THE ROLE OF THE GIANTS IN NORSE MYTHOLOGY

Andrew L. Hagen

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis is a survey of the roles that the giants play in Norse mythology. It involves examination, criticism and interpretation of the mythological poems of the *Elder Edda* and mythological information preserved in Snorri's *Edda*. All passages in Old Icelandic have been translated as literally as possible in footnotes. Relevant archaeological evidence is examined and evaluated. The first chapter deals with the cosmological giant Ymir, from whom the land, sea and sky were formed. Many giant-names seem to be associated with Ymir's characteristics, and the implications of these potential associations are discussed at length. Chapter 2 concerns Óðinn's involvement with the giants. In his pursuit of wisdom he encounters giants, giantesses and those who are arguably associated with giant-kind. They play the role of both obstacle and source for knowledge and wisdom. The third chapter concerns Þórr's relationship with the giants who pose a threat to the gods and man. Þórr's role is that of the heroic defender of Ásgarðr and Midgárðr. In these myths the giants seem to serve as devices to demonstrate the personality and various characteristics of Þórr. Chapter 4 deals with Gerðr and Skaði, two giantesses who marry into the circle of the Æsir. Having become involved with the Æsir in this way, they too become goddesses or the equivalent thereof. Previous studies have tended to focus more on the roles of the individual gods and goddesses, but this thesis aims to shed some light on their enemies.
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ABBREVIATIONS

All Eddaic poems can be found in G. Neckel, and H. Kuhn, edd., Edda (Heidelberg: 1962), or Jón Helgason, ed., Eddadigte I-II (Copenhagen etc: 1962-4), and skaldic poems can be found in Skj.

Akv: Allékvida.
Alv: Alvissmál.
ARG: Jan de Vries, Altnordische Religiongeschichte, 2nd ed. (Berlin: 1956-7).
Bdr: Baldurs draumar.
Bergb: Bergbúa þátr. (Íslensk fornrit XIII)
Eg: Egill Skallagrímsson in Skj.
EGils: Einarr Gílsson in Skj.
Eskál: Einarr Helgason skálaglamm in Skj.
ESk: Einarr Skálag in Skj.
Fagsr: Fagrskinna. (Íslensk fornrit XXIX)
Fj: Fjölsvinnsmál.
Fm: Fáfnismál.
Gd: Guðmundardrápa in Skj.
Giz: Gizurr Þórvaldsson in Skj.
Grettis: Grettis saga. (Íslensk fornrit VII)
Grott: Grottasögur.
Grm: Grimmismál.
H: Hauksbók.
Hál: Háleygjatal in Skj.
Hav: Hávamál.
Harð: Harðar saga. (Íslensk fornrit XIII)
Haustl: Haustlöng in Skj.
Hft: Egill Skallagrímsson: Hofvöldus, in Skj.
HHj: Helgvaldís Hjörvarðsdóttar.
Hkm: Hákonarmál in Skj.
Hynd: Hyndlutfjöð.
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE GIANTS

The gods can be powerful and entertaining such as Þórr and Freyja, or mysterious and enigmatic such as Óðinn and Loki. One could spend a lifetime researching a single god or goddess, from interpreting and reinterpreting the roles in which they are portrayed, to seeking their parallels in other Indo-European languages, to seeking historical and archaeological evidence for their lost cults. The giants in Norse mythology are rarely the topic of books, articles or dissertations such as this. The reason is not a lack of interest, but probably because they are overshadowed by the more colourful gods and goddesses. Where the gods are cunning the giants are gullible, and where the giants are strong, the gods are ever stronger, or more clever. Yet a study of the gods can rarely be conducted without mentioning the giants, and, as with that study, a study of the giants cannot easily be carried out without an understanding of the gods.

One of our chief sources for the mythology, and central to this thesis, is the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda, also popularly known as the ‘Poetic Edda’ (MS Gks 2365, 4to). It is an Icelandic manuscript dated to the third quarter of the thirteenth century, and contains eleven mythological lays which themselves are difficult, and often impossible to date with any kind of accuracy. A number of the Eddaic poems found within it are suspected to have roots in antiquity, whilst others seem to be of a later origin, perhaps as late as the thirteenth century. Some of the myths these poems deal with are referred to by skaldic poets who are often datable to between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Skaldic poems are rarely about the gods, but many refer to these myths through kennings which can only be interpreted through an understanding of the mythology. Often these kennings can be used to corroborate and substantiate the myths outlined in the Eddaic poems. The allusions in these kennings are often elliptical and brief but are at times sole sources for

\[\text{Sn.E. Gylf. 5: He was evil and all his kinsmen, we call them frostgiants (ed. Faulkes, p. 10).}\]
mythological information. The Eddaic poems are central to this thesis, and I quote from Jón Helgason's scrupulously careful edition.

1.2 PURPOSES OF DISCUSSION

One of the many reasons for writing this thesis on the roles of the giants is that they have often been overshadowed by the roles of the gods. This is to say that academic studies often focus on the roles of the gods, their characteristics, associations and cult followings. The giants are often seen as the enemies of the gods; they appear to represent the forces of chaos and destruction. They also are associated with various aspects of Norse cosmology. In this respect the world is said to be derived from a single primordial giant, Ymir, from whom the race of giants is descended. It appears that the world was believed to be held together by the Míógarðssormr, that the realms of the dead were ruled by Hel, and that Fenrir will swallow Óðinn at Ragnarök. These three figures are descended from Loki and the giantess Angrboða, 'grief-bidder'.

1.3 THE SOURCES

There are numerous sources available, most of which are textual. It should be noted that the study of mythology is in essence textual and linguistic. Archaeologists often reveal artefacts that depict scenes or characters which may be identifiable in the written sources, and conversely the finding of such objects can often help to give us an impression of when a myth was popular, where, and in what surroundings it was associated. Furthermore the identification of a god with a particular area, usually shown in place-names, can possibly offer historical evidence concerning cults that were practised in specific areas. Sometimes, as will be discussed below, the use of mythology to identify archaeological evidence can be difficult, but, moreover, it can be risky at best to use archaeological evidence to reconstruct the mythology. It can be said with some degree of certainty that the reconstruction of specific mythological narratives is not possible without texts, though archaeological remains can be taken as evidence of cult-practice.

2 There seems to be no agreed spelling of the English word Eddaic. Some writers prefer Eddie, and some capitalise and others do not. In this dissertation the form Eddaic is preferred.
The written sources for Norse mythology are limited to only a few manuscripts. The Eddaic poetry survives in the Codex Regius, R, (MS GkS 2365, 4to), which is generally believed to have been written in the second half of the thirteenth century. The manuscript is written in a single hand, but scribal features seem to suggest it preserves information from disparate sources. These differences are most apparent between the mythological poems and the heroic; thus it may be that the scribe copied these poems from two separate collections. It seems clear that this is not the first composition or the first time these poems have been written down. The poems contain many prose sections which have much in common with the presentation of the material as it is found in our other main source, Snorra Edda (also known as the Prose Edda), composed between 1220-1241. The text is preserved most importantly in the Codex Regius, R², (GkS 2367, 4to), Codex Wormianus, W, (AM 242, fol.), and the Uppsala manuscript (DG 11) which attributes the work to Snorri. He was a wealthy Icelandic aristocrat who was himself an accomplished skaldic poet and served at the court of Duke Skúli in Norway. Other sources include Hauksbók (AM 544, 4to – Völtuspá); AM 748, 4to (known as A – Vafþraðnismál 1-19, Grímnmál, Skírnismál 1-27, Hárbardsljóð, Hymiskvida and Baldrs draumar, the last of which is only preserved here); Codex Wormianus (W, AM 242, fol. – mentioned for Snorra Edda, but also contains Rigspula, not in R); Flateyjarbók (GkS. 1005, fol. – the only early MS of Hyndluljóð); Gks. 2367, 4to (R², mentioned above for Snorra Edda, but also contains Grottasöng, not in R).

Snorra Edda is a scholarly work apparently intended as a handbook for young poets. This thesis is concerned with two sections of Snorra Edda. Gylfaginning, ‘the Deluding of Gylfi’, is a compilation of mythological material which is intended to give students of skaldic poetry the necessary mythological background to interpret kennings. Snorri often uses the poems which were later preserved in the Elder Edda, and this connection shall be discussed at various points in this dissertation. The second section of Snorra Edda with which the thesis is concerned is the prose introduction to Skaldskaparmál ‘The Sayings / Language of Poetry’. In this section Snorri discusses poetic diction and in doing so he must recount the myths to which the diction refers. The Puhur are lists of heiti, or names

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for things ranging from rivers to giants appended to Sn.E. but of unknown authorship, and these, too, are important sources for this dissertation.

It is possible that the prose links and Snorra Edda could both draw on the works of scholars at Oddi writing in the latter part of the twelfth century. Snorri received his education there (1181 onwards) where he was fostered by Jón Loptsson. Jón was the son of an illegitimate daughter of King Magnús berfættr of Norway, and this relationship was acknowledged by the Norwegian kings. A poem, Nóregs konungatal, gives Jón’s genealogy back to legends of the Ynglingar, and this is evidence for the study of royal history, legend and poetry at Oddi. One must remember when handling these sources that the information therein derives from numerous sources, most of which were probably ultimately oral.

1.4 THE RECEIVED WISDOM

The most influential works of the twentieth century have only occasionally discussed the giants, and then in the context of the gods. There is valuable understanding derived from later nineteenth century study of comparative religion linking the giants of Norse mythology with the giants and Titans of classical mythology and demons of Sanskrit mythology. Studies which either directly or indirectly concern the giants are those by the comparative mythologists Georges Dumézil, Gabriel Turville-Petre, and Jan de Vries. Divergent approaches have been pursued in the latter part of the twentieth century by Lotte Motz, Marlene Ciklamini, Margaret Clunies Ross, Riti Kroesen and Gro Steinsland.

1.5 THIS SURVEY

The title, *The Role of the Giants in Norse Mythology*, is potentially too broad for a thesis of this length. Norse mythological sources are in practice largely restricted to Eddaic poetry and Snorra Edda, so the present discussion confines itself to giants recorded in both sources. Topics such as Ægir’s encounter with Geirröðr and his daughters, and the problem of Loki, have also received so much attention that they merit

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4 For the discussion of possible saga composition at Oddi see Einar ÖI Sveinsson, ‘Sagnaritun Oddaverja’ *Stúlta Islandica* 1 (Reykjavík: 1937).
separate discussion of considerable length. Similarly the giant-like figures who appear in
cagas such as Örvar-Odds saga, for example, will not be discussed here, though such
giants are indeed of interest. The subject of this dissertation concerns the interaction and
relationships between the gods and individual gods/goddesses and giants and giant-kind.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore any pre-Norse origins of giants.
Similarly I do not discuss the origins of Norse terminology for giants, such as jötunn and
furs, nor any possible distinctions between them.

I have taken the approach that it is often possible to make a distinction between myths
and the poems which report them. Some poems seem to be compositions intended to
perform a specific function such as to relay mythological data. Myths may lie within, but
the frameworks may be younger and/or intended to perform functions other than
recording myths. Myths may be told in various ways to illustrate preconceived points or
ideas. For example the myth of Óðinn and Gunni in Hávamál 12-14 is told as an
exemplum against drunkenness and in Hávamál 106-110 as an exemplum of male
infidelity. It is possible to tell only part of a myth in a text such as Gylfaginning, in
which for example, Snorri tells part of the content of Skírnismál. Many poems and myths
appear to function within their own space and time, and thus it is often difficult not only
to sequence mythological events but also to weigh one against another. There are clear
relationships between some Eddaic poems such as Vafáðnisvar and Alvisráð, which
appear to be composed within a similar tradition involving a wisdom game. This
convention appears also to have been adopted by Snorri in Gylfaginning and the
introduction to Skaldskaparmál. In light of this I have chosen to approach each poem
independently to prevent applying preconceived ideas. It may be valuable, at least when
considering the giants, to take this empirical approach so that we may have a better
understanding of the main focus of the poem and its possible functions. This principle
may be applied not only to the poems which contain the myths but to the myths
themselves. The framework of an Eddaic poem may have functions irrelevant to the
myths incorporated within it, which may have their own independent functions.
The Roles of the Giants in Norse Mythology

2 Ymir and Norse Cosmology

2.1 The Giant Ymir

Ymir, possibly meaning 'roarer', is one of the most frequently attested giants in Norse mythology though one of the most baffling. He plays an important role in the mythology as the cosmological giant out of whom the earth, seas and heavens were formed, and is also the sole progenitor of the giants having no parents of his own. Ymir is one of few giants for whom we have any sense of size. The heavens are said to have been made from Ymir's skull, the mountains from his bones, and boulders and rocks made from his molars. Therefore he seems to have been as large as the world itself. How his physical size compared to that of his descendants is difficult to determine except to presume that he was far larger. According to Snori, Ymir's blood alone was enough to drown the race of hrímþursar 'frost-giants' save Bergelmir who escapes with his wife on his lítgr, a scene reminiscent of Noah's escape from the Deluge on the ark. Thus it is from Ymir that the hrímþursar descend, and through Bergelmir and his wife that the race of giants continues.

In tracing the core of the myth of Ymir we can turn to a number of Ymir-kennings found in skaldic poetry. These kennings are significant in a great number of ways. Each kenning refers to an Ymir myth and uses one of the myth elements. For example Ymis hauss, meaning 'the sky' refers to the sky being made from Ymir's skull. This confirms that at least this element of the myth must be earlier than the skaldic verse in which it is

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5Ysp. 3: Early in ages, there where Ymir lived, was neither sand nor sea, nor frigid waves, and the earth had not found itself, nor heaven above, the void was gaping, and growth nowhere.

6Sn.E. Gýf. 7 (ed. Faulkes, p. 11).

found. It is logical to assume that elements of the myth found in kennings, such as this, are of considerable age because in order for the kenning to be understood by the poet’s contemporaries they should have had an understanding of the myth (or at least the relevant part of the myth). The works of skaldic poets can also be dated with a certain amount of accuracy. *Ymis blóð*, meaning ‘the sea’ can be found in a verse by Ormr Barreyjarðaskáld dated to the second half of the tenth century. The kenning *Ymis heaus* ‘sky/heavens’ is found in Amórr Bórðarson’s *Magníssrápa dróttkvöð* which is commonly dated to the mid-11th century. The kenning is also found in a verse of *Fríoðfjóðsaga* which exists in two versions: one is dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century and a longer version dated to the early fifteenth century.

Ymir may have been well known in the Norse pagan belief systems, if only because of his crucial role in the cosmology. He has been compared with primordial beings in other Indo-European belief-systems, some as far away as India. The possibility that the myth of Ymir has roots dating back to an ‘original’ set of Indo-European beliefs is an attractive one, and has inspired numerous interpretative possibilities. Much remains to be learned, however, concerning how he was perceived at the time our sources were composed. As the progenitor of the giants, do they share his characteristic features and in what ways?

### 2.2 Ymir in Völuspá

We have limited sources for Norse cosmology. Three Eddaic poems, *Völuspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, and *Grimnismál*, include cosmological information among other themes. Snorri’s *Gylfaginning* serves as an outline of the mythology as he knew it, and although he draws on the above sources for cosmological material, it is probable that he also incorporates material from sources now lost. The above strophe from *Völuspá* is an oft-cited reference to the first giant, Ymir, though it tells us nothing about his actual role in cosmology. 

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10. See *Grm.* 40, *Vn.* 21, *Sn.E. Gylf.* 8, for the element of the myth which associates Ymir’s blood with the sea.


the primordial period in Norse mythology. The poem is cryptic and puzzling, shifting from subject to subject. Strophes 3 and 4 seem to show a break in the sequence of cosmological events as outlined elsewhere (as in Sn.E. Gylf. 8 and Vm. 21):

Àôr Burs synir
biôôom um ypôo,
þeir er miôgarô
mæran skôpo;
þól skein sunnan
á salar steina;¹⁴
þá var grund gróin
grœnum lauki.¹⁵

(Vsp. 4)

The gap in the sequence of events between strophes 3 and 4 is unlikely to be due to a fault in the text of the poem itself, rather it seems to be that the poet decided not to include the events separating the murder of Ymir and the shaping of the world. In strophe 4 àôr, possibly meaning 'before' in this position, connects the contents of these strophes in such a way that it is possible to read them as a continuous train of thought. Some have translated àôr as 'until',¹⁶ and this translation places more emphasis on the sons of Burr than the picture of the primordial void. This implies a cause and effect relationship between the two strophes in that there was nothing but a gaping void and the giant Ymir until the sons of Burr lifted up the land. This leaves out Ymir's role in the shaping of the land and thus he may seem to be completely extraneous to the account and he does not appear in R. If àôr takes the meaning 'before', the emphasis is left on the picture of the void of which Ymir is a fundamental part:

Early in ages, there where Ymir lived, was neither sand nor sea, nor frigid waves, and the earth had not yet found itself, nor heaven above, the void was gaping, and growth nowhere, before the sons of Burr lifted up lands, they who made famous Miôgarôr, from the south the sun shone on the stones of soil, then was the ground grown with (a) green leek(s).

¹⁴ Salar steina is an unidentified place-name which may have once played an important part in the mythology. The name also appears in Vsp. 14 as Salarsteint in which it seems to be a place associated with dwarves. It may simply be a heiti for land.
¹⁵ Vsp. 4: Before the sons of Burr lifted up the lands, they who made famous Miôgarôr, from the south the sun shone on the stones of soil, then was the ground grown with (a) green leek(s) (lauki being the dative singular for onion or leek). Nordal suggests that the word either refers to grass or it means that the world was covered in leeks. Nordal (1978), pp. 15, 16.
Although these strophes are possibly connected in this way, *Völuspá* has an underlying thematic framework and ethical understanding, but seen through separate windows of perception, almost like looking into a shattered mirror. It appears to function through images of various occasions or significant periods in time. In strophe 3 the prophetess offers an image of the cosmos prior to the world describing the lack of things we see around us which make up our surroundings: *vara sandr né sær* ‘there was neither sand nor sea’; *né svalar unnir* ‘nor frigid waves’; *né upphiminn* ‘nor heaven above’, *en gras hvergi* ‘grass nowhere’. There was nothing but *ginnunga gap* ‘a gaping void’, and the primordial giant Ymir who will later provide the raw materials for all that which is absent. The sense of time is generalized *ár vas alda par er Ymir byggði* ‘early in ages, there where Ymir lived’, but this need not imply any specific point early in time, such as its very beginning. The word *áðr* serves to divide and compare the image of the early cosmos with an image of its present state as described in the following strophe. The prophetess has no need to discuss Ymir, though he is included as forming a component of the picture of the primordial cosmos. John Stanley Martin states, ‘The stress is on the yawning gap before any act of creation and it is hard to imagine a specific giant existing in this pre-creation void. Moreover, Ymir is extraneous to the account of creation in *Völuspá*.’\(^\text{18}\) Ymir is extraneous only in the sense that the prophetess does not include (or perhaps does not need to include) the events concerning how he came to form the cosmos. It may be hard to imagine Ymir living in the pre-creation void at the dawn of ages, just as it is hard to imagine him living ‘there where’ as opposed to ‘then when’. Therefore Ymir may not be extraneous if the prophetess is describing a period in time in which he was a fundamental component.

Pálsson suggests that a syntactical peculiarity in the use of *par er* ‘there where’ in *Völuspá* 3, ‘[implies that] during this stage of the creation of the world, the distinction between time and place is blurred.’\(^\text{19}\) In this way the sibyl describes the lack of distinction between time and place. We naturally look for a chronological ordering of

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events but it seems that there is a deliberate lack of sequential logic; thus the poem may be imitating the primordial chaos. Equally cryptic is the description in strophe 4 of the ground having been grown with a green leek: \( \text{há var grund gróin groenum lauki} \). \text{Lauki} (masc. dat. sing.) technically refers to only one leek as opposed to several leeks or greenery in general, and the significance of the leek cannot be known for certain. It may be that we are being shown an image or snap-shot of the beginning of vegetation or grass in general. Nordal offers only two possibilities: it either refers to grass in general, or nothing but leeks grew in the golden age — they being the best of grass.\(^{20}\) The Sibyl says nothing of a golden age in strophe 4, and is continuing the train of thought from the previous strophe. Strophe 3 and half of 4 show us an image of the primordial cosmos before the sons of Burr lifted up the land. The second half of strophe 4 shows another image of \text{Miôgarôr} immediately after the land was lifted, the sun shown and a leek grew. The word \text{lauki} (the metre would work with the plural \text{laukiim}) as it appears in the strophe is evidence enough to state that \text{lauki} is a single leek, and there is little justification to give the word in its current form a new and grammatically incorrect definition. It may not even be necessary if it is accepted that the image of the brand-new leek growing on the brand-new ground in the brand-new sunlight is a visualization of vegetation just beginning to flourish in its newly formed environment.

The leek could represent the first shoot of \text{Yggdrasill}. Cleasby-Vigfusson notes\(^{21}\) that \text{laukr} is occasionally used in similes and metaphors for sleek, taper-formed things; \( \text{rétr sem laukr} \) ‘straight as a leek’, and \( \text{blóð-laukr} \) ‘blood-leek, a sword’. In this definition Cleasby-Vigfusson add that a mast is called \text{skips-laukr}, ‘the leek of the ship’, which is also discussed in \text{Lex.Poet.}\(^{22}\) In this sense the \text{laukr} of \text{Völuspá 4} could be taken to refer to the first sprouting of the world-ash \text{Yggdrasill}, as it is at this stage that both time and place take shape and meaning. This can be compared with the description of \text{Yggdrasill} catching fire and groaning during Ragnarök at the end of the world in strophe 45. A parallel can be found in \text{Grm. 40} (which relates how \text{Ymir’s body parts} came to become

\(^{20}\) Sigurður Nordal (1978), pp. 15, 16.
\(^{21}\) Cleasby-Vigfusson (1957), s.v. \text{Laukr} pp. 374, 375.
\(^{22}\) \text{Lex.Poet. s.v.}
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Baðmr or hárí ‘(a) tree out of (a) hair’. This is often taken to mean that trees were made of his hair, but may instead refer to the one tree, the world ash.

Yggdrasill may represent the space-time continuum in Norse cosmology, and Vsp. 3 draws a picture of existence prior to the sprouting of this world-ash, which somehow seems to hold space and time together. The word gróa has several meanings derived from ‘grow’ (which is original but unusual) including ‘to grow together’ and ‘to be healed of wounds’. If we assume the meaning ‘to grow together’ it could be saying that as the cosmos forms Yggdrasill grows together with it, holding and binding it to the space-time continuum. The leek was also believed to have healing properties; therefore we may have an image of the growing together, binding and healing of the new cosmos.

It seems unlikely that Yggdrasill is a leek in the literal sense, but the descriptions of the Sibyl are cryptic.

It may be possible to compare the prophetess’s grammatical style in Vsp. 3 with other syntactical peculiarities found throughout the poem in which the völva ‘prophetess’ talks about herself in the third person. It may be that the odd use of syntax appears to be in line with the narrator’s cryptic style, and may therefore be deliberate. Helga Kress and Hermann Pálsson have recently revived the suggestion of Björn M. Ólsen (in Arkiv för nordisk filologi 30, 1914) that the poet is actually a poetess, though this remains speculative. In 1953 Gabriel Turville-Petre suggested, ‘...the ecstatic tone of Völuspá might lead to the suspicion that it was composed in an abnormal state of mind.’ The most that can be assumed with safety is that the narrator seems to be imitating the cryptic wording of a prophetess or fortune-teller. Therefore one must bear in mind when reading


Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder, vol. 11, p. 85.

For example Vsp. 22, 27, 28, 29, 30, 34, 37, 39, 56, 61 and 62 for the Sibyl referring to herself in the third person.


and translating Völuspá that the material may be deliberately puzzling, and a literal translation should reflect the cryptic nature of the Old Norse original.

2.3 COSMOLOGICAL MYTHS IN ORAL TRADITION INVOLVING YMIÐ

In Vafsrødismál Óðinn asks the wise giant Vafsrødînr hvaðan írð um kom29 to which he replies:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Vafsrødînr [kvaðí:]} \\
\text{Ór Ymís holdí} \\
\text{var írð um skópuð,} \\
\text{en ór beinom biörg,} \\
\text{hîmínn ór hausi} \\
\text{ins hrimkaldi íótns,} \\
\text{en ór sveita síóð.}^{30}
\end{align*}
\]

(Vm. 21)

In Grímnismál there is a nearly identical strophe:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ór Ymís holdí} \\
\text{var írð um skópuð,} \\
\text{en ór sveita sær,} \\
\text{biörg ór beinom,} \\
\text{baðmr ór hári,} \\
\text{en ór hausi hîmínn.}^{31}
\end{align*}
\]

(Grm. 40)

In these two strophes are a number of opposing alliterating word groups: biörg / beinom; sveita / sær; hausi / hîmínn. Both begin with Ór Ymís holdí / var írð um skópuð, and another structural similarity can be found in the beginnings of lines 3 and 6 of each strophe with en ór 'and out of'. The similarity between these two strophes could suggest either that they were copied from one poem to the another with slight alterations, or that they both originally belonged to the same oral tradition.

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29 Vm. 20: Whence did the earth come about?
30 Vm. 21: Vafsrødînr said: Out of the flesh of Ymir, the frost cold giant, was the earth shaped, and mountains out of [the] bones, the heavens out of his skull, and the sea from his sweat (=blood).
31 Grm. 40. The earth was formed out of the flesh of Ymir: the sea out of his blood, the boulders out of his bones, a tree out of a hair, and the heavens out of his skull.
Turville-Petre points to a possible connection between Ymir and the creation of the dwarves. This concerns a passage in *Vsp.* 9 in which the dwarves were made from the bloody surf of *Brimir* and ‘limbs’ of *Bláinn*:

```
pá gengo regin òll
á rekstóla,
ginnheilor goð,
ok um þat gættuz,
hvrr skyldi dverga
dróttir skeopia
ór Brímis blðði
ok ór Bláins leggiom.33
(Vsp. 9)
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This also appears in the fourteenth century *Hauksbók* version of *Völsúpa*:

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ór brimi blöðgu
ok ór Bláins leggjum.34
(H.)
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*Brim* means ‘surf’ and if so *Brimir* may be an Ymir-name, given that it is in the context of blood and the sea is (according to *Vm.* 21 and *Grm.* 40) made out of the blood of Ymir. *Bláinn* ‘blue’ may also be an Ymir-name, seeing that Snorri interprets the *Bláinn* in *Völsúpa* in terms of Ymir’s rotting flesh. He quotes *Vsp.* 9 and he relays a story of how the dwarves were maggots in the rotting flesh of his body:

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33 *Vsp.* 9: The all the ruling powers, most holy gods, went to their judgement-seats, and discussed about it, who should create hosts of dwarves out of Brímir’s blood and out of Bláinn’s (blue) leg bones.
34 Turville-Petre translates this as follows: from the bloody surf and the limbs of Bláinn. Turville-Petre (1964), p. 234.
35 If it is the form is *Brimir* it could be derived from *brimi* ‘fire’.
Blár- means ‘blue, blue-black’ and can refer to the colour of bruised flesh such as in the phrase blár ok blóðugr ‘blue and bloody’. It is also the colour a corpse turns after a number of weeks. If Snorri’s account is drawing on more sources than Völuspá, the myth may have been independent of it and could be part of another oral tradition. It seems unlikely that Snorri would have fabricated the dwarves’ development from maggots, but it is always a possibility that this is one of Snorri’s rationalisations. The fact that Ymir has, or seems to have, the names Bláinn (also found listed as a dwarf heiti in Skj. þul. IV, ii. Dverga heiti) and Brimir seems to suggest widespread knowledge, not only of Ymir, but also of his part in the cosmology.

Snorri adds further information which might stem from such an oral tradition concerning Ymir:

Par næst settuz guðin upp í sæti sín ok réttu dóma sín ok minntuz hvaðan
dvergar höfðu kviknæð i mælumni ok niðri í jörðumni, svá sem maðkar í
holdi. Dvergamið höfðu skipta þyöst ok tekst kviknæði í holdi Ymris, ok
vöru þá maðkar, en af atkvæði guðanna urðu þær vitandi manvitrz ok
höfðu mannz líki ok búu þó í jörðu ok í steinum.36

(Sn.E. Gylf. 14)

Gylfaginning post-dates Vafþrúðnismál, Völuspá and Grimmismál39 so it is fairly safe to assume that some of the information comes directly from these earlier sources. Yet

36Gylf. 14: Next the gods sat up in their seats and made their counsel, and noticed for themselves how the dwarves had quickened in the soil and below the earth, like maggots in flesh. The dwarves were formed first and had taken life in the flesh of Ymir, and were then maggots, but from the decree of the gods they came to know human consciousness and had human form and yet live in earth and stones. (ed. Faulkes, p. 15).
38Sn.E. Gylf. 8. They took Ymir and moved him to the middle of the yawning gap, and made out of him the earth: the sea and lakes out of his blood; the earth was made of his flesh, and boulders out of his bones; they made gravel and stones out of his teeth and molars and those bones which were broken.
39For example Grm. strophes 40 and 41, and Vsp. 5 being quoted in Sn.E. Gylf. 8, and Vm. 29 and 31 being quoted in Sn.E.Gylf. 5.
Snorri does add details which are not found in other extant sources such as: griót ok urðir gerðu þeir af tönnum ok ióxtum and af þeim heimum er brotin vóro.\(^{40}\) One can only wonder why Snorri does not name his other sources, but one possibility may be that these details derive from various scattered oral traditions which survived into his own day. It may be that \textit{Vm.} 21 and \textit{Grm.} 40 derived separately from such a tradition or another possibility could be that Snorri was aware of Ymir-kennings now lost which refer to stones as Ymir’s broken molars.

The myth concerning the giantess Jôrô ‘earth’ (Þórr’s mother) seems to conflict with the Ymir myth regarding the origin of land: we are told that the land, jôrô, was made out of Ymir’s flesh. There are numerous kennings which refer to a giantess Jôrô,\(^{41}\) which clearly connect her with the earth; in fact jôrô also means ‘land’. It would seem plausible to conclude that the jôrô (mentioned in passages such as \textit{Grm.} 40 and \textit{Vm.} 21) is interchangable with the giantess Jôrô. Further, another name for the figure of Jôrô is \textit{Fjörgyn}.\(^{42}\) The word \textit{fjörgyn} is of great antiquity: it has two plausible etymologies, one of which relates it to Old English \textit{fyrgen} and Gothic \textit{fairguni}, ‘mountain’ and further to various words for tree including modern English ‘fir’, cognate with Latin \textit{quercus}, so the word may have had an overall sense of ‘wooded mountain / forested mountain’. The second etymology relates both \textit{Fjörgyn} and the masculine god-name \textit{Fjörgynn} to the Lithuanian weather-god \textit{Perkunas} whose function seems to be very similar to that of Þórr.\(^{43}\) Both etymologies may be correct for Norse, giving a deity associated with thunder but also with wooded mountainous land. Halfsdrôr vandrosaskáld (late tenth century) echoes such a correlation of wooded mountain with giantess [1,5] when he describes Earl Hákon’s acquisition of Norway as his marriage to [Jôrô] ‘the only daughter of Ónarr, tree-grown’ [\textit{einga dóttur Ónars, viði gróna}].\(^{44}\)

Numerous studies have been undertaken concerning Ymir and variant forms in other Indo-European myths. In Iranian mythology the primordial being, Zurvan, conceived


\(^{41}\) See R. Meissner (1921), pp. 87-89.

\(^{42}\) \textit{Lex. Poet.} s.v.

\(^{43}\) Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, \textit{Íslensk Ordlistabók}, s.v. \textit{fjörgyn}; \textit{ARG.} §513, §560.
twins, one 'light and fragrant' and the other 'dark and stinking'. The light twin created the heavens and earth and the dark one created everything evil. This is comparable to Ymir in that he sprouts a man and a woman under his left arm (possibly armpit) as he sweats in his sleep. Óðinn is not the son of Ymir, but the son of Bestla, one of Ymir's direct descendants. It is possible that he can therefore be seen as the counterpart or variant of the light twin in Iranian mythology in that he creates the heavens and earth along with his two brothers (or possibly two Óðinn by-forms). The dark twin has no direct parallel in Norse mythology, but may, perhaps, be seen as the race of the giants in general. Ymir shares another striking parallel with Zurvan as the earth and heavens were made from his body: the sky was his head, plants were his hair and the earth was his feet.\(^45\) It seems likely that a primordial being, other than a god or spirit, was once an important component in the early Indo-European belief systems, and therefore it seems plausible that the myths surrounding him survived in oral tradition from an early age.

The name \textit{Ymir} has frequently been compared to \textit{Yima} (Sanskrit \textit{Yama}) 'twin'. De Vries points out that according to Tacitus the name \textit{Tuisto} 'twin' or perhaps 'hermaphrodite' belonged to the mythical first ancestor of the Germans (\textit{Germania II}), from whom all the Germanic tribes are believed to have descended.\(^46\)

Turville-Petre suggests, 'The Norse creation myths must be influenced by the Eastern ones, but it is not yet possible to say when and how this influence was exerted.'\(^47\) He suggests, among other possibilities, that the myths must have reached Europe at an early time when Indo-European language and culture were adopted, and in this case the myths must have been adapted, formulated and fossilised in the North.\(^48\) It is illogical to say that, because the Norse creation myths share striking resemblances with Eastern models, the Norse forms must have been influenced by them. According to the principle of diffusion, the Eastern and Northern variants probably developed independently from a single, central source. They would develop differently as they drifted apart and with the passing of time whilst certain features and themes remain fossilised in both cultures. It is

\(^{44}\) Hākonardápa 5, Skj. I B, p. 148.
\(^{45}\) See E.O.G. Turville-Petre (1964), ff. 278.
\(^{46}\) ARG. p. 573.
\(^{47}\) E.O.G. Turville-Petre (1964), p. 278.
also conceivable that some myths originated independently, but were similar because they had similar functions for similar peoples in similar circumstances. There are also a few myths which can be found around the world that seem to be based on human universals. Examples of such universal myths may be the dying god and the earth rising out of the sea. Therefore caution must be exercised when consulting Eastern myths in search for understanding of the Norse material. The Eastern myths seem to be related to the Norse creation myth, and if this is so, they are all likely to share a common older source, which in turn provides some idea of the age of the Norse creation myth. The longer the myths have been in circulation, the more the likelihood of there being variant names and sub-myths, such as the variant names Brimir and Bláinn and Snorri's account of the dwarves' origins in Ymir's rotting flesh. Furthermore it means that there is more likelihood of there having been ancient oral traditions involving Ymir and the myth of creation, which would explain various versions of what may once have been the same strophe in Vm. 21 and Grm. 40.

Robert Kellogg once suggested that the Eddaic poems never had a fixed text in oral tradition but were improvised on the basis of formulas like the Yugoslav epics studied by Parry and Lord.49 Lars Lönnroth argued that although Kellogg's position is untenable, 'this has' done Old Norse studies a very important service by insisting that we look at the Eddaic poems as oral texts and not as completely fixed literary compositions... It also appears quite likely that Eddaic texts were improvised, or were at least quite fluid and changeable, at an early stage in their transmission, before the Icelanders started to concern themselves so much with rigid metrical rules and the preservation of "correct" poetic diction... Recurrent formulas and oral variants in our present Edda texts may in some cases be explained as left-overs from such an earlier, more fluid stage in oral tradition.50 It may be that the myths involving Ymir were preserved as such 'oral texts' through a relatively fluid stage of development. It seems possible that Völsunga was one such oral text that was affected by fluidity of oral transmission given the fact that certain

48 Ibid, p. 278.
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Strophes have similar variants in other Eddaic poems, and that the subject matter shifts from theme to theme, including possible Christian themes introduced in later stages of development. Numerous variations between the R and H versions of Völuspá cannot be put down to simple scribal error, and this may suggest that they may have reached their present form partly as a result of oral transmission. This may also imply that there may not be a single Völuspá-poet or poetess, and that the poem in its present state may have had numerous contributors.

2.4 Ymir and Christian Themes Within Völuspá

Snorri tells us that the sons of Burr took Ymir and moved (him) into in the middle [of the] gaping void (ed. Faulkes, p. 11). This differs from Völuspá in that the earth is said to have been lifted up by the sons of Burr, giving the impression that it existed independently of Ymir. In fact, Snorri does not quote Vsp. 4, perhaps dismissing it in favour of another, now lost, source. Furthermore Snorri quotes Vsp. 3, but his second line is *pat er ekki var* ‘then when nothing was’ as opposed to *par er Ymir byggði* ‘there where Ymir lived’ as it is found in both R and H. Furthermore Snorri’s account has many striking parallels in Iranian mythology. He describes the hot world of Muspell on the one side and the frozen world of Niflheimr on the other with Ginnungagap in the middle. The Iranian cosmogony myths also concern the fusion of light and heat with cold and darkness, and the space between. There is a difference between the Norse and Iranian myths in that the light side is described as sweet-smelling and moist, and the dark side being dark, heavy, dry and stinking. This implies that the light side was (or had probably become) connected in some way with pleasantness and the dark side with unpleasantness. Snorri’s description of Muspell and Niflheimr presents both worlds in an ‘unpleasant’ context. Furthermore Muspell is considered hot and dry, whereas Niflheimr, although frozen, was far from dry. Snorri reports that Surtr stands on the edge of Muspell guarding it, and it is he who will destroy...

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51 An example of such oral recomposition can be seen in Ftnaz æsir elfa velli oc vm mold þinur matkan dōna oc a fimbol tys fornir runar (R, 57) and Hittaz æsar iða velli oc um mold þinur matkan dōna oc miñaz þar a megir doma oc a fimbulþys fornir runar (H, 53). The differences here do not interrupt the metre and the meaning is retained.
52 Took Ymir and moved (him) into in the middle [of the] gaping void (ed. Faulkes, p. 11).
the world with fire at Ragnarök (also found in Vsp. 52). There are definitely similarities between the two mythological accounts, but the differences are equally considerable.

Further, Völuspá stands alone in describing the earth having been lifted up, sinking beneath the waves, and rising anew from the sea after Ragnarök:

Sól tér sortna
sigr fólð í mar,
hverfa af himni
heiðar stírnor;
geisar eimi
við aldrnara,
leikr hár hiti við
hímin síalfan.\(^{55}\)

\((Vsp. 57)\)

In Vm. 47 & 48 we learn that Fenrir will swallow the sun, and this could be depicted on the Gosforth cross (fig. 1) and is possibly depicted on the Ovingham stone;\(^{56}\) thus two versions may have been concurrently in circulation. Furthermore this strophe can be compared with a similar strophe in Þórrfinnsdrápa by the Christian skald Arnórðr Þórdarson (c. 1064):


\(^{55}\) The sun turns dark, land sinks into the sea, the glorious stars vanish out of the sky, smoke rages against fire, high heat plays against heaven itself.

It appears Árnórr was aware of the contents and wording of Vsp. 57, and he freely uses this material in a Christian context.

The image of the new purified world rising from the water is reminiscent of baptism, in this case the baptism of the world after the fate of paganism. A convincing argument has yet to come forward proving that strophe 65 is pagan in origin:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{þá kóm ríki} \\
\text{at réginjómí} \\
\text{öflur ófán,} \\
\text{sá er öll ræðr.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Vsp. 65)

The possibility of Christian influences becomes evident when compared with Mark 13:24-6: 'But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken, and then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory'. These motifs and the wording of Vsp. 65 are echoed in Hyndl. 44, showing that they were widely known. Other stanzas also seem to echo Mark 13: Vsp. 45 cf. Mark 13.12 and 7; and Vsp. 57, cf. Mark 24-5. If it is the case that hinn ríki is Christ coming down to rule over all, after the baptism of the world, we might have a clue as to why Ymir’s role in the creation of the world is appears to be limited. It may be that

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57 The bright sun becomes black; the land sinks into the dark sea, Austri’s labour (sky) shuts; all the sea crashes on to the mountains — before a lovelier lord than Pórfinnr will be born in the isles (Orkney); may God keep that keeper of the court (Kock, I, p. 162-3).
58 For the view that this strophe is not original to the poem see Dronke (1997), pp. 192-3, and references to von See there.
59 Then the mighty one comes down from above (at divine judgement?), the one who rules all.
the poet knew Ymir's role in Norse cosmogony, but prefers to present the world as land originally lifted from the depths of Ginnungagap, only to sink again under the sea after Ragnarök and then to be lifted again after its baptism. Ymir's role in the cosmogony as described in Völuspá, probably stems from the same oral tradition as Vafþrúðnismál and Grimnismál, though his role, as it appears in Völuspá, has possibly been abbreviated. In an orally composed poem, indebtedness to Christian sources does not necessarily imply a Christian poet.

2.5 THE FORMATION OF YMIＲ AND HIS DESCENDANTS

The sources for Ymir are reasonably close in agreement concerning his role and characteristics. By the time of the composition of the Eddaic poems, Ymir seems to have been recognised as the first living being. It may be that Surtr lived before Ymir as Snorri describes him guarding the first world Muspell:

Snorri relates that Muspell⁶¹ existed before any other world, but he does not specifically tell us that Surtr guarded it from its beginnings. He uses the present tense to describe Surtr and the future tense to describe what he will do, but we know nothing about his origins:

⁶⁰ Sn.E. Gylf. 4: Then Third spoke: ‘But first was that world in the southern half which is called Muspell; it is bright and hot, that direction is flaming and burning [and it is impassable for those that are foreigners there and are not native to it] (trans. Faulkes, p. 9). He is named Surtr who sits there on the edge of the land guarding it, holding a flaming sword, and at the end of the world he will go and harry and be victorious against all the gods and burn all the world with fire’ (ed. Faulkes p. 9).

⁶¹ Cognates of Muspell appear as muspille in Old High German Muspille (I, 57) and mudspelli / mutspelli Old Saxon Heliand lines 2392, 4360. Its meaning here is ‘(the Christian) doomsday’, perhaps literally ‘the mighty news/event’. Its origin and early sense are debatable, (see de Vries, ARG., II, p. 394 and fn. 2) and given this meaning it could be borrowed from German Christianity, in which case it would have to be a recent arrival in Norse mythology.
Surtr ok Stórverkr, 
Sækarlsmáli, 
Skærir, Skríyrmir, 
Skerkir, Salfangr. 
(Sn.E. Skj. Þul. Jötna heiti I)

If this is the same Surtr, and he is a giant, then he would (following Vafþrúðnishál) be 
descended from Ymir as we are told in Hyndluljóð:

Eru vóður allar 
frá Viðólf, 
vitkar Viðmeiði, 
<en> seióberendr 
frá Svarthófða, 
iótnar allir 
frá Ymir komnir.62
(Hyndl. 33)

And again in Vafþrúðnishál:

Vafþrúðir [kvaö:] 
Ór Élivágom 
stukko eitt dropar, 
svá óx, unz varð ór íótunn; 
þar órar ættir 
kómu allar saman, 
því er þat æ allt til atalt>.63
(Vm. 31)

Surtr may be a demonic figure who is associated with the giants,64 but as Faulkes points 
out, 'The name is used for a giant in general in skaldic verse.'65 What this tells us is that 
not all giants are confined to parameters set in other poems.

62 Hyndl. 33: All prophetesses come from Viðólf, all wizards from Viðmeiðr, and sorcerers from 
Svarthófði, all giants have come from Ymir.
63 Vm. 31: Vafþrúðir said: From storm-bays sprang poison-drops so it grew until out of it a giant came to 
exist. There all our geneologies came all together, therefore all of it is always (possibly referring to ættir) so 
terrible (atalt possibly meaning ‘fierce’ or ‘loathsome’ see Cleasby-Vigfusson, s.v. atalt p. 29). The 
second half of Vm. 31 is preserved only in Snorra Edda.
65 Ibid. p. 174.
As far as we know Ymir is the progenitor of all the giants. It seems to be possible, if not to translate, then to interpret the second half of Vm. 31 as follows: ‘There all our genealogies came all together, therefore all of it is always so terrible.’ What the strophe appears to be relaying is that the giants are indeed terrible (fearsome/loathsome), because their lineage descends from Ymir who was formed from poison-droplets. In appendices A and B numerous giant names are listed which can be associated with ferocity, loathsomeness and malevolence. This may indicate that the circumstances surrounding Ymir’s formation are central to why so many giants are so named. It may be that giants had already been seen as terrible when the details of the myth of Ymir’s creation developed (possibly as explanations). Some names that would be transparent to a medieval Icelander could be of relatively recent coinage, whereas obscure names which could only have been formed in a proto-language must be of great age. It is noteworthy that the word Ymir seems to be transparent insofar as it could be derived as an agent noun from ymja ‘to whine, cry’, but this could be a reinterpretation of a much older form.66

Many giant and giantess names seem to be related to earthly features, and according to Norse cosmogony as we know it, earthly features such as sand, mountains and water were made of Ymir’s flesh, bones (molars), and blood respectively. Most of these names appear in the pullur in an appendix to Skáldskaparmál. The tables in appendices A and B are of giant- and giantess-names with earth/water/bone associations which may be associated with Ymir in this way. The fact that there are so many names that can be classified (to a certain degree) in terms of Ymir-characteristics, seems to suggest that as the mythical progenitor of the giants, Ymir’s role in Norse cosmogony lends itself to his giant descendants. What cannot be known for certain is if Ymir’s specific role in cosmogony developed earlier, concurrently, or later than these associations.

The sources for the formation (or birth) of Ymir are in Vm. 30, 31 and Sn.E. Gylf.67 (in which Snorri cites Vm. 30-31).68 In Vm. 30 Óðinn asks, hvóðan Aurgelmir kom69 to which Vafþrúðnir replies:

66 See de Vries, AEW., s.v.
68 Grm. 40 and 41 are directly quoted later in Gylf. 8 (ed. Faulkes, p. 12).
Snorri elaborates telling us that in the centre of the dark frozen world of Niflheimr is the spring 
*Hvergelmir* from which twelve poisonous rivers flowed. These rivers *Élivågar* ‘storm bays’ flowed so far from their source they froze and ran no more, and became rime filling the northern part of Ginnungagap. *Élivågar* is also often used as the name of the river dividing the world of men and gods from Jötunheimr (*Vm. 31; Hym. 5; Sn.E. Sk. ch 17.*). The rime met with burning sparks from Muspell and began to melt the ice, and the droplets of poison quickened into the likeness of a man, Ymir. As mentioned above many giant- and giantess-names are associated with coldness, wetness and frost, and the term *hrimpursar* means ‘rime-giants’. To an extent it is a ‘chicken-and-egg’ question to ask if the myth concerning the creation of Ymir from the rime predates the giants’ associations with frost. It may, however, be the case that as the myth of Ymir developed, people may have begun to perceive the giants in terms of their mythical forefather – the sons and daughters of Ymir would naturally share some of his characteristics.

Snorri presents Ymir as *illr*, perhaps meaning ‘hostile’: *Hann var illr ok allir hans aettnem, þá köllum vér hrimpurra.* Evil does not seem to have been conceptualised in the Norse belief-system until contact with Christianity, and Snorri for that matter is writing approximately two and a half centuries after the conversion of Iceland, though this need not imply that Snorri is the first to treat the giants in this way. It may also be that the survival of such mythical creatures in later folklore (in the form of trolls for example) may have had an impact on the way Snorri perceives them, in a way not unlike the many Christian influences shown in the presentation of Grendel in *Beowulf*.

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69 From what did Aurgelmir come?
70 *Vm. 31*: Vafþrúðnir said: From storm-bays sprang poison-drops; so it grew until out of it a giant came to exist.
71 As it is found in *Vm. 33, Hym. 109, Grm. 31, Skm. 34: Sn.E. Gylf.* (ed. Faulkes ch. 3, p. 9, ch. 5, p. 10).
72 *Sn.E. Gylf. 5*: He was evil and all his kinsmen, we call them frostgiants (ed. Faulkes p. 10).
2.6 Ymir the Hermaphrodite?

Snorri relates the way in which Ymir reproduced:

\[...Svá er sagt [at] þá er hann svaf, fekk hann sveita; þá óx undir vinstri hönd honum móðr ok kona, ok annarr fötr hans gat son við öðrum. En þaðan af komu ættir.\]

(Sn.E. Gylf. 5)

The reason why it is assumed that Ymir is a hermaphrodite is because his føtr 'leg' begets a son with the other; thus Ymir belongs to both sexes. Perhaps Ymir can be classified as hermaphrodite according to the terminology of our time, but is this how 'he' was once perceived? There is no Old Icelandic word for hermaphrodite, and in all the sources Ymir takes the masculine gender, and never feminine, or, more importantly, never neuter.

It is generally believed that as a primordial mythical figure, as already mentioned, it appears that Ymir is related to the Iranian Zurvan, who is a hermaphrodite in the sense that he gives birth to twins. The name Ymir has been related to Yima 'twin' and in the Iranian mythology Yima is the first man. The similarities are striking and seem to suggest the existence of an early Indo-European primordial hermaphrodite.

It may be possible to interpret Ymir's bisexuality as a form of ergi. This derogatory term frequently refers to passive homosexuality, but is also applicable concerning transgenderism. An ideal example of this is in Ls. 23:

[Óðinn kvað:]  
...vartu fyr iðró neðan  
kýr mólkandi ok kona,  
ok hefir þu þar <börn of> borit,  
ok hugða ek þat args adal.  

(Ls. 23)

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73 Sn.E. Gylf. 5: So it is said that when he slept, he sweated. Then under his left arm grew a man and woman, and one foot begot a son with the other. Thence came kindreds (ed. Faulkes, p. 10).
74 R. Much, Die Germania des Tacitus, 2nd ed. (1959), 22.
76 Óðinn said: you were beneath the earth, milking cows and a woman, and you have borne children there, and I thought that (was) the inheritance of a pervert.
The consistent theme throughout *Lokasenna* is the shameful deeds of which the gods are guilty. It may be that potentially shameful sexual attributes might have led to later perception of Ymir as evil, as seems also to have happened in part with Loki.

The word *Ymir* has a confusing and possibly ancient etymology. The closest word in Norse is the verb *ymja* meaning ‘to roar, groan, whine, cry’: *hann grét sárlíg ok umði,* svá bar hann prúðliga söttna at engi maðr heyrði hann ymja; pá umðu þeir er á heyrðu ok hlógu at. *Ymja* can also mean to resound or groan: *ymja mun i báðum eyrum þeim er á heyrir,* umðu ólskálir; and *umðu oddlár.* Another meaning is howl: *ymðu Úlfhéðnar,* *ymr bjóðar-ból.* Appendices 1 and 2 list the names of giants and giantesses which have associations with roaring or noise-making in general. This may suggest that ‘roaring’ is a substantial characteristic or trait of Ymir the progenitor of the giants. If the figure of *Ymir* originally derived from the same source as the Iranian *Yima,* then it appears at least that the name *Ymir* has taken on some new meanings. Whatever the name for any ancient Indo-European hermaphrodite once was, its earlier meaning (perhaps ‘twin’) may have been lost, and it may have been thereafter associated with *ymja* ‘to roar’.

Interestingly, the description Snorri gives of Ymir’s reproductive capabilities is reminiscent of the way in which Ymir was himself formed. It could be that his sweat drips and forms a man and woman in the same way that Ymir was formed of the poisonous droplets of melting rime. If this is the case, it seems to have little to do with sex or sexuality at all. Snorri’s description of Ymir’s legs having a son with each other, on the other hand, seems to imply that they were of opposite sexes capable of producing offspring. Snorri is our only source for this particular information concerning his legs.

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77 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 726.
78 *Hnm.* 116 (Gustav Indrebo, ed.).
79 *O.H.L.* 39
80 *O.H.L.* 75
81 *Stt.* 433
82 *Vsp.* 45
83 *Akv.* 34
84 *Hkn.* 8
85 *Fagrsk.* 8
86 *Anon.* XIII B7 *Ski.* B.2, p. 148.
and thus we cannot determine its age and it could possibly be a late development. The information concerning Ymir's sweat is similarly confined to Snorri, but the fact that it shares similarities with Ymir's own formation may suggest an earlier date, though this could not be proven without datable kennings which make use of giant names such as 'Ymir's sweat'.

2.7 THE EXTENT OF YMIR'S COSMOLOGICAL ROLE

Ymir shares many characteristics with his Eastern counterparts, but he also appears to have developed considerably both in the North and possibly in the East since his possible Indo-European origin. As a result one must bear in mind that the myth of Ymir seems to be comprised of countless components, some possibly Indo-European, some Germanic, and some Norse. His role in Norse cosmogony appears to have become intermixed with giants bearing names associated with both his characteristics and the components of the world which are said to have been made of him.

Ymir's role is a passive one in that he does not create the world but it is composed of him. The sons of Burr: Óðinn, Vili and Vé and/or Òðinn, Hœnir and Lóðurr killed Ymir and made the world from his flesh. The gods charge themselves with the ordering of the cosmos, and in this organizing the giants never seem to take a willing part, particularly Ymir. The gods take four dwarves and set them under the four corners of Ymir's skull thereby ordering the four directions. They organize the body and blood of Ymir in concentric circles. The land of the outermost circle is Jötunheimr 'giant worlds' and the innermost is Ásgarðr 'enclosure of the Æsir'. Separating them is the djúpi sjár 'deep sea' and Miðgarðr 'middle-enclosure', which serves as a defensive works protecting Ásgarðr and also serves as the home for mankind. Therefore Ymir is a part of the cosmos, but involuntarily so.

88 Vsp. 18.
90 Sn.E. Gylf. 8 (ed. Faulkes, p. 12).
91 Snorri may be rationalizing at this point, as nowhere else do we find any such precise description.
3 ÖÐINN AND THE GIANTS

3.1 ÖÐINN’S SEARCH FOR WISDOM

The relationship between Öðinn and the race of giants is perplexing, being full of contradiction and duality. He presides over the slain in Valhöll, and is also the god of hanged or sacrificial victims. Öðinn is versed in magic and in Hávamál we have a list of his spells which he learned from the giant Bolpor, his maternal grandfather, one of which concerns his powers over hanged men:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hat kann ek it tolpta:} \\
\text{ef ek sél á tré uppi} \\
\text{váfa virgílná,} \\
\text{svá ek ríst} \\
\text{ok í runum fák} \\
\text{at sá gengr gumi} \\
\text{ok mælir við mik.}^{93}
\end{align*}
\]

(Háv. 157)

It appears that spells such as those listed in the ‘Ljóðatal’ are a form of useful wisdom, and the runes a form of arcane and other-worldly wisdom. In search of this arcane wisdom Öðinn sacrifices himself to himself on the ash Yggdrasill ‘Öðinn’s horse’, and in doing so he takes up the runes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gunlnóó mér um gaf} \\
gullnom stóli á} \\
drykk ins dýra miðdar; \\
ill lógið} \\
lét ek hana eptir hafa \\
sins ins heila hugar, \\
sins ins svára sefa.\text{ }^{92}
\end{align*}
\]

(Háv. 105)

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\text{92 Háv. 105: On the golden chair Gunnlóð gave me a drink of the dear mead; after I gave her an ill payment, for her sincerity, for her heavy mind.}

\text{93 Háv. 157: I know it, the twelfth: if I see up on a tree a hanged corpse swaying, I cut runes and paint runes, in such a way that the man walks and talks with me.}

\text{94 The term ‘Ljóðatal’ for this section of Hávamál was first coined by K. Müllenhoff, Deutsche Altertumskunde V (Berlin: 1891).}
In this strophe nam is the verb ‘to pick up’. The word nam has other meanings which often imply the use of force, thus it is a temptation to see Öðinn not only finding the runes, but taking, or claiming them for himself.

In many respects wisdom is regarded to be a valuable source of power or advantage. In Norse mythology we often find that ‘wisdom’ is expressed in terms of tangible objects, particularly a drink, often intoxicating, or more specifically, a mead such as the mead of Mimir’s well, comparable with the mead of poetry. The acquisition of wisdom is often Öðinn’s primary motivation, and he goes to any length to obtain it: sacrificing an eye, sacrificing himself and putting his safety in jeopardy.

3.2 THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN ÖÐINN AND VAFPRÚDNIR

In many myths in which Öðinn plays a primary role, he encounters or engages giants, who, for the sake of the theme, provide obstacles to his acquisition of sources of wisdom. Yet the case of Vafþrúðnir is exceptional in that what Öðinn gains from the encounter is evidence that he is the wisest. Vafþrúðnir is the wisest among giants, and there is the implication that his reputation threatens that of Öðinn:

{Háv. 139: No one comforted me with bread, nor with the (drinking) horn, I searched below, I seized the runes, I cried out I seized them, I fell back from there.}
Frigg pleads with Ôôinn not to face the giant who is believed to be the wisest of his kind. Many have questioned why Frigg should bother asking this, as we learn in Lokasenna that she knows all fates:

\[
[Óðinn kvað:
Rāð þú mér nú, Frigg,
allz mik fara tíðir
at vítia Vaþþrûônís;
forvitni mikla
kveð ek mér á formom stófom
við þann inn alsvinna iötun.\]
\]
\[(Vm. 1)\]

Why should she concern herself with Ôôinn’s safety if she knows that his fate lies not with Vaþþrûônír, but the wolf Fenrir? Perhaps the description of Frigg in Lokasenna is generous or not universal, or the Vaþþrûônísmál-poet’s knowledge of Frigg differed from that of the Lokasenna-poet. It may be that the Vaþþrûônísmál-poet had to intensify the reputation of this wise giant, who is referred to nowhere other than in Vaþþrûônísmál and the Æulur (Sn.E. Sk. IV b. Jótna heiti I, 5).\] The question is to what extent is this an Ôôinn poem, and to what extent is it a Vaþþrûônír poem? Is Vaþþrûônír a significant character in the mythology, or is the poem devised to illustrate the greatness of Ôôinn?

The name Vaþþrûônír breaks down as veþla ‘to fold’ (or possibly ‘to weave’) and the second element frúdr roughly meaning ‘strength’.\] Cleasby-Vigfusson translate the

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\[Vm. 1: \] Ôôinn said: Advise me now, Frigg, since I desire to visit Vaþþrûônír; I say [that] I have great curiosity on old staves (possibly meaning ‘old things’) against him, the all-wise giant.

\[Ls. 29: \] Freyja said: Mad you are, Loki, when you tell your loathsome tales, I consider that Frigg knows all fates, though she may not tell (them) herself.

\[Sn.E. Sk., (ed. Faulkes I, p. 111).\]

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name as ‘doughty-riddler, riddle-master’. This translation fits the theme but may be imprecise in meaning. It is likely that Cleasby-Vigfússon’s translation may have been influenced by the poem itself. Its literal translation might approximate to ‘mighty-weaver’, which metaphorically might be interpreted as ‘doughty-riddler’.

Vafprúðnismál seems to serve several purposes; the most apparent is the transmission of Norse themes of cosmology, cosmogony and eschatology. Secondly, and less recognizably, it identifies Óðinn, providing an example of his characteristics, determination, and cunning, including a description of his own part in the mythology.

The myth is the classic Óðinn wisdom-contest in that Óðinn and Vafprúðnir wager their heads on the depth of their knowledge.

[Vafprúðnir kvað:]
Hví þú þá, Gagnráðr,
mæliz af gólfí fyrir?
Farðu í sess í sal!
þá skal freista,
hvárr fleira viti,
gestr eða inn gamli þulr. 101

(Vm. 9)

The key to the contest is Óðinn’s disguise and alias Gagnráðr, literally ‘contrary-advisor’, which may also be interpreted as ‘counter-explainer’. Gagn- is defined by Cleasby-Vigfusson as an adverbial prefix meaning ‘counter’,102 and a secondary meaning of ráða is ‘to explain or read’103 (for example ráða gátu — to interpret a riddle and ráða draum — to interpret a dream). Therefore one possible interpretation of Gagnráðr is ‘counter-interpreter’. There may be word-play involved in that gagn is also a noun meaning ‘gain, advantage, use’ and gagna is a verb meaning ‘to help’.104 The primary

100 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 747.
101 Vm. 9: Vafprúðnir said: Why do you then Gagnráðr, speak off (from?) the floor? Go to a seat in the hall! Then it must be tested to see who knows the more, the guest or the aged sage. There is no certain technical meaning for the word þulr, but in this case it probably takes the meaning ‘wise-one’ or ‘sage’.
102 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 186, 187.
103 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 485, 486.
meaning of the noun rāô is ‘counsel, advice’ and the verb rāôa ‘to advise, to counsel’. Therefore the interpretation ‘useful advisor’ seems equally as possible as ‘counter-interpreter’ and ‘contrary-advisor’. A likely interpretation of this would be ‘disputant’. It is also plausible that all senses would have been recognized.

Vafprûônir knows that Óðinn’s fate lies at Ragnarök:

```
Vafprûônir kvaô:
Ülfir gleypa
mun Aldaðôôr,
þess mun Viðarr <v>reka;
kalda klapta
hann klyfia mun
vitnis vîgi at.107
```

(Vm. 53)

Óðinn assumes Vafprûônir is aware of this; thus he challenges Vafprûônir in disguise. Given that the audience also knows Óðinn’s fate, one can suggest that the drive of the poem is not whether Óðinn will win the contest, but how. Narrative tension is developed in observing how he manipulates the situation. In his victory we develop an appreciation of Óðinn’s character, which thereby assumes definition. Vafprûônir himself praises Óðinn’s wisdom in the last strophe:

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105 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 485.
107 Vm. 53: Vafprûônir said: The wolf will swallow the Father of Men. That Viðarr will avenge; he will cleave [the] cold jaws at the slaying of [the] wolf (or ‘...of the wolf in fight’).
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Vafprûônir kvaô:
Ey manne þat veit,
hvat þu i árdaga
sagôir i eyra syni;
feigom munni
mælta ek mínâ forna stafi
ok um ragna rêk;
nú ek við Öðin deildak
mínâ orôspeki;
þú ert æ visastr vera! ¹⁰⁸

(Vm. 55)

It may be as McKinnell suggests, that a distinction between wisdom and knowledge can be seen in the questions asked by both contestants.¹⁰⁹ Vafprûônir’s questions concern the naming of various objects or cosmological features:

Hvé sá hestr heitir
er hverian dregr
dag of dróttmôgo? ¹¹⁰

(Vm. 11)

Hvé sá lör heitir
er austin dregr
nört of nýt regin? ¹¹¹

(Vm. 13)

Hvé sú á heitir
er deiðir með iöna sonom
ground ok með goðom? ¹¹²

(Vm. 15)

Hvé sá völfr heitir
er finnax vigi at
Surtr ok in sváso goð? ¹¹³

(Vm. 17)

¹⁰⁸Vm. 55: Vafprûônir said: No man knows what you in days of old said into the ear of your son; I talked with a fey mouth about my ancient staves (old things) and Ragnarök; now I dealt [out] my word-wisdom against Öðinn, you are always the wisest of beings!
¹¹⁰Vm. 11: What is the horse called, who drags each day over men?
¹¹¹Vm. 13: What is the stallion called, who from the east drags night over the gracious gods?
¹¹²Vm. 15: What is the river called, which separates the land of the giants’ sons, from the gods?
¹¹³Vm. 17: What is the field called, where they will encounter each other in battle, Surtr and the dear gods?
Óðinn’s questions concern origins and endings, questions which require both a greater amount of knowledge and ability to answer. This can be taken further in that Óðinn’s final question, hvat mælti Óðinn, áðr á bál stigi, sjálf í eyra syni? is the same type of question that Vafþrúðnir asks. So not only is there a distinction between wisdom and knowledge, but Óðinn betters Vafþrúðnir in both lines of questioning. Óðinn’s final question may resemble those of Vafþrúðnir (doubtless an aspect of the skill of an individual poet), but in origin it seems less to belong to the collection of esoteric knowledge, than to the framework-narrative of the wisdom-contest as in Heiðreks saga 73, which ends the wisdom-contest between Gestumblind (Óðinn again in disguise) and King Heiðrekr:

Hvat mælti Óðinn
í eyra Baldri,
áðr hann væri á bál hafðr?

(Hr. 73)

Perhaps the kind of wisdom involved in this contest is not to be found in the answers, but in the questions asked. Ciklamini sees Óðinn’s question as a lucky escape, and stresses, ‘Óðinn’s cunning is to be emphasized, not his knowledge which equals but does not surpass the information given by the giant.’ That Óðinn spoke something into the ear of Baldr as he lay on the pyre may have been an early component of the myth of the death of Baldr. This myth survives primarily in Sn.E. Gylf. ch. 49, and may be based to some extent upon the Húsdrápa which is attributed to the Icelandic poet Úlfr Uggason. The myth is referred to in Völuspá (Vsp. 31-5, 62), which may have been composed in the late tenth century. Lastly it appears in a semi-euhemerised account by Saxo Grammaticus (Gesta Danorum, III i-iv), which differs considerably from Snorri’s version.

114 Vm. 54: What did Óðinn himself say in his son’s ear before stepping upon the pyre?
115 Hr. strophe 73: What did Óðinn say into the ear of Baldr before he was raised on to the pyre?
117 This poem is associated with events of 983.
The fact that the myth of the death of Baldr appears in two tenth-century sources and a non-Icelandic source, coupled with the fact that Snorri appears to offer the myth special attention, seems to imply a general importance to the mythology as a whole. The myth is of structural importance within the quasi-historical framework of the mythology: in Gylfaginning the death of Baldr leads to Ragnarök, and this structure is implied in Völuspá. If this myth is of great importance to the mythological framework, then perhaps it was originally more elaborate than the version presented by Snorri. There seems little reason to doubt that at some point during Baldr’s funeral, Óðinn whispered a secret into the ear of his dead son. Thus the question ‘What did Óðinn himself say in his son’s ear before stepping upon the pyre?’ may be as substantial, insofar as the mythology is concerned, in the same way as Vafþrúðnir’s questions, such as: *hvé sá hestr heitir er hverian dag dregr, dag of dróttmúgo.*¹¹⁹ It is certainly the same sort of question outlined by McKinnell,¹²⁰ and perhaps we can see Óðinn adding insult to injury by turning Vafþrúðnir’s categorical line of questioning against him. Thus Ciklamini’s comment, ‘Again Óðinn’s cunning is emphasized, not his knowledge which equals but does not surpass the information given by the giant,’¹²¹ is not necessarily the only possible interpretation. It is possible to interpret Óðinn’s final question in terms of cunning and an unsurpassable knowledge of the mythological-historical events. Furthermore Vafþrúðnir boasts that he can speak the truth concerning the secrets of the giants and all the gods: *Frá íøtna rúnom ok allra goða ek kann segja satt.*¹²² Óðinn’s final question may resemble those of Vafþrúðnir, but in origin it seems to belong to the framework narrative of the wisdom-contest, since it also appears at the end of a very different list of questions in Heiðreks saga. Whatever Óðinn spoke into his son’s ear is one such secret which, among the living, only Óðinn knows; thus he will always be the wisest of beings as Vafþrúðnir himself is forced to admit: *þú er æt visastr vera!*¹²³

Whilst transmitting mythological information, Vafþrúðnismái highlights Óðinn’s cunning and knowledge, and Vafþrúðnir acts as an instrument of the poet to demonstrate

¹¹⁹ *Vm.* 11.
¹²² *Vm.* 43.
it. One of many questions is whether or not Vafprûônir is a giant invented by the poet to suit the purposes of his poem, or was Vafprûônir an important part of a pantheon of the giants? His name appears in the *Pulur*, mnemonic lists of heiti, and another question is how old are the *Pulur* and does his listing there predate *Vafprûônismál*? If so, was ‘Vafprûônir’ merely an obscure giant-name picked from the *Pulur* to create *Vafprûônismál*?

A number of *pulur* may have been in circulation at the time the poem was composed, and the obscurity of the name ‘Vafprûônir’ seems to suggest an early origin, though it could possibly be the creation of the poet. There are two interesting possibilities: one that Vafprûônir is a relic of a forgotten poem surviving only in ancient *pulur*, to be resurrected for this confrontation with Óðinn, or secondly that Vafprûônir is merely a fabrication of the poet to highlight Óðinn’s qualities. There is no way to know for certain, but the fact remains that Vafprûônir plays no other role in the mythology as a whole, if he did, one would expect to find such an important role explained at some point in *Vafprûônismál*.

Little about his age can be deduced from his name alone, save Vafprûônir is unusual in terms of word formation, but this gives no indication of age. It may be associated with names indicating power and cunning of giants (cf. *Prymr*, *Fjôrverkr*, *Stôrverk*, and the dwarf *Alviss*). *Vm* 53,3: *pess mun Viðarr vreka*, includes a clear case of alliteration between *v* and original *vr*, later *r*; which Bjarne Fidjestøl regards as a probable indication of a date before ca. 1000. There is no evidence that the giant-name *pulur* are as early as that, although it is not impossible that they could be. Yet another possibility is that there were other sources for Vafprûônir, now lost, and conversely, it is equally as possible that we may have all there ever was to know about this giant.

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123 *Vm*. 55. You will always be the wisest of beings!
3.3 ODINN AND THE ACQUISITION OF THE MEAD OF POETRY

The myth of Ôôinn and the acquisition of the mead of poetry is similar to Vafprûônismàl concerning the relationship between god and giant, yet there are important differences. The myth of Ôôinn and Suttungr is only referred to in Háv. 12-14 and 104-110, and there are few surviving references in skaldic poetry to either Suttungr or Gunnlôô. In strophes 12-14 the myth of the acquisition of the mead of poetry is told as a warning against drunkenness. Strophes 104-110 are a synopsis of a longer myth, or collection of myths, which is also preserved in Sn.E. Sk. 2.

The myth is alluded to in kennings used by various skaldic poets, though we have no skaldic poem discussing the myth itself. Among these kennings, one of the more oft-cited is found in Egill Skalla-Grimsson’s Höfuôlausn:

berk Ôôins mjôô
á Engla bjôô.\textsuperscript{126}

\textit{(Höfuôlausn 2)}

Other kennings for poetry include Yggs fuull ‘Ygg’s cup (Ôôinn’s cup)’\textsuperscript{127}, Vidurs pyfi ‘Viôurr’s theft (Ôôinn’s theft)’, horna fors farms Gunnlaôar arma ‘the waterfall of the horns of the burden of Gunnlôô’s arms’, Surts cettar sylgr ‘the drink of Surti’s tribe’, and Gillings gjôld ‘the weregild for Gillingr’\textsuperscript{131}, to name but a few. These kennings point to an early date for the myth, and also they incorporate many characters from the myth as we have it in Hávamàl. This points, not only to an early origin of the myth, but one which was wide-spread and well-known. The only way one can interpret many of these kennings is knowing the myth, or cycle of myths, to which they refer.

\textsuperscript{127} Den norske-islandske Skjaldedigtning, Finnur Jônsson, ed., (København: 1912-1915), B, I, 38, 6. Translation by E.O.G. Turville-Petre (1964), p. 38. Arinbjarnarkvida (Eg.) c. 3\textsuperscript{rd} quarter of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 34, I. Translation by E.O.G. Turville-Petre (1964), p. 38. Sonatorrek (Eg.) c. 3\textsuperscript{rd} quarter of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 153, 15. Translation by E.O.G. Turville-Petre (1964), p. 38. Hallfreôr vandræôaskâld, (turn of the 10\textsuperscript{th} to 11\textsuperscript{th} century).
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 60, I. Translation by E.O.G. Turville-Petre (1964), p. 38. Hál. c. 985.
As mentioned above, *Vafprûðnismál* seems to be a didactic colloquy specifically designed to relay varying mythological themes, whilst highlighting Ôôinn's characteristics. The myth of Ôôinn and Suttungr appears to be a combination of myths culminating in the acquisition of the mead of poetry. The myth itself recounts a complex series of events beginning with a treaty between the Æsir and the Vanir, which is sealed by their spitting into a vat and mixing it until it formed the all-knowing Kvasir, who was subsequently killed by the two dwarves, Galarr and Fjalarr. They then brewed his blood into mead which was later paid to Suttungr as compensation for the murder of his father, Gillingr. The mead was taken to Hnitbjörg where it was guarded by Suttungr's daughter Gunnnlöð. Ôôinn seduces her and manages to steal the mead, and taking the form of an eagle, carries the mead in his crop back to Ásgarðr where the Æsir are waiting with vessels to collect it. A drop spills out on the ground outside Ásgarðr; this is called the *skál(d)fîfla hlut* (which Snorri seems to imply comes out of the bird's backside). Thus Suttungr plays an involved part in the mythology, unlike Vafprûðnir, who seems to be essentially a component in the colloquy framework of a poem designed to relay a variety of mythological information.

The name 'Suttungr' appears in *Sn.E. Sk. Pul.* IV *Jötna heiti* I. 2 and *Alvissmál* 34 where the giants are referred to as *Suttungs synir*. The name also appears in the kenning *Suttunga mjöð* referring to the mead of poetry. The comparatively frequent occurrence of *Suttungr* suggests that this giant may have had deeper roots in the mythology than Vafprûðnir, particularly given his role in Ôôinn's acquisition of the mead of poetry. Like the name *Vafprûðnir*, the giant-name *Suttungr* is obscure in meaning. De Vries questioned whether the name is in some way connected with the giant name 'Surtr': 'Wie Suttungr zu verstehen ist, wissen wir nicht; der Name, der zu verschiedenen Deutungen Anlaß gegeben hat, ist nicht erklärt; nur ist es bemerkenswert, daß Eyvindr in seinem Háleyglatal (Skj. I, 60) erzählt, daß Odin den Met fliegender aus Surts stókkdöulum.

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122 It is noteworthy that these two names appear in the Pulur under *Jötna heiti* and not under *Dverga heiti*.
123 It is noteworthy that the form *Suttunga* is either gen. pl. 'Suttungar', or gen. sg. of a name *Suttungi*. Therefore there is a possibility that Álvis is referring to someone or something else.
124 *Sn.E. Sk.* 3 (ed. Faulkes I, p. 11).
geholt hat; gibt es einen Zusammenhang zwischen Surtr und Suttungr? Finnur Jónsson (Háv. 106) suggested Suttungr is a patronymic, which Magnusson discounts. It seems feasible that sut- is derived from either sótt ‘physical sickness’ or sút ‘grief, sorrow, affliction’. -Ungr is a patronymic suffix as found in Völs-ungr, but also is used in wider derivational senses as in öld-ungr, lon-ungr and breðr-ungr. The circumstances in which Suttungr is introduced in Hávamál suggests ‘mourner’ as a possible interpretation. Suttungr, stricken with grief, seeks revenge for the murder of his uncle Gillingr. Simek comments that, ‘because there is no clear etymological interpretation of the name [Suttungr], it is extremely uncertain if Suttungr indeed played a role in the myth of the theft of the mead of the skalds, or if Snorri was the first to link the giant with this deed’. One may also argue that because the etymology of Suttungr is so unclear, its original or early meaning may no longer have been understood at the time Snorri was writing.

Gillingr is similarly difficult to define. Orchard suggests ‘screamer’, presumably deriving Gillingr from the verb gjalla which, according to Cleasby-Vigfusson, can mean ‘to scream or shriek’ in cases of birds of prey. If Gillingr is in fact derived from gjalla, and being applied to a giant, the definition is more likely to be as Cleasby-Vigfusson define it ‘to bellow’ (as it appears in Flateyjarbók i. 545) or more likely ‘of a man, to yell, shout’. Cleasby-Vigfusson define the dwarf-name Galarr as ‘an enchanter, the name of a dwarf in Völuspá, overlooking the Galarr in Skáldskaparmál with whom we are presently concerned. He bases this on the verb gala (which is not the same verb as gjalla) meaning ‘to chant, sing’. The second dwarf-name is Fjalarr, which may mean ‘deceiver/concealer’. Within the Germanic languages the etymology of Kvasir is obscure: possibly related to Danish kwasse ‘to crush a fruit in order to extract the juice’,
modern Icelandic *kvasa* ‘to become exhausted’, and modern English *quash*.\(^{144}\) The Danish sense is probably related to Old Slavonic *kvasu* ‘fermented drink’ and modern Russian *kvass* ‘beer’. *Kvasir* seems therefore to mean something like ‘the one crushed to produce intoxicating drink’; this would fit his role very well, but its meaning would probably not have remained obvious to an Old Norse poet. The definition of these names is of secondary importance to this work, but the fact that so many names that elude easy interpretation appear in a single myth, seems to point to an early origin. If this is the case, it may be possible to compare these earlier giants and their roles with giants appearing in later sources.

The myth of the origin of poetry illustrates a few of Óðinn’s qualities and characteristics. Óðinn’s thirst for wisdom and knowledge is at the core of the myth and comparable with his role in *Völuspá*, in which he interrogates the prophetess seeking her knowledge of the future. Furthermore, Óðinn’s quest for the mead of poetry can be likened to the myth in which he surrenders an eye for a drink of the mead from Mímir’s well in the Underworld, one of the three wells beneath the roots of Yggdrasill, another of which contains dragons. This is corroborated by archaeological finds of figures bearing a face (presumably a god) with one eye closed (see Fig. 2). One difference is that in the myth of the mead of poetry, Óðinn does not sacrifice anything, though he puts his life at risk. In this sense it can be compared to *Vafþrúðnismál* in which Óðinn risks his life in the wits-contest with the giant Vafþrúðnir. Similarly this myth can be compared to the myth found in *Hávamál* 138 and 139 concerning how he sacrificed himself to himself in order to seize the runes. The embodiment of inspiration, in the form of a liquor, may have roots in the Indo-European period, and particularly relevant is the Indian myth of the theft of soma. *Soma* is said to stimulate the mind and is closely connected with poets, and the *Rigveda* recounts how Indra, filled with soma, defeated the monster Vritra. The soma was brought to Indra from heaven by an

\(^{144}\) de Vries, *AEW*, 336.
eagle that had broken into an iron fortress to seize it. Some sources identify Indra himself with the eagle. There are differences in the myths of Indra and the soma and Óðinn and the mead, but there are enough similarities to rule out coincidence. It may be that as the myth diffused in opposite directions across Eurasia, Vítra and Suttungr took on different names, personalities and even roles in the myth, but both still act as an obstacle in both myths.

The myth of Óðinn and Mímir’s well can be compared with the Irish legend of Finn and the well of Bec mac Buain of the Tuatha Dé Danann. In this myth Finn gets a drink from the well of Bec mac Buain. He had been hunting with two companions and he found an open fairy-mount, within which was the well of wisdom guarded by the three daughters of Bec. When the three hunters approached the sisters tried to close the door, and some of the water fell from a bowl the eldest was carrying, and went into the mouths of the three. This shares similarities with both the myth of Óðinn and the mead of poetry, and also of Óðinn and Mímir’s well. The fact that the water is guarded by the daughters of the Bec (owner of the ‘fairy-mount’, perhaps comparable to a fortress) is comparable to that of the mead of poetry being guarded in its three vessels by Gunnlöð, the daughter of Suttungr (the owner of the hall in which the mead was kept), as well as the fact that the mead/water is provided by a female figure. There is another important similarity to the myth of Óðinn and Mímir’s well. The mead of Mímir’s well contains ‘wisdom’ as opposed to ‘poetry’, and the same can be said of the water of Bec’s well. In both cases the mead/water is kept in a well as opposed to vessels, at least until the appearance of Bec’s daughter, who, for some unknown reason, tries to carry the water whilst running to close the door. It can also be compared to the Indian myth (discussed above) in which the eagle steals the soma from an iron fortress. The myth of Bec’s well contains similar aspects of both the myth of the mead of poetry and the myth of Mímir’s well. Although it cannot be proven, it can be suggested that the myth of Mímir’s well, Bec’s well, and the mead of poetry may have a common source, and may even be early derivatives of the same Indo-European myth. The Irish myth seems to have the fewest narrative

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correspondences, since it lacks the central motif of the theft of the drink by a god in the form of an eagle. In the Sanskrit version the divine drink is a source of power rather than wisdom or poetry. The motif of the god stealing the divine drink (nectar) also appears in the Greek myth of the rape of Ganymede, cup-bearer of the gods, whom Zeus in the form of an eagle takes to Olympus. The Greek version also has the erotic element which appears in Norse associated with Gunnlög.

### 3.4 Some Comparisons Between Vafprûônismál, The Myth of Óðinn and the Mead of Poetry and Fáfnismál

Both Vafprûônir and Suttungr are powerful and threatening, and they own mighty halls which Óðinn enters in disguise. Yet in Vafprûônismál Óðinn pits his wisdom against a formidable enemy knowing the outcome of the contest before leaving Ásgarðr (or at least it is possible to see it this way). In his encounter with Suttungr, Óðinn does not seek to confront the giant in any physical or intellectual way, but he still seeks to outwit the dangerous giant who possesses the blood (mead) of the most knowledgeable of beings, Kvasir. Thus Óðinn’s motivation here is more in line with his various other episodes and his endless search for wisdom and knowledge.

The thematic complexity of this myth differs considerably from that of Vafprûônismál, and its primary objectives seem to be both to explain the origin of poetry and to tell how Óðinn came to be the master of it. Óðinn plays a typical role: in the guise of Bölverkr ‘evil-doer’, he outwits the giants, stealing the mead and gaining wisdom. The version of Óðinn’s acquisition of the mead of poetry in Hâvamál leaves out the origin of the mead and how it came to be in Suttungr’s possession. Snorri’s version in Sn.E. Sk. ties together the two myths of how the mead came to be, and how it came into Óðinn’s possession.

Ægir asks:

Myrkt þikki mér þat mælt at kalla skáldskap með þessum heitum.
En hvernig komu þeir æsir at Suttungamiði?147

(Sn.E. Sk. 2)

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147 Sn.E. Sk. 2: It seems obscure [to] me to refer to poetry with these heiti. How did the Æsir get the Suttungamjöðr (mead of Suttungi / Suttungr)? (ed. Faulkes I, p. 4).
This break in the myth suggests that Snorri saw these as two separate myths.

The blood of Kvasir, being a source for wisdom (in the sense of poetry), is comparable to the legend of Sigurðr and the blood of the dragon Fáfnir's heart. In this myth the blood enables Sigurðr to understand the chirping of the birds:

<En> er hann hugði at fullsteikt væri, ok freydi sveitinn òr hiartano, þá tók hann á fingri sínom ok skyniði hvárt fullsteiktværi. Hann brann ok brá fingrinom í munn sér. En er hiartblóð Fáfnis kom á tungo hánom, ok skilði hann fuglsröðd.\(^{148}\) (\textit{Fm. 31} prose)

There is a possibility that the myths of Kvasir's blood and Fáfnir's blood share a common source. Both Kvasir and Fáfnir were wise beings. (A refrain appears twice in \textit{Fafnismál} in which Sigurðr refers to Fáfnir as a possessor of wisdom: \textit{Segðu mér, Fáfnir, allz þik fróðan kvæða ok vel mart vita...} \(^{149}\)) Where Kvasir's blood was fermented into mead, Fafnir's blood was boiled to a froth, but in both cases the blood had been processed. Both Fáfnir and Kvasir are killed, and the blood provides the consumer with wisdom. Thus not only does the myth of Óðinn and the mead of poetry appear to be comprised of several individual myths, it may be possible to identify branches of its various segments.

3.5 ÓDINN AND THE GIANTESSES / FEMALE FIGURES

According to Snorri, Óðinn sleeps with Suttungr's daughter, Gunnlög, for three nights and she allows him three drink of the mead which is kept in three vessels, Óðrærir, Borð and Són:

\(^{148}\) \textit{Fm. 31}: Then when he considered that [it] was fully cooked, and the blood frothed out of the heart, then he took [it] on his finger and checked whether it was fully cooked. He burned (got burnt) and brought the finger in his mouth. But when Fáfnir's heart-blood came onto his tongue, <and> he understood the bird-voice.

\(^{149}\) \textit{Fm. 12}: Tell me, Fáfnir, since they say you are wise and [know] very many things. (Cp. \textit{Fm 14.})
För Böllverkr þar til sem Gunnlod var ok lá hiá henni íi. nætr, ok þa lofaði hon honum at drekkja af miðinum iii. drykki. Í enum fyrsta drykk drakk hann all<ö> or Óðreri, en í öðrum or Boðn, í enum þriðja or Són ok hafði hann þá allan miðöinn.\(^{150}\)

(Sn.E. Sk. 2)

Snorri’s account mentions the relationship between Óðinn and Gunnlod only in passing, focusing solely on the acquisition of mead. In Hávamál Óðinn, perhaps mockingly, presents Gunnlod as the naïve woman who too hastily offers her affection:

Gunnlod mér um gaf
gullnom stóli á
drykk ins dýra míaðar;
il lögjölð
lét ek hana eptir hafa
síns ins heila hugar,
síns ins svára sefa.\(^{151}\)

(Háv. 105)

Evans suggests that the last line of this strophe is strictly illogical and svárr can only mean ‘heavy’ or ‘melancholy’ in this sense.\(^ {152} \) One might take svára sefa in terms of being the reward to which lögjölð refers, but there is little supporting evidence. Gunnlod is instrumental in Óðinn’s successful theft, and he admits that he might never have left the mountain without her aid:

Ifi er mér á,
at ek væra enn kominn
iðtna góðom ór,
ef ek Gunnlaðar ne nytak,
ennar góðo kono,
þeirar er lögðømk arm yfir.\(^{153}\)

(Háv. 108)

\(^{150}\) Sn.E. Sk. (G58): Böllverkr went to where Gunnlod was and lay with her for three nights, and then she permitted him to drink three drinks of the mead, in the first drink he drank all [the mead] out of Óðrerir, then in the second draught out of Boðn, in the third draught from Són and he then had all the mead (ed. Faulkes, I, p. 4).

\(^{151}\) Háv. 105: On the golden chair Gunnlod gave me a drink of the dear mead; after I gave her an ill payment, for her sincerity, for her heavy mind.

\(^{152}\) D. Evans (1986), I, p. 120.
The first element of her name, gunn- [gunnr] is a by-form of guðr meaning ‘battle’, and the second element -lôô means ‘bidding’ or ‘invitation’, therefore ‘one who invites battle’ would be a suitable translation. This name is reminiscent of valkyrie names, though Gunnlôô does not appear listed as such anywhere in the Pulur. Interestingly the meaning of her name does not seem to reflect her character in the myth, unless it is to make her seem foreboding and threatening, and thus adding to the daring of Ôôinn’s deeds. Furthermore it seems a possibility that Gunnlôô may have another association with valkyries, in that the image of the woman offering a horn is a common motif. On the Tjangvide Stone there is a depiction of a figure sitting on the eight-legged Sleipnir, who is almost certainly Ôôinn, and greeting him is the figure of a woman offering a drink. This figure in particular could show Gunnlôô offering the mead to Ôôinn, but the only literary instance of a woman offering a horn to Ôôinn is in this myth. The idea that Ôôinn manages to win the heart and trust of a giantess named ‘battle-inviter’ certainly illustrates the necessity of his cunning and adds an element of irony in that if it were not for Gunnlôô he may never have escaped.

Hâvamâl on the whole is a compilation of various Ôôinn-related themes, and immediately preceding the myth of Ôôinn and Gunnlôô is another myth (Hâv. 96-102) concerning one of Ôôinn’s less successful affairs with one who is presumably a giantess. Both myths fall within a section devoted primarily to relationships between man and woman, and particularly the themes of trust and deceit within such relationships. The female in question is neither named nor identified as a giantess, and her relationship to Billingr is ambiguous.

154 Hâv. 108: Doubtful am I that I would come again out of the giants’ courts, if I had not made use of Gunnlôô, the good woman, who I put my arm around.
155 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 221.
156 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 404.
Plate 1.
The Tjängvide picture stone, Gotland.
Billings mey
ek faun bêiôm á
söîhvita sofa;
 iarls ynôi
þótti mér ekki vera,
nêma viô þat lið at liða. 156

(Háv. 97)

Mær, in poetry, might refer to either ‘daughter’ or ‘wife’. The use of lôstr157 and
flæðîr158 might suggest ‘wife’ as the most likely meaning.159 The question as to whether
Billingr is a dwarf or giant is nearly impossible to determine. Orchard points out that his
name appears in a single kenning describing poetry as Billings burar fullt160 ‘the cup of
Billingr’s son’, which seems to suggest that Billingr was the father of the dwarves Fjalarr
and Galarr who fermented the mead.161 Yet Billingr could just as easily be a kinsman of
Suttungr, as the similarity between the names Billingr and Gillingr is comparable to the
similarity between the names of the brothers Fjalarr and Galarr. This need not be taken
as evidence that Billingr and Gillingr actually are brothers, but it certainly seems
plausible.

The role of Billings mær appears to be that of the deceitful woman, and her actions are
exemplary of the fickleness of women (according to Õðinn) in a previous strophe:

Meyiar orôom
skyli manngi trúu,
nê þvi er kveôr kona,
þviat á hverfanda hvéli
vóro þeim hjörto skôpoð,
brigð í briôst um lagið.162

(Háv. 84)

156 Háv. 97: I found Billing’s sun-white maiden asleep on her bed<5>, it seemed to me an earl would have
no pleasure, unless to live with that body.
157 Háv. 98.
158 Háv. 102.
162 Háv. 84: No man must believe the words of a maiden, nor what a woman says, because their hearts were
shaped on a turning wheel, and deceit laid in their breast.
The instance in which Óðinn is ‘stood up’ by Billings provides an example or model of Hâv. 84. The hverfanda hvél ‘turning wheel’ seems to be somewhat out of place as the Icelanders, and Norse in general, did not use wheels for wool or pottery until the later medieval period. There is the possibility that this strophe has been influenced by Latin concepts of the ‘wheel of fortune’, and might be a relatively late arrival to Iceland. In Alvissmál, herfanda hvél is what the moon is called in Hel:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Máni heiti með mönnum,} \\
\text{en mylinn með goðum,} \\
\text{kalla hverfanda hvél helio i.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Álvi. 14)

The phrase in Hâv. 84: þvat ð hverfanda hvél voðr þeim hiðrto skóð may therefore be translated as ‘because their hearts (mind / feelings) were made on the moon (or the phases of the moon)’ to be understood as perhaps emblematic of mutability in an Aristotelian world-view: something which is constantly changing. In wider European tradition the moon is commonly seen as the patroness of fortune. Hâv. 84 could be understood as referring to a woman’s menstrual stress.

Óðinn also seduces Rindr, who becomes the mother of Váli. According to Kormakr Ógmundarson, Óðinn used seið ‘magic, enchantments’ to entrap her. The magic appears to affect the mind and body as in the Bergen charm the intent of which is to make its target into a nymphomaniac. Saxo Grammaticus offers a long description including the use of magic. It can be compared with the account of Billings mer in
which he fails as a seducer of women. In Saxo Book 3 Óðinn makes Rindr ill by touching her with a piece of bark inscribed with spells, and then reappears later in the guise of a female physician. He then brews a concoction to cure her, and tells her that the potion is so bitter that she must allow herself to be tied up in order to bear the potency. It is noteworthy that Saxo adds an alternative ending in which the king allows Óðinn (who has failed to seduce Rindr and is groaning with passion) to secretly have sexual intercourse with her in return for his services. This alternate ending is interesting insofar as giving us a glimpse into a myth in transition. The key elements of the myth such as Óðinn's failure to seduce Rindr are preserved in both versions, whereas the alternate endings are evidence of the development of the details at a late date. Snorri counts Rindr among the Ásynjur.\(^{170}\) She also appears in Baldr's draumar 11, but we are told no more than that she will give birth to Váli. It appears that the original myth (if there ever was one) involved some element of disguise or shape-changing, not unlike that which occurs in Óðinn's acquisition of the mead. Clearly the giantess is not perceived as lacking in virtue, therefore Óðinn resorts to disguise or magic.

One of the possible reasons for Óðinn's seduction of giantesses may be to beget important sons. Váli, the son of Rindr and Óðinn, avenges the death of Baldr.\(^{171}\) The most famous son is Þórr, a product of the union between Óðinn and the giantess Jöðr. Only fragments of the myth regarding the relationship between Óðinn and Jöðr remain in skaldic poetry, none of which offers any detail regarding the circumstances of their union.\(^{172}\) Þórr's primary role is to defend the gods and Ásgardr from giant-kind. Víðarr, son of Óðinn and Gríðr, avenges his father's death at Ragnarök by killing Fenrisúlfr. What we can say concerning the role of these giantesses is that they bear sons with the ability to either defend or avenge the gods. In this sense the role of Gunnlög differs because she does not produce a son.

\(^{171}\) Brdr. 11; Hyndl. 29; Vm. 51; Pul. IV e. g.
\(^{172}\) Ólfr. (Skj. I B, 6); Brmr. 1; Ls. 58; Æthr. 15 (Skj. I B, 142); and Sn.E. Sk. ed. Faulkes for the jula I, 114, (which lists Jöðr among the goddesses); Haustl. 14 (Skj. I B, 17).
There are other instances in which Öðinn brags of his seduction of women, but whether these women are giantesses, goddesses or mortals is often impossible to determine. In *Hrbl. 18* Öðinn tells how he slept with seven sisters, winning them with his wits:

[Hárbarðr kvæð:]  
Sparkar átto vér konor,  
elf oss at spökum yrði;  
horskar átto vér konor,  
elf oss hollar varri;  
þær ór sandi  
síma undo  
ok ór dali diúpom  
grund um grófo;  
varð ek þeim einn öllum  
efrri at râðom;  
hvilda ek hið þeim systrom siao  
ok haða ek geð þeira allt ok gaman.  
Hvat vanntu þá meðan, þórt?173

(*Hrbl. 18*)

Öðinn then speaks of an encounter with the giant Hléðarðr and how he once used *manvèlar* (love tricks) to sleep with ogresses (presumably giantesses or something similar as *myrkriða* appears in *Psul. IV Tröllkvenna Heiti* C. 4 and seems to be in the same category of creatures as *trollriða, kveldriða* and *túnriða*):174

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173 *Hrbl. 18*: Hárbarðr said: We had lively (?) women if they became wise for us; we had wise women if they were trusty for us, they wound wire out of sand, and they dug the ground out of a deep valley, I alone outwitted them all, I slept beside these seven sisters, and I had all their mind and pleasure. What were you doing meanwhile, Pórr?

Hlébarôr appears nowhere else in the mythology, nor is he listed in the Æthur. His name can be translated as 'leopard' but is used indiscriminately as 'bear, wolf, etc.' It is tempting to associate the gambanteinn with that in Skirnismál, and even to note a striking similarity between Óðinn and Skírnir. Óðinn obtained a gambanteinn from Hlébarôr though we are not told the location. Skírnir states that he sought a gambanteinn in the woods, and a gambanteinn he got. One complication is in the prose introduction of Skirnismál which states that Skírnir is Freyr's skóseinn 'shoe-boy'. However, it may be noted that the methods of subduing Gerôr are indeed reminiscent of the way in which Óðinn wins over women. Skírnir threatens to cut magic runes as part of a curse on Gerôr, and as far as we know from the mythology, only two figures possess the runes, Óðinn and Skírnir:

Þurs ríst ek þér
ok þrið staði,
ergi ok æði
ok óþola;
svá ek þat af ríst,
sem ek þat á reist,
ef goraz þarf þess.

(Skm. 36)

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175 Hrbl. 20: I used mighty love-frauds against enchantresses/giantesses, when I tricked them away from their husbands, I thought Hlébarôr to be a hard giant, he gave me a magic wand and I tricked him out of his senses.

176 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 270.

177 Skm. 32.

178 Skm. 1. Prose Introduction.

179 Skm. 36: (The rune Þurs [Þ] according to Cleasby-Vigfusson was cut to induce love-madness. Cleasby-Vigfusson p. 729.) I will carve Þurs against you and three letters, 'perversion', 'frenzy' and 'restlessness'; so I scratch it off as I cut it on, if needs arise for it.
The author of the prose introduction does not seem to suggest that Skírnir and Óðinn are the same, but they are the only figures capable of winning or capturing the hearts of giantesses, and they do this through coercion and magic.

In *Hrbl.* 30 Óðinn brags about his seduction of a giantess in Jötunheimr for which we have no corroborative evidence:

> Hárbarðr kvað:  
> Ek var austr  
> ok við einhverja dæmðak,  
> lék ek við ena línhvitö  
> ok lánþing háðak,  
> gladdak ena gullbítörto,  
> gamni maer unði.\(^{180}\)

\(^{(Hrbl. \ 30)}\)

Óðinn's boasting about this affair continues with strophe 32 in which he tells Þórr that he could have used his help to restrain (possibly referring to her passionate lovemaking) or to retain her:

> Liðs þíns væra ek þa þurfi, Þórr,  
> at ek helda þeiri enni línhvitö mey.\(^{181}\)

\(^{(Hrbl. \ 32)}\)

What follows in strophe 37 illustrates the differences in attitude and character between Óðinn's relationship with giantesses and that of Þórr who boasts about how he battled women of the berserks on the island of Hlésey. Thus where Óðinn seduces giantesses, Þórr battles them, and in strophe 38 Óðinn chastises Þórr, further illustrating the differences in their relationships with the women or possibly giantesses:

> Hárbarðr [kvað]:  
> Klæki vanntu þa, Þórr,  
> er þú á konom barðir.\(^{182}\)

\(^{(Hrbl. \ 38)}\)

\(^{180}\) *Hrbl.* 30: I was east and conversed with a certain woman; I sported with the linen-white one, and had a secret meeting; I gladdened the gold-bright maid; the maiden enjoyed pleasure.

\(^{181}\) *Hrbl.* 32: I would have been in need of your help, Þórr, to hold that linen-white maiden.

\(^{182}\) *Hrbl.* 38: You performed a shameful deed then Þórr, when you did battle with women.
One of Pórr’s motivations for fighting the women of the berserks is because they involve themselves in trickery, perhaps witchcraft. For the sake of the theme of Háðarðiðjóð, these are typically Óðinn characteristics as is his general patronage over berserks:

\[ \text{Hrbl. 37} \]

Brúðr berserkia
barðak i Hléseyio;
þær höfða verst unnit,
véita þiða alla.\(^{183}\)

It cannot be known for certain if these ‘women of the berserks’ are intended to be berserks themselves or giantesses. It seems likely that they are berserks as Pórr likens them to vargynjur ‘she-wolves’ in strophe 39, and references connecting berserks and wolves are plentiful. Óðinn’s seduction of the linen-white woman (perhaps a giantess) is meant to contrast with Pórr’s battling of the berserk women, and the poet may therefore use the giantess and female berserk interchangeably. The poet’s point is most likely to illustrate their differing attitudes to the female sex of their adversarial race, namely the giants, be they monstrous berserks or beautiful maidens.

In his pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, Óðinn twice interrogates prophetesses which may or may not be of giant-kind. The most notable is the völva ‘prophetess / sibyl’ of Völuspá.\(^{184}\) The prophetess states in strophe 2 that she was raised among giants:

\(^{183}\) Hrbl. 37: I fought women of the berserks in Hlésey; they had done the worst (of things), and deceived all the people.

\(^{184}\) According to Hermann Pálsson ‘Heiðr’ can be none other than the völva. Hermann Pálsson (1996), p. 12. This is much debated.
The received wisdom is that the volva is not a giantess, though she may consider herself to be of giant-kindred. She, like Valfrúðnir, possesses knowledge of all that has gone before and what is to come, and included in this wisdom is knowledge of Óðinn’s own fate:

Ein sat hon úti,
pá er inn aldní kom,
yggjungr ása,
ok í augo lei:
‘hvers fregnið mik?
hvi frestið mín?
alt veit ek, Óðinn,
hvar þú auga falt:
i enom mæra
Mínis brunni!’
Drekkr miðð Mímir
morgin hverían
af veði Valfóðrs –
vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?

(Vsp. 28)

If wisdom is a form of power, the volva has power over Óðinn, and her taunting refrain vitoð ér enn, eða hvat? certainly suggests this is the case. She may or may not be a giantess, but her affiliations with the giant race seem to suggest that she is somehow

186 Vsp. 2: I remember the iðnar who were born at the beginning of time and reared me in former times. I remember nine worlds beneath the earth, nine troll women, and also the glorious tree of fate. Translation by Hermann Pálsson, (1996) p. 58.
187 Vsp. 28: She was sitting outside alone when the old Yggjungr of the Æsir came and looked her in the eyes. What do you ask of me? Why do you put me to a test? I know everything, Óðinn, where you hid your eye in the glorious well of Mímir. Every morning Mímir drinks mead from the Valfóðr’s pledge. Do you see what I mean or do you want more? Translation by Hermann Pálsson (1996), p. 76.
associated with them. She is similar in many respects to the völva of Baldrs draumar, but in the circumstances surrounding their confrontation with Óðinn they are far from identical. The völva of Baldrs draumar is more clearly defined as a prophetess long dead in her grave outside the hall of Hel. She is raised from the grave by Óðinn’s magic and forced to speak, and the subject-matter in both cases is that of fate. In the case of Völuspá the subject is the fate of the gods, whereas in Baldrs draumar the subject is the fate of Baldr. Neither of the prophetesses appear to be willing to serve Óðinn: in fact both are unwilling. Both poems include refrains suggesting unwillingness, Völuspá: vitoð ér enn, eða hvat and Baldrs draumar: Nauðug sagðak, ní mun ek þegja. This raises the possibility that perhaps both völur are one and the same but also that they have no desire to continue being interrogated. The source of this hostility could be an affinity to the giants, be they giantesses or not.

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of Óðinn’s relationships with the giants and those affiliated with them can loosely be divided into two categories: begetting offspring capable of performing great deeds, and the acquisition of wisdom. Vafþrúðnir and Óðinn engage in a wisdom-contest, Vafþrúðnir’s questions asking for the names of mythical and cosmological features, and Óðinn’s questions concerning processes and sequences of events. Óðinn learns nothing new from the contest, but proves his ability to outwit the wisest of the giants by asking a question impossible for Vafþrúðnir to answer, yet within the bounds of the mythological subject-matter. The function of Vafþrúðnir is possibly to demonstrate the cunning of Óðinn, and we learn little of Vafþrúðnir himself apart from his lineage.

This differs from Óðinn’s theft of the mead, in which the giant Suttungr plays an important role. Although Suttungr does not create the mead of poetry, his possession of it gives the giants the upper hand. Óðinn’s cunning is again the theme of this myth, the difference being in his goals. In Vafþrúðnismál his goal is to challenge the wisest among giants to an outright contest, whereas here Óðinn’s objective is the acquisition of wisdom, in the form of the mead of poetry, perhaps related to the acquisition of the mead.

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188 Bdr. 7, 9, 11: I spoke under duress, now I will be silent.
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of Mímir’s well. In doing so he seduces a giantess, Gunnlöð, who not only provides him with access to the precious mead, but also a means of escape. The myth highlights Óðinn’s characteristics, namely his cunning, charm and skill as a thief. We learn little of the admirable characteristics of the giants; in fact, we learn that giants are somewhat easily tricked and giantesses often easily manipulated. This pattern must also be associated with seduction of giantesses for other purposes. There may have been many other myths involving Óðinn stealing or deceitfully acquiring items of magical importance from the giants, and a fragment of one survives in Hárbarðsljóð in which Óðinn acquires a magic wand from a giant and then drove him insane. This can be seen in terms of gods versus giants, in that Óðinn creates for the Æsir a monopoly on wisdom in the form of magical items, abilities and knowledge, thus always having the upper hand. In addition to this he seems to require sexual relationships with giantesses to beget sons capable of great deeds. Óðinn’s own mother, Bestla, also seems to have been a giantess (Háv. 140, Gylf. ch. 6). The relationship between Óðinn and giants can also be seen in simpler terms, in that the giants merely provide an enemy from whom Óðinn acquires these items and knowledge, making his character what it is.
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Fig. 3.

The myth of Þórr’s fishing expedition is one of the most widely attested in Norse mythology. The longest version appears in the Eddaic poem Hymiskviða which is of uncertain date, and is possibly a ‘newer’ version containing older material. It is difficult to know if Snorri knew the poem Hymiskviða, but he certainly knew more than one version of the myth of Þórr’s fishing expedition. Snorri cites a number of skaldic poems such as Bragi Boddason’s Ragnarsdrápa which has been dated to the first half of the ninth century or possibly a little later. References also appear in Úlfur Uggason’s Húsdrápa, (c. 985) and the poems of Öflir hruðaf, Gamli gnæfaðarskáld and Eysteinn Valdason.

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4 ÞÓRR AND THE GIANTS

4.1 THE MYTH OF ÞÓRR’S FISHING EXPEDITION

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Sn.E. Gylfi


See Einar Ól Sveinsson, Íslenzkar bökmenntir í fornþold (Reykjavik: 1934), p. lix, Úlfur Uggason: Húsdrápa 3-6 [ca. 985]:

þórr [kvad:]  
Ek drap þjazi,  
enn þrúðmóðga iötun,  
upp ek varp augom  
Allvalda sonar  
það hann inn heða himin;  
þau er merki mest  
minna verka.  
þau er allir menn sildan um sé.  
Hvat vanntu meðan, Hárbarðr?  
(Hrbl. 19)


Sn.E. Gylfi 47.

Sfn. Þórr said: I killed þjazi, the mighty-spirited giant, I threw the eyes of Allvaldi’s son up into the clear sky, they are the greatest mark of my deeds, those which all men see since. What were you doing meanwhile, Hárbarðr?  


Sn.E. Gylfi 47.


See Einar Ól Sveinsson, Íslenzkar bökmenntir í fornþold (Reykjavik: 1934), p. lix, Úlfur Uggason: Húsdrápa 3-6 [ca. 985]:

þókkvaxinn kvezk þykkja  
þíkingr frinmikla  
hafra njóts at höfgum
Four picture stones from elsewhere in northwestern Europe supplement our Icelandic literary sources. The Altuna stone in Sweden has been dated to the beginning of the eleventh century (Fig. 3). The stone at Hörðum (Thy, Denmark) similarly depicts Bárr's fishing expedition, and has been broadly dated to between the eighth and eleventh centuries (Fig. 4). The Gosforth stone in Cumbria (England) has been dated to the tenth century (Fig. 5), and finally the Ardre VIII stone in Gotland has been dated to the eighth century (Fig. 6).

Furthermore the Miðgarðsrormr is believed to be present on the Lowther hogbacks in its role as holding the world together.

During the course of the twentieth century, comparative mythologists have subjected this myth to rigorous analysis. Georges Dumézil and Franz Schröder both viewed the myth as an integral component of wider Indo-European religious history. The myth has also been seen in the

\[ \text{hetting megindrætti.} \]

'It is said that the stout lubbard thought that the goat-owner's severely heavy haul was exceedingly dangerous.'


Fig. 6. Ardre VIII picture-stone, Gotland.
light of the Christian myth of Leviathan, and thus interpreted as a product of the conversion.\textsuperscript{204} Many parallels have been drawn between the myth of bórr’s fight with the Miðgarðsormr and Beowulf’s fight against the Dragon.\textsuperscript{205}

The Miðgarðsormr does not appear to be a typical jötunn, but seems to belong in a subclass with its siblings Fenrisúlfr and Hel (and possibly Niðhögg). According to Snorri they are the offspring between Loki, and a giantess \textit{Angrboða} (distress-bringer);\textsuperscript{206} thus these creatures are at least half-giant:

\begin{quote}
Angrboða heitir gygr í ló tunheimum. Við henni gat Loki .iii. börn; eitt var Fenrisúlfr, annat lórmungandr, þat er Miðgarðsormr, .iii. er Hel.\textsuperscript{207}
(Sn.E. Gylf. 34)
\end{quote}

This information also appears in \textit{Hyndl.} 40:

\begin{quote}
Ól úlf Loki
við Angrboðu,\textsuperscript{208}
(Hyndl. 40)
\end{quote}

The kenning \textit{lögseims fadir} ‘sea-band’s father’ in the first stanza of Eilífr Goðrúnarson’s \textit{Þórsdráp} (late 10\textsuperscript{th} century) is a reference to Loki as father of the Miðgarðsormr. The Æsir see the danger posed by these siblings and thus Óðinn casts Hel into Niflheimr, and throws the Miðgarðsormr into the sea where it grows to encompass Miðgarð.\textsuperscript{209} The Miðgarðsormr and Hel both have cosmological functions. Hel has authority over nine

\textsuperscript{204} A. Kabell, ‘Der Fischfang bórs’, \textit{Arkiv för nordisk filologi} 91 (1976), pp. 123-129.
\textsuperscript{206} Etymology from P. Meulengracht Sorensen (1986), p. 272. Perhaps a more accurate translation is ‘grief-bidder’ or even ‘grief-announcer’.
\textsuperscript{207} Sn.E. Gylf. 34: In Jötunheimar a giantess is called Angrboða. With her Loki got three children. The first was Fenrisúlfr, the second Jòrmungandr (that is Miðgarðsormr), the third is Hel (ed. Faulkes, p. 27).
\textsuperscript{208} Hyndl. 40: Loki produced (gave life to) the Wolf with Angrboða.
\textsuperscript{209} Sn.E. Gylf. 34. (ed. Faulkes, p. 27).
Plate 2.
Þórr and the World-Serpent, as depicted by the eighteenth-century Icelandic scribe, Jakob Sigurðsson in a privately held copy of Snorra Edda.
worlds of Niflheimr, and the Miðgarðsormr may be seen as holding the world together. These functions are, however, not voluntary. Hel is cast into Niflheimr:

Hel kastaði hann í Niflheim ok gaf henne valld yfir .ix. heimum, at hon skipti öllum vistum með þeim er til hennar vóro sendir, en þat eru sött dauðir menn ok ellidauðir.²¹⁰

(Sn.E. Gylf. 34)

Hel does not assume this role, but rather it is bestowed upon her. It should be noted that Snorri may be influenced by Christian ideas: the appointment of Hel to rule the nine worlds of Niflheimr could be influenced by the story of the fall of Lucifer (an idea already present as early as the Old English Genesis B, 1. 300 – ed. G. P. Krapp in the Junius Manuscript, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records I, New York and London, 1931, p. 12); similarly the casting of Miðgarðsormr into the sea could be influenced by the casting of the dragon into the pit, and later into the lake of fire (Revelations 20, 2-3 and 10). She, like Ymir, is forced to fulfill a cosmological function, as guardian of Niflheimr. The Miðgarðsormr is similarly cast into the sea:

Ok er þau kómur til hans, þá kastaði hann orminum í em diupa sæ, er liggr um öll lón, ok óx sá ormr svá at hann liggr í miðiu hafinu of öll lón ok bítr í sporð sér.²¹¹

(Sn.E. Gylf. 34)

The serpent's role is a passive one. There is no evidence to suggest that it is in any way an intelligent being; this therefore separates it from other giants.

Only a few elements of the myth are common in the surviving picture stones, and the Miðgarðsormr may or may not be one of them. The Gosforth stone depicts four creatures (possibly a fifth in the lower-left corner) and at first sight these creatures do not appear to be serpentine. It seems possible that the creature in the lower-right corner represents a snake-like animal as its head is connected to a distinctive S-shaped figure, distinguishing

²¹⁰ Sn.E. Gylf. 34: He cast Hel into Niflheimr, and gave her authority over nine worlds so that she should apportion provisions / lodgings among those who are sent to her, and they are men dead of sickness and dead of age (ed. Faulkes, p. 27).
it from the other three creatures (which are probably fish or at least are whale-shaped).

These fish-shaped creatures may be depictions of whales, as is told in *Hym.* 21 that Hymir pulled two whales out of the sea prior to Órr’s impressive catch:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dró mærr Hymir} \\
\text{móðugr hvali} \\
einn á öngli \\
\text{upp senn tvá;} \\
en aprí skut [sic] \\
\text{Óðni sífaðr} \\
Véorr við vélar \\
vað góði séi.\footnote{Hym. 21}
\end{align*}
\]

The ‘whales’ on the Gosforth stone may depict those mentioned in *Hym.* 21.

Unfortunately we cannot easily know for certain what the creature in the lower right-hand corner of the Gosforth stone is meant to represent, seeing that the bottom of the stone (containing the rest of the ‘S-shaped’ figure) is now missing.

Sørensen treats *Hymiskviða* with a great deal of scepticism as he believes it to be a comparatively late source, and takes into consideration only the parts which have parallels in other myths.\footnote{Sørensen treats *Hymiskviða* with a great deal of scepticism as he believes it to be a comparatively late source, and takes into consideration only the parts which have parallels in other myths.} Sørensen is not unfair in treating *Hymiskviða* with such scepticism, but perhaps his other source, Snorri, leaves out details he deemed unimportant. Regardless of the age of *Hymiskviða*, the myth which it involves may be of great antiquity. Ægir’s cauldron, referred to in *Hym.* 33 and 34, has a likely parallel with the Irish myth of the mighty Otherworld cauldron possessed by the Daghdha from which ‘no company ever went away unsatisfied’.\footnote{D. O’Hogain, *Myth, Legend and Romance: An Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition* (New York: 1991), Daghdha s.v.} There is always the possibility of recent borrowing from Irish myth or even of independent development.

\footnote{Sn.E. Gylf. 34: And then when they came to it, he then cast the serpent into the deep sea, which lies around all lands, and the serpent grew so that he lies in the middle of the sea around all lands, and he bites into his tail.}

\footnote{Hym. 21: In a rage renowned Hymir by himself drew up two whales at once on his hook, but back in the stern, Óðinn’s kinsman, Órr, made the line cunningly for himself.}

\footnote{P. Meulengracht Sørensen (1986), p. 259.}

The stone of Ardre (Fig. 6) does not depict the Miðgarðsormr, and may or may not depict Þórr’s fishing expedition. There are three boat scenes. Two depict a couple in a small boat (possibly Þórr and Hymir) and the third is a longship with a full crew. The boat-scene, immediately below the longship, appears to depict two men rowing (which again may be Þórr and Hymir), seeing that the arms of the left-hand figure are downwards as if to grip an oar. The boat-scene immediately below could possibly be the same two figures, one of whom spears a fish. The fact that a spear is used differs substantially from all the other sources, and the spear is associated with Óðinn, not Þórr. Lindqvist suggested that the depiction at the very bottom of the stone is a house and within it stands Hymir and Þórr and the ox Himinhrjót. He also suggests that the figure entering the house is Þórr. The left-hand figure within the house, according to Lindqvist, depicts Þórr carrying the ox head on his shoulder. This interpretation is exciting, and, if it could be adequately proven, it would imply that the myth had survived in a stable form for perhaps five hundred years prior to the writing of our literary sources.

Unfortunately the scene is so vague that it may also be interpreted as the tying-up of Fenrir in the Gnipa cave. Firstly, the fact that the ‘house’ is rounded and completely open without any doors, may suggest that it is a depiction of a cave as opposed to the giant’s hall. The figure on the far right could be Óðinn attaching the fetter Gleipnir to the back of the cave. The other figure behind him holds the fetter (perhaps a harness as well) on his shoulder. The figure outside could be the god Týr with his hand in the mouth of Fenrir whilst the fetter is being attached. The fact that the mouth of the creature is open further supports this hypothesis. It is not my purpose here to present the ‘correct’ interpretation of the Ardre stone, but merely to show that it is too ambiguous for any single interpretation, and far too ambiguous to offer valuable evidence to aid us in interpreting the myth or attributing a date to it. Such sources must be handled with extreme caution.

There are elements, or motifs, which can be used to indicate that a myth is being depicted. The Altuna stone and the Hordum stone both show a foot (or possibly feet) penetrating through the bottom of the boat. This correlates with Snorri’s account, though neither *Hymiskviða* nor skaldic sources contain this detail. However in *Hym.* 34, Þórr sticks his foot through the floor, which seems to echo him putting his foot through the bottom of the ship. Furthermore the Gosforth stone does not depict the foot. It seems that this was a semi-stable element of the myth or possibly of one version of it. Furthermore the ‘giant’ (if it is a giant) appears on three of the four picture stones: Gosforth, (possibly) Ardre, and Hordum, and this seems to suggest that Hymir, or the presence of another figure, was also a stable element of the myth. We can see that as late as the seventeenth century *Hymiskviða* is still being depicted in terms of the fishing trip, yet by this time Þórr threatens to strike Hymir rather than the serpent.

Hymir’s role is of importance to this discussion. Þórr visits Hymir prior to the fishing trip in both *Gylfaginning* and *Hymiskviða*, and it is Hymir’s ox that provides the bait. Hymir is apparently a crofter living at the edge of Jötunheimar and some have interpreted his occupation there as symbolic of civilisation. The giant has thus been perceived as the necessary agent for Þórr’s transition from order to chaos, or from the civilised world to the uncivilised. Hymir’s boat takes Þórr to the middle of the ‘uncivilised’ sea (albeit Þórr does the rowing and chooses the distance from land). According to this line of reasoning Hymir plays the part of the moderator between order and chaos. In *Gylfaginning* Hymir cuts Þórr’s fishing line, allowing the Miðgarðsormr to reassume its place (possibly holding the world together), thereby preventing a cosmological catastrophe. The account in *Hymiskviða* does not fit this picture, since Þórr strikes the serpent on the head, causing the whole world to move, and then the serpent sinks by itself back into the water. Hymir is thus presented in *Gylfaginning* as the mediator between the world of Þórr and the world of the Miðgarðsormr / Ásgarðr and the bottom of the world.

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219 See Meulengracht Sørensen (1986), pp. 268-274.
One must bear in mind that in *Gylfaginning*, Snorri appears to try to make sense of the mythology, and this attempt may be misleading at times.

Snorri tells another version in *Sn.E. Gylf.* 48 (which Snorri finds less credible), in which Þórr throws the hammer after the serpent, cutting off its head. This version is often disregarded, but is still evidence for the diversity and popularity of the myth. It raises the question: how universal was the cosmological importance of the serpent and could this role have developed later? It seems that those who knew (or preferred) this version of the myth were more interested in Þórr's victory than the cosmological significance of the serpent. Nevertheless, in *Gylfaginning* Snorri tries to build a comprehensive and 'logical' account of the mythology (as opposed to relaying every version of every myth), and, thus, he chooses not to accept this version. We are fortunate that he mentions it at all.

Who is the central figure of the myth, Hymir, Þórr or the serpent? In all surviving versions of the myth, the serpent plays a relatively small, though climactic role, and Hymir is present throughout. The competition between the giant and god is the central theme. Hymir challenges Þórr to fetch the head of a giant ox, which he does with ease. Þórr challenges Hymir to row further out to sea and he refuses. Hymir begins fishing and catches two whales. Þórr, however, catches the serpent, causing the earth to move. The following passage is of importance to this discussion:

\[
\text{Óteitr iötunn,} \\
\text{er þeir aþr reþro,} \\
\text{svá at ár Hymir} \\
\text{ekki mælti,} \\
\text{veifði hann reþi} \\
\text{veðr annars til.}^{222}
\]

\[(Hym. 25)\]

The giant had been made a fool of, dishonoured, and sulking, he refusing to speak, but the competitiveness continues after landing. Hymir asks Þórr to share the work. One

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The task is to haul the whales to the house, while the other is to secure the boat. Ægir does both. He lifts the whole boat, bilges and all, secures it, and hauls the whales to the house. Ægir is then challenged to break a goblet. He fails, and then (with the advice of a giantess) he succeeds by throwing it at the giant's hard head. Ægir is then challenged to carry the cauldron back to the Æsir. Týr tries and fails to budge it, but Ægir lifts it without difficulty. Finally Hymir, leading a host of giants, attacks, and, in a single sweep of Mjölnir, Ægir defeats them all. Thus one can possibly see Hymir as an opponent/opposite of Ægir. He is mighty, but nowhere near as mighty as Ægir. Insofar as the poem itself is concerned, Ægir is central whereas the serpent, and their meeting is peripheral. This is possibly the case with Hymiskviða, but the myth concerning Ægir and the serpent was probably more popular than Ægir's encounter with Hymir (or so one might gather from the archaeological evidence).

Hymir's role appears to be purely that of an adversary, challenging Ægir at all points throughout the myth. The purpose of this series of challenges may be simply to illustrate Ægir's physical and godlike characteristics, and the giant may be seen (at least in a literary sense) as merely an illustrative instrument. Hymir is associated with winter (Hym. 10,5-8) and barrenness (hraunhvala, Hym. 36,5), and Ægir's victory may also be seen as an illustration of victory over these. One might deduce from the fact that Hymir seems to be Týr's father (perhaps therefore an unacknowledged proxy-father to Ægir himself)²²³ the possibility that the two are opposite equals, just as with Ægir and Brymir.

We cannot easily know how these poems and myths were once interpreted, and the best we can do is bear in mind that people once believed in a god of might, daring and heroic victory. Hymiskviða is a portrait of such a god.

4.2 Brymir's Theft of Mjöllnir

Prymskviða appears in the thirteenth century Codex Regius manuscript of the Elder Edda. Only upon occasion has it been a focal point of modern scholarly work, and those who have published on Prymskviða have focused much upon the comical element and its

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²²² Hym. 25: The giant [was] uncheerful when they rowed back, so that Hymir early on spoke nothing; he swung the oar to another weather.
²²³ See Hym. 5,5-6, 11,3-6.
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relation to the strength of pagan belief. Hallberg and Kvillerud have published important studies concerning its possible dating, and Singer, among others, has written about its possible Indo-European roots. The fact that Snorri never mentions Brymr, or the myth surrounding the theft of the hammer, may be significant. Furthermore, the fact that the myth seems to have much in common with the diction of other Eddaic poems and skaldic poems (such as Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Baldrs draumar, Völsuspá and Húsdrápa) seems to suggest it is of considerable age. The age of Prymskviða is certainly a matter of concern, but that will not be discussed here. For the moment it is possible to assume that Prymskviða draws on long-established traditions concerning giants and their roles with the gods, traditions in which any possible number of such myths were composed and since forgotten. Generally it is believed that Loki steals the hammer to land Þórr in this situation, and though this would be consistent with Loki’s character, it is never actually mentioned, and, arguably, it is never even suggested in the poem. Indeed Loki’s role here is far more akin to that in Reginsmál which we believe to be ancient in origin. Furthermore the theme is similar to that of the theft of Íðunn’s apples, which is also known to be ancient as it appears in the ninth century Haustlög.

Þórr’s hammer is stolen and Loki flies to Jötunheimar in search of it. There he meets the king of the giants, Brymr, who offers to return the hammer in exchange for Freyja. Þórr is then persuaded to dress in the likeness of a bride and, Loki volunteers to pose as a handmaiden, and they travel together to Brymr’s hall. Loki’s uses his guile to keep Þórr undercover despite his burly and unladylike behaviour. When the hammer is brought to sanctify the wedding, and laid on Þórr’s lap, he then proceeds to kill Brymr and all the remaining giants. The poem appears to be relatively straightforward and generally comical.

Prymr differs from most giants in that, unlike Vafþrúðnir, he comes across as rather stupid and genuinely naïve. Unlike Hymir he is relatively tame and not aggressive. It is even possible to see Prymr as a sympathetic character. Yet it is Prymr who acquires Ásgarðr’s most treasured possession, thereby endangering the gods, elves and men, and thus rendering Þórr helpless. It is Prymr who essentially blackmails the Æsir into giving him Freyja as a wife, and thereby threatening their fertility. Therefore Prymr’s actions make him profoundly antagonistic and threatening. In Grm. 11 we learn that Prymheimr is the seat for the giant Þjazi. It should be mentioned that this need not be related to Prymr the giant, but it could be. The word pryrmr has a poetical meaning ‘thunder’ as it is found in compounds such as pryn-draugr, pryn-kennir, pryn-lundr, and arguably prynheimr. The names Þórr and Prymr are cognate and have identical meanings. In this sense Prymr and Þórr appear as opposite equals (or possibly Prymr is Þórr’s sinister alter-ego given a psychological reading of the poem), and also can be seen as the playthings of Loki.

Prymr is the pursadróttin or ‘lord of the giants’ and is depicted in strophe 6 sitting on a burial cairn, twisting gold collars for his dogs and trimming the manes of his mares. Interestingly the word prynja (present tense prynmr) means ‘sitting fast, or moping’, but also the image of the king sitting on a burial mound is common. In the first chapter of Hrölf’s saga Gautrekssonar, a saga containing numerous archaic motifs, we are told, Konungr sat jafnan á haugi drottningar, því at honum þótti mikit fráfall hennar. The custom of the king sitting on a burial mound is still practised today. At the annual ceremonial sitting of the House of Keys in the open at Tynwald, Isle of Man, all the officials sit at various levels of the mound, but the top is always reserved for the current Lord of Man (the British monarch). In strophe 23 Prymr tells of his golden horned cattle, pitch-black oxen and that many are his gifts and treasures, and all that is lacking in his life is Freyja. Again, the adjective prynmr has a poetical sense meaning ‘glorious’, perhaps his name also refers to his kingship. All taken into account, Prymr is not

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228 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 747.
231 Ibid., p. 747.
described in the myth as the powerful, angry giant we find in *Hymiskviða*, or even what his name implies. He seems to be presented as spoiled and lovesick.

When one asks who is the central character, and where should the focus fall, it is difficult to decide between Þórr and Loki. If one views *Prymskviða* as a series of challenges such I have done with *Hymiskviða* and *Vafþrúðnismál* thus far, it appears that Loki emerges as the god in the fore. Indeed Loki’s guile and cunning is challenged much in the same way as Þórr’s strength in *Hymiskviða*. In order to retrieve the hammer, Þórr’s disguise as Freyja must be convincing, which would seem impossible at best. When Þórr’s true character shines through the bridal linen, and Prymr’s suspicions are aroused, it falls on Loki to recover the situation. Should Loki fail and Þórr be discovered, he would be helpless against the giant’s wrath. The first of such instances occurs at Prymr’s feast (strophe 24 & 25) in which Þórr engulfs an ox, eight salmon, three casks of mead, and all the dainty dishes meant for the ladies. Prymr comments that never before had he seen a woman eat so greedily, to which Loki replies that such was ‘Freyja’s’ longing for Jötunheimar that she fasted for eight nights. Secondly, in strophes 27 and 28 Prymr bends under the bride’s veil for a kiss and staggers back the length of the hall in terror commenting that Freyja’s eyes seem to be filled with fire. Loki covers for him saying that such was ‘Freyja’s’ longing for Jötunheimar, that she has been awake for eight nights. Loki always manages to resolve the situation.

Loki is forced to make such a recovery in two out of the three instances in which there is dialogue and interaction between the two groups. Insofar as the theme of the poem is concerned, the conflict lies between Þórr and Prymr, yet Þórr plays an unusually passive role relying solely on Heimdallr’s plan and Loki’s guile. The role of Prymr appears to be that of a menace. His role as the challenger may not be as obvious as that of Hymir (at least concerning his relationship with Loki). What we can say is that the giants in this myth are instrumental in illustrating the characteristics of the gods. The characteristics of Þórr as a big eater, excessively masculine, and a fierce warrior are made obvious through situational irony. Furthermore Loki’s cunning is stressed along with his role as a messenger of the gods. *Prymskviða* tells us little about the giants save they desire Freyja,
and fear Mjöllnir. Gullibility seems to be a common characteristic whether it be subtle as with Vafþrúðnir or blatantly obvious as with Þrymir.

4.3 ÞJAZI, ÞÓRR AND ÓDINN

In Hrbl. 19 Þórr boasts that he killed the giant Þjazi:

Þórr [kvað:]
Ék drap Þjazi,
enn þruðmóðga iötun,
upp ek varp augom
Allvalda sonar
á þann inn heiða himin;
þau ero merki mest
mína verka,
þau er allir menn síðan um sé.
Hvat vanntu meðan, Hárbardr?\(^{232}\)

(Hrbl. 19)

Þórr attributes himself two deeds: the killing of Þjazi, and making stars from his eyes. Snorri’s account is in no way specific about who killed Þjazi saying that it was simply the Æsir:

Pá vóro æsirmir nær ok dráp Þjazi iötun fyrir innan Ásgandr, ok er þat vig allfægt.\(^{233}\)

In Ls. 50, Loki takes credit for being foremost in the killing of Þjazi:

[Loki kvað:]
Veiztu, ef mik á híórví skólo
ens hrímkaldí magar
görnó bánda góð,
fyrstr ok ófstr
var ek at flóragi,
þars vér á þíazæ þrifom.\(^{234}\)

(Ls. 50)

\(^{232}\) Hrbl. 19: Þórr said: I killed Þjazi, the mighty-spirited giant, I threw the eyes of Allvaldi’s son up into the clear sky; they are the greatest mark of my deeds, those which all men see since. What were you doing meanwhile, Hárbardr?

\(^{233}\) Sn.E. Sk. 1: Then were the Æsir near and killed the giant Þjazi within Ásgandr (the gate to Ásgardr), and that killing is very famous (ed. Faulkes I, p. 2).

\(^{234}\) Ls. 50: You know if the gods shall on a sword bind me [with] the guts of the frost-cold son, first and foremost was I in the killing, when we caught Þjazi.
The first consideration here is that, perhaps, Loki is emphasising his own role to upset Skaði, but, nevertheless, one can deduce from the strophe that more than one individual was involved in the killing. Here as in Haustl. vv. 1-13 Loki’s ambivalent role is stressed.

Snorri’s account of Þjazi’s eyes differs from that of Hrbl. 19:

Svá er sagt at Óðinn gerði þat til yfirbóta við hana at hann tók augu Þjazas ok kastaði upp á himin ok gerði af stiðnum.\(^\text{235}\)

(Sn. E. Sk. 1)

There are several possibilities as to why these accounts differ. Snorri twice gives the impression that the myth was well known, perhaps even in his own day. He says of the victory over Þjazi: ok er þat vig allfrægt\(^\text{236}\) and of the casting of the eyes into heaven he says: Svá er sagt...\(^\text{237}\) This might indicate that the myth was well-known. One may assume that the myth concerning the origin of the two Þjazi-stars would have been widespread given the use of stars to navigate ships. It is comparable with the myth of Þórr breaking off one of Auru-vandil’s frozen toes and casting it up into the sky thus making it into a star.\(^\text{238}\) If this is to be taken as evidence that the myth was highly popular, it may explain why there are two or possibly three variations. It is also possible that the myth shifted between cults. Snorri’s major source for this myth must have been Haustløng 1-13 (Skj B, 14-17), which also emphasises Loki’s role and says almost nothing about that of Þórr. It is difficult to know whether or not Snorri knew Hárðrósjóð, seeing that he never quotes it, but it is possible that he did, but chooses not to incorporate it in his work.

An alternative possibility is that the myth was so popular that a change in the details would have been unacceptable to a general Icelandic audience. This is to say that, perhaps the Hárðrósjóð-poet deliberately has Þórr take credit for the killing of Þjazi.

\(^{235}\) Sn. E. Sk. 1: So it is said that Óðinn made it as extra compensation towards her (Skaði), that he took Þjazi’s eyes and cast them up into heaven and made of [them] two stars (ed. Faulkes, I, p. 2).

\(^{236}\) Sn. E. Sk. 1: and that killing is very famous.

\(^{237}\) Sn. E. Sk. 1: So [it] is said...

\(^{238}\) Sn. E. Sk. 17 (ed. Faulkes, I, p. 22).
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(Hrbl. 19) to suit the theme of his poem. Þórr does not realise Hárbarðr is Óðinn in one of his many disguises, and this point is axiomatic to the poem. From a safe distance Óðinn provokes Þórr’s wrath by refusing to ferry him across the sound:

[Hrbl. 13: Þórr said: A great sorrow it seems to me to wade through the water to you and wet my food/genitals bag (?) I should/ought to pay your kid for [the] abuse, if I get myself across the sound.

They then engage in a boasting match in which Þórr claims to have killed Þjazi and made his eyes into stars. Þórr may be made to look a fool by unwittingly boasting about a deed that he did not do, to the very person who had. This would, if it is the case, explain why Snorri would not mention Þórr’s claim even had he had been familiar with Hárbarðstjóð.

It may be the case that the Hrbl.-poet is using a detail which was attributed to the two different gods in order to exploit a conflict between cults.

4.4 ÞÓRR AND HRUNGNIR

The myth of Þórr’s encounter with Hrungnir is similar to the myth of Þórr’s fishing expedition in that it was once popular and wide-spread. The myth survives in the skaldic poem Haustløng by Þjóðólf af Hvin, and is thought to have been composed around the turn of the ninth to tenth century. The poem is called a ‘shield lay’, as it describes the scenes from mythology which were depicted on a shield. The two myths depicted on this shield were the rape of Íðunn by Þjazi and Þórr’s encounter with Hrungnir. This part of Haustløng is preserved in Skáldskaparmál and Snorri frequently refers to the poem to illustrate skaldic diction. Due to a blunder of Óðinn’s, Hrungnir is invited to Valhöll and drinks with the gods. He boasts that he will kill them all except Freyja and Sif, who he wishes to have for himself, and that he will sink Ásgarðr. The gods call Þórr, who arrives from the East in a rage. Hrungnir, being weaponless, requests a fair duel. The giants

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\(^{239}\) Hrbl. 13: Þórr said: A great sorrow it seems to me to wade through the water to you and wet my food/genitals bag (?) I should/ought to pay your kid for [the] abuse, if I get myself across the sound.

\(^{240}\) Sn.E. Sk. 17 (ed. Faulkes I, pp. 22-4).
were worried that they might lose their strongest and bravest, so to frighten Þórr they built an enormous giant out of clay and gave it the heart of a mare. They named it Mókkurkálfi. Snorri tells us that Mókkurkálfi was far more frightened of Þórr: Svá er sagt at hann meig er hann sá Þórr. As Þórr and his helper, Bjálfi, approached Hrungnir, Bjálfi ran out in front and told Hrungnir that Þórr would attack from underground, and that he should stand on his shield. Hrungnir took the deceitful advice, thus leaving himself defenceless. Hrungnir threw a whetstone and at the same time Þórr threw Mjöllnir. Both weapons met in mid-air. The hammer struck Hrungnir’s head, killing him, and a shard from the whetstone was lodged in Þórr’s skull. Bjálfi then despatched Mókkurkálfi.

The role of Hrungnir is that of a menace to the gods. During his visit to Ásgarðr, he tells the gods what he, as a giant, wishes to inflict upon them. That he should want Freyja for himself is a common theme and can be compared with Prymskvíða, but this is, perhaps, the only myth in which Sif is also threatened in such a way (the aim, no doubt, being to cuckold Þórr). He boasts that he will pick up Valhöll and bring it to the worlds of the giants, and also that he will kill all the gods and sink Ásgarðr. This scenario is very similar to the description of Ragnarök, in which the gods meet their fate, and, interestingly, that the earth will sink beneath the waves.

Sn.E. St. So it is said that he wet himself when he saw Þórr (ch. 17 in Sk., ed. Faulkes I, p. 21).

Sn.E. Sk. Then when he became drunk, then big words were not wanting, he said he would take up Valhöll and take [it] into the worlds of the giants and sink Ásgarðr and kill all the gods, except Freyja and Sif who he wishes to take home with him (ch. 17 in Sn.E. Sk., ed. Faulkes I, p. 20).
It is often thought that Vsp. 57 is of Christian origin.\textsuperscript{243} It may be suggested, though, that the idea of the world sinking into the sea after the fate of the gods, not a Biblical motif, has a native origin, which can be seen as essentially the same type of apocalypse that Hrungnir boasts he will bring about.

This myth, and that of Bjazi (also in Haustläng), differ from other Pórr-myths in that the giants involved threaten or harass the gods in or near Asgardr. These two myths may have been chosen to be depicted on the shield described by Bjöðolf because they, apart from having been popular, involve divine defence. This might indicate possibly recognised functions and meanings of myth within pagan society. In this respect the myth of Hrungnir and Pórr differs from that of Pórr and Hymir in that the giant does not simply function as a device to illuminate Pórr’s characteristics. Hrungnir is a truly potential threat, and the only one who can stop him is Pórr. In this myth Pórr plays out the role for which he best known, the mighty defender of Asgardr and Míøgardr.

4.5 WHO OWNS THE GLOVE: SKRÝMIR OR FJALARR?

Some of Pórr’s great adventures come back to haunt him. Allusions to a myth in which Pórr has hidden inside the thumb of a glove can be found in the Eddaic poem Lokasenna:

\begin{center}
\texttt{[Loki qua\textae:]} \\
Austrförom þínom \\
skaltu aldredi \\
segia seggiom frá, \\
sízt í hanska þumlingi \\
hnúkþir þú, einheri, \\
ok þöttiska þú Pórr vera.\textsuperscript{245}
\end{center}

\textit{(Ls. 60)}

A strikingly similar strophe is Hrbl. 26, in which Hárbarðr similarly accuses Pórr of cowardice:

\textsuperscript{243} Vsp. 57: [The] sun turns dark, earth sinks into [the] sea.

\textsuperscript{244} In Blickling Homilies 7 (R. Morris, ed., Early English Text Society, o.s. 58, 1874, p. 93) the ‘depths’ want to swallow the earth. Neolnessa ‘depths’ may refer to both the sea and to Hell. If it refers to Hell then it could be related to the ‘hell-mouth’ motif in Christian iconography. If this refers to the sea it may be of Germanic origin.

\textsuperscript{245} Ls. 60: Loki said: About your journeys east you should never tell anyone, since, lone warrior you cowered in the glove’s thumb, and you didn’t seem to yourself to be Pórr.
This episode is also found in Snorri’s account of Þórr’s journey to Útgarðaloki. McKinnell aptly describes the myth as a parody full of ironic reversals in which Þórr becomes the victim of trickery. During Þórr’s journey he and his companions spend the night in a house, which later turns out to have been the thumb of a giant’s glove.

Snorri’s account has nothing to do with Þórr actively hiding from anyone or anything, as implied in Ls. 60 and Hrbl. 26. Furthermore, Snorri omits the name Fjalarr, mentioned in Hrbl. 26. This strophe from Hárbarðsljóð gives us the impression that Þórr is hiding in Fjalarr’s glove and from him. Both strophes are quite specific about Þórr’s fear, and this detail should not be readily discounted. Þórr is susceptible to fear, particularly if his hammer has gone missing, as his panic in Prm. 1 and 2 seems to imply. Fjalarr is best known in connection with Galarr, and Snorri says they are dwarves involved in the brewing of the mead of poetry. His name appears in Vsp. 16 listed as a dwarf, but in the Pulur he is listed as a giant (Sn.E. Sk. b. Jötna hett 1) and in Háv. 14 he seems to be identical with Suttungr. It is logical to assume that in Hrbl. 26 the glove in which Þórr hides belongs to the giant Fjalarr (unless Fjalarr is an exceptionally large dwarf). Fjalarr is commonly thought to be the same person as Skrýmir, though this need not be the case. Snorri may have had to choose between two variations of the same myth, in one, the giant was Skrýmir, and in the other, Fjalarr. In Ls. 62 Skrýmir is named as owner of the food-bag which Snorri associates with the glove mentioned in Ls. 60. Another possible reason why Snorri chooses Skrýmir as the owner of the glove may be that Fjalarr is attested in

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246 Hrbl. 26: Hárbarðr said: Þórr has sufficient strength but not heart, from fear and cowardice you were stuffed in a glove, and you did not then seem to be yourself Þórr; for your fear, you dared neither sneeze nor fart, so that Fjalarr heard you.


kennings as a dwarf, and again as a dwarf in connection with the mead of poetry. Being tidy-minded, Snorri may therefore have disregarded *Hrbl.* 26 (and conceivably *Ls.* 60, where the giant is not named) to avoid having Fjalarr the dwarf and Fjalarr the giant.

The word *fjalarr* has no obvious definition, but if it could possibly mean ‘deceiver’ as Orchard has translated it,\(^{249}\) or perhaps more accurately ‘concealer’ if it is derived from *fela* ‘to hide’, the name would be suited to Snorri’s account. Fjalarr also appears in *Háv.* 14,\(^{250}\) where he seems to be the same as Suttungr. For this reason de Vries (*AEW* 122-3) interprets the name as ‘he who hides (the mead of poetry)’.\(^{251}\) To further complicate the matter, it seems as though Skrýmir may be associated with either the verb *skrauma* ‘to scare away’ or the noun *skrauni* ‘a scary monster’. De Vries offers comparisons with Nynorsk *skrymja*, Swedish *skrymma* ‘to take up a lot of space’, ‘look big’, and with Icelandic *skrum* ‘boasting’, *skraumi* ‘boaster’ (cf. also Simek (1993), 292-3 ‘boaster’). If this were the case Skrýmir would be rather a suitable name in the myth as Snorri tells it, and perhaps aptly suited to *Hrbl.* 26 (unless we are to see that in terms of Fjórr being ridiculed for having been frightened by a giant named ‘deceiver’).

Snorri was faced with many complications, conflicting myths and possibly corrupted accounts. It is generally agreed that he was interested in accuracy and was also a genuine antiquarian. Yet it may be the case, at least in this myth, that he has unfairly disregarded the account in *Hrbl.* 36 and *Ls.* 60. It may also be the case that Snorri’s version of the myth is far newer than the one (or those) alluded to in *Hrbl.* 36 and *Ls.* 60. Because we cannot accurately reconstruct myths that are no longer extant, we have an answer to the question of ‘who owns the glove?’ – both and neither. It must be said that this particular problem, although central to the topic, raises many questions which cannot be fully handled in this dissertation.

\(^{249}\) A. Orchard (1997), p. 43.
\(^{251}\) See also R. Simek (1993), p. 84.
5 GERDR AND SKADI: FROM GIANTESS TO GODDESS

5.1 GERDR ‘THE WOMAN’ OR ‘THE ENCLOSED FIELD’?

The giantess is found in various roles throughout the Eddaic myths, some similar to the giants, some differing greatly. Often the giantess can be an object of profound beauty, and thus an object of sexual desire. Gerðr is among the giantesses falling into this category and has been the subject of frequent debate. The myth in which she plays the greatest role is preserved in the Eddaic poem Skírnismál or För Skírnis. The poem begins with a prose introduction followed by forty-two verses with two prose links and a prose ending. It is found in the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda, GKS 2365 4to, and the first twenty-seven verses can also be found in AM 748 4to. Snorri Sturluson provides an account of the myth in Sn.E. Gylf. 37, and a euhemerised version in Heimskringla. Snorri’s source is likely to be Skírnismál, seeing that he quotes strophe 42 in Gylfaginning. Other references to the myth are found in Ls. 42 and Hyndl. 30 and indirectly in Vsp. 52. No surviving skaldic works refer to this myth, but gerðr commonly forms the basis of kennings for women.

Felix Niedner was the first to interpret Skírnismál in terms of the marriage of sky and earth. Magnus Olsen, who saw it as a fertility myth, later expounded this interpretation. Gerðr is presented as the daughter of the earth/winter giant Gýmir, and he derives the name from garðr meaning ‘an enclosed field’. Olsen presents Skírnir as the

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252 Long is a night, long are two, how will I endure three? Often a month has seemed less to me than this half a [stag night]. (Cleasby-Vigfusson defines hýnott as one of three nights before or after a wedding.) Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 304.
illuminator offering the light of Freyr (interpreted as the sky-god) to the dark earth (interpreted as Gerôr) which is refused. She is threatened with a curse of perversion and infertility to which she finally submits, agreeing to meet Freyr at Barrey ‘Isle of Barley’. The poem was thus seen as a ritual drama to be re-enacted by Freyr’s worshippers, and Bertha Phillpotts saw it as purely such a dramatic re-enactment. Ursula Dronke explores the myth in terms of the hieros gamos (divine wedding) first mentioned by Olsen, and presents various parallels for the cursing of unwilling women. Gro Steinsland, inspired by Snorri’s account in Ynglinga saga 10, presents the view that the hieros gamos in Skirnismál is a depiction of the conquest of the king (with powers of fecundity) and his domination over the land. She believes that Hliðskjálf represents a throne, the apples represent an orb, the ring is that which a king traditionally wears, and the gambanteinn represents a sceptre.

Lars Lønnroth and Stephen Mitchell applied the structuralist approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss to seek the meaning or purpose behind the poem. They concluded that the myth is based on marriage-customs in Icelandic society. Essentially they believe that the poem is based on the buying of peace between two opposing factions through marriage. We are told in Hyndl. 30 that Freyr and Gerôr are married, Freyr àtti Gerôi, ‘Freyr married Gerôr’, but Freyr and Gerôr never actually marry in Skirnismál, in fact they never even meet each other within the poem. It is possible that marriage is implied, or at least sexual union. Nowhere is it suggested in the poem that peace between the gods and giants is a factor, nor the necessity for its purchase. Another structuralist approach by Julie Randlev concludes that the poem is centred on the concept of munr (longing), and is therefore a love poem, which she dates to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. Paul Bibire argues that the rune-names mentioned in the love-curse are unlikely to be older than ca.

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This would imply that the form of the poem we now have should probably be read in the light of medieval courtly literary ideas of fin amour instead of (or possibly as well as) the crop-fertility symbolism seen by Olson, which would also strengthen the argument put forward by Randlev. Her conclusions contrast greatly with that of Olsen (and his followers) and to that of Lönnroth and Mitchell in that it focuses on Freyr and Gerôr the characters, rather than what they are believed to symbolize.

The views of Olsen have been contested or at least questioned in the later twentieth century by Lotte Motz among others, questioning Olsen’s etymology of the name Gerôr. She suggests that Gerôr may be related to gjôrô and thus it is possible to interpret the name as ‘girdled one’. Paul Bibire suggests that, among a range of possibilities, the name could be seen as a by-form of the name Geirriôr, and developed as a name-element with no evident meaning. It is tempting to point to the possibility that it may be, or may have become, associated in some way with gerô. The foremost meaning of gerô is ‘armour’ or ‘war-gear’, but it has a secondary meaning according to Cleasby-Vigfusson, ‘girth; digrask i gerôum, to become stout in the waist, euphon.,[sic] of a woman, to be with child’. If this were the case it would confirm Gerôr’s role as a fertility giantess / goddess, and certainly has no immediate connection with the earth or enclosures of land. However this is entirely speculative and dependent upon a secondary meaning within a colloquial phrase which itself is likely to be modern.

Gerôr appears in several giantess names: Íngerôr ‘dust, ashes-gerôr’, Ángerôr ‘black-gerôr’, Flaugngerôr ‘din-gerôr’, Hergerôr ‘war-gerôr’, Hrimgerôr ‘frost-gerôr’, Skjaldergerôr ‘shield-gerôr’ and Unngerôr ‘wave-gerôr’. Gerôr and other names incorporating -gerôr belong exclusively to female names and it is possible that this may be a result of its now lost meaning. In this context, gerôr must not only function as a word by itself, but would logically have some feminine implication. Gerôr is found in

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264 Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 197.
numerous kennings for ‘women’ one of which is, ‘Gerðr-of-the-gold-ring’. Motz’s interpretation ‘girdled one’ seems to work for Gerðr in the context of *Skírnismál*, and it should be noted that the name is widely attested in personal names.

5.2 *SKÍRNISMÁL* AS LAY CONCERNING SKÍRNIR AND GERDR

*Skírnismál* is different from the other poems surveyed thus far. For example, we have seen that Hymir’s role in *Hymiskviða* exemplifies Þórr’s god-like characteristics; the poem is not about Hymir, rather it is about Þórr. Similarly Vafþrúðnir in *Vafþrúðnismál* exemplifies Óðinn’s god-like characteristics. Yet in *Skírnismál*, it is neither Freyr nor Gerðr who is the subject of such exemplification, but Skírnir who is neither a god nor an elf. This is not to suggest that the poem is entirely about Skírnir in the way that *Hymiskviða* is about Þórr, as the poem tells about the events leading up to the meeting of Freyr and Gerðr. Skírnir takes it upon himself to perform the difficult task of going to Jötunheimar and retrieving Gerðr’s affection:

\[
\text{Skírnir [kvað]:} \\
\text{Mar gefðu mér þá,} \\
\text{þann er mik um myrkvan beri} \\
\text{visan vaflologa,} \\
\text{ok þat sverð} \\
\text{er siþlft vegiz} \\
\text{víð iðtma rætt.}^{267}
\]

(Skm. 8)

Gerðr plays hard to get, and his cunning, capacity for persuasion and perhaps his determination to serve his master are exemplified. Skírnir brings three, perhaps four items with him to Jötunheimar: *Epli eilfjo* ‘eleven’ apples *ægillinn*, a golden ring (i.e. Draupnir) which drops eight new rings of equal weight every ninth night, and Freyr’s

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265 *gollthrings Gerðr*: Haraldr Sigurðarson 7, 1. 6 & 7; Magnús berfœttir 5, l. 3 (Kock I, 166-199).

266 Skírnir said: Give me a horse then, that might bear me through the dim, certain flickering flame, and the sword which fights by itself against giant-kind.

267 These are commonly presumed to be the apples of Jöunn which give the gods eternal youth. It is conceivable that *epli eilfjo* is a scribal error for *epli eilfjof* ‘apples [which are] medicine against old age’. 
sword which fights by itself. Skírnir also possesses a gambanteinn ‘magic wand’ which he claims to have sought and found in a forest.

Gerôr refuses the apples as they are insufficient to make her change her mind, and she also refuses the ring as she has her father's gold at hand. Skírnir threatens to cut off her head should she refuse, and to this she says that no such oppression will make her change her mind. Thus Skírnir threatens her with a curse of his magic wand, a curse of isolation, perversion, and misery. The curse is ten strophes in length, making up just under a quarter of the total number of strophes, and it is the curse which is central to the poem. The curse need not be central to the myth as Snorri does not include it in his description of events. According to Snorri, the significance of Skírnir’s journey is two-fold, he wins Gerôr for Freyr and does not return with Freyr’s sword. It is implied in Ls. 42 and Vsp. 52 that the sword was given away, and Freyr finds himself weaponless at Ragnarök.

Gerôr refuses to submit to the passions of fair Freyr. Everlasting youth, gold, and the threat of death fail to compel her to change her mind. Yet the threat of an eternity of being raped by freakish giants convinces her to reconsider:

Heill vér þú ná heldr, sveinn,
    ok tak við hrimkálki,
    fullom forns miðaðar;
    þó hafða ek þat ættlat,
    at myndak aldregi
    unni Vaningia vel! 269

(Skm. 37)

Only the threat of a future so grim persuades Gerôr to Freyr’s side. The curse itself shares striking characteristics with a love charm discovered in Bergen among a vast number of runic inscriptions:

269 Skm. 37: Hale be now rather, boy, and accept the frosty cup full of old mead; though I had intended that I would never love the son of the Vanir well.
Skírnir’s curse contains a number of significant verbal parallels:

\[
\text{Fvrs } \text{rìst ek } \text{ðer} \\
\text{oc } \text{þría ståfi}:
\]
\[
\text{ergi } \text{oc } \text{céði} \\
\text{ok } \text{oþola;}
\]
\[
\text{sva } \text{ec } \text{þat of } \text{ríst,} \\
\text{sem } \text{ec } \text{þat á } \text{réist,}
\]
\[
\text{ef } \text{goraz } \text{þárfa } \text{þess.}^{271}
\]

\[\text{(Skm. 36)}\]

Rather than rejecting Freyr, she leaps at the opportunity to meet him at the grove Barri. The poem does more than exemplify Skírnir’s characteristics, it tells us how Freyr and Gerðr came to be together (possibly married). The poem certainly seems to be concerned with fertility, and the necessity of the union between a fertility god, and, if not a fertility goddess/giantess, then the one whom he desires (or possibly requires) to share his sexuality. Gerðr may simply represent only a fair and beautiful woman (as she is described in the prose introduction and in strophe 6), and if she keeps herself to herself she would become an infertile old maid, not unlike the dried-up thistle mentioned in strophe 31. To some degree she may simply be representative of the female sex and sexuality, and thus the myth is still a fertility myth though not necessarily as Olsen and many others have viewed it. The theme of the poem certainly concerns the coming together of a god and giantess, but the thrust of the poem is, not necessarily why, but how Skírnir accomplishes this difficult task.

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270 A. Liestøl (1963), p. 41.
271 Skm. 36. I will carve Fvrs against you and three letters, ‘perversion’, ‘frenzy’ and ‘restlessness’; so I scratch it off as I cut it on, if needs arise for it.
5.3 Further Comparisons Between Óðinn and Skírnir

[Skírnir] kvæð:
Kostir ro betri
heldr en at klóskla va sé,
hveim er fúss er fara;
cino dögri
mér var aldr um skapaðr
ok alt líf um lagit.\(^{272}\)
(Skm. 13)

Stylistically this strophe seems to have much in common with Hávamál, in which Óðinn relays ‘words of wisdom’ in a series of loosely connected strophes. Many of these Óðinnic gnomic verses can be found throughout the Eddaic poems involving Óðinn. One of many parallels to Skm. 13 in this sense is Háv. 72:

Sonr er betri,
þótt sé síð of alinn
eptr genginn guma;
sialdan bautarsteinar
standa brauto nær,
nema reisi niðr at nið.\(^{273}\)
(Háv. 72)

In Hrbl. 22 Háðarbróðr (Óðinn in disguise) speaks the following gnomic verse:

Háðarbróðr kvæð:
þat hefir eik,
er af annarri skefri;
um sík er hverr í sílko.
Hvat vanntu meðan, bórr?\(^{274}\)
(Hrbl. 22)

\(^{272}\) Skm. 13: Skírnir said: There are better choices than to whimper, for him who is willing to travel, one day was my fate shaped and all (my?) life was laid out.

\(^{273}\) Háv. 72: A son is better, though born late [and] after the man departs. Seldom [do] memorial stones stand near the road, unless kinsman raise to kin.

\(^{274}\) Hrbl. 22: Háðarbróðr said: One oak gets what is cut off another; each sees to himself in such. What were you up to meanwhile, bórr?
This is the only such verse in Hárbarðsljóð, but seems to serve as a sort of trademark for Óðinn. It is possible that a similar comparison can be made between Grm. 51 and Háv. 12:

Ölt ertu, Geirröór!
hefr þú ofdrukkt;
miklo ertu hnuugginn.
er þú mño gengi,
õllom einheriom
ok Óðins hylli.²⁷⁵

(Grm. 51)

This can be compared with Óðinn’s sayings about the repercussions involved with over-drinking in Háv. 12:

Era svá gott
sem gott kveða
ðl alda sonum;
því at fiera veit
er fleira drekkr
sins til geðs gumli.²⁷⁶

(Háv. 12)

It seems that Snorri was aware of such gnomic interjections in myths involving Óðinn as he quotes strophe 1 of Hávamál in Sn.E. Gylf. 2:²⁷⁷

Gáttir allar
þór gangi fram
um skygnaz skyli;
þvíat övist er at vita
hvar úvinir
síta á flei̇ firi̇r.²⁷⁸

(Háv. 1)

Skm. 13 may or may not be one such gnomic verse, but it does have much in common with the verses in Hávamál. One of Óðinn’s identifying characteristics seems to be his

²⁷⁵ Grm. 51: Drunk are you Geirröór! You have over indulged in drink; You are deprived of much, when you [pass from] my support, from all the Einherjar, and from Óðinn’s grace.
²⁷⁶ Háv. 12: It is not so good as they say, ale for the sons of men; because a man knows less of his own mind, the more he drinks.
²⁷⁷ Sn.E. Gylf. 2 (ed. Faulkes, p. 8).
²⁷⁸ Háv. 1: One should look around all thresholds before going in, because one cannot know for certain where enemies sit on the hall-floor.
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wise sayings, and these appear not infrequently in other myths involving Óðinn. In the cases of Grm. 51 and Hrbl. 22 Óðinn is in disguise as Grimnir and Hárbarðr respectively. The gnomic verses may be intended to identify him. Skm. 13 may or may not be one such verse, but it seems to have all the same overtones. Furthermore Óðinn is the only character in the mythological poems of the Elder Edda who speaks in gnomic verses, with the possible exception of Skírnir. Óðinn and Skírnir are the only two characters to use rune-magic, and they are the only two characters actively to seek the affection of giantesses (albeit Skírnir seeks Gerðr’s affection for Freyr). They are also the only two characters who have possession of a magical gambanteinn. The character who is most often associated with horse-riding is Óðinn, and his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir seems to have the ability to cross between worlds as can be inferred from Bdr. 2:

```
Upp reis Óðinn,
alda gautr,
ok hann á Sleipnir
sóðul um lagði,
reið hann niðr þáðan
Niflhel lar til,
með þann hvelpi,
þeim er ór heliu kom. ²⁷⁹

(Bdr. 2)
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This can be compared to Skírnir riding to Jötunheimr, and in this instance he rides through a certain flickering flame. In the poem Skírnir borrows the horse from Freyr which complicates this general comparison, but need not be seen as an invalidating factor to this argument.

It may not be the case that Óðinn and Skírnir are variants of the same character, or that Skírnir is Óðinn in one of his many disguises. Óðinn and Skírnir appear together in a separate myth regarding Skírnir’s journey to Svartálfheimr to have the fetter Gleipnir made.²⁸⁰ Incidentally it is the Alfhórir who sends him there. There is a possibility, however, that, based on the parallels presented above, the myth of Skírnir’s journey may

²⁷⁹ Bdr. 2: Up rose Óðinn, Gaut of men, and he laid a saddle on Sleipnir, he rode down thence to Niflhel; he met the whelp which came out of hel.
²⁸⁰ Sn.E. Gylf. ch. 34 (ed. Faulkes, p. 28).
have been based on an Óðinn myth, in which he travels to Jötunheimr seeking the affection of a giantess. This hypothetical myth would have much in common with the myth of Óðinn and Billingr’s daughter (Háv. 96-102) in which the giantess plays hard to get. Perhaps Skírnir’s use of rune magic and the gambanteinn, his possession of Draupnir, and the gnomic-like verse in strophe 13 are fossils from such an Óðinn myth. Skírnir may have replaced Óðinn in Skírnismál (possibly even at an early stage in the development of the myth) much in the way that Fórr seems to have replaced (or parodied) Óðinn in Alvissmál. Snorri mentions that Skírnir is sent to seek Gerðr, but he omits all the details regarding their meeting (Sn.E. Gylf. 37). Conversely the kenning gollhrings Gerdr, which refers to a woman, may be drawing on the myth of Draupnir as a wedding gift (the ring which was eventually burned with Baldr), which drops eight rings of equal weight every ninth night. If this could be substantiated it would suggest that certain details in the myth of Skírnir’s journey, such as the wedding gifts, may be ancient, though it means little insofar as Skírnir’s role is concerned.

5.4 SKÁDI’S MARRIAGE INTO THE ÆSIR

The pantheon of the Norse gods is roughly comprised of three types: the Æsir, Vanir and those affiliated through marriage. Vafþrúðnir seems to give a reason why Njóðr is like one of the Æsir and yet was not born among them. Óðinn asks:

```
[Óðinn kvaðr]
Segðu þat it tiunda,
allz þú tíva rök
öll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan Niðr um kom
með ása somon,
hofom ok horgom
hann reðr hunnmorgom,
ok varðat hann ásom alinn. 283
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(Vm. 38)

282 golthrings Gerdr: Haraldr Sigurðarson 7, l. 6 & 7; Magnús berfœtr 5, l. 3 (Kock I, 166-199).
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Vafðrúnir's answers:

[Vafðrúnir kvad:]
I Vanaheimi
skópo hann vis regin
ok seldo at gíslingo goðum;
 lí aldar rök
hann mun aprt koma
heim með visom vōnom.284

(Vm. 39)

Thus Njórr is a god in that he has temples and worshippers, regardless of his lineage. Snorri provides a longer account in Ynglinga Saga concerning the war between the Æsir and Vanir, which need not be included here.285 It is possible that once it was believed that only the Æsir and those associated with them (through hostage-trading and marriage) were worshipped as deities, that those in the world Vanaheimr were somehow inaccessible or unknown altogether. If Óðinn’s description of a god in Vm. 38 (having temples and worshippers) in any way defines godly status, then Skaði may have had such status, given place-names suggesting a cult, and the fact that she is called Óndurgoð ‘ski- deity’. It is important that Snorri clearly does not regard her as a goddess, therefore her cult following may have died out although she was remembered by others albeit in the form of a giantess married to a god.

5.5 Vengeance and the Giantess

As a giantess Skaði’s role is that of a threatening menace, but upon marrying Njórr she takes on the role of a goddess. Snorri relates the myth concerning Skaði’s anger at the killing of her father Fjazi:

283 Vm. 38: Óðinn said: Say tenthty, since you, Vafðrúnir, know all the fate of the gods, whence did Njórr come among the sons of the Æsir, he governs innumerable temples and places of worship, and was not born among the Æsir.
284 Vm. 39: Vafðrúnir said, in Vanaheimr, the wise powers shaped him, and handed over as a hostage to the gods; at the downfall of time, he will come back, home with the wise Vanir.
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En Skaði, dóttir Fjázas, tok hiálm ok bryniu ok òll hervápn ok ferr til Ásgarð at helna fjödur sín.

(Sn.E. Sk. 1)

Skaði’s giant-like predilection towards the seeking of vengeance is similarly noticeable in Lokasenna:

[Skaði kvað:]
Létt er þér, Loki;
munattu lengi svá
leika lausom hala,
þvít þik á híðrí skolo
ins hrímkalda magar
göðnom binda göð.

(Ls. 49)

In strophe 50 Loki brags about having been foremost in the killing of Fjázi, and in the following strophe Skaði threatens: frá minom véom ok vongom skolo þér æ köld ráð koma. Skaði finally gets her vengeance as during the binding of Loki she hangs a poisonous snake over Loki’s head:

Skaði tok eitrorn ok festi upp yfir annlit Loka; draup þar or eitr. Sigyn kona Loka sat þar ok helt munnlaug undir eitrí. Er en munnlaugin var full, bar hón út eitrí; en meðan draup citrit á Loka. Þá kipti hann svá hart við, at þaðan af skalf íróð òll; þat ero nú kallaðir landskiálp. (Ls. 51)

(Ls. prose following 65)

There is a depiction of this scene on the Gosforth cross (Fig. 1) which suggests a widespread knowledge of the myth and of most of its details. Skaði is not depicted on the cross, but this need not influence our impression of the myth as told in Lokasenna.

Skaði’s vengefulness is comparable to the vengeance Suttungr seeks against Fjalarr and

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286 Sn.E. Sk. (G56): But Skaði, Fjázi the giant’s daughter took helmet and armour and all war-weapons and went to Ásgarð to avenge her father (ed. Faulkes, I, p. 2).
287 Ls. 49: You are cheerful, Loki, you will not sport so with a loose tail for long, because the gods must bind you on a sword with the guts of the frost-cold son.
288 Ls. 51: From my sanctuaries and fields shall always come to you cold counsel.
289 Ls. prose following 65: Skaði took a poisonous snake and fastened it up over Loki’s head, poison dripped out of it. Sigyn, Loki’s wife, sat there and held a bowl under the poison. But when the bowl was full, she carried the poison out; but meanwhile the poison dripped on Loki. The he jerked so hard against [it], that the whole world shook; that is now called earthquakes.
Galarr, they having killed his father, Gillingr. Vengeance is not necessarily a trait confined to giants; Óðinn’s son Víðarr is conceived with the sole intention of one day avenging his father. Similarly Váli is destined to be born with the specific purpose of avenging Baldr. It is worth noting that both Víðarr and Váli are sons of Óðinn, but moreover they are sons Óðinn has with the giantesses Gríðr and Rindr respectively. All this does is awaken the possibility that giants and giantesses may be inherently associated with vengeance, as is Óðinn who himself was the son of the giantess Bestla.

5.6 SKÁDI THE GODDESS?

If véom ok vongom means ‘sanctuaries and fields’ it suggests that Skáði had been equivalent to a goddess. The early references to Skáði are by two of the earliest skalds. In Ragnarsdrápa 20 (c. 850) Bragi refers to Skáði as öndurðís ‘ski-goddess’ and in Haustl. 7 (c. 900) Þjóðólfr of Hvin refers to her as öndurðogð meaning ‘ski-deity’. This can be compared with references to the god Ullr who was not only önduráss ‘ski-god’ but is also referred to as veiðiáss ‘hunting-god’ and bogaáss ‘bow-god’. In Sn.E. Gylf. 23 Snorri describes Skáði’s characteristics:

Pá för Skáði upp á fiallit ok bygði í Brymheimi, ok ferr hon miðk á skíðum ok með boga ok skýtr dýr. Hon heitir Öndurguð eða Öndurðís.291

(Sn.E. Gylf. 23)

It seems likely, given the accounts of Bragi and Þjóðólf, that Skáði had been seen as a god/dís goddess in earlier times. By the time Snorri is writing she has a deep love for Jötunheimar regardless of her marriage to Njörðr. In this way she voluntarily remains tied to Jötunheimar, and one might assume that these ties make her more giantess than goddess. Yet the mountains to which she belongs may be more significant than the fact that they are in Brymheimr. Just as Njörðr is associated with the sea, so Skáði is with the mountains, and just as the mountains and sea are figuratively opposites, so are Skáði and Njörðr. Evidence for a possible early cult of Skáði is given by place-names, above all

290 Sn.E. Sk. 22.
291 Sn.E. Gylf. 23: Then Skáði goes up on the mountain and lives in Brymheimr, and she goes often skiing and shoots wild animals with her bow. She is called ski-goddess or ski-dís (ed. Faulkes, p. 24).
Scandinavia itself.\(^{292}\) The Háleygjar (the family of Hákon jarl) apparently derived their descent from a supposed sexual union between Ôôinn and Skaôî (Eyvindr skáldaspillir, Háleygjarðatal 3-4, in Skj. I B, 60). This would associate her with the pattern of giantess-mistresses of Ôôinn, but it may also reflect an older cult in which she was a personification of the land over which they ruled (which would make her rather like Jôrô); whether this makes her a goddess or not seems uncertain. We must therefore ask if Skaôî was originally a local goddess\(^{293}\) who became assimilated into the Norse pantheon. The myth of her marriage to Njôrôr provides a means of explaining this. One consideration is that if a god or goddess, with its cult following, is assimilated into another group of deities, how is the addition of such a god or goddess to be rationalised? Does it develop gradually into a myth or series of myths like that of Bjazi and Skaôî? Perhaps Skaôî was once a goddess who had been redefined as giantess as a result of the development of a myth explaining how she came to be among the Æsir, and possibly also as a result of reinterpretation of her name to a meaning more suited to a giantess ('harm').\(^{294}\)

5.7 **DORGERÔR THE GIANT TROLL GODDESS**

Dorgerôr requires exploration, because she is identified as both a giantess or troll, and as a goddess. Dorgerôr’s appellative appears in various manuscript forms:

\begin{center}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hôlga bûôr</th>
<th>Holga troll</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hôlda-</td>
<td>Hôlda-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hôrpa-</td>
<td>Hôrpa-</td>
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<td>Hôrga-</td>
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\end{center}

Hôlgabrûôr appears in Snorra Edda\(^{295}\) and may be mentioned by Saxo (Book 3, ch. 2, para. 8, p. 65). The element bûôr generally means ‘bride’. In Snorra Edda we learn that Svô er sagt at konungr só er Hôlgi er nefndr, er Hôlogaland er viô kent, var faôir Porgerôar Hôlgabrûôar.\(^{297}\) Therefore it has long been argued that Hôlgabrûôr must be connected with the figure Hôlgi, who according to Snorri, is the founder of

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\(^{293}\) See distribution-map, ARG. II, p. 339, for localisation of placenames containing the name Skaôî.

\(^{294}\) AEW: s.v.

\(^{295}\) Forms are as they appear in: G. Storm, ‘Om Thorgerd Hôlgebrud’ Arkiv 2 (1885), pp. 124-135.

\(^{296}\) Sn.E. Sk. ch. 45 (ed. Faulkes, I, p. 60).
Hålogaland. Saxo tells us that King Helgi (possibly here used for Hölgi) of Hålogaland unsuccessfully courted Thora, daughter of Gusi king of the Finns. Helgi eventually married her despite her father’s disapproval and thus Hölgbraúr appears to mean ‘bride of Hölgi’. The alternative Hölga-troll is taken by Storm to mean ‘fiend’, and does not commit to any definition beyond ‘malevolent supernatural being’. Hörða- could be an indication of wider geographic spread of her cult in southwestern Norway as well as the North. Hóða- could be an indication of her affiliation with people of the status of hóðr. Horga- apparently refers to an outdoor cairn of stones, horg, often associated with female divinities, and which may be an early term for a cult centre. If this is the case it could suggest the cult might belong to an older stratum of local deities, which may be comparable with that of Skaôi. None of these names is attested early enough to determine which is original, and each may merely be a reinterpretation of the name to make sense of it.

References to the cult of Þorgeir Þorgabrúðr / Hórgabrúðr / Hórgatröll and her sister Irpa can be taken as instances of giantess-worship. One of which occurs in Jómsvikingadrápa (by Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson, d. 1222), mentioned in stt. 30, 32. In st. 32 Hólgabrúðr is named and she uses battle-magic:

> Pá fráð él í illa
  æða Hólgabrúðr:
  glumdi hagl á hlifum
  harða grimt ór norðri.301

(Jóms. 32)

Earlier in Jóms. st. 30 her devotees are identified, as is her propensity towards destroying her devotees or demanding another male human life as substitute.

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298 G. Storm, ‘Om Þorgeir Þórgóðr’ *Arkiv* 2 (1885), pp. 127.
299 G. Storm (1885), p. 126.
301 Then I heard the woman of Hólgóðr to make frenzied the evil storm; grim hail crashed from the north, on to shields harshly.
In Þórkell Gíslason’s Búadrápa (ca. 1200?) battle-magic again appears in reference to the giantess in st. 9.

She is referred to in st. 10 flagð et forljóta (flagð ‘trollwoman’ is a term of generic abuse for unpleasant female supernatural beings). It also refers to battle-magic being used on behalf of the ‘greedy ones’ suggesting a lust for gold.

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302 Before in the snowstorm of arrows Hákun grim to men, the hard vengeance came forward, should begin to sacrifice his son.

303 Each lump of hail weighted an ounce, it splattered blood onto the sea, blood of the wound washed then for our people from the wounds of men. There the slaughtered fell widely, they saw the gilded shields quiver, the troop fought keenly on the earls’ warships.

304 The hideous trollwoman caused keen arrows to shoot from her fingers. That was testing for warriors. There happened a grim storm and driving snowstorm from the sky for the greedy ones against the mighty men; there was a loud clashing of shields.
Skúli Þórsteinsson mentions Hólg in his account of the Battle of Svold (1000) but with no associations of cult or female deities.

In Jómsvikinga saga the tide of battle turns against Earl Hákon and he invokes Þórgerðr Hólgabrúðr.

‘Pat bykkjumek sjá at á oss tekur at hallask bardaginn ok hugða ek til þess verst at berjask við þessa menn enda reynisk mér at því. Nú mun oss eigi hlýða svá búit nema vér takim nakkvat gott ráð...

(Jómsvikinga saga, ch. 32)

Facing north, Hákon kneels in a wood in that but his prayers are not answered because Þórgerðr is angry. She rejects all his offerings including human sacrifice, save that of Erlingr, his 7-year-old son.

The figure of Þórgerðr is entangled in the sources and this scene expresses that very well. Here one could easily replace the variation of her name beginning with the hölga-element, with horga- (hörgr meaning ‘a sacrificial cairn built in open air’). The hölga-element works just as well given Earl Hákon’s relationship with Hólg and the lineage of the earls of Hålogaland as discussed in Háleyjarlát.
The Roles of the Giants in Norse Mythology

In *Njáls saga* (c. 1290?) we are told that a temple existed for Þórr in which were the idols not only of her but of her sister Irpa and the god bórr. Each was adorned with a gold arm-ring and were dressed in fine clothes.\(^{300}\)

In *Ketils saga hængs* (c. 1400)\(^{310}\) Þórr Hórgatröll is mentioned clearly in a comic context of trolls. There is no evidence here to support any godlike attributes, and the fact that this is such a late source, which is actually set in Iceland rather than Norway, seems to show the end result of a gradual development from goddess to troll.

Þórr Hóðabrúðr appears in *Flateyjarbók, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*\(^{311}\) and here she is portrayed more fully as a goddess. In ch. 114\(^{312}\) there is a description of her temple which is referred to as having glass windows; this seems to be an indication of Christian influence, given that elsewhere her sanctuary is out-of-doors. She gives a gold arm-ring to Sigmundr (or perhaps he takes it from the idol), lending credence to her recognition as a local deity. Chapters 154-5 are very similar to the account in *Jómsvíkinga saga* chs. 32-34; the most notable difference is the name Hólgabrúðr as opposed to Hóðabrúðr in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*. In ch. 173\(^{313}\) the words *tróllskapr* ‘malicious magic’ and *fitonsandi* ‘sorcery’ are used to define the way in which she and her sister Irpa assist Þorleifr, but these do not imply any connection to trolls. In ch. 326 reference is made to the apparent marriage between Háló and the goddess Þórr, again dressed in fine clothes; this relates back to her marriage with Hólg the eponymous ancestor of the earls of Hlaðir. This might be echoed in the pattern of the marriage between Freyr and Gerðr, since the same passage states that the idol of Freyr was also stood in the same temple and was destroyed at the same time.

The legend of Earl Háló and his sacrifices to Þórr Hólgabrúðr and her sister Irpa sheds more light on the relationship between ruler and this peculiar deity. It may be

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\(^{310}\) *Ketils saga hængs* Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Viðjónsson, edd., *Fornaldarsögur norðurlanda*, I, p. IX.
\(^{312}\) This is also regarded as ch. 23 of *Færeyinga saga*, Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., (1967), pp. 43-45.
possible to draw a connection between the female deity, married to the male ruler, and the sacrifice of the male ruler’s offspring. The suitability of this form of the name, Hölgbraur, may be explained in the wider context, that is if one sees the apparent conflict of interests in Hölgbraur bride of Högni (the founder of the dynasty) demanding the sacrifice of Erlingr (its last pagan generation).

### 5.8 STEINSLAND’S VIEWS CONCERNING GIANTS AS RECIPIENTS OF CULTS

Gro Steinsland once questioned whether the giants were ever recipients of cults in the Viking Age.\(^{314}\) Her premise rests on a study of Norwegian place-names conducted by Hjalmar Lindroth in 1930.\(^{315}\) This study brought to light a number of names which may have included skeðju (fem. gen. of skeðja: feminine form corresponding to the apparently grammatically masculine name Skaði). The feminine form of these names is linked to well-known place name elements possibly referring to cult-places such as vé, hof and hundr. According to Lindroth the toponyms seem to belong to old agrarian areas,\(^{316}\) and he concludes that Skaði may have been a goddess at one time. This conclusion is highly speculative but it does raise an important possibility that Skaði may have originated as a localised deity that became absorbed into the greater pantheon of gods. Lotte Motz pursues the possibility that the giants represent older gods of the Nordic inhabitants,\(^{317}\) though this cannot be sufficiently proven. It is difficult to imagine worshipping a goddess named ‘scathe’, unless the name is of such great age that it survives as a corrupted form of a different word.\(^{318}\) Nevertheless there has been substantial disagreement concerning the origin and meaning of the Skaði place-names, therefore the position will be taken here that the matter is uncertain.

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\(^{316}\) Ibid, p. 42.


\(^{318}\) *DNM*, s.v.; *AEW*, s.v.
On the basis of a refrain from Völsa þáttr 'penis-story', Steinsland questions whether the giants were recipients of cults: þiggi mörnir þetta blæti 'accept, mörnir, this offering'. She argues that mörnir is to be interpreted as 'giantesses':

'The interpretation of mörnir has caused a great deal of trouble. Linguistically there are two possibilities of interpretation:

1. mörn, masc. sing., meaning 'sword', testified among sword-heiti in Sn.E.

2. mörnir, fem. pl., meaning 'giantesses'. This meaning is best exemplified in the sources: Sn.E. Pulur; Haustlög 6; Pórsdrápa; Sturl.saga I, 280.

Most of the scholars who have been occupied with Vph, consider that linguistically the plural form is to be preferred. Still, this form has been rejected. This is the case with Andreas Heusler, who analysed the story in 1903; with M. Olsen in 1909, and their followers. What is the reason for their choice of interpretation? The answer is: the dogma that giants were never the object of any form of cultic ritual.\(^{319}\)

There are a few inconsistencies within this argument, at least in its published form. Mörn is listed in the Pulur under (Sn.E. Sk. IV c, 3. Tröllkverna heiti) as the name of a single giantess.\(^{320}\) Mörn seems to be feminine, not masculine as is apparently the word mörnir,\(^{321}\) which, incidentally, appears listed in the Pulur (Sn.E: Sk. IV 1, 8. Sverða heiti) as the name of a sword. Steinsland continues: 'Most scholars accept the former possibility: mörnir = masc. sing. meaning sword... Nevertheless the fact remains that mörn is a term meaning 'giantess'\(^{322}\).

According to Turville-Petre the plural form mörnir is possible, and comparable to an ancient Indian rite,\(^{323}\) but he feels it is unlikely philologically, 'A fem. pl., whether of the o, i, or u-stem, in the form mörnir would be exceptional, although forms such as marnar, marnir, even marnir might well be possible.' The form marnar appears in printed editions of at least one skaldic poem marnar faðir (Haustl. 12, Skj. I B 16), apparently referring to Skaði, but this is unlikely to be the same word since the form marnar has

\(^{320}\) Mörn may be associated with the sea as the name appears in a kenning Marnar mör possibly referring to the sea or a ship. See Finnur Jónsson, ed., Den norsk-isländske skaldedigtning (København: 1912-16), Bl 1 66 (Niddigt om kong Harald blöland).
\(^{321}\) Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 444, under entry mörnir. s.v.
\(^{322}\) G. Steinsland (1986), p. 216.
been produced by editorial emendation from manuscript mornar. One must also consider that the offering is the severed penis of a horse. The image of the horse-phallus being offered to and possibly even passed around between a number of giantess-deities is as amusing (if low-brow) as the bulk of Völsa páttr. According to Turville-Petre, 'mörnir' is recorded as a name for a "sword", and it is most probably related to the verb merja "to crush" (cf. bauta "to hit, strike"), which also appears in verses of the "Story of Völsi" with the meaning "phallus". On this basis the horse-phallus might be an offering to mörnir (= penis) as a part of a fertility ritual, and may not involve giantesses at all.

5.9 A SUMMARY OF THE TRANSITION FROM GIANTESS TO GODDESS

Gerðr and Skaði are associated with the gods in the source material. They are or were of giant kin, and have their roots in Jötunheimar, and in the case of Skaði this connection is kept alive. It may be the case, as the place-name evidence seems to show, though it does not conclusively prove, that Gerðr and Skaði were once localized deities. If this were the case it seems a possibility that, as they gradually became incorporated into a wider pre-existing pantheon of gods, these myths developed explaining their addition or popularity. The fact that Gerðr and Skaði are said to come from another world, Jötunheimar, seems to suggest that they are 'new' insofar as they are new to the pantheon. Their addition to the Æsir through marriage can possibly be compared to the addition of Njörðr, one of the Vanir, as a hostage. As speculative as this is, Snorri tells us in SnE. Gylf. 23 that Hœnir and Njörðr were traded as hostages after the war between the Æsir and Vanir. Insofar as the transition from giantess to goddess is concerned, the marriages of Gerðr and Skaði to gods seem to be a key element of their change of status.

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324 Ibid., p. 258.
325 SnE. Gylf. 23 (ed. Faulkes, p. 23), and Ynglinga saga ch. 4 in, Bjarni Ádalbjardarson, ed., Heimskringla I, Íslenzk fornrit XXVI (Reykjavik: 1941), p. 12.
6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 THE LITERARY MATERIAL

The bulk of our knowledge and understanding of Norse mythology is derived from only a few Icelandic literary sources whose manuscripts date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, between 250-300 years after the conversion of Iceland. Both Snorra Edda and the Elder Edda share information, and it is sometimes difficult to know if these sources borrow from each other, or if they both draw on earlier sources. If so, one cannot always know for certain if they draw on the same earlier sources. This must be borne in mind when anomalies arise such as the question of ‘who owns the glove? Skrymir or Fjalarr’ (see subchapter 4.5) in which Snorri can be seen picking and choosing details which suit his purpose.

Poems such as Vm., Grm., HrbL, Hym., Vsp., Bdr., and Alv. employ a framework involving at least one god, and an opponent which can be a giant, dwarf, sibyl, or Óðinn, and at least one of the characters involved has or has had access to the dead. It appears that the purpose of these frameworks is to relay mythological information on the one hand, and express the characteristics of the god on the other. We learn much about the giants discussed within the wisdom-game in Vm., but Vafþrúðnir himself may be a sort of stock figure. The dwarf Alviss ‘all-wise’ and Vafþrúðnir ‘inn alsvinni iötunn’ are made out to be worthy opponents in the wisdom game, but their characters are not necessarily central to the myths. Óðinn’s characteristics are exemplified by and within

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326 Vsp. 50: Hrymr drives from the east, raises his shield in front of him, the world serpent stirs in giant-rage, the serpent presses down on the waves, but the eagle screams, pale-beaked tears corpses; Naglfar is loosened.
327 Vm. 1: The all-wise giant.
the wisdom games, and the fact that he initiates them is in line with his proclivity for provoking conflict. Snorri employs this literary structure in Gylfaginning and the beginning of Skáldskaparmál, and his choice of this structure to present the mythology must be deliberate. This would suggest that the convention was old and associated with Eddaic poetry, and that Snorri is following earlier models, as in the case of Håttatal which is modelled on the Håttalykill of Earl Rögnvaldr Kali and Hallr Þórarinsson. In the case of Gylfaginning he not merely reproduces but plays with this older convention. For example the god always wins the wisdom contest, whereas in Gylfaginning the god does not lose but neither does he win. He reaches the limits of his knowledge because he has no knowledge of further truth (reaching the end of pagan wisdom), and then Hár, Jafnhár and Priði vanish with a thunderclap along with the hall and fortress, leaving Gylfi alone in an open field. Gangleri (Gylfi’s pseudonym) is listed as an Óðinn-name in Sn.E. Gylf. 20. The title Gylfaginning means simply ‘Gylfi’s tricking’, but Snorri leaves us wondering who is tricking who, or, perhaps, whether Snorri is tricking us as well?

Essentially each myth must be examined and understood as fully as possible in its own right before drawing parallels. This can only aid the value and accuracy of the parallel once drawn. Undoubtedly a great number of Norse myths have Indo-European origins or parallels, and the difficulty of the task may not be spotting the similarities but rather in sorting out the Indo-European from the Norse. To say that Ymir was a hermaphrodite may be accurate in that parallels from Iran suggest that an original figure from which both Norse and Iranian myth are derived may have been a hermaphrodite. Yet this may not mean that, by the time our sources were composed, Ymir was still strictly seen as a hermaphrodite in terms of gender. Concerning the clear and certain parallels between the myth of Óðinn’s theft of the mead, and Indra and the soma, the one myth cannot easily be used to explain what we find in the other, as there are too many variables in the development of both myths. What such parallels seem to tell us is the age and durability of such myths. Furthermore myths such as Óðinn’s theft of the mead and the myth of Bárr’s fishing expedition seem to be comprised of various sub-myths, indicating the age

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328 Sn.E. Gylf. ch.20 (ed. Faulkes, p. 21), quoting from Grm. 46.
329 See subchapter 2.7.
of the material and also its complexity. If more than one version of a narrative such as that in Hymiskviða occur, how does one determine which is ‘accurate’, if a myth can actually be considered so? It may be that myths were constantly developing in different areas across the Norse world, just as the variations in the picture-stones seem to suggest about Þórr’s fishing trip. This need not be applied strictly to geographical or temporal variations, but variation may also occur between different cults or strata of society, and thus there are numerous dimensions in which variation can take place. We must conclude that there cannot be a single ‘correct’ version of a myth.

6.2 ICONOGRAPHIC SOURCES

Caution must be exercised when applying iconographic evidence to the myths, and one must be equally cautious when applying mythological evidence to archaeological finds. Some of the picture stones bear completely ambiguous scenes, and sometimes myths can be read into them. In this way Sørensen reads the myth of Þórr’s fishing trip into the Ardre stone.\footnote{30 See subchapter 4.1.} In subchapter 4.1, I have presented an equally plausible explanation for exactly the same features on the stone. We cannot now know whether the carvers meant to depict two distinct myths using the same image, but it seems almost certain that they sometimes intended to depict one myth but also to include in it a symbolic allusion to another. The Gosforth cross, however, seems to have the potential to depict both pagan Norse and Christian scenes with the same images.\footnote{31 For a discussion of the Christian and pagan interpretations of the Gosforth Cross, see R. Bailey, \textit{Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England} (London: 1980), p. 125 ff.}

6.3 FUNCTIONS OF THE GIANTS

In the Eddaic myths the giants seem to play the part of worthy opponents to the gods. It is unclear if or when they came to be illir as Snorri describes them. Perceptions seem to have changed during the development of the myths, as must be expected, and the parts the giants play can often be highly ambiguous. We know that giantesses can cross the divide into the families of the gods, but we must raise questions such as the extent to which these giantesses were once goddesses. Otherwise the giants and giantesses often
act as opponents, be it a wise giant against Óðinn or a strong giant against Þórr. The cosmological giant Ymir seems to partake in this opposition, if not by actively confronting a god, then by producing the race of giants, but this is complicated by the fact that Óðinn himself is at least half-giant in descent. It is possible the giants were believed to have been not only the opposites of the gods but also of mankind, thus acting as a constant threat to human safety, and that people required a god such as mighty Þórr to protect them. Interpretations and explanations have been put forward, some attractive and some less so, and in most cases they have either been discounted or accepted, at least for a while. So it is with Norse mythology that we have multiple sources of potential evidence, yet rarely is it enough to prove a single point conclusively.
APPENDIX A: Giant Names with Possible Relevance to Ymir's Characteristics and Role in Norse Cosmogony

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earth/Rock/Bone</th>
<th>Water/Frost</th>
<th>Yelling/Noise</th>
<th>Malevolence/Opposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aurgelmir 'muddy-yeller'</td>
<td>Brunnir 'sea'</td>
<td>Bell 'bellow'</td>
<td>Alsvart 'all-black'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurgelmir 'mud-masked'</td>
<td>Hringvölnir 'frost-masked'</td>
<td>Bergslínir 'naked-yeller'</td>
<td>Andrór 'fearsome, terrible'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurnir 'muddy'</td>
<td>Hvarr 'whale'</td>
<td>Gillingr 'bellower'</td>
<td>Brandingr 'Burner'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurnir 'muddy'</td>
<td>Kaldegrani 'cold-moustached'</td>
<td>Glaumr 'noisy one'</td>
<td>Bollhorn 'Bale-thorn'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergbóll 'Mountain Dweller'</td>
<td>Vagnhófói 'head of a whale'</td>
<td>Glaumr 'noisy with merriment'</td>
<td>Eidr 'fire'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergdólnir 'Mountain Danes'</td>
<td>Vaspúr 'wetness, sleety'</td>
<td>Gala 'to crow' or more likely gjalla 'to yell'</td>
<td>Geirröðr 'spear-redener'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergsaúlir 'Mountain Hall'</td>
<td>Vindsvatr 'cool-wind'</td>
<td>Gallinh 'shrieker'</td>
<td>Haglfi 'greedy'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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332 *Aur* 'muddy, dirty'; *gjalla* 'to yell'; *Vm.* 29.
333 *Vsp.* 9.
334 *Belja* 'to bellow'; *Sn.* E *St.* (ed. Faulkes I, p. 18); *Vsp.* 53 (kenning); *Þul.* II 1; *Háld.* 5; *Hauatl.* 18.
335 *Þul.* IV b, 4.
336 *Þul.* IV c, 2.
337 *Þul.* IV b, 2; *Skm.* 35.
338 *Beyr* 'naked'; *gjalla* 'to yell'; *Þul.* IV b, 6; *Vm.* 29 & 35.
339 *Andr-* a prefixed prep. 'against, and metaph. hostile, adverse'. *Lex.* Poet. 662 and Simek 251 connect it with *indr* 'fearsome, terrible'.
341 *Þul.* IV b, 1; *Skm.* 28.
342 *Gala* 'to crow' or more likely *gjalla* 'to yell'; *Þul.* IV b, 3.
343 *Þul.* IV b, 4; *Ófs.* 5.
344 *Aurr* 'mud, clay, humus'; *reka* 'to drive'; *Korm.* 60.
345 *Þul.* IV b, 2.
346 *Háld.* 1.
347 *Þul.* IV b, 6, (see Simek, 1993 p. 44).
348 *Hym.* 2.
349 *Þul.* IV f, 2.
350 *Þul.* IV f, 1.
351 *Sn.* E *Gyff.* (ed. Faulkes, p. 11); *Háld.* 140.
352 *Hym.* 17; *Hauatl.* 18. (kenning)
353 *Þul.* IV f, 1.
354 *Ped.* 19.
355 *Þul.* IV b, 5.
356 Hofgarða-Refr skáld 3, 1.
357 *Vaspúr* 'wetness, sleety'; *Sn.* E *Gyff.* (ed. Faulkes, p. 21).
358 *Þul.* IV f, 1.
359 *Þul* IV b, 3; *Sn.* E *Gyff.* (ed. Faulkes, p. 21).
360 *Nó* on Haraldr Blue-Tooth.
361 *Þul.* IV b, 5.
362 *Goll* 'a shriek'. *VS.* 103 l. 12.
363 *Hafell* – *Lex.* Poet. s.v; *Þul.* IV b, 1. Simek 128.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bergstjori 'rock/mountain ruler'</th>
<th>Aegir 'sea'</th>
<th>Hlôl 'roarer'</th>
<th>Hutt 'hater'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bergsör 'mountain-bard / thunderer'</td>
<td>Frædegæmir 'powerful-yeller'</td>
<td>Helregmir 'hell-powers'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrærarbit 'crag-dweller'</td>
<td>Pryn 'noise of battle'</td>
<td>Hreavelgr 'carrion-swallower'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jârnhauss 'iron-skull'</td>
<td>Ôskruðr 'bellow'</td>
<td>Ímfr 'dirty/sooty'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jârnmefr 'iron-nose'</td>
<td></td>
<td>Letôl 'loathsome'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jârnspeld 'iron-shield'</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skrati 'monster'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangbelim 'crooked bone'</td>
<td></td>
<td>Surtr 'black'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskarmál 'Seaman’s Mull'</td>
<td></td>
<td>Svartr 'black'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Òsgrâl 'ash pit, ash heap'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

364 Gís 2, 2.  
365 Pul. IV b, 5; Hym. 1; Ls. 3.  
366 Hlôa 'to bellow, roar'; Pul. IV f, 2.  
367 Hff. 17, 24.  
368 Skraut-Oddr 2.  
369 Ym. 29; Pul. IV b, 2.  
370 Pul. IV f, 2.  
371 Grettis. 41 (in a verse).  
372 Pul. IV b, 2; A central figure in Prymstvø.  
373 Pul. IV b, 2.  
374 HBr. ch. 6, p. 334.  
375 Pul. IV b, 4.  
376 Pul. IV f; Gd. 22. The weak form Ími is found in a runic charm from Bergen (Liestøl, 1963, pp. 38-40), in a set formula imistein liætti (probably ‘let a stone be called Ími’; cf. a comparable formula on the Ribe healing stick: suart hetær sten ‘there is a stone called Black’ See Erik Moltke, Runes and their Origin.

377 HBr. ch. 4, p. 331.  
378 Pdls. 1, 2.  
380 Pul. IV b, 3.  
381 Pul. IV f, 5.  
382 Vsp. 53; Ym. 17, 18; Fðfn. 14; Vsp. 47; Fj. 24.  
383 Mâli ‘a jutting crag, peak’ [Scots Mull]; Pul. IV b, 4.  
384 Pul. IV b, 4.  
385 Etymology uncertain: possibly asa ‘an eagle’ / grúi ‘swarm, crowd’, or possibly, así ‘hurry’ / Grúi ‘crowd’ – (a stampede?); Pul. IV b, 4.
APPENDIX B: Giantess and Troll-Wife Names with Relevance to Ymir’s Characteristics and Role in Norse Cosmogony.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EARTH / ROCK / BONE</th>
<th>WATER / FROST</th>
<th>YELLING / NOISE</th>
<th>MALEVOLENCE / OPPOSITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aurboôa</strong> ‘mud-bidder’</td>
<td><strong>Drôfi</strong> ‘wave’</td>
<td><strong>Gjâlp</strong> ‘yelp’</td>
<td><strong>Angrbôda</strong> ‘grief-bidder’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Handva</strong> ‘Crag-wife’</td>
<td><strong>Dîsta</strong> ‘wave’</td>
<td><strong>Gnissa</strong> ‘the one who cries out’</td>
<td><strong>Angrbôr</strong> ‘black-Gérdr’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grottittana</strong> ‘rotten-toothed’</td>
<td><strong>Përenja</strong> ‘fenny, swampy’</td>
<td><strong>Grottintaima</strong> ‘rotten-toothed’</td>
<td><strong>Blôôiighadda</strong> ‘bloody-hair’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jårnglumra</strong> ‘iron-rattling’</td>
<td><strong>Hrîngardr</strong> ‘frost-Gérdr’</td>
<td><strong>Jårnglumra</strong> ‘Iron-rattling’</td>
<td><strong>Balrauf</strong> ‘arsehole’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jårnhôlja</strong> ‘iron-laid’</td>
<td><strong>Margardr</strong> ‘sea Gérdr’</td>
<td><strong>Skrikja</strong> ‘shrieker’</td>
<td><strong>Bîseyra</strong> ‘one who ruins farms’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Jöðr** ‘earth’ | **Leirvor** ‘muddy-lips’ | **Gurmâr** ‘great fusser’ | \*

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386 Hyndl. 30; Fj. 38.
387 Pul. I, 4 & IV a, 4; Ormr. 1, 5; Katr. 40; Egil’s 1, 9; Korm. Lv. 40. (She is one of the daughters of Ægir.)
388 Hyndl. 37, where she is one of Heimdallr’s nine mothers; Sn.E. Sk. ch. 18, (ed. Faulkens p. 25), where she is one of the two daughters of Geiðr who try to destroy Bôrr and have their backs broken by him; and perhaps Ægir, Pul. IV c 2; Hjôl. 12; Est., (Bonn) 3, 14; Grettis 3.
389 The Log. 40; Sn.E. Gylf. (ed. Faulkens p. 27).
390 Iadr. 2. One of the daughters of Ægir who were associated with waves; Pul. IV xx 4, 7.
391 Pul. IV c, 1.
392 Pul. IV c, 4; Egil’s 3, 15.
393 Pul. IV c, 1.
394 Grott. I; Borrn. 2, 24; ESK. 11, 6.
395 Pul. IV c, 1.
396 Pul. IV c, 3; Egil’s 3, 10.
397 Pul. IV c, 4.
398 Pul. IV c, 3; HHf. 17, 20, 21, 24, 27, 29, 30.
399 VS. ch. 2; p. 3.
400 One of the daughters of Ægir who were associated with waves; Pul. u, 4; ESK 12, 17.
401 Pul. IV c, 3; Hyndl. 37.
402 VS. ch. 2; p. 3.
403 VS. ch. 1.
404 VS. ch. 1.
405 VS. ch. 1.
406 Motz suggests that this might reflect a learned Latin pun whereby Latin anus also means ‘ugly witch’. L. Motz, ‘Giantesses and their Names’, Frühmittelalterliche Studien 15 (1981), p. 506. If one accepts Motz’s argument, this would suggest a post-conversion invention. The likelihood of a Latin pun seems to be a stretch of the imagination given no Latin influences can be traced in any other giantess name. All that may be implied in the name Bækrauf is probably a sense of unpleasantness. Pul. IV c 1; cf. Simek 25 ‘backside’, Lex.Poet. 33 ‘with a cleft back, or an unusually big arse.’
407 Pul. IV c, 4; Hâlj. 3; Sn.E. Gylf. (ed. Faulkens p. 14).
408 Pul. IV c, 4; Hsd. 11.
409 Pul. IV c, 3.
410 Pul. IV b, 3; Lex.Poet. 71 (cf. Herðhja). It may also be translated as ‘the one with big ears’, see AEW p. 66 and R. Simek (1993), p. 50.
411 Pul. IV c, 1; Håndsl. 14; Olv. 1; Pem 1; Ls. 58; Ídr. 15.
413 Pul. IV c, 5; Egils. 3, 11.
414 Pul. IV c, 1.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herkjá</td>
<td>'dearth'</td>
<td>Pul. IV c, 3; Anon. (XII) C 36; Harðr. 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jôrmnaxa</td>
<td>'iron-sword'</td>
<td>Pul. IV c, 3; Hýndl. 37.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mýrkrida</td>
<td>'dark-rider'</td>
<td>Pul. IV c, 3; Hrbfl. 20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skáli</td>
<td>'scathe'</td>
<td>Grm. 11; Hýndl. 30; Háli. 3; Pul. IV h, 1.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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