts the travails of the Rus on their expeditions down the Dnepr to reach Constantinople. Once they had cleared a series of rapids, and escaped the attacks of the Pechenegs,[76] they made a sacrifice of a noteworthy kind (trans. R. Jenkins):

> Μετὰ δὲ τὸ διελθεῖν τὸν τοιοῦτον τόπον τὴν νῆσον, τὴν ἐπιλεγομένην ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος καταλαμβάνουσιν, ἐν ᾗ νήσῳ καὶ τὰς θυσίας αὐτῶν ἐπιτελοῦσιν διὰ τὸ ἐκεῖσε ἵστασθαι παμμεγέθη δρῦν, καὶ θύουσι πετεινοὺς ζῶντας. πηγνύουσι δὲ καὶ σαγίττας γυρόθεν, ἄλλοι δὲ καὶ ψωμία καὶ κρέατα, καὶ ἐξ ὧν ἔχει ἕκαστος, ὡς τὸ ἔθος αὐτῶν ἐπικρατεῖ. ῥίπτουσι δὲ καὶ σκαρφία περὶ τῶν πετεινῶν, εἴτε σφάξαι αὐτούς, εἴτε καὶ φαγεῖν, εἴτε καὶ ζῶντας ἐάσειν αὐτούς.

> After traversing this place they reach the island called St Gregory, on which island they perform their sacrifices because a gigantic oak-tree stands there; and they sacrifice live cocks. Arrows, too, they peg in round about, and others bread and meat, or something of whatever each may have, as is their custom. They also throw lots regarding the cocks, whether to slaughter them, or to eat them as well, or to leave them alive.

[76] A Turkic tribe; for a thorough account of their history see Macartney (1929–30).

Given the many peoples the Rus travelled amongst, and the uncertainty as to how far they were already assimilated to the Slav population by this period, it is difficult to be certain of the sources of the worship recounted here.[77] For example, Mannhardt (1904–5: I, 174) mentions that the Slavic Wends planted an oak in the middle of the village on a mound on the 2 July (about the same time as the Rus sacrifice), after attaching an iron cock to its crown, and performed dances around it. On the other hand, Herrmann (1903: 591) notes that a cock was attached to the midsummer tree – the fate tree – held by the bridegroom as he left his parents house in Swedish tradition. However, there are several features in the account that may be related to known features of Norse religion: the ceremony takes place around the mid-point of the year, and the mid-point of the Rus's journey. There may be reflections of the Norse midsummer sacrificial celebration (*AR* §305), but the more immediate reason for the sacrifice at this place and time may be surmised to be one of thanksgiving for safe passage so far, and the desire of a blessing for the further course of the journey to Constantinople.

Constantine's expression is striking: the Rus sacrificed here *because* of the existence of a great oak. Clearly the Vikings recognised in the tree a suitable object of veneration, implying an already clear idea of a sacred huge tree. The tree is surely to be regarded as a guardian of the Rus's passage. The offerings to it link it with the "guardian tree" of later Scandinavian folk practice. It is not clear how the island acquired the name of St Gregory, but Γρηγόριος means "watchful": possibly a pagan tradition of the oak as guardian has passed into the name of a saint at the hands of the Byzantines. The tree grew on an island. In Tacitus's *Germania* the solemnities of Nerthus took place in a grove on an island. *Grímnismál* 29 ⟨37⟩ implies that Yggdrasill grew if not on an island then at least beside mighty rivers that the gods have to cross to gain access to it for their council; an example is given above of a Norwegian tree, possibly representing Yggdrasill, growing on an island. This opens the possibility that the taking of counsel at this midway point of the journey may have been another concomitant circumstance of the sacrifice. The sacrifice of cocks is to be linked with ideas of rebirth; the purpose of the offering thus seems to be to secure renewal of life and livelihood. In the account of Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān concerning the Rus ⟨31⟩, a cock and hen are sacrificed and thrown into the funeral ship. In Saxo's account of Hadingus's visit to the otherworld in *Gesta Danorum*

[77] Jenkins (1962: 55) points this out in his commentary; he notes some of the Slav parallels, not all of them convincing. Oak trees were important in Slav paganism; they do not form a major component of Germanic religion, though the Saxons of Geismar ⟨qv⟩ worshipped one, which Boniface felled (see Palm 1948: ch. 3). Jenkins's examples of "Slavic" sacrificial slaughtering of cocks in fact mostly refer to Rus or other Norse. Nothing can be inferred from the offering of food, since it is a commonplace. On the arrows, see below. An oak existed on the island up till last century, and prayers were offered there (the island now lies below water, the river having been dammed). This suggests a tenacious local tradition, which the Rus accommodated themselves to rather than originated. Siikala (2002: 188) notes that in Slav belief there was a rock in the midst of the sea with a cosmic oak tree growing on it, which functioned as a banishment site (for illnesses and ills); the Rus may therefore have been performing a ritual of banishment of whatever ills were befalling them on the journey.

1.8.14 ⟨108⟩ a cock is killed and thrown over the barrier of the realm, and is then heard alive on the other side.[78] In *Vǫluspá* 41–2 two cocks, one in heaven and one among the giants, crow as the end of the world nears: they have eschatological significance.[79]

It is likely that the casting of lots by the Rus had greater significance than Constantine realised (merely deciding on the fate of the chickens). The cocks are clearly open to interpretation as symbolic of resurrection, and casting lots over them may have related in some way to the supposed fate of the Rus adventurers themselves. The cocks indicate a link with the god Hœnir: *Hœnir* is possibly derived from *hani*, "cock" (*AeW, s.v.* "Hœnir"; for an overview of proposed etymologies, see Lorenz 1984: 333–4); in *Vǫluspá* 60 it is Hœnir's job in the new world to «hlautvið kiósa», "choose the twig of augury".[80] The Rus sojourn on the island is likely to have been regarded as a dangerous transition; Hœnir may be connected with resurrection, and dangerous transitions seen as resurrections: U. Dronke (1992*a*: 681–2) argues that Hœnir may fulfil a similar role to the Indian Udgātṛ "chanter" priest ("chant" and "cock" being etymologically related) who presided over transitions from death to life, at birth, at initiatory rebirth, and at the rebirth following physical death (Coomaraswamy 1940: 49–51). Coomaraswamy (ibid. 59 n. 30) notes another ritual undertaken by the Udgātṛ, in which he raises a pillar representing the world pillar "in the seat of Āyu (the Sacrifice, Agni), in the shadow of the Favouring one, in the heart of the Ocean", and prays that it will "prop up the sky, fill the atmosphere, stabilise the earth": this collocation of sacrifice, world axis and ocean with a cock-like "chanting" priest forms an interesting analogue to the Rus sacrifice of cocks beside a sacred tree on an island.

The ring of arrows[81] could represent the fence around the sacred place of the *þing* (*AR* §265), within which weapons were not to be brought; Jenkins, however, notes Slav parallels involving the offering of weapons to deities, which form a more convincing analogue.

[78] Schjødt (2007: 143) also makes the comparison between the Rus hen sacrifice and the cock of Hadingus, pointing out that while the two accounts differ, they do so in a structurally systematic way, suggesting they are realisations of one primary set of motifs; thus the protagonists and the animal victims are of opposite sexes, and Hadingus is in the world of the dead, so the cock must be thrown into the land of the living, where it comes to life, whereas the slave girl is in this world and throws the hen into the world of the dead (presumably the notion of taking life with it is still present: what is dead on one side is alive on the other, by implication, in both tales).

[79] Wensinck (1921: 36) notes a Muslim tradition of a cosmic cock, which, like the cocks of *Vǫluspá*, has eschatological connotations: it stretched from lowest earth to highest heaven, and its wings from east to west (indicating that it symbolised the sun); when the resurrection is to begin, God says to the bird "Take thy wings in and lower thy voice that the inhabitants of heaven and earth may know that the Hour is near."

[80] Another tale, recorded only by Snorri in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4, confirms Hœnir's links with counsel: Hœnir was sent as hostage from the *æsir* to live among the *vanir*: the *vanir* discovered that Hœnir's counselling abilities did not amount to much, as whenever any difficulty arose he advised «ráði aðrir», "let others decide"; the *vanir* therefore killed Mímir on whom Hœnir relied for advice.

[81] Possibly related may be the wreath of arrows around the head found in a sixth-century Gepid grave, thought to be that of a priest (Bóna 1976: 87).

THE TREE AS GUARDIAN

The "guardian tree" of an establishment (such as a farm) or community may be seen as an extension of the concept of the "life-tree" of the individual. The guardian tree, as well as reflecting the fate of the establishment, also acted as a guardian.

Examples of the "guardian tree" are widespread. Thus Boetticher (1856: 167–8) notes that every Greek state had a guardian tree, such as the ancient olive at the agora of Megara, on whose fate that of the city depended; the tree's trunk had completely grown round a great many offerings of weapons left at it, and an oracle declared that "The state will perish as soon as a tree gives birth to weapons", which of course happened when the tree was felled, and the city fell. Boecler (1854: 2–6) gives an account of tree worship among the Estonians in the nineteenth century; a tree, called in some areas *varjopuu*, "protecting tree", stood near the house and would receive a blood offering at least once a year.

In shamanic rituals the symbolic world tree may take on a role of guardian. In Ewenki belief the shamanic tree is the guardian of the tent as well as representing the world tree ⟨SHEVENCHEDEK⟩, and the Ewenki shaman has a personal tree whose fate is bound up with his own ⟨DARPE⟩. The Nganasan account ⟨16⟩ presents several guardian trees, of birth, children, flocks and the home. Mikhailovskii (1894–5: 88–9) notes the following among the Buryats:

> On the morning of the day on which the [shamanic initiation] ceremony happens, the trees that have been brought in are put in the proper places. First of all they lay in the *yurta* [hut] a great thick birch with its roots stuck in the right hand south-western corner, at the point where the earthen floor lies bare round the hearth; the top of the tree is thrust out through the smoke hole. This birch symbolically indicates the porter god who allows the shaman ingress into heaven; it is left there permanently, and serves as a distinctive mark of a shaman's abode.

Olrik and Ellekilde (1926–51: I, 229–41) give a detailed picture of the *vårdträd*, "guardian tree", of the house, found throughout Scandinavia, but especially commonly in Norway.[82] The tree typically grew on a grave mound close to the farm. In some areas, such as Værend, nearly every house had its *vårdträd*, usually ash, elm or linden. It was regarded as animate and in control of the welfare of the household, and offerings of milk or ale would be made to it (ibid. 231):

> "O du Guds vætt" sagde man på gården Helle i Undalen, Vestagder, når man hældte en skål øl ud ved gårdens vættetræ. "Jeg under dig det, jeg giver dig, søster min" sagde de i Sætesdalen, når de hældte koens förste mælkedråber ud på vættetræet efter kælvingen.

> "O God's spirit" they said on the farm Helle in Undalen, Vestagder, when they held out a bowl of ale to the farm's guardian tree. "I grant you this, I

[82] Palm (1948: 60 ff.) also discusses folk-beliefs about the *vårdträd*, citing some classical beliefs, but without considering Norse examples such as the *barnstokkr*.

give you this, my sister" they said in Sætesdalen, when they held out the cow's first drops of milk to the guardian tree after calving.

To fell the tree brought calamity; thus a man who did so heard the tree sing one night how he too would suffer, and his whole establishment burnt down (ibid. 234).

Mannhardt (1904–5: I, 54) saw the guardian tree as the prototype of both the Uppsala tree and the world tree; H. Chadwick (1899: 78–9) likewise suggested that the Uppsala tree was seen as the guardian tree of the Swedish nation, having originated as a local guardian tree; when Valhǫll came to be modelled on a human community, it too was provided with a guardian tree; with the development of the awareness of the wider community, the idea of a "world guardian tree" developed. While such a historical development seems unlikely, on the basis of the many analogues to the world tree among primitive Eurasian peoples, it is surely valid to see the Uppsala tree as, among other things, the guardian tree of the Swedes, and Læráðr as the guardian tree belonging to Valhǫll, and Yggdrasill as the guardian tree of the cosmos.

Conclusion

Eurasian analogues to the Norse world tree illustrate that the Norse mythologem belongs, even in details, to a widespread concept found in many parts of Eurasia, where the belief was the subject of popular cult, and formed a central element of shamanic practices. Moreover, the popular image of the world tree afforded poets ample material for subtle development – seen for example in the thematic linking in *Vǫluspá* of the tree to the idea of time and fate.

Several over-all themes may be isolated.

The tree represents through its *compass* the whole cosmos. This is apparent in most versions of the tree, both Norse and Eurasian.

The tree is a source of *life*. In Germanic tradition the tree, or the grove of which, it may be surmised, it formed part, was the origin of man (called in Norse *Askr* after the *askr* tree) – it provides the *materies* from which he is formed. In shamanic societies is found the image of the tree as the nesting ground of unborn souls.

The tree is the seat of the life of the cosmos, and hence it reflects the *suffering* of the world. This is scarcely represented in Eurasian sources, but is developed in Norse, being represented in *Grímnismál* by the animals wearing down the tree, and in *Vǫluspá* by the careful correspondence imposed by the poet between the state of the tree and the state of the world in its history.

The tree is a site of *wisdom*, and hence of judgement, fate and divination. This is a strongly developed theme in Norse, less so in Eurasian sources.

The tree is a *guardian* of men and their settlements (including, on a macrocosmic scale, the whole world). This is represented in the cult of the *vårdträd* of later Scandinavian tradition, guarding the welfare of the farm

where it grew. The representative world tree could act as a guardian tree of the shaman and his clan.

The tree is a means of *communication*, and a bridge from one world to another. For the shaman, the tree is the means to pass from one world to another, and it is realised in concrete fashion in the kamlanie (particularly notable in the Ewenki case presented above). There is nothing equivalent in Norse, unless we count the passage of Óðinn into the realm of death on the tree (which is not, however, presented as a movement between worlds: the tree functions as a gallows rather than something to climb), or the scurrying of Ratatoskr the squirrel up and down it. The tree is situated near the *ásbrú*, which may originally have represented the soul bridge in the form of the Milky Way; this, however, is far from anything that could be equated with shamanic ritual.

The tree is a site of cult and *sacrifice*. This is clear in many Germanic accounts, from the grove of the Semnones, to the oak of Geismar, to the tree of Uppsala. The ultimate sacrifice on the tree is that of Óðinn himself. The name of the Norse tree, Yggdrasill, indicates the centrality of this divine offering in Norse myth. Sacrifices take place also at Eurasian trees, notably among the Sámi to ensure the continued sustenance of the world, but it cannot be said to take such a focal position in the overall concept of the tree as in Norse.

It is striking that the Norse image of the tree is most similar to ones found among peoples remote from Scandinavia, and has little in common with that of neighbours like the Finns and the somewhat more distant Mordvins.[83] How far the greater similarity to trees found in classically shamanic societies is to be seen as an indication of a shamanic element in the Norse tree is a matter of debate; without evidence to demonstrate a cult of the tree involving shamanic practices, the tree can only be described as consistent with (and, if not actually a prerequisite, at least an expected feature of) shamanic cosmology, but not an indication of the presence of shamanism in itself. The disparities in the imagery of the tree over the areas in which it occurs speak against the world tree being a circumpolar cultural phenomenon (as does its occurrence primarily among people living rather further south), and suggests an origin from a different root,[84] and subsequent development along different lines: although many features are shared between Germanic and shamanic societies, in Norse, the element

[83] There are possibly more similarities with Sámi world trees, but our information about these is very limited; moreover, the Sámi were subject to strong Norse influence, and this may have included their concepts of the world support (which they basically seem to have conceived as a pillar, in line with many other circumpolar societies).

[84] It is possible to speculate on what this may have been: an inherited Indo-European tradition is one, given the evidence for the cosmic tree in India; another would be influence from the slightly later Indo-Iranian-speaking societies occupying much of the steppe from Europe into Asia; yet another would be from the steppe-dwelling Huns of the first few centuries AD, who ruled for a time over the Goths, from whom many traditions may well have originated in the Germanic world. Unfortunately we lack specific enough information about the beliefs or imagery of any of these peoples (other than the Indians, and to some extent the Iranians) for the suggestions to remain more than speculative.

of divine sacrifice on the tree takes on central importance, but among shamanic societies it functions as the means of passage between worlds in shamanic ritual settings. Despite the points of similarity, which can be illuminating for the interpretation of the Norse texts, there is ultimately little about the Norse tree that can be described as fundamentally specific to shamanic practice or belief.

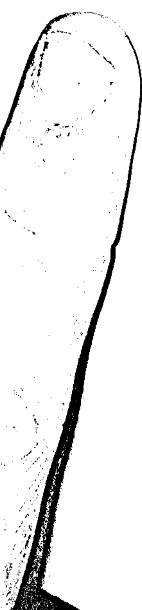
15. Aspects of non-vertical cosmography

Eurasian

Classic forms of shamanism are, as seen, often accompanied by a cosmography which is vertical in aspect, using images such as the pillar or mountain, where the cosmos is envisaged as composed of layers one on top of another. However, this does not preclude other cosmologies from existing alongside; a few examples are given here.

OB UGRIAN

The Ob Ugrians have developed a complex system of equivalences between vertical and horizontal world axes (Schmidt 1989: 187–9): the upper, and south, represent life, the lower, and north, represent death; a great number of oppositions, both vertical and horizontal, are made, such as the divisions between land and water, the warm sea/lake and the icy sea, the thawed and the frozen earth. Animals may represent mediators both vertically and horizontally between spheres: for example the wild goose migrates along a north–south axis, and acts as a representative of Mir-susnə-χum (the god "World-watching-man"); large animals are sacred and clean, and small ones the opposite, and there is a further opposition between terrestrial and aquatic animals, so that we end up with patterns such as bear : mouse :: beaver : water-rat, but an animal in one category may represent its equivalent in another, so that a mouse can "be" a bear, but one that can reach into unclean areas under the ground. Particularly important are animals such as the bear, which is liminal, partaking of two spheres: it acts as a mediator in itself between society and nature, and from earth to heaven (whence it was believed to originate). The notion of oppositions on vertical and horizontal axes affects every aspect of the Ob Ugrians' spiritual and everyday life.



EWENKI

The Ewenki, among whom the symbolism of both shamanism and cosmography was particularly developed, also had both a vertical (discussed above) and horizontal perspective of the spiritual world. The horizontal is traced in particular by Vasilevich (1963). Fundamental to the system was the long river *Engdekit*, "place of prohibition" (*engi*, "cannot", *dek*, "place"); this is likely to have been in origin a spiritual version of the Yenisei. Engdekit has a number of rapids along it (usually conceived as nine in number), called by explicitly liminal titles such as *kultyr*, "threshold".

The greatest rapid is the last, and beyond it lies the river's mouth. The shaman would travel along this river, but only the most eminent managed to proceed beyond this last terrifying rapid and return to tell the tale; the sudden death of a shaman during a kamlanie would be explained on the basis that he had penetrated beyond these rapids, and become irretrievably stranded there. *Bukit*, the place of death, was situated along the lower stretches of Engdekit. The boundary between the realms of the living and dead were imagined as *darisal*, "tiers", of iron and bone spirits standing with outstretched arms like a fence to keep the dead from making their way upstream. The shaman would have his own tributary, which fell into Engdekit. Whirlpools in natural rivers served as entrances to shamanic rivers, and enemy spirits always looked out for opportunities to drag someone through such whirlpools and on into Engdekit. The shaman would set up various spirit fences to guard against enemy intrusion, but enemy spirits would gather on the promontories by the spirit rivers and try to force a passage through these fences. The shaman's spirits were believed to dwell somewhere about the mouth of his tributary (where also, in some conceptions, the clan dead were believed to dwell). On the high cliffs by the rapids also dwelled evil spirits.

THE SÁMI WATER REALM

A non-vertical spiritual cosmography also clearly existed among the Sámi, though our records do not allow us to reconstruct it in the detail that has been recorded among peoples such as the Ewenki or Ob Ugrians; the Sámi otherworld appears to have been located either under lakes or in the mountains, depending on local geography.

The Sámi term *sájva* designates, at least in some areas, a fresh-water lake without visible outlet. These lakes were held to abound in fish, and were believed to be double-bottomed (Bäckman 1975: 14); in Swedish and Finnish Lapland spirits were believed to dwell about the lower level of these lakes (Karsten 1955: 17–18; Bäckman 1975: 14). However, in most parts of Lapland Sájva was a spirit realm in various mountains; the shamanic spirits dwelt there, and the shaman would himself sojourn there sometimes, and look forward to living there after his death. Bäckman has shown that Sájva-ájmuo was not originally conceived as a general abode of the dead, but as a realm for spirits (the *saajve ålmah* or *basseváre ålmmå*), that is tutelary beings, helping spirits (and later, among southern Sámi, underworld beings); among these would be included special individuals from amongst men, such as departed shamans, who become tutelary spirits to the living and thus distinct from the normal dead (Bäckman 1975: 103). She notes (ibid. 150) that the idea of the dead dwelling in Sájva is later: "The association of the dead to *Sájva* must, in my opinion, have arisen through attraction, for beings with similar motives are, in popular belief, attracted to each other, merge into each other and are uniformly expressed."

The word *sájva* derives from primitive Old Norse **saiw-*, "lake"

(Korhonen 1981: 47; *AeW*, *s.v.* "sær"; *VA*, *s.v.* "sjø").[1] Bäckman (1975: 141–2) sums up the accepted view on the semantic development from "lake" to "supernatural mountain realm":

> Wiklund [1916: 68] presumes that the term *sájva* has undergone a shift in meaning; originally it was loaned with the meaning of "lake in contradistinction to sea"; subsequently the term came to designate the idols on the shore of the lake and the beings represented by these idols. And finally the word was disconnected from its association with the idols and given the significance of "sacred" in general. Among the Sámi in southern Lapland in Scandinavia, who made their living from the reindeer on the mountains, *sájva* was transferred from the idol at a lake to the idol on a mountain and to the spirits thereabouts. This hypothesis has been accepted by most researchers.

Comparable to the Sámi spirit world beneath sacred lakes is the Ewenki belief that openings at the bottom of lakes led to the lower world (Vasilevich 1963: 54).

There is evidence for an underwater realm suffused with spiritual significance in Norse. In *Vǫluspá* 20 ⟨38⟩ three maidens, "knowing much", come from a lake (*sær*) beneath the world tree, and lay down destinies for men, incising a slip of wood. In *Grímnismál* 7 Óðinn and Sága drink from cups in the hall *Søkkvabekkr*, "Sunken bench"; *Sága* derives from *saga* "something said, saw" (Sturtevant 1952: 1146),[2] giving, when applied to a person, a meaning "sayer", which suggests a possible connection between numinous oracular power and an undersea realm. Óðinn's usual spouse Frigg is said to have prophetic powers in *Lokasenna* 29.

The Sámi concept of Sájva mountains – especially as an abode of the dead – is usually seen as influenced by the Norse idea of the "dead in the mountains" (for example, Bäckman 1975: 89; see *AR* §168 on the motif).[3] However, Pettersson (1987: 72–3), although he accedes to the general view of Norse influence, adduces a Russian parallel to the idea of mountains as the abode of the dead. This suggests that, although the idea is not one that characterises belief systems of shamanic societies in general, it may be an areal feature whose precise origin cannot be assigned to one specific society.[4] Nordland (1968: 307) notes how the belief was characteristic of certain areas of Norway:

> In the shamanism of the Lapps, and of many of the peoples to the east, the goal of the travelling shaman is believed to be either a mountain or a lake

[1] Itkonen (1946: 68 n. 2) proposes that the word is purely Sámi, but his proposal has not been generally accepted.

[2] Sturtevant compares the quantitative ablaut in *mǫgr*/*mágr*, *ǫ́*/*Ægir* (from proto-Germanic **ahwō*/*āɣwjaz*).

[3] For a general survey of the "dead in the mountains" see von Unwerth (1911: 7–36); von Unwerth likewise concludes, despite showing that the Sámi cult was more widespread and developed in many particulars, that the belief "must" have originated with the Norse. However, Bäckman (1975) sees the motif as essentially shamanic.

[4] How localised the notion actually is remains to be proved. Compare, for example, how in Sumerian *kur* means both "mountain" and "earth", in particular the underworld realm, the entrance to which was believed to be in the mountains (Black and Green 1992, *s.v.* "kur").

> (a *saivo*, generally believed to be the abode of the dead – even of the dead shaman). The theory of a southern extension of those beliefs has recently been confirmed by a comparative study of Scandinavian place-names. On the western coast of Norway there is a large area which is characterized by the absence of farm-names of a mythological origin, names like: *Thors-land, Balders-heim*, etc. This particular area has an abundance of mountains characterized by the term *Helga-*, "holy". The farm-names corresponding to the mythological names in this area are: *Helga-heim, Helga-land*. It seems to be obvious that this is an area in which the newer strata of farm names from Germanic mythology is absent, and where, instead, the farms were named in accordance with the ancient belief as regards "the holy mountain".

Some caution, however, needs to be exercised in seeing an integral connection between Sájva and the Norse "dead in the mountains" theme. As noted, Sájva is probably a region of the dead only by extension from what is essentially a realm of independent spirits. In Norse, the mountain of the dead is not presented as an abode of spirits; it is, rather, a conceptual extension of the *haugr*, the burial mound, an extension which no doubt took place readily in mountainous areas. The belief attached to only a few families, and the motif is specific in presenting a joyous feast taking place, seen by an outsider: for example, in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 19 a shepherd hears Þorsteinn being welcomed with «mikinn glaum ok hornaskvǫl», "great merriment and noise of horns", and sees great fires in Helgafell, "Holy mountain". The world of Sájva is not presented in such limited terms, but is an integral part of the Sámi shamanic cosmos, the source of the shaman's spirits.

The Sámi Sájva, whether conceived as being below special lakes or up in the mountains, represents an image of the shamanic cosmos which is not primarily vertical, but horizontal in its layout; this is in line with concepts found among other Siberian shamanic peoples, where both vertical and horizontal concepts of the spirit world may exist alongside each other. The Sámi horizontality is also in accordance with the greater emphasis on the idea of the world support as a pillar or post rather than a tree, since the pillar is conceived essentially as a support for the firmament, rather than a means of communication between layers of the cosmos.

Norse

The image of the world tree with roots reaching down to various worlds implies a vertical cosmography, but there was also a notion of giants living somewhere beyond the inhabited world of men or gods, for example in the east (thus Þórr, as attacker of giants, is said to make journeys to the east in *Lokasenna* 60 and *Hárbarðsljóð* 23, to take just two instances; cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 8, where Jǫtunheimr is placed on the edge of the world). Hence, in different contexts, a primarily vertical or horizontal view of the cosmos could be envisioned. It is possible, of course, for complex systematisations to result from such a coexistence of cosmic axes, with notional equivalences between the two axes, such as developed among

the Ob Ugrians; some have inferred the existence of such a systematisation in Norse belief, notably Meletinskij (1973, 1974), who for example sees the underworld realm of the dead as symbolically equivalent to the north/east (the world of giants), and draws in ideas of opposition between, for example, nature and chaos. Yet Schjødt (1990) is right to object to such systematisation: terms such as "nature" are ill-defined, and there is no real parallel between the dead and giants; in short, the evidence does not warrant the inference of such a close-knit system. Instead, we encounter a fragmentary kaleidoscope of notions – Schjødt calls it chaotic, but I would prefer to say that it is simply ad hoc: the poets were concerned with particular contexts, in which, for example, giants are characterised as "other" by placing them on the periphery of the world, contrasting with "us" (the gods and men) in the centre, without wishing to imply thereby any overarching cosmography. Schjødt evaluates the sort of systematisations advocated by Meletinskij and others in some detail, and it would be futile to repeat all his well-aimed criticisms. I would, however, note that Schjødt's view of the Norse cosmography being essentially dichotomous, in effect contrasting an in-group and and out-group in different ways, is not the only possible reading of the evidence and is itself too much of a systematisation. Thus he emphasises that the notion of the gods dwelling in heaven is likely to be due to Christian influence, and that in fact gods are frequently encountered among men, so that we encounter contrasts between the gods (associated, it is to be inferred, with the community of mankind) and giants, and between the living and the dead (the world tree connecting these two worlds). Gods are, it is true, only exceptionally associated with *himinn*, the heaven or sky in Norse, yet the notion of gods being contrasted with mankind and dwelling separately in heaven is such a widespread religious phenomenon that its presence, if detected, need not necessarily be seen as stemming from Christian influence; as we have seen, in many traditions the gods are believed to dwell about the world tree on a different level from that of mankind, although it is never made clear that this is the case in Norse (as noted, the gods in judgement may have been conceived as riding to a site which is above mankind, close to the world tree under which humans dwell, and perhaps close to the summit of the firmament about the North Star; this is not their customary dwelling place, however, even if such a cosmography was earlier suggested as underlying the image of one particular mythologem). What is specifically lacking in Norse is a religious context in which gods would be distinguished from humans: it is in religious rites such as sacrifice and prayer that the contrast would be most keenly felt, and would be most likely to be realised symbolically by assigning different cosmic levels to each type of being, yet there is a dearth precisely of such genuinely pagan rites in the Norse remains. This is not to undermine Schjødt's insights on the cosmic axes, but rather to allow for a wider scope of symbolism as being likely to have existed than we have direct evidence for, and thus to avoid inferring too narrow a scope (for example, a solely dichotomous one) for that symbolism.

Conclusion

Some shamanic societies had both vertical and horizontal cosmographies, and sometimes developed sophisticated systems of symbolic equivalences between them. The Norsemen also envisaged the cosmos along these two axes, without, however, apparently developing any systematisation of the various symbolisms; there appears, at least, to have been a general idea of the world of men, Miðgarðr, being "middle" not only on a vertical axis, but also a horizontal one, with realms such as that of the giants on the periphery. Some particular notions may be matched among the Norsemen's neighbours, such as that of the dead in the mountains (limited to certain Norwegian families), and a general idea of prophetic knowledge being associated with water (itself often situated at the world tree, which is not something evident in the Sámi ideas about Sájva). Yet, in the main, Norse spiritual cosmography was clearly vertical, marked by the world tree, a feature which links it with remote societies, rather than its immediate neighbours such as the Sámi. Again, however, while such a cosmography is consistent with a sort of shamanism found widely in Eurasia, it does not in itself prove its presence. Moreover, whilst the attenuated nature of the sources must strike a note of caution, the Sámi example shows that an overemphasis upon the layered cosmos as a basic feature of shamanic practice may, in any case, be misplaced.

Conclusion on cosmic structures

The Norse myths depicting the world axis in its various realisations are comparable in many respects, even in many details, to analogues found in shamanic and other societies in Eurasia. The aim of this section has been not merely to evaluate any evidence for shamanism in the Norse texts dealing with the world axis, but also to map out a typology of the features of these world-support images.

The tree is the main form in which the structure of the cosmos was imagined in Norse; besides the obvious symbolism of its all-encompassing embrace, the image of the tree naturally led to an emphasis upon the life of the cosmos and of man, and upon the fate which ruled both the world and its inhabitants; this aspect is also clear in parallels from shamanic societies (for example in the tree as a resting place of souls), though the Norse sources show a distinct propensity to develop such themes poetically. Just as the shaman's personal life-tree acted as a microcosmic version of the clan tree and beyond that of the world tree, so too it would seem the Norse world tree was a macrocosmic version of the guardian tree of the homestead. In shamanic rituals, representations of the world tree or of more specifically focused aspects of the world tree were personified into different forms of guardian spirits; in Norse, the god Heimdallr would appear, in part, to be a similar personification, in particular of the tree as watchful guardian and engenderer of mankind, and as a liminal being overseeing passage between worlds.

The realisation of the world axis as a pillar takes a secondary place in Norse myth, as it is worked out in poetic sources. The pillar is particularly associated with the god Þórr, and the emphasis is upon brute strength; Þórr, like Heimdallr, is a defender of the world of men, though they operate in somewhat different fashions. The myths which link Þórr with the world pillar are fragmentary, but it would seem likely that a complex of ideas was shared with the Norsemen's Finnic neighbours: the North Star may be represented by a chink of whetstone in Þórr's forehead, and also in concrete form in the "divine nails" at the top of the hall-pillars with which the god is particularly associated; it is also likely that the divine origin of fire was believed to derive from the summit of heaven so represented, as in Finnish.

The mountain is associated to some extent with the world tree and with Heimdallr, but is not a developed motif in Norse myth.

The mill, or milling, occurs in some obscure Norse myths, where it appears to be associated with primordial fertility and with the ordering of cosmic time. However, the notion of a cosmic mill was not specially developed in Norse, whereas in Finnish tradition a more sustained symbolism of this sort seems to have applied to the *sampo*. The Norse mill Grotti is not

primarily a cosmic mill, though it has attracted certain mythic aspects to it which have, so to speak, elevated its conceptual status.

There were certainly other cosmographic frameworks within Norse tradition of a non-vertical kind, as there were in shamanic societies, but it is impossible to make any specific connections, or to determine any spiritual significance to the Norse cosmography (in contrast to the shamanic examples cited).

The emphasis upon the tree rather than the pillar in extant sources links Scandinavia more to the sub-circumpolar cultures than the Arctic circumpolar ones to which the Sámi belong; this is consistent with findings elsewhere in the present work. The major difference between Norse and shamanic societies is in the ritual aspect of representations of the world axis. Several of the texts cited, in particular in connection with the tree, show that there was a distinct cult aspect to the Norse tree, which managed to survive well beyond the introduction of Christianity, seen for example in the offerings of milk or beer to the farmstead's guardian tree, and probably reflected in the laving of Yggdrasill with white mud. Yet nowhere do we have any indication of anything specifically shamanic taking place, of the tree as a means which the shaman or his counterpart would use to traverse the cosmos to carry out his tasks; the nearest is perhaps the sacrifice of Óðinn on the tree, considered in Chapter 16, but even here the emphasis is upon sacrifice, not on shamanic cosmic journeys. Whereas among the Ewenki, for example, a rich cosmographic imagery developed (far richer than it has been possible to present during the present discussion) in a fashion which was clearly rite-based, the Norse focus, at least as it has survived, was divorced from ritual and devoted to artistry: a clear example is the use of the image of the world tree in *Vǫluspá*, which is carefully placed to emphasise the developments of the world through its history, and also the *vǫlva*'s intimate knowledge and connection with these events, but is never *used* by the *vǫlva* – we are given no hint that using a tree in a shamanic fashion could ever have played any part in the rituals performed by a *vǫlva*.

V. THE WORKINGS OF SHAMANISM

16. Vocation and initiation

Eurasian

The process of becoming a shaman could be initiated in various ways, by various types of being. Findeisen (1957: 48–9), lists twelve ways of becoming a shaman:

1. Calling by ancestral spirits;
2. Calling by a shaman spirit without the neophyte having a male shaman in the family (exceptional);
3. Helping spirits of the father choose their new master in the form of the son (Kirgiz);
4. Spirits of the mountains or water wish to manifest themselves in a new shaman (Altaian);
5. Spirits of the upper world possess a man and make him a shaman;
6. The soul of a departed person is placed on the shaman tree and is nourished by the animal mother, and is reborn on earth as a shaman;
7. The son of the heavenly ruler of fate steps down to earth, mates with a woman, and the resulting son becomes a shaman;
8. A heavenly spirit falls in love with a person and possesses him, so he becomes a shaman, maintaining a spiritual love affair;
9. The animal mother takes the soul of the neophyte to the underworld and nourishes him there;
10. The "waters of destruction" can turn one shaman into another;
11. Spirits of sickness take the soul of the neophyte to the underworld, where it acquires the characteristics of these spirits;
12. By study with another shaman (a sign of degeneration of old shamanic ideals).

These categories cover at least three areas, which are considered separately here, with a few examples (which do not, however, cover all of Findeisen's types): the divine origin, vocation and initiation.

THE DIVINE ORIGIN

Myths on how the first shaman came to be are not recorded from among the Sámi; Eliade (1972: 68–71) gives several such origin myths from other areas. Tales of the origins of shamans are reflections of their role in society – to cure the sick, to act as psychopomp – and also of the limits of their

powers: they thus clarify both the indispensability of the shaman, and the threat they would pose if no bounds were set on them. In several accounts a woman is either the first shaman or gives birth to the first shaman, which may reflect how shamanism in certain respects inverts the normal social hierarchy, and thus could be seen as a threat to social order, even if it is something that is regarded as necessary. The tales themselves do not appear to be of any great antiquity, but the principles they manifest probably are.

The Buryats recount that in the beginning there were only the gods (*tengri*) in the west and the evil spirits in the east. The gods created mankind, and people lived happily until the time when the evil spirits spread sickness and death over the earth. The gods decided to give mankind a shaman to combat disease and death, and they sent the eagle. But men did not understand its language; besides, they had no confidence in a mere bird. The eagle returned to the gods and asked them to give him the gift of speech, or else to send a Buryat shaman. The gods sent him back with an order to grant the gift of shamanising to the first person he should meet on earth. The eagle saw a woman asleep under a tree, and had intercourse with her. Some time later the woman gave birth to a son, who became the first shaman. According to another variant, the woman, after her intercourse with the eagle, saw spirits and herself became a shamaness.

This myth combines the themes of the divine origin of shamanism and the adventures of the first shaman, which are dealt with in other myths. According to the Buryat version (Mikhailovskii 1894–5: 63–4), the "first shaman", Khara-Gyrgän, having declared that his power was boundless, was put to the test by God. God took a girl's soul and shut it up in a bottle. To make sure that it would not escape, God put his finger into the neck of the bottle. The shaman flew through the sky, sitting on his drum, discovered the girl's soul and, to set it free, changed into a spider and stung God in the face. God instantly pulled out his finger and the girl's soul escaped. Furious, God curtailed Khara-Gyrgän's power, and after that the magical abilities of shamans diminished markedly.

According to Sakha tradition (ibid. 64), the "first shaman" possessed extraordinary power and, in his pride, refused to recognise the supreme god of the Sakhas. This shaman's body was made of a mass of snakes. God sent down fire to burn him, but a toad emerged from the flames; from this creature came the "demons" who, in their turn, supplied the Sakhas with their outstanding shamans and shamanesses.

The Ewenki of Turukhansk have a legend of how the "first shaman" created himself, by his own powers and with the help of the devil. He flew out of the hole in his yurt and came back later accompanied by swans.

For the Teleuts, the first *kam* was a woman (ibid. 134). To test her power, an arrow was shot at her: far from being killed, she continued her shamanic activities with even greater vigour. From her were descended all succeeding *kams*.

Among the Nanai the first shaman was the first man, Hodai, who with his sister Miamendi appeared without explanation on earth. From them

the whole race of mankind sprang. In time, the world became too crowded with people, so something had to be done. Lopatin (1960: 134–5) continues the myth thus:

> "Why do you not open the door to the other world, old man?" asked Mia-mendi of her brother. And so old Hodai went to look for the door to the other world and after travelling a great distance he finally found the door and opened it. The people then began to die and soon there were many dead bodies around with no shamans to bury them.
>
> One night old Hodai dreamed that a *seon* (spirit) stood before him and said: "I want to make you a shaman and then you can bury the dead and convey their souls to Buni. Go to the woods, find a tree on which grow *tolis* (copper disks used in shamanism), *kongoktos* (bells), and horns. Choose as many of these things as you wish and you will then be a shaman."
>
> The next morning old Hodai went to the woods and found the tree about which the *seon* had told him. He took a large number of the *tolis*, *kongoktos*, and horns and putting them into a sack started home. When night came these objects began to rattle and finally spoke thus: "Why did you take so many? You have too much for yourself alone." When Hodai opened the sack the shaman attributes flew out with a whistle through the *chenko* (round opening in the wall of a Goldi house) to different parts of the country and to persons of the various *hala* (clans) worthy of shamanhood – Yukamika, Udinka, Beldy, Odzial, and others.
>
> Thus there were suddenly many shamans on the earth. Old Hodai and these other shamans could now bury the dead and convey their souls to Buni.

VOCATION

A person would be chosen to become a shaman – often against his will – by members of the spirit community (ancestral shaman spirits in the case of hereditary shamanism). He would often become aware of his vocation during a severe illness.

Skanke (1943–5: 205), writing around 1730 of the Sámi vocation, interprets the spirit responsible as the devil, but otherwise gives a clear account, which in essence is similar to many other accounts of shamanic vocation from Siberian societies: the spirit appears in a vision to those suitable to become shamans in their early manhood, either after they have been drinking, or else when they have been sojourning in the wilderness, and contracts them to his service ⟨15⟩.

Bäckman and Hultkrantz (*SLS* 25) emphasise the distinction between vocational and practitionary experiences:

> In evaluating the occurrence of possession in Siberian shamanism it seems to me we have to make a distinction – too often overlooked – between the vocation of the shaman and the shaman in action. During his *vocation* the future shaman is harassed by spirits (often, but not always, beings who become his helping spirits) who make him seemingly insane and "kill" him in order to resuscitate him as a new, power-filled being, a shaman. In several cases the spirits are reported to have possessed the shaman. [...] During his *shamanistic activity*, on the other hand, the shaman imitates the spirits in a trance of varying depths, and sometimes exerts a hypnotic influence on

his audience, suggesting their acceptance of a possession; alleged cases of possession may thus come down to nothing else than genial imitation.

During the period of initiation, the shaman would learn the necessary songs, supposedly being taught them by spirits in the wilderness though older shamans are sometimes known to have been responsible. The actual initiation would take place when the shaman was ready, and would be carried out by the spirits; the shaman lost his old self and was given a new one, a process which might be represented in various ways. After the initiation, the shaman would have to prove his abilities, as Balzer (1997: 26–8) notes:

> Testing of the shaman took different forms among the varied peoples, but its meaning was always the same: the shaman had to demonstrate in practice that the spirits were rendering him aid. The authority of the shaman, his "career", depended on successful healing, predictions coming true, accurate counsel. Failure meant that the shaman had lost power over the spirits.

In southern regions there developed a rich array of ceremonies for the purpose of demonstrating shamanic powers, but elsewhere the shaman tended to prove himself simply by the successful practice of his art (Siikala and Hoppál 1992: 6–7).

INITIATION

The initiation as a shaman typically consists of the initiand being taken down to the world of the dead or of the spirits by his guardian shamanic spirits, and there being dismembered and reassembled into a new man, often with new (iron) joints; he is instructed in the lay-out of the spirit realm, and this cosmic map is used as a basis for the descriptions of his visits to the spiritual worlds that he subsequently offers during kamlania (Siikala 1978: 331–2).[1]

Two of the fullest accounts of initiation come from the Nganasans: those of the shamans Sereptiye Dyaruoskin ⟨16⟩ and Dyukhadiye Kosterkin (Huottarie) ⟨17⟩. Similar concepts to those found in these Nganasan accounts are encountered elsewhere: for example, the Ewenki kept the clan fire at the foot of the symbolic world tree; the divine mistress of the fire was the guardian of the clan's souls and was hence responsible for reincarnation (Anisimov 1963*a*: 97). The accounts of shamanic initiation differ considerably from each other – there are marked differences even between the two Nganasan accounts – but they share the purpose of showing how during his initiation in the spirit realm the novice is given the powers he needs in order to shamanise.

[1] Compare Honko (1979: 388): "In every séance, the shaman repeats central features from his own initiation vision, i.e. from the trance experience during which he finally gets to know the topography of the beyond and finds – first led by the teacher-shaman, and later by himself – the ways along which after his initiation as a shaman he will often have to go in order to satisfy the expectations which the community puts on him."

The Dyaruoskin account is almost a northern *Divine Comedy*. The novice fells a tree to make a sledge, and is approached by a spirit being from the tree, who then acts as his otherworld guide, though he abandons the novice at the culmination of the experience, which is then directed by a female character, who it emerges is the mistress of the earth who has created all life. The novice is presented with a sort of cosmography and ethnography of the spirit world; many things are revealed to him, such as the spirit origins of parts of his shamanic costume, but the main point, as the first guide says, is to reveal to him "the origins and ways of diseases", but there is a strong emphasis on the novice perceiving for himself, at the guide's prompting, what the nature is of each person or thing he encounters.

The Kosterkin account places more emphasis upon the physical remaking of the shaman, but, as with Dyaruoskin, the main issue is to show how the shaman personalises the tribal cosmology and thereby becomes a powerful worker in the spirit realm on behalf of his community. The Kosterkin account is more brutal; this is primarily a reflection of the personal torments, through disease and other misfortunes, which this particular shaman had suffered in his life – he raises these torments to a spiritual level, as the means by which he is marked out as different from his peers, and by which he gained his shamanic powers; the physical sufferings through illness are matched, after his initiation, by the mental suffering of madness, during which he would wander off aimlessly. The metaphor of the forging smith working on human body parts crystallises the shaman's perception of the torments he has suffered as affording him exceptional powers by making him into a different being. There is a particular emphasis on the head and the eyes: the head is the source of wisdom, represented by the special letters found therein which the shaman must read, and the eyes are the source of spiritual sight, so that the shaman has special spiritual eyes placed in him during the initiation, which he uses thereafter, binding up his normal eyes during shamanic activities. Whilst the shaman is keen to illustrate how his experiences set him apart from normal men, at the same time they reaffirm the tribal belief system and cosmography, and emphasise how the shaman is the embodiment and manipulator of these traditions. Hence the account's reiteration of the roles of the various spirit beings, in particular the mistresses and masters of nature (of fish, of reindeer and so forth), so important in a hunting society, and whom the shaman is able to approach in person to make requests on behalf of his community. Hence too the reaffirmation of the traditional cosmography, here realised as the theatrical setting for the shaman's initiation: the great ocean, the mighty tree which affords life to all the peoples of the earth and is itself a talking, animate being, the lakes whence come all the bird species important to the tribe, the mountain beneath which is a realm of death where the shaman is reforged, and the cauldrons representing levels of health and of shamanic skill, which had their ritual counterparts in everyday life. Attention is also paid to the prototypes of the healing herbs used by the tribe (in particular by the shaman) for healing, which thus act as a sort of adjunct to the more typically shamanic soul healing. There is a strong emphasis throughout

the initiatory account on the acquiring of knowledge of how the world works: such knowledge forms the basis for the shaman's wisdom and for his professional activities. The other chief emphasis is upon the shaman's encounters with beings who are responsible for birth, for the origin of all things on which humans depend. The events following the shaman's initiation, showing the process of how he takes up his profession, exhibit a strong emphasis upon the participation of the whole community, both men and women, the men being particularly concerned with the creation of his drum, and the women with the sewing of his costume. Both costume and drum encapsulate the shaman's position as intermediary between worlds. The whole community takes part in their creation, and is thus, in a sense, contained within them, and benefits from their use. They are made from the hide of reindeer, the tribe's staple of existence, which in the shaman's hands becomes a means of communicating with the spirit masters on whom the tribe depends for the provision of sustenance (the very reindeer from which the shaman's equipment is made). The drum is also a metonym of the world tree, from a representative of which it is made – the tree which affords life to all the peoples of the earth, and which, through the herbs growing beside it, is also the source of healing. At the same time, the tree *is* a reindeer in the shaman's mind: both sources of life and sustenance, the tree and the reindeer, are really one, and the shaman's skill with the drum and costume represent his ability to control these sources of life, healing and well-being.

Norse

THE DIVINE ORIGIN

In Norse there is a distinction between myths relating the origin of practitioners of *seiðr*, and those relating the origin of the practice itself.

The origin of the practitioners of *seiðr*

Hyndluljóð 33 ⟨97⟩ lists the ancestors of various classes of magician; the poem is probably late, and is not recorded until Flateyjarbók (late fourteenth century), so much may be late poetic invention. The names of the magicians, Viðólfr, Vilmeiðr,[2] Svarthǫfði, Ymir – all of which other than Ymir are found only here – may perhaps reveal some of the traditional background to magic, or at least fragments of such traditions. The three types of sorcerer mentioned here (*vǫlur, vitkar, seiðberendr*) probably overlap in their functions – the poet has selected a representative sample of designations to encompass magical practitioners in general. The female practitioners of

[2] The element *vil* in personal names such as *Vilgeirr, Vilbaldr*, is listed as an independent word for etymological purposes, but not glossed, by de Vries (*AeW, s.v.* "vil"); he cites Gothic and West Germanic names incorporating the element, which suggests it is borrowed in Old Norse from outside Norse.

seiðr are often called *vǫlur* (notably in *Vǫluspá* 22 ⟨125⟩), though *seiðr* is not the only activity carried out by *vǫlur*. In *Lokasenna* 24 ⟨104⟩ Loki accuses Óðinn of practising *seiðr*, like *vǫlur*, and of travelling in the form of a *vitki* (though this may possibly represent a feminine, **vitka*). *Seiðberendr*, said to be the offspring of Svarthǫfði, has attracted a certain amount of unwarranted attention. I take *berendr* here in the sense of "practitioners" (regular substantival use of the present participle of *bera*); Strömbäck's suggestion (1935: 31) that the word is a grossly obscene designation of the female *pudenda* is wholly inappropriate to this prosaic listing of ancestor figures; indeed Strömbäck's one source for the meaning of female sexual parts is a medical treatise whose manuscript is from the fifteenth century (Larsen 1931: the word is glossed *s.v.* "berende" on p. 245), where the meaning on none of its occurrences is obscene. *Seiðberandi* may be precisely paralleled in the term *fjǫlkynngiberandi* used in *Hauksbók* (p. 228) for a magician,[3] and there is no need to see anything beyond the obvious sense in either case. Moreover, the reading is not wholly certain: whilst Snorri has *seiðberendr*, Flateyjarbók has *skilberendr*, "bearers of discernment".

Viðólfr, "Woodwolf", suggests various connections. *a.* It may signify "outlaw" (cf. the standard Old Norse terms *skógarmaðr*, "woodsman" i.e. "outlaw", and *vargr*, "wolf; outlaw"), an indication of the socially peripheral status of the *vǫlva* descended from him. *b.* The wolf is the witch's steed in many kennings ⟨KENNINGS: WOLF⟩, reinforcing the link with magic. *c.* If we see the name as a heritage from a higher poetic tradition (presumably skaldic), it could be interpreted as a kenning: the "wolf" of wood would be its destroyer, either wind or fire. This may relate to the traditions associated with the destructive witch spirit known as a *gandr*, considered in Chapter 9; the witch's spirit was, in any case, believed to travel in destructive whirlwinds. *d.* The first element could be *vitt* ⟨QV⟩, an object used in conjuring, and the "wolf" associated with this may be a wild and destructive spirit (as in *c*). *e.* The name may also be related to, or indeed derived from traditions of, Saxo's Vitolfus in *Gesta Danorum* VII.2.2. He is a retired warrior skilled in the art of healing, but if anyone asked him for medical aid, he would injure rather than heal them; he could also dull the eyes of enemies so they could not find what they were seeking, a skill he used to protect Haldanus from his enemies.

Svarthǫfði appears to be a giant name: for the second element, cf. for example Vagnhǫfði, "Whale head", *Þula* IV f 1 (*Skj* B_1 660); for blackness, cf. the giant name Alsvartr, "All black", *Þula* IV b 4 (*Skj* B_1 659); also the giant-name Ímr, "Soot", in *Vafþrúðnismál* 5, and probably also Ími in a thirteenth-century runic inscription from Bergen (P8), Ámr, "Dark", on an eleventh-century amulet from Kvinneby, Öland (D12), in which an illness is cast off onto the giant so named, and Svartr, "Black", on a healing-stick of *c.* 1300 from Ribe (R1). The latter three are all in healing charms of the kind in which the demon/giant that causes the disease is named, though at

[3] The passage relates the power of diamonds: «Adamas er hœfiligr: fjǫlkynngiberanda gerir hann útaman», "Diamond is fitting: a practitioner of magic it renders indomitable".

Bergen and Ribe the name is transferred to the stone in which the demon is to be imprisoned. (The references are to McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004.)

As noted in Chapter 9, giants are both ancestral and magically potent beings; contact with such beings must have ensured access to the primeval power they possessed, to the extent that "giant" and "magician" become almost synonymous: thus words for giantess found in earlier kennings correspond to words for witch in later examples – "wolf" is *Fǫlu marr*, "Fála's steed", in a verse attributed to the eleventh-century Gísli Þorgautsson (*Skj* B, 198), and "warrior" is *Gríðar glaðfœðandi*, "feeder of the steed of Gríðr" (i.e. of the wolf) in Kormákr's *Sigurðardrápa* 4 (*Skj* B, 69) from *c.* 960; Fála and Gríðr are giantesses. By the time of Óttarr svarti's *Hǫfuðlausn* 1 (*Skj* B, 268) from *c.* 1025, we find *gífrs glaðnistandi*, "nourisher of the witch's horse" (i.e. of the wolf), for warrior.[4]

Viðólfr and *Vilmeiðr* also point to a connection with trees – but the nature of the connection is debatable (and Vilmeiðr, "Will tree", could be using "tree" in the common metaphorical sense of "man"; a tree with will would function as a kenning for warrior). In *Vǫluspá* 2 ⟨38⟩ the *vǫlva* claims to remember the world tree under the ground – before it had sprung: she thus appropriates to herself the knowledge that goes back to the first *vǫlva*, born, like the Sakha shaman, at the same time as the tree ⟨AJȲ TOJŌN⟩. The names in *Hyndluljóð*, however, scarcely suffice to posit a connection with the primeval world tree. Rather, the intention may well be to reinforce the impression of social peripherality: the same notion is implied in *Vǫluspá* 39, where an old female (presumably a giantess) "sits" (cf. "sitting out" for sorcery) and gives birth to a brood of giants in Járnviðr, "Iron wood".

The dead are often conceived as lying under tree roots; whilst such imagery may suggest that trees might be the passage to the realm of the dead and the supernatural knowledge they possess, in fact the point appears more to be that the tree separates the dead off, hence marking them off as another manifestation of social "outcasts" (in a certain manner). Thus in the verse of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* ch. 4 Hervǫr, addressing her dead father and uncles, says «vek ek yðr alla / und viðar rótum», "I wake you all beneath the tree roots"; in *Skírnismál* 35 Gerðr is threatened with being placed «fyr nágrindr neðan», "down by the corpse gates", where she will be dealt goats' urine «á viðar rótum», "at the roots of a tree"; in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 16 Atli threatens the giantess Hrímgerðr: «nío rǫstom / er þú skyldir neðarr vera, / ok vaxi þér á baðmi barr», "it is nine leagues down that you should be, and let a tree grow on your breast".

The contrast with the Eurasian examples is noticeable: we are not given any hint of social function for the *vǫlva* in the Norse poem, merely one of social exclusion (which, while intimated in Eurasian tales, is only one side of the coin). This confirms the impression gained from other evidence, that the *vǫlva* was afforded any recognition only grudgingly. The lack of

[4] The wolf is *hrægífr* in *Guðrúnarkviða II* 29: *gífr* here appears to relate to its earlier sense of "ravenous being, monster" (cf. Old English *gīfre*, "ravenous") devouring flesh (*hræ*).

mention of any social function may also be an indication that for the poet *vǫlur* were in fact primarily fictional characters, not ones that might be called upon in everyday life; this is consistent with the stanza being of late, probably thirteenth-century date. Ultimately, it tells us little of the social position of *vǫlur* in pre-Christian times.

The origin of the practice of *seiðr*

Snorri tells us in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 ⟨111⟩ that Freyja «kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vǫnum var títt», "was the first to teach *seiðr*, which was customary for the Vanir, amongst the Æsir"; he also says that Óðinn practised *seiðr*, but owing to its being accompanied by unmanliness (*ergi*) it was taught to the *gyðjur*, "priestesses" or "goddesses" ⟨112⟩. Presumably Óðinn – to whom the practice is clearly alien – learned it first from Freyja. If the reference here is to human priestesses (whatever pagan reality that may allude to), then there is some notion of a divine origin for a human practice, such as that practised centuries earlier by the vatic priestesses of the Cimbri according to Strabo ⟨69⟩, if we accept that Snorri is relaying an older tradition.

We have allusions to a fuller account of the introduction of *seiðr* amongst the *æsir* in *Vǫluspá* 22 ⟨125⟩, from which, indeed, Snorri may have surmised the information about Freyja being the first to teach it among the Æsir. Here *seiðr* is practised by Heiðr as she wanders among people, and specifically visits women in their homes; Heiðr is to be seen as representing the goddess Freyja, and the *seiðkona*'s wanderings may indeed match those of the goddess, searching the world for her lost mate, Óðr ⟨QV⟩, and weeping tears of gold as she does so. What would be the original religious significance of the wanderings of this fertility goddess among mankind if not to school them in her arts, as her classical counterpart Demeter did, as well as giving them gold from her tears? Freyja's particular art, the preserve of women, was *seiðr*. Heiðr, the "bright", is surely a realisation of this wandering golden goddess as she first comes among womankind to teach this art.

Yet one of the most striking things about the Heiðr stanza, and the Gullveig one that precedes it, is how subversive the female protagonists appear. The aggressively male *æsir* are unable to defeat the female Gullveig from the enemy camp of the *vanir*, and she, or her counterpart, then shifts her attention to humans, successfully converting married women to her cult, the implication being of a double subversion, against both the *æsir* and against husbands. The poet is being doubly scathing about *seiðr* as a force which destroys both religion and society. And yet it is one whose power has to be recognised and incorporated within the socio-religious system, which is what finally happens in the poem when the *æsir* and *vanir* form a unity. The overall conclusion is clear: *seiðr* is something powerful, but something which is only accepted grudgingly, and whose practitioners were almost social pariahs. This is a very different picture from that gained about the origins of shamanism in societies which practised it, though the "demonic" origin of shamanism among the Sakhas is interesting: it would appear to

represent a degeneration of beliefs as a result of contact with religions of the Book which make a clear distinction between good and evil spirits in a way alien to traditional shamanism. Such an influence from Christianity on pagan Norse religion is likely to have begun very early, and the negative characterisation of *seiðr* may reflect such influence.

VOCATION

We do not hear of any vocation to *seiðr* in Old Norse; however, there was a tradition in fiction of "training to be a sorceress" among the Sámi or related peoples like the Bjarmians: in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 32 the evil queen Gunnhildr as a girl tried learning magic from two Sámi (both male, and both seeking to have her as wife), and in *Bósa saga* ch. 8 an abducted princess Hleiðr is being trained as a "priestess" among the Bjarmians. The implication is that the Sámi were regarded as having a more developed system, both of magical practice, and of instruction in it, than Norsemen did. Other examples, not involving Sámi, also occur, however: the examples all reflect a literary motif of magic as an acquired art, which is examined by Mitchell (2003*b*); he cites further instances – Busla offers to teach Bósi magic; in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 15 Gunnlaugr tries learning witchcraft with Geirríðr Þórólfsdóttir; in *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4 Guðríðr admits learning the ritual song from her foster-mother Halldís; *Historia Norwegie* 11.7 ⟨116c⟩ recounts that Rǫgnvaldr learnt his magic from a *fitonissa* in Haðaland. Literary sources indicate a general acquisition of magic skills, for example in *Þiðreks saga* ch. 349, where Queen Ostacia as a child appears to have learnt "magic" as a job-lot in one go from her step-mother, who cast a spell on her apprentice and thus communicated all her knowledge. Mitchell contrasts this literary tradition with what is found in non-literary sources, which indicate the learning of individual spells. Over all, we can deduce little about any real-life vocation to be a practitioner of *seiðr* or any other type of magician from our literary sources.

Another type of vocation, to be a poet, is also a recognised motif in Germanic sources; a link is suggested by the apparent field of reference of *óðr* being both to poetic and prophetic inspiration, as discussed below. One of the earliest examples is that of the seventh-century Englishman Cædmon, recounted by Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.24. Cædmon had spent the latter part of his life in a monastery composing religious verse, but Bede tells how he originally acquired this gift of poetry when, unable to compose, he fled from the merrymaking and slept in a barn, where a divine visitor told him to sing, after which he had the gift of composing religious verse. There are many Christian references in the story – for instance, the heavenly visitor who calls forth song resulting in the birth of a new type of Christian poetry recalls the visitation to Mary and her poetic response in the form of the Magnificat, which leads on to the birth of Christ in a stable, which is likewise the setting of the genesis of Cædmon's Christian poetic gift. Bede recounts that the heavenly visitor was interpreted by the monks as Christ, though Cædmon does not say this. Christianity was

new in Cædmon's time, and the cultural mentality would still have been largely pre-Christian. It is possible to glimpse something of this behind Bede's overtly Christian interpretation. North (1991: 15–26) investigates some of the possible pagan background to the incident, and associates it with the Norse myth of the mead of poetry (considered below); the inspiration seems to follow on from drinking, which in the Norse myth is the inspiration for the production of poetry, and the heavenly visitor would not necessarily have readily been identified with Christ (that is the monks' interpretation). North emphasises that being able to sing the beginning of creation would have been regarded as a special gift; I would add to his observation that from a pre-Christian point of view, such as continues to be exhibited in many charms, knowing the origin of something (like a disease, usually) grants power over it, so knowing the origin of the cosmos is parallel to the knowledge gained by shamans at their initiation, who must know all the worlds they visit to be able to master the spirits that dwell in them. Cædmon's calling takes place away from people, in a byre (a sort of wild antithesis of a house), which parallels the neophyte shaman's sojourn in the wilderness, the setting for a visitation by the spirits who call him and initiate him. After initiation, the shaman is able to practise his art for the benefit of the community, recounting what takes place in the spirit realms and how he masters the denizens of them, in the same way as Cædmon becomes a gifted member of the monastic (and wider Christian) community, to whom he recounts the glories of the new religious themes. Nonetheless, the similarity is not necessarily as close as this selection of features may imply: some aspects point in the opposite direction, notably the fact that Cædmon does not in fact communicate new knowledge, but simply recasts familiar biblical tales, and others are ambiguous – Cædmon presumably drank less than the others, as he fled away, so the inspiration could be viewed as resulting from abstention rather than indulgence in drink, and the byre is not a demanding setting in the way the wilderness is.

In Norse the most striking account of poetic vocation is that of Hallbjǫrn in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskalds* ch. 8 ⟨51⟩. He received the gift from the dead poet Þórleifr, while sleeping on his burial mound. Like Cædmon, he had previously been unable to compose. Cædmon's retiring to be on his own may also be compared with the loneliness of the grave mound here. As Buchholz (1971: 17) points out, this is an example of the practice of "sleeping on the mound", which is undertaken for the sake of gaining knowledge from the dead: hence poetry is linked to the wider theme of magically acquired wisdom, as it is in the myth of Óðinn's acquisition of the mead of poetry.

There may, then, have been a notion of vocation to be a poet within the Germanic world, which included contact with the spirit world (or world of the dead), and which in certain respects may have paralleled the sort of initiation which took place with shamans in societies such as the Sámi. Poetry is not in itself the preserve of shamans, and the existence of a vocation to be a poet need not imply the existence of a shamanic vocation. Yet there is a fundamental link between poetry and shamanism. In Norse

tradition the mead of poetry bestowed gifts of wisdom in general, as Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G57–8 makes explicit, and, as discussed below, the theft of this mead has analogues in particular in Indian myth, where it is more closely identified as the elixir of life itself, the retrieval of which could be described as intrinsically shamanic in nature, in so far as the shaman was responsible for safeguarding the welfare of his people by seeing off the attacks of hostile spirits, by retrieving the souls of the sick from the underworld, and determining the correct way to appease the spirits of the hunt.

How similar ancient Norse societies were to (rather more modern) shamanic ones may moreover be masked by the nature of our sources. Norse sources were composed by poets who would naturally emphasise the poetic aspects of what they discussed; by contrast, our knowledge of cult practices is very weak. The converse is true of shamanic societies. We usually know a fair amount about the external details of rites such as shamanic kamlania, but observers rarely understood the languages concerned well enough to be able to comment on poetic aspects of what was going on. Yet we can often note strong affinities between poet and shaman; for example, in Khanty the shaman is referred to as *ilhot*, "singer", and the Khanty, Mansi and Tatar shaman would often be a story-teller (Meuli 1975: 850; Nioradze 1925: 98). In the few cases where it has been possible to record and analyse shamanic texts, it becomes apparent that shamans typically revelled in an allusive interplay of elements derived from the traditional mythic and cosmographic images of the community. Instances of such texts along with analysis are rare; one recorded among the Nenets is given as text ⟨24⟩, though even here the situation is far from ideal: the recorder, Castrén, was new to the language and did not understand (or presumably record) everything correctly. Despite these weaknesses, Simoncsics (1978) was able to explain the workings of the incantation in the following manner. Its purpose is to ensure success in childbirth, and its theme is the shaman's journey to the otherworld and his return thence. It is characterised by parallelism and contrast, forming a complex structure: the opening motifs are repeated in reverse order and reverse sense (dissolution, release, opposed to resolution, gathering together) at the end, after the finding of the iron tent. The iron tent is the object of the journey, and the symmetrical axis. It is the abode of the heavenly deity *num*, whom the shaman visits to find out the outcome of the kamlanie, and having found out, he returns: what happens in the tent determines the future, but cannot be spoken. The shaman's journey is *wi*, related to *widuta*, the central part of the shamanic ceremony, being the name given to the shaman's cutting of himself with a knife: hence the "blood river" mentioned, which also alludes to the charm's purpose of allaying labour pains. The plaits of hair are the mother's, over which the shaman performs spells to rid her of pain; the hair is a metonym for the woman. The new knowledge the shaman gains in the iron tent means the way back is different from the way there: all has changed. Hence there is no cohesion between the line mentioning the iron tent and what follows. In practice, after the cutting in the midst of the ceremony, the

shaman often lay motionless, speechless like a corpse, with blood running from him. Simoncsics (ibid. 401) comments: "The shaman losing his power of speech while in trance, and lying like a *dead body* on the ground, and the *blood* flowing from him, *taken all together,* reveal more of the great mystery of shamanism than any loquacious talk: the interdependence, the secret connection, of *life* and *death.*" He also notes how the structure of the song reflects the whole hierarchy of the belief system of the community: "The symmetry running through this incantation reflects not only the sequence of the shaman's way there and back, but it assigns also the place of the motives in the hierarchy of the entire system of motives."

The Norse text that most readily springs to mind as resembling this Nenets shaman's charm, and which adheres most closely to some of the principles outlined by Simoncsics, is *Vǫluspá*. Unlike the Nenets example, however, which is a real charm used in a real situation, *Vǫluspá* is wholly a fiction, whose structure and other features may work by *allusion* to actual charms or other ritual texts, but which is not itself an example of such a text; indeed, *all* Norse poems (perhaps with a few exceptions such as *Sólarljóð*) differ from such shamanic examples, in that they do not relate the actual experiences of a seer on his spirit journey. *Vǫluspá* presents the fiction of a *vǫlva,* a prophetess, as poet, proclaiming a mantic vision of the history of the cosmos. The Nenets text clearly exemplifies how a poetic structure is formed from a selection of the shaman's visions during his spirit journey, which are presented as snatches of images succeeding one upon another without any explicit connection between them: the connection is in the structure, not the narrative, of the journey described. We encounter something very similar in the Norse poem. One of the great difficulties in its comprehension is the non-manifestation of the connections between each successive scene; it is only by knowing the myths alluded to from other sources (in the case of the original audience this would be the familiar mythic tradition of the community, mainly handed down orally and often, most probably, in poetic form), and perceiving the structure into which the poet is fitting them – in this case the history of the cosmos as viewed from the *æsir*'s perspective – that any idea of how the poem works may be gained. *Vǫluspá* is remarkably visual in its presentation: it makes use of visionary poetry, based ultimately on the actual series of mental images that spiritual practitioners such as shamans behold, and it alludes to the technique of disjointed visual imagery such as is found in the Nenets example. It would appear to witness to a belief that *vǫlur* would have had such visions of the spirit world (whether *vǫlur,* in so far as they existed, actually did cannot of course be demonstrated); on the other hand, the Nenets example might be paralleled by non-shamanic, but still visionary, poems – *Vǫluspá* is likely to have made use of sibylline oracular texts, for instance – which could have been used as a basis for the particular type of presentation the poem adopts, so the source of verisimilitude need not necessarily lie in genuine ancient Norse *vǫlva* rites. Yet the Nenets example does show that the allusive visual and poetic complexity of *Vǫluspá* need not be the result of familiarity with learned traditions, but could feasibly

have grown out of, or allude to, a native tradition comparable to the imaginative shamanism of the Nenets.

INITIATION

We have scant evidence for a notion of initiation among practisers of *seiðr* or similar activities. However, the *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá* indicates that she was reared among the giants (st. 1), which stresses the primordial extent of her knowledge, but also where she originally obtained it: these giants may be regarded as her initiators, corresponding to the anthropomorphic spirits of most classic forms of shamanism. It is impossible to say whether such an initiation would have had any details in common with shamanic practices, so no very close link can be made.

In the divine realm, it is Óðinn who stands out as the god who suffers in order to gain. This principle recurs in the myths centred upon him, but most prominent are his hanging on the gallows-tree to master runes, the loss of his eye for wisdom from Mímir's spring, his retrieval of the mead of poetry, and his torture by fire resulting in a revelation of cosmic knowledge. There has been much debate over the correct characterisation of these myths; only some of the chief points can be raised here, but the degree to which a shamanic element is discerned is dependent on what the nature of these myths is perceived to be. One significant issue in the categorisation of these myths, within shamanic terms, is whether (as often assumed) they depict Óðinn as undergoing a sort of initiation at all, or whether they should be considered rather as equivalents to the kamlania performed by already practising shamans, since Óðinn is performing these deeds in part to achieve altruistic purposes other than his own illumination (which, nonetheless, they also achieve), such as bringing the mead of poetry back to the gods. Placing them in a chapter on initiation recognises the common assessment of the myths as in some sense initiatory, but is not meant to prejudice the outcome of discussion on their nature.

Óðinn on the tree

Hanging appears to have been a form of sacrifice to Óðinn from antiquity; Procopius (†562) recounts in his *History of the Wars* VI.15 (following on from the description of the Sámi cited earlier) how the inhabitants of Thule (Scandinavia) perform numerous sacrifices (F. Schröder 1933, no. 54):

> οἱ μέντοι ἄλλοι Θουλῖται ὡς εἰπεῖν ἅπαντες οὐδέν τι μέγα διαλλάσσουσι τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων, θεοὺς μέντοι καὶ δαίμονας πολλοὺς σέβουσιν, οὐρανίους τε καὶ ἀερίους, ἐγγείους τε καὶ θαλασσίους, καὶ ἄλλα ἄττα δαιμόνια ἐν ὕδασι πηγῶν τε καὶ ποταμῶν εἶναι λεγόμενα. θύουσι δὲ ἐνδελεχέστατα ἱερεῖα πάντα καὶ ἐναγίζουσι, τῶν δὲ ἱερείων σφισι τὸ κάλλιστον ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν ὅνπερ δορυάλωτον ποιήσαιντο πρῶτον. τοῦτον γὰρ τῷ Ἄρει θύουσιν, ἐπεὶ θεὸν αὐτὸν νομίζουσι μέγιστον εἶναι. ἱερῶνται δὲ τὸν αἰχμάλωτον οὐ θύοντες μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ξύλου κρεμῶντες, καὶ ἐς τὰς ἀκάνθας ῥιπτοῦντες, ταῖς ἄλλαις τε κτείνοντες θανάτου ἰδέαις οἰκτίσταις. οὕτω μὲν Θουλῖται βιοῦσιν.

> The rest of the inhabitants of Thule do not differ greatly from other people, but they worship many gods and spirits, heavenly and aerial, earthly and maritime, and indeed other spirits said to dwell in spring-waters and rivers. And they incessantly offer up all kinds of sacrifices, but the noblest of sacrifices for them is a human being, the first to be taken captive in war; for they sacrifice him to Ares, whom they regard as the greatest god. They hallow the captive not just by sacrificing him, but also by hanging him on a tree, and throwing him among thorns, or killing him by some other cruel forms of death. This is how the inhabitants of Thule live.

The god of war honoured here was most probably Óðinn (or an earlier antecedent). The most notable sacrifice to Óðinn in Old Norse is that of Víkarr, brother of the Óðinnic hero Starkaðr, recounted in *Gautreks saga* ch. 7 ⟨47⟩; the sacrifice was intended to be a mock one only, but the calf's guts turned to a firm withy and the reed to a spear, and Víkarr died. The saga, perhaps from the late thirteenth century, is hardly in itself a witness to pre-Christian practices, but it probably represents a persistent tradition of hanging as a mode of sacrifice to Óðinn (particularly in view of the evidence from Procopius).

The form of sacrifice to the god is determined by the god's own initial nine-night sacrifice to himself in the tree of unknown roots (the gallows), as recounted in *Hávamál* 138–9 ⟨48*c*⟩. There can be little doubt that Óðinn is pictured here as dying by hanging; the arguments of Grønvik (1999, 2000*a*) are unconvincing: he sees the "I" of the stanzas in question not as the god Óðinn, but as an initiate priest who becomes identified with Óðinn in an *unio mystica*. Grønvik sees the *Loddfáfnismál* section of *Hávamál* (st. 111–37) as forming an integral whole with *Ljóðatal* (st. 138 onwards), with the "I" in both being a *þulr*. By contrast, McKinnell (2007*b*) gives cogent reasons for seeing the two sections as two distinct poems of quite different date only recently conjoined before the Codex Regius was written. To read the "I" of st. 138 as anyone other than Óðinn is, in any case, forced in the extreme – whilst many Eddic verses are difficult to interpret, this is surely one of the most explicitly clear in what it means. Moreover, as McKinnell (ibid. 105) points out, the notion of an *unio mystica* is an essentially Christian concept relying on traditions of mysticism which were all but unknown in the North before the thirteenth century (it also bears no resemblance to anything found in traditional classic shamanism, where the shaman initiate is always kept conceptually and physically distinct from the divinities or spirits who initiate him). Grønvik also objects that parallels cannot be found for a god sacrificing himself to himself: yet the example of Prajāpati ⟨QV⟩ comes very close – he contended with Death, and defeated him, and, making himself fit for sacrifice he offered himself. He is not specifically said to offer himself to himself, but the gods in general, amongst whom he belongs, are the recipients of sacrifice; the point is, however, that he becomes explicitly identified *as* sacrifice, as the life-giving force of the cosmos (a reflection of his nature as Lord of Creatures) (Heesterman 1993: 3), which is functionally equivalent to what Óðinn achieves, represented less abstractly as the runes and the flourishing. Nonetheless, Grønvik's approach may be indirectly relevant: a sacrifice, in one of its aspects, involves the offering

of a *pars pro toto* on the part of the sacrificer; in the prototypical sacrifice, this *pars* becomes *totus*, so that Óðinn offers his very self; as he is the god to whom the sacrifice is directed, he is also identified with the dedicatee of the offering – offerer, victim and dedicatee are all identical in this special case. Whilst I am convinced that *Hávamál* is describing this prototypical divine offering, not a human type of it, it nonetheless remains true that in human realisations of the offering, the offerer would, in offering a *pars pro toto* sacrifice, be to some extent identified with the victim, and hence, by analogy with the prototype, also with the divine dedicatee: what may be described as a conceptual pull would operate on the human realisations of the prototype for it to conform to that prototype. This is realised dramatically (in fiction) in the tale of King Víkarr's sacrifice, where the power of the prototype demands that its re-enactment should conform in all aspects, so that in copying the divine sacrifice, Víkarr becomes, in some sense, identified with the god – though not in the crucial point of his being able to survive death. Whilst this demonstrates the notion of formal identification with the prototype, it does not, however, illustrate that worshippers underwent any religious union with the divinity (in the way Grønvik proposes), though this must remain a possibility (but without the connection with Christian notions of an *unio mystica*).

It is Óðinn's abiding preoccupation to seek wisdom from the dead; *Hávamál* 157 presents him (it is probably him, at least) as having the power to make the hanged – those over whom he has power through his prototypical participation in this death – walk and talk to him; in the early thirteenth century Bjarni Kolbeinsson, in his *Jómsvíkingadrápa* 2 (*Skj* B_2 1), says he has not learned the poetic art, «Yggjar feng», "the prize of Terrible [Óðinn]", under the hanged (clearly implying that Óðinn did learn the art in this manner). *Baldrs draumar*, though late, probably reflects an ancient tradition, implied in *Vǫluspá*, when Óðinn summons a dead *vǫlva* in search of arcane knowledge. Just as the *vǫlva* sees wide over the worlds (*Vǫluspá* 29), so Óðinn «nýsta», "gazed", from the gallows tree and took up the runes.

How far the stanzas following *Hávamál* 139 continue a related narrative is a matter of uncertainty. St. 140 refers to the myth of the acquisition of the mead of poetry – a juxtaposition that surely implies some sort of equivalence between this «dýra mjaðar», "dear mead", and the runes gained in st. 139 – before relating the new powers gained (whether from hanging on the tree, or getting the mead of poetry, or both, is left open): the speaker begins to thrive, and words and deeds multiply for him. In what is probably a later interpolation – but one that nonetheless contains ancient lore (McKinnell 2007*b*: 105–6) – st. 142–3 return to the theme of runes, and st. 144 asks if "you" know how to do various things of a religious cultic nature (in particular sacrificing). St. 145 continues on this theme, before returning to Óðinn under the name Þundr, who is said to have carved this lore at the beginning of history, and to have returned (from his deathly journey, we are to assume: verbal parallels are evident with *Hávamál* 139/6 «fell ek aptr þaðan», "I fell back from there": *aptr* occurs in both passages, and *fell*

contrasts with *reis; kom* suggests that a journey has been performed). The stanzas in between in essence extrapolate on the nature of the "runes" Óðinn acquired and the use he puts them to – at least in the eyes of the editor who joined these stanzas to the original *Ljóðatal* (accepting that they are interpolated), whilst also mentioning the parallel journey to acquire the mead of poetry; it would appear that the knowledge contained in the runes related, in part at least, to religious practice.

What, in religious terms, is the nature of Óðinn's ordeal? Some important points are made by van Hamel (1932–3), who calls into question whether Óðinn's suffering on the gallows-tree, and his relinquishing of his eye, should be regarded as sacrifices; they are, he argues, rather cases of martyrdom, of self-inflicted suffering which guarantees a reward (which sacrifice does not). He notes (ibid. 264) that *gefa*, found in *Hávamál* 138, can mean "dedicate a child as a living pledge", and concludes (ibid. 265): "The meaning of *gefinn Óðni, sjálfr sjǫlfum mér* is clear now. When hanging on the tree, Óðinn raises his magical power to its acme, he leaves himself entirely to his own *máttr ok megin*, or better still – since he is a god, not a mortal – he develops his *ásmegin*." He goes on to observe that Óðinn is to be regarded as learning the runes, subjecting them to himself (and not inventing them), and comments (ibid. 266):

> It is obvious that a sacrifice to Óðinn, even a self-sacrifice, could never have this effect; an offering to the god is of no consequence to the runes. An effort must be made, a magical force must be raised in order to oppose them. This is done, as we shall see, by martyrdom, not by a sacrifice. In fact, martyrdom is Óðinn's means to actualize his *ásmegin*. The whole scene recalls another similar exploit of Óðinn: he acquires supernatural knowledge from Mímir by leaving an eye in the well. According to a popular belief, supernatural knowledge is paid for by the loss of the eye that saw too much. Accepting this form of martyrdom, Óðinn compels Mímir to let him drink.

He notes (ibid. 278) that a similar increase in divine power occurs when Þórr is forced to face the rising river Vimur; he adduces Celtic analogues of facing elements and fasting to achieve a closer contact with the dead (and hence their power). He continues (ibid. 266):

> He who suffers martyrdom in order to obtain a certain object, extorts it from the actual possessor, his magical power is overcome by the greater magical power of his opponent. Through martyrdom one actualizes his own magical power and, if one is only able to sustain the torture long enough, the power of the desired object will be compelled to surrender. But in case of sacrifice the possessor can only be moved to grant the demand from his free will.

Van Hamel's arguments do much to elucidate how all the Óðinnic myths of "sacrifice" work. However, the clear differentiation of martyrdom from sacrifice is open to debate (as pointed out also by Schjødt 1993: 267), particularly since the question of what precisely constitutes sacrifice is not probed (the notion that it does not put the recipient under an obligation, for example, could prove unfounded); "martyrdom" is also something of

a misnomer, in that martyrs tend to suffer an unsought death, whereas Óðinn is clearly seeking out his ordeal in order to benefit himself (and perhaps others). Van Hamel's limp suggestion (ibid. 238) that the examples of martyrdom by Óðinn involve hanging and fasting on the basis that the cult of the god happened to involve these is unsatisfactory: the elements of the cult, in particular the sacrifice to Óðinn by hanging, call for a divine prototype, which requires Óðinn's hanging on the gallows-tree to be interpreted as a sacrifice – albeit, as a divine prototype of sacrifice, differing in some marked respects (in particular the aspects of martyrdom highlighted by van Hamel) from the sacrifice of an unwilling earthly victim.

Óðinn's self-immolation on the tree and his pledging away of his eye are to some extent to be seen as parallel realisations of one motif. As Fleck (1971*a*: 398) points out, Óðinn reaches down to seize the runes from below the tree on which he hangs; the wisdom-bestowing spring of Mímir, in which the god pledged his eye, lies below the tree: the runes and the spring of mead are alternative manifestations of the wisdom which resides at this cosmic *omphalos*.[5]

Schjødt (1993) probes the question of how sacrifice is related to initiation in the myth of Óðinn on the tree. He notes (ibid. 267–9) that both sacrifice and initiation contain four essential elements: 1. the subject who sends 2. an object to 3. a recipient who sends back 4. another object in return. In initiations, the initiate "gives" himself to (usually) a social or religiously separated group, which is often under the protection of a particular god, who may thus be seen as the recipient of the rituals; in return, the initiate receives the rights and duties connected with the group, and knowledge of these rights. It is often necessary for the initiate to gain some magical knowledge in order to fulfil his new functions (as with the shaman). In initiations, unlike in *do ut des* sacrifices, it is the norm for the subject and object to be identical. An apparent difference too would be that in a sacrifice the object is destroyed, whereas in initiation it (or rather he/she) benefits from the ritual: but, as Schjødt (ibid. 270) points out, this distinction is probably meaningless – the initiate may be "destroyed", to be reborn on a new level of existence (which might also be said of the object in a sacrifice). Schjødt concludes (ibid. 271–2):

> In connection with the strophes in *Hávamál* it has been ascertained in this paper that it is not reasonable to argue, as Sauvé does, that the act of Odin must be classified as a sacrifice and not as an initiation. The identity between subject and object definitely points rather to the category of initiation. On the other hand, it should be admitted that, in the face of the mythical example, it is extremely difficult even to keep the identification between subject and object as the decisive point, since what seems to be an initiation in the myth, the god being both subject and object, might become the mythical model for sacrifices.

[5] Fleck argues, throughout this article, that Óðinn hung inverted on the tree, from which position he gazed down and grasped the runes below him; this may be the case, but the many analogues for inversion Fleck adduces cannot lessen the paucity of information which *Hávamál* itself affords, so the question must remain open.

Fleck (1971*b*: 55–6) also considers the question of whether Óðinn's self-sacrifice should be considered as tantamount to a shamanic initiation, and raises two objections to seeing it as such. He claims the world tree tends to be used by shamans on subsequent journeys to the otherworld, rather than in the initiation. The Nganasan accounts of shamanic initiation ⟨16, 17⟩ show, however, that the tree marks the site of the the novice's descent to the underworld for his initiation, and takes a central role in this initiation. The shaman's initiation involves the acquiring of a detailed knowledge of the traditional cosmography of his clan or tribe, which includes the world tree (in areas where the notion existed) which would feature in his future kamlania. The Norse myth goes one stage further, in identifying the tree as the means by which the initiatory death is achieved.

This leads into Fleck's second objection, that the Norse account does not include a remodelling of the novice into a new man by stripping him down to a skeleton and reforging his joints (exemplified in ⟨17⟩). The general notion of rebirth from a complete skeleton, of which this shamanic experience was a particular refinement, was characteristic of Siberian belief systems, and is found for example in the attention paid to the burial of the sacred bear (including within northern Scandinavia; see Mulk and Iregren 1995, esp. 12, and Pentikäinen 2007: 58–9, 80), as well as in tales such as that of the Sakha shaman No-Jaw, who was cut into pieces by his enemy, his jawbone being thrown into the fire: No-Jaw came back to life, but with a calf's jawbone instead (Vitebsky 1995: 94); the idea finds a reflection in the Norse myth of Þórr's goat which is cooked and eaten, and then resurrected from the bones (*Gylfaginning* ch. 44), which is likely to be of Eurasian origin (Tolley forthcoming). In Óðinn's sacrifice the death on the tree and subsequent resurrection take the place of reforging on an anvil by a subterranean smith – the particular form the experience takes is not fundamental to its primary signficance. Hanging is not a means of initiation found within shamanism, but it could nevertheless be incorporated into a shamanic system without contravening any essentials of the belief-system. Arguably more problematic is the absence of any overt remaking of the putative shaman's body, with new parts added that signify his new powers; yet actual accounts of shamanic initiation differ on the degree to which physical remaking is emphasised: the longest account ⟨16⟩ is more interested in the knowledge the shaman gains in the initiation than in the physical remodelling (though this is still prominent). In like manner, Óðinn declares that his knowledge increased after the experience, and he clearly acquired skills he did not have before; this matches the essential point about what the shamanic imagery of new body-parts represents. Yet, while the gaining of knowledge in initiation is shamanic, it is not distinctively so, whereas the symbolism of new body-parts approaches being a feature distinctive to shamanism; as each specific point of similarity with shamanic traditions drops away so too does the case for seeing Óðinn's self-immolation as shamanic.

It may, however, be wrong to look at the gallows experience as an initiation. As noted above, the essential differences between an initiatory and

a practitionary shamanic experience are that the neophyte is benefiting primarily himself (not the community at this stage), and that he is subject to the spirits who instruct him, whereas the practising shaman works for the community and commands the spirits (or at least persuades them to cooperate). It is difficult to draw the distinction in Óðinn's case: he certainly acquires new knowledge and skills in all his "initiatory" experiences, but the emphasis is arguably on the use of these skills for his community (the *æsir*, and through them mankind). The status of the helping spirits in the experiences would help to define them, but the presence of such spirits is difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, they do seem to be present in the form of giants, the guardians of primordial and ancestral wisdom. In *Hávamál* 140 Óðinn declares that he learnt nine *fimbulljóð*, "mighty songs", from his mother's brother, the son of the giant Bǫlþórr (Bolþorn), a fact mentioned just before his gaining a drink of the mead of poetry, the implication being that these mighty songs helped him to do so. Whilst this is a clear initiation into arcane knowledge, its precise nature is too vaguely defined for us to be able to ascribe any shamanic characteristics to it; moreover, as it clearly formed an event separate from the gaining of the mead, itself considered below as a possible initiation experience, the implication is that the latter is *not* an initiatory, but a practitionary act. What of the gallows experience? No other characters appear overtly here – Óðinn is the poet's focus of attention – yet they lurk in the background, as the shadowy "they" that pierced him with a spear and refrained from offering him refreshment. It is difficult to imagine these as being other than giants, as in all other adventures undertaken by Óðinn involving the aquisition of arcane knowledge. The role these characters appear to take is comparable with the spirits at the shaman's initiation, who direct a great deal of suffering at the neophyte in order for him to learn his shamanic skill and acquire the knowledge of the spirit world which he will use in his craft, just as Óðinn takes back the runes with him and puts them to use for his own benefit and that of his community.

Óðinn's hanging on the gallows-tree appears to be a richly developed mythic motif, with probably the best analogues in Indian sources (if we leave aside the obvious similarities with Christ's crucifixion, which may to some extent have influenced it).[6] Some elements are found, in a less developed form, in shamanic circles. The notion of the tree as stallion, ridden to another world, is found in the characterisation of the shaman's drum (often made from a symbolic world tree) as a steed: the Sakha shaman would call his riding reindeer while beating on his drum, and then apparently identified himself with the steed, calling himself "stallion shaman", while jumping around like the animal in question (Alekseev 1997: 53–4). This would parallel, at least in some basic manner, the equivalence between Óðinn and his steed argued above. The tree as a mode of sacrifice

[6] Ritual hanging, a central part of Óðinn's sacrifice, is found in the case of Tollund man, indicating the antiquity of the motif within the Germanic area; the scene of Óðinn's sacrifice in *Hávamál* 138–9 (48c) cannot be explained simply as a Christian artefact.

cannot be precisely paralleled, though it is found as a place of sacrifice: the Selkups called the trees at which the sacrifice of reindeer took place outside the hut "the sacrificing trees connecting heaven with earth" («nop tettonty nymyčarmyl kåssyl po»), and these were thought of as the "seven sacrificing trees" («selči kåssyl po») growing in high heaven (Diószegi 1978: 140). Radloff (1884: II, 25) describes the horse sacrifice of the Altaians, in which a horse is sent up to the ninth heaven to the high god; the horse is impaled on a leaning pole, near which is a representative world tree. There is here a loose association of at least some of the main elements of the Norse divine sacrifice as interpreted above, but they have not been developed in the integrated fashion of the Norse myth.

Despite various points of comparison, the Norse myth lacks, in its extant form, many of the typical features of shamanic initiation; there is also in the Norse myths no clear distinction between initiatory and practitionary exploits. Nonetheless, on balance it seems reasonable, just, to classify the self-immolation as being parallel to a shamanic initiation. It would, nonetheless, be wrong to describe it as an example of such without being able to place it into a wider context of shamanic practice, for which evidence is at best patchy.

Óðinn and Mímir

Snorri recounts that under the root of the world tree towards the frost giants is the spring of Mímir (Mímisbrunnr), with wisdom concealed in it; the owner, Mímir ⟨QV⟩, is full of wisdom since he drinks from the spring. Óðinn comes to the spring and seeks a draft, but is not granted it until he lays down his eye as a forfeit (*veð*) ⟨42⟩. Snorri has based his information on *Vǫluspá* 28 ⟨38⟩, which he then cites; the verse states directly, in the form of a taunt by the *vǫlva* to the god, that Óðinn placed his eye in Mímir's spring, and Mímir drinks from the god's forfeit every morning.

Óðinn's selling of his eye for the wisdom of Mímir's well is parallel to the replacement of the shaman's eyes, a parallel which makes explicit the import of the Norse tale, that physical sight is replaced with spiritual. The notion is common in shamanism; thus Dyukhadiye Kosterkin believed the blacksmith spirit had removed his eyes and put in new ones, with which he could see much better (at least, anything to do with spiritual matters) ⟨17⟩. Czaplicka (1914: 177) mentions one shaman who was so outstanding that his eyes used to jump out during performances!

Yet such imagery relates to a wider notion of supernatural knowledge than anything specifically shamanic.

Óðinn and the poetic mead

The most extensive myth, or mythic cycle, concerning Óðinn's acquisition of knowledge is focused on the mead of poetry, which is told in fragmentary or allusive form in poetic texts, principally *Hávamál* ⟨48*a*, *b*⟩, and in full by Snorri ⟨49⟩, nearly all of whose account can be shown to go back

to earlier sources.[7] The myth, as recounted by Snorri, encompasses the following episodes in a cyclical chain, with an overlapping succession of characters as the protagonists – the Æsir and Vanir, Kvasir, the dwarfs Fjalarr and Galarr, the giants Gillingr, his wife, his nephew Suttungr, Óðinn (who then remains in the tale until the end), Suttungr's brother Baugi, Suttungr's daughter Gunnlǫð, the *æsir*:

> *The creation of Kvasir*. As a conclusion to the war between Æsir and Vanir the two groups spit into a pot, and from this mixture is made a man called Kvasir. He wanders the earth imparting his wisdom.
>
> *The dwarfs*. Kvasir comes to some dwarfs named Fjalarr and Galarr, who kill him, and pour his blood into three vessels, called Óðrœrir, Són and Boðn, mixing it with honey to make mead, which turns its drinkers into poets or scholars. The dwarfs report to the Æsir that Kvasir has choked on his own wisdom.
>
> *The dwarfs and the giants*. The dwarfs invite the giant Gillingr to visit them, but they row out to sea with him and drown him there. They tell his wife about the accident, and she wails inconsolably. Fed up with her racket, the dwarfs kill her by dropping a millstone on her head. Suttungr, Gillingr's nephew, comes to seek vengeance, and strands the dwarfs on a skerry which would submerge at high tide. The dwarfs buy their way out by offering the mead as ransom. Suttungr places the mead in his mountain, Hnitbjǫrg, in the charge of his daughter Gunnlǫð.
>
> *Óðinn and the giants*. Óðinn on his travels comes across nine slaves mowing hay. He offers to sharpen their scythes and they accept. They ask to purchase the whetstone: Óðinn casts it in the air, and in the contest to get hold of it they all decapitate each other. Óðinn comes to Suttungr's brother Baugi, who says he is short of workers as his slaves have killed themselves. Óðinn names himself Bǫlverkr, "Evil worker", and offers to do the work of nine men for the summer, in exchange for a sip of Suttungr's mead. Baugi says he will try to help but does not promise success. At summer's end, they both approach Suttungr, who refuses absolutely to grant a sip of the mead. Óðinn suggests using machinations against Suttungr, which Baugi agrees to. Óðinn draws out the auger Rati, "Gnawer", and Baugi drills through the mountain with it. Óðinn blows into the whole when Baugi says it is ready, but chips fly back at him as Baugi has not drilled right through. Baugi drills again, and this time it goes right through. Óðinn transforms himself into a serpent and proceeds down the hole. Baugi thrusts after him with the auger, unsuccessfully.
>
> *Óðinn and Gunnlǫð*.Óðinn sleeps with Gunnlǫð for three nights, and she grants him a sip from each of the mead vats, and Óðinn completely empties each vat in turn.
>
> *The return of the mead*. Óðinn transforms himself into an eagle and flies back to the Æsir. Suttungr transforms himself into an eagle and follows. Suttungr almost catches up with Óðinn at the walls of Ásgarðr, but Óðinn defaecates some of the mead on him; this portion is available to anyone, and is the portion of poetasters. Óðinn flies into Ásgarðr and empties the mead into vats laid out by the Æsir. The mead is now available for people to become poets.

[7] Davidson (1983: 426–45) argues for Snorri's reliability in most details in a fine rebuttal of Frank (1981), who attempted to show that many elements of Snorri's version of the myth derived from his misconstrual of various skaldic verses.

The myth, as recounted by Snorri, and even in the version of *Hávamál*, has the marks of being an amalgam of various tales assembled over a long history of retellings. Thus van Hamel (1934*b*: 78) argues that Snorri has combined two versions of the theft of the mead of poetry: in one, Óðinn was to be paid with the mead for working for Baugi, but instead stole it and escaped through a bore-hole, a motif then adopted as a means of his access to Suttungr's mountain, which forms the setting for the original second version of the myth. Van Hamel (ibid. 85) cites an Irish tale of the "battle of the sheaves" as a likely source (though analogue would be a safer description) for the Baugi episode: the devil arrives on the scene and offers to keep pace mowing while the other workers match him in binding, but, unable to keep up with the devil, the workers end up killing each other with their sheaves in mutual recrimination over their slovenliness. It is likely, as for example Drobin (1991: 112) argues, that the Baugi episode relates to harvest rites, in which the sheaves of this year's harvest are "slain", but return as the new crop the following year. As a mythicised version of such rites, it has no doubt been placed as an adjunct onto the myth of the mead, and intimates an awareness that the overall cycle is about death and resurrection, and not simply the means to producing poetry (for connections of Óðinn to harvest and other agricultural rites, see de Vries 1931, and on the overall class of myths involving the theft of some life-giving agent, see Doht 1974).

Whatever the origins of the elements of the myth, there is nonetheless a good deal of structural unity in it. The gods represent the creative force which produced Kvasir, the bearer and communicator of wisdom; their antithesis is the giants, who hoard the mead unproductively. The dwarfs are agents of calamity, the channel for the passage of the mead from the gods to the giants; their killing of their guest, which leads to the loss of the mead, is balanced by Óðinn's visit to Baugi, where as a guest he kills and defeats his hosts (the servants of Baugi and Baugi himself), and uses them to help retrieve the mead. The dwarfs are compelled to yield up the mead to the giants, and in turn Gunnlǫð willingly yields the mead up to the god Óðinn, whose triumpant return to Ásgarðr (the antithesis of Hnitbjǫrg) marks the conclusion of the cyclical tale.

Some aspects of the myth are broadly shamanic in nature, such as its cyclical quest to a deathly realm, though this scarcely amounts to anything particularly distinctive; other features may have been picked up as wandering motifs. The bore-hole which grants access to the otherworld depths is reminiscent of the "cleft" (*lovi*) into which the Finnish *tietäjä* falls ⟨LANGETA LOVEEN⟩, and the passage through which spirits enter the world when God split a rock asunder in Mordvin and Udmurt tradition (none of these traditions had any full-scale shamanism, however); in the Nganasan account ⟨17⟩ the initiate enters the blacksmith's mountain, where he is reforged, through a cleft. In a Finnish poem on Väinämöinen, evil (cf. Óðinn's name *Bǫlverkr*) is imagined as a snake inside a rock, sipping beer (Siikala 2002: 190). Particularly interesting is an eastern Finnish poem where the cosmic focal point to which illnesses are banished is presented as a stone in the middle of a hill, with a hole drilled by an auger in the midst of the stone, into which

pains would be thrust ⟨25⟩; the notion of expelling an evil spirit into a stone is also found in Norse charms ⟨SVARTR⟩. The coincidence of imagery between the Finnish charm and the Norse myth of the mead is extraordinary: a girl with the name Gunnlǫð, "Beckoner of strife", comparable to the Finnish Kivutar, "Girl of pains", guarding an otherworld mountain realm, a kettle in which either pains or mead are being brewed, a passage to this world effected through an auger-hole drilled in a rock in the cosmically focal mountain. Óðinn, as Bǫlverkr, "Evil worker", then a serpent, fulfils the role of the illness, usually conceived as a *mato*, "worm", which is banished to this otherworld in Finnish. *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, although a very late poem, is likely to contain folk traditions relating to a mountain of healing, Lyfjaberg, "Mountain of drugs", guarded by a girl (here Menglǫð), and given a cosmic focus by the presence of a version of the world tree (Mimameiðr). However, both Norse myths differ from the Finnish: even if we may detect a notion of the place of banishment of ills, the omphalic quality of the setting in Norse determines that this will be a source of benefit to men and gods, as is clear both in the name "Mountain of drugs", and in the mead of poetry residing there. Hnitbjǫrg itself is an evil abode of the giants, a deathly realm like the Kipuvuori of Finnish charms, but the Finnish charms do not, as far as I am aware, ever portray a source of life being banished to this site and then having to be retrieved. Yet Siikala (2002: 193) raises the question of whether the Finnish notion of illness as caused by intrusion of an object (an illness spirit) may have displaced an earlier, more typically shamanic, idea of soul loss; in this case, it would be the shaman's job to retrieve the soul from the world of the dead. This would come much closer to what we see in the Norse myth, especially if we may interpret *óðr* as a type of life-giving soul whose energisation relies on the retrieval of the mead, "rouser of *óðr*". Be that as it may, the complexity of the Norse myth as compared with the Finnish charm directs us to seek analogues elsewhere.

Doht's is one of the most thorough and lengthy analyses of the myth of the mead of poetry, which presents analogues from around the world involving the theft of a range of life-giving products such as fire, water and corn, and investigates similarities and differences from the Indian mythic cycle of the *soma*, which had, in turn, been analysed by Dumézil (1924) as an analogue to the Norse myth. Doht points out that the Indian cycle focuses upon the god Indra, who is of a different Dumézilian order from Óðinn (Indra corresponds more to Þórr); the extent to which this is troublesome is likely to correspond to the degree of acceptance of the Dumézilian tripartite system, but in any case it highlights the fact that the *soma* has a more general significance of life, power, fertility than the mead which Óðinn seized, which ostensibly merely affords the gift of poetry (of which Óðinn, and certainly not Þórr, is patron); the Norse myth would appear to have become more limited in its scope, most likely as a result of development through countless generations of poets who emphasised the mead's poetic powers to the exclusion of its wider significance. As will be seen, there still remain many intimations in the Norse myth that its ambit is wider than just an elixir of poetic art.

The motif of the enticement of the daughter of the guardian of the water of life (or variants thereof) appears, according to Doht (1974: 86), only in North American tales, and is absent from Indian analogues to the Norse myth. Less precise analogues are found for example in Greek, where Psyche is brought the water of life by the eagle of the high god; in such tales the princess, who is saved by the hero, is not the guardian's daughter. The water of life is fetched from a wondrous castle, mountain or underworld realm.

Doht (ibid. 231) concludes that the Norse myth actually combines two: an Indo-European one (with analogues in Indian versions) of the theft of a divine drink of immortality by a bird of prey, and another about the dangerous journey to the other world to a divine woman who guarded the ambivalent water of life/death, who unites with the initiand in a holy wedding and offers him the drink. At what stage these two myths became united in Germanic tradition is impossible to say.

There are many indications in the surviving Norse myth that its focus is rather deeper than poetic inspiration; it is possible that the more religious aspects, concerned with the source of life itself, may have been downplayed within the Christian society in which the myth was passed down, but it is still possible to glimpse something of these aspects through an analysis of some of the main details.

According to Snorri, the blood of Kvasir is drained into three vessels and turned into mead; he names the vessels as Óðrœrir, Boðn and Són. Boðn is cognate with Old English *byden*, "bushel", but is not used in Norse other than as a name for this vessel; it is difficult to establish what connotations the word may have had.[8] Són and Óðrœrir were probably originally names for the mead which have been attached instead to the vessels in which it was kept; Óðrœrir certainly appears to be the liquid in *Hávamál* 107 ⟨48*b*⟩.

Óðrœrir appears to be the "stirrer of *óðr*".[9] *Óðr* occurs in the sense "poetry", so the mead here appears to be the elixir of inspiration. However, it has a wider sense of "mind, soul". Both senses appear to be present from the beginning – the cognate Latin *vates*, "prophet, seer, poet", Gaelic

[8] U. Dronke (1992*a*: 662 n. 19) argues that Boðn may be parallel to Old English *orc*, which occurs both in the sense of "goblet" and "underworld", and would thus point to a *poculum mortis*, a vessel which embodies death. However, the double meaning of *orc* stems from the word's dual Latin origin in the words *orca*, "vessel", and *Orcus*, "underworld". Whilst it would seem likely that Boðn, like Óðrœrir and Són, should have some religious sense to it beyond the mundane "bushel" or the like, it is impossible to know if the poet who originated the term would have been aware of the ambivalence of the Old English term *orc*, or been able to impose this on the Norse word.

[9] In Snorri's *Edda*, manuscript W has «-rærir», which certainly points to an earlier «-rœrir», and T and U have «-rerir», which probably indicates «-rœrir»; R has «-reyrir» (*SnE* 82). This could be a (scribal?) reinterpretation (stemming from the ambiguities of early Icelandic orthography): *Óðreyrir* would be "that which binds *óðr* around", in the way a band encircles and binds in a barrel; hence this would be a designation of the vessel containing the *óðr*, the inspirational mead of poetry. However, «ey» is a recognised representation of /œ/ (Noreen 1970: §31 n.), so there is no need to see any of the forms as representing anything other than *Óðrœrir*.

fáith, "seer, prophet", Welsh _gwawd_, "praise (poem)" (derived from an earlier sense of prophecy: Hamp 1977) make it clear that a sense of inspired prophecy is archaic (see _AeW_, _s.v._ "óðr"; also _VA_, _s.v._ "Odin", for wider discussion: the reconstructed Indo-European form _*wāt-_ < _*weH$_2$t-_ has no known connection with other roots): _óðr_ or its earlier antecedent form indicated that part of a person manifesting itself in mental agitation or inspiration; the related adjective _óðr_ covers senses such as "raving" and "wild". In _Vǫluspá_ 18 ⟨38⟩, _óðr_ is one of the gifts of the gods to inchoate man; it is Hœnir who gives it. It appears to complement _ǫnd_ (given by Óðinn), which, as "breath", would be the "spirit" which dissipates at death: _óðr_ is intellectual inspiration, but it may designate a soul that lives on (as opposed to _ǫnd_), though nothing explicitly suggests this. The presence of Hœnir is ambiguous (since we know so little of him): one of the few other recorded myths, in _Ynglinga saga_ ch. 4, recounts his lack of intelligence after he has been sent as a hostage to the _vanir_; it is possible that he had given away _óðr_, "intellect", to mankind and was left with none himself. His return after _ragnarǫk_ could then be conceived as a reflection of his simplicity, and thus lack of complicity in the deeds which brought about the gods' destruction. Yet, when he enters _Vǫluspá_ again in st. 60, his intellect is manifestly restored: he chooses a lottery stick, and appears to oversee the entry of the _æsir_ into the new world; Dronke (_PE_ II, comm. _Vǫluspá_ 60/1) notes the parallel of the Indian "chanter" priest, Udgātṛ (_Hœnir_ appears to be related to Latin _cano_, "sing"), who oversees transitions between life and death and rebirth, a comparison which, if valid, may suggest that Hœnir's gift of _óðr_ to man was of something – effectively a soul – that ensured man's survival into the next world (see also the section below on Óðr).

Equally laden with meaning may be the name of the third vessel, Són. The word _són_ and its possible cognates still remain underinvestigated, both from a philological and a mythological perspective; here I can only outline some of the problems in interpretation. De Vries (_AeW_, _s.v._) glosses it as "blood", and Jörundur Hilmarsson (1988–9: 33) argues for the same meaning: kennings such as _sónar fress_, "bear of blood", for "sword" illustrate this sense. He proposes a derivation from a proto-Indo-European heteroclitic _*H$_1$ésH$_2$ōr_, a collective noun for "(living) blood" (as opposed to _*kreuH$_2$-_, blood outside the body, gore), where an initial normal grade was replaced by zero-grade on the analogy of the oblique cases, such as genitive singular _*H$_1$sH$_2$n-és_. The resulting _*H$_1$sH$_2$ōr_ would yield Germanic _*sōr_, which was levelled to _sōn_ after the loss of the heteroclitic inflexion (as happened with Gothic _fon_, "fire", for earlier _*fōr_). A meaning of "life-blood" would suit the sacrificial contexts in which _són_ occurs. How far other words are related to _són_ is open to debate. The word _haptsœnir_ occurs as a name of Óðinn in Kormákr's _Sigurðardrápa_ 5 (_Skj_ B$_1$ 69), in the kenning «haptsœnis heið», "gift of Óðinn", meaning "poetry"; _hapt_ is probably "the divinities" (_Lexicon poeticum_, _s.v._ "haptsœnir"), so the term may indicate "divine one connected with _són_/Són", or "one who directs _són_ to the _hapt_". The verb _sóa_, with a general meaning of "sacrifice", may also be connected – or the resemblance may be coincidental. Unfortunately Jörundur does not

consider *sóa* in his discussion of *són*, though it may be possible to derive it from the same root (without the *-r/-n* heteroclitic suffix); however, it may alternatively be related to Old English *spogan*, "strike, attack violently", in which sense the Norse word would have become confined to sacrificial contexts (*AeW*, *s.v.* "sóa", puzzlingly but unnecessarily cites the Old English *aspogan*, "throttle", a derivative of *spogan*, and then constructs a picture of bloodless sacrifice, *AR* §288). The word *són* could also be related to Old High German *suona*, modern German *Sühne*, "expiation, atonement"; yet the etymology of the German word is itself highly problematic: Kluge (2002, *s.v.*) refers back to the Old Norse *sóa*, and suggests the sense developed from "expiatory sacrifice" to "expiation"; Kluge also notes that the Middle Low German *swone* indicates that the root may have contained *-w-*, which would fit well enough with the derivation of *sóa* relating it to Old English *spogan*, but not to *són* in the sense of "life-blood" – but the strength of the evidence afforded by the Middle Low German form is, in any case, open to question. If *suona* proves to be related to *són*, the development from "life-blood (offered in sacrifice)" to "expiation" is equally likely. (For a consideration of words of sacrifice in Germanic, but not including *són*, see Düwel 1970.)

Amongst all this uncertainty, it becomes difficult to make any observations which aid in the comprehension of the Norse myth of Són. Yet Jörundur's derivation appears plausible, not only from a philological perspective, but also a semantic one: the Norse instances of *són* do not require a sense of "atonement", and it is unlikely that an abstract meaning such as "atonement", if it was indeed a connotation of the term, was not originally coupled with a concrete sense, indicating the means of achieving that atonement: "life-blood" offered in sacrifice would appear an eminently likely original sense, and one from which the abstract sense recorded in German could easily have developed. The blood held in Són, or which is Són, must be Kvasir's, and the use of this religious term lends the blood a numinous awe (and power, we may infer); there seems no reason to evoke ideas of atonement here (however well recorded such a sense may be for Old High German *suona*) – who, in this case, would be atoning with whom, and for what?

Cauldrons or vessels form a widespread motif, of course. A few pertinent examples will suffice to illustrate the context into which the vessels of the mead of poetry fitted. The nearest parallel is the kettle presented in *Hymiskviða* and *Lokasenna*: the gods acquire this massive vessel from the giant Hymir, and Ægir, the demigod of the sea, brews a beverage for the feast of the gods in it. Dumézil (1924: 8) traces Indian analogues to this myth, where it has become absorbed into the *soma* cycle (contrasting with Norse, where it remains or has become distinct from the mead-of-poetry cycle). The emphasis here is not on mead or beer as an elixir of poetry, but as something closer to the Indian guarantor of continuing life. An earlier example, from a time when paganism was still at its height among the Germanic peoples, is illuminating. A cauldron was used by the priestesses of the Cimbri, according to Strabo, to collect the blood of sacrificial human

victims: the purpose was for the priestesses to make prophecies ⟨69⟩. He also mentions in *Geography* VII.2.1 that the Cimbri presented Augustus with one of these sacred cauldrons, in the hope of winning his favour: clearly the cauldron itself was regarded as carrying the power of influencing someone's mind, presumably as a result of the sacrificial blood which had sanctified it. The pouring of human *són*, in the sense of sacrificial life-blood, into a mighty vessel to achieve a state of mantic wisdom is realised as an actual cult event among the Cimbri, but survives only as a myth into medieval Scandinavia – though apparently with many of the ancient elements intact.

There are echoes of the wisdom-bestowing *poculum mortis* in other texts. *Sigrdrífumál* 13 recounts how Óðinn «um hugði», "thought up", runes from the liquid flowing from the skull of Heiðdraupnir, "Dripper of bright [mead]", which may be a designation of Mímr, whose head is mentioned in the same passage as first speaking wisdom when Óðinn, under the name Hroptr, stood on the hill by the edge of the sea. This mythologem has a parallel, close in a number of details, in the Nganasan intiation ⟨17⟩, where the neophyte's experience begins with his descent into an underworld sea, and involves his bone marrow turning into a river and floating away, and his reading of letters, representing his mastery of shamanic knowledge, from his own defleshed skull in the setting of an underhill smithy. Despite the coincidence of imagery, the emphases of the two traditions are different: Óðinn appears as a mastering warrior (almost certainly he had overcome Mímr and extracted his knowledge by force), whereas the Nganasan neophyte is under the power of the spirits, who have chosen to instruct him; the detail of the runes or letters hidden within the skull in both cases represents the notion of the wisdom of the dead being channelled through the shaman's mind, and the similarity of imagery to represent this is to be explained by both Nganasan and early Norse societies being marginally aware of, but scarcely using, letters, which to both appeared as mysterious bearers of knowledge.

The myth alluded to in *Vǫluspá* 28 ⟨38⟩, and expounded by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 ⟨42⟩, tells how Óðinn gained wisdom, again in the form of mead (from Mímir's spring), by pledging his eye in what may well be a *pars pro toto* sacrifice. The spring is at the roots of the world tree, as Snorri states directly and *Vǫluspá* 27–8 ⟨38⟩ implies. According to *Grímnismál* 26 ⟨37⟩ the spring of all waters, Hvergelmir, "Cauldron roarer", lies at the foot of the Valhǫll tree Læráðr; Snorri places the spring below Yggdrasill and sites the serpent Níðhǫggr there (earlier, in *Gylfaginning* ch. 4, he also places Hvergelmir in the midst of Niflheimr at the creation of the world). Whilst Snorri is clearly conflating and systematising scraps of mythic lore, he is no doubt correct in his inference that the various springs below the tree are different realisations of the same spring, and that Hvergelmir is an underworld source (implied in the presence of Níðhǫggr there). This being the case, the cauldron is again associated with the realm of death, and with the source of life (not so much wisdom on this occasion) in the form of the world's rivers.

There are, then, strong indications that the myth of the mead of poetry in fact involves, as do most of the analogues adduced by Doht (1974), an otherworld journey to retrieve the elixir of life itself, even if this elixir is manifested as a source of poetic inspiration. The myth thus parallels Óðinn's hanging on the gallows-tree. Further confirmation of this comes from an examination of some of the other elements of the myth. The mountain of Suttungr where the mead is kept is named Hnitbjǫrg, "Clashing mountains". Although no incident of clashing rocks occurs in the extant form of the myth, we have at least one analogue in the tale of King Sveigðir in *Ynglingatal* 2 (*Skj* B_1 7), who, according to *Ynglinga saga* ch. 12, spent his time searching for Óðinn, and was led astray by a dwarf inviting him into a rock if he wished to meet Óðinn (in other words, to die), which clashed shut on the king («við jǫfri gein») the moment he went through:

En dagskjarr
Dúrnis niðja
salvǫrðuðr
Sveigði vélti,
þá's í stein
enn stórgeði
Dusla konr
ept dvergi hljóp,
ok salr bjartr
søkk-Mímis
jǫtunbyggðr
við jǫfri gein.

And the day-shy hall-guardian of the kin of Dúrnir [the dwarf] deceived Sveigðir when the great-minded offspring of Dusli [Sveigðir] leaped after the dwarf, and the bright hall of sunken-Mímir [the rock], inhabited by giants, snapped shut on the prince.

The clashing rock here clearly marks out the deadly otherworld (the clashing itself being the king's death); the passage in fact appears to allude to the sojourn of Óðinn in Hnitbjǫrg: in addition to the clashing rocks themselves, Sveigðir is found as an Óðinn name in Goþþormr sindri's *Hákonardrápa* 5 (*Skj* B_1 56), the *geð* with which Sveigðir is well endowed parallels the *geð* Óðinn acquires from (or as) the mead in *Hávamál* 13–14 ⟨48*a*⟩ (see below), the hall is inhabited by giants (though "hall inhabited by giants" may be little more than a kenning for "rock"), and the particular giant owner is sunken-Mímir, hence a Mímir (an owner of the mead of wisdom) dwelling in a sunken place (under a mountain); *søkk* is also "treasure" which shines in this "bright hall" («salr bjartr») like bright mead itself, and which no doubt was the enticement that drew Sveigðir in. The name *søkk*-Mímir also occurs in *Grímnismál* 50 as the name of an ancient giant, the son of Miðvitnir,[10] whom Óðinn declares himself to have deceived and slain (a

[10] The form and meaning are uncertain: A has «Miðvitnir», but CR has «Miðviðnir». *AeW* (*s.vv.* "mið", "Miðvitnir", "vita", "vitnir") raises several possibilities of interpretation: *mið* may either be "fishing grounds in the ocean" or derived from *mjǫðr*, "mead"; *vitnir* may be "wolf" (and hence any savage being), or "protector, guardian"; *vitnir* may also be connected

myth possibly to be associated with Mímr's head); hence the use of the name here to make an association with Óðinn and the mead.

The name Hnitbjǫrg, then, marks this out as a boundary to the otherworld – the clashing rocks may in fact represent the edge of the world where the firmament reaches down and touches earth (a notion found for example among the Chukchi: Bogoras 1904–9: 332, and implicit in Hungarian and Ob Ugrian beliefs: Róheim 1954: 20–2), beyond which lies a paradise, a land of life;[11] Coomaraswamy (1977*b*: 537), in his wide-ranging discussion of the motif of the clashing rocks, or, as he terms it, the Active Door, notes how in the Indian *Mahābhārata* 1.29.1 the motif is realised as a razor-edged wheel, through which the Garuḍa eagle must pass to seize the *soma* of immortality: "He saw, in front of the Elixir, an iron wheel with a honed edge and sharp blades, which ran incessantly, bright like fire and sun, the murderous cutting edge for the robbers of the Elixir, a surpassingly dreadful device that had been skilfully forged by the Gods."[12] Thus the mountain is a version of the world mountain, and as a means of passage into the otherworld it parallels Yggdrasill: both are the obstacles and at the same time the means for Óðinn to pass to the world beyond. The vats of mead at the depths of this deadly mountain parallel the spring, in particular the wisdom-bestowing mead spring of Mímir, below Yggdrasill. They are guarded by a female being, Gunnlǫð, in the way Urðr (with her two companions in *Vǫluspá*, who are probably a later elaboration) looks after her spring below Yggdrasill. As a mortal, Sveigðir cannot return from the world of the dead, rich with fertile wisdom, beyond the clashing rocks: that is a feat reserved to the gods.

There is no parallel in the Yggdrasill mythologem to the seduction of Gunnlǫð to gain the mead, unless we look at the myth in a slightly different manner: to gain the runes, Óðinn gave up his life, and to gain a drink from Mímir's well he yielded up his eye, but he appears not to sacrifice anything in the myth of the mead of poetry – unless we view his dalliance with Gunnlǫð as a wooing of death itself, for as the guardian of the ambivalent vessels which at once are death and life (as seen in Doht's analogues, as well as being implied in the imagery of the cauldrons noted above) she is the counterpart of the maiden Móðguðr, "Spirit strife", guardian of the

to *vitt*, and hence mean "sorcerer". The most contextually meaningful interpretation would see the giant as a protector, defender or magical possessor of the mead.

[11] Thus Róheim (1954: 21) notes how the Ob Ugrian "land of birds", whence they migrate each spring, lies in the mythic south, behind narrow rocks or the edge of the sky; there is a spring there into which dead ducks are thrown and then emerge alive.

[12] The whole episode is told in bk 1.23–30. Garuḍa co-ordinates himself with the wheel and flies in. The elixir is guarded by two large snakes, shimmering like blazing fires, their eyes burning, their mouths ablaze. Garuḍa throws dust in their eyes and gathers the *soma*. He shatters the wheel and flies upwards. Indra smites him with a thunderbolt, to no effect. Thereafter Garuḍa and Indra agree friendship; Garuḍa proclaims his strength, but tells Indra he can seize the *soma* once he has put it down. The points of similarity with the acquisition by Óðinn of the mead of poetry are many, even if some are displaced relative to each other, such as the accord reached between Indra and Garuḍa at the end, matching that between *æsir* and *vanir* in Norse at the beginning of the myth (and which gave rise to the mead in the first place).

gold-thatched bridge over the river Gjǫll which marks the boundary of Hel's realm in the myth of Hermóðr's visit to the world of the dead to retrieve Baldr in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49 ⟨53⟩.

Drinking in the mead, Óðinn becomes fettered, according to *Hávamál* 13–14 ⟨48*a*⟩, in the feathers of an «óminnis hegri», "heron of forgetfulness" (see U. Dronke 1984); the poem says that this heron steals men's *geð*, "mind", but the best thing about getting overdrunk is getting one's *geð* back afterwards. There is much play, both lexical and mythic, here.[13] The reference is not just to the return of one's senses, but also to that of the mead of poetry to the gods. Moreover, *geð*, as North (1991: 48) points out, means not just mind but also the spirit which is stirred into expressing poetry (comparable with *óðr*). The stanzas are also permeated with a deep *double entendre* of irony: as Dronke points out, whilst ordinary drunkenness may make a person oblivious, a heron hovering over its prey is as far from being in a forgetful stupor as Óðinn is when he seizes the precious mead, and his being "fettered" in this bird's feathers is actually his means of escape; the theft of the *geð* is, within the myth, not the loss of one's senses, but the retrieval of the mead from the giant's fastness.

I suggest that the "forgetfulness" of the heron (the ironic flip-side of Óðinn's alertness) may be not just drunkenness, but death – Óðinn as it were has drunk of the waters of Lethe. In addition to the significances of the heron discussed by U. Dronke (1984), largely drawn from the Germanic world, I would mention, tentatively since it is difficult to establish how much influence there may have been from more remote areas, the rich imagery found in ancient Egypt of the divine Benu bird (see Hart 1986, *s.v.*), which was realised as a heron, and which later fed into Herodotus's picture of the phoenix and thence into the early Christian tradition as a symbol of resurrection; the Benu bird was believed to be self-created, and it was depicted in underworld settings as a symbol of resurrection. If we accept that Óðinn in fact enters the world of death in the myth under discussion, the symbolism of the Benu heron would coincide well with the «óminnis hegri».

Snorri does not incorporate the heron into his version of the myth; here,

[13] Further levels of interpretation are certainly possible. *Hegri* appears in two other contexts in Old Norse verse: in a list of bird-names in *Þula* IV xx 7 (*Skj* B1 677), where it appears in the same line as *hrókr*, "rook", and *gjóðr*, "falcon/eagle", both of which otherwise appear mainly in kennings for "raven" in the context of battle – for example, *hrókr Haddingja vals*, "rook of the slain of the Haddingjar", in Eyvindr Finnsson's *Háleygjatal* 11 (*Skj* B1 61), or *gjóðr Yggs*, "Óðinn's falcon", in Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Nesjavísur* 9 (*Skj* B1 219); and as a bird portending disaster in Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlínusspá I* 24, 26, 27 (*Skj* B2 15), where it is called (st. 26) «fogla verstr», "worst of birds", and it is said (st. 27) that «eigi es hegra kyn / hugþekt firum», "the race of herons is not endeared to the *hugr* of men". Since other instances of *hegri* seem to suggest affinity with raven-kennings, therefore, and since ravens eat the bodies of those who have fallen in battle, the poet here may be suggesting that this bird preys on the minds of those who have fallen down drunk; this comparison would be strengthened by the fact that the mead of poetry was made out of blood in the first place. It is possible to infer that the heron is therefore merely a poetic device rather than an integral part of the myth, but this need not be the case. (I thank John McKinnell for pointing out this interpretation of the heron.)

Óðinn becomes an eagle to escape, as does Suttungr, who chases after him. The elaborate use of the image of the heron in *Hávamál* may derive from a version of the myth in which Óðinn actually fled *as* a heron; as U. Dronke (1984) points out, for example, the regurgitation of half-digested food is something the heron, but not the eagle, does when panicked, which suits the myth's account of the origin of the poetasters' portion of the mead in what Óðinn emitted as he approached the realm of the gods. More significant, perhaps, is the parallel between the heron hovering over the bowl and stealing *geð*, and Óðinn loitering over the three vats of mead and stealing the content (which may have been characterised as *óðr*, poetic inspiration), which implies a structural identification between the bird in the myth of *Hávamál* 13–14 (a passage which, serving different purposes, keeps Óðinn distinct from the bird) and the god in the myth of *Hávamál* 104–10 ⟨48*a*, *b*⟩. However, one effect (if not deliberate intention) of making Óðinn into an eagle is to accommodate the imagery more closely, again, to the Yggdrasill mythologem, since Óðinn penetrated the deathly world as an underworld creature, a snake, passing through the hole he carved into the mountain depths, and he leaves as a heavenly creature, an eagle, thereby matching the serpents (Níðhǫggr and others) biting at the roots of Yggdrasill, and the eagle at its crown.

Doht (1974: 116) also considers whether the Norse myth is essentially shamanic in nature, and concludes that while a number of apparently shamanic features are found, this does not make it an example of shamanism, but may indicate influence from shamanic poetry on the visit to the otherworld. It is not clear, however, where such influences would have come from, or what precise form they would have taken. Doht's analysis of analogues from around the world in fact demonstrates that the Norse myth belongs among a group of analogous myths, only some occurrences of which are found in shamanic societies. It would therefore be foolhardy to see it as exhibiting an essentially shamanic nature; nonetheless, it is worth considering some of the parallels with the shamanic texts cited above.

It is a moot point how integral the Baugi episode is to the Norse myth as a whole, and how recent an addition it may have been. If we read it as an agrarian fertility myth, implying not only death (in the autumn), but rebirth (in the spring), then it may act as a thematic prelude to the main events of the story, if, in turn, we regard this as being about not just the source of poetic inspiration, but the elixir of life, saved from the deathly undermountain realm. In the Nganasan text ⟨16⟩, among the first things the novice encounters are the twin rivers of birth and death. The other Nganasan initiate shaman ⟨17⟩ has his head removed as part of the initiation, as Baugi's slaves cut each other's throats; it is as if we have a displacement here of the ritual death of the novice onto some minor characters, but it may nonetheless be an intimation of the mortal conflict Óðinn himself undertakes to gain the mead.

Hnitbjǫrg may be described as a world mountain in that it holds a treasure of cosmic significance which must be retrieved; the depths beneath it surely represent the subterranean world of death in the same way as the

roots of the world tree reach into these realms. In a similar parallelism of mythic imagery, in the two Nganasan accounts, descent beside tree roots in the first corresponds to descent into a mountain's depths in the second.

Both Nganasan descents are described as taking place through holes; similarly, Óðinn descends through a narrow hole into the depths of Suttungr's mountain to reach the poetic mead. This emphasises both Óðinn's struggle (which links well with the theme of so-called martyrdom noted above), and the general impermeability of the boundary with the otherworld. Similar notions are found in other shamanic texts: for example, the Sámi shaman reached the spirit world through a hole, according to Lundius (1905: 7), an idea which may be evidenced too in the Finnish *tietäjä's* falling into trance, described in the traditional phrase as "fall into a cleft" ⟨LANGETA LOVEEN⟩. The motifs are too general, however, to see any particular shamanic element in the Norse myth here.

The three vats of water – of death, recovery, health – in the Nganasan account ⟨17⟩ correspond to the three vats of mead – including, it would seem "blood" (death) and "rouser of the soul of inspiration" – in the Norse; the giant cauldron in which the shaman's body is boiled might similarly be compared with the three Norse vats as the instrument of the initiate's re-formation.

Óðinn encounters two characters within the mountain episode, Suttungr and his daughter Gunnlǫð. Their roles – which compared to the shamanic accounts are underdefined – do not appear to coincide with the many spirit characters who appear in the Nganasan accounts, though the name Suttungr may perhaps be connected with that of the fire giant Surtr – Eyvindr Finnsson in *Háleygjatal* 2 (*Skj* B_1 60) describes the mead of poetry as being taken «Surts ór søkkdǫlum», "from the sunken dales of Surtr", as from a sunken smithy, a connotation which may also have been inferred in the name of Suttungr's home, Hnitbjǫrg (according to Snorri), which could be perceived as connected with *hnita*, "weld"; hence Suttungr could be a vestigial smith-like figure, comparable to the undermountain shaman-forging smith in the Nganasan account ⟨17⟩.[14] It is interesting to note that of the Norse myths involving Óðinn in the acquisition of wisdom, this is the only one with a female helper: in the others, the god is presented as achieving his goals by his own efforts alone. As the female shamanic figure being forged in the Nganasan account proves to be identical with the remade shaman himself, it might be illuminating to consider how far in fact Gunnlǫð, the source of the now poetry-endowed Óðinn's "reforging", could be considered as an alter ego of Óðinn, a splitting off of the protagonist's feminine aspects essential to success in the venture – but I will not enter further into such interpretations here. Rather, I will draw attention to some parallels to Gunnlǫð's role. Gunnlǫð has two roles: she is Óðinn's

[14] However, how far Suttungr and Surtr should be related is a matter of debate; the most obvious reading of Eyvindr's verse is that the tradition, presumably a Hálogaland one, that he refers to differed from that recorded by Snorri, and had Surtr as the giant responsible for holding the mead, in sunken valleys rather than an undermountain cave (see Poole 2007: 156–61 for further discussion).

helper in the procurement of the mead, and she is his mistress. Comparable is the role of Guðríðr as Þorbjǫrg's helper in the *seiðr* session in *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4 ⟨87⟩, but only in that she is a lone female helper: clearly no sexual elements are involved. Guðríðr, however, acts as a replacement for a larger choir, so her role is accidental. More interesting as a helper is the girl who helped the Sámi shaman to recover his soul – note how *Hávamál* 107 ⟨48*b*⟩ indicates it is Óðrœrir ⟨QV⟩, whose name appears to imply "rouser of the soul of inspiration", that Gunnlǫð has helped Óðinn acquire – whom he commented on in a sexual light afterwards; similar too is the role of the two spirit girls in the Yukagir kamlanie, who use sexual manipulation to resuscitate the shaman ⟨22⟩. It would appear that Óðinn's ability to carry out his task and recover from it is dependent on a female helper in a way closely similar to these shamanic roles.

A good part of the Nganasan account ⟨16⟩ is devoted to explaining the origin of parts of the shamanic costume, and the sparks that fly from the forging of the shaman are his avian spirit helpers; the costume was typically of bird form. Óðinn escapes from Hnitbjǫrg in bird form; he had entered as a serpent. The serpent is a clear underworld denizen in Norse myth, and corresponds to the fish in Sámi shamanism which guided the shaman down to the underworld; in Finnish the shaman Väinämöinen escapes from the underworld in the form of a snake through a net set to trap him (*FFPE* no. 30; *SKVR* I₁ 370), and the snake is recorded as a helping spirit of the *tietäjä* (Hokkanen 1981). Clearly the serpent and bird are not comparable to shamanic helping spirits, but they could be compared with cases where the shaman transforms himself into some animal; nonetheless, the assumption of three different forms within one ritual would be odd. Viewing these features of the myth as shamanic is not especially convincing.

The examples of shamanic initiation cited above are chosen for their relative completeness and detail; other examples may possibly add further points of similarity with the Norse myths, but would not, I believe, fundamentally alter the picture gained from the comparison undertaken. In essence, the points of comparison tend either to be vague, or else to lack a context which would enable us to say that something closely comparable to shamanism lay behind the Norse myths. They do, I would suggest, push the balance towards seeing the Norse myth of the mead of poetry as involving an otherworld journey (something already inferred on the basis of other Norse and Indian analogues), and one that involves the acquisition of a skill which is then used in the community (as indeed is already explicit in the Norse account). As a god, Óðinn acts as a prototype, and the myth of how he gained the mead of poetry for the gods would have acted as an ideal, an origin myth in which in a sense all poets would subsequently have partaken, harnessing their poetic powers from their otherworld cache (as we have seen may have been the case with Cædmon and Hallbjǫrn). In earlier forms, those so inspired may have been not only poets, but healers, as is the case with shamans, but this wider application is much less evident in our Norse records, which deal with such healers only

in passing; nonetheless, in the German *Second Merseburg Charm* Woden is able to heal a wound:

Phol ende Uuodan   vuorun zi holza,
du uuart demo balderes volon   sin vuoz birenkit,
thu biguol en Sinthgunt,   Sunna era suister;
thu biguol en Friia,   Volla era suister;
thu biguol en Uodan,   so he uuola conda:
sose benrenki,   sose bluotrenki,
sose lidirenki:
ben zi bena,   bluot zi bluoda,
lid zi geliden,   sose gelimida sin!

Phol and Wodan went to a wood,
then the lord's foot was wrenched,
then Sinthgunt chanted, and her sister Sunna;
then Friia chanted, and her sister Volla;
then Wodan chanted, as he well knew how:
so for bone sprain, so for blood sprain,
so for limb sprain:
bone to bone, blood to blood,
limb to limb, so let them be glued!

Likewise, in the Old English *Nine Herbs Charm* found in *Lacnunga*, Woden, on one of his exceptionally rare appearances in Old English, is presented as a healer (*ASPR* VI, 119–20; cf. Cockayne 1864: III, 34–6; Storms 1948: 188):

Ƿyrm com snican,   toslat he man;
ða genam Ƿoden   VIIII ƿuldortanas,
sloh ða þa næddran,   ꝥ heo on VIIII tofleah.
Þær geændade   æppel and attor,
þæt heo næfre ne ƿolde   on hus bugan.
Fille and finule,   felamihtigu tƿa,
þa ƿyrte gesceop   ƿitig drihten,
halig on heofonum,   þa he hongode;
sette and sænde   on VII ƿorulde
earmum and eadigum   eallum to bote.

A worm came sneaking, it tore into a man;
Then Woden took nine wondrous sticks,
struck the snake so it split into nine.
And there ended apple and poison
so never again would it settle in a house.
Chervil and fennel, mighty pair –
these herbs the wise lord formed,
holy in heaven, as he hung;
he set and sent them into seven worlds
for the wretched and the rich, to help them all.

There may be a reference to the myth of Óðinn (or Woden) hanging on the gallows-tree here (if the allusion is not purely to the lord Christ), and sending healing throughout the worlds linked by the cosmic tree (just as the Nganasan shamans acquired knowledge of herbs during their initiation). The motif is particularly reminiscent of the seven healing herbs

found beside the world tree in the Nganasan initiation ⟨17⟩; these, it is implied, will be used by the shaman in his career. As we have seen, in *Grímnismál* the world tree is gnawed by worms or serpents from below, and the Old English charm, less purely mythical and more practical in its reference, consistently presents the worm as a source of illness; most of the charm is directed against its *attor*, "venom". Woden thus appears as the vanquisher of the serpent of illness. A Saxon charm, recorded in a tenth-century manuscript, summons the worm out of an infected body (Holthausen 1900: 212):

> Gang ūt, nesso, mid nigun nessiklīnon,
> ūt fana themo margę an that bēn, fan themo bēne an that flēsg,
> ūt fan themo flēsgke an thia hūd, ūt fan thera hūd an thesa strāla!
> Drohtin, uuerthe sō!
>
> Go out, worm, with nine little worms,
> out from the marrow into the bone, from the bone into the flesh,
> from the flesh into the skin, from the skin into this arrow.
> Lord, make it so.

The worm signifies illness and death, and Óðinn's adoption of worm form in his penetration of Suttungr's fastness is another pointer to this being a realm of death, the place to which illnesses and ills are banished. Óðinn's power over the worm, as seen in the English charm, demonstrates also his power over death, and hence determines his victory in Suttungr's deathly realm.

In Norse, there is, nonetheless, one direct statement by Óðinn that he possessed healing powers in the form of a *ljóð*, a charm, needed by healers (*Hávamál* 147): apparently, this was one of the pieces of knowledge Óðinn gained through his sacrifice on the tree in the preceding episode. In *Sigrdrífumál* 11 the Óðinnic *valkyrja* Sigrdrífa declares the need to know *limrúnar*, "limb runes", for the healing of wounds.

There are, then, broad similarities between the myth of the mead of poetry and shamanic initiation, and all the more so to the degree that we accept that Óðinn may also have had a role as healer. Yet I would hesitate to call the myth shamanic, or even necessarily initiatory. There is certainly an acquisition of skill, in poetry and possibly more widely in providing the wherewithal for life, yet initiation is surely appropriate as a term only if the change of state or knowledge of the neophyte is brought about by those already possessed of the skills concerned, be they human or, as typical in shamanism, spirits; this usually expresses itself in a (physical) remaking of the initiand. Óðinn perhaps is remade in a more subtle manner: in *Hávamál* 141/1–2 ⟨48*c*⟩, having drunk of the mead, he tells us «þá nam ek frævask / ok fróðr vera», "then I began to thrive and to be virile/wise". Yet Óðinn is presented as achieving his feats on his own (unless we count Gunnlǫð as his instructor), so the myth becomes a heroic exploit more than a religious initiation. Such other characters as appear are there for

Óðinn to defeat in some way, not to school him – and here there is a huge difference from the Nganasan (and other shamanic) texts; the same is true of the absence of the typically shamanic unwelcome vocation, where the novice is forced on pain of death to become a shaman by spirits afflicting him; a typical example is that of the Nanai shaman approached by a very beautiful woman spirit, an *ayami*, on his sick-bed, who tells him he has to become a shaman, and she will teach him as she taught his ancestors, and give him helping spirits, but he has to be her husband, or else she would kill him (Sternberg 1925: 473, 476).

The initiatory experience for a shaman was just the beginning, as noted above: he had then to prove his powers, primarily through successful kamlania. We do not really find this element within the myth of the mead – it is a myth, after all, rather than a ritual practice – but there is little in the narrative to indicate that Óðinn has subjected "spirits" to his service: rather, as noted above, those he encounters are his antagonists whom he vanquishes as a warrior, without any indication being given that they serve any further use.

There is indeed an initiatory element in Óðinn's exploits, but it is doubtful if it is helpful to view the god as undergoing an essentially shamanic experience; moreover, analogues such as the Indian, with which the Norse tradition may have had some genetic relationship, are in the end more fruitful in helping us to elucidate the essential purpose and structure of the Norse myth.

Óðr and Freyja

Given the scant manner in which it is recorded (in particular by Snorri, ⟨52⟩), any interpretation of the myth of Freyja and Óðr is bound to be tentative – the following is particularly so. The god Óðr was the mate of Freyja: he disappeared, and she searched the world for him, weeping golden tears; whether he was ever found, we do not know. Despite the paucity of information, some parallels may be drawn with other myths. Freyja loses two things: the Brísingamen and Óðr. She gives two things, if we may read *Vǫluspá* in the way suggested: gold and *seiðr* (through Gullveig and Heiðr). She takes two things: land (implicit in the myth of *Húsdrápa* 2, and explicit in the doings of her counterpart Gefjun) and the departed (she shares half the slain with Óðinn). Óðr, through his name, suggests a link with Óðinn ("One endowed with *óðr*"), and with *óðr*, the spirit of inspiration given to man as part of his essential make-up in *Vǫluspá*. Óðr goes off on long journeys, as does Óðinn (and Óðinn returns, which cannot be ascertained for Óðr); Óðr is lost, as is the mead which rouses *óðr* (Óðrœrir), so effectively *óðr* is absent for as long as the mead is kept in the deathly realm of Hnitbjǫrg.

Let us consider the two things given. On her search for Óðr Freyja is explicitly said to weep gold. The connection with *seiðr* in the myth is less clear, but nonetheless detectable. Snorri, in presenting the myth of Óðr, records that one of the other names adopted by Freyja was Gefn; this is

nothing but a variant of Gefjun, found for example in Þjóðólfr's *Haustlǫng* 2. Gefjun appears to be a local variant of Freyja (see for example *Haustlǫng*, ed. North, comm. 2/6). Like Freyja, Gefjun appears as a wandering goddess, and appears to share mastery of witchcraft, as argued by Heizmann (2002). Little is recorded of Gefjun; the main myth is given by Snorri as the opening of *Gylfaginning* with a variant in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 5, according to which she turned up as a *farandi kona*, "travelling woman", and tricked King Gylfi of Sweden into giving her land in exchange for the *skemtun*, "amusement", she had provided, and by means of oxen from Jǫtunheimar ploughed a huge area away, which became the Danish island of Selund (Sjælland); Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* 13 (*Skj* B_1 3) is cited in support. Heizmann (2002: 205–10) shows that a *farandi kona* was regarded, both in the West and East Norse areas (and further afield in the Germanic world), as more or less synonymous with a whore; such travelling women were also characterised as herbal healers. The *Pactus legis Salicae* (64.2 C6, p. 231) identifies a *faras* (from *faran*, "go, travel") with a *striga*, "witch", and *meretrix*, "whore"; Heizmann (2002: 210–22) cites a good many other Germanic examples up to the fifteenth century of the same connotation of "travelling woman". There are other indications that Gefjun was regarded as a witch/whore. *Droplaugarsona saga*, from the mid-thirteenth century, has a woman called Gefjun in fjǫlkunga ("magician"), which may relate to a traditional characterisation of the goddess after whom she is named. In *Lokasenna* 21 Gefjun is said to know the fates of the whole world; knowing fate is the prerogative of the magical practitioner, the *vǫlva*, and *vǫlur*, like Gefjun, are typically presented as wandering around districts. In the myth of the attempted removal of the whetstone fragment from Þórr's forehead recounted in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17, the woman responsible is named Gróa, and she is called a *vǫlva* by Snorri, but Þjóðólfr in *Haustlǫng* 20 calls her «ǫl-Gefjun sára», "good-fortune Gefjun of wounds", implying she shared characteristics with Gefjun, among which we must reckon magical ability and healing powers (Heizmann 2002: 224–5). Gefjun's magical powers are explicitly mentioned in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 5, where she begat sons on a giant and changed them into oxen. In translations from Latin, according to the *interpretatio norrœna*, Gefjun typically represents Diana; Heizmann (2002: 232–5) argues this is unlikely to refer to Diana's classical characterisation as a virgin, but rather to her medieval role as a demonic being, the leader of the nightly host of witch women. Witchcraft was intimately associated with sexual abandon, and the occurrence of Gefjun as a translation of Venus on one occasion implies a sexual aspect. Gefjun is explicitly associated with offering sex for a jewel in *Lokasenna* 20, and the "amusement" offered by a *farandi kona* to Gylfi was also surely sexual; Freyja too offered sex for a jewel, the Brísingamen, in *Sǫrla þáttr*. Sexual activity implies a fertility role; Gefjun illustrates this clearly in her drawing of Selund across the sea, "for the increase of Denmark", as Bragi says, and her name, "Giver", links her with older Germanic *matronae* such as the Alagabiae ("Givers of good fortune", probably); she is alluded to in the kenning *ár-Gefn*, "Gefn of good harvests", in *Haustlǫng* 2 (see ed. North, comm. 2/6), which stands for the fertility goddess Iðunn.

As a *farandi kona* searching for Óðr, Freyja would have appeared as a witch, *fordæða*; as she passed "among peoples" she must have interacted with them, as did Gefjun with Gylfi, which implies she performed magic (and perhaps prostitution), in a similar manner to her avatar Heiðr in *Vǫluspá*, perhaps teaching it to mankind (this would explain how the divine practice of *seiðr*, a prerogative of the *vanir*, came to be known by humans). The attempted restoration of Óðr constituted an act of healing, in a broad sense, which must have formed part of the magic she undertook.

The two things Freyja loses encompass the well-being, and continued existence, of the world and its denizens, mankind. The Brísingamen, discussed in connection with *Húsdrápa* 2, I would take as symbolising the fertile earth; Óðr here may be seen as a personification of *óðr*, the soul of inspired utterance, which was a necessary component for the creation of man.

If we turn to what Freyja took it is notable that her counterpart Gefjun was responsible for *drawing* land out of the ocean (and Gróa – compared to Gefjun – for drawing out a whetstone); Freyja, through Heimdallr's agency, drew the sea-kidney, probably representing the jewel Brísingamen, out of the ocean, which appears to act as a metaphor for drawing life and fertility from the realm of death. We are left to wonder if Freyja may similarly have aimed to draw Óðr out from a deathly realm, in the way the mead of poetry, the "rouser of *óðr*", was drawn from the deathly Hnitbjǫrg by Óðinn, and as a shaman would draw a patient's soul from the underworld. The discussion of the myth of the mead of poetry has shown that it is likely to be a particularisation of a wider mythologem, in which the mead represented not just inspiration but was the elixir of life itself. Freyja appears in *Vǫluspá* to be the guardian of indomitable life (Gullveig and Heiðr, and the *vanir* on the battlefield, cannot be overcome), and the retrieval of Óðr was perhaps an assertion of this power. Certainly, Freyja has no particular connection with poetry, in the way Óðinn has, so Óðr can scarcely be a personification merely of poetry; his name is to be seen as relating to *óðr* in the somewhat wider sense implied in *Vǫluspá*, where it is a vital part of man. Nonetheless, as a practitioner of *seiðr*, Freyja would have required a spirit of inspired utterance to deliver the supernatural knowledge the rite evoked: for a goddess, this spirit could scarcely be conceived as an independent entity as it probably was for human practitioners – for that would make the powers of the founder of *seiðr* dependent on yet another level of being: thus Óðr was, perhaps, an externalised form of Freyja's own *óðr*, her source of prophetic inspiration. This further suggests that the long journeys of Óðr were no accident: they are like the far-flung inspired vision of the *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá*, seeing «vítt ok um vítt», "wide and wide around" (st. 29), and the need to call him back is perhaps comparable to calling a shaman or medium out of trance to proclaim the visions attained. A further comparison would arise with shamanic societies where the shaman had a spirit mate of the opposite sex, who would act as informant of the affairs of the spirit world – the spirit mate is conceived as a separate being, as is Óðr, but could be viewed as an externalisation of the shaman's own innate spiritual insight, as I am suggesting in the case of Freyja's *óðr*.

It seems likely that the other thing Freyja took, half the slain, relates to the Óðr myth obliquely: her partner in the taking of the slain, Óðinn, shares with her a skill in *seiðr*, and is said to gain knowledge from the dead; the mastery over the dead is probably directed at attaining mantic knowledge from them.

One further aspect of the myth is worth commenting on. In the kenning for gold, *Mardallar grátr*, "weeping of Mardǫll", the name adopted by Freyja, Mardǫll, points to a connection with the sea (*marr*). Indeed, the name may mean "Sea-gleaming" (if *dǫll* is parallel to the Old English *deall* ⟨qv⟩): in this case the name itself would be kenning for gold, and the goddess becomes identified with what stands as a metonym for her, her tears of gold, in the way that Gullveig stands for Freyja in *Vǫluspá*. For gold is also known as the "fire of ocean" (for example: *sævar bál*, "bonfire of the sea" (Glúmr Geirason, *Gráfeldardrápa* 9, c. 974, *Skj* B₁ 67), *fúrr fens* "fire of the fen" (Kormákr Ǫgmundarson, *Sigurðardrápa* 6, *Skj* B₁ 70)). The hall of Ægir, demigod of the sea, is lit by shining gold (*lýsigull*) in the prose introduction to *Lokasenna* and he furnishes the gods with a beer festival, after Þórr has acquired a huge brewing kettle from the giant Hymir. Doht (1974: 158–9), following F. Schröder's comparison with Indian analogues, shows that originally a version of the retrieval of the mead of poetry formed the core of this myth. That the retrieved mead – or, in the preserved myth, beer brewed in the retrieved vessel – should be offered to the gods by the god of the sea indicates a concept of the sea as a source of inspired wisdom and renewed life (cf. how in *Vellekla* 5 (*Skj* B₁ 117) poetry is called *Óðrœris alda hafs*, "wave of the sea of *óðr*-rouser"). The mention of the golden hall of Sindri and the hall of Brimir (Ægir) at the end of the world in *Vǫluspá* 36 hints at a faith in the continued brewing in the ocean of the mead of life, and hence the re-emergence of this sunken treasure, the "fire of ocean", realised as the fertile *aurr*, the mud that will form the new world,[15] as the bringing up of Freyja's jewel, the Brísingamen, symbolised the emergence of the present world.[16]

The myth of Óðr is alluded to in *Vǫluspá* 25, where the gods gather together to uncover who was responsible for polluting the air (by promising away the sun and moon, we are to infer) and giving away «Óðs mey», "Óðr's girl", to the giants: the story in question is Loki's bargain with the giants to build walls for Ásgarðr in exchange for these possessions of the gods (see *PE* II, 44–6). As Dronke notes (ibid.), the mention of Óðr presents Freyja as a weeping goddess, intimating a picture of desolation should she be lost to the giants – the basic notion of the fertility goddess weeping when fertility disappears from the wintry world is appealed to here; there may also be a plaintive suggestion that Óðr has disappeared, and now his wife is to follow. Yet there may also be a simpler point to using a description

[15] The land which Gefjun drew appears to be identified as a *djúprǫðull*, "sun of the deep", by Bragi in *Ragnarsdrápa* 13 (*Skj* B₁ 3; see P. and U. Dronke 1998: 39); "sun of the deep" certainly parallels kennings which characterised gold as "fire of the ocean".

[16] I am indebted to Ursula Dronke for communicating this observation to me (see also *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 36/8; P. and U. Dronke 1998: 37–45).

of the goddess which emphasises her affinity: we are, I believe, to infer that Óðr was an *áss*, standing, indeed, as a sort of double of the leader of the *æsir*, Óðinn, as Freyja stands, to an extent, as a double of Óðinn's wife, the prophetic Frigg. This being so, the union of Freyja and Óðr (viewed here primarily as an independent character rather than as a part of Freyja herself) would be part of the truce between *æsir* and *vanir*, and by breaking the union and sending Freyja off to the giants, Loki is in fact breaking the union of the two classes of gods.

Whilst these suggestions are, naturally, tentative, they gain some support from a more remote parallel myth, illustrating some of the essential aspects of the fertility goddess upon which the more complex image of Freyja and Óðr appears to be built, where fertility has, to an extent, been sublimated into the inspired wisdom indicated by Óðr's name. The motif of a wandering goddess of fertility, seeking a beloved companion, surely finds its closest analogue in the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, recounted in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.[17] Persephone was playing with some of her girlfriends, when Hades seized her and dragged her down to the underworld to be his consort. Her mother, Demeter, set off, weeping, to wander the earth in search of her. During this time the seeds did not grow – this is a typical consequence of the absence of a goddess of fertility, and may indeed be a kernel of the myth; it is not apparent in the briefly recounted Norse myth, but could well have been present. It was while on her search that Demeter instituted the Eleusinian mysteries (corresponding, perhaps, to the magical practice of *seiðr* taught by Freyja), which promised some sort of better existence in the afterlife; they were somehow connected to Demeter's almost successful attempt, foiled at the last minute by the ignorant intervention of the lad's mother, to make the youth Demophon immortal while on her travels, by bathing him in fire each night and anointing him with ambrosia (the implication is that participation in the mysteries will not make someone immortal, but will make them more like an immortal). The hymn adds an interesting note, that Demeter also instituted a perpetual battle at Eleusis (which was enacted ritually each year), a parallel to the Norse Hjaðningavíg instituted as a result of Freyja's actions (according to *Sǫrla þáttr* ch. 2); both Demeter and Freyja show the two faces of the fertility goddess as giver of both life and death. In the end, Hades is forced to relinquish Persephone, since otherwise no crops would grow on the earth, a task which Demeter

[17] We might also compare the myths of Inanna and Dumuzi, and Isis and Osiris, which are closer in that they involve the separation and loss of the male consort, who is sought by his wife. Whilst some versions, or fragments, of these myths are recorded at a much earlier date than the Greek texts were composed, there are many problems with their interpretation and the establishment of early forms (for example, the motif of the wandering of Isis after Osiris is likely to be influenced by or even modelled on the myth of Demeter presented here). There was clearly considerable cultural contact throughout the Middle East, and probably beyond, from the earliest times, but the topic is too complex to consider here. The Greek text is at least preserved complete, and dates from a fairly early pre-classical period within the development of Greek literature, so may be approached with somewhat more certainty than Mesopotamian or Egyptian myths.

refused to care for until her daughter was free. However, Hades tricked the girl into eating some pomegranate seeds, so that she must return for a period each year to the world of the dead. Clearly, Persephone is a sort of alter ego of Demeter herself, representing the new growth in spring, which cannot start while she is in the world of the dead, just as, I suggest, Óðr could be seen as an alter ego of Freyja, without which she could not fulfil her prophetic role, or, on a more basic level of myth, her office of overseeing the fertile well-being of the world.

Óðinn between the fires

The prose introduction to *Grímnismál* (excerpted in ⟨50⟩) explains how Óðinn and Frigg have a wager about what sort of man King Geirrøðr, Óðinn's protégé, is; Frigg cheats by sending her handmaiden Fulla to warn the king to beware a certain wandering magician, who is, of course, Óðinn in disguise under the name Grímnir, "Masked". Óðinn arrives at Geirrøðr's, dressed in a dark cloak, and saying little about himself. The king tortures him to make him speak, by placing him between two fires for eight nights. The king's son Agnarr offers Óðinn a drink, saying that the torture was wrong. The fire reaches Óðinn's cloak, which is the cue for the poem to begin. (In due course, Agnarr is rewarded for his kindness to Óðinn by being given the kingship, while Geirrøðr is punished with death.)

The poem itself begins with Grímnir declaring how hot the fire is, so close it burns his cloak; he has sat for eight nights there and only Agnarr has served him a beverage, for which he will be well rewarded. The poem then moves on to its series of mythic information, and only returns to its narrative framework in st. 45:

Svipom hefi ek nú ypt	I have now raised *svipir*[18]
fyr sigtíva sonom,	before the sons of the victorious deities,
við þat skal vilbiǫrg vaka;	with that shall the desired deliverance arise;

[18] It is unclear what the *svipir* are that Óðinn lifts at the beginning of the stanza; the word is recorded in several senses: *a.* "Countenance": thus Óðinn is pictured as lifting his face. However: i. all the other instances of *svipr* cited by Cleasby and Vigfússon (1957, *s.v.*) and by Fritzner (1886–1972, *s.v.*) are in the singular; ii. the meaning "countenance" is unparalleled: all the other examples approaching this sense are qualified by what the person concerned looks like, so *svipr* rather means "resemblance". No resemblance is defined in this stanza, so the statement becomes meaningless. *b.* "Fleeting appearance", but again it is always stated who (or what) the fleeting appearance is of; in the present case, the appearances could be the fleeting mythic scenes presented in the previous stanzas, though the word does not seem to be recorded with this "cinematic" sort of reference. *c.* "(Critical) moment": it is difficult to see in what sense these could be "lifted". *d.* "Sudden loss": Óðinn would be referring to his set-backs at Geirrøðr's, from which deliverance now arises as Agnarr brings him refreshment (the *vilbjǫrg* may pun on the dual sense of "deliverance" and "provisions" found in *bjǫrg*). *e.* "Swift movement, swipe", as of a weapon, this being the core meaning of the word. This suits the literal sense of *yppt*: Óðinn would be pictured as lifting his weapon, presumably his spear which guaranteed victory, at the head of the gods (or, as he is alone at Geirrøðr's, as their representative), from which ensues his overthrow of Geirrøðr and his release, celebrated by the gods at a feast provided by Ægir.

ǫllom ásom	that will bring in
þat skal inn koma	all the *æsir*
Ægis bekki á,	to Ægir's bench,
Ægis drekko at.	to Ægir's drink.

The details of this stanza remain obscure, but if it belongs to the narrative framework at all (and is not borrowed in poetic tradition without adaptation from some unrelated incident) it may mark the point where Óðinn turns on his oppressor, raising himself to strike, and the deliverance may be that brought by Agnarr, which will make the gods rejoice at Óðinn's being freed (with a feast at Ægir's, such as forms the setting for *Lokasenna*).

The narrative of *Grímnismál* is difficult to analyse, as it appears both to be the result of various reworkings over the course of presumably oral transmission, and (perhaps as a result) not to be particularly coherent or well worked-out. Hence various interpretations have been suggested. Fleck (1970: 46) sums up what he sees as the poem's primary function:

> In summary, according to my interpretation the *Rígsþula*, *Hyndlolióð* and *Grímnismál* offer us three variants of the same functional narrative. A godly figure accepts the individual consecration of a royal younger or youngest son. He then provides his human protégé with that numinous knowledge necessary to decide the succession in the latter's favor despite the principle of primogeniture. In one case the ritual education consists of runic knowledge, in another of royal genealogy, and in the third of a magic spell.[19]

As the "initiatory" experience of the god, under this understanding, is subordinate to the demonstration of Agnarr's worthiness to be king, it is reasonable to expect the perspicacity of the account from an Óðinnic viewpoint to be similarly subordinate, an expectation realised in the varying interpretations proffered. A similar point can be made when the more general purpose of the poem is considered, namely to provide a collection of pieces of mythic lore, to which the narrative framework is subsidiary.

Why does Óðinn, and not Agnarr, undergo the torture that results in numinous knowledge (which is necessary for kingship)? Fleck (1971*b*: 61, 64) suggests:

> For each rite actually performed by humans for the purpose of amassing numinous knowledge, we should assume that a mythological example, leading to the desired results, existed. [. . .] I submit that the innermost frame surrounding this core is a myth of Óðinn performing a first exemplary ordeal between the fires and thereby gaining the great wealth of knowledge carried in the nucleus.

Fleck follows F. Schröder (1958: 374) in seeing a rite of suffering in *Grímnismál* comparable to the Indian *tapas*, where the person undertaking it watches through the night by a fire, which is intended to increase inner strength; Schröder (ibid. 371) also mentions an Indian trial for a warrior involving fasting, and being set between two trees unable to move, while

[19] Under Fleck's definition, the gaining of knowledge from a god, as occurs in the case of the younger Agnarr, counts as a spell.

herbs were burnt, after which he collapses as if dead in the smoke and heat, and only then is given a drink.

Fire can symbolise a variety of things, but essentially it signifies *destruction*, and sometimes an associated *reconstruction*. In *Grímnismál*, the main motif is one of attempted destruction of a witch with fire (though this is stated explicitly only in the prose introduction): the same motif is found in *Vǫluspá* with Gullveig, who, like Óðinn in *Grímnismál*, is indestructible by the fire.[20] A parallel to the framework of *Grímnismál* is found among the Tatars, who made foreigners walk between two fires, to disable any witchcraft they were endowed with (Harva 1933: 157). Not succumbing to the fire is seen, naturally, as a sign that the witchcraft powers are stronger than what is trying to destroy them; hence shamans sometimes prove themselves by for example taking burning embers in their hands (Eliade 1972: 257, 316 n. 74), but such a test constitutes a universal motif of proof of greater than natural powers (divine or shamanic).

As a symbol of passage marked by the destruction of the body in cremation, fire commonly bounds the world of the dead. Thus in the Finnish folk tradition of *itkuvirret*, "mourning songs", the land of the dead is situated beyond fiery rapids (Haavio 1952: 92). In Norse, examples of the fiery otherworld barrier include the howe fires of *Hervarar saga* ch. 4, the howe of Kárr in *Grettis saga* ch. 18, the fires surrounding Sigrdrífa in the prose to *Sigrdrífumál*, the wall of fire the giantess has to surmount on her way to Hel in *Egils saga einhenda* ch. 13 and the fiery barrier to be crossed by Skírnir to reach Gerðr in *Skírnismál* 8. As an extension of this idea, it is natural to find in necromantic rites a fire used to summon the dead: in *Færeyinga saga* ch. 41 ⟨74⟩, Þrándr lights a great fire, sets up four gateways (*grindr*), and sits on a stool between the gateways and the fire; various dead men, or their apparitions, then appear, showing thereby the manner of their death; Þrándr breathes tiredly after the performance ⟨GATEWAYS, YAWNING⟩.

Shamanic practice extends and ritualises the otherworld fire into a means of refinement and initiatory rebirth, as in the Nganasan accounts ⟨16, 17⟩. Fire may then continue within the performance of kamlania as a means of contact with the spirit world: heat, in the form of sweating, and shamanic ecstasy are linked by Meuli (1975: 831–3); the hot-steam sauna was used by Finnish sorcerers until recently (see the seventeenth-century account given by Siikala 1990: 191) – the Finnish for "sauna steam", *löyly*, is cognate with Hungarian *lél*, "spirit" (Voigt 2001); the Khanty shamans of the eighteenth century were reported by Zuev to prophesy in a mist of blue smoke (Balázs 1968: 60):

[20] The Swedes dedicated King Óláfr trételgja to Óðinn by burning him in his house in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 43, but it is doubtful if this should be seen as re-enacting a prototypical Óðinnic sacrifice (with the implication that the god underwent a similar sacrifice); it primarily exemplifies the widespread motif of "burning someone in", which has no religious connotations; cf. other examples in *Ynglinga saga*: ch. 14 (King Vísburr), ch. 36 (King Ingjaldr burns in six other kings), ch. 39 (King Ingjaldr burns in King Granmarr), ch. 40 (Ingjaldr and his daughter burn themselves in). Only the last of these could conceivably be viewed as a sacrifice.

> Divining is performed as follows: The fortune-teller or shaman binds himself, lies on the earth, makes faces and then begins to rave. Beside a big fire which is burning in the tent he utters unintelligible words while he is waiting for the devil to appear. It is believed that by answering the shaman's questions the devil foretells the future and shows him where the best hunting grounds are to be found. If a hunter gets into trouble, the devil will show him how to get out of it. The people who are eagerly waiting for the answer shout incessantly, beat kettles and bowls and make a terrible noise around the shaman until a blue mist or smoke appears above him. Then the shaman disperses those who are standing around him. Anyhow, he is always standing in smoke, because at the place where he mutters his words there is a fire smouldering all the time. The shaman arises and jumps up and down like a maniac. Sometimes after this the shamans remain unconscious and insensible for more than an hour. When they regain their senses, they give cunning answers to the questions or say anything that occurs to their mind, or are simply raving. They relate in great detail how they saw the devil and what happened to them.

An Englishman, Richard Johnson, travelling among the Samoyeds (probably Nenets) on the Pechora, reported a kamlanie he witnessed in 1556 ⟨19⟩, where the shaman wore a special head-dress, and performed part of the ceremony on a chair, screened off behind a cloth, with a kettle boiling beside him. This combines the heat, in the form of the kettle, with a hooded/concealed shaman, who attains diving knowledge, revealing the will of the spirits, just as "the Masked", Grímnir, reveals his divine knowledge when the fires nearly consume his cloak and his person.[21] Just as the Samoyed shaman was distinguished by his head-dress and by the special covering used in the kamlanie, so too is Óðinn distinguished: *Grímnir* implies a concealing hood, and particular note is made of the dark cloak («í feldi blám») – dark clothing being a commonplace motif to intimate death – the kindling of which sets the action of the poem in motion. Hence both heat and cloak act as symbols of potent access to the otherworld, in both Samoyed and Norse accounts.[22] The notion of achieving inspired insight through concealment beneath a cloak is implied in Norse tradition in the

[21] Kettles are also mentioned in *Grímnismál*. However, it seems unlikely to me that the passage in question, the obscure stanza 42, witnesses to the power of heat to "open worlds" in the sense of unveiling arcane perceptions about them; neither Fritzner (1886–1972, *s.v.*) nor Cleasby and Vigfússon (1957, *s.v.*) record *opinn* in the sense of "revealed (as to its inner nature)". Ralph (1972) presents persuasive arguments for reading the stanza as «Ullar hylli hefr ok allra goða hverr, / er tekr fyrstr á funa, / þvíat opnir heimar verða um ása sonom, / þá er hefia af hvera», "The cauldron of all the gods also has Ullr's favour, which first touches the fire, since worlds will be laid bare around the sons of the gods when they take away the cauldrons." The context of information given in surrounding stanzas is mythic, and the reference here is likely to be too; *Sólarljóð* 78 mentions a Sólkatla, "Sun cauldron". Fritzner records *opna jǫrð* in the sense "to reveal the earth, lay it bare by removing the vegetation", which at least comes close to the sense of "lay bare" which is implied by the devastating removing of the cauldron from the sun, which Ralph takes the stanza to imply (the cauldron thus functioning like the shield Svalinn, which *Grímnismál* 38 says protects the sun from burning the earth up).

[22] It is not necessary to seek a genetic connection between Samoyed and Norse traditions, but it is not impossible that one existed: the Samoyeds lived on the borders of the area of northern Russia known to the Norsemen as Bjarmaland, so contact for purposes of trade is not unlikely.

tale in *Íslendingabók* ch. 7 of how the lawspeaker Þorgeirr followed this practice when determining how Christianity should be adopted in Iceland (it also parallels *Grímnismál* in the enforced taciturnity): «En síðan es menn kvómu í búðir, þá lagðisk hann niðr Þorgeirr ok breiddi feld sinn á sik ok hvílði þann dag allan ok nóttina eptir ok kvað ekki orð. En of morguninn eptir settisk hann upp ok gørði orð, at menn skyldi ganga til lǫgbergis», "And when men came to their tents, Þorgeirr laid himself down and spread his cloak upon him and rested all that day and the night after and spoke not a word. But on the morning after he rose up and spoke a word, that people should go to the law rock".[23] The magical power of the hood is indicated for example in weather control in the late-fourteenth-century *Víglundar saga* ch. 12: Kjǫlvǫr is introduced as a woman versed in magic, and in fine weather she «fór upp á hús ok veifði kofra sínum í austrætt, ok þykknaði skjótt veðrit», "went up on top of the house and waved her hood towards the east, and immediately the weather worsened". A specific connection with the world of the dead is found in an account given by Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* VII.1.5–6 ⟨108⟩, of a magician woman who wraps the hero Hadingus in her cloak and steals him away on a trip to the underworld.

Just how far this array of symbolism plays into the meaning of *Grímnismál* is open to debate, however. Thus Schjødt (1988) rejects Fleck's arguments concerning *tapas* and kingship initiation. He objects that it should be Agnarr, not Óðinn, undergoing the rite of accession to kingship through knowledge. Nor is there any indication that Óðinn gained the knowledge displayed in the poem through suffering: he merely communicates some knowledge he already has. There is no ritual death in *Grímnismál*, and hence there can be no ritual rebirth (such as might justify viewing it as shamanic). For Schjødt, the differences from the rite recounted in *Hávamál* – the failure to complete nine nights of torment, the drink offered after eight nights – are deliberate attempts by the poet to dissociate his work from *Hávamál*.

Yet Schjødt's argument that Óðinn waited eight nights merely to give Geirrøðr a chance to repent, and then acts once Agnarr has stepped into the breach and proved himself worthy to receive the divine knowledge, is weak. Fleck's and Schröder's argument that Óðinn is indeed undergoing

[23] The interpretation of lying under a cloak as a means of gaining supernatural insight is broadly in line with the arguments of Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson (1999: 103–23), though Jón Hnefill's arguments are rather loose. Thus the Sámi shaman's actions in a kamlanie, lying as if dead and communing with the spirit world, are only broadly similar, and do not suggest any particular influence upon the Icelandic practice: we have no indication, for example, that Þorgeirr sent his soul out while under the cloak. Óðinn's lying as if dead while his soul wandered off in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 ⟨112⟩ is probably irrelevant: it is likely itself to be inspired by Sámi practices (Chapter 17). The later folk practice noted by Jón Árnason, in which someone seeking special knowledge could obtain it from the dead by staying out over night wrapped in a skin, is perhaps a remnant of the same sort of tradition employed by Þorgeirr. Relevant too is the account of *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, in which Þorgrímr pulled his cloak over his head and slept, during which it is made clear he travelled in spirit to the farm of his enemy Atli to spy it out: the essential point of similarity is that spreading the cloak and resting facilitates the acquisition of knowledge which could not be gained by normal physical means.

a *tapas* is more convincing here. But it needs qualification. The way the poem works appears to be more subtle than either Fleck or Schjødt admit. It does not portray an initiation on Óðinn's part, but a series of *allusions* to initiation; it is careful to ensure that what takes place in the poem always falls short of what is alluded to, leaving the actual initiatory experiences of the god (such as that on the gallows-tree) as a numinous, but unencroached upon, mythic backdrop. Thus Schjødt is correct to point out the references to the nine-night rite of *Hávamál* 138–9 ⟨48*c*⟩, but wrong to read these as a rejection of that rite: rather, they are a pointed reminder that what is going on in the poem *partakes* in that rite, without supplanting it. Similarly, the *revelation* of knowledge does not quite match the *acquisition* of runes or poetic power, but again surely alludes to it in its very curtailment of the integrity or completeness of the latter motif.

The main outcome of the actions that occur in the poem is the selection of Agnarr as future king; the lore that most of the poem is devoted to imparting is presumably (but not explicitly) what the god views him as worthy of learning in his new position. The point of the allusions to Óðinn's myths of suffering to gain knowledge must be to emphasise how this lore now being presented by Grímnir approaches in its importance that gained by the god in his greatest sacrificial feats. This is a somewhat different interpretation from that of Fleck cited above, and one that avoids its difficulties in trying to explain why Óðinn, not Agnarr, undertakes the initiatory rite – the point being that no initiatory rite actually takes place on Óðinn's part.

Another reason the poet may have had for presenting the suffering of the god as a sort of *ritus interruptus* is the human setting – though here again there is no direct indication in the poem itself; an earthly setting by definition necessitates a level of imperfection for the human recipients of divine grace – just as Demeter failed, by a whisker, in her task of ridding the infant Demophon of mortality through his nightly ember bath, but still taught the arts of agriculture to his brother Triptolemus, who remains a mortal culture hero, so too must Agnarr, the human heir of the rite (and one, like Triptolemus, who was an "accidental" beneficiary), be just short of the perfection which might have accrued from a sacrificial feat fully accomplished on the god's part.

The Demeter myth presents the deity clearly as an *imparter* of knowledge (and attempted immortality), not as an *acquirer* of it, which is the role of the human, Triptolemus. This is the case too in *Grímnismál*. The additional feature the Norse poem adds is the unwitting torture of the god. Óðinn's position may be compared to that of Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, imprisoned, released, and taking vengeance.[24] The ritual forces Óðinn to reveal his

[24] Much of the material considered in this chapter might be compared with the events of the *Bacchae*; a detailed consideration lies beyond my scope, but a few points may be mentioned. *a*. The ecstatic practices of Dionysus's followers, despised by but impregnable to the authorities, forms the background, just as *Vǫluspá* sets the scene of the ecstatic *seiðr* upsetting the authority of the gods, who are powerless against it. *b*. Dionysus wanders about, winning over devotees, and thus threatening the position of the traditional gods; his followers are very largely women: this parallels closely the wanderings of Heiðr, establishing the cult

divine nature, rather than enabling him to *acquire* numinous knowledge (as Fleck suggests); as in the *Bacchae*, the lore revealed by the god becomes the property of his cult followers, the maenads in Greek, Agnarr in Norse.

It might well be argued that it is only the chance collocation of these two themes of the god as instructor and as torture victim that produces something that happens to look like an initiation rite. The poem does not even actually say that Óðinn's outpouring of mythic lore is the result of his torture – this is inference; it would be reasonable, alternatively, to suggest that the lore is enunciated solely in response to Agnarr's acts of sympathy towards the god, in which case we simply have a case of divine instruction of the chosen mortal, with no initiation, and no *tapas*. This would, however, be to ignore the points made above, that the poem appears to allude to Óðinn's acquisition of knowledge through suffering in other myths.

Any interpretation of the poem is, as noted above, bound to be tentative. We need not, I think, shy away from admitting a certain level of confusion arising from the structural weaknesses in the poem: there may simply be too many things going on – the punishment of the witch between fires, the wandering masked god, the divine revelation, the initiation into kingship – which have not been worked out that well in the extant version – as Fleck (1971*b*: 65) points out: "The narrative units mesh with difficulty and the author is forced to sacrifice overlapping motifs."

Other interpretations than of the poem as an ancient heathen rite may be possible; the Christian element has not been investigated here, for example: Óðinn could be seen as a Christ-figure, undertaking a kenotic sojourn among men who then come close to killing him, and blessing the one who stands up for him in his last tribulation, then returning in triumph from his torment, defeating the one who had imposed it on him (primarily the devil, in Christ's case). Yet a Christian reading meets with the same problems as many other interpretations: lack of direct support in the text.

Whatever the extent of Christian influence, the poem, in structural terms, can only be regarded as at most an allusive reworking of sometimes ancient elements: it does not present, nor does it pretend to present, an actual rite, whether of initiation into a shamanic state or of any other sort.

of *seiðr* amongst women, and thus winning the recognition of the *vanir* as gods. *c.* Pentheus suspects the maenads of lewd acts, which is perhaps implied of the "bad women" of *Vǫluspá*. *d.* The wandering of Dionysus is also to be compared with that of Óðinn "in the form of a wizard", when he practised *seiðr*, and when moreover he brought the charge of *ergi*, effeminacy, upon himself; apart from the shame which the god deliberately brings upon Pentheus by luring him into dressing as a woman, effeminacy is a constant attribute of Dionysus himself in the *Bacchae*. It focuses upon his feminine hair-style, which was also possibley a feature of fertility demi-gods in the Germanic area (the Haddingjar), and loose hair was associated specifically with witches; Óðinn himself is described as *fallhaddr*, "loose haired", in *Berudrápa* (*Skj* B_1 42). *e.* Dionysus reveals his divinity when he is bound by Pentheus: he breaks free in flames which engulf the royal palace; cf. Óðinn in *Grímnismál* revealing his divinity through knowledge as useless to Geirrøðr as Dionysus's is to Pentheus; just like Dionysus, Óðinn conceals his identity, calling himself *Grímnir*, "Masked".

Conclusion

The four myths of Óðinn undergoing suffering to gain supernatural knowledge show a superficial resemblance to shamanic rites of initiation. However, closer examination has revealed that, while certain details are indeed comparable, over all the Norse myths lack many of the typical elements of shamanic initiation. The one that comes closest is Óðinn's hanging on the gallows-tree, which may perhaps justifiably be considered a sort of initiatory rite. Even so, to call it shamanic would require us to be able to show that it fitted into a pattern of ritual practice and belief such as is found in shamanic societies; here we again find that while many elements typical of shamanism are found in Norse sources, it is difficult to assemble them into a cohesive system which could be regarded as reflecting a practised ritual belief system. It is notable, for example, that while Óðinn is said to have practised *seiðr*, this ostensibly shamanic magic practice is not linked to his "initiatory" feats, nor indeed do we have any indication of what sort of initiation there may have been (if any) to become a practitioner of *seiðr*.

17. Performance

Eurasian

THE KAMLANIE

A shaman is defined essentially by what he does rather than what he is, and the kamlanie, during which he establishes contact with the spirit world for varying purposes, is one of his main actions. From the many accounts of the shamanic kamlanie which have been recorded, a few examples will be presented in sufficient detail, it is hoped, to communicate the most significant, and varying, details, and to provide a bank of comparative material against which the Norse accounts may be judged. In principle, the Sámi accounts should be of most relevance to the Norse, in view of the geographical proximity, but they are less detailed than accounts recorded in more recent times (but from geographically more remote areas); the rites of the Finnish *tietäjä* are also of value, but the *tietäjä* is not a typical example of a classic Siberian shaman; an Ewenki account is therefore given in the Sources section to provide a fuller picture of a classic kamlanie. Even here, however, the actual words used in the rite are not recorded (accounts which actually record the songs and other words are very rare), and for this reason a Yukagir example is also given.

The general structure of the kamlanie

The structure of the shamanic kamlanie varies from place to place and from occasion to occasion. Siikala (1978: 321) outlines the typical content, as far as this is possible, as follows:

> The shamanic séance is a functional system aimed at executing a certain task, its fundamental being one of communication. The dramatic tension of the rite passes between the audience and the supranormal via the shaman: he bears information from both sides to be used in achieving the real goal of the rite and resolving a critical situation, for example, by means of some suitable sacrifice. The events, the acts, and the episodes or sequences are connected in a logical order from the point of view of the rite as a whole. Since the shamanic rite is specifically a process based on communication, the structure of the rite reflects the interaction of those attending and those imagined as participating in the rite. Or rather: because the shaman must create some of the participants by means of his ecstatic role-taking capacity, the structure of the rite reflects the construction, manifestation and,,, through this,,, contact with role figures as well as the sending away of figures created.

The chief episodes reflecting the course of this communication, the sequences of the rite, stand out clearly in the accounts of kamlania analysed:

1. Preparatory stage
2. Actualisation of the spirit-helpers
3. Meeting the spirit-helpers
4. Meeting the disease spirit
5. The shaman's journey
6. Deactualisation of the spirit-helpers
7. Termination of the shamanising.

Other ritual functions may occur in addition to these.

The kamlanie is typically a meeting between the shaman and various spirits. It is, of course, the shaman who makes the presence of these spirits manifest; this may take place in a number of different ways: *role-identification, dual role* or *description of counter-role*. Combinations of these methods could, however, occur in the course of a kamlanie. Role-identification is particularly common where the ancestor shaman spirit plays a major role as initiator of the novice shaman; the ancestor shaman spirit enters the shaman in a kamlanie and speaks through him.

The Finnish kamlanie

Finnish shamanism is not generally included within the ambit of classic Siberian shamanism, or is at best regarded as an attenuated form of it, but it is nonetheless valuable to present an outline of the ritual working of the *tietäjä*, particularly as the Finns, along with the Sámi, were in closest contact with Scandinavians of the peoples considered here.

Siikala (2002: 99) presents a schema of the *tietäjä*'s ritual healing as follows (though elements could be repeated, occur in different orders or be supplemented with other material):

A Summoning or raising of the *tietäjä*'s own *luonto*
B Summoning of the spirit helpers
C Stating the reason for the request for help
D Self-protection – the *tietäjä* seeks to safeguard himself
E The *tietäjä*'s boast
F Inquiry into the origin of the illness
G Naming the opponent
H The *tietäjä* sings and bewitches his opponent
I The *tietäjä*, equipped with special *väki* force, attacks the illness-agent
J Description of the *tietäjä*'s mythical animal helpers
K Banishing the illness-agent
L The *tietäjä*'s final struggle against the illness
M The *tietäjä*'s powers: there is a superior power working through him
N Healing clichés

In many forms of shamanism the shaman's soul is the operative agent during (parts of) the kamlanie. In Finland the *tietäjä* made use of his *luonto* ⟨QV⟩, "nature", which in certain respects equates to the shaman's soul, and of *väki*, a dynamistic force inherent in certain objects and localities. Stark (2006: ch. 9) analyses the dynamistic forces of the *tietäjä*'s and his

community's world in further detail. She emphasises the main point in her introductory remarks (ibid. 254):

> Rather than securely enclosed and well defined as separate from its environment, the human body in rural Finland was conceived as porous and easily invaded by harmful forces from the outside world [...] as *a body in flux and motion*, a body defined through what we might call *energies* and *forces*, although these are not the terms used by nineteenth-century rural inhabitants, who spoke of *luonto* and *väki*. These terms described dynamic qualities seen to inhabit both the human self and a wide range of objects and locations in the natural and cultural environment: forest, water, animals, fire, iron tools etc. According to the older folk beliefs, numerous beings carried within themselves supernatural power charges, and some of these power charges were able to infect humans.

These forces are further specified (ibid. 257):
Väki (pl. *väet*): dynamic force existing in certain entities and locations in the environment.
Luonto (pl. *luonnot*): dynamic force emanating from the human self and interacting with the environment.
Viha (pl. *vihat*): physical illness or pain caused by *väki* entering body through wounds in the skin.
Nenä (pl. *nenät*): physical illness or pain caused by *väki* entering body through weakened outer boundaries of the *luonto*.

Further points of interest are worth noting (ibid. 260–5, 270, 278, 283; 441–4 on *lempi*). Everyone has *luonto*, which in its non-raised state was thought to be either hard and strong, or soft and weak. The *luonto* might be "raised" (brought to the fore and empowered); this could normally be achieved only by *tietäjät*, and it was then thought to be hard as long as the *tietäjä* had teeth. Particularly interesting is the imagery of swelling applied to *luonto* when raised, which achieves a state of such power that it banishes an afflicting *väki* by its presence (ibid. 275): a *tietäjä* healing a lizard bite is described: "one swells up and speaks angrily, so that the [lizard's] *luonto* grows faint"; "then the *tietäjä* becomes so *luonnokas* (filled with *luonto*) that when he heals a sick person, the illness flees merely from his raw *luonto*". By contrast, someone with weak *luonto* was easily infected by *väki*. Strong *luonto* was linked to male potency, and helped men resist dangerous *väki*. Women who could raise *luonto* and control *väki* were regarded as exceptional, and sometimes developed secondary male characteristics like a moustache. Girls (and not boys), however, were possessed of *lempi*, which made them sexually attractive – or, if they lacked it, it could (like *luonto*) be raised through magical ceremonies. A person's *luonto* could be hardened by anger, and become so hard that it would open up the *luonto* boundaries of another and infect them. Thus two people fighting did not infect each other, because both hardened their *luonnot*, but a third person nearby could be infected. When "raised", the *luonto* was also called *haltija*; however, the terms were not wholly synonymous: one difference was that the *haltija* could exist outside the body (but nearby) and move ahead or behind it, and could warn of *väki* danger (though in some cases the *luonto* is also

said to warn the *teitäjä* of dangers or to give information).[1] One *väki* could neutralise another, and like *luonnot, väet* were hard or soft. The *tietäjä* tried to persuade an infecting *väki* that it was soft rather than hard, and hence would submit to his authority. *Nenä* is probably related to a base meaning of "take offence, become angry"; it often resulted from angering the *väki* of something, such as a well. But it could also result from thinking in the wrong way about something (for example, residents of a cemetery without reverence), or from falling down: lying on the ground was regarded as a severe loss of control, and precautions had to be taken when doing so intentionally, such as asking permission of the ground. Stark (ibid. 274) notes: "inadvertent acts were regarded as a loss of agency, which in turn was seen as *a collapse of the distinction between self and 'other'*"; the other was always trying to become part of the self, so it could cross the boundary at such moments.

Stark's analysis of early-modern Finnish rural mentalities goes beyond what has usually been undertaken in connection with shamanism. We may suspect that comparable systems of belief existed elsewhere, and would alter our perception of shamanism if they had been recorded and analysed. Humphrey's presentation of *tengger, ejin* and *suli* among the Daurs (noted above) suggests points of comparison with the Finnish beliefs. Shirokogoroff (1935: 51–2) noted beliefs among the Ewenki, some of which are at least suggestive of underlying similarities: for example, all things have what he terms an *animus* (he notes that in Ewenki there is no actual word for it) which defines it, and which is lost when an object is broken (and hence broken objects were put in graves so their animus would go with the departed person); the Ewenki *māryla* ⟨QV⟩ spiritual fence may also be seen as a strengthened boundary of the shaman's own *luonto* (or its equivalent).

The Sámi kamlanie

The accounts of Sámi shamanism present us with short snatches of information. One of the earliest descriptions of a kamlanie to give any detail is that of Samuel Rheen, written in 1671, on the Sámi of the Lule area, supplemented by that of Olaus Graan from 1672 ⟨18⟩: the drum and the bone drum-hammer are described, along with brass rings, which jump around on the drum's skin (clearly, a divinatory rite is being described); the shaman sings a *juoigos* in a high voice, accompanied by the audience, who sing of the place they want to get news of. Then the shaman falls down as if dead, while those present continue singing, reminding him of his mission. Once he comes round, exhausted, he tells the people what he has found out by his drumming.

[1] This statement is, however, problematic: the existence of parallel terms, *luonto* and *haltija*, is probably in large part the result of traditional formulaic variation within the *tietäjä*'s verse repertoire, and a consideration of distinctions between them needs to take account of variations between individual singers, between geographical locations, and between different verses sung by one singer. See Frog (forthcoming) on this matter.

Using all such accounts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the general sequence of the Sámi kamlanie is analysed and presented by Bäckman and Hultkrantz (*SLS* 97–101), who list the original sources for each element. There is some variation between accounts, indicating that the details of the kamlanie varied. The following is a composite analysis, but it represents a framework within which these variations occurred.

1. The shaman prepares himself for a day beforehand by fasting.
2. The drum is brought in through the sacred door of the hut opposite the ordinary entrance.
3. The shaman takes an intoxicant – lye or brandy.[2]
4. He undresses himself and sits naked.
5. He beats the drum and starts singing.
6. He is accompanied by the men and women present, the men in a high and the women in a low voice; the singing (*juoigos*) is mostly inarticulate, but includes words referring to the places to be visited by the shaman in trance, or to details of the journey.
7. The shaman runs around like a madman, holding glowing embers and cutting himself.
8. After the shaman has drummed for at most a quarter of an hour, he turns black, walks on his knees with his hands on his hips, sings a *juoigos* in a high voice, and falls down exhausted as if dead.
9. The shaman stops breathing; the return of his breathing indicates he is leaving trance. The depth of the trance corresponds to the extent of his freedom in the spirit realms. The trance lasts a half to one hour.
10. Destinations of the shaman's soul include the land of the dead, to retrieve the souls of the sick, or bring back a spirit to guard the reindeer herds; other supernatural places (Sájva), to gather information; distant places in this world; possibly also heaven.
11. Trance seems to be involved when he sends out helping spirits to fight.
12. The journey of the shaman's free soul takes place in the company of his helping spirits.[3] The *basseváre lådde* bird guides the shaman's spirit down to the underworld, and speeds him back afterwards through mountains and dales. The *basseváre guolle* fish appears after the shaman sings a *juoigos* for it; its length varies according to the length of the song. The shaman rides on its back to the underworld, and it helps the shaman fight the dead in the attempt to wrest the sick person's soul from them; one account says that the fish is responsible for the actual stealing of the soul, as well as for guarding the shaman throughout the trance (Sigvard Kildal 1807: 456).
13. The choir. Whilst he is in trance, watchmen are left to guard the shaman's body, consisting, it seems, of a choir ordered by the shaman. At the

[2] Clearly, brandy is a late feature; lye may be earlier, but it is also possible that no intoxicant was taken in earlier periods – it is by no means uncommon to find shamans in other areas that take nothing at all to enter trance.

[3] When the shaman sent the *basseváre lådde* to the holy mountains for the purpose of calling the anthropomorphic spirits there for consultation, he did so before the kamlanie proper (*SLS* 43). The shaman did not fall into a trance, but sang a *juoigos*.

beginning of the kamlanie all those present apparently take part in the singing, but a special choir is appointed for continuing operations: this is in several accounts said to consist of women or one woman. Singing continues throughout the kamlanie, the purpose being to remind the shaman of his mission. Some sources indicate that the singing is concentrated or confined to the final stages of the trance, and the aim here is to wake the shaman; it seems it is the particular responsibility of one girl to perform this waking song, and her task involves searching for the shaman's soul, so she must herself go into trance. Another shaman is also able to wake a shaman in trance.[4]

14. As the shaman returns, the choir starts to sing again, and he rises, puts the drum to his ear and beats it slowly; he then stops and sits thinking, before recounting his journey, and what sacrifice he has had to arrange to secure the soul of the sick person.

15. He also praises the girl who woke him and sings to her, alluding to his genitals and her sexual qualities.

An Ewenki kamlanie

Shirokogoroff presents a fairly detailed picture of Ewenki shamanic ritual, though without any original text; one of his examples is given in ⟨20⟩, which involved the sacrifice of a reindeer and the delivery of the animal's soul to the otherworld. As in the Sámi kamlania, it is striking how much the ceremony involves interaction between the shaman and the participating audience. It is a distinctive feature of Ewenki shamanism (shared with other more southerly forms such as that of the Buryats) to find a high degree of ceremonial elaboration and ritual particularisation (note the many precise representations of helping spirits, and their careful arrangement into even numbers, for example). Another feature which emerges from this, as from many accounts of Ewenki shamanism, is the notion of constant spiritual threat from spirits outside the shaman's control, which are likely to assail him on his trance journey (this is not, of course, confined to the Ewenki, but appears to be a particularly pronounced feature among them).

An Ewenki shamanic song

In the shamanic song cited in ⟨21⟩ the shaman is setting off downwards along the shamanic river, along with his assistant spirits. The song has various functions. It is presented as reportage, a vivid description of the key moments of the shaman's journey to the otherworld, and thus serves to convince the audience that the shaman is really carrying out his task. Yet the method is not so much informative as allusive, a reflection of its visionary nature: the shaman is actually experiencing a journey predetermined

[4] An assistant with the responsibility of waking (or assisting in the waking of) the shaman is found elsewhere, for example among the Yukagirs ⟨22⟩ and the Ewenki (Anisimov 1963*a*: 102–3).

by the traditional tribal otherworld cosmography – hence the reference to seeing beyond the eighth rapid, for example (to the limits of where the most powerful shamans could penetrate). Hence the poem appeals to the audience's sense of distinct identity: the shaman is the spiritual practitioner of his clan, which he must protect against incursions from other clans, and an understanding of the allusive lines of the verse requires some knowledge of the clan beliefs. The edgy awareness of a plethora of spirits, some of them hostile, on this journey reflects this typically Ewenki preoccupation.

A Yukagir kamlanie

The Yukagir kamlanie cited in ⟨22⟩ involved the shaman, with his hair loosened, and accompanied by his helping spirits, visiting the world of the dead to retrieve the soul of a patient. It begins with an invocation of the ancestors from the roots of the shaman's tree, and the ancestral spirit speaks through the shaman. The journey to the underworld is described after the shaman's return, and contains many elements found in such journeys elsewhere (not just within shamanic traditions): the dog, the female guardian of the road to the underworld who questions the shaman as he approaches, the river which must be crossed to reach the dead, the reluctance of the dead to give up the soul.

SHAMANIC CONTESTS

Shamans contended with each other in magic power. The contest was not performed in person, but through a fight by the animal spirit helpers, and anything suffered by these spirits would be reflected in the shaman that owned them, including death (Vajda 1959: 472 ff.), a point made in the account, recorded before 1750, by Jens Kildal from among the Sámi ⟨23⟩, which singles out the reindeer spirit as the one chiefly used in such contests (though the other shamanic spirits, including the anthropomorphic, were said to be used to cast sorcery upon others).[5] A reason for the contests is also given – the materialistic one of gaining greater income and status.

Wisdom contests

Shamanism of the sort found among the Sámi had long receded into the background in Finland (if it ever existed in that form) and developed into new forms. The wisdom contest was one of these forms; there was probably an underlying idea of shamanic contest, but it was now focused on knowledge rather than actual (spiritual) fighting. Two wisdom contests stand out in Finnish poetic sources.

Väinämöinen and Joukahainen crash into each other while on sledges,

[5] The Sámi shamanic contest over control of reindeer herds is considered by Itkonen (1960).

and begin a wisdom match: the winner is to be the one who remembers most about the creation of the world; Joukahainen vaunts his knowledge about various natural features – which amounts to the perception that dells have been hollowed out, mountains piled up, etc. He is rebuffed in an unsurpassable act of oneupmanship by Väinämöinen, who declares himself to have been responsible for the creative acts mentioned. He forces Joukahainen into a swamp by the power of his words, and only stops short of drowning him when he is promised the young man's sister (*FFPE* nos. 10, 11; *SKVR* I_1 185, IV_2 1855).

Lemminkäinen sets out for a feast uninvited and meets various obstacles on the way, such as a snake, which he successfully removes by the power of his singing; arriving at Väinämöinen's he is sung down to Tuonela (the world of the dead) by the more able magician (*FFPE* no. 35; *SKVR* VII_1 835). This incident may be regarded as a magic contest, in that the obstacles which Lemminkäinen overcomes are set up specifically to hinder his coming; Väinämöinen calls on his full powers only when Lemminkäinen disobeys him face to face.

Norse

SHAMANIC ELEMENTS

Individual features found in the accounts of shamanic kamlania may be paralleled in Norse sources; the Yukagir example ⟨22⟩ contains a number of such elements, which are concentrated in Snorri's tale of Hermóðr's journey to Hel in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49 ⟨53⟩: Hermóðr rides on Óðinn's horse Sleipnir for nine nights through dark dales, and comes to the bridge over the River Gjǫll, guarded by a girl, Móðguðr, "Spirit strife", who questions him on the purpose of his journey; Hermóðr crosses the river, and comes to the hall of Hel, where the dead Baldr is, and has to bargain with Hel about his release. The female guardian of the otherworld or its riches is also reflected in Gunnlǫð guarding the mead in the underworld realm of Hnitbjǫrg ⟨QV⟩. The dog is not found in Snorri's version of the tale, but occurs elsewhere: a barking dog is found in *Baldrs draumar*, when Óðinn journeys to the realm of the dead, and is reflected in *Skírnismál* 11 (a poem which itself describes an otherworld journey), where the dogs of Gymir are mentioned (and interpreted as barking in the preceding prose), as well as in the barking Garmr of *Vǫluspá* 44, 49, 58 and in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 13–18 ravenous guarding dogs are mentioned just before the tree, Mimameiðr (the way to which they are presumably watching over).[6] The Yukagir shaman's loose hair ⟨QV⟩ is a characteristic of witches. The coincidence of relatively common otherworld motifs in both Yukagir and Norse texts does not, however, serve to justify the inference of shamanism in Scandinavia. In the case of the Yukagir, these motifs form part of a backdrop for a rite of healing; in

[6] This is the manuscript order, followed by Robinson in his edition, but rejected by some earlier editors.

Norse, they lend colour to a mythic event, and we have no indication of any ritual counterpart to this myth in healing or other rites. There is also the stark difference, in Snorri's version of the myth, that the Yukagir shaman is successful, after contending with the denizens of the otherworld, in securing the release of the patient's soul, whereas Baldr is doomed to stay in the realm of Hel, which points to a very different significance to the overall tale from anything resembling shamanic healing.

Telling too are the differences to be found between the shamanic kamlania and our Norse accounts of *seiðr*. The shaman need not always embark on a soul journey to other worlds, even if this remains a constant possibility – he can also summon spirits and speak to them in the tent; in Norse, we seem to encounter only the summoning (and sending out) of spirits, as has been discussed in connection with *gandr* in Chapter 9. That the Norse were familiar with journeys of the free soul while the body was in trance is clear from accounts of men remaining still while they appear elsewhere as animals (Askmaðr in *Þorskfirðinga saga* ch. 10; Hǫrðr in *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ǫlvís* ch. 20; Bǫðvarr bjarki in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 50 ⟨96⟩; the Sámi lads in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 12 ⟨123⟩). This practice is not, however, associated with *seiðr* – though accounts such as that of Saxo ⟨109⟩ where what appears to be a *seiðkona* arguably falls into a trance indicate that trance (but not soul wandering) almost certainly did occur in connection with magical activities, which, however, were devoted to gaining information. In the mid-thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga* ch. 352 ⟨126⟩ Ostacia summons various beasts to herself by means of *seiðr*, and herself takes the form of a dragon, but it is not implied that her body remained in trance; in the late *Friðþjófs saga frækna* ch. 5, 7 ⟨88⟩ two *seiðkonur* appear at sea while practising *seiðr* on land, and the clear implication is one of free-soul wandering. They do not, however, appear in animal form here, but riding on an animal. The name of one of them, *Hamgláma*, plays on *hamr*, "outward form", and *glámsyni*, "illusion". The lateness of the source (*c.* 1500) in any case considerably diminishes its likely value as a reflection of ancient beliefs. Even if it were reliable, and were accepted as indicating something comparable with shamanic soul-wandering, it would add only a glimmer of support to the suggestion that such a shamanic notion was a well-established part of pagan Norse belief, such as it would be necessary to demonstrate were we to propose any extensive presence of shamanism in Norse pagan practice. Evidence does not, in any case, support the notion that *seiðr* involved the soul visiting other worlds, as is typical of shamanism.

Although I discuss its presence below, I would downplay the importance of trance as an indicator of shamanism; clearly it may occur in many contexts, religious or otherwise, and its presence is not required in many shamanic rites. Moreover, it is impossible to define as a phenomenon. Even when clearly present, it does not necessarily imply the concept of soul wandering, as Bäckmann and Hultkrantz note (*SLS* 20):

> We may [...] widen the concept of shamanistic trance to infer two distinctive experiences, one, the extra-corporeal flight of the shaman with the assistance of helping spirits, two, on-the-spot information passed to the

shaman by helping spirits. In both cases the séance opens with the calling of these spirits.

It is probable that the latter type of trance is found in Norse. Its presence may be marked by the yawning of the *seiðkona* in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3 ⟨95⟩, of Þrándr in *Færeyinga saga* ch. 41 ⟨74⟩ as he completes his summoning up of the dead, and of Heiðr in *Hauks þáttr hábrókar* ch. 4, who, during the heroes' visit to the fantastical realm of Gandvík, «sat við eld ok geispaði mjǫk», "sat by the fire and yawned greatly", before giving them warnings about their onward journey. The breathing in (and out) of spirits occurs widely in shamanism: for example, apart from the Yukagir example ⟨22⟩, the Ewenki shaman yawns to breathe in the spirits he summons (Anisimov 1963*a*: 101), and the Sakha shaman yawns thrice in the lead-up to a kamlanie as he invokes the helping spirits (Alekseev 1997: 51). Whilst yawning might equally be conceived to indicate the breathing out of the shaman's soul, there is no indication in Norse sources that this was thought to take place.

Female helpers, responsible for rousing the shaman from his sojourn in the otherworld, are found both in the Sámi and Yukagir examples. It may be that Gunnlǫð, guardian of the mead which Óðinn steals with her help, is a mythic representative of such a female assistant, but it is impossible to determine if the myth has any relation to actual cult practices; moreover, Gunnlǫð is placed firmly in the otherworld from which Óðinn escapes, whereas the point of the shamanic female assistants is that they are in this world, and call the shaman out of the otherworld. There seems, then, to be little connection. More promising for comparison is the role of Guðríðr, who assists the *vǫlva* in her rite in *Eiríks saga rauða*, which is considered in detail below. However, despite Strömbäck's support for a connection with Sámi practices, the arguments are rather weak. Guðríðr is a lone helper by default, since the requested choir of women cannot be found: this indicates, in so far as any genuine tradition is to be found in the account (on which question see the discussion below), that *seiðr* was at least sometimes believed to have been practised with the support of a group of professional helpers; the artistic reason for dispensing with the group in the present context is the need to focus the spotlight on Guðríðr, the heroine of the episode. Whilst there may be a certain parallel with the Sámi groups of helpers (a feature which in any case is rather unspecific and commonplace), it is doubtful if it is legitimate to compare Guðríðr with the individual female rousers found in some shamanic accounts.

One of the main differences between the shamanic kamlania such as those cited above and Norse accounts of magical practices is in the degree of detail and interaction with the spirit world which the shamanic accounts engage in. This may be due in part to a depletion of the Norse tradition with the onset of Christianity, but the association of *seiðr* with the lone practice of *útiseta* suggests a tendency for a self-isolating sort of practice without a great deal of communal interaction. It is problematic to argue from absence of evidence, but it is nonetheless difficult to envisage any

recorded Norse magical practices as ever being very close in form to the kamlania described above.

It is likely that in pre-Christian Scandinavia there were beliefs about natural and personal forces that later disappeared in the face of the imposition of Christian notions, but such beliefs are difficult to elicit from the scant evidence at our command. Reflections of such beliefs may nonetheless be glimpsed in early sources, manipulated in highly artificial (or artful) verse such as *Þórsdrápa*: in st. 7, Þórr is hampered on his journey by a river in spate, caused by a giantess urinating (or perhaps menstruating) in the hills:

> Harðvaxnar lét harðar
> hall-lands of sik falla
> gatat maðr njótr inn neytri
> njarð- ráð fyr sér -gjarðar;
> þverrir lét nema þyrri
> Þorns barna sér Marnar
> snerriblóð til svíra
> salþaks megin vaxa.

> The user of the strength-belt let the cliff-land's harsh-grown shoulders fall over him – the capable man found no solution for himself; the waster of Þorn's children would let his might grow for himself to the neck of the [world's] hall-roof unless the dashing blood of Mǫrn ebbed away.

The giantess, through her innate strength (her *luonto*, so to speak), manipulates the power (the *väki*) of a river bearing rocks, described as the harsh-grown shoulders of the mountains: as in the Finnish examples, we may infer that it is not just the rocks that are "hard" and "grown", but the power which is directing them. In some respects, the notion of Hastrup (1995: 97) of embodied motivation – which, as Stark (2006: 256) notes, is closely analogous to Finnish *väki* – is particularly apt here; it is realised when "some kinds of personal presence exert an almost physical force upon others", a force which is a sort of ecstatic expansion of the body beyond its physical bounds.

Þórr is usually protected by his belt of strength (like the Finnish *tietäjä*), but now he is compromised, knowing no solution, and his strength temporarily broken, marked by the tmesis of «njarð-gjarðar» – yet the epenthetic phrase within this tmesis, "solution for himself", now divorced from its earlier negative, does what it says: the solution is for the god to use his belt to swell his might (*megin*) heaven-high: this he will do until he becomes (in st. 9) *himinsjóli*, "the pillar of heaven" (a meaning argued for above), which appears to be a reference to the mythic entity of the world pillar. The image of swelling, apparent in the Finnish example cited above, is very clear: first the river swells and increases its malicious power, then Þórr swells back at it. An important means of raising *luonto* in Finnish is through anger, and this too is very apparent in the Norse example. *Þórsdrápa* dates to the end of the pagan period, and hints at concepts which later are lost. *Megin* comes to be used just for "strength", so the proposed interpretation of it here as

an innate and manipulable force comparable to Finnish *luonto* or *väki* can scarcely be paralleled; as noted above, *móðr* is also particularly associated with Þórr, and with swelling. How far *Þórsdrápa* witnesses to an earlier mentality must, in these circumstances, remain uncertain, but it appears to show an understanding of forces which is comparable, at least in certain respects, with the Finnish. Whilst the context is both mythic and poetic, this understanding may nonetheless derive from a more widespread tradition (just as many of the Finnish examples of *luonto*-raising are found in stylised poetic texts, but nonetheless relate to documented practices and beliefs).

Any Norse concepts of *luonto/väki*-like forces cannot have been precisely in line with the Finnish system, however. It is clear that in Finland, women had weaker *luonnot* than men, and could hence only rarely function as *tietäjät* (Stark 2006: 265); by contrast, women predominated as practitioners of *seiðr* (and it was considered inappropriately effeminate for men to practise). One way of looking at this would be to say that women were *blauðar*, "soft, weak",[7] having less *móðr* or *megin* (which is patently the case, as, like Finnish *väki*, *megin* relates in many cases to physical strength), and hence, following the Finnish way of thinking, were more susceptible to penetration by outside forces in the form of spirits they wished to consult. But the matter is unlikely to have been viewed in a purely negative way: our earliest source to describe women in Germanic society, Tacitus, says in *Germania* ch. 8 «inesse quin etiam sanctum aliquid et providum putant», "they believe indeed there is something holy and foresighted in them"; the phrasing is notable: the women are not said to be foresighted, but to have something foresighted in them, which suggests a special, almost externalised force, of the same general type as Finnish *luonto*, but specific to women and focused on foresight (and for which there is no parallel in the Finnish system); this is consistent with the pattern found in Old Norse literature, whereby it is primarily women who exhibit a spontaneous ability to utter prophetic verses.[8]

VǪLUSPÁ

Vǫluspá is probably the oldest text we have that presents in any detail a *vǫlva*'s performance (and, in st. 22, specifically the exercise of *seiðr*); it is

[7] *Blauðr* is used to designate feminine animals; it is used of people in general in *Niðrstigningar saga II*, ch. 6, when Christ descends to hell and terrifies the denizens, who scuttle around to escape his gaze, then proclaim that he has overcome them, and «blauðir eru vér nú orðnir ok skemmðarfullir», "bashful we have now become and full of shame"; it is used as a term of insult by Hallgerðr in *Njáls saga* ch. 38 as she addresses Gunnarr, talking of Njáll, and attacking the cowardice of them both: «Jafnkomit mun á með ykkr [...] er hvárrtveggi er blauðr», "It amounts to the same thing between you two, when you are both soft" (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.*).

[8] This motif is examined in detail, with respect to Eddic verses uttered by women in *fornaldarsögur*, by Quinn (1998). She observes (41) that the compulsion to speak such verse is not confined to women, but when the speaker is male, "the kind of utterance tends not to be the prophetic *ljóð* that casts such a long shadow over the narrative, but the more mundane *vísa* (verse) or *staka* (ditty), poetry arising from the speaker's own reflections".

therefore most likely to give us at least hints of what the pre-Christian practice may have involved. At the same time, it is essential to stress that the poem is a fictional construct – it does *not* aim to be a representation of an actual *seiðr* performance, but rather to *allude* to such performances for the dramatic organisation and presentation of the systematised cosmic mythic lore that is its main concern.

Whilst some elements are, or at least may be seen as, broadly shamanic, as discussed below, others are not, as Edsman (1948) points out: the world tree is alluded to, but is not climbed upon as in a real shamanic kamlanie; the *vǫlva* remembers things from the ancient world rather than relating details of a trance journey; nine worlds are mentioned, but as they are remembered, they may be envisaged as arranged in chronological rather than geographical order, emphasising the *vǫlva*'s great primordial age rather than her access to hidden realms – this is more in line with her sibylline nature rather than anything shamanic. Nonetheless, it remains feasible to argue that an originally more ritual-based set of imagery (such as might be found in shamanic kamlania) is to some extent repositioned to relate to a more sibylline presentation.

The audience

An amorphously defined audience for the *vǫlva*'s performance is implied. She first calls for attention from «allar / helgar kindir, / meiri ok minni / mǫgu Heimdallar», "all the holy offspring, the greater and lesser sons of Heimdallr", which implies an audience of men. This audience is not mentioned again: it should probably be read as a stereotyped address to the actual audiences of people that would have been listening to the poem, but one that engages them in the action of the poem by the invocation of the divine ancestor, Heimdallr. The rest of the poem is concerned with the affairs of the gods, and the fate of the world (men's part in this being incidental); this begins in the first stanza, where the *vǫlva* addresses Óðinn as «Valfǫðr», "Father of the slain", and makes it clear that he has come to ask her for the most ancient news of the world. The gods as a collective audience are implied in the second person plural pronoun in the *vǫlva*'s refrain «Vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?», "Do you know yet, and what?", and in her tetchy question to Óðinn in st. 28, «Hvers fregnið mik? / Hví freistið min?», "What do you ask me? Why do you try me?" The gods do not appear to be physically present, however: it is Óðinn who represents them to the *vǫlva*. In st. 28 as she practises sorcery on her own Óðinn is said to come to her under the name of *Yggjungr*, "Dreaded" – «ein sat hon úti, / þá er inn aldni kom, / Yggiungr ása», "alone she sat out when the old one came, Dreaded of the *æsir*"; *Yggjungr* surely alludes to his sacrifice on Yggdrasill to gain knowledge – knowledge clearly as useless as that which she immediately taunts him with gaining from Mímir's spring. Several things may be inferred here. A *vǫlva* is likely to have carried out her magic on her own: it is not a social activity. It was concerned with gaining knowledge, or with prophecy; this is the usual connotation of *útiseta*, as is clear from the

laws ⟨78⟩. This knowledge was nonetheless desired by the gods – and, it is reasonable to surmise, on a mundane level by men and women – so that the *vǫlva* had to be cajoled into revealing it, Óðinn fixing her with his eyes; it would appear that Óðinn may have tried terrifying her, for this is a further implication of the use of the name *Yggjungr*, but her taunting rejoinder to his visit amounts to a scornful rejection of his intimidatory methods: in the next stanza he resorts to the normal way of dealing with fortune-tellers, paying them richly. Behind this scene we may sense a social tension: *vǫlur* are difficult characters (cf. the pernickety Þorbjǫrg in *Eiríks saga rauða*, who is no doubt depicted in the traditional manner in this respect), who would rather be left to practise their magic on their own, but who need society to pay them for their services. There is sometimes a tension between society and the shaman, but the Norse magical practitioner appears to be marginalised to a greater extent than in any shamanic society. How far this may have been due to the influence of Christianity (already evident in other aspects of *Vǫluspá*) is difficult to assess.

The ancestral spirit

The *vǫlva* declares at the outset that her knowledge stretches back to the beginning of the world, and that she was reared by the denizens of that primordial time, the giants; she remembers the nine worlds, nine giantesses (*íviðjur*) and the world tree under the ground (that is, before it had sprung); she then proceeds to recite the lore she knows of this ancient time in the first person, as her own knowledge.

The *vǫlva* thus establishes the source of her knowledge as ancestral beings (giants), and its locus as the roots of the world tree, whose focal cosmic status is emphasised later in the poem, being the source of knowledge (Mímir's spring) and fate (Urðr and her companions). This closely matches various shamanic kamlania, where the ancestral shaman, responsible for providing the information communicated in the ritual, comes from a tree-root (associated with the world tree or the ancestral clan tree), as in the Nganasan ⟨16⟩ or Yukagir ⟨22⟩ accounts, or the fragment of a Sakha shamanic invocation for healing given by Mikhailovskii (1894–5: 94):

> Spirits of the sun, mothers of the sun, dwelling in the south, in the nine woody knolls, you who will envy … I pray you all … let them stand … let your three shadows stand high! In the east, on his mountain, is the lord my grandsire, mighty in strength, thick of neck – be with me!

The spirits dwelling in the nine woody knolls are to be associated with the spirits that are believed to guard each layer of heaven, represented each by a tree in the shamanic ritual, and who aid the shaman on his celestial ascent (Eliade 1972: 233).[9] The woody knolls in the south with female spirits on are perhaps also reminiscent of the aged giantess who lives in the east in *Vǫluspá* 39: but whereas for the Sakha shaman these spirits are invoked

[9] This, however, is a feature of the shamanism of the Sakhas' neighbours the Dolgans.

for aid, in *Vǫluspá* "the old woman" sits in Járnviðr and produces a brood of monsters – we are given a swift glimpse of a vision, but there is no interaction.

It would seem appropriate to bring an example from a society where female shamans predominate, the Soras of India. Here, notes Vitebsky (1995: 66), the soul of the shaman departs for the underworld, and the soul of her predecessor speaks through her throughout the ceremony, leading a succession of other spirits to speak through her mouth. A further type of helper is a resident of the underworld, who has never been a human, whom the shaman marries and through whom she keeps her powers. The latter correspond to the giants mentioned by the *vǫlva*: these reared her rather than married her, but the role of instructor and giver of skills is the same. The different spirits, including the ancestral shaman, who use the Sora shaman as a medium, are matched in *Vǫluspá* in so far as we accept the appearance of different *vǫlva* figures, which is discussed below.

Vǫluspá may, in a fashion typical of shamanism, invoke a sort of ancestral figure, whose knowledge stretches back through the ages, in the form of the *vǫlva*, but it differs in the manner of presentation: the shaman acts as interlocutor and presents the knowledge given by the ancestor, whereas in *Vǫluspá* the *vǫlva*, who is functionally equivalent to the shaman, is herself the ancestral figure. The *Vǫluspá* poet may well be playing with traditional notions of ancestor spirits for literary effect here, altering the tradition as he sees fit, but naturally it is impossible to say that something like the shamanic practice of invoking an ancestor figure, who then speaks through the magical practitioner (the *vǫlva* in the Norse case), did actually exist in Norse tradition.

Trance

Many kamlania take place with the shaman in a state of trance; this may either result in him lying as if dead, or (in a lighter form) in acting wildly and leaping about, often in imitation or personification of a spirit. That some form of trance was involved in *seiðr* may be indicated by *Vǫluspá* 22 ⟨125⟩, where the *seiðkona* Heiðr is described as *leikin* while she practises *seiðr*. The word is used in the sense "mad" in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 53: «syndisk mǫnnum þann veg helzt sem hann myndi leikinn, því at hann fór hjá sér ok talaði við sjalfan sik», "it seemed to people most likely that he was mad, since he went out of his mind and talked to himself"; in the late-thirteenth-century *Guðmundar saga biskups hin elzta* ch. 35 (*Biskupa sögur* 1858: I, 464) it is reported that «maðr sá er Snorri hét [var leikinn] af flagði einu», "the man called Snorri was bewitched by a giantess" (*leikinn* not occurring in the oldest manuscript, AM 399 4to), who then tried to lure him into the mountains. Another common sense of *leikinn* is "vexed" (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.* "leika III.2"). As *leika* means essentially "play", the underlying sense is "played upon", by someone with spiritual power like a witch, or a spirit. Whilst the sense in *Vǫluspá* might be simply that she performed *seiðr* in a distraught fashion, the more plausible inference

is that she was possessed by a spirit. From usages elsewhere, the word *leikinn* more likely indicates the wild type of lighter trance than the deep death-like one found for example among the Sámi.

Gullveig and Heiðr

In the difficult stanzas 21–2 the poet tells first of Gullveig, "Gold liquor", and then of "Heiðr", "Heathen"/"Bright".[10] It appears that Gullveig arrives from the *æsir*'s adversaries, the *vanir*, but the *æsir* seek to destroy her, first with spears then with fire, a punishment which may mark her out as a witch (cf. the burning in of the *seiðmaðr* Rǫgnvaldr réttilbeini ⟨116⟩): she is most plausibly to be seen as an avatar of Freyja herself, the mistress of *seiðr* in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 ⟨111⟩. The attempt is unsuccessful, but in the next stanza we are presented with the *seiðkona* Heiðr, wandering, like Freyja (in the myth of her search for Óðr ⟨QV, 53⟩) among mankind, going round houses, performing *seiðr*, and, it would seem, gathering a cult among women. After this, the *æsir* declare war, but eventually have to concede a truce (not stated explicitly in the poem). The sequence of events only makes sense if Gullveig and Heiðr are twin facets of the invincible power of the *vanir*, each carrying out a slightly different strategy in the campaign against the *æsir*. Gullveig epitomises one of the chief attributes, eternal gold, of Freyja (the weeper of gold tears), and Heiðr, who follows Gullveig as a second avatar of the goddess, embodies another, Freyja's practice of *seiðr*, which the *æsir* are similarly helpless against.

The poet delights in playing on the names. *Veig*, "strong drink", is a common element in female names, and comes to mean "lady" in *Þula* IV yy 2 (*Skj* B_1 678), and *Gullveig* could well have been an everyday name about whose literal meaning people may hardly have spared a thought. Yet it is used pointedly by the poet. The "gold" is there to remind them of the riches the gods lost at the beginning of the world – the poet states «var þeim vettergis / vant ór gulli», "they had no lack of gold", which, however, disappeared when they lost the golden chequers (which turn up again in the new world, marking a new golden age) – but which the *vanir* still possess and flaunt. But gold is a symbol of life, and rejuvenation (and perhaps rebirth): and Gullveig cannot be killed, just as her people rise again on the battlefield (st. 24, see *PE* II, 43). "Gold liquor" brings gold together with drink – just as the hall of Ægir, brewing the drink of the gods (originally affording them immortality, on the basis of the Indian analogues), is lit with *lýsigull*, "gleaming gold"; whilst *gull* appears to be used only literally with reference to gold and does not mean simply "golden", the name is nonetheless probably intended to recall the golden beverage, mead, a characterisation seen in the name of the animal producer of mead, Heiðrún, "Bright rune" (*Grímnismál* 25 ⟨37⟩) and the skull Heiðdraupnir, "Dripper of the bright (liquid)" (*Sigrdrífumál* 13–18). Mímir's spring of

[10] My interpretation of these stanzas in the main follows that of U. Dronke (1988: 227–31).

mead may well, in earlier tradition, have been a spring of life, but it is certainly a source of knowledge, and the name *Gullveig* may therefore serve as a taunt to the gods at the knowledge they do not possess (which Óðinn attempts to redress by various means, and within the context of the poem by consulting the *vǫlva*).

Heiðr is similarly loaded with allusion (see *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 22/1). There can be little doubt, I think, that *heiðr*, "heath", represents the primary connection, and derivation, of *Heiðr*, as McKinnell (2001) argues – though *Heiðr* can scarcely *mean* "heath": it is a derivative, even if identical in form; this marks the *seiðkona* out as an outsider, someone who comes from the heath, or exercises magic there (by sitting out, for example), and is, indeed, *heiðinn*, "heathen" (a word used already in *Hákonarmál*, which the poet knew). As the name is found fairly stereotypically for *seiðkonur*, almost certainly the author of *Vǫluspá* is exploiting this known tradition. This does not mean he is confined to it, however: it seems quite reasonable that, in addition to the traditional significance of the name (someone from the heath), he has intended an allusion to be inferred with *heiðr*, "bright" (alluding to the brightness of the gold of Gullveig, and to the brightness of mead: U. Dronke 1988: 228), *heið*, "brightness (of the sky)", *heið*, "fee" (a matter of importance to *seiðkonur*), and *heiðr*, "honour" (which Heiðr appears to be demanding, and which the *æsir* have to consider extending to the *vanir* in st. 23, where the words *afráð* and *gildi* are used, however) – an allusion, be it noted, is not the same as a derivation.[11]

There may be a general allusion in these names to intoxicants taken by *seiðkonur*, as, in some accounts, by the Sámi shaman. We have no other evidence for such intoxication, but the association of drink, especially mead, with knowledge of an arcane kind would naturally lend itself to use in this way.

In order to explain the appearance of Heiðr in the poem, McKinnell suggests she is a "dark sister" who possesses esoteric information that Gullveig/Freyja lacks (in the way Hyndla is dark sister to Freyja in *Hyndluljóð*, and as Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr has a dark sister Irpa), and that the wicked *brúðr* to whom she brings joy (by revealing her magic) is Gullveig/Freyja. This is a possible construction, but we are given no hint that Gullveig/Freyja lacks any knowledge;[12] moreover, I would see the wicked bride as

[11] These allusions, reiterated here, are pointed out by Dronke, *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 22/1. McKinnell (2001), however, argues for a dissociation of Heiðr from brightness, and from Gullveig, and suggests that the parallelism seen between Heiðr and Gullveig is an artefact of modern scholarly desire to see a deep structure in this aspect of the poem where none may exist. I tend towards accepting that such parallelism is more than a modern perception, since a depth of awareness of the implications of words' different meanings is apparent elsewhere in the poem (see Dronke's discussion of many such points in the poem in her edition, *PE* II; as one example, see her argument over the meaning of *gildi*, comm. st. 23).

[12] We can, of course, suggest that Óðinn is consulting the *vǫlva* because Freyja, now one of the community of the gods, cannot help him, and that the *vǫlva*, in the guise of Heiðr, is boasting of her superior knowledge which she imparts to Freyja in the lead-up to the divine war, and which is now being called upon again. Such an approach smacks too much of rigid rationalisation; the poet avoids any mention of the prophetic goddesses such as Freyja in their "present" (whatever that is) circumstances. His aim is not, ultimately, to present an

most naturally to be read as the denizen of each of the houses which Heiðr comes to (and hence, most probably, human: the creation of humans has been presented shortly before this scene, and the war between the two sorts of gods is most likely a representation of a perception of differences between two sorts of human cult) – Heiðr is demonstrating her powers, and establishing a following, just as the new shaman among the Nanai must visit each house and shamanise to gain acceptance in the community (Harva 1938: 486). It is not, I think, necessary to argue that Heiðr is precisely a reincarnation of Gullveig (who, in any case, is said to "live still" at the end of st. 21), but she represents the other half of a two-pronged attack by the *vanir* on the *æsir*, and the weapon she uses is *seiðr*, undermining the authority of the *æsir*. It is possible that Heiðr is identical with the "she" *vǫlva*, but if we accept that "she" and "I" are distinct (discussed below), Heiðr cannot also be the narrator *vǫlva*.

Dialogue

Dialogue between the shaman and the audience is usually an essential part of a kamlanie: it demonstrates graphically that the shaman is really communicating between the spirit world and his audience. This is less of a feature in recorded *seiðr* or *vǫlva* performances; it is, however, matched to an extent in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3 ⟨95⟩, where the *seiðkona*'s verses prove too obscure for King Fróði, who interrupts and asks for clearer answers several times. This obscurity parallels that of *Vǫluspá* in general, and is quite likely to represent an actual feature of such sessions. One refrain of *Vǫluspá*, in the form of the question «Vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?», "Do you know yet, and what?", also breaks the flow of the vision and may represent in (deliberately) vestigial form an actual practice of interlocution in *seiðr*; the same is true of the interlude in which it is stated that Óðinn came to visit the *vǫlva* as she practised her art on her own, and paid her (st. 28–9): this is reminiscent of the different stages of a kamlanie such as are found in the Ewenki example above (though, under the interpretation given in the next section, this interlude in fact forms part of what the main *vǫlva* of the poem reports).

Counterroles

The poem alternates in its narration between first and third persons: we are sometimes told what "I know (see, etc.)", sometimes what "she saw". Many – notably McKinnell recently (2005: 90–1) – see the alternation of grammatical persons as without significance for the number of *dramatis personae* appearing in the poem, so that just one *vǫlva* is envisaged; the *seiðkona* Heiðr may then also be identified with the narrator (and not with

analysis of varying prophetic powers, but to give a structured view of cosmic myth; the *vǫlva* or *vǫlur* are part of the framework to achieve this, but this framework does not extend to areas outside the poet's concern. On the structuring of Eddic *vǫlva* poems (*Vǫluspá*, *Baldrs draumar*, *Hyndluljóð*) see Quinn (2002).

Gullveig). Certainly, Snorri succumbed to a reductionist approach, and removed the differences between "I" and "she" in his citations from the poem – but the *lectio difficilior* of regarding the difference in pronouns as reflecting something of significance to the poet is more convincing, if more difficult to analyse. *Vǫluspá* is indisputably one of the most skilful and concentrated of Norse poems, so it seems ill-justified to see this variation as random, particularly when, for example, a contrast between "I" and "she" is pointedly emphasised in the refrain, «Fiǫlð veit hon frœði – / fram sé ek lengra», "Much she knows of [ancient] lore – I see further forward". Yet quite what the distinction implies is open to debate.

Dronke (*PE* II, 26–30; 1992*b*: 16–21) argues that the alternation of "I" and "she" is a deliberately crafted device of the poet intended to represent a complex spirit world where several *vǫlur* are presented. Dronke has certainly presented the most convincing argument for respecting the poem's sometimes puzzling alternations as referring to a series of distinct *vǫlva* figures. Something resembling her scheme (but not necessarily the accompanying interpretation of its significance) must, I think, have been a feature of the poem from its inception; however, given that it must, on Dronke's dating of *c.* 1000, have undergone at least a century and a half of oral transmission, during which time a confusion between first and third person forms, or present and past tenses, would be among the easiest to arise, I would not venture to say that the present form of the poem reflects in all particulars that which it would have had several generations earlier. However, as any attempt to establish an earlier phase would be nothing more than speculation, I present the outlines of Dronke's interpretation without such speculative adjustment.

The *vǫlva* of the opening presents herself as both contemporary with the audience she addresses in the first person, and as being reared by giants at the beginning of the world: she spans all time, all worlds (she remembers the nine worlds). She recounts the ancient lore of the cosmos up to st. 20, which culminates in her vision of the world tree Yggdrasill, flourishing just after the creation of mankind: thus the first part of the poem is flanked by her assertions of knowledge about the primeval beings, the giants, about the nine worlds and the world tree before it sprang, then her visions of the creation of man and of the burgeoning world tree. The strong link with the world tree, used as a structural element in the poem, could be seen as decidedly shamanic, but it may equally well be the result of the selective choice of imagery by the poet.

We then move to the third person "she" as the source of the knowledge; Dronke suggests this is another *vǫlva*, one consulted by the gods, who is knowledgeable about their ancient affairs, and whose visions the first *vǫlva* reports. She is kept distinct by the use of the third person *hon* to refer to her, except at one dramatic moment in the poem (the only place where the first person *ek* is used with a past tense), where she speaks for herself, which means there is a role-identification with the first *vǫlva*: this is where she declares in st. 31 «Ek sá Baldri ...», "I saw for Baldr ...", and relates the calamitous death of the young god. This *vǫlva* appears to be the source of

information, much (but not all) presented in the past tense, until about st. 43: thereafter, the poet looks forward, untrammelled by present concerns, to the end of the world as a future event, and the past tenses are left behind. The first *vǫlva* seems to reassert herself in st. 43, with the new refrain «Fiǫlð veit hon frœða – / fram sé ek lengra», "Much she knows of [ancient] lore – I see further forward"; thus she re-establishes her mastery over the whole of time. In st. 56, however, we move back to "she", with a present tense; Dronke (*PE* II, 30) argues there is no reason not to take this as referring to the second *vǫlva*, but it may be a dramatic intervention of another, dissociated, "she", looking down at the world from celestial heights – the point here being to highlight this vision of a new world rising from the ocean; this "she" also sees the hall, fairer than the sun, in st. 61, whose significance as a metonym for the whole new world may thus be emphasised.

Others, such as McKinnell, do not follow Dronke's arguments for the existence of multiple *vǫlur* within the poem, but may still regard the alternation between first and third persons as reflecting different aspects of the *vǫlva*'s supernatural activities, in which she at times speaks on her own behalf in the first person, and at others as voicing an impersonal truth or fate, which speaks through her in the third person; charms were regarded as coming into the speaker's mouth from outside (see Quinn 1998), and such an alternation could be based on such a notion. An alternation between first and third person narration occurs also in the proclamations of the *vǫlva* Busla in *Bósa saga* ch. 5 (though far more simply than in *Vǫluspá*), and it may have been a traditional feature which the *Vǫluspá* poet has exploited.[13]

To make any clear distinction between the multiple and single *vǫlva* arguments seems futile. We are dealing with *imagined* metaphysical roles, not with real independent entities. If the *vǫlva* imagined that other people, or other forces, spoke through her, and she represented these through the use of the third person (or, to be more precise, if the poet presented what he envisaged the *vǫlva* as imagining through the use of the third person), then these separate entities may be said to "exist", and a poem like *Vǫluspá* falls into Siikala's multiple-role category, even if the person imagined as consulting the *vǫlva* was only aware of one physical presence. Unless we view the alternation between first and third persons in *Vǫluspá* as being random coincidence, the poem presents us with a sophisticated play on the manifestation of counterroles (however defined in precise terms) on the part of a seer, such as Siikala outlines, in the fictionalised setting of the poem. Such a well-crafted use of the counterroles is not paralleled either in other Norse sources, or in shamanic ones. If it is genuinely present, the poet must have assumed some familiarity with dual roles in a kamlanie such as is found in shamanism, but also perhaps in sources such as *Bósa saga*, for the audience to be able to grasp his unusually complex play upon the concept. The implication of such a familiarity with the dual-role model would be the existence of a greater complexity in practices such as *seiðr* than our later Norse sources usually recognise.

[13] I thank John McKinnell for outlining his thoughts to me, as presented in this paragraph..

The clairvoyant style

The style of *Vǫluspá* differs from all other Eddic poems. There appear to be three channels of influence at play here.

Although as a work concerned with myth, and not with the present moment as is the case with human consultations with seeresses, the poem is of an essentially different nature, it could nonetheless be described as visionary or clairvoyant in the way it presents a series of apparently disconnected scenes, almost always highly visual in nature, in the way that a series of scenes present themselves, without any inherent explanation of why, to the mind's eye of a clairvoyant. The poet may well have wished to allude to the manner in which fortune-tellers worked; there are shamanic parallels: the Ewenki shamanic poem ⟨21⟩ illustrates this very clearly, for example; yet there is also a great difference, in that *Vǫluspá* presents the *vǫlva* as wholly detached from the events she narrates (except that she interacts with her interlocutor on one occasion, when he pays her to see and say more) – they are visions, no more – whereas the Ewenki shaman, like all shamans, relates his own interaction with the spirit world, which he is visiting in order to influence it: the shaman's role is primarily efficatory, that of the *vǫlva* is divinatory. The Ewenki poem, as argued above, is a reassertion of the tribal notions of the spiritual cosmography, but at the same time it constantly undermines the audience's sense of security by emphasising the spiritual threats that hang over them (which, of course, call for a shaman to deal with them) – and here there is perhaps some similarity to *Vǫluspá*, though the Norse poem rather presents an inevitable course of events spirally downwards to *ragnarǫk*, than threats which could be dealt with. The theme of deliberate disturbance on the part of the shaman is taken up also by Humphrey (1996: 59–61), who, describing the Daur Mongol shamans, notes "the poetry of the elders tended to eulogize the actual world in its ideal order, while the poetry of *yadgan*-type shamans disturbed that order, presenting images of hostile, invisible currents that would undermine the solidity of the known world and all social institutions built in its image", with the shaman using intuitive understandings of the psychology of human relations whilst constructing strange, destabilised visions of a natural world: altogether this is an observation that could well serve to describe *Vǫluspá* itself (or rather the fiction of what the poem pretends to be – I do not refer here to its actual sources of composition, which include swathes of Christian morality not derived from within the poet's own intuition), and bolsters the argument for some allusion to mantic poetry of the type produced by the Daur shaman.

Nonetheless, the *Vǫluspá* poet could also have had literary antecedents in mind in the form of sibylline oracles (*PE* II, 99–104; U. Dronke 1992*b*). These texts, originally (and mainly preserved in) Greek but later translated or adapted, at least in part, into Latin, took the ancient pagan figure of the sibyl, a female seeress, and ascribed series of utterances to her of a prophetic and moralistic nature relating to mankind's actions and position in the world; the main text to bear comparison with *Vǫluspá* is the *Prophetia*

sibyllae magae.[14] U. Dronke (1992*b*) points out, however, that the Norse poet, if he has used these Latin texts, has recast them in an unparalleled fashion into a work which is more perfect, as a sibylline oracle, than any of them, but at the same differs too in some fundamental aspects: thus *Vǫluspá* concentrates on the gods rather than man, and focuses on the death of Baldr (in a way the oracles never focus on the death of Christ). Moral turpitude is ascribed to men in the description of the end of the world (as in the sibylline oracles), but this *eschaton* is not the result of any moral decline described earlier in the poem; the gods perform actions which lead to *ragnarǫk*, but they are not presented primarily as actions to be morally judged (unlike in *Lokasenna*, for example) – the theme is rather one of inevitable decline of the gods, and the world they inhabit, through time, which may rather be a traditional pagan theme than a Christian one. Nonetheless, the sibylline influence appears to be deep-rooted, if subtly applied. Outside *Vǫluspá* (and to a degree the dependent *Baldrs draumar*), no *vǫlva* appears as a cosmically prophetic figure: this is a sibylline characteristic, which is surely the result of an imaginative response, inspired by classical models, to the supposed prophetic skills of fortune-tellers, realised in only an incipient form in native tradition. Again, the poet, in dwelling upon the human evil-doers at the end of the world, has not wished to depart from this major theme of the sibylline models, even though it is highly unlikely to have been a topic of interest to *vǫlur* in pagan times. The structure, of divine sacrifice leading on to cosmic calamity (Baldr and *ragnarǫk*, Christ and the *eschaton*), even if not in fact sibylline, surely marks a response to the Christian understanding of the history of redemption. U. Dronke (1992*b*: 19–20) sums up the situation well:

> In the moral, religious and sibylline structuring of his cyclic theme, the Norse poet would seem to be creating his Oracle quite independently of any Christian source. This independent creative behaviour may represent, however, not ignorance of Christian sibylline tradition, but a deliberate re-casting of that tradition, which he found less acceptable and more jejune than his own. He justifies the heathen traditional faith by substituting it for the Christian in the conventional Christian sibylline utterance, and as he works he seems to shine a Christian light on heathen matter to establish parallels with greater clarity: on the bleeding figure of Baldr, a god's son sacrificed for a cosmic purpose; on the weeping mother; on the evilness of the enemies of the gods; on the peace of the new world where brothers are reconciled and the sanctuaries restored.

Some doubt must remain on the influence of the sibylline oracles, not just

[14] The relationship of the sibylline oracular texts to *Vǫluspá* is a matter calling for far fuller treatment than can be afforded it here: see the discussions by Dronke referred to, where further references to the history of this scholarly debate may be found. Also of great value, as illustrating the nature of certain sibylline texts on the basis of which both the similarities to and differences from the Norse texts may be inferred, is P. Dronke (1995), who discusses (but not in reference to Norse tradition) the *Prophetia sibyllae magae*, as well as some French and German sibylline texts; the text of the *Prophetia*, of which the edition of Bischoff (1951) remains standard, is also discussed in P. Dronke (1990). For text and translation of the Greek sibylline oracles, see Kurfess (1951). For a general introduction and discussion of classical sibyls and their oracles, see Parke (1988).

because of the distinctness of the poem's treatment of its prophetic figure, but also because of the difficulty of reconstructing the circumstances in which the poet may have come to know the Latin texts: they were probably too remote from the experience open to pagans for him to know them in any detail if he was not converted, and if he was Christian, the question arises of why he should have produced a poem so imbued with pagan myth and which apparently misinterprets some fundamental Christian teachings, such as the time of the punishment of sinners with respect to the *eschaton*. The case must remain open, however: we are far from being able to determine the possible means of knowing, or not knowing, particular sources at the turn of the millennium.

The third aspect of the poem's style is also literary, but one that relates to native forms. The clairvoyant style happens to coincide with the way much skaldic verse style had developed: here too a series of tightly packed and mythically and verbally allusive scenes is typically presented, which is already apparent in even the earliest preserved poems such as *Ynglingatal*, and reaches a climax in poems such as *Húsdrápa* or *Þórsdrápa*. It seems clear that the poet wished to align his poem both with prophetic visionary literature (and perhaps actual fortune-telling practice), and with the courtly poetic tradition (whilst wishing, through his choice of Eddic metre, to dissociate his poem from any specific ruler or event, and, by giving it a temporally and geographically amorphous setting, to generalise the applicability of its message). The shamanic texts cited above show, in general outline, a similarly clairvoyant and allusive style (the shaman typically refers to details of the tribe's belief system and myths in a manner which for comprehension requires previous familiarity, which is a method of asserting his deep knowledge of such matters); this at least suggests the likelihood that practitioners such as *vǫlur* acted in a similar way, and that *Vǫluspá* is reflecting this in its chosen style of presentation.

The biblical background

Any argument in favour of a pagan background to *Vǫluspá* must be balanced with an acknowledgement of the Christian element. The sub-Christian sibylline oracles have been mentioned, but a more directly biblical source to which the poem alludes is the story of the witch of Endor in I Samuel 28: 3–19; this was a topic of contemporary sermons, such as Ælfric's "Saul and the Witch of Endor" (which roundly condemns any idea that *scincræft*, "apparitional sorcery", could raise the dead: the devil is responsible for the whole appearance of Samuel here). Saul is faced with destruction at the hands of the Philistines, and, although he has banished mediums from the land, he immediately decides he needs to consult one to uncover his future. He secretly visits one at Endor along with two companions, coming by night. He asks her to divine by a spirit, and to summon up the prophet Samuel. The medium is unwilling: Saul has banished mediums, she says: "Why then are you laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?" Saul promises her immunity, without revealing his identity. She

summons up Samuel, and at once recognises Saul, exclaiming "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." The king tells her not to fear, and asks what she sees; she says she sees a spirit coming up (from Sheol, the world of the dead, that is). The dead Samuel asks Saul why he is disturbing him; Saul replies that in the face of the might of the Philistines he needs advice from him as to his course of action. Samuel replies that God has wrested the kingdom from him and given it to David; tomorrow Saul and his sons would be dead, and Israel delivered to the Philistines.

The structure of *Vǫluspá* essentially follows the same pattern. *Baldrs draumar*, although a much later composition, relates a piece of information which must have been traditional to the Óðinnic consultation of the *vǫlva* motif: Baldr is having bad dreams, and Óðinn needs to know what this portends. The death of Baldr is a turning point in *Vǫluspá*, as noted; it marks the beginning of the end for the gods. So, like Saul, Óðinn comes to consult the *vǫlva* at a time of calamity to seek advice, and the answer he receives is that soon he and his kin will perish. Saul comes disguised; Óðinn is not explicitly said to be disguised in *Vǫluspá*, but this was a commonplace of his travels, represented by his adoption of travelling names like *Grímnir*, "the masked", and it is a motif adopted in *Baldrs draumar*, where the *vǫlva* bursts into an exclamation when she recognises her interlocutor. In *Vǫluspá* Óðinn is addressed, but a larger audience lies behind him (marked by the plural verbs the *vǫlva* uses in addressing him), just as Saul has two companions with him. The tetchy and insistent questions posed to Saul both by the medium and by Samuel have their match in the *vǫlva*'s to Óðinn, and the medium's realisation and exclamation of who she is dealing with is paralleled by the *vǫlva*'s exclamation of «alt veit ek, Óðinn», "I know it all, Óðinn". Saul responds by persuading the medium to continue and tell him what she sees; Óðinn secures the *vǫlva*'s continued services with rich payments, and in both cases we are told what visions the women then had. The fact that Saul's medium both tells what she sees, and makes the presence of the dead Samuel apparent, suggests that the Norse poet indeed (as Dronke argues) intends to communicate the visions of the *vǫlva* that Óðinn consults, and those of the (presumably dead) *vǫlva* that the present-day *vǫlva* calls up.

The biblical echo is, I think, clear and intentional. The poet is adapting his material in general to fit a new structured view of cosmic history, such as was the norm within Christianity, and the use of a framework derived from the Bible (as well as other elements of a distinctly Christian nature, such as the apocalyptic details of *ragnarǫk*) is consistent with this. It does not mean that the pagan elements, such as are discussed above, are not genuine, but it suggests these elements are being structured and perhaps interpreted in a way which may not have taken place in earlier, more purely pagan times.

EIRÍKS SAGA RAUÐA

The most substantial account of a performance of *seiðr* within a supposedly historical setting which might be considered comparable to a shamanic kamlanie is found in *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4. *Eiríks saga* exists in two parchment manuscripts, Hauksbók (H) and Skálholtsbók (S). The first was written in 1306–8, the latter around 1420 (Dillman 2006: 276, with datings by Stefán Karlsson). However, H shows strong indications of revision by Haukr Erlendsson and others, whereas S, despite many errors, is a slavish copy which is now regarded as closer to the lost autograph (Sven Jansson, cited by Ólafur Halldórsson, *Eiríks saga* p. 335). The saga is believed to have been composed in the early thirteenth century (Dillmann 2006: 293, on the basis of research by, most recently, Ólafur Halldórsson). The discussion which follows is based on the S version, as edited most recently by Dillmann ⟨87⟩.

In order to elucidate our picture of shamanic features in Norse religious or superstitious practices it is clearly necessary to consider this text, and its value as a witness to such practices, in some detail. Strömbäck (1935: 59), although he regarded the text as late and unreliable, nonetheless believed it contained antiquarian observations testifying to actual shamanic-type practices. Dillmann (2006: 288) rightly rejects any shamanic element to the account, pointing out that there is no mention of falling into trance or any other feature typical of the shamanic kamlanie; nonetheless, he still regards the account as deriving from real oral tradition, possibly handed down in the family of Guðríðr. Barring a few minor elements in the account, themselves possibly misunderstood, all such appeals to apparently genuine tradition stretching back to the pagan period seem to me ill-founded and to underestimate the inventive ingenuity of the thirteenth-century author, as I shall seek to show.

The deceptive allure of verisimilitude

The saga writer is endowed with the ability to present a lively, detailed and generally convincing narrative; apart from the passage concerning Þorbjǫrg, we are given fairly lengthy descriptions of dealings with native Americans, and of events in the colony of Greenland such as the founding of the church at Eiríkr's settlement of Brattahlíð. The reader is easily seduced into believing in the factual reality of this description of life centuries before the composition of the work, in a remote colony. Yet the author's description of clearly learned fantasies such as the monopod in ch. 12 are in themselves no less well crafted, and should act as a warning against lending too much credence to the saga. Some of the information is no doubt accurate: traditions about the settlement of Greenland must surely have been passed down, and the church at Brattahlíð would have been visible in the writer's day (even though it was only rediscovered in 1961). Trade between Greenland and the American mainland almost certainly continued as long as the settlement in Greenland survived (or at

least while they possessed sea-worthy vessels, which may not have been quite so long), and knowledge of this contemporary activity would have given the saga writer much accurate information. But there is no reason to believe that most of the precise details the saga presents us with were necessarily true for the time in which it is set, around the year 1000.

The Christian background

The account of Þorbjǫrg also needs to be placed within the spiritual context of the saga. The saga is imbued with an almost fundamentalist Christian morality, and forms a polemical attack on the pagan practices still supposedly prevalent around the year 1000 in Greenland; the author manufactures some extraordinary scenes to illustrate his point, notably (ch. 8) the beached whale which made everyone who ate it ill, and which the Christians rejected, casting it over a cliff, when they discovered it might have been provided as an answer to a prayer to Þórr on the part of Þórhallr, and even more strikingly the episode (ch. 6) in which Guðríðr's dead husband Þorsteinn awakes and whispers to her that the pagan customs still prevalent in the land simply will not do.[15] As North (1991: 159) points out, the beached whale story is probably based on the account of the devil's poisoned beef in Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 37, which indicates the manufactured, artificial, nature of the paganism presented so realistically in *Eiríks saga*. The episode with the *vǫlva* should be seen as a further example, itself potentially wholly artificial, of a moral fable fancifully highlighting the evils of paganism and the mastering power of Christian *virtus* in the person of the Christian Guðríðr.

Guðríðr as christianised foremother

Guðríðr is a central character of the saga. Looked at from a Christian perspective – and it is certainly reasonable to infer the saga-writer's perspective to have been Christian – she might be characterised in various ways. Thus she is a Ruth figure, taken from her native land (Iceland) to be with strangers in Greenland, where as the wife of Þorfinnr karlsefni she becomes the ancestor, not of kings like Ruth (the foremother of David, but also of Christ), but of three of the great bishops of Iceland (Þorlákr Rúnolfsson of Skálaholt, 1118–33, Bjǫrn Gilsson of Hólar, 1147–62, Brandr Sæmundarson of Hólar, 1163–1201), who are mentioned in the concluding passage of the saga.[16] She is thus the foremother of Christianity in

[15] Þorsteinn says first «Guð vill at þessi stund sé mér gefin til leyfis ok umbótar míns ráðs», "God wishes this moment to be granted me by dispensation for the emendation of my affairs", recalling the *spatium poenitentiae*, "time for repentance", which the repentant sinner seeks from God before being consigned to death in Catholic doctrine, as exemplified in the priest's prayer before Mass in the Sarum Rite, asking for «spatium veræ pœnitentiæ et emendationem vitæ», "a time for true repentance and improvement of life".

[16] Just as the chapter in which Guðríðr's family's future greatness is foretold by the *vǫlva* begins with a famine, so too does the book of Ruth. Ruth is widowed, as is Guðríðr, and it is from the second husband that the great family descends. Guðríðr was great-grandmother

Iceland, and could hence be viewed also as a Mary figure; Mary, of course, is firmly associated with supernatural Christian prophecy in the form of the Annunciation (Luke 1: 26–38). The author's focus is, however we look at matters, upon Guðríðr as a channel for the Christianity to come; he is not interested in adulation of pagan practices or of perpetuating them in any way, and the description of Þorbjǫrg and her soothsaying merely acts as a foil to Guðríðr.[17] The only reasonable approach is to regard the whole description with the greatest suspicion, in terms of its telling us anything about tenth-century paganism.

The point of labouring the description of Þorbjǫrg's finery, and her domineering fussiness, is that it contrasts with the simplicity and humility of Guðríðr and her part in the episode; she is willing to take part only because she is persuaded that it will be beneficial to others, and because the master of the house asks her to, exhibiting thereby the Christian virtues of charity and obedience. It is notable that without Guðríðr the soothsaying session would not have taken place: this is surely stating that powers of prophecy lie only with those who serve the true God, not with pagans (even if the practice as such was essentially pagan in its nature); it is a characteristic of saintly people in general in the *Biskupa sǫgur* to be able to prophesy. We cannot infer from this that it was a general prerequisite for a *seiðr* performance to have a particular song performed: the author is simply showing, in the case he is presenting, that the intervention of a Christian was necessary to ensure success.

Similarly, it would be a mistake to infer on the basis of this account that the singing accompanying *seiðr* was regarded as beautiful. The author implies, in any case, that Guðríðr's singing was exceptionally fine, as particular note was taken of it, but again the overall point is to emphasise that it is the Christian who produces this thing of beauty which ensures the success of the event: the implication is that the beauty of Guðríðr's singing reflects the beauty of the faith she adheres to.

The soothsaying session has two purposes working on different levels. On an elementary level, the "historical" purpose was to foretell what would happen with the famine raging in Greenland, and the *vǫlva* answers on this point. But more important is the prophecy of Guðríðr's family's coming greatness. It is likely that the author, to lend verisimilitude to the

to two of Iceland's bishops (and great-great-grandmother to the third) mentioned in the saga's conclusion, just as Ruth was great-grandmother of King David. The comparisons cannot, of course, be pushed too far – the author is scarcely writing an allegory, after all. Guðríðr is a Christian going among pagans, rather than a pagan going among the chosen people, as was Ruth (who then adopts the ways of her new land), and Guðríðr returns to her native land to give rise to her great family, whereas the point of the book of Ruth is that its heroine does not return to hers. Such differences are the natural result of the different narrative, and religious, frameworks of the two tales.

[17] Dillmann objects that the detailed description of Þorbjǫrg's attire hardly contributes to the praise of Guðríðr, and is therefore likely to be genuine. Yet the description adds to the outlandishness of Þorbjǫrg, and also provides a list of features which might be expected in magicians, and hence acts as a tabulation of things for readers of the saga to beware of as being essentially unchristian: the author's polemic is directed against pagan practices, wherever and whenever found. I consider the attire in more detail in Chapter 18.

scene, has ascribed to it a purpose (the foretelling of the success of crops) that was traditionally associated with soothsayers.[18]

Þorbjǫrg and her biblical antecedents

The *vǫlva* Þorbjǫrg is, I suggest, a character with a multifaceted set of allusions behind her. Despite his opposition to paganism, the author does not adopt an over-condemnatory attitude towards the *vǫlva*. Clearly, given that Guðríðr takes part in this pagan practice, he could not be too critical without judging his heroine into the bargain. But the reason is probably deeper than this. In terms of the spiritual narrative of the saga, the *vǫlva* appears for one reason: to prophesy about Guðríðr, and the glorious Christian future of Iceland she would give rise to (implied in the prophecy, but not, of course, spelled out in so many words). As North (1991: 156) notes, "Þorbjǫrg's prophecy only serves to promote the Christianity which we must presume was encroaching on her practices". That she matches, in general terms, the angel Gabriel in the Annunciation has been implied above. She corresponds, in another facet, to the Magi, those magicians from the east who, following their pagan star-gazing practices, recognised the birth of the true Son of God in Christ and bore witness to him in Bethlehem. In both cases, pagan practices condemned by Christianity were allowed, by (we are to assume) divine dispensation, to achieve a glimpse of the truth and to reveal it, and that truth is the same in each case: the coming of Christ the saviour (in the case of Iceland in the persons of the bishops mentioned by the saga), marked by a star or a bright beam («bjartr geisli») – a motif which was readily and frequently adapted to mark out a saint or holy man, as in the case of Bishop Guðmundr in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* ch. 14, where a woman at Mass, looking at Guðmundr as he says the *Dominus vobiscum*, sees a bright beam coming from his mouth: «þá sá hon eld fara ór munni honum í lopt upp, bjartara miklu en hon hefði fyrr slíkan sét», "then she saw a flame go forth from his mouth up into the air, brighter than any such that she had ever seen". The Magi were believed to be rich kings, bringing wealthy gifts to the King of kings, and Þorbjǫrg's finery (and pomposity of behaviour) similarly marks her out as a regal character, but whereas the Magi kings bore testimony to the King, Christ, Þorbjǫrg bears witness to the future bishops of Iceland.

Sibylline prophecy, medieval para-liturgical feasts and the parody of the bishop

If we turn from these directly biblical parallels and look at medieval liturgical and para-liturgical texts, we are at once confronted with the use of sibylline prophecy in the Christmas liturgy. Þorbjǫrg's activities take place

[18] Even here, however, an oblique biblical reference may be intended, since it was by participating in the harvest of crops that Ruth, Guðríðr's prototype, gained her new husband Boaz, from whom King David descended – Ruth helped in the harvest, and Guðríðr in the foretelling of the harvest.

in winter, and as argued, her prophecy relates to the rise of Christianity, parallel to the birth of Christ. P. Dronke (1995: 589–90) points out that in all extant full versions of the Christmas Lesson (and in the related play, the *Ordo prophetarum*), in which prophets are summoned to foretell the birth of Christ, Nebuchadnezzar's words, declaring that a fourth person resembling the Son of God is visible in the fire, is followed by the sibyl's lines foretelling the Judgement, the *Iudicii signum* (translated from the Greek by Augustine in *De civitate Dei*).[19] The sibylline *vǫlva* of *Eiríks saga* does not foretell the end of the world: the writer takes the elements of prophecy (related to Christ or Christianity) and of the sibyl, but concentrates on just one prophetic element. In fact, although the main Greek and Latin sibylline texts focus upon the *eschaton*, there are variants where the coming of Christ is the central concern: P. Dronke (1995: 614–15) notes a Latin example entitled the *Versus sibille Theodole magne*, probably Spanish/southern French from the eighth century, which presents prophecies of the life of Mary (thus paralleling Þorbjǫrg's prophecy of Guðríðr), as well as Christ; furthermore, there was a tradition of depicting the queen of Sheba as a sibyl, who on her visit to Solomon foresees Christ's crucifixion; this is found, for example, in a German text from 1321/2 (clearly based on earlier tradition: P. Dronke 1995: 600). Hence, an Icelandic saga-writer, familiar with continental paraliturgical traditions, would have precedent for presenting a sibylline figure whose prophecies relate to the birth of Christ (and hence Christianity), rather than the to him irrelevant end of the world.

Through her prophecy concerning Guðríðr, Þorbjǫrg foretells by implication the rise of the great bishops of medieval Iceland. Under another of her facets, Þorbjǫrg in fact constitutes a sort of inversion – female and pagan – of the male, Christian bishop, like the Viking chief Þorgils's wife Auðr, sacrilegiously prophesying from the altar of Cluain Mhic Nóis in the ninth century, according to the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* ⟨70⟩. She travels around the district as if on an episcopal visit (or even visitation), with Þorkell acting as "dean", gathering all the local populace in, not to hear sermons and to line up to confess their sins in turn, but to hear a general prophecy about the famine and individual prophecies on their own circumstances. Note too the emphasis placed on the high seat she is provided with, recalling a bishop's *cathedra*, and the staff she bears, adorned like a bishop's crozier, along with her cloak and hat, a sort of parody of the bishop's robes and mitre, as well as the general deference afforded her as to an honoured ecclesiastic. Her performance of *seiðr*, surrounded by a sort of *chorus virginum* (this, at least, was the stated intention) – even if this *chorus* may be a traditional feature, as other sources witness – recalls the bishop officiating at Mass, encircled by the church choir, or, seeing it as a parody of a visitation, the bishop with his accompanying entourage of monks responsible for the effective implementation of the event. Þorbjǫrg functions as

[19] Lendinara (2003: 92) notes the *Ordo prophetarum* including the sibyl's words goes back to the late eleventh century; Lendinara includes the full Latin and Greek texts, and places the widespread use of the Latin text in an Anglo-Saxon context, as well as references to further discussions of the texts.

a sort of anti-bishop of paganism (or perhaps "ante-bishop" would be a more appropriate designation), at once despised for her heathendom and honoured for predicting the coming of the true bishops (in a sense her replacements) who will enlighten the land of Iceland.

The motif of acting the part of a bishop as a foreshadowing of what is to come occurs in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* ch. 4, composed *c.* 1300, where as a child the future bishop always took the part he was later to adopt in reality:

> Þá áttu þeir Guðmundr ok Ǫgmundr barnleika saman ok margt annat ungmenni með þeim. En til ins sama atferlis kom jafnan um leik þeira, hvat sem fyrst var upp [tekit], at Guðmundi var ger mítra ok bagall ok messufǫt, kirkja ok altari; ok skyldi hann vera biskup í leiknum; en Ǫgmundi øx ok skjǫldr ok vápn; ok skyldi hann vera hermaðr.
>
> Guðmundr and Ǫgmundr played children's games together, and many other youngsters with them. All their games, however, tended to end in the same way, however they began: Guðmundr was equipped with a mitre, crozier and vestments, a church and an altar; he was to be a bishop in the game, while Ǫgmundr got an axe, shield and other weapons; he was to be a warrior.

Both sagas, I suggest, are using the principle of *dramatic narrative use of play*, *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* explicitly and directly, while *Eiríks saga* does so in a more involved manner (as is discussed here); both pick upon the most obvious distinguishing features of a bishop to do this, with *Eiríks saga* bringing in a wider array of elements to emphasise the pompousness of the dramatic event.

This is not the place to enter into digressions about the dramatic element in Norse culture – a topic which has been discussed at length by Gunnell (1995) – other than to note its pervasive importance. However, there was one particular liturgical season where the element of play, and of episcopal parody, was to the fore, which is, I argue, of relevance in the present context, and that season is again Christmastide. The Feast of Fools (on the Circumcision of the Lord, 1 January) and the Feast of the Boy Bishop (generally on the Holy Innocents' day, 28 December) afforded celebrations where the Mass and the offices of the church were parodied, and the celebrations included inappropriate or cross-dressing (see Chambers 1903: ch. 13–15 for details of both festivals). Such festivities of misrule took place widely in medieval Christendom; in particular, they are well recorded in France and especially Paris in the twelfth century, at a time when a significant Icelandic presence is known to have existed in the city;[20] the Boy Bishop at least was realised in popular play in Sjælland

[20] Gunnell (1995: 326–8) notes that Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056–1135) probably studied in Paris, and the bishops Ísleifr Gizurarson and his son Gizurr studied in Saxony in the eleventh century as liturgical drama was beginning; Þorlákr Þórhallsson, bishop of Skálaholt, studied in Lincoln and Paris in the mid-twelfth century, as the performance of vernacular religious plays began. Norwegians appear to have had strong contacts with England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Liturgical drama was particularly fostered in Benedictine

as the *julebisp*, "Christmas bishop" (Gunnell 1995: 134). There was also a strong connection with Lincoln, where a feast of fools was celebrated at least from the early thirteenth century until it was suppressed in 1390; the probable originator (or at least organiser) of the feast of fools ceremony at Sens, Pierre de Corbeil, was coadjutor bishop at Lincoln in the late twelfth century, at about the same time as Páll Jónsson was a student in England (probably at Lincoln, where his uncle St Þorlákr had studied) (Chambers 1903: I, 321–2; *Páls saga*, p. 474, §2).

Richard of St Victor (†1173) had preached against popular "fortune-tellings, divinations, deceptions, and feigned madnesses" associated with the Feast of the Circumcision. He complained (PL 177: 1036):

> Hodie namque sortilegiis et divinationibus, vanitatibus et insaniis falsis prae caeteris anni diebus intendunt. Hodie donis ad invicem vanae et superstitiosae intentionis observatione se praeveniunt; hodie debacchationis suae furiis rapti, et instigationis diabolicae flammis accensi ad ecclesiam convolant, et vaniloquiis ac stultiloquiis, quibus peccatum non deerit imo aderit rhythmicis quoque dictis nefariis, risibus, et cachiniis domum Dei profanant [...] et nonnulli sacerdotum plaudunt manu, et populus diligit talia.

> Today above all the days of the year they focus on fortune-tellings and soothsayings, on vanities and false insanities. Today, they concentrate on exchanging gifts, following an empty and superstitious custom; today, seized by the furies of their bacchic ravings and set afire with the flames of diabolical instigation, they fly to the church, and profane the house of God with vain and foolish talk in which sin is not wanting but certainly present, and with evil rhythmical poems, laughter, and cackling [...] and some of the priests clap with their hands, and the common people love such things.

We chiefly know of the festivities from the thirteenth and later centuries, once their more outrageous elements had been somewhat contained. The early-thirteenth-century decrees limited the *precentor stultorum*, "master of fools", to intone the *Laetemur gaudiis* and to wield the precentor's staff – clearly the chant and the staff, as in Þorbjǫrg's case, were central elements. The celebrations took place in mid-winter; Þorbjǫrg is specifically said to make her visitations in winter. Girls also followed the customs of the boy-bishop feast, electing a Girl Abbess; this is recorded both in England and France, and was condemned, for example by Archbishop Peckham, who wrote (in French, rather than Latin, as he was addressing women) to Godstow nunnery in 1279 to ask them to desist (Chambers 1903: I, 361; Hutton 1996: 102). The costumes involved in the ceremony are mentioned in several records. At King's College, Cambridge, an inventory of 1506 describes the whole costume of the Boy Bishop for the feast of St Nicholas: a white wool coat, a scarlet gown with its hood furred with white ermine,

houses, and the majority of Icelandic monastic houses were Benedictine; there were close communications within the order. Many European clerics also worked in Scandinavia and Iceland at this period. Liturgical drama developed within Scandinavia itself: at least in the case of Sweden, three Easter plays are extant which were performed in the thirteenth century.

fine fitted gloves, gold rings, a crozier, and a mitre of white damask with a rose, star and a cross embroidered upon it in pearls and green and red gems; the wearer presided at services and at theatrical performances (Hutton 1996: 102). At Westminster in 1388 the costume consisted of a mitre with silvered and gilt plates, gems and pearls, a *baculus* with images of St Edward the Confessor and St Peter, two pairs of cheveril gloves to match the mitre, an amice, a rochet, a surplice, two albs, a cope of blood-red colour decorated with gryphons and other beasts, as well as a principal cope of ruby and blood-red velvet, embroidered with gold, with the new arms of England on it (Chambers 1903: I, 360). We cannot, of course, be sure how far the costume of the twelfth century differed, but the tradition is unlikely to have changed greatly; there is a clear notion of exuberant indulgence in the dress, which corresponds to what is found in Þorbjǫrg's case, and even particulars like the white fur and the gloves at King's College are matched.

The subversion of church authority in these ritualised festivities of misrule was a source of annoyance to many churchmen, but they clearly had a recognised place; the justification for them, in religious terms, would be that they occur at the liminal time of the new year, and of the coming of the new kingdom through Christ's birth. As we have already noted, Þorbjǫrg is also a liminal character, marking the passing of the paganism of the old world she represents and the coming of the new world of Christianity. There is an ambivalence to Þorbjǫrg; the overtly Christian author rejects the paganism, but at the same time uses it as part of a *praeparatio evangelica* leading to the spread of Christianity through (ultimately) Guðríðr. There is a similar ambivalence, as Hutton (1996: 101) notes, to the festival of the Boy Bishop; it is a world upside down, but at the same time honours children – "theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

M. Harris (2008) brings out some interesting points in his discussion of the Feast of Fools in thirteenth-century northern France. He emphasises that, whilst the wilder aspects of the festival may in the twelfth century have been somewhat uncontrolled, by the early thirteenth the licentious elements had been subsumed within the overall structure of the feast, in the case of Sens in a liturgy composed *c.* 1200–20 by the bishop, Pierre de Corbeil, which survives as a full text. The main purport of the texts peculiar to the Feast of Fools is the shining of the light of joy, the birth of Christ, and the coming of the new year. The subdeacons who were in charge of the festivities had the usual task of caring for vessels and vestments, and they made use of these on the day; a central role is taken by the *bacularius*, a subdeacon who had taken charge of the cantor's staff (*baculus*) and ornate cope. In theatrical plays associated with the feast, the garments are emphasised: the splendid robe of Joseph, and the "golden garment" of the queen in the *Ludus Danielis* (which would have involved cross-dressing, a subdeacon taking the part of the queen). The *Ludus Danielis*, composed (argues Fassler 1992: 97) as an off-shoot of the Feast of Fools at Beauvais in the early thirteenth century (but probably based on earlier antecedents), presents a character from the Old Testament, but the play was intended to

be associated with the Christmas season, and concludes with a prophecy of Christ.[21]

Over all, then, the liturgical and para-liturgical texts of the Feast of Fools show, argues Harris, that the "rough" drama of the parody and licence of the subdeacons was taken up into an essentially affirmative Church celebration. The same approach can be seen in *Eiríks saga*, where a series of pagan practices are made to form part of an overall story of the victorious arrival of Christianity; the extravagant staff and clothing, upon which so much emphasis is placed in Þorbjǫrg's case, parallel the *baculus* and cope "misused" by the subdeacon, or the whole episcopal outfit as used by the Boy Bishop. The focus of the Feast of Fools is the birth of Christ, something even more dramatically realised in the *Ludus Danielis*, which prophesies it, in the way that Þorbjǫrg prophesies the future bishops of Iceland, the bearers of Christ to this new land. The hymn on the light of joy is matched by the «bjartr geisli», "bright beam", which hovers over Guðríðr's kin.

The author of *Eiríks saga* appears to have made use of the motif of the wandering fortune-teller, but by his particular contextualisation of the motif he has, I suggest, implied a series of connotations, linking the scene to aspects of Christianity and Christian worship so as to underline the essentially Christian message of his saga.

The wandering fortune-teller

Turning back to the more obvious aspects, of Þorbjǫrg as a wandering fortune-teller, it is interesting to note a parallel from a more recent record of a visit by a close equivalent of Þorbjǫrg; examples might be found, no doubt, in many societies, but this is from Finland, and was recorded in 1955 (Stark 2006: 173):

> I remember how dreadfully afraid we were of the sorceress named Pykly. I was a small girl on my home farm of Emoniemi. It was a completely different time than now, there were no railroads, nor anything else that was modern. The old beliefs were still alive. Every once in a while our home farm was visited by a tiny, old, extremely dark-complexioned woman with a bundle in her hand. She was the dreaded sorceress Pykly, with her magic objects in her bundle. "Pykly is coming," it was said, "now children, behave." Cold shivers ran up and down my body. I would have wanted to run away, but there was nothing to do but remain in the farmhouse and be good, so that Pykly wouldn't work her magic. The adults tried to curry favour when dealing with Pykly. She was fed and given drink and gifts. Pykly was a malicious old woman, from whose brown face blazed a pair

[21] According to Fassler (1992: 81), the *Ludus Danielis* grew out of a dramatic reading of the sermon "Contra Judeos, paganos et Arianos", read during the Office in and around Christmas, but the *Ludus* was associated specifically (it would appear) with the Feast of Fools on 1 January. One of the deliberately jarring features of the play is the Babylonians, comic characters out of place in the ecclesiastical world in which they temporarily find themselves, who are staged playing instruments, dancing and revelling to emphasise their paganness (ibid. 96) – an illustration of how such anomalous figures may nonetheless be incorporated into an essentially Christian work, just as, I suggest, the Icelandic author does with the outlandish Þorbjǫrg.

> of keen black eyes. And she was capricious and quick to anger. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief when she left the farm. Many people used Pykly's "services" during their lifetime. Pykly was in fact a capable sorceress, so it was said.

A common comment on such visiting fortune-tellers, which happens not to occur in the example just given, was that they were welcomed like a bishop, such as in the following example recorded in 1938 (ibid. 175):

> Anna-Maija Tuppi was an extremely good fortune-teller who was received on every farm as if she were a bishop in the parsonage. For if she were treated badly, then one could expect poor success in cattle husbandry and the cow might even end up in the forest cover.

The fortune-teller, demanding this, that and the other, is even sometimes explicitly said to act like an evil bishop (ibid.). The visit of a bishop was the most obvious irruption of the stately world into the everyday life of ordinary people, and formed a natural simile in the minds of such people: and this would apply just as clearly in thirteenth-century Iceland as in early-modern Finland, so, even though the simile is not explicit in the Icelandic text, the overall context discussed above suggests such an implicit understanding.

A number of motifs link the Pykly account to that of Þorbjǫrg. The narrator was a young girl, unable to resist the overawing presence of the older sorceress: we have an opposition of young innocence and openness to experienced guile and subjection, just as between Guðríðr and Þorbjǫrg. The narrator is keen to emphasise that this took place in a different world, when "the old beliefs were still alive"; Guðríðr's world is set in the far past and in a far land, where paganism is imagined as still being rife, yet Guðríðr, the foremother of the bishops of Iceland, acts as a link between that world and the saga-writer's, just as the Finnish narrator is the living conduit from the old world to our own. There is an emphasis on unwillingness to participate in pagan rituals in both accounts, which almost, but not quite, results in downright refusal. The obsequiousness of those tending the seeress is emphasised in both cases, the explicit reason for this being made plain in the Finnish account (and it is implicit in the Icelandic); we have specific mention of the provender afforded the old woman. The character of the seeress is highlighted in both accounts in two ways: by explicitly describing her tetchy temperament, and by describing her odd appearance. The tools of the trade, particularly the witch's bundle, are mentioned in both. Both accounts manage to communicate a strong sense both of revulsion and fascination, such that neither seeress had any need to worry about the size of her clientelle. The main difference between the accounts is that the Finnish merely records a personal history; there is no narrative purpose to the seeress's visits, whereas the author of *Eiríks saga* is clearly *using* a stock set of motifs for a clear narrative end within the saga. There is no question of a genetic link between the Icelandic and Finnish accounts, but there is a clear typological connection, which indicates, I believe, that the Icelandic account goes back ultimately to commonplace folk memorates such as the

Finnish account exemplifies. It is possible that such seeresses existed in Iceland, though the evidence is against this; Norway or Scotland are more likely sources for such folk accounts. Arguing that such a memorate lies behind the saga account is very far, it must be emphasised, from suggesting that there is any truth in the account (in the way the Finnish account is true, as being a faithful description of what one woman experienced in her childhood): it is simply that the author has been able to call upon such accounts in the construction of his wholly literary work, and will have been free to elaborate, adapt and direct his narrative at will.

Within this general framework, how much in the account might be thought to represent traditions of genuine paganism? Many researchers have been bewitched by the detail of the description of the *vǫlva* into thinking it must represent such a genuine tradition. In fact, the detail speaks precisely against such a conclusion: it is inconceivable that such precision and particularity could survive in oral tradition over a couple of centuries, whether in Guðríðr's family (as Dillmann suggests) or elsewhere. There are only three potential sources for the information: the imagination of the author; observations of contemporary soothsayers; literary tradition. There does not appear to be any clear literary antecedent to the scene (which does not preclude further research revealing one, however). At least some of the details can be paralleled in later accounts of "wise women" (such as the Finnish one cited above), and knowledge of such people may have given rise to some of the details. Some of the motifs may be recognised from folk culture, such as the knife with broken tip (cf., for example, that found in the magician woman's grave at Maglehöj beside Frederikssund, discussed by Olrik and Ellekilde 1926–51: I, 80), or the youngest daughter with prophetic powers.[22] Here too, however, there are probably literary allusions: Þorbjǫrg is the successor to (or perhaps, reading inclusively, the last of) nine daughters, which recalls both the nine worlds remembered (perhaps successively) by the *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá*, and the god Heimdallr, who was the son of nine sisters, and had praeternatural powers of perception (in Snorri's account ⟨62*a*⟩) and foresight (according to *Þrymskviða* 15 ⟨57⟩).[23] Some general elements relate to traditions widely referred to

[22] Dyer (1905: ch. 26) notes several instances of the supernatural powers of the seventh daughter (though without citation of sources), including how the Scottish spae wife would claim to be the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter; Robert Kirk (2007: 24, 49), writing in the mid-seventeenth century, records a comparable belief in the supernatural healing power of seventh sons in Scotland.

[23] Some Celtic (Irish or Scottish) influence is also possible, as the ninth recursion is often regarded as magically powerful: for example, the tale of the great sage Morann, contained in the *Echtra Cormaic* ch. 13 ("The Irish Ordeals and Cormac's Adventures in the Land of Promise"), recounts that when he was born, a membrane covered his head, which was subsequently removed by immersion in the sea; as the ninth wave washed over him the membrane separated, releasing his head, whereupon he sang a *laid*, in which he called upon mortals to praise the forgiving God over the beautiful world (N. Chadwick 1935: 109). A Celtic, or better still mixed Celtic–Norse, source for the depiction of the *vǫlva* in general would appear worth considering, either in the form of a text (though I have been unable to find any that are strikingly close), or from familiarity with wandering fortune-tellers there; it is of interest that King James VI/I (1616: 129), in the third book of his *Daemonologie* (first

elsewhere: the description of the session as *seiðr*, the *seiðhjallr*, the naming of the practitioner as a *vǫlva*;[24] the author is clearly relating the event to known traditions, but it does not follow that anything in his description beyond these well-recognised terms also belongs to that tradition. There is no need to avoid the conclusion, indeed, that the author's imagination may have contributed no small part of the description. Some elements appear to allude to biblical themes: thus the meal of kids' milk and hearts is surely a reference to the prohibition in Deuteronomy 14: 21 against boiling a kid in its mother's milk (from which was developed a general Judaic law of not eating milk and meat products together), the failure to observe the prohibition marking out the non-chosen. I consider the *vǫlva*'s clothing and accoutrements further in the next chapter, but to anticipate I find little to indicate any coherent genuine tradition behind the description.

Náttúrur

There are two further features that call for consideration. The first is the meaning of *náttúrur*. The text, which Dillmann notes is likely to be somewhat corrupted at this point, states: «Spákona þakkar henni kvæðit; "hon hafði margar náttúrur higat at sótt ok þótti fagrt at heyra þat er kveðit var, er áðr vildi frá oss snúask ok oss øngva hlýðni veita".» The traditional interpretation is that the *náttúrur* are independent spirits which provide the information to the *vǫlva*, which she then pronounces to her audience; for example, most recently, Dillmann (2006: 285) translates the passage – with editorial additions which alter its sense considerably – "elle avait attiré ici de nombreux esprits et il <leur> paraissait agréable d'entendre ce qui avait été chanté, <eux> qui auparavant voulaient se détourner de nous et nous refuser toute obéissance" ("she had drawn here numerous spirits and it seemed pleasant <to them> to listen to what had been sung, <they> who previously wished to turn away and refuse us any obedience"). The

published 1597), specifically mentions only the Orkneys and Shetlands (in other words, the still Norse-speaking areas of Scotland), along with Lapland and Finland, as notoriously given over to witchcraft involving incubi and succubi, which implies that still in the sixteenth century some form of magical (probably divinatory) practice which was vaguely reminiscent of Sámi shamanism with its helping spirits continued in these Norse isles (whereas in Iceland, as we have seen, it did not), and suggests that in such areas might well have been found characters on whom to base the depiction of Þorbjǫrg (James may have picked up some familiarity with Sámi practices in his six-month sojourn in Denmark in 1589). It is clear that remote areas of Scotland were already associated with fearsome sorcerers in the medieval period, as the Hebridean provenance of the horrid Kotkell and his family in *Laxdœla saga* ⟨102⟩ shows.

[24] There are even verbal and thematic echoes of other sources, such as the restless night suffered by Þórdís in *Fóstbrœðra saga* ch. 23 (preserved, like *Eiríks saga*, in Hauksbók) ⟨132⟩, where Þórdís says «ok em ek nú vís orðin þeira hluta, er ek vissa eigi áðr», "and I have become wise about those matters which I did not know before"'; cf. *Eiríks saga* «En mér eru nú margir þeir hlutir auðsýnir er áðr var bæði ek ok aðrir dulðir», "Many things are now easily visible to me which earlier both I and others were in the dark about". The older dating of *Fóstbrœðra saga* to the earliest thirteenth century would suggest it was the source here, but the saga is now dated to the latest part of the thirteenth century (Vésteinn Ólason 2006: 100–1), and hence is likely to be the borrower.

account goes on to state nothing more explicit than that many matters were now clearly visible which previously, that is before the singing of the special song by Guðríðr, were hidden; the information is not said to derive from any supernatural beings. The focus of attention at this point is in fact on the song; the "spirits" – if such is what the *náttúrúr* were – are mentioned merely in passing, indeed in such a perfunctory manner that their very existence may (and will) be questioned.[25] Several features of the S text require comment:

1. The lack of sequence of tense and abrupt shifts between direct and indirect speech can be readily paralleled (as Dillmann notes, 2006: 284 n. 74), yet the syntactic disruption in the present case remains somewhat suspicious.

2. H has altered the verb *sœkja at* to *sœkja til*; the latter is more anodyne, indicating a "visit" on the part of the *náttúrur*, but *sœkja* requires further consideration, undertaken below.

3. The S reading does not state that it was the *náttúrur* which found the singing pleasant; given that we have just been told that the audience found Guðríðr's singing to be the finest they had heard, it is more natural to take the *vǫlva*'s comment to be a reiteration of this.

4. Similarly, the last part of the sentence does not necessarily refer to the *náttúrur*; again, given what we have been told of Guðríðr's hesitance at taking part in the ceremony, this comment may readily be read as referring to her, wanting to turn away and not to offer any help until persuaded otherwise.

5. The meaning of *náttúrur* is unclear. This requires further consideration.

In H, *náttúrur* can scarcely mean anything but some sort of spirit, but this is a secondary reading of a difficult text more accurately rendered in S (following the latest scholarship on the manuscript texts: Dillmann 2006: 276–7). The reviser of the text who produced the H version could well have been aware of the tradition of summoning spirits during a performance of *seiðr* (as indicated in other sources already considered), and been led to interpret *náttúrur* in this sense (despite no sense of the word anything closer than an object's or person's "numinous power" being otherwise recorded). In S, however, the abruptness of the introduction, with no explanatory context, of "spirits", and the use of a word we have no reason to believe ever meant this elsewhere, render it highly unlikely that the word should be taken in this sense – all the more so when we bear in mind the (vehemently) Christian stance of the author, who is more likely to have wished to keep spirits out of the scene altogether, or else to have made an explicit objection to such a belief.

[25] Dillmann notes that the H reading is secondary, being in all likelihood an interpretation of an antecedent which was already corrupt; it reads: «Spákonan þakkar henni kvæðit ok kvað margar þær náttúrur nú til hafa sótt ok þykkja fagrt at heyra, er kvæðit var svá vel flutt», "The soothsaying woman thanks her for the song and said many of those *náttúrur* have now visited and find it pleasant to listen, as the song was so well performed".

As noted, whilst Fritzner (1886–1972, *s.v.*) and other dictionaries, relying on the H reading, interpret the word as "spirits", such a sense occurs nowhere else in Old Norse. Moreover, the Latin word *natura* from which it is borrowed is not recorded with this sense, or anything approaching it, in the *Novum glossarium*, covering the period up to around 1200. In Norse, *náttúra* occurs in two senses (both well established already in Latin): "nature, the created world", which is scarcely apposite here, and "nature, inherent quality" (cf. sense X in the *Novum glossarium*, "dispositions naturelles, caractère"), from which develops the sense "potency, power, virtue"; this in turn often extends its meaning further to "numinous power", which is said to *fylgja*, "follow, accompany", a person or object (for example, Fritzner cites *Karlamagnúss saga*: «mikil náttúra fylgir yðr kristnum mǫnnum», "great power accompanies you Christians").

The specific phrase «margar náttúrur», occurring in the *Eiríks saga* description, otherwise occurs (as cited by Fritzner) only once, in *Þorgils saga skarða* ch. 8 (within *Sturlunga saga*): «Hann [Knútr] hafði margar náttúrur fram yfir aðra menn», "Knútr had many natural powers above other men" (his ability to perceive «steina náttúru», "the nature of stones", is given as an example). *Náttúra* in this sense of natural skills is also indicated by the compound word, *náttúrubragð*. This is used, in a manner directly comparable to *Eiríks saga*, in the later version (*c.* 1350) of *Bragða-Mágus saga* ch. 47, describing the French bishop Trajanus, described as an excellent clerk and master of all things, since «hann vissi firi af náttúrubragði sínu marga óorðna hluti», "through his natural skill he foreknew many things which had not happened". The sense of "natural powers, virtues" (particularly those used for powers of prophecy), in other words those of Guðríðr herself, would fit the context of *Eiríks saga*, and act as a further authorial commendation of the heroine; as noted, powers of prophecy were regularly attributed to holy persons in Icelandic saints' lives, and it would accord far better with the general message of the saga to see Guðríðr, rather than the pagan seeress, as the ultimate source of prophecy in the present instance (even if the seeress remains the channel for their enunciation).

The verb governing *náttúrur*, namely *sœkja*, is slightly problematic in this interpretation of *náttúrur* as abstract qualities, as it occurs predominantly with concrete objects. At least some doubt must be raised, however, over whether it really does govern *náttúrur*. Ólafur Halldórsson, in editing the S text, found the passage under consideration to be corrupt, and emended it to accord better with the H reading. However, it would also be reasonable to suggest not so much corruption as elision of part of the original text: if we read «hon hafði margar náttúrur … higat at sótt» (with the ellipsis marking a lacuna), the *náttúrur* would be governed by *hafa*, precisely as in the example cited from *Sturlunga saga* above; exactly what is doing the visiting or fetching after the lacuna could not be determined (a natural inference would be that it is still spirits, but under some other term). Nonetheless, if we retain the S reading as it stands, we may note several parallels. *Sœkja* is occasionally associated with abstracts: in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 5, Þorsteinn visits the queen to tell her he has slain her son Jǫkull, and asks her to

intercede for him to the jarl; she says to her husband: «Nú svá sem Jǫkull gaf honum líf ok átti áðr alls kosti við hann ok sótti sjá maðr giptu til hans [...]», "Now, as Jǫkull granted him his life and he had previously had total control over him, and this man obtained good fortune at his hands [...]". *Sœkja* here, as in many of its senses, retains a sense of striving to achieve something; as an example in a less abstract context, cf. *Egils saga* ch. 22: «Þá hljóp Þórólfr fram ok hjó til beggja handa, sótti þangat at er merki konungs var», "Then Þórólfr leaped forward and struck with both hands, and strove to get to where the king's standard was", or, earlier in the same chapter, where an inanimate object is the subject: «sótti eldrinn at þeim», "the fire pressed hard upon them". *Sœkja* is associated with *náttúra* in one text: in *Gunnars saga keldugnúpsfífls* ch. 16, Gunnarr attacks Ǫrn, «en sakir þess at Ǫrn var orðinn gamall maðr þá sótti hann mannleg náttúra svá at hann mœddisk», "but because Ǫrn had become an old man his human nature pressed so hard upon him that he grew tired"; here, the sense is that to keep up his strength for the fight places more demands upon him than his body can stand. Here the *náttúra* is the subject rather than the object, but there is little semantic difference between a man's nature making demands upon him, and him making demands upon his nature (his strengths and weaknesses).

Taking into account the above considerations,[26] I suggest – with the proviso that here, as in many places in S, the text has probably been corrupted[27] – that *náttúrur* refers to Guðríðr's innate skills, particularly those of a numinous and perhaps prophetic disposition (cf. the *luonto* ⟨QV⟩ of the Finnish *tietäjä*), and that *sœkja* communicates her successful striving to bring these skills to bear; the whole sentence refers to her abilities and actions, and spirits play no part in it. I would render the sentence of S as "The soothsaying woman thanks her for the song; 'She had brought out here many natural strengths – and it seemed pleasant to hear what was sung – who previously wanted to turn away from us and offer no obedience'."

Varðlokkur

In order to exorcise the spirits totally from *Eiríks saga* it will be necessary to consider another term used in the account, *varðlokur* (*varðlokkur* in H).

[26] I read «higat at» together, equivalent to the more common *hingat til*; otherwise, we are obliged to read *sœkja at* together. This has the chief meaning of "attack", which appears to be irrelevant here (and is difficult to construe syntactically); it can also mean "petition, ask for something", but *at* must then function as a preposition with object, not an adverb as here; a further usage, developed from "attack", refers specifically to a visitation by premonitory "spirits" or fetches (*fylgjur*), as in *Njáls saga* ch. 12: «Nú tók Svanr til orða ok geispaði mjǫk: "Nú sœkja at fylgjur Ósvifrs"», "Now Svanr began speaking and yawned mightily: 'Now the *fylgjur* of Ósvifr are attacking'". The last meaning could scarcely be inferred in the S version of *Eiríks saga*, however, since the *náttúrur* would need to be the subject, and the idea of hostility on the part of the spirits would be inappropriate.

[27] Even if the proposed reading is not accepted, it still remains problematic to accept a meaning of "spirits" for *náttúrur* on the basis of this one, probably, corrupt text (discounting the H version, where the meaning is probably forced by the retention of the word within a reordered and reinterpreted text).

There is some doubt over what the word refers to; Dillmann (2006: 282) argues that *varðlokur* in the sentence «Bað hon fá sér konur þær sem kynni frœði þat er þyrfti til seiðinn at fremja ok Varðlokur heita», "She asked for women who knew the lore required for carrying out *seiðr*, who are called *varðlokur*", refers not to the song, but to the women who go on to form a circle around the *vǫlva*.[28] Guðríðr echoes the phrase in her reply, «en þó kenndi Halldís fóstra mín mér á Íslandi þat frœði er hon kallaði Varðlokur», "but in Iceland my foster-mother, Halldís, taught me the lore she called *varðlokur*", with the implication that the *varðlokur* are a *frœði*, a piece of learning (and thus by implication the song which Guðríðr sings), though, as Dillmann indicates, it is still possible to take *frœði* as the general designation for the *varðlokur* as the group of women and what they do. The indications are that the author, while aware that some sort of *frœði*, and specifically a song, is involved, is uncertain of the word's overall meaning, and is hedging his bets.

It seems that the author regards the word *varðlokur* as consisting of *a.* the word *vǫrðr* in the usual sense of "a guard", combined with *vǫrð*, "woman", and *b. loka* in the plural, in the sense of something that locks or closes in, combined with the idea of a song.[29] On this basis, he presents us with a scene in which the women form a circle, closing in the *vǫlva* – a scene which appears to have no function whatever other than to realise the implications of the word *varðlokur* – while Guðríðr sings the special song which is vital to the whole enterprise. As this scene appears to be the result of the author's inference of the meaning of the word *varðlokur*, the account may be dismissed as affording any evidence for actual practices accompanying *seiðr* performances. It also implies that the author did not associate the word with the summoning of spirits, which is one of the possible meanings that may be inferred, as considered below. The result of this reading, and the other arguments presented above, is that shamanic-type spirit helpers, along with any other features of shamanism, have been wholly banished from the *Eiríks saga* account. This accords much better than the traditional reading of the passage with the Christian spirit of the author, whom we should be surprised to find presenting his Christian heroine consorting with spirits, whom he could scarcely regard as anything other than devils.

[28] Dillmann argues that in the first sentence the verb should be in the singular as its subject is «frœði»; this is, strictly speaking, true, but the plural «heita» may nevertheless be nothing more than the result of attraction by the immediately preceding plural, «varðlokur». As he notes, however, the reading of H supports the interpretation of *varðlokur* as the women: «konvr þer er kvnnv frę̨ði þat sem til seidsins þarf. ok varðlokkvr hetv», "those women who knew that lore which was necessary for *seiðr*, and were called *varðlokkur*".

[29] Matthías Þórðarson, who first edited the H version for Íslenzk fornrit, notes (207, n. 3): "With the *varðlokur* the *vǫrðr*, the guardian spirit [...] was locked within the ring of those singing (and who were also most likely named *varðlokur*)" ("Með Varðlokum varð *vörðurinn*, verndarandinn [...] lokaður inni í hring þeirra, er sungu (og sem voru ef til vill einnig nefndar varðlokur)"). Yet there is no indication of anything being locked within this circle; moreover, the notion of a spirit being confined within such a circle of women (as opposed to possessing the individual *vǫlva*) is highly questionable, and would call for parallels to be adduced.

However, it appears unlikely (but cannot altogether be dismissed) that the author invented the strange word *varðlokur*; far more likely is that, as with *seiðr* and *seiðhjallr*, he is using a traditional term associated with soothsaying and probably specifically with *seiðr* (though it is possible that the conjunction of *seiðr* and *varðlokur* is his own work) to lend his account an air of authenticity, and is reinterpreting it, either deliberately to avoid unacceptable pagan aspects, or simply because the meaning of this probably ancient term was no longer clear.[30] What can be uncovered of its more ancient likely usages?

Varð- derives from *vǫrðr*. The *vǫrðr* appears to have been a protective spirit, for example of farmsteads ⟨VÅRDTRÄD⟩, in which case it remained a conceptually distinct entity, but also of individual persons, when it readily merges with the notion of the free soul. It is this *vǫrðr* spirit that is to be seen as referred to in the term *varðlokur* for the song (this interpretation was first made by M. Olsen 1916: 9). The only other case in Old Norse where *vǫrðr* probably means "guardian spirit" is in the title of Heimdallr, as *vǫrðr* of the gods, where it clearly refers to an independent entity; however, we cannot without question infer such a connotation of *vǫrðr* in *varðlokur*. Thus, in seeking to accommodate the *Eiríks saga* account more closely to shamanic notions, Strömbäck (1935: 139) favoured the interpretation of *vǫrðr* as "free soul", as exemplified by the witch trial from Namdalen ⟨QV⟩ in 1660; the song would be to draw back the wandering free soul of the *vǫlva*. Ohlmarks (1939: 334–5) made particular objection to Strömbäck's interpretation, pointing out its unlikeliness from a religious and textual point of view, since *seiðr* accounts do not yield evidence of cataleptic trance during which the soul would be sent out,[31] and that since the song is sung *before* the ceremony, not after it, it could not act as a means of calling back the free soul. Admittedly, given the argument above against the writer seeing anything to do with spirits in *varðlokur*, it could be suggested that his placing of the song at one point rather than another within the ceremony may well not reflect the traditional usage; however, since dismissing one element after another of the account will result in the whole matter disappearing into thin air, I will assume that the positioning of the *varðlokur* does reflect tradition: it will be seen that this is consistent with the arguments over its interpretation which I will adduce, so we need not question the source unnecessarily.

Ohlmarks's position, then, is that the *vǫrðr* is an independent spirit. The problem then ensues, however, of considering what the protective spirits are that are being enticed, and why. One possibility is that they are the *verðir*

[30] If we follow the traditional interpretation of *náttúrur* as "spirits", we have to ponder why the author, knowing that spirits were involved, did not use the native *verðir* indicated by the term *varðlokur*, but instead chose, apparently, to interpret the latter term as referring to the women's watch-circle. It is arguable that he knew both that spirits were involved, and that something called *varðlokur* was used without understanding its meaning (the calling of *verðir* spirits), but this would be a weak argument.

[31] Here Ohlmarks's argument is somewhat undermined by the fact that shamans do not always enter trance to send their soul out, though this appears to have been the case with the Sámi.

of the establishment about whose fortune the *vǫlva* is making prophecies: they would be providing information about it, which she passes on to those enquiring. However, would spirits whose role is to protect be expected to do anything but protect – especially given that we lack evidence of them extending their role in this way? Other accounts, as noted in Chapter 9, present the spirits called *gandar* as responsible for gathering information, not *verðir*. The role of the *vǫrðr* may, then, reasonably be determined as protective, and as this protection is called for while the *vǫlva* is involved in the ritual, it is presumably against attack, while in this vulnerable state, by other spirits. The need for an assistant to oversee the *varðlokur* certainly implies that the *vǫlva* would be in a state where she could not maintain this protection by herself, which in turn suggests she may have entered some sort of trance, as is suggested by *Vǫluspá* ⟨LEIKINN⟩. This leads us back towards seeing the *vǫrðr* as intimately connected with the *vǫlva*, rather than an independent spirit. However, this does *not* mean it must be interpreted as a free soul, the arguments against which seem convincing.

The solution to the nature of the *vǫrðr* lies in recalling the actions of the Finnish *tietäjä* ⟨QV⟩: in order to withstand the rigours of spiritual encounters, he had to summon up his *luonto* and increase its strength. Naturally, this had to be done *before* the encounter with the spirit world, which is the case with the *varðlokkur* too. The *luonto* was an innate part of the magical practitioner, but variant terms for it included *haltija*, which also functioned as a term for independent spirits (of houses, woods, and so forth): again, this parallels the *vǫrðr*, which occurred in both these senses. The *vǫrðr* then is the innate spiritual power of the *vǫlva*, acting as a protective force (an important characteristic of a strong *luonto* in Finnish), which must be put into the right state before undertaking the spiritual encounter; it has already been noted that there are differences between men and women in their contact with the spirit world, and it may well have been that women needed rather to be *receptive* to the spirits than to be able to *resist* them, so the suggested purpose of the song was perhaps not precisely hardening or strengthening, but making it suitable for the task ahead. In Finnish tradition the *tietäjä* generally summons up his own *luonto* (an act of self-assertion, which perhaps was not what was called for with the woman's *vǫrðr*), but if we turn to the Daurs, we find that in a kamlanie the audience is responsible for maintaining the shaman's soul energy by constantly repeating refrains of the shamanic songs (Humphrey 1996: 234). Among the Sámi, the shaman would also have singing female assistants: the surviving accounts do not allow us to identify their role as precisely the strengthening of the *noaidi*'s soul power, but their guardianship of his welfare in the otherworld amounts to something similar (though I am not suggesting that this implies the Norse *vǫlva* must have sent her soul out). The *vǫrðr*, then, appears to have been the protective force – which, as with all other spiritual forces examined in the present work, was no doubt to an extent externalised into a separate entity – which safeguarded the *vǫlva* while she was in a spiritually vulnerable state and enabled her to carry out her mission in the spirit world.

-lokur is problematic. The H reading is *-lokkur*. In orthographic terms this is the *lectio difficilior* (in that duplication of a single «k» is less likely than the simplification of a double «kk») and therefore more likely to be correct, but this argument is weakened by the known level of revision the H version has undergone. However we look at it, the variation in readings indicates a difficulty in comprehension of the word. Two pieces of evidence support the S reading with single «k». In *Grógaldr* 7 Gróa sings a charm called «Urðar lokur», a term which itself is probably a misunderstanding (or deliberate adaptation)[32] of *varðlokur* (or a variant, with genitive *varðar*), replacing the "guardian spirit" with Urðr, guardian of fate. The second is the word *langloka*, the name of a type of verse in which the first and last lines form one syntactic unit, interrupted by the intervening lines. The sense appears to be a verse which "locks together" at a distance. From such a usage, and taking the "locking" to refer to the interlocking nature of alliterative verse,[33] *loka* could develop a general sense of "verse", which might be seen both in *Urðar lokur* and *varðlokur*.[34] However, if such a usage were recognised, we might expect to find a richer array of examples.

Loka could be taken more literally as "what locks", in this case the *vǫrðr*, which would thus be envisaged as being locked to the will of the *vǫlva*, or even locked inside her in a possessive state. It is relevant here to note the Swedish folk beliefs described by Hyltén-Cavallius (1864–8: I, 356–7):

> Huru innerlig förbindelsen än är emellan menniskan och hennes vård, kan denne likväl, ännu medan menniskan lefver, aflägsna sig ifrån henne, ehuru blott för vissa tillfällen. Vården följer härvid antingen sin egen drift, eller lyder han makten af en bjudande mensklig vilja, vare sig menniskans egen eller någon annans. Wärendska folktron antager således, att menniskan kan binda sin vård och sålunda skilja sig vid honom. [...] Således, om någon märker att "han har lyse med sig", eller "att det följer honom", behöfver han blott lemna ute sin vandrings-staf, så stadnar vården vid stafven och håller der trogen vakt.

> Although there is an inner connection between a person and their *vård*, it can also, even while the person is alive, withdraw from them, although only in certain circumstances. Here the *vård* either follows its own impulse, or responds to the power of a dominating human will, be it the person's own or someone else's. Thus Värend folk belief assumes that a person can bind their *vård* and so become detached from it. [...] Thus, if someone notices that "he has a light with him", or that "it is following him", he need only leave his walking-stick outside, and the *vård* will settle itself on the stick and faithfully keep watch there.

If such practices reflect long-standing tradition, as seems likely, it is reasonable to infer that the *vǫrðr* too could be controlled by a strong-willed person, through ritualistic means. The *vård* here appears as intimately connected with an individual, yet distinct enough to be set tasks which the

[32] Urðr occurs again at the end of the poem, indicating a structural use of fate.
[33] Such a notion existed in medieval English – the «lel lettres loken», "loyal letters locked", of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 35 – but Norse examples seem to be lacking.
[34] On «Urðar lokur» see P. Robinson (1991: 381–3). He notes that the *lokur* here are, as in *Eiríks saga*, the preserve of women.

individual could not accomplish by himself. However, even though such a notion may well lie behind the use of the *vǫrðr* in tradition antedating *Eiríks saga*, the word *loka*, "lock", is rather inappropriate to describe it – *binda*, used by Hylten-Cavallius of this and other spirits being bound, would be the expected term in Old Norse too.

This takes us back to the H reading of *-lokkur*. This would derive from *lokka*, "entice", and hence *varðlokkur* would be the things that entice the *vǫrðr*, namely the songs sung. (Despite his apparent interpretation of the term as something like "(female) enclosing guard", the author of *Eiríks saga* was surely aware that *varðlokur* was somehow associated with song, given the need for Guðríðr to sing.) Something aimed at *enticing*, or calling forth, spirits or spiritual forces appears *a priori* far more likely than something that imprisons them (as noted by Mitchell 2001: 66). There is no inherent reason why an enticement should be a song, but, as Mitchell points out (ibid. 66–7), in fact a *lokk*, an enticement, is precisely the name of many types of song in Norwegian folk tradition, used for calling and gathering animals in (the term does not appear to occur in Icelandic, which may explain the variations of spelling and the apparent difficulty of comprehension in the forms considered).[35] The *lokk* in Norway was mainly sung by women, corresponding to the situation in *Eiríks saga* (ibid. 67). An association with supernatural beings exists in the form *huldrelokk* (which however is a song sung by *huldrefolk*, presumably expressing the bewitching enticement of the fairy world, rather than one aimed at attracting them).[36] The likely Norwegian provenance of *varðlokkur* is consistent with the probable non-Icelandic origin of the *vǫlva* scene over all, as noted above (Norway is a much more feasible source of the folk tradition of such seeresses upon which the account is in part based).

It therefore seems likely that a form of song was sung to entice the *vǫlva*'s *vǫrðr*, her innate protective spirit, in the course of the practice of *seiðr*. Far from this being apparent in *Eiríks saga*, however, it appears that the author has striven to avoid the mention of anything like spirits or spiritual forces, while still wishing for the sake of verisimilitude to use some of the traditional terms associated with the practice of *seiðr* to evoke an air of antiquity.

[35] *Lokk* is masculine in Nynorsk, whereas Icelandic *lokka* is feminine, so the words are not wholly identical in form, though it is possible that an originally Norwegian term may have been grammatically recast in Icelandic, or that a feminine plural *lokkur* has been taken as a masculine singular (*lokkr*) in earlier Norwegian (the word in not included in *VA*).

[36] How ancient the musical forms of the Norwegian *lokk* are is naturally impossible to say, but such traditions, preserved in remote country districts, may well have remained relatively stable. At a much later date, it may be of interest to note, the *lokk* played an important part in the development of the music of Edvard Grieg, from whose accounts it is clear that the *lokk* was alluring not merely to the animals being called in, but to the human listeners – a point that corresponds very well with the reaction of the audience in *Eiríks saga*. See Grimley (2006: 80–1) for citations of Grieg's letters and the notation for a *lokk*, where he describes his meeting with a couple of girls in the mountains (there is definitely a sexual frisson to the account, as there may be in *Eiríks saga* too), who played such a song on a goat horn, producing "a gentle, melancholic sound", evoking (in Grimley's words) "a nostalgic, disembodied quality" that left Grieg in tears; he describes himself as "bjergtagen" ("bewitched", overtaken by the supernatural forces of the mountains).

The *varðlokkur* is hence comparable, but only in the broadest terms, with the Sámi *juoigos*, sung to enable the shaman to make his trance journey, as well as to call spirits. The singing of the song does not imply that the *vǫlva* sent out her soul, however, even if she went into some form of trance during which she consulted the spirits (something which may be inferred from accounts other than *Eiríks saga*); the song's purpose, in tradition antedating (and probably not understood by the author of) *Eiríks saga*, was to ensure the preparation of the *vǫlva*'s own protective spirit, a necessary task before a demanding encounter with the spirit world could take place, just as the Finnish *tietäjä* needed to strengthen his *luonto* in the same situation.

YNGLINGA SAGA

Snorri Sturluson devotes the seventh chapter of *Ynglinga saga* to a composite picture of the supernatural powers of the "god" Óðinn (here euhemerised into a founding chieftain of his people, the Æsir). Like *Eiríks saga*, this has proved a favourite haunt of those in search of Old Norse shamanism, and similarly calls for some closer attention. The text is presented in ⟨112⟩, but I give a summary below, divided, for the purposes of the arguments that follow, into sections (I take each occurrence of the name Óðinn as marking a new section, except that the summarising section E begins with a general «Af þessum krǫptum», "For these skills"):

A. *Supernatural travel and incantation*
1. Óðinn transformed himself into animals and travelled on errands in this form, while his body remained as if asleep or dead.
2. With words alone he could quench fire, calm the sea, and turn the winds to his will.
3. He owned the ship Skíðblaðnir, on which he travelled over great oceans, and which could be folded up like a cloth.

B. *The acquisition of knowledge (especially from the dead)*
1. Óðinn kept the head of Mímir, which told him tidings from other worlds.
2. He roused the dead or sat beneath the hanged.
3. He had two ravens (associated with death as the carrion bird of battle) trained to talk that brought him news from far and wide.
4. He thus became very wise and taught his wisdom in runes and incantations.

C. *The practice of seiðr*
Óðinn practised *seiðr*, which gave him great power, so that he knew men's fates, and could cause death and illness, or transfer a man's strength to another, but the practice was accompanied by such great shame that it was taught to the priestesses.

D. *The acquisition of hidden treasure by means of incantations*
Óðinn knew where all treasure was hidden, and with incantations he could unlock stones or the earth and bind those that dwelt there, go in and take what he pleased.

E. *Summary: the spread of Óðinn's knowledge*
1. He became very famous for these skills.
2. His enemies feared him, his friends put their trust in him and his power.
3. He taught his skills to the sacrificial priests, but the knowledge was picked up by others and spread far and wide.

F. *The spread of the cult of Óðinn*
Men worshipped Óðinn and his twelve princes for long after, because of his powers.

G. *Nomenclature*
Men called their sons by names derived from Óðinn's (or – as Snorri rather irrelevantly adds – from Þórr's).

Two aspects of the opening action in this passage call for particular attention: the trance journey, and the transformation into animal shape.

Snorri's account stands out as giving an explicit indication that Óðinn undertakes a trance journey, as recognised from Siberian shamanism, where the body in trance remains motionless and breathing decreases, while the free soul is believed to wander, gathering information or visiting the underworld. The clarity of Snorri's account calls for explanation, since it is unique among Norse sources in this respect.

Óðinn's journeys were an essential part of his make-up; some of them have been considered in the previous chapter. In particular his "journey" on the gallows-tree is clearly otherworldly in nature, and so could be inferred to involve a soul journey – though *Hávamál* does not actually present it as such, nor does Óðinn appear separately from his body in any myth.

The notion of a trance journey to the other world may have arisen out of, or been influenced by, vision literature, where there was a tradition of someone resting, for example in a cave, and then being taken on a visit to the otherworld.[37] This tradition is exemplified in Norse by *Sólarljóð*, a poem clearly Christian in outlook and composition, but which nonetheless makes use of motifs derived from native myth. The journey is described at st. 51–3: at this point the narrator had died, and the sojourn on the stool of the *nornir* acts as an interlude before he passes down through the seven worlds:

Á Nornastóli sat ek níu daga, þaðan var ek á hest hafinn	On the *nornir*'s stool I sat for nine days, from there I was heaved on a horse
[. . .] Útan ok innan þóttumk alla fara sigrheima sjau.	[. . .] In and out of all seven victorious worlds I seemed to go.

[37] The *Visio Tnugdali* from the mid-twelfth century is the classic example (text in Dinzelbacher 1989: 86–96; an Icelandic version, *Duggals leiðsla*, was produced in the early thirteenth century); much earlier, however, is the briefer account of Dryhthelm in Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* v.12: he "died for a night" and had a vision of Purgatory before returning to his apparently lifeless body the next morning.

It appears that this scene in *Sólarljóð* is based on the vision-literature tradition of a soul journey to the otherworld, the body remaining behind on a raised platform or chair; the journey was undertaken on horseback (cf. Yggdrasill, "the Óðinn steed", on which the god offered himself).[38] After a nine-day "initiation", presumably into the arcane knowledge of the *nornir*, comparable to Óðinn's nine nights' hanging on Yggdrasill, the visionary seems to himself to be traversing the seven worlds. The poem does not bring the visionary back to earth, but strays off into didactic areas. The result of the dream journey is the necessity of communicating the numinous knowledge so gained, in the form of the poem.

Nonetheless, Óðinn's journeys in *Ynglinga saga* are not otherworldly, but to mundane places. The depiction is generally in agreement with the ride of witches, witnessed already in the tenth-century canon "Sortilegam" (see Chapter 5), and mentioned at least in the fourteenth century in Icelandic in *Jóns saga baptista II* ch. 35 ⟨76⟩, which terms such people *hamhleypur*, "shape-shifters", who could traverse vast distances in an instant, "riding whales or seals, birds or wild animals". Yet the idea of riding beasts as steeds when in some sort of night trance is not quite the same as transformation into beasts: transformation of this sort is, however, sometimes undertaken by shamans, to various regions of the world. This has no counterpart in other Norse sources as far as gods are concerned; some human examples are presented below.

As noted above, trance of some sort seems to be linked with the practice of *seiðr* in *Vǫluspá* 22 ⟨125⟩, a practice which is also ascribed to Óðinn in *Lokasenna* 24 ⟨104⟩. Yet this trance is unlikely to have been of the deep, unconscious, sort indicated for Óðinn. All the indications from other sources are that *seiðr* involved the summoning, and perhaps the breathing in, of spirits, but not the sending out of the soul: where this occurs, it is not associated with *seiðr*.

With the notion of a trance journey Snorri has combined the assumption of animal form, a motif found elsewhere in Norse: two types may be distinguished. The first simply involves the assumption of animal form, temporarily, by people (for example Kveldúlfr in *Egils saga*, Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli in *Vǫlsunga saga*, Askmaðr in *Þorskfirðinga saga*).

A second type of shape-shifting involved leaving the body behind while the soul wandered in animal form: for example, in *Hjálmþérs saga* ch. 20, several characters assume animal shape to fight each other, while their bodies remain motionless on the ships (this is clearly the case with Hǫrðr, and is implied for Hervǫr, whose fight has left her unconscious and very weak); Bǫðvarr bjarki in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 51 ⟨96*b*⟩ fights as a bear while his body remains motionless in his tent. *Hjálmþérs saga* is, however, very late (fifteenth century) and full of baroque fantasy, and *Hrólfs saga* appears to be influenced by Sámi rites (see Chapter 20), and, in its extant form, is

[38] Compare also *Skírnismál*, where a vision from Hliðskjálf (cf. *Sólarljóð*'s platform) into the giant realm is followed by the journey on a special horse; the journey is described in terms reminiscent of the visit to the underworld.

even later. This second type of shape-shifting therefore appears ill-established within Norse tradition.

Óðinn changed into animals in myths such as the stealing of the mead of poetry, where he transformed himself into a snake and an eagle (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. G58 ⟨49⟩). A parallel to Óðinn being said to be able to lay his hands on hidden treasure is recounted by Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* III.34, who tells of Gunthram, who dreamed that he crossed a bridge and found treasure in a mountain; his soul was seen by his companions to leave his body in the form of a snake, just as Óðinn does when he enters Hnitbjǫrg to retrieve the treasure of the mead of poetry. Other gods also transform themselves into animals; thus in the contest recounted in *Húsdrápa*, according to Snorri's commentary in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 8, Loki and Heimdallr were in the form of seals. Clearly Snorri had these and comparable myths in mind in composing the *Ynglinga saga* passage. Yet nowhere else is it said that Óðinn left his body behind whilst "he" (presumably his free soul) took on various *hamir*, "outward forms", i.e. the second type of shape-shifing noted above.[39] It appears that, in line with the euhemerisation of *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri ascribes a process elsewhere only undergone by humans to the humanised Óðinn to explain the god's animal transformations.[40]

The change into animal form seems elsewhere to be associated particularly with Sámi magic, as in *Landnámabók* ⟨100⟩, which relates how two Sámi are specifically said to make a *hamfǫr*, a journey in assumed (presumably animal) form ⟨BIFURCATION⟩.

In fact Snorri's account of Óðinn's body lying as if sleeping or dead,

39 In *Lokasenna* 24 ⟨104⟩ Loki says to Óðinn that in association with his practice of *seiðr*, «vitka líki / fórtu verþjóð yfir»; Strömbäck (1935: 26) suggests that this refers to soul wandering "above the earth", in the manner of the witches of *Hávamál* 155 ⟨72⟩. Even if it did, there would still be no explicit reference to any body left behind. However, this suggests a meaning "like a wizard" for *vitka líki* instead of the more natural "in the form of a wizard". I take the lines in the straightforward sense "in the form of a wizard you went over [i.e. through all] mankind".

40 Snorri's picture of Óðinn is also reminiscent of the account of Herodotus, *Histories* IV.13–16, of the poet Aristeas of Proconnesus, close to Asia Minor, whence, according to Snorri, the Æsir originated. Herodotus says that Aristeas recounts in his poem how, rapt in a Bacchic ecstasy, he travelled to far northern regions. A tale about the poet told how he once collapsed in a shop and was believed dead, yet was in the meantime encountered by a man in a distant place; when the relatives came to collect the poet's body, he had gone. Aristeas also claimed, it seems, to have visited Metapontium with Apollo, not as a man, but transformed into a crow. Whether it is possible that Snorri had access to some version of these tales of Aristeas I cannot venture to say, but Pliny, *Natural History* VII.52, recounts: «reperimus inter exempla Hermotimi Clazomenii animam relicto corpore errare solitam vagamque e longinquo multa adnuntiare, quae nisi a praesente nosci non possent, corpore interim semianimi, donec cremato eo inimici, qui Cantharidae vocabantur, remeanti animae veluti vaginam ademerint; Aristeae etiam visam evolantem ex ore in Proconneso corvi effigie», "We find among the examples that of Hermotimus of Clazomenae, whose soul, leaving its body behind, used to wander, and straying off would proclaim many matters from afar, which it was impossible to know about other than for someone present; his body meanwhile was but half alive, until his enemies, called the Cantharidae, cremated him and as it were deprived his returning soul of its covering. Aristeas's soul too was seen flying from his mouth in Proconnesus in the form of a crow".

while he went on journeys in animal form, comes closest of any description written in Old Norse to the Sámi shaman's trance journey. The fact that this journey was typically directed towards the realm of the dead (in order to retrieve a sick man's soul, for example) – a journey which Óðinn was traditionally believed to have undertaken (*Hávamál* 138 ⟨48c⟩) – may have disposed Snorri to make use of the Sámi shaman's trance journey in his depiction of Óðinn. However, the Sámi shaman's journey could be to anywhere, as, according to Snorri, could Óðinn's. The main difference between the shaman's and Óðinn's journeys is that the shaman was not usually conceived as being *transformed* into animals, but was believed to be *accompanied* by helping spirits in animal form (though there are exceptions to this), of which there were principally three: reindeer, bird, and fish spirits (*SLS* 42–3, 97–100). However, this difference is of relatively minor importance (though I would not dismiss it altogether, as does Heide 2006, *passim*), since the Sámi shaman's free soul is occasionally identified with his animal spirit helpers, and the shaman himself could be conceived as taking on the forms of beasts – there is a fundamental identity between the shaman and his spirit helpers (see *SLS* 18, 100).[41]

Snorri is known to have visited Norway twice, in 1218–20 and in 1237–9. During these times he would have had opportunity, in particular under the patronage of Jarl Skúli, both of hearing about Sámi or encountering them himself on his travels, and of consulting literary works inaccessible to him in Iceland. The *Historia Norwegie* is an example of such a work. That Snorri had indeed read the *Historia Norwegie*, or at least was familiar with the traditions which were used in its composition, may perhaps, as North (1991: 113) argues, be indicated by the place of battle in which Dagr was killed being named by Snorri as «Skjótansvað eða Vápnavað» in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 18 – an addition to *Ynglingatal* on which it is based – and by *Historia Norwegie* 9.13 as «Sciotanuath»;[42] admittedly it is arguable, yet it is unlikely, that both Snorri and *Historia Norwegie* derive the name from a portion of *Ynglingatal* no longer extant. An analysis of *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 will, I hope, show evidence of Snorri's indebtedness to the *Historia Norwegie* passage concerning the Sámi kamlanie, which has been discussed in detail in Chapter 9.[43]

[41] Isaac Olsen (1910: 32) records that the *noaidegázzi* teach the shaman to take on the shape of wolves and bears, as well as casting the form on others.

[42] The recent edition of *Historia Norwegie* (comm. *ad loc.*) weakens North's argument, however: it is pointed out that the Swedish manuscript adds to Sciotanuath «uel Wapnawath», but the scribe had certainly read Snorri, so the text is dependent on, not an influence upon, Snorri. The point about Skjótanvað remains, however – though the question then arises of where Snorri has derived Vápnavað from.

[43] Heide (2006: 146 n. 81) dismisses the points of similarity with *Historia Norwegie* which I have previously published on the grounds that most of the attributes of Óðinn in the *Ynglinga saga* passage can be paralleled elsewhere; this is true – though Heide does not in fact argue his point (which thus remains vague) – but my arguments rely not just on the occurrence of features gathered from elsewhere, but on their arrangement, so I feel justified in repeating just what I believe Snorri to have done with his various sources, and reiterating that the case for his knowing the *Historia Norwegie* – or at least traditions very close to the *Historia* – does not appear to me to have been refuted.

Sections E to G are clearly entirely Snorri's own contribution, reflecting a theme he pursues in *Ynglinga saga* of how the chieftains led by Óðinn came to be regarded as gods; these sections need not concern us further here.

Section A1 surely reflects the events of the shamanic trances in the *Historia Norwegie*: the hostess lies as if dead, and the return of her soul necessitates spirit activities by the shamans involving the *gandus* in animal form; it is clear that both shamans, like the hostess, lie on the ground while on their spirit journeys. The *Historia Norwegie* associates the *gandus* at least with whales and reindeer, and Snorri's list of forms that Óðinn took, namely bird, animal, fish or snake, corresponds to the forms of the Sámi helping spirit known from other sources – though it is more likely that Snorri is thinking of traditional stories of Óðinn in animal form, which could be accommodated in the shamanic framework, than that he had the specific forms of Sámi spirits in mind here.

Section A2 does not derive from the *Historia Norwegie*, but from the concluding part of *Hávamál*: st. 152 outlines the power to quench fire through charms, *galdrar*, and st. 154 the control of wind and weather. In addition, the incantatory power over the weather ascribed to Óðinn may have been a commonly recognised power of Sámi in Old Norse; it is at least ascribed to the closely related Finns in *Óláfs saga ins helga* ch. 9 and Bjarmians in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* I.8.16 and IX.4.22; Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* III.16, ascribes the power to control the winds to the Finni.

Discussion of the wind leads on to section A3, which deals with the ship Skíðblaðnir. Skíðblaðnir forms an exception in the *Ynglinga saga* passage: everything else Snorri lists consists either of supernatural powers of Óðinn, or of items that afford Óðinn supernatural knowledge. Skíðblaðnir is merely a magical ship. Not only is it exceptional in the context, but also in its ascription to Óðinn, for elsewhere it is said to be Freyr's ship (for a concise summary of ships as vehicles of fertility deities, see Lorenz 1984: 485–6). What induced Snorri to include it here? There are three obvious characteristics of Skíðblaðnir: *a.* it is a magic ship; *b.* its name means, approximately, "ski blade"; *c.* it can be folded up into a cloth. In the *Historia Norwegie* account we find that *a.* on the drum was depicted a magic ship for the transportation of the *gandus* spirit; *b. ondri* (casting-off skis or snow shoes) were also depicted there, and are mentioned immediately after the ship (and served the *gandus* similarly); *c.* before sending off the *gandus* (which took animal form) – much as Óðinn sends out his soul in *Ynglinga saga* in animal form – the shaman prepared himself under a cloth. The coming together of these points in *Historia Norwegie* would not demand much from a trained mythographer to put him in mind of the ship Skíðblaðnir: hence Snorri's inclusion of the boat in his account in *Ynglinga saga*.

Section B appears to consist of information about Óðinn derived from Norse rather than from Sámi traditions (though the gaining of knowledge from the dead, and the use of helping spirits in bird form for the gaining of knowledge from the spirit realm both occur in Sámi shamanism). It may thus be appropriate to label section A as "Sámi-type magical practices", contrasting with section B relating to "Norse tales of supernatural knowledge".

The general structure of sections A to D reveals a strange arrangement: Snorri devotes two sections (A, B) to miscellaneous information about Óðinn's powers and his knowledge, and follows them with a section (C) about the specific practice of *seiðr*: this in turn is followed by a short section (D) on Óðinn's power to unearth hidden treasure (this power cannot be ascribed to *seiðr*, since *seiðr* is nowhere said to be used for this purpose in other sources); as this was achieved by incantation, we should expect it to have been included in section A2, rather than being separated from the "miscellaneous powers" sections (A and B) by the section on *seiðr*. An explanation for this odd arrangement emerges if we assume Snorri is basing sections C and D on the introductory section of the *Historia Norwegie* account listing some of the shaman's attributes; that of foretelling corresponded to *seiðr*, but that of discovering hidden treasure did not, hence Snorri, following the order of *Historia Norwegie*, ended up with the broken-backed structure noted.

Although Snorri makes no mention of the *gandus* or anything like it, it is clearly the *gandus* that has prompted the connection between Sámi shamanism and Norse *seiðr*, for the author of the *Historia Norwegie* is using the Norse word *gandr*, which designated a Norse spirit, as a term for a Sámi spirit (Chapter 9). The reproach that the Christian author casts on the shamanism related in the *Historia Norwegie* corresponds to the shame that Snorri says accompanied the practice of *seiðr*.

Some of the correspondences between *Ynglinga saga* and the *Historia Norwegie* perhaps reflect verbal or phrasal echoes, though the degree of similarity is arguable: «immundum spiritum, quem gandum vocitant»: «þá íþrótt [...] er seiðr heitir»; «multa præsagia ut eveniunt [...] prædicent»: «mátti hann vita ørlǫg manna ok óorðna hluti»; «absconditos thesauros longe remoti mirafice produnt»: «Óðinn vissi um allt jarðfé, hvar fólgit var, ok hann kunni þau ljóð, er upp lauksk fyrir honum jǫrðin ok bjǫrg ok steinar ok haugarnir [...] ok tók þar slíkt, er hann vildi».

Snorri's account of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 proves to be a composite tacked together from pieces of information in Norse tradition, with additions from elsewhere, possibly including the medieval Latin traditions of vision literature and witches, but more convincingly from Sámi religious practices, most likely as recorded in *Historia Norwegie*, or at least within the tradition which gave rise to this work, which have formed a useful framework within which to assemble his picture. It may well have been the *gandr*, a spirit Snorri knew from *Vǫluspá* to be associated with *seiðr*, that provided the link with Sámi practices, since the *gandus* is ascribed to them in the *Historia Norwegie*. It was appropriate for Snorri to turn to what appears to be the only reasonably accurate written account of the magic of the Norwegians' heathen neighbours when he wished to present Óðinn as a pagan magician, rather than a real god, who had settled in the North and established a cult. Although Snorri originates the Æsir, led by Óðinn, in Asia, the use of sources relating to Sámi traditions would also be a nod in the direction of origin legends which looked to the Sámi, as exemplified in texts like *Hversu Nóregr byggðisk*.

MINOR SOURCES

Whilst *seiðr* is mentioned fairly frequently in Norse sources, and the reasons for engaging in it are usually stated, little is said, outside the sources considered above, about its actual performance.

It is often said to take place on a raised platform, a *seiðhjallr*, which is considered in the next chapter. *Laxdœla saga* ch. 35 ⟨102⟩ and *Friðþjófs saga frækna* ch. 5 ⟨88⟩ indicate that *galdrar* formed part of the performance, matching the information from *Eiríks saga*. The performance is sometimes said to take place at night (*Laxdœla saga* ch. 37 ⟨102⟩, *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ch. 3 ⟨128⟩). These pieces of "information" hardly add to our picture of *seiðr*; if anything is said at all during the performance (and this is not clearly the case in all instances of *seiðr*), then it is likely to be characterised as a series of *galdrar*, "charms", as this is the most appropriate word for any spoken incantation. Similarly, it is a commonplace, especially in Christian circles, that magic takes place at night; this characterisation can scarcely be relied on as reflecting the nature of actual archaic *seiðr* performance.

An extraordinary disruption of a *seiðr* performance takes place in *Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga* ch. 28 ⟨92*b*⟩, where a dwarf, Mǫndull, skilled in magic, uses *seiðr* spells against the performing *seiðmenn* themselves and sends them raving into woods and fens to their own destruction. We might infer from this a particular vulnerability while in the process of performing *seiðr*. However, the saga is late (fourteenth century), and full of imaginative fantastic elements which are unlikely to relate to any ancient tradition. The episode affords an interesting example of what an inventive author might do with a *seiðr* scene, but nothing more.

One saga account in particular appears to confirm some of the picture of *seiðr* presented in *Eiríks saga*, namely *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ⟨128⟩. When Oddr is twelve, Ingjaldr invites a *seiðkona* to Berurjóðr; she foretells the fate of Ingjaldr and the other inhabitants, coming last to Oddr, who does not want anything to do with her. He will live an immensely long and famed life, travelling the world, but will die there at Berurjóðr, and his bane will be the skull of his horse Faxi. The independent value of this account may, I think, be dismissed. The author uses the traditional name for a *vǫlva*, *Heiðr*, and assigns to her an episode which is clearly based on that in *Eiríks saga*. As noted, *Eiríks saga* is dated to the early thirteenth century, while *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* is probably from *c.* 1270.[44] A tabular comparison will highlight the closeness of narrative and phrasing between the accounts, which should leave no doubt over the question of borrowing:[45]

[44] The earliest manuscript, Stockholm Royal Library manuscript 7 4to, is from *c.* 1300, and the other manusript, AM 344 4to, differs from this to the extent that a late-thirteenth-century antecedent is probable (Strömbäck 1935: 97); the saga is used by the author of *Vatnsdœla saga*, composed before (but probably not by much) 1284 (*Vatnsdœla saga* is used by *Landnámabók* (S): Jónas Kristjánsson 1997: 234).

[45] It is possible that both sagas have made use of a common type scene, or that *Eiríks saga* contributed to the formation of such a type scene which was then employed in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, but whatever the precise details, the two accounts emerge as related rather than independent.

Eiríks saga rauða	*Qrvar-Odds saga*
Sú kona var <þar> í byggð er Þorgjǫrg hét; hon var spákona; hon var kǫlluð lítilvǫlva.	Kona er nefnd Heiðr, hon var vǫlva ok seiðkona.
hon fór á veizlur, ok buðu menn henni heim, mest þeir er forvitni var á um forlǫg sín eða árferð.	Hon fór á veizlur víða um landit, er bœndr buðu henni til; sagði hon mǫnnum forlǫg sín ok vetrarfar eða aðra hluti.
Bað hon fá sér konur þær sem kynni frœði þat er þyrfti til seiðinn at fremja ok Varðlokur heita; en þær konur fundusk eigi. [. . .] Slógu konur hring umhverfis [. . .] Kvað Guðríðr þá kvæðit svá fagrt ok vel	Hon hafði með sér þrjátigu manna, fimmtán sveina ok fimmtán meyjar. Þat var raddlið mikit, því at þar skyldi vera kveðandi mikil sem hon var.
Þorkell býðr spákonu þangat, ok er henni búin góð viðtaka, sem siðr var til, [. . .] Borð váru upp tekin um kveldit, ok er frá því at segja hvat spákonunni var matbúit	Nú ferr Ásmundr við inn fimta mann ok býðr vǫlunni á Berurjóðr; hon tók því vel ok kvezk koma mundu, ok efnask þar veizla fǫgr.
Guðríðr segir: "Þetta er þess konar atferli at ek ætla í øngum atbeina at vera, þvíat ek em kona kristin." [. . .] Var <þá> sent eptir Þorbirni, því at hann vildi eigi heima vera meðan slík heiðni var framin.	Oddr var í lítilli stofu ok vildi ekki ganga í sýn við Heiði, "því ek vil ei samneyta henni".
hon kom um kveldit [. . .]	Ingjaldr ok vǫlvan ætluðu til seiðar mikils um nóttina.
Hon kvezk þat ekki mundu upp bera fyrr en um morgininn, þá er hon hefði sofit þar um nóttina.	Um morgininn eptir gekk Ingjaldr til frétta við Heiði ok spurði hversu seiðrinn hefði gengit.
En mér eru nú margir þeir hlutir auðsýnir er áðr var bæði ek ok aðrir dulðir.	"Þat ætla ek" segir hon "at ek muna vís hafa orðit þeira hluta er þik varðar ok þér báðuð mik forvitnaz."
Síðan gengu menn at vísenda-konunni ok frétti hverr eptir því sem mest forvitni var á.	ganga þaðan sér hverr til frétta
hallæri þetta mun ekki haldask lengr ok mun batna árangr sem várar.	Ingjaldr búandi spurði þá fyrst um veðráttu ok vetr.
Guðríðr's glorious future is foretold: þín forlǫg eru mér nú ǫll gløggsæ [. . .] vegar þínir liggja út til Íslands	*Oddr's glorious future is foretold (few verbal echoes)* þinn vegr mun fara um hvert land

FIGHTS

Fights in assumed animal form are found in Norse (some explicitly involve the person's body remaining motionless while the animal forms fight, others do not); examples have been cited above, from *Hjálmþérs saga* (Hǫrðr and Hervǫr), *Hrólfs saga kraka* (Bǫðvarr bjarki) and *Landnámabók* (Dufþakr). However, such accounts are not directly comparable with shamanic practices, since there is no concept of animal helping spirits involved, and transformation into animals in itself is insufficient as an indicator of anything shamanic taking place.

In the myth of Heimdallr and Loki fighting in seal form over the necklace Brísingamen ⟨QV⟩, there is no suggestion that they left bodies behind as in the examples just given of this practice, nor that the animals could be regarded as spirit helpers. The myth has Siberian analogues, in the "earth out of ocean" creation motif, in which animals are responsible for bringing the earth up from the ocean bed (Schier 1963), but this is not specifically shamanic. The contending in water-beast form (at least one shaman is in whale shape) in *Historia Norwegie* illustrates that Norsemen were aware of this shamanic motif among the Sámi, and this could possibly have had some influence upon the myth of *Húsdrápa*.

Norse examples indicate the wisdom contest was well known. In *Vafþrúðnismál* Óðinn contends against the giant Vafþrúðnir in cosmic knowledge, and defeats him by asking what Óðinn spoke in Baldr's ear on the pyre, to which Óðinn alone knows the answer. In st. 55 Vafþrúðnir confesses himself doomed: «feigom munni / mælta ek mína forna stafi / ok um ragnarǫk», "with doomed mouth have I spoken my ancient wisdom and [talked] of the fates of the Powers". In *Hervarar saga* ch. 10, Óðinn contends in a riddle match with King Heiðrekr, concluding with the same question as in *Vafþrúðnismál*; he then dooms Heiðrekr to a dishonourable death. In *Rígsþula* 46, the youngest son outclasses his father in runic knowledge and so wins the god-given name of Rígr: this sophisticated use of the wisdom contest indicates how well established it was.

The Finnish examples cited above possibly reflect a shamanic background, but contending in knowledge cannot in itself be described as specifically shamanic (Fromm 1967: 39). In both Norse (*Vafþrúðnismál*, *Hervarar saga*) and Finnish (both cases) the conclusion is the same: death (or an averted threat of death), but this is insufficient to indicate any close relationship between them.

Conclusion

Old Norse records afford us no account which matches the detail found in the examples of shamanic kamlania discussed at the beginning of the chapter; we therefore lack the wherewithal to make anything but tentative assertions about the shamanic nature of Norse practices or traditions.

An investigation into the nature of some of the key Norse texts which have been used as evidence of a shamanic element in Norse religious

practice has revealed that they are of spurious value. The author of *Eiríks saga* is a master of verisimilitude, of creating a convincing picture of a pagan soothsayer plying her trade some three centuries before he is writing, but his purposes are to underline the Christian message of his saga, and his account provides us with merely a few scraps of arguably genuine pagan lore which have been frozen within it, as if in amber; the most important of these is *varðlokkur*, which appears to have been a charm to summon up the *vǫlva*'s innate spirit power, *vǫrðr*, before undertaking the ardours of the ceremony. The other fairly extensive account of a *seiðr* performance, in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, has been shown to be derivative, based largely on that of *Eiríks saga*. The account of Óðinn's magical activities in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 ⟨112⟩ proves to be a concoction by Snorri of elements derived from Norse poems, but also from traditions about Sámi magic, most likely derived from *Historia Norwegie*.

It would appear that the *seiðkona* would enter a trance, almost certainly of a light sort, during which she no doubt obtained information from the spirits, but no Norse account points to the sort of vivid interaction between magician and spirits that the shamanic kamlania indicate. There is no evidence for the sending out of the free soul during the practice of *seiðr*, although the notion of the soul wandering in animal form existed. It is uncertain whether the *seiðkona* merely called the spirits to her presence, or took them into herself (which would indicate a deeper possession), though the mention of yawning in some accounts suggests the latter is possible. The *seiðkona* also sent spirits out on a mission; I have discussed this in Chapter 9.

When we turn to poetic sources, which in this case means largely *Vǫluspá*, we find a series of further elements which are arguably of a shamanic nature, but may also derive from other traditions. *Vǫluspá* shows a knowledge of a typically shamanic cosmology, with the world tree at its centre, yet there is no hint of any ritual use of the tree, which becomes instead a means of holding the *literary* structure of the poem together. There appears to be a play on the notion of counter-roles in the poem, with at least two *vǫlva* figures appearing; this may allude to the notion of calling up an ancestral spirit to speak through the medium, but does not follow this pattern. The style of the poem is deliberately modelled on the jerky visionary traditions of spiritual mediums, such as are found in shamanic texts too. However, the poem brings together many different influences, including biblical, sibylline, poetic (the skaldic tradition) and visionary, and the degree to which actual practices of Norse soothsayers lie behind it is open to debate.

18. Accoutrements

Eurasian

COSTUME

Shamans were not characterised by a special dress in all areas; in particular the Finno-Ugric tribes within Europe, including the Sámi, did not have one (U. Holmberg 1922: 5), though the eastern Khanty in earlier times had special headgear, gloves and clothing (Kerezsi 1996: 184). In more easterly and southerly areas a distinctive outfit was common. The Siberian shaman's costume took one of three basic forms, representing the bear, the deer, or a bird: bird costumes were the most common,[1] and bear costumes of limited provenance (found primarily among the Samoyeds and Kets) (U. Holmberg 1922: 14).

The Sakhas believed that when the shaman wore the bird costume he assumed the power of flight; the Ewenki described the shaman's costume as his "shade":[2] he became possessed of the animal's powers when he dressed in the costume (ibid. 33–5). Harva (ibid. 35–6) concludes that in most cases the shaman costume is a representation of the shaman's soul, which wanders in the form of an animal during the kamlanie. However, the significance can be deeper. Pavlinskaya (2001: 48) writes:

> The shaman's ritual costume symbolises the universe and its sacral centre. Making a costume equalled, in a way, the creation of a macrocosmos: cutting the reindeer hide = the division and destruction of the world; sewing the pieces of the costume together = creation of a cosmic whole.

All parts of the costume served to symbolise aspects of the shaman's activity; to illustrate how its form represented its functionality, I summarise the account given by Dolgikh (1978: 346 ff.) of the costume of Sereptiye Dyaruoskin,[3] a Nganasan of Ewenki descent; the explanation derives in large part from the shaman's own account (cf. FIG. 2 for an illustration of another Nganasan costume).

1. *The parka*. This was dyed red with ochre, and was made of wild-deer hide (domesticated deer was forbidden): this brings luck in hunting wild deer. The seams were sewn with dewlap hair from wild deer, again securing success in the hunt. It was sewn by an ill woman, who by doing so

[1] Eliade (1972: 156) mentions the presence of bird costumes among the Altaians, the Tatars, the Teleuts, the Soyots, the Karagas, the Nanai, the Dolgans, the Ewenki, and, in its most developed form, among the Sakhas. The eagle is the most commonly imitated bird, but others such as owls are also found.

[2] Compare how in some Siberian cultures, for example the Samoyed, the soul is believed to be in the form of a bird (Pettersson 1957: 47).

[3] Dolgikh gives the name with the spelling "Kheripte Jarockij" – I assume that this is merely a spelling variant of the shaman Sereptiye Dyaruoskin (Sereptie Djaruoskin in Popov 1968).

hoped to recover. Bundles of hair from a bear's paw and of fox attached to ribbons, and bear representations in copper, brought luck in hunting these animals. Plaits of twisted cords with hairs of a young polar fox were used to tie the soul of a child being brought back. Cords and stripes blocked the aperture in the earth through which the soul of the deceased passed, to prevent illnesses seeping up through it. An ornamented piece of chamois leather on the sleeve, and a metal half-moon, served a similar purpose. The leather piece also imitated goose wings: in the underworld, souls dive into water, and geese and loons plunge after them, so the shaman has goose-wings on his parka. Iron pieces on the back also represented the loon or goose. The three tails on the parka were also used when diving into water, and when the soul was found, the shaman set it on the tails and brought it back. Triangles on the back prevented the shaman's back breaking when bearing souls on his back. Copper bears on the back represented the male and female bear gods, and some shamans appealed only to the bear's soul. Horn-like bent iron pieces made of wire hangers represented white sheep, a game animal of the ancient Ewenki; usually these would represent deer antlers.

2. *The apron.* This was of wild-deer skin, painted red at the top. When the shaman swam in water, he rode the apron as if paddling a canoe. Four iron and two copper sheets helped the shaman break ice when swimming. Three iron faces at the bottom of the apron spoke to the other iron objects, saying "The faster you go, the better you break the ice". The face in the middle was that of a woman. If something got broken on the coat or boots while in the underworld, she mended everything, taking a needle and yarn out of the two sewing kits also attached to the apron. Small iron pieces on the belly represented the wool of white sheep.

3. *The mittens and sleeve.* These are decorated to resemble the feet of wild deer.

4. *The head-dress.* This was of dark red cloth with stripes sewn on in yellow, with a small black strip in the middle and with alternating white and green beads. In front were tassels of black and red cloth representing hair. A round iron plate was sewn on to protect the head, imitating the shamanic spirits. The head-dress has four ears, two to hear Nganasan speech from the west, and two for Ewenki speech from the east.

5. *The boots.* These were of clipped hide, with the hair inwards. Five stripes were added in black, white and blue beads. The bifurcation of the front stripe was the cleft of the cloven hoof of the wild deer, while the others presented its spotted legs, and the circle on the knee was the deer's knee cap.

This description will suffice to show the way in which shamanic costumes formed an integral whole and reflected the coherent belief-systems of the societies in which they were found.[4]

[4] Similar explanations of the symbolism of the dress could be repeated for other peoples. For examples, see Dyakonova (2001) on the Turkic female shaman's dress of southern Siberia.

THE HAT

The hat is a common shamanic attribute. For example, Siikala (1978: 272) notes that among the Nanai the hat is the most important shamanic garment during memorial feasts; strips of bear, fox or raccoon fur were sewn onto it, and while wearing it, the shaman was the servant of his *seons*, shamanic spirits, and the enemy of antagonistic spirits. Smoljak (1984: 247–8) notes that the Nanai called their hat "antlers", a term borrowed from the neighbouring Ewenki, but the apparent horns were in fact *suje*, representations of the roots of the world tree *konuro jagda*; the hat of the Manchurian shaman is similarly crowned with the shamanic tree and a bird.

According to Donner (1946: 227–9), the hat was also the most important garment of at least one Selkup shaman he consulted, and occupied an important place for Nenets shamans. The hat symbolises the shaman's power to remove his head and replace it; cf. the removal and forging of the shaman's head among the Samoyeds and Ewenki (Eliade 1972: 41, 471 n. 19). The Nganasan shaman would say "strong is my hat", meaning that his shamanic powers were strong (Gračeva 1984: 199).

The cloth used by the Sámi shaman, and the handkerchief of the Samoyeds (Mikhailovskii 1894–5: 81), appear to symbolise the obscuring of physical sight in favour of spiritual sight; similar examples are widespread, such as the tassles dangling over the eyes of the Chulym Turk shaman (Lvova 1978: 238). The idea reaches its climax in the notion expressed by the Nganasan shaman Dyukhadiye, that in shamanising he used new eyes given to him by the blacksmith spirits at his initiation, and had his natural eyes bound up so that he could, for example, find lost objects better (Basilov 1990: 14).

The Finnish *luonto* ⟨QV⟩ was often called up with a hat on, such as in the opening of this charm (*SKVR* I_4 12, sung in 1877 by Miihkali Arhippaińi from Latvajärvi):

Noušeš luontońi lovešta,	Rise, my *luonto*, from the cleft,
Havon alta haltieńi,	From under the branch, my guardian,
H[avo]n alta, hattu peäštä,	From under the branch, with hat on head,
Moan alta makoamašta	From your rest below the ground.

Here, though, the symbolism seems to have veered off in a different direction from that found in truly shamanic societies: the "good luck hat" was a widespread concept in Finland, found, for example, in the folk belief noted by Haavio (1967: 289), that a child born with a "hat" (a caul) on its head becomes a wise or clever person or someone of notable status.

THE BELT

Amongst the Nanai the belt is of particular significance: an old man appeared to the first shaman and told him to set *toli* (copper discs) on his breast and

back to protect him from the arrows of devils and to make a belt with bells; the belt would have to be worn too in Buni, the otherworld (Nioradze 1925: 64). The belt was held during shamanic performance by two assistants, who supported the shaman with it to prevent him falling, and hence becoming irretrievably lost, in the underworld (Siikala 1978: 267).

The belt was not purely shamanic, even in shamanic societies: among the Ainu, for example, all the women of one matriline wore a common belt, *upsor*, which was believed to afford magical powers such as causing storms (Adami 1991: 63).

The only sign of any specifically shamanic costume among the Sámi is a special belt that the *noaidi* wore when he functioned as a diviner or sacrificial priest (Karsten 1955: 71); Leem (1767: 476) describes women present at a *noaidi* kamlanie as well dressed "but without belts"; since Skanke (1943–5: 200) points out that while women would be present at the kamlania they were not allowed to sacrifice, the absence of the belt surely marks this. On the other hand Solander mentions that when a woman wants to pray to the *Passevare-Ollmaj*, the shamanic spirits of the mountain, she hangs up her belt and asks through it (Reuterskiöld 1910: 24). In Kola Lapland it was a custom to wear a three-coloured belt in sleep to bring prophetic dreams (U. Holmberg 1922: 4).

In Finnish, Väinämöinen's belt is often mentioned, mostly in formulaic poetic phrases and in charms. It was probably his shamanic insignia: "it seems probable that Väinämöinen's belt-buckle and sheath with the loops and rings, are part and parcel of the shaman's costume" notes Haavio (1952: 213), who compares the Nanai shaman.

Clearly the belt was an object with various potential significances, which might be incorporated into shamanic ritual. It was in fact only the Amur peoples (Nanai, Udeges, Ulchi, Orochi, Oroks) who carried this process to its conclusion and used the belt as part of the overall shaman's outfit; it symbolised the macrocosmos, and when tied around the waist represented the closed circle of the world of men on earth: by opening the belt during the kamlanie, the shaman opened a gateway to the spirit world (Pavlinskaya 2001: 47).

THE DRUM

The drum is a common, but not universal, piece of apparatus for the shaman (Vajda 1959: 475). Even where drums were in use, certain types of shaman might be distinguished by not having them: for example, the bear shamans of the Kets used a bear's paw instead while jumping on a bear skin to effect their journey to the lower world (Alekseenko 1978: 261; Basilov 1986: 45); moreover, Nioradze (1925: 83) notes that other objects take on the drum's functions (such as summoning spirits) in other cultures, for example the Buryats used an iron staff, with which the shaman hit himself. The shape and degree of decoration of drums varied from area to area, and even within areas; Nioradze (1925: 79–80) notes that the Sakhas, Yukagirs, Ewenki and Amur peoples had an undecorated oval drum, whereas the

Khanty, Kets and Altaians had round, decorated forms; Donner (1946: 230) provides slightly different information: the western Samoyeds and Khanty often had drums with no images, but the Khanty, Samoyeds and Ewenki of the Yenisei region had richly decorated specimens. Decorated drums exist in a highly developed form amongst the Sámi and also amongst their neighbours the Samoyeds. The map provided by Hoppál (1994: 56–7) gives a good visual representation of the different drum types.

The drum served three purposes: *a.* divination (this did not necessarily require a shaman); *b.* inducing trance in the shaman; *c.* summoning the shaman's spirits (our records do not allow us to determine whether this function existed among the Sámi, but it is likely).

The depictions on the Sámi drum (FIG. 8 gives one example) represent (amongst other things) tutelary spirits, regions of the cosmos, sacrificial animals, gods, the shaman on his trance journey; there is considerable variation between drums (as is evident by examining the extant examples, collected in Manker 1938 and 1950). An example of the cosmic content of the depictions is given by Pentikäinen (1987: 137, 147), who is describing a Sámi drum in the Pigorini Museum in Rome:[5]

> The clear centre of the drum, however, is the sun which again has a black centre. The *peive* or the sun seems to be under the celestial sphere, although connected by a line up to the radial line between heaven and earth, on the one hand, and with a thicker pillar down to another line towards the bottom of the drum, on the other.
>
> The drum is very sun-centred. The *peive* is a part of the pillar of the universe around which everything takes place both in the heaven of the deities as well as among people below [...]
>
> What becomes manifest on the surface of the drum is a Saami Weltanschauung of a tripartite universe. It consists of the upper realm of the heavenly deities, the middle human realm and the lower realm, *Jabmeaivo* or the world upside-down. They are, however, connected with a pillar having a *peive* or the sun as its centre [...] Inside the sun there is a deep hole or a black centre which is the road of the shaman into the inner depths of the universe and into the human mind.

The earliest description of a Sámi drum occurs in the Norwegian *Historia Norwegie* from the twelfth century ⟨138⟩. Hultkrantz argues that the *Historia Norwegie* account shows that Sámi drums were simpler at that time than in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, for example in not including depictions of gods (*SLS* 58). The use of *occupatum* to describe the depictions "covering" the drum need not be taken too literally, however, and in the absence of more certain evidence it is dangerous to use this description to determine what was *not* on the drum – other depictions may simply have been left out of account.

[5] The Sámi word *peive* means simply "sun", but Pentikäinen here uses it to mean "depiction of the sun". *Jabmeaivo* means "dead realm", not "the world upside down", as may be inferred here: this is a description, not a translation. Other interpretations of the drum's central circular depiction are possible: thus Åke Hultkrantz points out that a reindeer is often drawn in the centre of the drum, possibly representing the divine figure of Tjåervieraedie, guardian of the reindeer for the tribe, in the centre of the world (private communication).

The drum of *Historia Norwegie* is said to depict four things: waterbeasts, reindeer, snow-shoes and a ship, all of them said to be vehicles of the *gandus*. This interpretation must be approached cautiously. The concept of animal helping spirits travelling on vehicles does not exist among the Sámi; moreover, while the *cetus* is said to be a *vehicle* of the *gandus* when the diagrams are described, the *gandus* later appears *transformed* into a *cetus*. The information seems to represent a vacillation between the animal helping spirits seen as steeds for the shaman's free soul, and the free soul transformed into, or more likely accompanied by, the fish helping spirit.

Precise interpretation of drum images is a source of much contention, in particular over the extent to which the depictions relate to spiritual rather than mundane entities.[6] Comparable diagrams to those mentioned occur on later drums (Manker 1950: 139):[7] fish are depicted on the drums sometimes (ibid. 32); these represent real fish to be caught, rather than the shamanic helping animal; birds also represent game, but Manker acknowledges they sometimes represent the shamanic helping spirit: the same could therefore be the case with marine beasts. Reindeer are depicted on almost all drums, and represent various things: wild reindeer; the reindeer herd; the shamanic reindeer, sometimes in contest with another (for example ibid. 213). They occasionally have a man with them, and may then represent a shaman's journey with the reindeer.[8] None of the depictions indicate the presence of a bridle. However, the drums nearly all depict Rota, the god of the underworld, riding a horse (his sacrificial animal), along with bridle.[9] It is possible that two or more depictions have been conflated in the *Historia Norwegie* account.

Figures of Sámi with skis also occur on drums (Manker 1950: 18); these are not necessarily to be interpreted as shamans on ecstatic journeys – they may simply be hunters.

On later drums the ship represents either an actual ship used in fishing, or more commonly a ship offering, made in particular to the spirits that went about in the air at Yule (ibid. 57; the information is derived from Rheen 1897: 27). The representations do not often contain oars, though at least one printed in Manker (1950: 56) has protrusions that could be so interpreted.

It appears that the depictions on the *Historia Norwegie* drum need not, in themselves, be taken as representing spiritual entities. However, the

[6] Manker's *magnum opus* on the Sámi drum (1938, 1950) remains the standard authority, but his inclination to read pagan spiritual significances into the depictions wherever possible has come under fire in more recent years.

[7] Manker notes that the owner of the drum was apparently a sea Sámi, while the preserved drums generally belonged to reindeer nomads of the interior: however, this is based merely on interpreting the *cetus* as a whale, a beast which is not depicted on any of the later drums.

[8] For example Manker (1950: 318, with figure on 316); whilst Manker interprets several such depictions in this way, this goes beyond the evidence of our literary sources, which do not indicate that the spiritual reindeer acted as a steed. A contemporary annotation to a drum with a reindeer and man together from 1642 describes the scene as a Sámi going to the store with his reindeer – not particularly shamanic (ibid. 146).

[9] In one depiction (Manker 1950: 262) Rota appears on a reindeer.

description of them as vehicles of the *gandus* indicates that at least the whale and the reindeer are to be taken as spirit helpers, which the shaman would sometimes use as steeds (the literary sources indicate this for the *basseváre guolle*, and Manker's notations to the Sámi drums for the *basseváre sarves*). The Norwegian observers may simply have lumped the ship and snow-shoes together with the other depictions as vehicles of the *gandus*; this would have been facilitated by the association of at least the ship with spirits of another, not specifically shamanic, kind. The interpretation of snow-shoes and ship in this light may have been influenced by Norse traditions, where the magical ship Skíðblaðnir was the vehicle of Óðinn or Freyr, and Ullr was the *ǫnduráss*, "snow-shoe god" (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 14).

The Samoyed drum depictions are mentioned by Donner (1946: 230): they usually showed the world along with the sun and moon, with the lower part representing the underworld with headless men; a shaman is seen driving a sleigh with reindeer (symbolising his drum), along with various spirits and animals.

The drum was made, in some traditions, from a tree representing the world tree (or pillar); this is seen in the Nganasan account ⟨16⟩, and is evident among the Sakhas, Ewenki, Nanai and Samoyeds, but this feature is not explicit in Sámi shamanism (but probably existed: Emsheimer 1946: 178–9).

The drum was often regarded as a means of transport for the shaman on his ecstatic journeys; thus amongst the Kets the drum was regarded as a *k,aduk,s*, a shamanic reindeer (Alekseenko 1978: 256). Eliade notes (1972: 173):

> The drumming at the beginning of the séance, intended to summon the spirits and "shut them up" in the shaman's drum, constitutes the preliminaries for the ecstatic journey. This is why the drum is called the "shaman's horse" (Yakut, Buryat). The Altaic drum bears a representation of a horse; when the shaman drums, he is believed to go to the sky on his horse. Among the Buryat, too, the drum made with a horse's hide represents that animal.

Siikala (1990: 198) notes that in Arctic regions the drum is called a boat. Among the Ewenki the drum is thought of variously as a wild reindeer, a weapon and a boat (Anisimov 1963*a*: 117–18). The Tuvans regard the drum and rattle as the shaman's horse and the lash (Vajnštejn 1968: 335; 1984: 366); similar beliefs, where the drum is regarded as a reindeer (usually) or horse (less often) are found among the Sakhas, Altaians, Khakas, Tofalars, Kets, all Samoyeds, Khanty, Ewenki, Yukagirs, Dolgans, Mongols and Buryats (Basilov 1986: 41). Thus the Yukagir shaman addresses his drum as his mount and riding reindeer, which is said to prance rapidly, and it is used to descend below the fourth layer of the cosmos on the descent to the underworld (Alekseev 1997: 53, 58). The Tuvan shaman undertakes an extensive ceremony of enlivening his drum (described in detail by Vajnštejn 1968). His relatives, whom he has informed of his need for a drum, inform the tree from which it was to be taken, and they make a frame within a day, covering it with elk skin and attaching two so-called

"reins" to it. The shaman then asks his relatives to tame his "horse": it is passed from man to man (no women may be present), ending up with the strongest, who proclaims that the horse is coming to life, is overgrown with flesh, and has found a new master. The shaman then invokes his drum at night, addressing it with a horse's name:

> All hundred and six bones
> Are gathered and united by us.
> You, *borodaj – syryylyqty*,
> Let us make you overgrown with flesh
> Let us make you a living creature,
> We will ride you
> Over the tops of low
> And high trees
> We shall fly, smoothly fly.

On its first use, the drum is smeared in tea, milk, brandy and reindeer milk, with which the shaman announces he is clothing it with flesh.

Similar ceremonies are recorded elsewhere (Basilov 1986: 40): the Selkup shaman has to enliven his drum (FIG. 9 gives one example) by settling in it the soul of the deer whose skin was used to cover it; the shaman details how he has collected every part of the deer, even the hairs it scratched off against the trunks of trees. Only then can the drum be used as a steed to ride to the spirit world.

The symbolism of the drum could be still deeper, however; Basilov (1986: 42) notes:

> On the one hand, the drum was regarded as a majestic equestrian animal of the shaman, while on the other, it was also a double, an external soul of the shaman. It was considered that the life of the shaman is embodied in the "enlivened" animal. The shaman "guarded" this animal, and, having "resurrected" it, did all he could to immediately "dispatch" it far away into the taiga where he "hid" it in backwoods because rival shamans could "find" and "kill" this animal regarded as a soul and thereby cause death to the shaman himself.

Such a belief is realised ritually in some enlivening ceremonies: once the selected deer has been shot among the Ewenki, the shaman clothes himself in the pelt and the hunters who have killed the animal shoot imitation arrows at him to re-enact the killing of the deer.

THE STAFF

The Selkup shaman's staff represents the tree of life (Prokofyeva 1963: 153), whose powers of sustenance and fertility it no doubt focused, and it helps him as a staff on his journey to the underworld. The Ket pronged staff also represents the world tree; the cross bar enables summoned spirits to rest on it (Nioradze 1925: 79; cf. the Dolgan staffs, illustrated in *BL* 16).

Among the Tuvan Soyots a new shaman uses a staff before graduating to a drum (Diószegi 1959: 280). It is aquired by an old shaman from a birch

tree after making offerings of tea and milk in the air. It has tines on it, and is painted red, and sometimes has nine carved heads on it. These features suggest a cosmic symbolism. The staff is regarded as the shaman's steed.

Part of the Buryat shaman's equipment is a carved stick, used as a steed to visit the underworld; a sheep is sacrificed to the "lord and lady of the stick steed" (Harva 1938: 490).

Oinas (1987: 330), discussing the "straw stallion" of the Finnish hero Väinämöinen, writes on the general symbolism of the horse, staff and drum:

> In my opinion, the explanation of the "straw stallion" is to be sought in shamanism. A Hungarian *táltos*, "shaman" is said to have gone "to a wedding on a reed horse, that is, he put a reed between his legs and galloped away and was there before the men on horseback". Close parallels for Väinämöinen's ride are also found among the Altaic and other Siberian peoples. Holding his staff, called "my horse", like a hobby horse on his left side, the Tuvan shaman feigns the act of riding. The Buryat shaman hits two sticks, carved like horses, together while shamanizing. The Mongolian shamans use the same kind of horse-shaped sticks with attached stirrups. The Uzbek dervish is believed to be able to fly on a stick decorated with human features, which he puts between his legs. More commonly in Asia, the drum functions as the shaman's mount. It is variously called the shaman's "horse", "white horse", or "reindeer bull", depending upon the kind of animal used for riding in the area. The drum is equipped with reins, and the drumstick is the whip.
>
> Thus staff, drum and horse are all linked. Elsewhere the staff represents the world tree.

It appears, then, that the staff overlaps conceptually with the drum. Both are connected with the world tree, and with the means to get to the otherworld. The drum is usually conceived as being made from the sacred tree, and as being a steed, whereas the staff lends itself more readily to direct identification with the tree, but also with the steed on which the shaman rides.

THE STEED

In more northerly areas of Siberia the reindeer acts as a steed, whereas the horse is used in southern Siberia; the shamanic symbolism associated with the steed may therefore be associated with whichever animal fulfils this role in society.

We have seen that the drum (and sometimes the staff), which "takes" the shaman on his journey through the trance-inducing beating upon it, is widely conceived as his steed. We have also seen that riding animals are often offered as sacrifices, and hence the animal is thought to ascend to heaven: the Altaian shaman is believed to accompany the soul of the sacrificed horse up to heaven, where he could talk face to face with the high god (Eliade 1972: 325). A further level of symbolism stems from the importance of owning numbers of steeds, whose reproductive power therefore marks the success of the clan which owns them: hence arises a sexual ritualisation

of the animals' fecundity, which may be overseen by the shaman. Eliade (1972: 79–8) notes some examples where the elements of fecundity and sacrifice (aimed at the renewal of fecundity) meet:

> Among the Kumandin of the Tomsk region the horse sacrifice includes an exhibition of wooden masks and phalli, carried by three young men; they gallop with the phallus between their legs "like a stallion" and touch the spectators. The song sung on this occasion is distinctly erotic. Among the Teleut when the shaman, climbing the tree, reaches the third *tapty*, the women, girls and children leave and the shaman begins an obscene song resembling that of the Kumandin; its purpose is to strengthen the men sexually. This rite has parallels elsewhere, and its meaning is the more explicit because it forms part of the horse sacrifice, whose cosmological function (renewal of the world and life) is well known.

Norse

COSTUME

In *Þrymskviða* 3 Freyja lends her *fjaðrhamr*, "feather skin", to Loki, who flies to Jǫtunheimr with it; *hamr* here clearly has a physical sense (and, as Cleasby and Vigfússon note, *s.v.*, is particularly used of a bird's skin flayed with the feathers), but Loki does use the object to move to a different world, which is reminiscent of the shaman in feather dress; whether any spiritual sense of *hamr* as "outward form" may originally have been implied in the term is impossible to discern. It is interesting that the device belongs to Freyja, the goddess with the closest association with sorcery. Unfortunately, *Þrymskviða* is too unreliable a source, in its extant burlesque and probably late form, to deduce any ritual significance for such objects from. Whilst gods (including Loki) readily assume animal form elsewhere, we have no parallel to this costume which gives powers to move between worlds.

When we move from myth to the world of (fictionalised) sorceresses, we find that the only substantial description in Old Norse of the costume worn by a magical practitioner is that of Þorbjǫrg lítilvǫlva in *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4 ⟨87, FIG. 3⟩. This may be summarised as:

> Mantle, dark blue, with straps, adorned with gems
> Necklace of glass beads
> Hood of lambskin, black, lined with white catskin
> Belt with large purse to keep charms needed for predictions
> Boots, calfskin, fur-lined, with long laces with pewter knobs on the ends
> Gloves of catskin, white, fur-lined
> Staff, with knob, adorned with brass and stones
> Knife with broken point

I have already argued that this account is of very little value as a source for pagan practices of the pre-Christian period. Given the complete absence of any written tradition of a *vǫlva*'s costume, it would stretch credulity to take the details of this account as a reliable indication of what was worn a

couple of hundred years earlier, beyond the probability that *vǫlur* carried a staff, and possibly that they were believed to have some sort of distinctive outfit (though even this might be questioned). It may be felt that the author was drawing the details from contemporary soothsayers. Even if this were the case, it would not necessarily tell us much about the costume of *vǫlur* in pagan times. But we have already seen that there is scant evidence that *vǫlur* or *seiðkonur* actually existed in thirteenth-century Iceland (and hence are unlikely to have done so in Greenland at the time either). It is just possible that such women may still have existed in Norway and other Norse areas, such as parts of Scotland, and this appears to be the only likely source – albeit a highly tentative one – that might be adduced for the description, if it has any basis in reality as a description of a *vǫlva*; traditions of magical practitioners elsewhere in Europe may also, of course, have acted as a source, but they would not have been Norse *vǫlur*. Descriptions of such people exist from an early date: for example, Gregory of Tours in *Historia Francorum* IX.6 describes two male magicians who pestered him or his diocese at different times. The first, Desiderius, was (in Gregory's view) a necromancer and user of familiar demons, a pretend healer, who reckoned himself the equal of the Apostles; the second was a rather pathetic creature whom Gregory despises (but who appears in reality to have been suffering a mental illness): the description is interesting, as Gregory gives details of the clothes and belongings:

> Hic enim colobio indutus erat, amictus desuper sindonem, crucem ferens, de qua dependebant ampullulae, quas dicebat oleum sanctum habere. [...] Perscrutatisque cunctis quae habebat, [sacerdos] invenit cum eo sacculum magnum plenum de radicibus diversarum herbarum, ibique et dentes talpae et ossa murium et ungues atque adipes ursinos.

> He came dressed in a short-sleeved tunic, with a mantle of fine muslin on top, and he carried a cross from which hung a number of phials, containing, or so he said, holy oil. [...] The priest, examining everything he had, found on him a big bag filled with the roots of various plants; in it, too, were a mole's teeth, the bones of mice, and the claws and fat of bears.

Gregory is disgusted by the man's effrontery in approaching him in his private chambers and declaring «Meliorem occursum nobis exhibere debueras», "You should have shown us a warmer welcome".

The Icelandic author may have picked up the general motif (or even some of the details) of the wandering magician from Gregory or later writers, or else from oral traditions about such characters (from which Gregory's own account is only one step away). Yet he shows his skills of literary artifice, noted already in the previous chapter, in the matter of the *vǫlva*'s attire. Thus the description immediately creates an air of strangeness, of another world and time outside the reader's experience, precisely suitable for a depiction of the distant land of Greenland some centuries ago, a place still (it was supposed) largely unenlightened by Christianity. This spiritual darkness is reflected in the predominantly black clothing. The gems and adornments, and the fur, all constantly emphasised, add a further level

of outrageousness to her appearance, but are perhaps primarily a reflection of the wealth of the *vǫlva*, gained through the practice of her art: her obvious success is a further indication of the sway such dark magicians – whose uncouth appearance should itself be a warning to anyone of sound spiritual standing – still held in the land.

I have already suggested that the *vǫlva* functions, from one perspective, as a sort of subverted episcopal figure. The clothing appears to mirror this (cf. the images of Þorbjǫrg and a twelfth-century bishop in FIGS. 3, 4). I have outlined some of the aspects of mock episcopal figures in dramatic liturgical traditions, but the itemised presentation of the *vǫlva*'s dress may also make a more immediate reference to the ordinary garb of a bishop, which, while it varied, consisted ideally at this time of:[10]

Dalmatic (a long, wide-sleeved tunic, heavily ornamented)
Tunicle, similar to the dalmatic, and from the twelfth century worn in addition to it
Chasuble (an open poncho-like vestment, worn outermost)
Gloves, usually white, mainly of silk
Buskins (silk stockings), embroidered for example with gold
Slippers, with gold galloons (trims)
Mitre
Pectoral cross
Ring
Bugia (episcopal candle)
Crozier

The dalmatic, tunicle and chasuble were adorned with various bands, often highly ornate; these garments correspond to the *vǫlva*'s mantle with its straps, heavily gem-studded. The white gloves correspond to the *vǫlva*'s white cat-skin gloves. The buskins and slippers, with their exuberant decoration, match the *vǫlva*'s fur-lined boots. The mitre corresponds to her hood. The pectoral cross, held on a neck chain, corresponds to the *vǫlva*'s necklace of glass beads, but the cross itself, the clearest declaration of the bishop's Christian office, may correspond to the purse with the tools of the *vǫlva*'s trade. The ring and bugia appear to have no counterparts. The crozier, a focus for elaborate ornamentation, clearly corresponds to the staff with its decoration.

But let us for a moment give the description the benefit of the doubt as reflecting some pagan motifs, and see how far it may, by whatever means, have preserved arguably traditional motifs that may have been associated with the *vǫlva*. The staff has been mentioned, as has the broken-tipped knife. The hood might be related to the hood/cloak of magicians and Óðinn – though nothing is made of such a connection in the case of Þorbjǫrg. Two other features may represent pagan motifs, and both would relate the *vǫlva* to Freyja. The first is the use of cats to provide parts of the attire. The cat is Freyja's particular animal (*Gylfaginning* ch. 24, 49). The second

[10] The information is derived from entries in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (the recently revised version of the encyclopaedia is less informative).

couple of hundred years earlier, beyond the probability that *vǫlur* carried a staff, and possibly that they were believed to have some sort of distinctive outfit (though even this might be questioned). It may be felt that the author was drawing the details from contemporary soothsayers. Even if this were the case, it would not necessarily tell us much about the costume of *vǫlur* in pagan times. But we have already seen that there is scant evidence that *vǫlur* or *seiðkonur* actually existed in thirteenth-century Iceland (and hence are unlikely to have done so in Greenland at the time either). It is just possible that such women may still have existed in Norway and other Norse areas, such as parts of Scotland, and this appears to be the only likely source – albeit a highly tentative one – that might be adduced for the description, if it has any basis in reality as a description of a *vǫlva*; traditions of magical practitioners elsewhere in Europe may also, of course, have acted as a source, but they would not have been Norse *vǫlur*. Descriptions of such people exist from an early date: for example, Gregory of Tours in *Historia Francorum* IX.6 describes two male magicians who pestered him or his diocese at different times. The first, Desiderius, was (in Gregory's view) a necromancer and user of familiar demons, a pretend healer, who reckoned himself the equal of the Apostles; the second was a rather pathetic creature whom Gregory despises (but who appears in reality to have been suffering a mental illness): the description is interesting, as Gregory gives details of the clothes and belongings:

> Hic enim colobio indutus erat, amictus desuper sindonem, crucem ferens, de qua dependebant ampullulae, quas dicebat oleum sanctum habere. [...] Perscrutatisque cunctis quae habebat, [sacerdos] invenit cum eo sacculum magnum plenum de radicibus diversarum herbarum, ibique et dentes talpae et ossa murium et ungues atque adipes ursinos.

> He came dressed in a short-sleeved tunic, with a mantle of fine muslin on top, and he carried a cross from which hung a number of phials, containing, or so he said, holy oil. [...] The priest, examining everything he had, found on him a big bag filled with the roots of various plants; in it, too, were a mole's teeth, the bones of mice, and the claws and fat of bears.

Gregory is disgusted by the man's effrontery in approaching him in his private chambers and declaring «Meliorem occursum nobis exhibere debueras», "You should have shown us a warmer welcome".

The Icelandic author may have picked up the general motif (or even some of the details) of the wandering magician from Gregory or later writers, or else from oral traditions about such characters (from which Gregory's own account is only one step away). Yet he shows his skills of literary artifice, noted already in the previous chapter, in the matter of the *vǫlva*'s attire. Thus the description immediately creates an air of strangeness, of another world and time outside the reader's experience, precisely suitable for a depiction of the distant land of Greenland some centuries ago, a place still (it was supposed) largely unenlightened by Christianity. This spiritual darkness is reflected in the predominantly black clothing. The gems and adornments, and the fur, all constantly emphasised, add a further level

of outrageousness to her appearance, but are perhaps primarily a reflection of the wealth of the *vǫlva*, gained through the practice of her art: her obvious success is a further indication of the sway such dark magicians – whose uncouth appearance should itself be a warning to anyone of sound spiritual standing – still held in the land.

I have already suggested that the *vǫlva* functions, from one perspective, as a sort of subverted episcopal figure. The clothing appears to mirror this (cf. the images of Þorbjǫrg and a twelfth-century bishop in FIGS. 3, 4). I have outlined some of the aspects of mock episcopal figures in dramatic liturgical traditions, but the itemised presentation of the *vǫlva*'s dress may also make a more immediate reference to the ordinary garb of a bishop, which, while it varied, consisted ideally at this time of:[10]

Dalmatic (a long, wide-sleeved tunic, heavily ornamented)
Tunicle, similar to the dalmatic, and from the twelfth century
  worn in addition to it
Chasuble (an open poncho-like vestment, worn outermost)
Gloves, usually white, mainly of silk
Buskins (silk stockings), embroidered for example with gold
Slippers, with gold galloons (trims)
Mitre
Pectoral cross
Ring
Bugia (episcopal candle)
Crozier

The dalmatic, tunicle and chasuble were adorned with various bands, often highly ornate; these garments correspond to the *vǫlva*'s mantle with its straps, heavily gem-studded. The white gloves correspond to the *vǫlva*'s white cat-skin gloves. The buskins and slippers, with their exuberant decoration, match the *vǫlva*'s fur-lined boots. The mitre corresponds to her hood. The pectoral cross, held on a neck chain, corresponds to the *vǫlva*'s necklace of glass beads, but the cross itself, the clearest declaration of the bishop's Christian office, may correspond to the purse with the tools of the *vǫlva*'s trade. The ring and bugia appear to have no counterparts. The crozier, a focus for elaborate ornamentation, clearly corresponds to the staff with its decoration.

But let us for a moment give the description the benefit of the doubt as reflecting some pagan motifs, and see how far it may, by whatever means, have preserved arguably traditional motifs that may have been associated with the *vǫlva*. The staff has been mentioned, as has the broken-tipped knife. The hood might be related to the hood/cloak of magicians and Óðinn – though nothing is made of such a connection in the case of Þorbjǫrg. Two other features may represent pagan motifs, and both would relate the *vǫlva* to Freyja. The first is the use of cats to provide parts of the attire. The cat is Freyja's particular animal (*Gylfaginning* ch. 24, 49). The second

[10] The information is derived from entries in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (the recently revised version of the encyclopaedia is less informative).

is the girdle, represented in a threefold way by the strap, the necklace and the belt, which could represent Freyja's Brísingamen. As Freyja's girdle fundamentally embodies the fecundity of the earth, this would suggest the *vǫlva*'s role would be to pronounce in particular on matters related to this, such as the success of crops or children, but also on matters overseen by the goddess, which would include foretelling in general.

It would make good sense if Freyja were indeed seen as divine guardian of *vǫlur*. However, without better evidence for such a connection being manifested through the use of girdles or catskin than this one account, we must remain cautious. The dangling strap and necklace and belt may simply have been intended to give the *vǫlva* an outlandish "Gothic" look, and moreover the pouch for her spells is paralleled in witches' purses.[11] The cat, too, is the archetypal witch's helping animal[12] – which indeed is probably the reason for its (quite possibly independent) association with the witch goddess Freyja.[13] But it may just as well have been chosen to add to the excessive luxuriousness emphasised throughout the *vǫlva*'s costume.

Another serious argument against the costume as a whole is its arbitrariness, its non-functionality. A comparison with shamanic costumes is illuminating. In practically all cases (and the exceptions are probably due to inadequate recording), every aspect of a shaman's costume serves a specific function, as with the Nganasan costume analysed above; it is true that one of these functions may be to demonstrate the shaman's spiritual strength through an accumulation of adornments (for example the Tuvan shamaness considered by Djakonova 1978), but the adornments have a practical purpose: the many snake pendants indicate, in this case, the number of snake helping spirits the shamaness possessed, and the number of tobacco pouches her access to the inspiration afforded by the drug. Whether we count *vǫlur* as shamans or not, their role was sufficiently close for us to expect this apparently universal principle of functionality to apply here too if the costume is genuine, but the author makes no such purposes explicit, nor is it easy to imagine any, other than the show of wealth.

[11] An early example is that found in Gregory's account cited just above; other examples, from the Scandinavian area, are mentioned elsewhere in the present work (the Finnish fortune-teller Pykly's bag, and a Sámi magician's bag mentioned by Clausson Friis 1881: 401). Less likely parallels can be found among Siberian peoples. For example, Simčenko (1978: 505) tells of a Nganasan amulet, *simi*, in the form of a small semicircular pouch made of deer skin worn around the neck by women, into which various herbs, moss and earth were placed, mixed with fat; a new *simi* was sewn each spring if the woman remained unpregnant. The *simi* was considered part of the body of Mou-njami, "Mother Earth", who protected the woman, ensured fertility and eased labour. It might well be imagined that a *vǫlva* could have demonstrated her power over these aspects of a woman's life with such a pouch, but the evidence of *Eiríks saga* is quite insufficient to suggest that such was the case.

[12] Gregory IX, in the bull *Vox in rama* (1233), asserted that heretics worshipped a black cat; its association with witches no doubt antedates this.

[13] The cat originated in Egypt, where it was associated with the goddess Bastet, daughter of the sun god. Bastet was originally associated with the lion, but after about 1000 BC came to be depicted as a cat. (Hart 1986, *s.v.* "Bastet")

If Norse *vǫlur* were to be regarded as a form of shaman, and ones possessed of a special outfit to boot, then they would mark an outpost in the occurrences of shamanic dress, with an extensive swathe of territory between them and the eastern Khanty and Samoyeds, the nearest shamanic neighbours to have used a special dress. The unlikeliness of this is further argument against seeing anything genuine in the *Eiríks saga* depiction.

In terms of any magical practice, Þorbjǫrg's costume cannot be seen as anything but arbitrary. However, in terms of the anti-pagan polemic of the saga, the costume contributes in a coherent manner to a picture of an outlandish superstition characterised by darkness and luxuriance; we are presented here with a travesty of a Christian bishop's dress (and performance in that dress).

THE HAT

Óðinn is the only Norse god constantly described with a hat; de Vries (*AR* §396) sees the veiling hat as reminiscent of the magic cap of the dwarfs and the *huldrehat* of Norwegian earth spirits, but also of the cap of Hades or the *petasos* of Hermes. This would point to a symbolism of magical power and contact with other realms of the cosmos, which would be seen in Óðinn's wanderings, especially under names such as Grímnir, "Masked". Some shamanic uses of veils, such as the cloth found in the *Historia Norwegie*, may signify a passage between worlds. The main point, however, must be that it marks his increased supernatural vision (and thus knowledge) which he gained by sacrificing his physical eye in the spring of Mímir. This is matched in several shamanic accounts in the emphasis upon spiritual eyes, whose power is often enhanced by covering the physical eyes. Óðinn's hat could be described as "shamanic", but, as with any such feature, it is not exclusive to shamanism and is insufficient on its own as an indicator of the presence of shamanism.

THE BELT

The belt in Norse has at least two associations: physical strength, and birth.

Þórr bound on a *megingjǫrð*, "belt of strength", to increase his strength: the earliest source (from *c.* 986), Eilífr's *Þórsdrápa* 2 (*Skj* A₁ 148), describes him as *gjarðvenjuðr*, the *customary* wearer of the belt, and it saves the god's servant Þjálfr, who holds onto it as they cross the murderous river, in the way the Nanai shaman appears to have relied on his belt as a sort of safety line.[14] The belt effects a change of state in Þórr: he will grow as high as heaven when he wears it, and have the strength to overcome an obstacle he was previously defeated by. It is pertinent here to bring in Clunies Ross's (1981) interpretation of the myth of *Þórsdrápa*: she sees Þórr, overcoming the river (caused by a giantess urinating, or possibly menstruating), as

[14] The manuscript reading «giarðvenioðr» is emended needlessly by Finnur Jónsson to «garðvitjuðr» in *Skj* B₁ 139; see Davidson (1983: 572).

breaking free from the fetters of maternal female control. The myth therefore represents a sort of adolescent-related initiation, and hence a symbolic new birth, a change from one state to another. The belt embodies the power necessary to accomplish this, and its symbolism of strength merges with that of birth.

Birth, i.e. successful fertility, appears to feature in Freyja's necklace the Brísingamen (called a *gjǫrð*, "belt", in the oldest source, *Haustlǫng* 9 (*Skj* B$_1$ 16), from *c.* 900). The Brísingamen ⟨QV⟩ is, I have argued, connected with birth saved from destruction (and in *Húsdrápa* that potential destruction is in the water), just as Þórr's belt gives him the strength to overcome the threatening river Vimur. The Brísingamen is taken from Freyja, and has to be returned from a deathly realm, represented by the watery crag: the notion of return implies rebirth, something found very clearly in the analogue of the Mesopotamian fertility goddess Inanna ⟨QV⟩ with her belt or girdle.

A notion of rebirth associated with a belt is found in *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðaálfs* ch. 7 (*Flateyjarbók* II, 9), where the belt of the dead Óláfr Geirstaða-álfr is taken from his grave and placed over Óláfr Haraldsson's mother in travail; an incident later in the king's life when he passes the howe of his namesake hints at the idea of reincarnation (*Óláfs saga hins helga* ch. 106, *Flateyjarbók* II, 135): one of Óláfr's *hirðmenn* asks him whether he feels he has been here before, and alleges that he once said so (thus revealing the belief of the *hirðmaðr* that Óláfr may be a reborn form of Óláfr Geirstaða-álfr), but the king fiercely denies ever having had more than one mortal body, and rides away from the place immediately. The writer thus rejects belief in reincarnation, but suggests that some people once believed in it, at least as regards exceptional people. The same belief is also noted (and condemned) in the prose at the end of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*. These instances naturally prove only that Icelanders of the thirteenth to fourteenth century thought it likely that their pagan ancestors sometimes believed in reincarnation, not that the belief was actually current in pagan times. If, however, there is any genuine tradition in the story of the belt, it appears as the means to ensure the passing on of its possessor's soul, which goes further than what is found in shamanistic contexts (but is comparable to the matrilineal belt of the Ainu).

Freyja's girdle would fittingly be represented in the accoutrements of the *seiðkona*, if *seiðr* was indeed fundamentally concerned with rebirth or fecundity. The seeress Þorbjǫrg does have a notable belt in *Eiríks saga*, from which she hangs the objects she needs for her trade; the account has been evaluated as containing little of value as evidence for traditional practices, though some elements may be elaborated from basic pieces of traditional lore. That the belt may have been a traditional feature of the Germanic seeress's attire is perhaps suggested in that Strabo, *Geography* VII.2.3 ⟨69⟩, describing the priestesses of the Cimbri, makes special mention of their bronze belts. We do not have an idea of rebirth or the fecundity of the land (and its seasonal return) in this text, but the seeresses nevertheless oversee the victory of the clan, which is a martial counterpart to the agrarian

fecundity the warriors would be equally concerned about at home. In this Cimbric setting, we encounter a combination of the elements of violent death, prophecy and belt, which in Norse meet in the person of the goddess Freyja, as the mistress of half the slain and the owner of the hall Fólkvangr, "Battlefield" (*Grímnismál* 14), as the introducer of *seiðr*, and as the owner of the Brísingamen. The belt of the Cimbri may thus be distantly related to the Brísingamen, or a cult representation of some form of antecedent.

The fire-stones, oval stones often in the shape of the female pudenda, which are bound into a belt, and which are found throughout Scandinavia from *c.* AD 50 to 800 (Salo 1990, especially 125–9), have been disguised above in connection with the Brísingamen. It may be added that they suggest a conneciton with both Freyja and Þórr. The stones are frequently found in votive offerings, suggesting that the practical matter of striking a fire was readily regarded as having religious significance. In a religious context, striking a flame from the stones parallels the striking of earth by lightning, which itself constitutes a *hieros gamos*; in the Finnish context Salo considers these stones in relation to the myths of how Ukko – the god of thunder, but also of fertility – struck fire from heaven, and "huffed and puffed" with his wife. The Norse equivalent to Ukko is Þórr; if the sacred fire-stones were dedicated to him in Norse areas, this would reinforce the evidence for him as a fertility god (*AR* §§422, 425, 426). The *ǫndvegissúlur* ⟨QV⟩, dedicated to Þórr in the few places they are mentioned, had nails in their tops; a Sámi analogue to these was used to strike fire from. At the same time, a belt of stones of clearly female form suggests a link with birth-stones, such as the sea-kidney which is mentioned in *Húsdrápa* 2 ⟨54⟩ in a mythic context, probably concerning the Brísingamen, Freyja's necklace, whose name ostensibly derives from *brísa*, "gleam, spark".

The belt exhibits an underlying theme of birth, or rebirth (salvation) from destruction, and might symbolise rebirth into a changed state; it is also associated with fire, the origin of which was itself probably seen as a birth resulting from the coming together of (in the broadest terms) heaven and earth. By the time of our Norse records the ritual use of the belt has become obscured, even if a scattered kaleidoscope of its significance survives in myth. It was something that might be used in shamanism, but its symbolism need not derive from there; thus the proposed presence of the belt in Norse myth and ritual would be consistent with the presence of shamanism, but, again, does not demonstrate it.

THE DRUM

An incident of drumming, upon shields, occurs in Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān's account of a Rus funeral in 922 ⟨31⟩; the warriors make this noise, so the account states, to drown out the cries of the slave girl being sacrificed in the tent where her master's body lay. Ström (1947: 12), on the basis of similar practices in India, proposes that the specific purpose of the drumming was to drown out the girl's last words, which would carry great power with them and could curse someone; such an idea existed in Norse: cf. the prose

introduction to *Fáfnismál*, where it is said that the words of a doomed man carried great power, if he were to curse anyone by name. This may be the case here, though the fact the Rus girl has volunteered to die renders it unlikely that a curse would be expected to issue from her lips; moreover, the drums can just as well be seen as simply marking the passage into death. The priestesses of the Cimbri are said by Strabo ⟨69⟩ to have drummed on the skins of their wagons during battle. In both Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān and Strabo there is a coincidence of drumming, female seers (for Strabo has just given a description of their mantic powers, and the Rus slave girl has been lifted up to peer into the otherworld) and death. It appears that drumming was associated with the passage or vision into the otherworld. It is impossible, however, without further evidence to assign any more efficatory purpose to it: the beating of the shaman's drum is carried out *in order* to pass to the other world, not just as a symbol that he is doing so. There is no comparable ritual context in either Norse example. Hence, while drumming may have had a ritual association with the otherworld and thus the potential to develop into an efficatory means of reaching it, it does not, on this evidence, appear to have undergone this development. However, a related, but unfortunately indefinable, activity is considered in the next section which indicates that a comparable development may in fact have taken place in some Norse practices.

THE *VÉTT*

In *Lokasenna* 24 ⟨104⟩, Loki makes an accusation of disreputable practices against Óðinn, saying that «draptu á vétt sem vǫlor», "you beat on a *vétt* like *vǫlur*". The word *vétt/vitt* is puzzling, and its connections and derivation are unclear.

The *vitt* is mentioned in Norwegian law ⟨140⟩ as something that could be kept in a house, that pertained to heathendom. *Vitt* also occurs in Þjóðólfr's *Ynglingatal* 3 ⟨141⟩ in the genitive plural, where a «vitta véttr», "creature of *vitt*", engineered Vanlandi's death; another «vitta véttr» kills Aðils in st. 21 of the same poem. Þjóðólfr also uses the word (manuscript «vez») in *Haustlǫng* 1 (I cite the text from North's edition, slightly amended; see also his commentary *ad loc.*):

> Týframra sék tíva
> trygglaust of far þriggja
> á hreingǫru hlýri
> hildar vétts ok Þjaza.

I see the trustless journey of three divinely eminent deities and Þjazi on the brightened cheek of the *vétt* of battle.

A "*vétt* of battle" (this seems a more natural reading than North's "of Hildr" the *valkyrja*) is a kenning for "shield", on which the myths are depicted; a *vétt* must therefore bear some resemblance to a shield.

In 1660 in Fosnes in Namdalen, Karenn Erichsdaatter was examined and

some of her lore was recorded (Østberg 1925: 83–4); she described a *word* that would go out of a person during sleep to do harm to others (cf. *vǫrðr*). Upon going to bed, she would take off her belt and speak a verse:

> Jeg signer min giord
> wnder Guds drotnings soel.
> Min word er i wetten,
> min siel er i himmerig.

I bless my belt under the sun of God's lady. My *word* is in the *wett*, my soul is in heaven.

A verb *vítta* may be related: in *Vǫluspá* 22 ⟨125⟩ the *seiðkona* Heiðr «vitti ganda», that is she performed some magic with *gandar* spirits.

How far these instances may be listed as occurrences of one lexeme is open to debate. There are two main etymological suggestions. Pipping (1930: 2–4) sees an underlying root of Indo-European *weik-*, "separate, make holy", seen for example in Latin *victima* and Old Norse *vígja*, "consecrate". The alternating nominal forms *vétt/vítt* can be explained as developments of **wiht-* varying according to the vowel of the following syllable (Noreen 1970: §110.3: *ih* > *eh* except when the following syllable has long or short *i* or *u*), which would no doubt have been subject to levelling (*vætt* would be a variant showing the sporadic Icelandic change of *étt* to *ætt*: ibid. §109). The verb *vítta* Pipping sees reflected in Swedish dialect *vīta*, "bewitch" (shortened from **vítta*: as preterite *møtta* stands to infinitive *møta*, so preterite *vítta* levels its infinitive **vítta* to *víta*). Pipping's suggestions would appear to work derivationally, and neatly explain all the recorded forms. Some objections might nonetheless be raised. A *vétt* would, in origin, simply be "a consecrated object", whereas all the uses indicate it was rather an object of witchcraft: as far as I am aware, all other Norse words derived from Indo-European **weik-* are confined to the religious field, not magic (though Old English *pih*, "idol", *piglere*, "soothsayer", may derive from this root). Also, the sense of Swedish *vīta*, "bewitch" (if this is indeed an accurate rendering), does not really match the context of «vitti ganda»: the *seiðkona* is hardly "bewitching" the spirits, but putting them to use – it is the victims of witchcraft who are bewitched, not the spirits that carry out the tasks; presumably, however, the sense would originally have been "use a *vétt*", so the objection may disappear.

Strömbäck (1935: 24) explains *vétt* as a form of *vætt*, "lid of a chest" (from *vega*, "lift", *AeW*, *s.v.* "vætt 2"). He cites Graan as noting that in Pite Lappmark the Sámi sometimes used a bucket lid instead of a real drum; the same practice is noted also by Forbus and Leem; M. Olsen (1960: 19) notes also that in Finnmark the *bøttelokk*, "bucket top", is more widely recorded as a (male) magician's tool. To this may be added that the Sámi word for shamanic drum, proto-Sámi **kōmtē* (Lehtiranta 2001, *s.v.* 473), means in addition "lid". A resonating lid would be a suitable object for the ersatz-*vǫlva* Óðinn to beat, like a Sámi diviner – and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Sámsey here may even be "Sámi isle" (though the

Sámi are otherwise recorded under their own name only as *sem(sveinar)* in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 12 ⟨123⟩), rather than referring to the known Danish island. A lid would also be a suitable metonym for the vessel on which it rested: thus Karen Eriksdatter puts her *vǫrðr* away in a box – though the *vétt* is clearly one from which it can be called forth when needed (an action which, it is implied, would jeopardise her soul's position in heaven). Whilst it is not actually recorded in our meagre records, Hultkrantz (*SLS* 51) considers it likely that the Sámi drum was used to collect spirits in, as was the case in Siberia, which would match the inference about the use of the *vétt*. It would follow from this that the beating which the *vǫlva* bestows on it would call these spirits forth, to be sent on their tasks. The meaning of *Ynglingatal* 3 ⟨141⟩ appears to be that the *mara* is a spirit which has been sent on its mission (probably by Freyja) through the use of a *vítt*. If it is possible to derive the verb *vítta* in *Vǫluspá* 22 from the same root, the poet would be depicting the use of the *vétt* to send out the *gandar* on their mission (here, to find things out); however, other derivations of this verb (along the lines of "send out") are possible. From a religious perspective, Strömbäck's etymology appears to offer better parallels than Pipping's, but a root **weht-*, on which *vétt/vætt* can be based, will not yield the forms in *í*; it is, of course, possible that the forms «vit(t)» are scribal misreadings of «vet(t)», perhaps influenced by words such as *vitki*, "wizard", and that «vitti» in *Vǫluspá* is unconnected. This solution would offer something which falls short of the neatness of Pipping's derivation, however. It may also be that *vítt* is a more genuine form which has developed into *vétt/vætt* under the influence of the lid, *vætt*, used in rituals such as Strömbäck outlines (thus, an obscure word would have been adapted by folk etymology to a more readily comprehensible form). In the end, it seems impossible to decide between the various possible explanations.

THE STAFF

The staff has often been seen (for example by Price 2002: 175) as a distinguishing mark of the *vǫlva*, a word supposedly derived from *vǫlr*, "staff"; the evidence for the staff as a magical accoutrement I will present below, but first I turn to the philological arguments.

The etymological connection between *vǫlva* and *vǫlr* is questionable. It is true that *vǫlva* is most readily interpreted as formed from *vǫlr* (< **walus*), "staff", with a suffix indicating an agent, "carrier of a *vǫlr*", giving an apparently satisfactory sense – and most investigators seem to have contented themselves with this etymology. But doubt was cast on the derivation by Motz (1980), the weakness of whose own alternative suggestions has unfortunately undermined the more important points she was making, in particular that *vǫlr* is almost invariably used in prosaic settings with nothing to do with magic, and that a *vǫlva* is never said to possess a *vǫlr*. It is true that in *Þórsdrápa* Þórr carries a *vǫlr* which he got from a giantess, Gríðr, which it is probably to be inferred had magical powers, though this scarcely amounts to strong evidence for any etymological link between *vǫlr*

and *vǫlva*. Also, the seeress of the Semnones bore the name Waluburg in the second century ⟨67⟩, a name which may mean "protection of the staff" – though it may not. To this weak evidence supposedly connecting *vǫlva* with *vǫlr* it may be added that no argument has been produced, with analogous examples, to explain the details of the word-formation from "staff" to "seeress" (*AeW, s.v.*, merely glosses *vǫlva* as "carrier of a *vǫlr*" with no further consideration). Other possibilities clearly need to be investigated more thoroughly. *Vǫlva* must derive from proto-Germanic **walw-ōn-*, with a weak-declension formative suffix. A semantically more satisfactory derivation than the red-herring "staff" is offered by the proto-Indo-European root **wel-*, "see" (Pokorny 1959, *s.v.* "u̯el-[1]"). This root occurs certainly in Italo-Celtic, as in Welsh *gweled*, "see", Latin *vultus*, "appearance", Irish *fili* "seer, poet" (Ogam VELITAS), but it is also the root of the name (or title) of the Germanic seeress Veleda, which may be a Celtic borrowing, but could possibly be a Germanic cognate – either way, the sense of "seeress" must have been apparent to the Germanic speakers of the time (see Much 1967: 168).[15] On this etymology, we would be looking at a proto-Indo-European *o*-grade form of **wel-* plus *w*-suffix, giving a sense of "seeing", as the stem on which the nasal suffix, performing a nominalising and individualising function, was added (as a deadjectival suffix parallels are widespread: cf. Latin *Cato*, "the shrewd one", from *catus*, "shrewd": H. Nielsen 1989: 29; Meid 1967: §91).[16] The implication would be that *vǫlva* is a very ancient formation,[17] whose meaning was no longer apparent in medieval times, but which originally had the transparent and wholly apt sense of "seeress", which, after all, is the main function of the *vǫlva* as found in Norse sources, as well as of her counterparts in classical writings on Germanic affairs. It goes without saying that all the elements of this proposed etymology require further investigation to ascertain its viability, something I leave to those to those with greater skills in Indo-European philology, in the hope that any solutions offered will not only be formally correct, but will take account of the semantics of the earliest recorded uses of the word (which a sense of "see" would appear to cover very well).

There are in fact only two mentions of staffs (never, however, *velir*) in connection with *vǫlur*. The main one has already been presented, in *Eiríks saga rauða*. A further description in *Laxdœla saga* ch. 76 ⟨103⟩ of a *vǫlva*'s grave seems to mark the staff, here called a *seiðstafr*, as the give-away sign

[15] It is probable too that the root is found in Germanic words such as Old English *wlite*, "appearance", and *wuldor*, "glory".

[16] As a partial parallel (without the substantival nasal suffix) compare the formation of **wolwā* from the homophonic root **wel-*, "turn, roll", with a meaning "that which covers", giving rise to Latin *vulva*, "covering, womb". The *w/u*-suffix is presented in Meid (1967: §72), where it is defined as primarily a deverbative adjectival/substantival suffix, most often taking a zero-grade root (but the Latin example cited here, *vulva*, is *o*-grade).

[17] Meid (1967: §72) notes that the *w/u*-suffix was almost certainly not productive by the time of proto-Germanic, but the nasal nominalising suffix certainly remained highly productive in the daughter languages, and hence would mark *vǫlva* out explicitly as an agent-type feminine noun, even if the underlying adjectival sense of "seeing" on which it was originally built was no longer apparent.

of what sort of creature is buried there; in *Laxdœla saga* the *vǫlva*, whose dress is described, appears only in a dream to the young Herdís and complains of the torture she suffers with Guðrún praying above her each night; she is dug up and moved away. The evidence this passage provides needs to be treated with caution. I have already argued that *Eiríks saga* presents the *vǫlva* as a sort of parody of a bishop, amongst whose paraphernalia the staff occupied a prominent place. It seems possible to me that *Laxdœla saga* alludes to *Eiríks saga*, though the *Laxdœla saga* account is rather too short to form certain conclusions; the accoutrements correspond, at least to a large degree: the mantle, the head-dress, the brooch and the staff match the dark mantle, the head-dress, the string of beads and the staff, presented consecutively in that order in *Eiríks saga* (the darkness of the clothing there being applied instead to the bones in *Laxdœla saga*). Just as the *vǫlva* of *Eiríks saga* is presented chiefly as a foil to the heroine Guðríðr, ancestress of bishops, so too in *Laxdœla saga* the uncovering of the *vǫlva*'s grave highlights Guðrún's piety, praying each night in the church and causing pain to the pagan seeress buried beneath; Guðrún was ancestor of two priests (Sighvatr and Ketill) and an abbot (Ketill) (and Herdís, who suffered the visitation of the *vǫlva* in the passage cited, the ancestor of two of these). Both sagas are keen to present the passing of heathendom through the presentation of *vǫlur*, and in both there is a pointed contrast between the old (or antique), gruff magic-worker, and the innocent young woman who is addressed (Guðríðr and Herdís); in *Laxdœla saga* the author chooses to mark this passing by a parody of the exhumation of a bishop, whom we might expect to be marked by his staff and by beautiful bones, but whose antitype is marked by the presence of a *seiðr* staff, a *kinga*, "brooch" (perhaps corresponding to a pectoral cross), and dark, ugly bones; a saintly bishop would be put in a shrine, but this *vǫlva*'s bones are interred far off under a highway, like a criminal. An example of the exhumation of a saint is found in *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 57, where St Magnús's remains are dug up by the bishop: we encounter the motifs, all paralleled in one way or another in the *Laxdœla saga* account, of the bishop being alone in the church at Kristskirkja, of his weeping tears, of the implied intercession of the saint releasing the bishop from his blindness (both literal and metaphorical), of the coffin being lifted, and an emphasis on the colour of the bones, said here to be «allvel lit», "fully fine in colour", and, when heated, to take on the colour of gold. The bones were laid in a shrine and placed by the altar.

As Price (2002: 176) points out, another magical use of a staff is recounted in *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 44: Þórdís, a *spákona*, lends her black cloak and staff, *stafsprota*, to Þorkell to use on Guðmundr to persuade him to agree to the terms of a law suit by striking him three times with it on his left cheek. Guðmundr becomes confused and forgetful, so that the case is delayed and dismissed. Afterwards, the *spákona* tells Þorkell to strike Guðmundr three times on the right cheek, and he recovers his memory. The staff here thus appears as a wand, a physical means of directing the power of a spell; moreover, it is used by someone other than the practitioner of magic. In both respects it differs from the use of staffs in contexts such as shamanism,

where carrying out spells is not part of a shaman's activity, and the staff is an inalienable attribute, associated with his initiation and personal power over the spirits. The account is unlikely to reveal anything more about earlier Norse notions than that the staff was thought of as a traditional attribute of the magician and endowed with special power.

Little value, then, can be placed on accounts of *vǫlur*'s staffs as evidence of their actual existence in the pagan period. It is, of course, quite likely that they did use staffs – they are a commonplace attribute of the magician in many societies, but also of other classes of people, such as bishops or the aged. It is to be acknowledged that they had some pagan associations in Norway, since their presence in a person's house is forbidden along with that of a root,[18] *vétt*, altar and idol ⟨78⟩, but these staffs' particular function, and their connection with *seiðr*, cannot be determined.

Accepting, however, that there was a notion of a magic staff in Norse tradition, analogues and suggestions of interpretations can readily be found; apart from being possibly connected with the world tree in shamanic traditions, in Greek mythology the staff is the particular attribute of Dionysus the god of frenzied ecstasy, in the form of the θύρσος: this too is linked with trees – it sprouts into a vine, and hence represents the channelling of fertility; it is in some areas associated with the underworld (Pauly 1964–75, *s.v.* "Thyrsos"). The condemnation of roots alongside staffs in the Norwegian laws is at least suggestive of a similar set of connections, but this can only remain speculation.

It is possible that staffs uncovered in graves from the Viking period were associated with magic (Price 2002: 127–61, 181–206). Price interprets various artefacts from a selection of graves as magical in intent, but most of the interpretations can only be described as, at best, speculative – artefacts may have many purposes (the presence of supposedly narcotic drugs, for instance, could equally well indicate a folk healer as a magician, especially given that *seiðr* is not in fact associated with such substances in the written sources). It is clear, at least, that since the staffs occur in opulent female graves, they formed part of an array of objects symbolising female authority (however socially defined).

At the risk of seeming equally speculative, a less than direct piece of evidence for the use of the staff in a magician's ritual may perhaps be afforded by *Skírnismál*, if we accept that it alludes to a broadly shamanic ritual. In st. 26 Skírnir threatens the unwilling Gerðr (trans. Dronke):

Tamsvendi ek þik drep, en ek þik temia mun, mær, at mínom munom.	With taming stick I touch you, for I will make you tame, girl, to my wishes.

[18] The root that may not be kept in a house may be compared with the *rótartré*, "root timber", that an old woman carves magical runes on in *Grettis saga* ch. 79, and with the *rót* that has magically harmful powers in *Hávamál* 151. As noted, the threat against Gerðr in *Skírnismál* 35 that she will be cast down under the tree roots indicates this is a place of death, and using a root in a magical manner was presumably intended to invoke deathly powers.

This is presumably the same staff whose origin is described in st. 32:

Til holtz ek gekk ok til hrás viðar, gambantein at geta – gambantein ek gat.	To a forest I went and to a fresh-growing tree, a twig of power to get: a twig of power I got.

The *gambanteinn* is mentioned also in *Hárbarðsljóð* 20, where Óðinn relates that the giant Hlébarðr once gave him a *gambanteinn*, but he tricked him out of his wits («en ek vélta hann ór viti»), which, as Dronke points out (*PE* II, comm. *Skírnismál* 32/3), is what Skírnir is threatening Gerðr with here; in fact, he threatens to use the staff to bring down the wrath of the gods on her, and to banish her, full of unrequited sexual longing (*ergi*), to a world of death, among the corpses below the roots of a tree (probably the world tree, below whose roots the world of the dead lay according to *Grímnismál* 31 ⟨37⟩). The spell is effected by the carving of runes on the staff.[19]

Skírnir's staff does not double as a steed in the way a shaman's some-

[19] Gunnell (2006) discusses some aspects of the dramatic staging of *Skírnismál*, including (ibid. 240) a rather complicated diagram of the *mansiones* (separate stage areas) of the action. Leaving aside the matter of whether all symbolic elements of a poem like *Skírnismál* must necessarily have been physically stageable, it is possible in some respects to simplify the model, at least conceptually, that Gunnell proposes. Essentially, the poem presents two worlds, of gods and giants, a mediation between them by Skírnir, and their coalescence in the marriage of Freyr and Gerðr in the grove Barri. Hliðskjálf – not mentioned in the verse, but inferred in the prose introduction from Freyr's glimpsing of a maiden in an otherworld – is a sort of boundary between worlds, but is the antithesis of the boundary marking off the world of Gerðr, with mountains, flames and hounds, which act to block passage instead of afford it (each boundary is thus a symbolic representation of the two protagonists' psychological positions of yearning and refusal). Movement is a characteristic only of Skírnir (except, in a very minor way, of his giant antithesis, Gerðr's maid, who goes to let him in), until the forecast movement of the main characters, Freyr and Gerðr, to the grove Barri after the end of the poem. Would a dramatic performance not be most effective by having just three distinct *mansiones* (with, perhaps, areas within each, for example for Njǫrðr and Skaði as distinct from Freyr) – the world of the gods, the world of the giants, and the grove of consummation? This would still leave the *holt*, the coppice from which Skírnir gained his wand – if indeed this is acted out at all. Yet the *holt* may be viewed as identical with the *lundr* Barri. The designation *lundr* may have sacred overtones, suggesting a *hieros gamos*, but at the same time the focus on sexual consummation has a progenerative implication, so the *lundr* becomes metaphorically a *holt*, a grove viewed as a place to derive useful timber objects from (such as wands, here), or – in the myth of *hodd*-Mímir's *holt* – a new race of people, and conversely the *holt* whence the wand derives which effects the sexual consummation, the *hieros gamos*, becomes proleptically the grove in which this consummation takes place. The name *Barri* may also be intended to refer to the world tree (as well as, perhaps, to barley, particularly associated with Freyr through his servant Byggvir in *Lokasenna* 44): *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 19 ⟨39⟩ calls the tree a *barr*, and Snorri in *Gylfaginning* ch. 16 ⟨42⟩ says that Yggdrasill has *barr*, "evergreen leaves". Gunnell takes the *hof*, the hall of Freyr, as physically and symbolically central, and the grove as peripheral; however, it seems to me that, in stage terms, a placing of the worlds of gods and giants on the two wings, with the grove of the concluding scene in the centre, would work well; it appears, in any case, rather inept to have this final act of consummation taking place more or less off-stage. In fact, even if in reality sacred groves were necessarily physically peripheral for a community as compared to the hall, this does not mean they were symbolically peripheral – and, as I have suggested elsewhere in this study, notions of peripherality and centrality can vacillate, or perhaps we might say co-inhere, both of them functioning as different realisations of, for example, liminality.

times did. But in other respects there are points of similarity. Why does Skírnir devote a stanza to describing where he got the staff? This is surely a ritual declaration of origins (note the use of *galdralag*, "charm metre"), and hence of power over the object: it is probable that the "fresh tree" from which the staff derives is none other than the world tree, and it is from here that its power stems, just as the shaman's drum and sometimes staff are derived from the representative of the world tree. The Sámi counterpart of Freyr was known, among other titles, as *Vearelden ålmaj* (recorded as *Waralden olmay* by Johan Randulf 1903: 10), *ålmaj* meaning "man", but the title overall being probably a calque rendering of Old Norse *veraldar goð*, "god of the world", a title of Freyr in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 10;[20] Vearelden ålmaj was, according to Randulf (1903: 10–12), honoured as tutelary deity of fertility, of earth and sea and all living things, and besought to promote growth; his visible symbol was a young, flourishing tree, which was dug up and placed at his altar (and turned upside down, to represent its growing from heaven) ⟨6–9⟩. Mebius (2003: 64–7) shows that *Vearelden ålmaj* is one among a group of names for the high god (other recorded forms being *Radien, Radienatsie, Maylmen radien*), who was split into two personages under Norse influence from an original *Dierpmis*, the one becoming Vearelden ålmaj, the high god, and the other Hovrengaellies, the thunder god (with input from Norse Þórr); the degree to which the characteristics of the Sámi deities was influenced by Norse notions (or, indeed, how far the influences may have been in the opposite direction, despite a lack of linguistic parallels for such a direction of influence) is impossible to determine, but the fresh tree which Skírnir fetches his staff from, and the fresh tree dedicated to Freyr's Sámi counterpart, suggest a common set of imagery associated with both. That the Sámi tree was seen as world-sustaining is suggested by the world-pillar/tree representations which were associated with the Sámi high god under different names ⟨2–4, 6–9⟩.

A stick from the world tree would be endowed with that tree's control over fate and over the layers of the cosmos: thus Skírnir is able to impose a fate upon Gerðr and cast her down among the dead beneath the tree. *Skírnismál* does not mention *seiðr*, and we cannot be sure that Skírnir's actions would be seen as representing what went on in *seiðr*, yet it is difficult to see them as other than an act of ritual magic, and to avoid the conclusion that what he did with his staff represents in a mythic form what magicians (whether specifically *seiðkonur/vǫlur* or not) were believed to do. The imposition of *ergi* is paralleled in a fourteenth-century runic love-coercion charm from Bergen, closely matching the curse of *Skírnismál*, which is carved on a four-sided stick, possibly symbolising a staff (the inscription is edited by Liestøl 1964: 41, and more recently by McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004: P6, whence the text and translation are cited,[21] and

[20] *Verǫld*, "world", is probably borrowed from Old English *weorold* (*AeW*, *s.v.*; *VA*, *s.v.* "verden", does not regard it as a loan), and hence the title may not be particularly ancient. *Verǫld* probably connotes the world as a community of people rather than a physical object, and it is thus implied that Freyr oversees the welfare of the community.

[21] The runes are transcribed thus: A: **ristek : bot : runar : rist : ekbiarh : runar : eæin :**

is considered in relation to *Skírnismál* in Mitchell 2007: 83):

Ríst ek bótrúnar,	I carve healing runes,
ríst ek bjargrúnar,	I carve protective runes,
einfalt við álfum,	once against elves,
tvífalt við trollum,	twice against trolls,
þrífalt við þursum . . .	thrice against giants . . .
við inni skœðu	against the harmful
skag-valkyrju,	jutting (spear-carrying?) valkyrie
svá at ei megi	so that she cannot
þó at æ vili	though she may always wish to,
lævís kona	the evil woman
lífi þínu . . .	hurt your life . . .
Ek sendi þér,	I send on you,
ek sé á þér	I chant onto you
ylgjar ergi ok óþola.	the she-wolf's perversion and intolerable longing.
Á þér renni óþoli	May unsatisfied longing come upon you
ok jǫtuns móð.	and the giant's rage.
Sittu aldri,	May you never (be able to) sit (still),
sofþú aldri . . .	may you never sleep . . .
Ant mér sem sjálfri þér.	Love me like yourself (fem.).
Beirist rubus [etc.]	Beirist [? may there be born] rubus etc.

Essentially the staff acts as a channel of power which may be directed at opponents: this may have included the human victims of *seiðr*, but the poem suggests that a more immediate target would be the denizens of the otherworld – in the poem, the giantess Gerðr takes this role, but within *seiðr* or similar practices it would be fulfilled by spirits, however designated, that the *vǫlva* wished to command. Finally, the sexual emphasis in Skírnir's curse is worth notice. It is consistent with the sexual element noted elsewhere, and specifically associates the performance of magic with *ergi* – though Skírnir himself is in no way *argr*: he has *power* over *ergi*, which he can impose on his victim. It is possible that *seiðr* may have been regarded as disgraceful not solely because the person performing it became *argr* (in a way that Skírnir certainly does not), but also because he could subject others to *ergi*, which would be regarded as an act of malicious witchcraft of the most heinous kind – though this is to read rather much from magical acts on the part of Skírnir which can themsleves scarcely be classed as *seiðr*.

Skírnir's staff is paralleled by another weapon, that he specifically requested from Freyr: the sword that fights of itself against the giants (*Skírnismál* 8). Within the poem, the sword ostensibly functions as just that,

faluiþ : aluom : tuiualtuiþ : trolom : þreualt : uiþ : þ(us) . . . B: **uiþenneskø : þo : skah : ualkyrriu : sua : at : eæimehi : þo : atæuili : læuis : kona : liui : þinug ? . . .** C: **eksender : þer : ekseaþer : ylhiar : erhi : okoþola : aþer : rini : uþole : auk : ialuns : moþ : sittu : aldri : sopþu : aldri . . .** D: **– ant : mer : sem sialpre : þer : beirist : rubus : rabus : eþ : arantabus : laus : abus : rosa : gaua . . .**

yet a more ambivalent tradition may lie behind this. A weapon which fights of itself against giants suggests an object that is antithetical in its nature to giants; now, giants are variously characterised in different sources, but the important factors here are precisely those outlined by Skírnir as being the lot of Gerðr if she rejects Freyr, namely unfulfilment and unproductiveness, a miserable antithesis of society, symbolised by the three-headed ogre that she will be subject to. The sword then is the enforcer of sexual union representing the basis of a productive and fulfilling society. *Sverð* in fact could mean both "sword" and "penis", and thus epitomised the dual aspects of the god Freyr as lord of both life and death (like his sister Freyja).[22] The sword Skírnir wields is called «málfán», that is with (magical) marks inscribed on it; the other place this word is used to describe a sword is in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 4, where it separates a couple in bed – but here it is an ambiguous image (as in a sense it is in *Skírnismál* too), serving to unite the couple while also separating them (leading on to a tragic outcome). There is a parallel to this sexually dividing and uniting phallic object in the form of the phallic deity Rígr, "Stiff" (one among several senses), lying like the Indian *gandharva* between couples, who go on to engender the forebears of the social classes in *Rígsþula*. If we take the sword wielded by Skírnir to have phallic overtones, it means that he is threatening Gerðr with a penis curse to effect a state of sexual impotence, precisely as the Bergen woman Ragnhildr did in real life ⟨137⟩. A further point obliquely suggesting the special sword embodies Freyr's phallic power is the curious note that at *ragnarǫk*, Freyr would sorely miss his sword when the sons of Múspell attack (*Gylfaginning* ch. 37); it is not exactly clear from *Skírnismál* (the only source cited here by Snorri) why Freyr did not get his sword back, unless he had had to forfeit it – which associates it with the forfeits of Óðinn's eye and Heimdallr's hearing: but then it should be a bodily part or function specifically epitomising the god's field of activity, a requirement that would be fulfilled if the sword doubles as Freyr's penis. Snorri also says that as Freyr no longer had his sword, he had had to fight against Beli with horns (antlers) instead; Beli is probably a term for bull, and the contest appears to be with Freyr in the form of a stag (cf. the depiction, probably of Cernunnos, the Celtic stag-antlered god, on the Gundestrop cauldron: Boberg 1951: 19–25) for lordship of the tribe (see *PE* II, comm. *Vǫluspá* 51/5, for lengthier discussion of this). Beli could, however, just as well be a term for a stag, which would base the divine struggle more firmly in the natural world, where stags fight ferociously at just one time, the rut; it means "bellower", which would be a particularly apt term for stags in rut (when, above all, their thunderous bellowing roars out). Deer act as symbols of fertility (see Heizmann in Hoops, *s.v.* "Hirsch"), and Freyr's identification as a victorious stag in rut underlines his sexual mastery in the world. Interestingly, in form at least, it would also parallel the shamanic

[22] His association with death is seen in his title *fólkvaldi goða*, "battle-leader of the gods" (as in *Skírnismál* 3) and in the name of his horse, Blóðughófi, "Bloody hoof", probably from its treading the battlefield (*PE* II, 401); see also *AR* §§184, 460, 536.

contest, which took place in the form of stags representing two contending shamans, the winner taking the professional control of the district; it is most likely, however, that various societies with (rein)deer in their midst have used the animals' activities to symbolise their own particular struggles, whether over fertility or spiritual control, so there is little to suggest anything shamanic in this particular aspect of Freyr.

To return to the staff: a further text may allude, obliquely, to its power, namely *Þórsdrápa* 9. Here Þórr carries the staff (*vǫlr*) of the giantess Gríðr. Its place in the myth is well analysed by Clunies Ross (1981: 383–7). To giantesses are often attributed equivalent powers to witches, and it is likely this staff was endowed with magic power (in a similar way Óðinn was presented with a *gambanteinn* by his giant kin). The staff is also referred to as «hógbrotningr skógar», "handy piece broken from the woods", which recalls Skírnir's staff whose origin in the woods is so pointedly mentioned in *Skírnismál*. Þórr uses the staff as a weapon to defeat the giantesses that threaten him, up to the moment when he acquires his own characteristic weapon, the hammer Mjǫllnir (as Clunies Ross interprets the poem). The power of the staff appears to be to divert *ergi* – subjugation to the weaker sex in the form of the giantesses who are trying to overturn the god – and instead impose it on his opponents: by breaking the backs of the giantesses, Þórr renders them impotent (as Gerðr is threatened with impotent longing in *Skírnismál*).

THE HORSE

The horse appears as a psychopompic animal: it takes the soul of the departed to the beyond, a role it assumes in Saxo's story in *Gesta Danorum* VIII.5.1 of the horse sacrificed so that King Haraldr hilditǫnn could ride to Hel on it. Similarly, the eight-legged horse Sleipnir is used for visiting the underworld by Óðinn in *Baldrs draumar*, and by Hermóðr in an attempt to retrieve Baldr from Hel in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49 ⟨53⟩; Skírnir is given a special steed which is able to pass the barriers to the deathly world of the giants in *Skírnismál*. The name *Yggdrasill* is the "Óðinn steed": no doubt informed by a tradition of the horse which conveys people to the otherworld, the gallows are here conceived as the steed on which the god journeyed to the realm of the dead. Whilst the imagery of the steed as the means of transport to the otherworld is clear, little of particular note arises for comment: clearly, for anyone passing to the otherworld, some form of transport was likely, which was most naturally a horse. There is little to suggest any particular shamanic aspect to any of this.

THE *SEIDHJALLR* AND THE RAISED PORTAL TO THE OTHER WORLD

The *seiðhjallr* is mentioned in many of the accounts of *seiðr*. It was a raised platform, described as "high" in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3 ⟨78⟩; the *seiðkona* sat on it during the performance of *seiðr*, but it could accommodate a number

of people (twelve in *Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga* ch. 28 ⟨92⟩). Kiil (1960: 107, 109–11) proposed that the *seiðhjallr* was provided with a central pillar representing the world tree; he compares a tapestry from Oseberg, representing a bier, which, questionably, depicts a central pillar on the bier podium. This does not constitute a convincing argument, however.

The basic notion is that physical elevation symbolises elevated spiritual sight. Kiil (ibid. 87–9, 111) notes several Germanic parallels in which seeresses are elevated: in Tacitus's *Historiae* IV.65 ⟨64⟩ Veleda sits in a *turris*, which may indicate any raised structure; Otta (Auðr), wife of Turges (Þorgils), first Viking king of Ireland, pronounced oracles on the altar of the cathedral of Cluain Mhic Nóis (*c.* 838–45) according to the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* ⟨70⟩; the manuscript is from the twelfth century, deriving from an eleventh-century original, and thus constitutes the earliest written evidence of Norse fortune-telling. To these examples may be added that of the passage from Strabo ⟨69⟩, where the seeresses climb a ladder, or mount onto a platform (the precise meaning is not clear), and that of the sorcerer in the pagan Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Sussex in 666, who stands on a hill (Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi* ch. 13, trans. 119). In the *Gesta Herwardi* (p. 389) a prophetess raises herself on a high place amidst the crowd and addresses them from there.

The *seiðhjallr* parallels the symbolic world tree that the shaman often climbs during kamlania, but only in the vaguest way; the shaman enacts a dramatic movement between worlds, engaging with his audience and with the cosmography they share, whereas the *seiðhjallr* and related platforms serve a more staid purpose of simple elevation, without any explicit cosmological references (at least as far as can be ascertained), and rather acts to separate the *vǫlva* off into her own temenos than to unite her with her audience.

Strömbäck (1935: 116–17) cites several parallels of shamans sitting on stools; these do not present very convincing analogues. Ohlmarks (1939: 344–5) noted that we have to go as far afield as the Tlingits of Alaska before any closely comparable apparatus is found: there the shaman gets up on a very high box to perform. In Tibet, the shaman would operate from a high stone. The distance and generality of such analogues indicate that the Norse tradition, as recorded, is essentially not shamanic in this respect. However, the *seiðhjallr* relates to other Norse apparatus for access to the otherworld.

The chief comparable item in myth is Hliðskjálf, "Gateway shelf". A *hlið* is a gateway or wide gap, and hence a way through to somewhere else; clearly here this was conceived as situated on a *skjálf*, either a platform or a geological shelf. Snorri thinks of it in terms of a seat, describing it as a *hásæti*, "high seat, throne" situated in Óðinn's hall Válaskjálf (*Gylfaginning* ch. 17), or as the place where Óðinn sat in a *hásæti* (*Gylfaginning* ch. 9); how far this is his own surmise is difficult to establish. It is owned by Óðinn, as Þórálfr (probably eleventh century) indicates by calling Óðinn its lord (*Skj* B, 388):

> Sagði hitt, es hugði,
> Hliðskjalfar gramr sjǫlfum,
> hlífar-styggr þars høggnir
> Háreks liðar vǫru.

The lord of Hliðskjálf said to himself what he thought when the forces of shield-shy Hárekr were slain.

The connection of thought or wits, hence implying insight, with Hliðskjálf is to be noted here; this may reflect its function of offering a view into other worlds: in the prose introduction to *Grímnismál* Óðinn and Frigg sit in Hliðskjálf and see over all worlds, and in the introduction to *Skírnismál* Freyr sits in it and glimpses Gerðr in Jǫtunheimr; Skírnir's subsequent journey to fetch Gerðr, described in terms of a visit to the realm of the dead, suggests a similarity of symbolic imagery to that found in the door-frame described by Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān, over which the doomed girl could see into the next world ⟨31⟩. That death lies beyond a door is a commonplace; thus Gróa is raised from the "doors of the dead" (*Grógaldr* 1), and in *Hávamál* 70 death waits "before the door"; dwarfs before doors symbolise death, as in *Ynglingatal* 2 (⟨SVEIGÐIR⟩; see Motz 1973–4, 102, and 1983*b*: 98, for further discussion of this dwarf imagery). Other slightly less precise parallels, which confirm the general symbolism of the doorway as a passageway to the otherworld, are to be found. Thus when Þrándr calls up the apparitions of the dead in *Færeyinga saga* ch. 41 ⟨74⟩, he sets up four lattices or gateways (*grindr*). In the Bayeux tapestry appears a scene of «unus clericus et Ælfgyva»[23] in which the woman stands, slightly raised, within a door-frame, and a cleric strikes her on the face; Kiil (1960: 88) interprets the act as one of preventing the woman using magic on Harold's behalf by giving her a nose-bleed, which finds parallels in Scandinavian folk belief (cf. too how Ǫrvar-Oddr strikes a *vǫlva* in a similar manner with a stick after being given a prophecy he did not want to hear in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* ch. 3 ⟨128⟩). How far it is credible to discern the presence of such witchcraft in the court of the Christian English king, and then find it depicted on a celebratory tapestry with a political slant, is perhaps open to question, however.

Hliðskjálf is situated in the hall Válaskjálf (*Gylfaginning* ch. 17). Kiil (1960: 103) takes the first element as *vala*, "of the dead" (from an unrecorded **valr*, "still", i.e. "dead", reconstructed from modern Scandinavian forms), rather than *vála*, "of Váli", so the *skjálf*, "shelf", is to be associated with the dead (for an overview of other interpretations see Lorenz 1984: 274–5). However, Snorri's siting of Hliðskjálf in Válaskjálf is probably his own invention, based on the presence in the name of *val-*, as in Óðinn's hall *Valhǫll*, and *skjálf*, as in *Hliðskjálf*. *Grímnismál* 6 does not say Válaskjálf belonged to Óðinn; as it is mentioned directly after Freyr's dwelling, Álfheimr, Kiil (1960: 103) takes it as belonging to him. This is an unnatural reading: the most obvious inference is that the hall belongs to the god Váli, Óðinn's

[23] The supernatural overtones of the woman's name, "gift of the elves", is presumably fortuitous if she is historical, but deliberate if she is fictitious.

son:[24] Snorri's placing of the Hliðskjálf in the hall causes problems in that Váli is a late-comer born to avenge Baldr, so his hall could hardly house the Hliðskjálf: hence Snorri's eschewing of the obvious sense of *Válaskjálf*.

Skjálf must derive its powers of supernatural vision from the same basic principle of elevation we have seen with the *hjallr* and other comparable items (for a synopsis of interpretations of *skjálf*, see Lorenz 1984: 175–6). Kiil (1960: 93–8) suggests that in many cases place names in which *skjálf* occurs point either to the presence of an oracular platform or to a geological shelf used in the same way; the evidence is rather tenuous, however: mainly that *skjálf* is combined with personal names which in Old Norse sources are associated (loosely) with magic, such as *Heðinn*, or with worship (*vé*). The use of the geological shelf is found in literary sources, for example in *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 8 Þórhallr goes up onto a *hamargnípa*, "peak of a crag", where he is found gaping, staring up into the sky and reciting; Óðinn is said to go up on a *berg*, "hill", to consult Mímir's head in *Sigrdrífumál* 14.

There are a few further hints of a religious connection to the *skjálf*. Freyja, goddess of oracular magic, is called *Skjǫlf* in *Þula* IV h 3 (*Skj* B, 661), "one to do with the *skjálf*". The Swedish kings were called the *Skilfingar*: this could signify merely "those from a geological shelf"; Kiil (1960: 102) suggests it signifies "those connected with an oracular *skjálf*": the kings would have taken their directives from chthonic powers communicated by means of a *skjálf*. Perhaps simpler is to connect the title with a male equivalent to Skjǫlf, which then would refer to Freyr: the descent of the Swedish dynasty of the Ynglingar is traced to Yngvi, identified with Freyr (for example in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 10), so the Skilfingar would simply be the Ynglingar under another name.

Óðinn also bears the name *Skilfingr*. This is likely to be an encroachment on the ambit of the *vanir*, especially Freyr and Freyja, as indeed is his ownership of Hliðskjálf; in *Skírnismál*, after all, it is Freyr who uses the apparatus in the only myth where it serves a dynamic purpose within what might be termed a religious context.

Freyr and Freyja are connected with the dead (*AR* §§184, 460, 536), which is consistent with the imagery of the *skjálf* as a place from which to look into the other world. The euhemerised version of Freyr in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 10 is buried at Uppsala, where the grave mounds form a prominent part of this Swedish cult centre to this day. From this connection a possible link is established between the oracular *skjálf* and the ideas associated with *sitja á haugi*, "sitting on the burial mound", a practice encountered several times in Norse sources (Olrik 1909).

At least three sorts of people sit on mounds: poets (such as Hallbjǫrn in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskalds* ch. 8 ⟨51⟩), kings (see below), and giant herdsmen (such as Þrymr in *Þrymskviða* 6, Eggþér in *Vǫluspá* 41). Sitting on a mound suggests various connotations. Contact with the dead was clearly

[24] Kiil objects that no other hall in *Grímnismál* is named after its owner: equally, however, no other hall is named without specifying its owner in the same stanza; clearly the poet felt it unnecessary to refer to the owner of Válaskjálf as more than *áss*, "the god", because his identity was already obvious.

a primary function (and giants may here be viewed as variants of the dead, as wise, chthonic otherworldly beings). Elevation is also likely to be of importance (in particular in a very straightforward manner for characters like herdsmen), which links the practice with the basic purpose seen in the apparatus discussed so far. Elevation had a social significance in the case of kings sitting on mounds, vividly illustrated in the case of King Hrollaugr, who had to roll down from his position to that of the *jarlar* in order to relinquish kingship (*Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 8). What is probably an ancient practice going back to Viking times is preserved in the House of Keys, the Manx parliament, whereby the highest level of the mound at the parliament site (Tynwald) can only be ascended by the Lord of Mann.

Clearly contact with the dead bestows otherworldly knowledge, as in the account of the poet Hallbjǫrn, but it is also connected with fecundity, for example in *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 2 ⟨46⟩, where King Rerir is given an apple, sent from Óðinn, while he sits on a burial mound; he gives the apple to his wife, who then conceives. A similar motif is found in *Skírnismál*: here Freyr looks down from the *skjálf* to the deathly otherworld of the giants, but from there he plucks his mate, the giantess Gerðr, as earth was plucked by the gods from ocean in the primordial act of creation, and as the sea-kidney, most likely symbolising or identical with the Brísingamen, the necklace of fertile rebirth, is saved from the deathly ocean, to be returned, we may infer, to Freyr's sister Freyja (see U. Dronke 1998: 32–7).

As noted above, Snorri associates Hliðskjálf with a seat or throne. The imagery of the seat is somewhat different. In *Vǫluspá* the gods gather on *rǫkstólar*, "chairs of fate", to consider important matters: the act of sitting appears to bestow the necessary insight, but there is also the implication of the *announcing* of wisdom. In *Hávamál* 111 the idea of the chair as the place of acquisition, and then proclamation, of numinous knowledge (runes) from a cosmically focal place "at the well of Urðr" is clear:

Mál er at þylja	It is time to proclaim
þular stóli á	on the seer's chair
Urðar brunni at;	at the well of Urðr;
sá ek ok þagðak,	I saw and was silent,
sá ek ok hugðak,	I saw and I thought,
hlýdda ek á manna mál;	I listened to men's talk;
of rúnar heyrða ek dœma	runes [secrets] I heard discussed
né um ráðum þǫgðu	nor were they quiet about counsels
Háva hǫllu at,	at the High One's hall,
Háva hǫllu í.	in the High One's hall.

In *Hávamál* 105 ⟨48*b*⟩ Óðinn is given a drink of the precious mead of poetry «gullnum stóli á», "on a golden chair"; the cosmic aspect of this myth is discussed in Chapter 16, but this marks the point at which he is able to gather the necessary arcane knowledge, by swallowing the mead, and disseminating it by returning it to the gods.

The complex of ideas discussed in this section is specific to Germanic religion, and does not find a parallel in shamanistic imagery other than in

the broadest terms. It does, however, show a developed symbolism, and apparently ritual apparatus to match, involving physical elevation and doorways to peer into other worlds, and to effect changes by doing so, sometimes by actually travelling to those worlds. Whilst the specifics of the imagery are distinctively Germanic, the overall system of ideas could be described as basically shamanic.

Conclusion

Descriptions of *vǫlur*'s attire have been shown to be unreliable as witnesses to pagan customs. The dress in *Eiríks saga* has its purpose within the saga (as discussed also in the previous chapter), but in terms of shamanic parallels it is unconvincing: in particular, it lacks the functional and integrated symbolism of the magical practitioner's costume. Moreover, the nearest developed shamanic costumes are at a considerable distance from Scandinavia (not being found among the Sámi), and there is unlikely to be any connection with them. The hat is found in Norse in association with the god Óðinn, a practiser of magic, but the motif is too general to link specifically with shamanism.

The belt for shamans was primarily a symbol of protection and control, for example on dangerous journeys to the underworld; in Norse, there is a developed symbolism which goes well beyond this basic notion, involving ideas of fertility, (re)birth and power. Whilst such a complex imagery could have developed out of something simpler within a shamanic context, it need not have done so.

We do have some evidence for a sort of drumming in connection with *vǫlur* and *seiðr*, in the form of the instrument, probably a sort of lid, named *vétt* or *vitt*, but the evidence is difficult to interpret; it may have been used to summon and/or send out spirits, in which it would correspond to many instances of shamanic drum use. As the functional use of the shamanic drum is mainly to induce trance, it is likely that the same was true of the *vétt* (the presence of trance in *seiðr* has already been shown to be likely), but this is surmise.

It is likely that the staff was an instrument of the *vǫlva*, though the evidence of the prose sources is again unreliable. Both *Skírnismál* and *Þórsdrápa* support the existence of a magician's staff, however. It is possible that it was derived from a representative of the world tree, in the way the shaman's drum was often said to be, though there is no explicit evidence of this. It gave the wielder power over his victim, and in particular granted power over *ergi*, or sexual subjugation, both to impose it (*Skírnismál*) and to fend it off (*Þórsdrápa*). Neither poem, however, associates the staff with *seiðr* specifically, and it is also to be noted that the users are in both cases male, but are far from succumbing to *ergi*, which the practice of *seiðr* by males would have implied; it is therefore questionable whether the symbolism of the staff in these instances can be regarded as the same as it would be were the protagonists female, particularly as the sources relate to the affairs

of gods (they are myths) rather than human practices: mythic symbolism need not be reflected in ritual.

The steed as a vehicle to the underworld is found in Norse as in shamanic societies, but the motif is too widespread to regard as specifically shamanic, especially as it is not associated with other shamanic features (except, to a certain extent, in *Skírnismál*); the symbolism of the drum as a shamanic steed is lacking in Norse, though the world tree, the communication between worlds, is pictured as a steed in Óðinn's sacrifice upon it.

The Norse *vǫlva* seems characteristically to have operated from a raised dais or equivalent; this has only the vaguest parallels within shamanism. Its primary function must be to imply wider vision, so the seeress is pictured as seeing over the worlds, rather than travelling through them, or under them, as the shaman characteristically does. Hliðskjálf is a slight exception, in that the vision afforded to Freyr from it results in Skírnir setting off to the world that has been glimpsed; this is scarcely a strong parallel to the actual climbing of a representative world tree by the shaman during kamlania, however.

VI. KINDRED CONCERNS

The following two chapters deal with two motifs which are not central to any definition of shamanism, but which yet are commonly found in close association with it: that of the smith as a supernatural worker, in particular a forger of the shaman himself, and that of the sacred bear, a being believed to be intermediate between animal and human, between terrestrial and divine, in a way comparable to the liminal being of the shaman.

19. The smith

Eurasian

There was a popular saying among the Sakhas, that "smiths and shamans come out of one nest" (Sieroshevski 1901: 104); there was a certain shared ground of skills, as smiths were able to cure diseases, give counsel and make predictions, yet their dexterities lacked any magical character. Spirits are afraid of the clink of iron and the roar of working bellows, yet it is only in the ninth generation that a smith can without danger to himself forge the iron ornaments of the shaman's professional dress and drum, otherwise crooked-clawed and beaked birds will tear out his heart (ibid.): this appears to represent a balance between the powers of the smith and the spirits comparable to that which exists between them and the shaman. The essential point of similarity between smith and shaman is that both are able to direct their powers to modify the world, as Eliade (1962: 79–80) notes:

> Fire turned out to be the means by which man could "execute" faster, but it could also do something other than what already existed in Nature. It was therefore the manifestation of a magico-religious power which could modify the world and which, consequently, did not belong to this world. This is why the most primitive cultures look upon the specialist in the sacred – the shaman, the medicine-man, the magician – as a "master of fire". Primitive magic and shamanism both carry the notion of "mastery over fire", whether it is a question of involving the power to touch live coals with impunity or of producing that "inner heat" which permitted resistance to extreme cold.

The smith is essentially a maker, and as the shaman is remade in his initiation into a new being, those responsible are naturally thought of as spirit smiths; the Nganasan account of initiation ⟨17⟩ offers a typical example of

how the smith forges the novice into a shaman at his initiation.

Motz (1986–9: 57) has outlined some of the features of certain Siberian tales, comparing them with the tale of Vǫlundr the smith:[1]

> Recurrently in this mythology the son of the sky god descends to earth, usually in the shape of a duck, and here he performs the office of a healer and a shaman. Sometimes, however, he suffers injury at the hands of men and takes vengeance. The son of the shaman Doh of the Ostyak [*recte* Kets] thus came to earth in the form of a bird; people shot him thinking he was an ordinary bird and were then punished by their own deaths.

She notes also a myth from the Mansi, given as follows by Róheim (1954: 37):

> In another version of the hero's life story he becomes the servant of a Samoyed. This Samoyed tortures him, and the children make fun of him saying that he is one of the reindeer brought in to be sacrificed. But he soon manifests his divine origin by performing supernatural tasks. Finally he sees that the Samoyed are getting ready to sacrifice him. His father in the sky gives him supernatural power. He has armor, bow and arrows, and a sword. He kills the animals and the people, including his Samoyed master's son, whom he sacrifices in the way they would have sacrificed him, that is, by cutting his tongue out, half-blinding him, and impaling him. He places the boy on his father's knees. Significantly he does not kill the boy's father, but triumphantly returns to the house of his own father in the sky.

Norse

The great smith of Germanic tradition is Vǫlundr; his myth survives in the Eddic poem *Vǫlundarkviða*, in the *Vélents þáttr* contained in *Þiðreks saga* (a Norse compilation of legends of Low German origin), on the carvings of the English Franks Casket (eighth century), and in brief mentions elsewhere (for example in the Old English *Deor*).[2]

The Norse version of the wronged smith finds poetic expression in *Vǫlundarkviða*. This is firmly associated with the far north, and in particular with the Sámi: Vǫlundr is said in the prose introduction to be son of the king of the *Finnar* (Sámi), and in the verse he is a hunter, gliding around – *líðandi* – presumably on skis. The poem makes use of the swan-maiden folktale, of female beings that exchange swan and human forms, and in the end depart from their human lovers. This is almost certainly of northern

[1] The sources cited by Motz for these tales are: Findeisen (1929: 39); Donner (1933: 94, on the Ket tale); Kannisto (1951–82: I, 323); Róheim (1954: 37), citing Munkácsi (1892–1921: II, pt 2, 101–5, and pt 1, 71, 72; the Samoyed tale is taken from ibid. pt. 2, 105, and pt 1, 73). Contrary to what Motz claims, the text in Kannisto does not identify the son of the high god as a duck or goose, nor is the hero in the myth recounted by Róheim stated to be in bird form, though he lands on the house of Turuj-punpa-χum, "Eagle-feathered-man".

[2] On the Franks Casket see *ASPR* VI, cxxv–cxxx; on *Deor* see *ASPR* III, liii–liv and (text) 178–9. I am thankful to Frog for showing me his forthcoming article (2008) covering much the same themes as my present section; he considers a good many additional details which space precludes me from considering in any depth here, but the overall conclusions are similar to mine.

Siberian origin, as Hatto (1980) and Motz (1986–9: 52) have shown. The Mansi tale of the wronged divine son cited by Motz also appears to represent one form of the tale which must have underlain the poem, and therefore also points to a far northern origin for the version of the myth as it appears in the poem.

There are several features of the tale of Vǫlundr which appear potentially to be broadly shamanic, though even on the most generous estimate these elements are overshadowed by others. If the poet has made use of shamanic elements, he has divorced them from their religious and ritual context, instead using them to create an atmosphere of the far north, of the "other", and to communicate human emotions rather than ritual realities; it would be wrong to view the poem as some sort of coded account of a shamanic kamlanie, and indeed the elements do not add up to anything resembling the systematic presentation that would be needed to make such a supposition credible. They may, however, show some awareness of shamanism as practised by the Sámi or more remote northern peoples – if, that is, they have not simply been brought in as elements within the folktales which have been used as a basis for the poem, which, as noted, appear to derive ultimately (but almost certainly not directly) from Siberia.

The smith. As noted above, the smith plays a central role in shamanic initiation in some Siberian societies.[3] However, these are remote from Scandinavia, and if any such connection was known it was probably only indirectly. At the time of Tacitus, the Sámi did not practise metalworking, adopting the use of metals only in the first few centuries after this; in the early Middle Ages, considerable numbers of metal objects are found among the Sámi, but these were obtained ultimately through trade with Norsemen or others to the east. The smith does not play a role in recorded Sámi shamanism. On the other hand, the smith did have an important role among the Finns, whose partially agrarian lifestyle was closer to that of the Scandinavians. The importance of the smith is epitomised in the myths concerning Ilmarinen, forger of the *sampo*, who was said also to have forged the firmament so well that no signs of his work could be detected (*FFPE*

[3] Metalworking was fairly widespread in Siberia, though smelting from ore was much less so; the Shors and Sakhas (who had moved from much further south) were, for example, renowned over a wide area for their skill in ore processing. Ironworking was established in eastern Russian Europe by the ninth century BC, with large centres of production in the forest-steppe (Koryakova and Epimakhov 2007: 193, 281; see ch. 5 and 8 for the forest-steppe and central Ural regions respectively). A metalworking site from *c.* AD 1000 was found recently near Salekhard at the village of Zelenyi Yar alongside graves containing copper face masks (see Choi 2004 for a newspaper report on this; also the online report at the Northern Archaeological Congress site: http://www.northcongress.ural.ru/index/en/north/archive/34.html); this is on the borders of Ob Ugrian and Nenets areas, though whether those responsible for the graves and workshop were ancestors of the present inhabitants of the area has not yet been determined. Whilst metalworking has clearly been known in the far north for a considerable length of time, among sparsely spread peoples it must nevertheless have been a practice unfamiliar to most, and hence was likely to be viewed as endowed with some special (spiritual) power. This was scarcely the case in Scandinavia, where the smith was fairly common; here, however, the need for a smithy to be somewhat remote from most settlement would lead to the smith being regarded as only half belonging to human society.

no. 8: 9–14; *SKVR* I, 136, Miihkali Perttunen, Latvajärvi, 1877):

Še šeppä joka jumala	That smith is a god
joka on taivosen takonut	who has forged heaven,
ilman koaret kalkutellut:	tempered the arches of the air:
ei tunnu vasaran jälki	no sign of the hammer is seen
eikä ni pihtien pitely	nor grasp of tongs,
hoararauvan hallitsenta.	the grip of the forked iron.

There is nothing specific to link Ilmarinen with Vǫlundr, however. It seems most likely, over all, that the characterisation of Vǫlundr as being both a smith and a *Finnr* is a result of a double emphasis upon his otherness and remoteness from society, something that applied to both smiths within Germanic cultures and to Sámi (as seen from a Norse perspective) without there being any integral connection between them other than in the imagination of poets.

Flight. Flight is, as Motz shows, connected with smiths in shamanic cultures. The shaman was often endowed with a bird costume to ascend to heaven in kamlania; in the passage cited above, Motz notes that the smith god is conceived as descending from heaven as a bird. In the myth of Vǫlundr it is the smith's spouse, rather than the smith himself, who appears in bird form, a motif taken from the widespread swan-maiden folktale;[4] Vǫlundr's ascent at the end of *Vǫlundarkviða* may be compared with the shamanic ascent to heaven in bird form, and the ascent into heaven of the smith/shaman god, as well as the flight of the husband in pursuit of his swan wife in some versions of the swan-maiden folktale. Eliade (1959: 3–4) argues that shamanic flight is of similar significance to a ritual death: the soul leaves the body and reaches into realms unattainable by the living; in the soul flight the shaman becomes like the spirits or the dead, or gods. Dronke (*PE* II, 281) points out that on carvings of the Vǫlundr story from Gotland (Ardre VIII, probably eighth century) and the area of Leeds, England (tenth century), but not in *Vǫlundarkviða*, the smith appears flying from the smithy, carrying a girl: she interprets this as a deliverance of the girl, representing the soul, from the despair of mortal life, represented in the imprisoning smithy (a synthesis with Christian ideas is all but certain for the English examples, though seems unlikely in the Gotlandic case; the Christian symbolism is one that utilises pre-existent elements of the tale). Vǫlundr therefore appears as a psychopomp. Eliade (1972: 479) notes that the soul is commonly imagined as a bird, and the bird is often a psychopomp, but admits (481): "the symbolism and mythologies of 'magical flight' extend beyond the bounds of shamanism proper and also precede it; they belong to an ideology of universal magic and play an essential part in

[4] For an investigation of many parallels to the swan-maiden motif of *Vǫlundarkviða* see Holmström (1919) and Hatto (1980). Hatto notes (283) that the swan-maiden folktale is likely to have originated in northern Arctic regions (on the basis of the birds' migratory patterns), coinciding with the area of classic shamanism, though the motif may well have been invented independently several times over, so any specific source location is unlikely to be traceable.

many magico-religious complexes". It is not necessary to seek a shamanic background, therefore, for the (soul) flight ideas which appear to inhere in the Vǫlundr myth, but given the other connections of a broadly shamanic nature, such a background remains a possibility; another possible reference (as Frog 2008 points out) is to the divine ascent of the hunted bear, regarded as a holy animal, as a conclusion to Arctic bear rites (see Chapter 20 on these), since Vǫlundr, as discussed below, has marked associations with the bear. If such a background in Arctic rites and beliefs did exist, by the time of the carvings it must have been synthesised with Christian notions of the salvation of the soul, and in the poem the flight has become a literary motif of escape, with Vǫlundr lording it over his former master.

The bear-skin. Vǫlundr's bear-skin, and the bear-steaks he eats, primarily yield local colouring, reinforcing the image of him as a northern hunter. It may also be intended to stress his warrior nature by recalling the bear-skins we may suppose tradition ascribed to the manic *berserkir* warriors (⟨BERSERKIR⟩; *AR* §310), though it is likely these "skins" were symbolic representations of the warriors' own natures, rather than being skins of actual bears, as is the case with Vǫlundr. There are loose parallels from shamanic practices to the use of the bear-skin rug: the cloth that the Sámi shaman spreads out before shamanising in the *Historia Norwegie* ⟨138⟩; the reindeer skin sat upon by the Yukagir shaman ⟨22⟩; the rug of the highest class of Enets shaman (*SLS* 65). The bear was a semi-divine being accorded the highest respect in many Siberian societies (see Chapter 20), but it was only among the Kets that the bear was closely associated with the shaman (in most areas it was regarded as too dangerous to master as a helping spirit), where one category of shaman would impersonate the bear, and another a semi-ursine anthropomorphic spirit (Alekseenko 1978: 256). Over all, it is difficult to see anything specifically shamanic in Vǫlundr's bear-skin by itself, though it is doubtlessly intended to form part of the far-northern panorama of the poem, and allude to traditions derived from there. However, it may form part of a more complex motif, which I consider next, which suggests a link not so much with shamanism as with Arctic bear-hunting rites.

The ring. In Sámi tradition, as recorded by Fjellström, the eating of bear-flesh enables the recognition of the identity of the bear to take place (in this case, the bear's son recognises his father), and the same is true in the Norse *Hrólfs saga kraka* (in this case, the wife identifies her bear husband) – in both cases (and the Norse is, I argue, derived from Sámi tradition), this recognition takes place through a ring or piece of brass on the bear (see Chapter 20 for further discussion). Nothing explicitly comparable takes place in *Vǫlundarkviða*, but the poet may be intending a general allusion in his reference to eating bear meat, alongside mention of a ring, to magical means of tracking someone down as practised by the Sámi. Vǫlundr uses a ring in an attempt to get back his supernatural wife. The ring plays an important part in various broadly shamanic activities. The Sámi used rings on shamanic drums to discover the will of the spirits (Itkonen 1946: 124). The ring was also used as a means of control: in the Sámi bear-hunting rites

the locater of the bear approaches, carrying a staff with a ring attached, and then begins a song; a withy ring would be attached to the dead bear's jaw and to the belt of the principal hunter, who, pulling at it, declares himself to be the bear's master (Karsten 1955: 116–17).[5] When the hunted bear is returned to the village, women could only look at the ceremonies through a brass ring, which thus acts as a filter of supernatural power (see Fjellström's account ⟨28⟩). Among the Ob Ugrians a copper ring would be put in the grave to stop the dead wandering (Chernetsov 1963: 30). The Ket shaman would hang an image of an eagle on himself, with a ring about its neck to symbolise it would stay in his service (Nioradze 1925: 70). In view of the part played by the rings in Sámi bear rites, and in their divinatory shamanism, the coincidence of bear-skin and rings in *Vǫlundarkviða* may be more than accidental, and intended to recall these Sámi practices. The counting of the rings appears to be a divinatory activity to determine the return of Vǫlundr's wife, and he carries this task out as he sits on the skin; the complex of bear-skin and rings may thus fulfil a vaguely shamanic role. The poet, however, has humanised the scene into one of absorbed, doting loneliness, and it is clearly unsuccessful in bringing back the swan-maiden wife – unlike (we may assume) the shamanic acts which may be alluded to. The poem also tells us that Vǫlundr sat so long that he fell asleep and woke *viljalauss*, "joyless": this, again, may be a humanised version of the ritual trance of the Sámi shaman, who would wake utterly exhausted after searching in far regions for the knowledge he desired.

The dead. Motz (1983*b*, esp. 65–6) analyses parallels to Vǫlundr from German folktales, where the smith is often seen as dwelling in a deathly underground world, sometimes specifically the howe. The smith in some shamanic societies is associated with the otherworld act of recreating the novice into a shaman – note particularly the Nganasan smith operating in a pointedly deathly underworld setting ⟨17⟩; in *Vǫlundarkviða* the smith similarly butchers the king's sons, and redirects their life, not into re-formed men, but into the forge itself: Eliade (1962: 31 ff.) notes how the sacrifice of a person in the foundations of a new building was seen as transferring their life to the building. In *Vélents þáttr* there is some indication that something like a shamanic experience of rebirth is recast in concrete terms, and deprived of its spiritual significance, for purposes of narrative adventure: Vélent (i.e. Vǫlundr) is brought up underground amongst dwarfs – beings themselves associated with death (Motz 1983*b*: 98) – but escapes in a hollowed out tree reminiscent of a coffin (*Þiðreks saga* ch. 61); among the Sámi burial took place in an *akja*, a wooden chest, originally in the form of a boat (Pettersson 1957: 100–2).

The divine epiphany. Motz (1986–9: 57) considers that the nature of Vǫlundr's revelation of his powers and the tone of his speech at the end of *Vǫlundarkviða*, and the humility of the king's reply, are clarified by viewing the episode as a divine epiphany, as occurs in the Siberian parallels she cites involving the smith god. Vǫlundr may thus be a humanised version of a

[5] The interpretation of the significance of the ring is mine, not Karsten's.

divine being; as Motz argues, this points to Óðinn, whose imprisonment, divine epiphany and punishment of Geirrøðr in *Grímnismál* is the closest Norse parallel to the maltreatment of the first shaman or smith, resulting in the manifestation of his divine power. Vǫlundr's exultant flight away at the end of the poem finds an Óðinnic parallel in the god's flight from Hnitbjǫrg ⟨QV⟩ with the mead of poetry.

In Vǫlundr's overpowering and seducing Bǫðvildr, and his begetting an heir on her, *Vǫlundarkviða* also appears to have used motifs found in another myth of Óðinn, his wooing of Rindr to beget an avenging son Váli, as Ellis-Davidson (1969: 218) points out. Unfortunately the myth is recorded in full only by Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* III.4.1–8; in summary, the story runs:

> In order to beget a son to avenge Baldr, Óðinn appears as a smith, Hroptr[6] at the court of the king of the Rutheni, who gives him a supply of gold to make jewellery; he makes rings for the princess, which she accepts while repulsing their maker. He touches her with a piece of magic bark, and she falls into a frenzy. Óðinn disguises himself as a woman skilled in medicine, named Wecha, and becomes the princess's handmaid; Óðinn is thus able to bind the princess, and giving her a drugged drink, he rapes her. Her father is filled with remorse when she bears a son.

McKinnell (2005: 157–62) looks in some detail at the fragments of information we have on the Rindr myth (as well as considering some of the excrescences of Saxo's version), and summarises it as follows, though in a form which omits some of the details in Saxo's version which are relevant to comparison with *Vǫlundarkviða*:

> Óðinn discovers that his son Baldr is destined to be killed by Hǫðr, and that he himself will beget an avenging son on Rindr, the daughter of an unnamed giant. He travels to the giant's home three times, disguised as a warrior, a smith and an old woman, but is rebuffed by Rindr each time. She, too, is a worker of magic, and the contest between them may have been partly magical. He uses *seiðr* to drive her mad with desire,[7] and she has to be tied to the bed. He lays the charm by having sex with her, then takes her back to Valhǫll, where she gives birth to Váli (or in Danish versions to *Bófi* "the lad"). Váli takes vengeance on Hǫðr one night after he is born. Rindr probably chants a protective spell over Váli. Like Jǫrð, Rindr is linked to motherhood and wild nature, and particularly to the process of childbirth.

These parallels – the myth of Óðinn's maltreatment at the hands of Geirrøðr, his escape as a bird from Suttungr, his wooing of Rindr – suggest that Óðinn has been the inspiration for the character and legendary treatment of Vǫlundr. As has been discussed in earlier chapters, Óðinn shows some shamanic characteristics, and these would presumably have been felt to accord well with the other northern elements used in the poem.

[6] Saxo has the (corrupt) form Rosterus.

[7] Kormákr's line «seið Yggr til Rindar» (*Skj* B, 69) indicates that Óðinn used *seiðr* in this adventure, though not how he used it.

The extant tales of Vǫlundr utilise motifs which may reflect archaic practices and beliefs, derived in part from traditions of shamanic societies such as the Sámi, but which are denuded of the archaic intentions and are employed only for scene-setting and human dramatic purposes – they have become *literary* rather than *religious* motifs.

20. The bear

Rites focused upon the hunting of the bear are found in a number of circumpolar societies, from the Sámi and Finns in the west, through the Ob Ugrians and then, with gaps in central Siberia, to the Ewenki, and on to the Nivkhs and Ainus in the east (and indeed, on into America).[1] These rites exhibit a striking coherence. Not all societies which practised shamanism had bear rites, which occur predominantly in the most northern hunting societies, but it would seem that wherever circumpolar bear rites were practised, shamanism was also present in some form. It therefore seems reasonable to discuss the Germanic attitude to the bear in this chapter, which, like that on the smith, acts as an adjunct to the main study of shamanism.

Finnic bear rites

OB UGRIAN RITES

Circumpolar bear-rites existed among several peoples who relied on hunting for their sustenance; the geographical proximity of the Sámi and Finns to Scandinavia would suggest a consideration of their rites as being of most relevance to Norse materials, but the Sámi rites are rather badly recorded, and the Finns' greater and increasing reliance on farming resulted in the bear songs being mainly incorporated in charms to protect cattle. It is therefore the similar rites of the Ob Ugrians, which are fairly well recorded and constituted one of the dramatically most developed forms, that are presented first (based upon Honko *et al.* 1993: 120–32).

Honko (ibid. 120) describes the ceremony as "an elaborate accumulation of songs, pantomime, drama, feasting, sacrifice and prayer lasting several days [...] In their entirety, the ceremonies allowed the community to see the coherence of its central economic, social and religious values and to reaffirm their significance." The bear was not important as a food source or economically; its hibernation, however, marked it out as symbolising the waxing and waning of fertility in nature, and its unusual size and man-like habits made it the focus of men's attention. It would only be hunted when it made particularly invasive inroads against human communities, such as digging up the dead. A bear which had killed men was regarded as an outlaw, and it was not afforded the special bear ceremonial discussed here.

Before setting out on the hunt, the men would purify themselves communally in birch-bark smoke (which also covered their own scent from

[1] On the Finnish bear rites see Pentikäinen (2007). One of the most elaborate systems of bear rites existed among the Ewenki: see Paproth (1976). Essays on a number of Eurasian bear rites are presented in Tolley (2007*b*).

the bear). They then went and woke the animal from its winter den before killing it. The bear was carried home in a sort of cradle, and the villagers would come out to welcome the hunters home. Thereupon began the performance of bear songs, with the leading role given to the bear itself, which may even describe its own death: it has a two-fold existence, slain, yet also present at the festivities. The poems recount the whole history of the bear (ibid. 125, discussing in particular a Mansi poem, Poem 29):

> Born the son of the sky god, the bear was an unruly cub who lived with its father in the sky where it had its own dwelling made of leather. One day the young bear caught a glimpse of the earth and its inhabitants; according to one variant, this occurred when its paw tore a hole in a cloud. The bear was so overcome by desire to visit the earth that finally Kores gave in and prepared a cradle from gold and silver coins in which the bear was lowered to earth on iron chains. The winds blew the cradle in all directions but at the third attempt the descent succeeded and the bear found itself on earth, in the middle of a forest swamp. Before allowing his son to go down to earth, however, the sky god had given specific instructions about how to behave there. The bear was forbidden to touch the sacrificial huts dedicated to the guardian spirits. Nor was it to disturb the human corpses buried in the ice and snow for the duration of the long winter. In some variants, the bear was also told not to harm human beings unless they had sworn false oaths. For food the bear was told to eat the abundant fruits of the forest, especially berries. [...] The bear soon grew discontented with life on earth – the summer created by the sky god was hot, mosquitoes were everywhere, berries and other fruits were in short supply – and disobeyed its father's instructions. It plundered the sacrificial huts, destroyed the image of the guardian spirit and disturbed a frozen corpse in its coffin. The end of the poem [...] gives an account of the killing of the bear, the skinning, conveyance to the village and the ensuing festival. In the final sentence, the performer shifts to the first person when the bear states that it will depart the same way as its seven animal mothers had before.

An example of a poem reflecting this outline is given as text ⟨27⟩, a Khanty poem from Irtysh, which begins with the bear's descent from heaven, supported by an iron chain, to a special paradise on earth; after various episodes, the bear is hunted and killed by men; the reception of the bear in the village, where the women are waiting, is then described, and this is followed by the bear feast; the poem concludes with the bear's ascent back to heaven.

A whole series of other poems and dramas (the latter alternating between serious presentations concerning gods and ancestors, and merry dances and masques, often of a sexual nature) took place during the festival. One of the characteristic features throughout was imitation of animals and other devices aimed at deluding the bear into thinking it had been killed by anyone but the actual hunters responsible. Women's participation in certain parts of the festival was limited: for example, they had to be veiled, as the bear could not stand the sight of female flesh, and some songs were too sacred to be heard by women.

The latter parts of the festival consisted of the bear's departure ritual, followed by the raising of the animal's skull on a branch at the sacrificial

site outside the dwelling. The bear's remains were carried from the house; in the poem accompanying this the bear relates how much it had enjoyed the feast, and how sorry it was to leave. It lingers at various spots as it leaves the village, then follows a track into the wild, which transforms into a silver chain leading to its grandfather, the sky god.

The bear rites clearly manifest the Ob Ugrian cosmography (for a detailed discussion of this theme, see Schmidt 1989). There is a constant theme of passage, on a horizontal and a vertical plane. The bear as an animal comes from the forest, the antithesis of human society, but as the son or daughter of God it comes also from heaven; at the end of the ceremony, its remains, and along with them the bear's essential being, are taken back to the forest, but the trail there turns into the silver chain leading back to heaven. The cyclical nature of the rite is also important: hunting culture was one of exchange, where the taking of prey required payment (as sacrifice, for example); this principle was realised in the belief in the metempsychosis of the game animals, which existed on a kind of eternal circuit of slaughter and resurrection. Hence the taking out of the bear, symbolising the hunt in general, necessitated its subsequent return to ensure the continuing supply of game and nature in general.

Just as the bear was endowed with human powers and personality, people could assume the nature of the bear. Honko *et al.* (1993: 125 and Poem 30) record a Mansi poem where

> A boy out hunting finds that he is lost. He sits down on a treestump, weeping and longing to return home when he suddenly tumbles head over heels down to earth. When he stands up he realizes that he is a bear and the son of god. Full of self-confidence verging on hubris, he proclaims his intention to live according to his own desires, recognizing no other master.

Honko notes that an ecstatic state may lie behind this description. It may originally have referred to some rite by which man sought superhuman powers and skills.

SÁMI AND FINNISH-KARELIAN RITES

A similar background myth of the bear's origins in heaven, his sojourn on earth, and his return, by means of the bear hunt and wake, to his heavenly home appears to have lain behind the Sámi and Finnish-Karelian bear-hunting rites, though the full details of the myth have been lost, and indeed it is clear that as agriculture increased in importance over the centuries in Finland (not among the Sámi, where instead reindeer-herding became the prevalent means of livelihood) it affected the purpose of the rites, and also probably the underlying myth and attitude towards the bear (which came to be seen increasingly as a threat).

The main features of the Sámi bear rite are outlined in Pentikäinen (2007: ch. 6), whence this summary derives; the main source of information is Fjellström (1755).

1. The bear is encircled after the first snow-fall, often with the help of

an oracle from a shamanic drum; the purpose is to determine just where the bear will be at the time of the hunt.

2. A hunting party is formed; this was often a family affair.

3. The hunt takes place in early spring, with a prognostication on the success of the hunt being made with a shamanic drum. Preparations for the hunt include ritual washing and chastity. The hunters leave the houses through the sacred back entrance, and the den is approached in a festal procession. Before it is slain, the bear is awoken, to ensure the return of its soul, which may be wandering while asleep (it would pose a threat if it was left to wander disembodied).

4. The party returns to the village. The reindeer drawing the bear is protected against its power with a brass ring. Women are not allowed to cross the party's path. A special song is sung during the procession. At the village, women look at the party through a brass ring. Further songs are sung.

5. The bear is cooked and eaten; the preparation, by men, takes place in a special house closed to women (at least in some areas). Songs are sung to the bear, of an apotropaic nature, shifting the blame for its death onto anyone but the hunters themselves. In dividing the meat, special care is taken not to break any bones: the bear has to be able to return to its spiritual home unscathed.

6. Purification rites take place. The hunters are purified with strong birch-ash lye, and this is followed by erotic games.

7. The bear's funeral takes place. Its bones are buried in strict anatomical order: as long as this is observed, the animal can receive a new body in the otherworld, enabling it to be reincarnated into this world. Bears which have killed people deliberately have their skeletons mutilated so they cannot return.

8. The shooting of the pelt. Women may shoot at the bear's pelt, stretched on a frame, with their eyes closed; the husband of the one who first struck the pelt would lead the next hunt.

9. The ritual concludes with a period of several days of celibacy for the men, after which the bear's spiritual power is viewed as being neutralised.

The ritual appears to have been aimed at negotiating a balance of power between the society of men and bears as representatives of wild nature, but there is also a desire to appropriate the powers of the bear.

The earliest poem related to the Finnish bear rites is cited as ⟨30⟩; it was recorded in Viitasaari, in central Finland, in the seventeenth century. It is entitled *Couvon pääliset*, "Forefather's Wedding", evoking the bear as a sacred ancestor. The following brief notes on the sections of the poem, which is a text bristling with obscurities, will illustrate some of the main points in the Finnish rite (the text is discussed more fully in Pentikäinen 2007: 71–81).

I. Men gather to seek out the bear's den on skis. The perspective is pastoral: the concern is that the bear should not harm the herds. Respect

is shown to the bear, who for example is addressed in noa terms, but he is asked not to seek vengeance for his forthcoming death. The skiing takes on a cosmic dimension, being compared to the skiing of Väinämöinen to the otherworld to get a hair of Hiisi (a dangerous forest spirit) and the North Star. The hunter seeks to deprive the bear of power by recounting his origin (which is related to local topography). The hunter asserts his own powers, while at the same time recognising his inferiority to the bear.

II. The bear is killed with spears and charmed guns. Aid is sought from a fiery *perkele* (an otherworld spirit, identified in later tradition as a devil), and a curse directed against anyone seeking to bewitch the weapons used in the hunt.

III. The body is transported and the hunting party arrives home; this is described in prose with no accompanying verses.

IV. The song of invitation to the wedding table. The crossing of the threshold of the festal house marks a passage from the mundane to the sacred. The bear's wake is conceived as his wedding, and follows traditional wedding rites. The bear is welcomed to his new home, which symbolises his new heavenly existence.

V. The bear's canine tooth is loosened, to become a sacred heirloom: some of the bear's power is appropriated and passed on in the human community.

VI Departure to the skull tree. The bear's skull is taken to the sacred pine tree, where it is hung. A dialogue takes place between the hunter, an old bear skull, and the new bear skull. The hunter is concerned to convince the bear that he has been honoured by being brought here, but he also shows his manliness to the old skull, fearing vengeance, and declares he has good skis (to get out of the way, if necessary). The bear's corpse would be buried at the foot of the pine, and his skull lifted into its branches, symbolising his ascent back to heaven (though this is no longer explicitly stated in any record); the pine grove was the bear's place of birth, and it is here that he has been brought, to be reborn again.

The text concludes with some prayers to protect cattle, omitted here, which are a later addition, reflecting the growing agrarian concerns of a society no longer reliant on hunting for its sustenance.

Norse bears

BEARS AS BEASTS IN NORSE TRADITION

The proto-Indo-European word for "bear", *ṛksos* (or variants thereof), survived into a number of daughter languages, such as Greek *arktos*, Latin *ursus*, Welsh *arth*, Sanskrit *ṛksas*. The Germanic and Slavonic branches of Indo-European abandoned the word; it may be no more than coincidence, but the Germanic and Slavonic peoples lived in closest contact with circumpolar cultures such as the Sámi, where the bear was regarded as a sacred, hence potentially tabu, animal, whose true name was avoided,

being replaced by innumerable noa circumlocutions, before being forgotten altogether.[2] "Bear" (and its variants in other Germanic languages) may have meant originally simply "the brown one", a terminology readily interpreted as being of the noa type under discussion.[3] However, this is scarcely irrefutable evidence of an erstwhile religious awe felt towards the bear, and if any such awe once existed, it has left scant trace in the extant literary texts. Moreover, Ringe (2006: 106) argues that proto-Germanic **berō*, "bear", derives from the Indo-European word for "wild animal" (cf. Latin *ferus*, "wild"), which is not so convincing as a noa term.

Bears do appear in Norse sources occasionally, but not as objects of religious awe. We encounter both ordinary bears and polar bears. The latter were something of a novelty to Norsemen, who encountered them when they settled Iceland (whither the animals sometimes floated on the ice) and Greenland. They were regarded as valuable curiosities. For example, one particularly memorable short fictional saga, *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka*, a beautifully constructed study in wealth, power and honour, recounts how Auðunn spent all his wealth on buying a polar bear, "a great treasure" as it is described, in Greenland, and transported it all the way to the king of Denmark as a gift, despite being waylaid by the king of Norway on the journey, to whom he refused to sell the bear at any cost, and then by the king of Denmark's messenger, who forced him to sell a half-share in the bear in exchange for the prodigious amounts of victuals it needed. *Auðunar þáttr* has biblical echoes, recalling for example the parables of the pearl of great price, the unjust steward and the prodigal son, but the choice of the polar bear as the focal symbol is distinctly Norse.[4]

Close natural observation of polar bears is found in the account of Greenland in *Konungs skuggsja* (*c.* 1250), p. 30 (text normalised):

> Bjǫrn er þar ok á því landi ok er hvítr, ok ætla menn ok víst vita, at þessi dýr fœðask á því landi, því at hann hefir alt aðra náttúru en svartir birnir, er í skógum ganga. Þeir veiða at sér hross ok naut ok annat bú, ok fœðask við þat. En hinn hvíti bjǫrninn, er á Grœnlandi er, þá ferr hann mest í hafi út á ísum ok veiðir þar at sér sela ok hvala ok lifir við þat, svá er hann ok vel fœrr til sunds als sem selar eða hvalar.
>
> There is a bear there in that land and it is white, and men believe and indeed know that this animal is indigenous to that land, since it has quite a different nature from the black bears that traverse the forests. These hunt horses and cattle and other livestock for themselves, and live on that. But

[2] For example, the Finnish term *karhu*, more or less tabu in its traditional usage (but now the standard word), is probably an ancient noa term meaning "shaggy-furred"; the Ob Ugrians have lost the ancient tabu term for bear altogether, and use a variety of noa terms such as Mansi *ōjka*, "old man".

[3] However, among the couple of hundred circumlocutory terms for "bear" in Finnish listed by Pentikäinen (2007: 97–101), only one, Rusko, "Brown", is precisely comparable.

[4] The story-writer has clearly made use of more historical sources: *Hungrvaka* ch. 2 recounts that not long after christianisation in 1000, Ísleifr made a gift of a polar bear from Greenland to Emperor Heinrek III in Germany; *Landnámabók* S179 relates that Ingimundr found a white she-bear and two cubs in Húnavatn ("Cubs' lake") in Iceland, and presented them to King Haraldr in Norway, who rewarded him with a ship.

the white bear that is found in Greenland mainly goes out into the ocean on the ice and hunts seals and whales for itself out there and lives on that: it is well adapted to the sea, just like the seals or whales.

Turning to the more common brown bear, we occasionally see its natural habits as the focus of interest, as in the kenning «húns nótt», "bear's night", for "winter" (Hallar-Steinn, *Rekstefja* 13/1, *Skj* B_1 528, twelfth century). However, in family sagas bears appear primarily as dangerous beasts which ravage cattle and often men too; the only point of interest is how the hero of the moment – a young Icelander going abroad and proving his manhood – dispatches this fearsome opponent. Thus *Grettis saga* ch. 21 describes the appearance of a *híðbjǫrn*, a bear woken from its hibernation, which was exceedingly fierce; Grettir and a mob of armed men attack it in its den, but can only poke at it from a distance, but subsequently Grettir is able to cut off its paw and kill it. In *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 3 Eyjólfr proves his doughtiness by fighting and defeating a forest bear newly emerged from the hide, slicing off its snout. *Finnboga saga* ch. 11 tells of a bear which comes to Hálogaland and kills cattle. Bárðr calls an assembly and declares the bear an outlaw (using the technical legal term, *sekr*) and puts a price on its head. Finnbogi tracks the bear to the pastures and faces it, engaging in a "conversation" in which he agrees (by interpreting the bear's stance) to contend with his opponent equally armed. Needless to say, the bear is defeated in the fight and its back broken. The degree of humanisation of the bear seen in *Finnboga saga* is notable; it lifts the fight from the level of hunting out a wild animal to that of a contest between warriors.[5] A similar image is already evoked in Kormákr's *lausavísa* 26 (*Skj* B_1 75, ascribed to the tenth century): «Hefk á holm of gengit / [...] við híðbyggvi holta [...] at berjask», "I have gone to fight a duel with a den-dweller of the woods"; here, however, "the den-dweller of the woods", i.e. bear, is a kenning playing upon the name of Kormákr's opponent, Bersi, "Little bear". It is possible that some familiarity with Sámi rites, in which the bear is humanised, has influenced the Norse picture of the bear as an almost human warrior, but it could well simply arise from a desire to personify one's opponent.

THE BEAR AND THE WARRIOR

The bear as a form of metaphor for the warrior is indeed the main theme associated with the animal in Germanic sources. The semantics of the two related Germanic words for "bear" are interesting to note in this respect: in Old English, *bera* is the standard designation for the animal, whereas *beorn* had, by the time of our sources, completely adopted the sense "warrior"; in Norse, *berr*/*beri* had almost ceased to exist (occurring only in the compounds *berserkr* and *berfjall*), and *bjǫrn* was the ordinary term for the

[5] Shorter accounts of raving bears and their inevitable destruction are found elsewhere, for example in *Gunnars saga keldugnúpsfífls* ch. 5, and *Egils saga* ch. 58 (which, however, wanders onto a different theme once Egill has established that a local posse he encounters is out looking for a bear on the isle of Herðla).

animal – but was also common as a man's name (indicating a similar identity between the natures of warrior and bear to that found in Old Engish *beorn*).

BEOWULF

There are two possible realisations of the motif of the warrior as bear in the Old English poem *Beowulf*. The very name *Beowulf*, it has been argued (in particular by Chambers 1959: 365–9), may be a poetic periphrasis or kenning for "bear", with the literal meaning "bee wolf": a "wolf" associated with bees is a bear (cf. the Russian медведь, "honey-eater", or Finnish *mesikämmen*, "honey paw"). The name *Beowulf* would thus be a sort of two-layer metaphor: bee-wolf = bear = warrior (*beorn*). Ingenious as this explanation is, it should almost certainly be abandoned. J. Harris (1999, which I largely follow here, adding a few observations of my own) offers a sceptical view of Chambers: *a*. Can the name *Beowulf* be a kenning at all? This manner of poetic expression is Norse, not Old English (other than in the simplest forms), and moreover is not used to form proper names. *b*. If "bee wolf" were a kenning, in which "wolf" carried the sense suggested by Chambers of "enemy", it would require that bees were the booty the animal was after, whereas they are merely a concomitant of the honey, the bear's actual target; kennings do not work by means of vague associations of this sort. *c*. The name may be analysed just as well as *beow* + *wulf*, i.e. "barley wolf" or "[the barley spirit] Beow wolf", an etymology Chambers vehemently, but unjustifiably, opposes.[6] "Barley wolf" could still be a kenning for "bear": the bear appears in folklore as a sort of guardian spirit of the crops (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987, *s.v.* "Bär §8"). *d*. However, a sense "Beow wolf", in reference to the barley spirit Beow, is more likely (Harris 1999: 15), and obviates taking the name as a kenning. In an antecedent form of the text, Beow almost certainly appeared as an ancestor in the prooemium (his name has been altered to "Beowulf" in the extant manuscript: see *Beowulf*, xlviii–li and comm. 4–52), and an agrarian myth underlies this portion of the poem (Tolley 1996): the poet could well have used such a myth also in creating his hero, without any reference to bears. *e*. The formulation "god's name + wolf" is paralleled by many names in Norse (such as Þórólfr); the motivation for the use of "wolf" is unclear, but is probably intended merely to evoke the wolf's fierceness. *f*. Alternatively, or additionally, another possibility emerges from comparison with Norse traditions. The Norse counterpart of Beow, the barley-god Byggvir, is

[6] He cites the version of the name in the Northumbrian dialect (where the diphthongs in the words for "bee" and "barley" are distinct), *Biuuulf*, as demonstrating that the first element must be "bee", not "barley", but if the name derives from that of the hero of the poem (whether directly from the poem, or from some oral version of the tales of the hero), it could simply represent a misetymologising by a Northumbrian hearer or scribe, taking it to be "bee wolf" when in fact it was originally intended to mean "barley/Beow wolf". Nonetheless, this would still demonstrate that speakers of Old English did indeed interpret the name as being connected with bees.

derided in *Lokasenna* 44–6: he will always «und kvernom klaka», "chirp under the quernstones", which characterises him as a sparrow pecking at the corn (*PE* II, comm. *ad loc.*); the "barley wolf" could well designate the sparrow stealing corn, an unlikely hero-to-be, but essentially represent a reflex of a godhead focused on prosperity and abundance, even when that had to be defended by martial prowess (hinted at in the "wolf"): Beowulf, unpromising in youth, would be a human realisation of this deity defending the welfare of his people.[7]

The second reference to bears rests on a surer foundation (and its existence does indeed lend weight to the supposition that some connection with bears was intended in the name Beowulf). It has long been recognised that the poet has made use of a folktale in which the hero is the son of a bear.[8] Here, in outline, the hero fights against a monster in a hall, then with his companions pursues it to its watery dwelling hole, down which he descends[9] to a magical underworld. Here he defeats the adversary, but is deserted by his companions above and has to make his way back unaided. The three princesses who in the folktale versions are often saved by the hero find no place in *Beowulf*. Beowulf's ursine character is moreover reflected in some other characteristics, such as his hugging enemies to death.[10] The original connections of the hero with the bear are rather attenuated in the existing text (to the extent that they would not be evident at all if we were unable to detect the general outline of the bear-son folktale in the poem), but the use of the bear-son motif indicates that some tale such as that recorded by Saxo Grammaticus at a much later date (and cited as ⟨142⟩), in which a royal dynasty descends from a union between a bear and a girl, must long have been current within the Germanic world.

BERSERKIR

Perhaps the best-known connection of bears with warriors is in the *berserkir*, the "bear-shirts" who in Norse legend rushed into battle in a frenzy, roaring and biting their shields. The oldest reference is in Þorbjǫrn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði* from the ninth century, describing the battle of Hafrsfjǫrðr

7 I thank Bryan Weston Wyly for the striking insight of linking Beow with Byggvir (personal communication).

8 ATU 301, "The Three Stolen Princesses", with extensive bibliography; however, the tales collected by Chambers (1959: 370–80), with the overall title of the Bear's Son, are more illuminating. A version of the tale close in many (but not all) features to that of *Beowulf* occurs in the Icelandic *Grettis saga*. Recent work has shown that the tale type can be defined more precisely than ATU 301 as the "two trolls" type, found specifically in Scandinavia (see Anderson 1997: 134 for a review of work on this).

9 Often on a rope: this forms an interesting parallel to the lowering of the bear, the son or daughter of the high god in Ob Ugrian belief, on a chain from heaven to the middle world of men. The bear is then abandoned to live in this lower world, as the hero is abandoned in the hole by his companions.

10 There is an interesting development through the three contests in the poem: in the first, Beowulf relies on the power of his hands, in the second he resorts to a magical sword, and in the last he relies on his weapons – and each contest represents a diminution of the ease of attaining victory.

⟨144⟩; in the fight, the *berserkir* are said to growl, «grenjuðu», whilst immediately after the *úlfheðnar*, "wolf-coats", are said to howl, «emjuðu». It is clear that "bear-shirts" and "wolf-coats" are more or less the same type of particularly wild warrior. It may be surmised that they were believed – in poetic fancy – to go into battle wearing the pelts from these animals, but also that they took on their wild natures (indicated in their howling).

Such a fancy appears to be realised in a different art form in the sixth-century Torslunda plaques from Öland (widely illustrated: see for example Andersson and Jansson 1984: 64–5), used as dies for repoussé panels on objects like helmets: in one, a warrior is in mortal combat with two bears, and in another, a warrior appears to be performing a war-dance alongside another dressed in a wolf-pelt.[11] Gunnell (1995: 66–80) argues that such plaques, from Torslunda and elsewhere (such as Sutton Hoo in England), depict a ritual sword dance between a warrior and another man or men dressed in animal clothing, resembling wolves, bears, dragons or other supernatural beasts. A fresco is also found in the cathedral of the erstwhile Rus centre of Kiev, painted around 1054, depicting a theatrical contest between a warrior, apparently a Varangian, and another dressed in a bird mask resembling some of the earlier plaque representations. In Constantinople in the tenth century there was also performed a "Gothic" dance between warriors, dressed in skins and wearing masks (the "Goths" in question being, argues Gunnell, rather Götalanders or Gotlanders). Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* VI.5.10, also mentions mimetic dances taking place at the Uppsala festivals. All that can be concluded from this is that there was a long-standing tradition of warrior dances, involving animal costumes and masks, in Scandinavia: we do not have any evidence to substantiate the claim that these dances were *initiatory* in any sense. The dressing in animal costumes, which often seem to resemble wolves and bears, certainly implies some connection with *úlfheðnar* and *berserkir*, but we cannot simply infer that in real battles these wild warriors actually dressed in this manner: the costumes may well be intended to represent, for theatrical purposes, the essence of what such warriors felt themselves to be, rather than the way they dressed.

In much later sources, *berserkir* appear both in ordered units serving kings (*Egils saga, Vatnsdœla saga, Hrólfs saga kraka*), and as wandering trouble-makers challenging farmers to single combat and demanding their wives or daughters (*Grettis saga, Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*).

Snorri describes *berserkir* in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 6 ⟨143⟩: Óðinn's men are said to advance into battle without armour, as wild as dogs or wolves, biting their shields; they kill many, while remaining themselves unscathed. It appears that Snorri is misinterpreting the name as meaning "bare-shirts", i.e. not wearing any armour; already, the vital connection with bears has become obscure.[12] The antiquity of the term is indicated by the use of *ber-* to

[11] Such rituals may or may not have existed.

[12] McCone (1987: 106), however, supports Snorri's interpretation as correct. Arguments against the interpretation "bear-shirts" tend to focus on the impracticality of wearing such a pelt in battle; this misses the point: Þorbjǫrn, by far our earliest source, is composing a

mean "bear"; this is the only place the word occurs in Norse (in the many other compounds where it occurs, it means "bare"), except in one other compound, *berfjall*, "bear pelt", found in *Vǫlundarkviða* 11.[13]

Snorri mentions that the *berserkir* were Óðinn's men; he was the god of battle, and, as a sort of personification of the bear-as-warrior motif, he went under the name Bjǫrn, "Bear" (*Harðar saga* ch. 15). After the description of *berserksgangr*, Snorri passes in the very next chapter of *Ynglinga saga* ⟨112⟩ to a lengthy description of Óðinn's ecstatic shaman-like powers, discussed above. It is likely that we are intended to view the two types of frenzy as parallel; Óðinn, "the frenzied", realised the central force manifest in his name through the warrior *berserkir* and through the ecstatic *seiðmenn*. However, it would be dangerous to draw too close a parallel: the sources concerning *berserkir* do not allow us to postulate that their frenzy was technically ecstatic, and, whereas shamanic ritual is controlled, we do not find any ritual element associated with *berserksgangr*, which indeed appears to be a wholly uncontrolled release of individual strength. In short, *berserkir* are not shamanic.

The Mansi poem summarised above, in which a boy becomes a bear, is analogous to the accounts of *berserkir*: like them, he takes on a bear's nature, and feels this gives him strength to give up following the norms of society, just as the *berserkir* acted outside expected norms, in battle and in social relations (harrying local farmers, for example). For the Ob Ugrians, like the Norsemen, the bear appears as a sort of warrior, but this is part of a more complex symbolism of the bear and set of attitudes towards it which are absent in Germanic sources.

BǪÐVARR BJARKI

Bǫðvarr, nicknamed *bjarki*, "the little bear", whose tale is recounted in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, is the *berserkr par excellence*, and many of the features of the rather late version of his tale which we possess constitute exaggerations

poem, not a factual description, in which the shirt is imagined as real in order to add weight to what is essentially a metaphor for the assumption of a bear's nature. The Torslunda artist also obviously imagined warriors fighting in animal pelts, whether or not they actually did, but this too may be a pictorial representation of what was essentially an inner reality.

[13] The occurrence of this word in the poem is worth consideration. The poem contains many obscurities, and there are signs of contact with English and German sources (*PE* II, 276–80), which may explain the unusual use of *ber-* as "bear" (Old English *bera*). Given that the skin is of a she-bear (Norse *bera*), however, the compound may have arisen naturally in this context (*ber-* functioning as a shortening of *beru*). However that may be, the word in its extant form evokes a link with *berserkr*, the only other place where *ber-*, "bear", occurs, particularly as the meaning of the second part of the compound is almost identical in meaning with *serkr*. To some extent, Vǫlundr appears as an antithesis of the *berserkr*: the latter carries his shirt on his back (presumably), and rushes (*ganga*) both into battle and into an uncontrolled frenzy, whereas Vǫlundr is said to sit (*sat*) on the pelt without moving, in the hope of his wife's return: Vǫlundr's whole story is one of control, culminating in a sort of ecstatic and jubilant flight away from his oppressors whom he has overcome with cunning. This perhaps parallels the *berserksgangr* in its release of pent-up emotion, but contrasts markedly with it in all other respects.

of his *berserkr* nature. Like *Beowulf*, *Hrólfs saga* makes use of the bear's son folktale, though the similarities between the tales of Beowulf and Bǫðvarr are regarded as too vague to be of use for analysis (Anderson 1997: 133–4). Nonetheless, the same basic folktale type appears in both, and the Norse tale emphasises an ursine side which has been cast into the background in the English, and in general constitutes one of the clearest examples of the motif of the warrior as bear in Germanic sources.

Bǫðvarr is the son of Bjǫrn, "Bear", and Bera, "She-bear"; his father had been bewitched into bear shape. When he grows up, he murders his step-grandmother in a cruel manner, and then travels via Gautaland to King Hrólfr kraki. He is harangued by the retainers, but proves his mettle by overcoming a monster which has been ravaging the court. (In Saxo's version of the tale, the monster in question is said to be a bear – though this may be the result of working back from the nickname *bjarki*.) Bǫðvarr moreover raises an unlikely courtier, Hǫttr, to become a hero through drinking the monster's blood; under the new name of Hjalti he becomes the hero's life-long comrade.

Bǫðvarr's career comes to a climax at the final onslaught against Hleiðargarðr, the Danish palace. Before the battle, Bǫðvarr disappeared; then, in the midst of the fight, a large bear was seen, slaying hordes of the enemy and impervious to missiles (ch. 50) ⟨96*b*⟩. Hjalti wondered where Bǫðvarr could be, and although the king told him that Bǫðvarr would be wherever he was most needed, and to mind his own part, he rushed back to his quarters, where he found his companion sitting motionless through the battle. Disturbed at being interrupted by Hjalti railing at him for not fighting, Bǫðvarr heaved a sigh, and said he would join the fray, but that the battle had almost been decided in their favour before the disturbance, and «Ek segi þér at sǫnnu, at nú má ek mǫrgum hlutum minna lið veita konunginum en áðr þú kallaðir mik upp heðan», "I tell you for sure that I can give the king far less help than before you called me away from here". While the bear had been defending the king, Queen Skuld on the enemy side had been able to work no sorcery from her tent, but now things changed, and a monstrous boar appeared in the host, and laid the Danish forces low (the boar is a symbol of the Swedish royal house). However many of the enemy were killed, their host seemed to lessen not the least, for the dead were raised up again. The battle concludes with the slaughter of nearly everyone on both sides, and so fell the glorious King Hrólfr kraki and his companions, chief among whom was Bǫðvarr bjarki.

Hrólfs saga exists in manuscripts from the seventeenth century, but is believed to have assumed its extant form in the late fourteenth or fifteenth century (though the antecedent of the preserved versions was probably only late sixteenth century: Slay edn, xii–xiii); elements in the narrative are found earlier, for example in Snorri's *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*.[14] The

[14] See Simek and Hermann Pálsson (2007, *s.v.* "Hrólfs saga kraka"), where further references to discussions of the saga's date and provenance are given. Another source for Bǫðvarr and Hjalti is the *Bjarka rímur*, composed possibly in the early fifteenth century and based, it would seem, on a version of *Hrólfs saga* which differed somewhat from that preserved.

great fight at Hleiðargarðr was already the subject of *Bjarkamál* (composed possibly in the tenth century, doubtless with more ancient antecedents), perhaps the most renowned heroic poem of the North, but one which has, bar a few fragments, been lost to us. The appearance of Bǫðvarr's free soul (for so we must interpret it) as a bear in the fray is one of the most memorable scenes of the battle as recounted in *Hrólfs saga*, yet Saxo's rendition of *Bjarkamál*, made in the twelfth century, has nothing resembling it, and, given Saxo's general propensity for florid elaboration which this episode would afford, the likelihood is that it was absent from the poem; we have no other evidence within Germanic tradition for the notion. In any event, there is nothing to suggest that it was ascribed to Bǫðvarr by anyone other than the composer of *Hrólfs saga*; it is a folktale motif, like many others in *Hrólfs saga* – a sort of "hyperrealisation" of the concept of the *berserkr*. Comparable notions do, of course, exist elsewhere, particularly among shamanic societies, and it is more likely to have been adapted from a wandering motif derived ultimately from such a society (the nearest of which was the Sámi). The vagueness of the motif precludes anything but a tentative conclusion; however, I turn now to an episode from the saga of a somewhat more specific nature, for which I believe it is feasible to suggest sources, one indeed being pagan practices documented among the Sámi.[15] I see no reason, however, for ascribing any great antiquity to the *borrowing* of this motif, even if the motif itself is likely to be of great antiquity within the tradition from which it is derived (the Sámi).

The bear mate

In summary, the tale of Bǫðvarr's birth and early life runs (ch. 24–30):

> King Hringr has a son Bjǫrn, but later weds Hvít, the daughter of the king of the Sámi (Finnakonungr). Bjǫrn is in love with Bera. While the king is away, Hvít tries to seduce Bjǫrn, who scorns her; she puts a curse on him, turning him into a bear. The king's cattle begin to be attacked by a great bear. The bear one evening comes up to Bera, who recognises the eyes of Bjǫrn and follows the animal to a cave, where he turns into Bjǫrn: he is a bear by day, but a man by night.[16] They stay together in the cave for a while. Hringr returns, and Hvít urges him to hunt the bear. Bjǫrn says to Bera that he would be killed the next day. He gives her the ring he has under his left arm: when he is killed, she is to go to the king and ask him for what is found under the shoulders on the left. The queen would give her bear meat to eat, but she must refuse, as it would affect the three sons she was carrying, whom he names and to whom he assigns certain

Bjarka rímur is not complete, lacking the ending where the bear transformation might be expected, so it is not directly relevant to the discussion here.

[15] The relevance of the Sámi bear rites to the interpretation of *Hrólfs saga* is noted by Edsman (1994: 85), who does not, however, devote detailed attention to the parallels in the way I aim to do here.

[16] The same motif, of a prince bewitched into being a bear by day but a man by night, is found in the Norwegian folktale "East of the sun, west of the moon" and the very similar "White bear king Valemon" (collected by Asbjørnsen and Moe 1871).

> treasures in the cave. He takes on bear form, leaves the cave, and is hunted: the hunters encircle him so that he cannot escape. Bera retrieves the ring as promised as the bear is skinned. Hvít lays on a celebratory bear feast to welcome the hunters, and Bera is with her. She forces Bera to partake of the bear flesh. Bera returns to her father and gives birth to three sons, the first, Elg-Fróði, partially elk in form, the second, Þórir, partially hound, and the third, Bǫðvarr, fully human in bodily appearance, but with an ursine nature, whom she loves most. The physical "deformities" of the first two were caused by Bera consuming some of her mate's flesh. Fróði leaves to become a murderer, and Þórir becomes king of Gautaland, while Bǫðvarr remains at home. When he is eighteen, he goes with Bera to the king and shows him the ring, whereupon the king realises what had happened. Bǫðvarr kills Hvít, and Hringr dies soon after.

The folktale motif of the bear as mate, and the descent of a royal family from the union, is widespread; a similar tale is told earlier in typically prolix form by Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* x.15.2–4 ⟨142⟩: in Sweden, a huge bear seized a girl while she was playing, took her to his den, and mated with her; he looked after her tenderly, raiding herds in the district for food. The owner of the herd hunted down the bear, and found the girl. She gave birth to a son, who later sought out his father's killers, and himself had a son, Thorgils Sprakaleg, who founded a royal line through his son Ulf.

The symbolising of the warrior as a bear could possibly have given rise to tales of the type found in *Hrólfs saga* (and perhaps that of Saxo, though the animal here is a "real" bear rather than a bewitched warrior, even if it is a very humanised beast), yet tales of a tribe's descent from a bear would seem to be most at home among tribes where the bear was an object of cult; among the Ob Ugrians, for example, there is a tale of how a bear gave birth to a woman, who became the primordial mother of the *por* moiety (the moiety most given to bear celebrations). However, the bear's son tale is so widespread that it is difficult to assign a particular origin to it (Honko *et al.* 1993: 126). One of the classical accounts of Sámi bear rites is Pehr Fjellström's *Kort berättelse om Lapparnas björna-fänge*, based on first-hand familiarity with the still-living customs, and published in 1755. Fjellström grew up in northern Sweden close to the Sámi, and after studying in Stockholm and Uppsala devoted himself to work among them; he knew the local language well, and even devised a standardised orthography which he hoped would be used for all Sámi languages (but the considerable differences between them doomed this attempt to failure). He is a critical writer, noting when others have mentioned matters he has found no evidence for himself, and, whilst it is conceivable that he read *Hrólfs saga* while in Stockholm or Uppsala, his account of Sámi bear rites has the hallmark of first-hand understanding derived from experience rather than literary tradition (other than where he explicitly says otherwise). Fjellström relates an aetiological legend about Sámi bear rites ⟨28⟩, which in summary runs:

> A girl, hated by her three brothers, runs away and comes to a bear's den, where she rests; the bear arrives and takes her as his mate; she gives birth

> to a son. The bear grows old, and allows the brothers to kill him in a hunt, but first has a piece of brass attached to his brow to distinguish him from other bears so that his own son should not kill him; the bear also establishes from his wife that the youngest brother had been somewhat kinder to her than the others. When the brothers attack, the bear wounds the eldest two and sends them packing. He returns to his den and asks his wife to grasp him round the waist, and he carries her out of the den; she tells the youngest brother to shoot the bear, but covers her face as he does so (this was the origin of the custom that women could not look at the bear or the hunters except through a brass ring, Fjellström observes). The three brothers prepare a feast of the bear's flesh, and the son arrives; he discovers the bear had been wearing a brass ornament on its brow, and realises it was his father; he asks for a share of the bear, but is refused. He calls upon his father to arise, and the kettle starts boiling over, so the brothers are obliged to meet his demand.

Fjellström relates the various features of the story to parts of the bear-hunting customs. Indeed, all the details of the story match Sámi practices, as recorded in other sources. Just a few examples will suffice here. Fjellström reiterates throughout his overall account how vital it is that something of brass is attached to everything to do with the hunt, and all the more so where women are concerned, who for example had to behold the goings-on through a brass ring. The chance find of a group of hunters with a newly felled bear is a topic of folktales in Finland/Lapland, which relate primarily to the mores of the hunt, as the point made is that someone chancing upon the catch has the right to a share in it unless the animal has already been skinned and prepared. The son's threat to the hunters reflects the notion of the conjured bear, roused up to do harm to one's enemies, and also to the belief that the hunted bear returned to its heavenly home to be reborn again later. Even the carrying out of the bear's bride from the den relates to the fact that women were only allowed to consume bear flesh from lower down the animal than where they would be able to clasp it around the waist. Overall, it is clear that tales of this nature must have been widespread in Sámi society, where bear hunting was a central social and cult activity.

Fjellström gives a long description of the hunt and the subsequent feast, and the background to the cult may be further filled in from other sources. Honko (Honko *et al.* 1993: 133) writes on the Skolt Sámi: "Features of a totemistic bear belief system appear to have survived among the eastern Lapps, especially the Skolts. The latter did not, for example, eat bear meat; their oral tradition includes various metamorphosis rites and stories about men and women who change into bears; they recognize a 'man-bear' creature and preserve a tribal origin myth about the descent of the Skolts from a marriage between a bear and a Skolt woman." In other areas, the handling and consumption of the slain animal forms a central part of the rite. It appears that women were limited in their participation in the rituals, being kept away from the shelter erected to receive the bear and from cooking the meat, yet their part was important: for example, they were the main participants in the dialogue with the bear and the hunters.

The Sámi origin of the bear motifs of *Hrólfs saga kraka*

The author of *Hrólfs saga* hints at a Sámi influence when he makes the instigator of the were-bear episode and the bear hunt a Sámi, Hvít: the saga account in fact may be seen to constitute, in part, a garbled form of a Sámi bear-hunt ritual and its associated tales, such as Fjellström recounts.[17] As Norwegians lived in contact with the Sámi, they would certainly have been familiar with some of their rituals, and occasional more factual accounts such as that of Sámi shamanism found in the *Historia Norwegie* ⟨138⟩ from around 1175 indicate this knowledge could be fairly precise. The first historical Norwegian mention of Sámi bear rites dates from 1606 (the Norwegian Royal Chronicle) ⟨29⟩, though familiarity with the practices no doubt antedates this by a long way.

The existence of tales similar to that of Fjellström across Siberia, including among the Ob Ugrians, whose particularly complex bear rites have been glanced at above, and the precise manner in which they mirror the customs and beliefs of the peoples that told them, are indications that the tale was the reflection of deeply rooted indigenous rites, and not the invention of Fjellström or a borrowing from outside. Even so, such tales change over time and place, of course, which must act as a caveat in making comparisons with the Norse tale. Nonetheless, the bear rites recorded from northern Siberia are remarkably homogeneous, suggesting that aetiological tales recognisably similar to each other will have existed over a wide span of time and space.

Hrólfs saga is a very different type of document. It is Icelandic, and thus removed from the direct contact with the Sámi which the Norwegians would have had, and there is clearly no direct relationship between the fictional events and motifs and the precise concerns of the society for which it was produced, in the way there is for the Sámi bear tale: in short, the author is concerned with telling a good story rather than ethnographic accuracy. Nonetheless, even though all we are left with is a series of events emptied of their original ritual significance, there is enough in the *Hrólfs saga* account to suggest an origin in Sámi rites, however derived (presumably through knowledge among northern Norwegians of such rites).

The Skolt "man-bear" creature is surely comparable to Bjǫrn, alternately man and bear; he originates, by mating with a local woman, a dynasty of lords described in the saga, just as the union of a bear and local woman engendered the Skolts. The position of the women in the saga is intriguing: in consuming the forbidden bear meat, which Hvít does with relish (emphasising her evil nature), and Bera does unwillingly, they break an

[17] At the same time, it must be noted that the name Hvít identifies the princess as a protagonist of the "winter princess" tale type (on which see McKinnell 2005: 70–2, 75) – other notable examples include Drífa in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13 ⟨113⟩ and Skjálf Frostadóttir in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 19; whilst the princess is typically identified as Sámi, the tale type itself is not Sámi in origin, but represents Norse notions of contact, through marriage, with the perilous "other", of which the Sámi were representatives. I am not primarily concerned with the "winter princess" motif, but with the other Sámi elements that this well-known tale type has enabled the writer to bring in.

injunction comparable to the tabu against Sámi women – or, following the Skolt practice, anyone – doing so; at the same time, the importance of the women in the episode coincides (though the precise roles differ) with the Sámi practice. The general festivities after Bjǫrn is slain mirror the typical bear feast of Sámi and other tribes.

The ring is particularly interesting. The stressing by the bear, just before he is hunted, of the importance of the ring as an indication of his identity for his son is particularly close to Bjǫrn's similar actions, though it is his father in this case that the action is directed towards. A Swedish South Sámi poem contains the following lines (Honko *et al.* 1993: 183, Poem 42: 13–14):

> Gållie-suorbmasav dån akta bálien guuddi áj
> ja náhkátjav dån bárdnáj árbbien viddih áj.
>
> You wore a gold ring once as well
> and you passed your skin on to your son.

This celebrates the bear's erstwhile glorious condition, and the continuance of his existence in his kin, just as Bjǫrn's ring shows the king who the slain bear really was, namely his son, and his (metaphorical) "skin" is passed on to his son, who transforms into a bear himself at the final battle. Yet the ring played a more central part in Sámi bear rites; Rheen (1897: 43–4) relates how the man who has "ringed" the bear in, that is located it for the others to surround, leads the way with a staff onto which a brass ring has been attached; after him comes the man who has used a drum to determine if the hunt will be a success, and the one who is to be the first to shoot. When the bear is brought home, one of the wives approaches the man leading the procession, but has to keep her left eye closed and look through a ring of brass with her right. Fjellström (1755: 16, 25–6) gives details about further "rings". A switch was twisted into a ring and attached to the slain bear's lower jaw, and the belt of the principal slayer was tied to it, marking him out as the bear's master. This ring would be taken home and preserved by the housewife until after the ceremonial meal, when it would have a brass ring along with the bear's tail attached to it by the women and children; it was subsequently buried, but the brass ring was removed and hung on the drum used for bear-hunting divination, as it brought luck. Fjellström mentions brass rings frequently, in particular in connection with women, whose contact with the bear and the hunt had to be conducted through a ring at all turns (even to the extent of having to consume the bear flesh through one). The ring, then, is prophylactic against the bear's power, but also channels power and gives mastery over the bear, and over the success of the hunt; it passes, interestingly, into the hands of the women and children for a while. In similar vein, Bera's acquisition of the bear's ring marks a female garnering of the bear's power and her legacy of it to the next generation.

The precise place the ring is found on Bjǫrn's body does not correspond to the ring of the Sámi rites, but it matches exactly the position in which

a purse is discovered in a different type of bear folktale found among the Sámi and Finns. Here, a hunter kills a bear (or else finds a dead bear), and upon skinning it discovers a purse with money in: this is a sure sign that this was a conjured bear, a person transformed by witchcraft into a bear (see Pentikäinen 2007: 125–6 for examples of such tales).

Finally, the odd birthgiving that Bera undergoes, in which a half-elk and half-dog, and sort of bear-man are born, finds a parallel in certain oral Finnish poems; for example, text ⟨26⟩, a charm directed, it would seem, against clawed animals of the wild, begins by relating how the Mistress of Pohjola gives birth to a bear, a wolf and a lynx, whom she stares at, wondering what is to be made of them. Variation, both of content and purpose, is characteristic of Finnish oral poetry, and the particular animals mentioned here may have been subject to such variation; it is interesting to note that the three animals of the far earlier Norse saga seem to represent a more precise reflection of ancient Finnish/Sámi animal cosmography: the dog is the animal used for hunting, and the elk and the bear are the two great animals whose pursuit is celebrated in sacred rites and poems (and which become constellations).[18] Given that the age or even provenance of the motifs of the Finnish poem cannot be demonstrated, it would be unwise to build too much upon it, but it would be consistent with the general argument put forward in this chapter to suggest at least the possibility that the saga may have been influenced by the Finnish/Sámi tradition in this respect, and that the Finnish poem represents a later, indigenous form of that tradition.

Conclusion

Hrólfs saga recounts the tale of Bǫðvarr from his birth to his death. The tale has been analysed by Schjødt (2003: 273–6) as a narrative based on initiation rites, which here would mean initiation into the status of a *berserkr* warrior. He is undoubtedly correct, both to bring the initiatory aspect to readers' attention, and to emphasise that the saga does not constitute an account of an initiation per se, but is a narrative based on the elements of such an initiation. The problem with this approach is the potential confusion between two separate aims of analysis: uncovering a pattern of initiation is quite a different matter from demonstrating that such a pattern goes back beyond the particular literary monument in question (for example, to pagan times). Schjødt states (275): "when the stated criteria are included and realized, we can say quite a lot about the semantics which have also been in play in the rituals, because it can be argued plausibly that the sequence of certain narratives must have a source in old rituals", even though the concrete events described may be later realisations of meanings which are inherited from earlier times. Yet there is no reason whatever why any initiatory narrative sequence *must* reflect old rituals

[18] On the elk, see Hautala (1947), *FFPE* nos. 53 and 54 (*SKVR* VII, 859, I₂ 858), Pentikäinen (1999: 196–9).

– the existence of which must be corroborated by evidence from outside the particular narrative sequence in question if the argument is to hold any water; it would appear far more plausible to argue that initiation is a general motif occurring the world over, including in modern literature, and we need look no further than the particular context in which it occurs for its comprehension. In the case of *Hrólfs saga*, it should not be forgotten that the saga is late, almost certainly too late to have preserved anything as complex as a procedure of *berserkr* initiation from the pre-Christian period – which may or may not have existed: and even if they did, the initiatory aspect of *Hrólfs saga* is still essentially a narrative one which does not correspond to any *act* of initiation. What we encounter here, surely, is a purely *literary* type of initiation which tells us nothing about surmised real initiations into the status of *berserkr*.

It might be countered that the sources relating to Sámi practices are of a similarly late relative date. Ultimately, it cannot be demonstrated with absolute certainty that the rituals discussed here, and particularly their more detailed aspects, did indeed exist at earlier periods of Sámi history, since the evidence simply does not exist. However, there are compelling differences from the Norse sources. The first is that the earliest sources relating to Sámi practices date from a time before they were christianised (or at least when the conversion was only in its initial stages), whereas a source such as *Hrólfs saga* postdates its society's conversion by centuries. The *a priori* assumption must therefore be that the Sámi practices recorded are the direct development of long-standing rituals from the (unbroken) pagan past; the ancient roots, in a hunting society, of the practices under consideration are confirmed by widespread parallels, even down to the detailed structure of the bear rite, found in other circumpolar societies with comparable social make-up to the Sámi.[19] The Sámi were, of course, subject to influence from outside, which was primarily from Scandinavians, and such influence can often be demonstrated in their belief systems. But whereas for example the figure of Þórr karl offered the opportunity for the Sámi to reformulate aspects of their high god and name him Hovrengaellis (Mebius 2003: 70) after his Norse counterpart, there is no evidence that the Scandinavians had anything by way of bear rites to loan to the Sámi (who, on the contrary, had a detailed and integral system of such rites of great antiquity). The ancient Sámi traditions gradually underwent a process of attrition in the face of outside influence, and also as a result of their shift to a reindeer-herding society (which took place over many centuries but was well under way by the medieval period); however, the time gap between *Hrólfs saga* and the early records considered here is not great within this overall process, given that there were no major disturbances such as wholesale conversion to Christianity in addition.[20] The contrast with a source such as *Hrólfs saga* is stark: not only had the society in question undergone

[19] It is outside the scope of this book to consider these parallels in detail; they are dealt with more thorougly in Edsman (1994), Honko *et al.* (1993), Pentikäinen (2007).
[20] Again, the overall consistency (despite the partial attrition noted) of the *Historia Norwegie* with the later sources exemplifies this continuity.

enormous changes since the pre-Christian period (when the *berserkr* rite must presumably be placed), but there is also no external evidence for such a rite, as there is in abundance for the Sámi bear rites.

My own assessment of *Hrólfs saga* is rather more circumspect than Schjødt's. The impression that the saga may reflect large-scale rituals deriving from pre-Christian times arises in part from the success with which the narrator has made use of the general motif of initiation in his creation (or, in short, his literary artifice), but also in part from the antiquity of some of the individual motifs. The bear hunt is such a motif, with roots in decidedly pagan practices of great antiquity and geographical extent – but roots which did not grow in Norse soil.

THE BEAR, THE WOLF AND THE BOAR

The bear indeed presents itself as an animal suitable to be metaphorised into a warrior: it is large and strong, and has certain human characteristics like standing upright on its hind paws, or in being omnivorous. Other animals do fulfil the role of representing the warrior, however: notably the wolf and the boar. Yet the animals are not merely interchangeable. The wolf represents *destruction*, epitomised in its mythological role as swallower of the god Óðinn at the end of the world (*Vǫluspá* 51). Its other associations are reflections of this principle, though a further division of connotation tends to be made, or is implicit, between *úlfr* and *vargr*: while *úlfr* occurs frequently in men's names, and therefore implies destructive power in a favourable sense (the strength of the warrior), *vargr* never does, but takes on a metaphorical sense of "outlaw" (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1957, *s.v.* II). The other chief occurrence of the wolf is alongside the raven and eagle as a beast of battle,[21] i.e. one that turns up to eat the carrion, and hence a harbinger or symbolisation of death. This is not a role assigned to the bear. The wolf is an animal that belongs wholly to the wild, outside human society; the *úlfheðnar*, it may be deduced from the name, must have been regarded as warriors endowed with this wholly wild nature. A thorough discussion of the symbolism of the wolf and associated beasts cannot be undertaken here, but one episode where warriors appear as wolves may be mentioned. In *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 8 the exiles (i.e. a type of outlaw) Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli come upon some men sleeping, with wolf shapes hanging over them; they take these shapes and put them on, and immediately adopt the nature of wolves, including the howl, though they can understand each other. It is interesting that the kinsmen's society breaks down: they each go their own way, and their calls to each other for assistance result in an argument between them which leads to serious injury. They win much fame, by slaying large numbers of men (for no explicit reason). They are unable to shake off the wolf shapes, and have to wait in a hut until the metamorphosis back into men happens of its own accord. We are presented

[21] On beasts of battle in Old Norse and Old English, see Jesch (2002), where further references to this much-discussed theme are found.

with a picture of wild and uncontrolled savagery, which the heroes are glad to relinquish.

It is interesting to consider one passage where wolf and bear occur side by side in a poetic context in Norse, in the Eddic poem *Atlakviða*. One of the heroes, Gunnarr, is about to set off for the court of the Hun-king Atli (Attila), but has forebodings after his sister sent a wolf hair wrapped round a ring – the way would be wolfish, he thought. Setting out nonetheless, he proclaims (st. 11, trans. Dronke):

Úlfr mun ráða	The wolf shall rule
arfi Niflunga,	the inheritance of the Niflungar,
gamlar gránferðir,	the old packs of grey ones,
ef Gunnars missir,	if Gunnarr is lost.
birnir blakfialler	The swart-skinned bears
bíta þreftǫnnom,	shall bite with wrangling teeth,
gamna greystóði,	bring sport to the stud of curs,
ef Gunnarr né kømrat.	if Gunnarr does not come back.

In a general sense, Gunnarr is saying the society of men will be turned over to the beasts if he is killed; yet the image appears to be more specific (I follow, on the whole, Dronke's interpretation in *PE* I). The treasure of the Niflungs will be made inaccessible to men, hidden in some wild place ruled by wolves, the traditional beasts of battle (indicating a premonition of fighting to come); the swart bears, however, may represent the dark Niflungar, and so stand as an image for the cornered Gunnarr and his kin, baited, or hunted down, by Atli. The image of the bear as a noble warrior fighting to the last in a battle he must lose comes close to that found for example in the Khanty poem cited above, even if the overall context in which this image occurs is very different.

Just as in Old English the assumed original sense of *beorn* as "bear" has passed over, by the time of our records, to "warrior", so in Norse the word *jǫfurr*, originally "boar" (as found in the cognate Old English *eofor*), comes to mean "warrior prince", above all in skaldic diction (see *Lexicon poeticum*, *s.v.*, for many instances; for example, the word occurs three times in *Ynglingatal*). The boar shares the characteristics of the bear and the wolf as a fierce beast of the wild, and hence would similarly be appropriate to represent the warrior, yet it appears to have been endowed with the additional quality of protection (perhaps deriving from the boar's naturally marked proclivity to be defensive) and hence the word tends to imply leadership rather than purely warriorship. Boars appear in *Beowulf* 303–6, 1112, 1286, 1328 and 1451–4, where images of them are said to adorn warriors' helmets and to protect the wearers; depictions of such helmets, as in the seventh-century repoussé dies from Torslunda, Öland, and helmets themselves, such as the seventh-century Benty Grange example, have been found (see *Beowulf*, comm. 303–6, 1111, 1453, for discussion and illustrations). Snorri relates the dealings of Hrólfr kraki and the king of the Swedes, Aðils (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 44), in which Hrólfr's mother Yrsa gave her son the ring Svíagríss, "Swine of the Swedes", an heirloom of the ruling Yngling dynasty, which Aðils pursued Hrólfr over the Uppsala plain to retrieve; it

would appear likely that the swine, the beast of the Yngling founder Freyr (*Gylfaginning* ch. 49, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 7), was a dynastic protector, and the holder of the ring was marked out as a prince of the dynasty.

Conclusion

Bears are *liminal* animals: they belong to the forest, yet they share certain features with humans. Liminality – a crossing of boundaries – appears to have been seen as a mark of the bear's holiness and power. In many circumpolar societies this led to a complex of rites in which a bear was hunted and slain, but at the same time respected, being viewed for example as the offspring of the high god of heaven. The slight reflection of such a belief and rite found in *Hrólfs saga* is probably due to some familiarity with Sámi rites; we do not find any evidence for indigenous circumpolar-type bear rites among the Germanic peoples, which is consistent with the agrarian/husbandry basis of these societies, as opposed to the more hunting-dependent communities of the far north. Nonetheless, the image of the warrior as a bear surely stems from the same observation of the bear's liminality, and indeed reflects that of the warrior, an observer of the social mores of the hall, but at the same time a savage attacker of his foes.

VII. EPILEGOMENA

21. Conclusion

I have sought in this book to present a measured approach to the question of Norse shamanism. In the first place, my aim has been typological: this has involved tracing, in some detail, what classic shamanism actually is, to see how far Norse records yield anything which follows, in any systematic or cohesive fashion, the features of this shamanism. This is a necessary first step before the presence of shamanism can be adjudicated on. I have also sought to highlight more specific features which resemble those found in shamanism, but with the proviso that they can only be judged shamanic if they can be accommodated within a wider system, such as that proposed by Vajda; it is not, I think, necessary absolutely to demonstrate the presence of all these features each time, since our evidence is too meagre to allow for this, but without at least some indication of a wider context it becomes impossible to argue for the presence of shamanism, as a system of belief (or rather of belief-related ritual), on the basis of isolated resemblances. Nor is it acceptable to assemble a series of such isolated resemblances and then force them into a system which the sources themselves do not give any indication of.

My investigation has, over all, found little grounds for proposing the presence of shamanism in pre-Christian or later Scandinavia, if by that is meant the classic form of shamanism typical of much of Siberia. The evidence does, however, support the likelihood of *some* ritual and belief of a broadly (but not classically) shamanic nature as existing and being remembered in tradition. Yet most of what we uncover from investigating literary sources is bound, in my view, to be literary in nature: we are discovering motifs and themes, worked on by poets over the generations, and only loosely based on real practices (even when such practices were current). The underlying assumption in my arguments for the antiquity of a motif has been that we are dealing, in the first place, with a literary motif of long standing, and its presence in real life is yet a further step back, and hence all the more debatable. The distance between our sources and lived experience is greater than is often allowed for in studies of pagan Norse beliefs.

The most recent lengthy discussion of some of the core themes dealt with in the present volume is that of Price (2002). Despite the many interesting discussions and materials he offers, I find myself essentially at odds with his viewpoint: he has argued for an extensive presence in Viking Age ritual and belief of "shamanism", in particular in the form of *seiðr*, and for

its intimate connection with the war mentality of the time. He is inclined to use *seiðr* in a wider, catch-all fashion for practices which he regards as shamanic, which is not justified from the sources. I see scant evidence for a particularly military aspect to *seiðr*, any more than any practice in our medieval sources is imbued with military overtones. Price's arguments, as far as the literary sources are concerned, are built, it seems to me, too much on an assumption of these sources' general reliability, and relevance indeed for a "Viking" period; I would not like to include the literary culture of thirteenth and fourteenth-century Iceland, which produced most of these sources, within the definition of the Viking Age. Information elicited from these sources should be used to construct a picture of pagan practices of some centuries earlier only with the greatest circumspection and scepticism being applied in the analysis, which is what I have endeavoured to do. The remoteness of our sources from the reality of pagan life is something that in my view Price takes insufficient account of, allowing him to construct a picture of pagan Scandinavia which is exciting, but whose weight a careful consideration of the sources will not bear. For me as a non-archaeologist, Price's archaeological evidence forms the most interesting part of his presentation – though here too I would be far more sceptical of some of the interpretations; archaeological artefacts are dependent on input from intellectual monuments for their interpretation, and, as we have seen, these sources are far from accommodating in the clarity of their meaning. In short, archaeology cannot in itself demonstrate the presence of shamanism, and the written sources are mainly too late and unreliable to use as evidence of it either: to lean one flimsy card against the other in the hope of securing some stability does not make for an enduring or reliable structure, however high it may tower in the short term.

I would like now to sum up in more detail what I think the examination conducted in this present volume has shown.

The comparison with Greek sources, in particular the *Bacchae*, has shown illuminating similarities in the way two Indo-European societies, roughly comparable in their social structures and sources of livelihood (as opposed to the generally simpler hunting societies where shamanism prevails), reacted to the presence of shamanic elements, and particularly how this reaction was manifested in literature: such elements are regarded as "other" (even when they may well have largely been indigenous), and hence are often characterised as foreign; this otherness is realised in various similar ways, so that the Norse *seiðr* and the Greek bacchic rites are both essentially the realm of women, though led by gods (Óðinn and Dionysus) willing to accept the concomitant effeminacy, and the practices are regarded as being brought by newcomers (the *vanir* and Dionysus). The Greek sources sound a warning shot, that much of the depiction of such practices, in both societies, relies on the literary artifice of poets, the reconstruction of actual cult practices from their works being fraught with difficulties and uncertainties.

Nonetheless, such practices did lie behind at least some of the depictions. The examination of medieval witchcraft, the sources for which are

not literary, illustrates this – though here we have an equally limiting problem, of the religious manufacture of pseudo-systems of belief, from which genuine folk practices have to be deduced, and the difficulty is compounded by much of the detailed information being very late (relative to Norse sources). When we are able to elicit likely folk practices or beliefs in this way, witches appear as practitioners of magic, making contact with the spirit world, often on behalf of the community, working for healing, divination and the protection of livelihoods, though their skills were also clearly resorted to for malicious purposes such as cursing livestock and sexual relations. There is probably enough of a credible nature that can be sifted from the sources to describe the beliefs and practices upon which the descriptions of witchcraft are based as broadly shamanic. Scandinavia should (probably) be included within the area of such practices.

However, when we start to examine in more detail how far the recorded Norse practices or myths correspond to what is found in classic Siberian shamanism, the case for any close connection begins to evaporate, though there are striking resemblances in certain areas, nonetheless. There are several features of Norse sources that permeate the whole investigation. The first is their scarcity: we simply do not have evidence, one way or the other, for many things that are found in shamanism, so it is impossible to determine to what extent Norse practices may have coincided. The second is the often tantalising nature of the sources we do have: for example, should the search of the originator of *seiðr*, Freyja, for her lost husband Óðr, whose name may indicate the soul or life-giving principle, be seen as parallel to the shamanic retrieval of souls from the otherworld? The third is the isolated nature of features which appear to be shamanic: we could describe the attempted return of Baldr from the underworld, with Hermóðr as the active agent, as similar, again, to the shaman's journey after lost souls, but we have no context, no allusions to any other shamanic features, to suggest that any shamanic framework was conceived; this is a problem with a great many features which are often adduced as indicating shamanism (by no means all of which have even seemed worth discussing). The fourth, in a way an extension of the third, is the presence of conceptual structures in Norse of a far-reaching kind, which are fully compatible with the presence of shamanism, but do not in fact provide strong evidence of any shamanic use: an example is the concepts of the various types of spirits.

Seiðr differs in its purposes from classic Siberian shamanism in several respects. Most notably, the central shamanic task of retrieving the souls of the sick is absent; even healing of a more general sort is absent, whereas it is still a central feature of even vestigially shamanic practitioners such as the Finnish *tietäjä*. Even though the concept was familiar to the Norse, *seiðr* does not seem to have involved the sending out of the free soul, which is characteristic of many, and particularly circumpolar, shamanisms. Divination appears to have played a central role in the Norse practices, and this was probably an ancient tradition, since classical sources mention a number of Germanic seeresses; in shamanism, divination is of secondary importance, and often performed by others than shamans. *Seiðr* was largely

the domain of females, whereas classic circumpolar shamanism is usually, and certainly among the Sámi, dominated by men – though this is not the case with shamanism of the non-classic type, as practised in more agrarian societies such as Japan or India. Unlike shamanism, *seiðr* seems always to have carried the onus of social rejection with it. The practitioner of *seiðr* emerges not so much as a mediator with the spirit world who resolves conflicts, as either a medium, communicating supernatural knowledge, or a manipulator of the spirit world who uses spells (*galdrar*) in a way that often increases rather than dissipates tension – though this picture is built up in large part on the basis of unreliable prose sources.

As the *vǫlva* appears always to be in some sense an outsider, she does not fit into any of the four social bases of shamans which Siikala outlines; given the hierarchical level of Norse society, we would expect some form of territorial professional shamanism, such as was practised by the Buryats, but we find no such thing. The sources rather present the *vǫlva* in line with the witch of later European sources, someone in but not of the society they live in; nonetheless, the same is clearly not true of the classical seeresses, or the priestesses of the Cimbri, encountered in accounts of actual pagan practices, so the social position of the *vǫlva* as depicted may well be the result of later literary tradition, or (additionally) of social change over the centuries after Tacitus wrote.

Seiðr explicitly involved a sexual element: it is said to be associated with *ergi*. For men, this probably indicated a loss of the strength which defined their virility, which may have been connected to the notion of penetration by spirits (which could be seen as standing metaphorically for sexual penetration), and may also have involved a feminisation, as the practitioners of *seiðr* identified with the goddess Freyja, its founder and mistress (such identification is nowhere directly indicated, though it is implied in the case of the first practiser of *seiðr*, Heiðr, in *Vǫluspá*); for women, *ergi* implied promiscuity, which was certainly a feature of the *vanir*, among whom *seiðr* originated, and may have played a part in the practice among women, though, again, this is not directly witnessed in the sources. As a female practice, *seiðr* is likely to have been concerned with birth, and rebirth: it is therefore noticeable how it is referred to in cases of engendering an heir, such as Váli, and also appears as a means of rebirth (according to Dronke's arguments) or of indomitable life on the battlefield in *Vǫluspá*. This is consistent with the practices of female shamans such as the Daur *otoshi*.

Some, but not all, of the various sorts of Norse spirits were involved in *seiðr*. As noted, the practice originated among the class of fertility deities, the *vanir*. It involved the summoning and manipulating of dangerous spirits called *gandar*, which it would appear both provided information and carried out tasks, and would often (or perhaps always) assume animal form. Giants, in one of the several guises in which they appear, seem to correspond to the anthropomorphic (and often ancestral) spirits of classic shamanism, who are sometimes summoned for information, but whose main role is to initiate the shaman. The *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá* learnt her art from

these ancestral beings, and possibly Óðinn's hanging on the tree was an initiatory exercise supervised by such beings; he certainly is said elsewhere to have learnt from the giants. The practice of magic condemned in the Norwegian laws involved the summoning of *troll*, a word which designated any practiser (or even victim) of supernatural activities. It seems that the *vǫlva* would also call forth her protective spirit, *vǫrðr*, probably representing her innate powers, before undertaking a ritual contact with the spirit world (this interpretation relies, admittedly, on just one word, of the greatest interpretative difficulty, surviving in an otherwise unreliable source). The *vǫlva*'s contacts with and manipulation of the spirit world thus correspond in many respects with what is found in shamanism – though parallels can also be adduced from European witchcraft, so again the feature can only be described as broadly shamanic. The examination of *gandr* has shown that differences existed between Norse and Sámi concepts of what took place during a shamanic kamlanie, indicating a rather different base to Norse magic from the circumpolar shamanism of the Sámi.

Many features of the Norse spiritual cosmography find parallels in shamanic and other Eurasian societies. The predominant image is of the world tree, associated hypostatically with the god Heimdallr, acting as *vǫrðr*, protective guardian, of the world, in the way an animate protective tree stood guard over the farmstead, and sacrificially with Óðinn. The tree connects Scandinavia typologically primarily with the sub-circumpolar shamanic societies, which were not so reliant on hunting. There is some evidence to make a tentative identification of a secondary Norse image of the world axis as a pillar, associated in particular with Þórr; the pillar is typical of circumpolar societies, including the Sámi. It is likely (but the evidence is tenuous) that the pillar was believed to culminate in the North Star, which perhaps was represented mythically by the whetstone in Þórr's head and in cult in the nails at the head of the hall pillars, the *ǫndvegissúlur*. Similar ideas are found among the Sámi and Finns, and this is likely to represent a common Nordic motif (it is also found in the far east of Siberia, however, possibly independently, or possibly as part of a more general, but rather amorphous, circumpolar culture). The spiritual cosmography of the Norse was thus consistent with the layered universe typically encountered in shamanism. However, its presence does not determine the existence of shamanism. We do have strong indications of cult offerings being made to representative world trees in the Norse area, but we do not encounter anything parallel to the shaman's ritual clambering on the tree to represent his passage through the worlds. Many of the parallels to the religious significance of the world tree in fact seem to lie in India rather than Siberia, so it emerges as a rather dubious indicator of shamanism.

Óðinn was also associated with *seiðr*, and some of the myths he is represented in have ostensibly shamanic elements to them. The initiatory experiences of Óðinn can also be illuminated by comparison with shamanic analogues, but a closer examination of them has shown that the explicitly shamanic elements within them are fairly minimal. There are notable differences even in the areas of greatest similarity: thus although

the world tree is a typical feature of the shamanic cosmology, the shaman is not hanged upon it, like Óðinn, but remade by a smith, an idea which does not occur in Norse. The Norse "initiatory" myths also involve aspects not found in shamanism, such as the complexity of the retrieval of Són, the sacrificial (and life-giving) blood, in the form of poetic mead. Óðinn's otherworld journeys are essentially connected with knowledge and skill, rather than with healing (though there is some evidence of Woden/Óðinn as a healer in both Old English and Old Norse). However shamanic they may ultimately be judged, Óðinn's initiatory or martyric acts are not associated with human (or divine) practices like *seiðr*, and are divorced from any ritual context which could be regarded as shamanic (they may be connected to sacrificial practices).

Seiðr is not said to involve any initiation; this may be a reflection of the lack of sources, but the female shamanism of the Indian Soras also did not involve any initiatory experience comparable to that of the Siberian shaman. As a female practice, *seiðr* may well not have involved such essentially male warrior imagery, so its absence cannot be used as an argument against the potential shamanic nature of *seiðr*, but it does remove another element which might be used to argue that *seiðr* was indeed shamanic.

The accoutrements found in association with *seiðr* are not, on the whole, particularly shamanic. We can say little about any dress, since the sources describing it are untrustworthy. The *vǫlva* almost certainly had a staff, which may, just possibly, have been conceived as stemming from the world tree, and which almost certainly would have been endowed with numinous power, probably to command the spirits and to effect curses. The belt or girdle may also have been used: Freyja was possessed of the Brísingamen, which was associated with birth (and rebirth, probably); if the *vǫlva* represented Freyja, she may well have been endowed with a representation of the goddess's girdle, though this is nowhere clearly the case. The importance of the belt to the divinatory priestesses of the ancient Cimbri suggests that the possession of a belt by their spiritual successors was quite likely. The main accoutrement of the *vǫlva* was the *seiðhjallr*, the platform on which she performed. This has no parallels in classic shamanism; it rather characterises the *vǫlva* as a medium, cut off from the members of her audience and not interacting actively with them. It suggests through elevation the idea of increased spiritual vision over the world, but it does not imply the layered cosmos traversed in shamanic kamlania. Over all, it is a distinct mark of the non-shamanic nature of *seiðr*.

The smith often assumed a central role in shamanic initiations (though we do not have evidence for this amongst the Norsemen's neighbours, the Sámi or Finns). Leaving aside dwarf smiths, there is essentially one smith hero in Norse literary tradition, Vǫlundr. The poem dedicated to his story, *Vǫlundarkviða*, shows an awareness of aspects of far northern society, probably derived from familiarity with Sámi culture, yet this does not amount to a systematic awareness of religious aspects of such an alien society: rather, the poet has manipulated motifs to create an impression of northernness by means of literary artifice. It seems likely that the poet

has employed some features typical of the Sámi to reinforce Vǫlundr's otherness, and the danger of offending the Other, rather than because of any deep connection of the smith with the Sámi or other shamanic societies; Sámi features are much less evident in the *Vélents þáttr* version of the story (which was of German origin).

The examination of the bear similarly illustrated a distinct chasm between Scandinavians and circumpolar peoples such as the Sámi, though it also showed the likelihood that some motifs were borrowed from the Sámi (evident particularly in the man–bear transformation and associated narrative in *Hrólfs saga kraka*). In northern hunting societies the bear is a sacred animal, a liminal beast who acts as a mediator between the worlds of men and the gods. The bear is hunted, but with special apotropaic ceremonies which ensure the sacrilege of killing him is not visited upon the perpetrators. None of this exists in Norse tradition. When it came to hunting actual bears, it was carried out with no religious respect whatever. The bear is still liminal, but in a very different sense: he functions as a metaphor for the warrior. The bear warrior *par excellence* was the *berserkr*: he would, it seems, rush into battle in a sort of ecstasy, which has inclined some to see a shamanic element at play. This is misplaced: ecstasy can exist in many contexts, and does not in itself indicate shamanism. Nor does anything else about the *berserkr* link him with shamanism.

If we allow the Norse to have had practices or systems of mythic belief which might be termed shamanism, it is not, on the whole, to the tundra shamanism of the far north, as practised by the Sámi, that we should look for the closest parallels, but to the forms of shamanism practised further south, in areas where agriculture plays a large part in the winning of a livelihood, and where female shamanism is more evident. The shamanism of Japan is illuminating in this respect: here, an earlier ecstatic form of shamanism was gradually formalised over the centuries, to produce a system with primarily female divinatory mediums, answering questions from a temenos comparable to the area of the *seiðhjallr* of the Norse *vǫlva*, and not having an active interaction with the audience, in marked contrast to classic shamanism, but in agreement with the Norse sources; many of the questions were about the crops, which again corresponds to the Norse situation. Even the way that an *itako* would be a wandering seeress, who was welcomed into houses with all due attention paid to her welfare, corresponds to some of the descriptions of similar visits by *vǫlur* in Norse. There is, of course, no genetic connection between Scandinavian and Japanese practices, but there is a typological one, resulting from the presence in comparable hierarchical agrarian societies of ecstatic divinatory practitioners, whose presence and role needed to be accommodated within the norms of those societies.

It is notable that where we do find features which are close to Sámi shamanic practices (or beliefs about practices), such as the visit from mainland Scandinavia to Iceland within three days, or the lying as if dead for periods of time, the practitioners are explicitly described as *Finnar*; similarly, the author of *Historia Norwegie* included his description of a Sámi kamlanie out

of amazement at the *difference* from what he was used to. The Norsemen were well aware of Sámi magic, but they were also aware how far it varied in most points from their own, just as they were aware of the drastically different lifestyle, based on hunting as the main means of sustenance, that many Sámi practised. My overall position is essentially in agreement with Ohlmarks (1939), who fiercely opposed Strömbäck's arguments for a close link with Sámi shamanism. Ohlmarks had a wider acquaintance with other forms of shamanism, whereas Strömbäck was, perhaps, seduced by certain similarities he saw in the practices of the Norsemen's nearest neighbours, the Sámi, whilst not taking sufficient account of the huge differences. I have sought to follow Ohlmarks's example in offering a wider panorama of shamanism than just that of the Sámi, and the examples examined (which do not coincide particularly with Ohlmarks's) back up Ohlmarks's general position.

All things considered, then, it seems to me unsafe to argue for the presence of shamanism within Norse pre-Christian belief and practice, if by "shamanism" is meant something like the tundra shamanism of the Sámi – it is clear at least that neither *seiðr* nor the exploits of Óðinn will fit within the stringent definition of shamanism suggested for example by Vajda – but it is likely that a practice involving contact with the spirits did exist (and was alluded to and elaborated in poetry), which could be described as broadly shamanic in nature. But the same could probably be said for much of Europe: the evidence from ancient Greece and from medieval witchcraft in Europe, contentious as it is, points in this direction. This is in line with the proposal by Hultkrantz (1993: 10):

> I consider trance, direct contact with spiritual beings and guardian spirits, together with the mediating role played by the shaman in a ritual setting, to constitute the minimum requirement for a case of shamanism. The presence of guardian spirits during the trance and following shamanic actions is, as I see it, a most necessary element, and one that delimits shamanic trance from other states of trance. The above describes what I would call the salient features of "general shamanism", the simple form of shamanism that we find everywhere, in contradistinction to the more specialized shamanic pattern such as Arctic shamanism, Siberian shamanism, and Mongolian shamanism. Maybe general shamanism should be seen as a defoliated but nevertheless ideologically meaningful shamanism, a kind of spiritual platform from which the more specialized and developed forms of shamanism have grown.

The evidence of *seiðr* and other practices considered in this volume suggests that the Norse practices can well be accommodated within this general shamanism. I fear, unfortunately, that such an apparently anodyne conclusion will do little to dampen the enthusiasm of those many modern devotees who seem determined to conjure up "shamanism" – taken implicitly as the exciting Siberian kind – from ancient sources as if from thin air; indeed, such prestidigitation appears to do not a little to enhance their standing, as once it did for the shamans themselves in their communities.

It has been an important part of this study to make a reassessment of

the value of some of these sources. In particular, the classic account of *seiðr* found in *Eiríks saga rauða* has been shown to be almost wholly unreliable, and to reflect primarily Christian concerns. The description of *seiðr* in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* is derived in large part from *Eiríks saga*. Similarly, the account of Óðinn's performance of *seiðr* in *Ynglinga saga* is unreliable: it derives partly from surviving poetic sources (which can be considered on their own merits), and partly from Snorri's use of traditions concerning Sámi practices, probably through the *Historia Norwegie*. With other sources, it has proved important to emphasise their allusive nature: thus *Grímnismál* is by no means an account of ritual initiation, but a dramatic presentation of the god Óðinn in a difficult situation in which he reveals divine knowledge, which makes suggestive reference to the god's initiatory experiences, as on the tree, but refrains from pretending that this drama constitutes an initiation in itself. *Vǫlundarkviða* contains a number of shamanic elements: the author uses these as local colouring, to aid the process of verisimilitude in his depiction of this far northern hero; the elements are bereft of religious significance, but richly endowed with literary meaning. *Skírnismál* and *Vǫluspá* have been deeply mined for their apparent shamanic references. There may, indeed, have been some awareness on the part of the authors of the ritual dimensions of practices such as *seiðr*, which may be inferred from the texts as we have them. But a great deal of caution is necessary. In the case of *Skírnismál* the shamanic structure – the vision into other worlds, the journey thither undertaken by an alter ego figure, the "salvation" from an underworldly realm, the wand and the magical charms – may appear shamanic merely as a result of the author's manipulation of traditional motifs into this particular form. The same is true of *Vǫluspá*: the presence of the world tree, for example, does not necessarily imply any real ritual use of the tree by *vǫlur* – it occurs in the poem for essentially literary structural purposes, not ritual ones; some features, however, perhaps reflect notions that may have been part of the older tradition on *vǫlur*, such as the way that Heiðr, the first *seiðkona*, is to be identified in some way with Freyja, the divine originator of the practice, and how she is said to become *leikin*, "entranced", as she practices, and uses *gandar* to secure her prophetic knowledge. But in its composition *Vǫluspá* alludes, it would appear, to non-Norse sources, such as the sibylline oracles or the Bible, so that it becomes impossible to determine quite how far it may reflect genuine Norse practices, particularly given the artistic mastery the author shows in ordering his composition. It is the perception of this artistic mastery, whatever the sources involved, that is in the end the chief target of investigation.

Vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?

Nú mun hon søkkvaz