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RECONSIDERING THE TRADITION:
THE ODINIC HERO AS SAGA PROTAGONIST

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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A number of people greatly supported me throughout the years of my work on this dissertation. First and foremost, I would never have been able to make it this far without the love and support of my husband Mikhail, who had always given me not only comfort and encouragement, but also constructive criticism and hours of proofreading.

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As will be clear from this dissertation, it has been inspired by the work of Jens Peter Schjødt, with whom I have had illuminating discussions at the Fifteenth and Sixteenth International Saga Conferences. These have, among other things, helped me to formulate the exact theme of this thesis and find my scholarly point of view. I would like to especially thank Jens Peter for the hypotheses that this thesis argues against. I started my PhD course as an admiring reader of Initiation between Two Worlds and I am aiming to finish it as someone who starts a dialogue with this important book; this transformation is something of a great value to me.

Last but not least, my warm regards go to my family and friends back in Russia, whom I have always missed despite the great and challenging time I have had during my PhD course at the University of Nottingham.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction
1. Aims of the dissertation and its place in scholarly discussion 6
2. Methodology 9
3. Structure 11
4. Note on the translations 12
5. Note on the forms and variants of proper nouns

Chapter 1: Previous scholarship and the Odinic hero complex
1. The Odinic hero theme in scholarship 13
2. The Odinic hero complex 36

Chapter 2: Völunga saga
1. Introduction 42
2. Overview of the scholarship 44
3. Völunga saga’s references to Óðinn and their significance for the narrative 52
4. Presumably Odinic motifs in Völunga saga 66
5. Conclusion: Völunga saga’s Odinic imagery in the light of its sources 76

Chapter 3: Hrólfs saga kraka
1. Use of the Odinic hero theme in Hrólfs saga kraka 78
2. Hrólfs saga kraka’s origin 81
3. Genre and subject matter 83
4. The saga’s structure and the development of the Odinic theme 84
5. Initiation structures in Svipdags þáttr and Bóðvars þáttr 95
6. Hrólfr’s champions as the ‘twelve berserkir’ 97
7. Conclusion 101

Chapter 4: Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka
1. Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka’s place in the discussion 104
2. Structure of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka 106
3. Characters and their functions 107
4. The motifs of fire ordeal and fire funeral 108
5. The Odinic theme in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka 115
6. The protagonist and the nature of conflict 118
7. Conclusion 120
Chapter 5: The Sámsey complex

1. Definition of the Battle of Sámsey complex 124
2. The choice of material 125
3. The Battle of Sámsey complex in Old Norse-Icelandic literature 126
4. Parallels between the Battle of Sámsey complex and Skuldabardagi 128
5. Óðinn and Sámsey 134
6. The death of Ingibjörg 136
7. Conclusion

Chapter 6: Gautreks saga

1. Interpretation of the Odinic theme in Gautreks saga 139
2. The Odinic hero complex in Vikars þætr 140
3. Óðinn and Þórr’s connection to Starkaðr 145
4. Odinic hero elements in the image of Starkaðr in Vikars þætr 154
5. The afterlife of some motifs in the Víkarr narrative 156
6. Conclusion 161

Chapter 7: The Odinic hero in learned Latin tradition

1. Methodological approach to non-saga texts featuring the Odinic hero complex 164
2. Hadingus as an Odinic hero 167
3. The fornaldarsaga background of Siward of Northumbria 177
4. Conclusion on the Latin sources 195

General conclusion 196

Bibliography 201
LIST OF BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS

The following texts are referred to extensively in this dissertation, which suggests their abbreviated use. Quotations from them refer to the following editions with page numbers in brackets, except for the first time a text is referenced when full bibliographical description is given.

Destiny  

Edd.  

GD  

GD Fisher  

Herv.  

HLD  

HSH  

HSK  
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
1. AIMS OF THE DISSERTATION AND ITS PLACE IN SCHOLARLY DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate and reconceive the scholarly understanding of one of Óðinn’s aspects — Óðinn as a patron to a mortal hero figure. This theme runs through a number of Old Icelandic and continental Scandinavian texts, but it is most widely represented in the fornaldarsaga genre. One of the most important pre-Christian Scandinavian deities, Óðinn has received an enormous amount of scholarly attention throughout the history Old Norse studies, and the Ödinic hero theme has been often referred to for the purposes of scholarly discussion. The precise nature of Óðinn’s connection to hero figures, however, has been surprisingly rarely considered in detail. The few attempts of such analysis — most importantly, Georges Dumézil’s work — have as much shed light on the material as they created pressing methodological problems, especially when the ideas of mythological criticism were being adapted to the constantly developing, increasingly more cross-disciplinary studies of Old Norse-Icelandic literature and mythology.

How the sagas in general interpret earlier mythological material, in particular material related to Óðinn, has been an important research trend of the last few years, with two staples in Annette Lassen’s Odin på kristent pergament: En teksthistorisk studie and Merill Kaplan’s Thou Fearful Guest: Addressing the past in four tales in Flateyjarbók. Now that to a researcher are available both Lassen’s systematic overlook of sources on Óðinn and Kaplan’s discussion of the plot about Óðinn visiting a Christian king’s court, a study of the typical fornaldarsaga Óðinn, the patron and betrayer of heroes, is a logical continuation of the scholarly discussion that this dissertation is aiming to make. Flateyjarbók gives a picture of Óðinn who, together with the pagan past that he embodies, suffers defeat before a Christian king. Most fornaldarsögur are believed to be considerably later than Flateyjarbók, and they tend to give the picture of an all-powerful, triumphant Óðinn, more often than not resented and even opposed by the protagonist, but always easily getting the upper hand. The fornold, according to narratives like Gautreks saga and Hrólfs saga kraka, is definitely Óðinn’s time, and this leaves a distinctive stamp on the greatest figures of
the legendary past, such as Hrólfkr kraki and Starkaðr. One could argue that this picture of Óðinn, different from that in texts like Óláfs saga helga and developed by a different genre, is a part of a larger gnoseological process of understanding the past and coming to terms with it. To quote Merill Kaplan, ‘the original consumers of [the þættir in Flateyjarbók], inhabitants of the High Middle Ages, found in them a glimpse of both the age of pagan heroes and the time of the missionary kings. If these stories were good to think with in the Lévi-Straussian sense, they would have helped the Christian Icelanders of the fourteenth century think about the conceptual problem they faced in remembering the pagan past and reusing the intellectual goods associated with it’.

1 This dissertation deals with the same Medieval Icelandic anxiety concerning the pagan past and Óðinn, but it looks at different material that requires a different approach. The fornaldarsögur analysed in this thesis are centered around the same ‘problem of Óðinn’, but they exclude the missionary king from this system and look directly at the fornöld, of which texts like Norna-Gests þáttir give but a distant echo.

In this kind of narrative, the focus inevitably shifts to the hero figure that has to deal with Óðinn in a world without Christ; to make a concrete example, the protagonist of the story is now not Ólafr helgi sympathising with Hrólfkr kraki in a dialogue with Óðinn, but Hrólfkr kraki himself, who is involved in an ambiguous and fatal connection to Óðinn rather than just a dialogue with a ‘fearful guest’ from the past. Such a hero that himself belongs to the fornöld, the Odinic hero of the fornaldarsögur, is for the Christian Islander a figure that embodies both the heroic past and the problematic relationship with its pagan nature.

So, the underlying conflict that is the essence of the fornaldarsaga Odinic hero is deeply connected to the nature of the genre in which this character type is usually found, and a study of the Odinic hero will be predominantly a study in fornaldarsögur. In the scholarly discussion of today, the fornaldarsaga is not anymore the often overlooked and marginal genre it was a few decades ago. A sufficient body of research has accumulated to shed new light on both the literary-cultural nature of these relatively late texts and on the mythological material they contain. Of the six fornaldarsaga texts that are analysed in this dissertation, all have recent close-reading history, sometimes sparse, but in other cases quite extensive. Even more importantly, recent studies in fornaldarsögur have developed an effective

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1 Merill Kaplan, Thou Fearful Guest: Addressing the past in four takes in Flateyjarbók (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2011), 16.
methodological approach to this type of texts that is focused on structure and the problems of parallelism and transmission between related variants. Finally, the more theoretical works like Stephen Mitchell’s *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* provide today’s scholar of the *fornaldarsögur* with insights into these texts’ underlying traits like their complex genre, nature and connections to other narratives like the *rimur*. The methodological apparatus and research evidence accumulated in recent years do not just allow for a study of such a fundamental *fornaldarsaga* theme as the Odinic hero — they make it a necessary step from which a few fields of research will profit. Firstly, they allow a clearer understanding of post-fourteenth-century Iceland’s attitude to what Merill Kaplan calls ‘the intellectual goods of the [pre-Christian] past’. Secondly and consequently, disciplines like history of religion and comparative mythology will gain information helping them to more accurately evaluate their *fornaldarsaga* sources on Óðinn and Óðinn-worship. Since a large body of Odinic references is contained in the relatively late saga narratives, this has been an important methodological problem for more than a century. A contribution to understanding the treatment of one specific mythological theme in the sagas will not resolve this problem, but it is a small step towards a cross-disciplinary analysis capable of overcoming such obstacles. The cross-disciplinary effect is also applied retrospectively, as this dissertation will evaluate the recent historical-religious findings from the point of view of saga criticism, which will bring new ideas into the current discussion. Thirdly and maybe most importantly, it will be shown in chapter 1 that ‘Odinic hero’ is an extremely problematic concept that is, nevertheless, used extensively in scholarship because of the theme’s importance for the current scholarly discourse overall. The discussion will therefore profit from a formal analysis of the Odinic hero theme in the sagas, and will be able to avoid scholarly misunderstandings that have been common in the last few decades.

To sum up, this dissertation aims to make a twofold contribution to scholarly discourse: it aims to improve understanding of the treatment of a particular mythological theme in the *fornaldarsögur*, but its main ambition is to be methodologically useful for further research in a number of interconnected fields in saga studies.

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2. **Methodology**

From the methodological point of view, this thesis is mostly literary-critical in its approach to the source material, but it has numerous points of connection to other fields — most importantly to mythological criticism and history of religion. Both of these fields have studied Óðinn extensively; to quote John Lindow, ‘to understand Odin is to understand the mythology, and vice versa’. The theme of Óðinn’s connection to mortal warriors — the Odinic heroes — is, of course, an important aspect of this god that runs through numerous sources. Most of these sources are relatively late literary texts like the *fornaldarsögur* and *Gesta Danorum*. Here emerges a methodological inconsistency which this thesis seeks to resolve: although the sources that contain information on the Odinic hero are literary, the literary-critical methodological apparatus has hardly ever been applied to them. For example, the most recent important work on the Odinic hero figures and their alleged historical-religious significance, Jens Peter Schjødt’s *Initiation between Two Worlds*, consciously ignores the problems of genre and structure in its saga sources, although the evidence of close-reading analysis could either support its argumentation or belie some of the hypotheses it brings up.

One of the problems that this thesis aims to resolve is that there is no scholarly consensus on what exactly makes a hero ‘Odinic’ (even an explicit affiliation with Óðinn is not a requirement for some researchers). There are, however, surprisingly many scholarly commonplaces connected to this character type. These include statements like ‘Starkaðr is, in general, a typical Odinic hero and therefore represents essential traits of Óðinn-worship’ (see 1.1.4). When mentioned in parenthesis, presumably as a common scholarly consensus which most of such statements in fact rarely are, such references to the Odinic hero theme tend to confuse the argumentation. In an attempt to break this vicious circle, this dissertation develops a formal approach to what it calls the Odinic hero complex. This leaves out some important material that does not fit into the scheme but, since the scheme has been developed a number of concepts are introduced specifically for the internal use in this

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thesis, limiting the material to a particular narrative structure that is present in a number of saga texts. The use of this narrative structure in different sources is the main object of consideration in this thesis, which is based on the idea that the analysis of a text’s structure can provide the researcher with new insights on this text’s cultural-ideological level.

To give a specific example of this approach, section 1.17 of chapter 2 in this thesis looks at the structural and stylistic features of the werewolf episode in Völsunga saga, and finds that it is very different from the saga’s overall homogenous narrative in terms of structure and the use of folktale material. Given that the sources for most other episodes of the saga are known and well-studied, and the saga evidently has an author, chapter 2 claims there are solid reasons to believe that the shapeshifting episode was introduced by the author compiler, maybe under the influence of similar narratives in circulation. Consequently, Völsunga saga is not a reliable source on the úlfhéðnar as a cult. However, another important deduction can be made from chapter 2’s analysis: the Icelandic literature of the late thirteenth century consciously associated heroes who are connected with Óðinn with the themes of initiation and bestiality, even when these themes were not present in the source material. This way, the thesis looks at the texts with an aim to both test the scholarly status quo and, if possible, throw new light on their significance.

3. Structure

The discussion of this dissertation progresses from the general to the specific, starting with theoretical and methodological considerations in chapter 1, and then moving on to the close-reading material in chapters from 2 to 7 where the ideas expressed in chapter 1 are illustrated and put to the test. The thesis can, therefore, be divided into two parts: theoretical, consisting of only chapter 1, and analytical, which includes the rest of the work. Such a structure has been chosen because the subject of the thesis is a methodologically problematic one, and it is important to establish a clear viewpoint on the methods of research before looking at the heterogeneous material of chapters 2-7.

The sequence in which the close-reading chapters 2-7 are arranged pursues, in the first place, clarity of argumentation. Starting with Völsunga saga (chapter 2)
allows the thesis to give an overview of its main themes, because the idea of Óðinn’s patronage and eventual betrayal of his chosen heroes is presented in *Volsunga saga* in a very straightforward manner. The conclusions to chapter 2 provide a solid background for considering the Odinic theme in *Hrólfs saga kraka* (chapter 3), where this theme is introduced more subtly and with more complex implications. The analysis of *Hrólfs saga kraka* is, in a way, a staple of this thesis’s discussion, because it provides the most complete and consistent development of the Odinic hero theme, where initiatory structures, *berserkir* and *berserkir*-fighting imagery, and the (bear) bestiality are closely connected to the Odinic theme of patronage and betrayal. For this reason, all the subsequent texts are often looked upon against the background of *Hrólfs saga kraka*. The short chapter 4, devoted to *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka*, seeks to explain this text’s Odinic imagery through this text’s relation to *Hrólfs saga kraka* and is, therefore, dependent on chapter 3. So is chapter 5, which reads the Battle of Sámsey episode found in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* and *Hervarar saga* in the light of Skuldarbardagi’s imagery. Chapter 6 considers the famous sacrifice plot in *Gautreks saga* against the background of evidence derived from the previous analysis, and argues that the saga changes the traditional Starkaðr material in order to fit a prevailing scheme characteristic of the texts considered in chapters 3-5. Finally, chapter 7 considers the Odinic hero theme in learned Latin texts, which are not saga narratives and therefore can provide external evidence on the subject. After that, the results of the close-reading analysis are looked at in the general conclusion.

4. **Note on the Translations**

Throughout the thesis, I am using my own translations of the quotes from sources in Old Norse, but published translations of Latin sources from the corresponding editions that are detailed in references and bibliography. Since the purpose of my analysis mostly deals with the ideological level of the texts, I have aimed in the translations to convey the atmosphere and general impression that the quotations are likely to make, at the same time keeping them as precise as possible. It should be noted, however, that these translations are provided for reference only, while the analysis is based solely on the phrasing of the original.

Occasionally, I employed a published translation of a source or scholarly work in this thesis rather than making my own one. This is usually the case with scholarly
works that have established and commonly referred to English editions, such as Dumézil’s *The Stakes of the Warrior*, but I also used Peter Fisher and Cyril Wright’s translations of Latin sources as indicated in the references.

5. **Note on the Forms and Variants of Proper Nouns**

Due to the comparative nature of this dissertation, many of the proper nouns in it exist in more than one form, which may vary from source to source. This especially applies to the characters’ names; for example, Bǫðvarr bjarki from *Hrölfís saga kraka* is called Bjarki in *Bjarkarímur* and Biarco in the Latin *Gesta Danorum*. In such cases, proper nouns are used in the same form as they appear in the text that is currently being considered. When more than one variant is referred to at the same time, solidus is used (e.g. Bǫðvarr bjarki/Bjarki/Bjarco when the protagonist of all the three sources is discussed as a complex unity belonging to the narrative tradition). Old Icelandic names are not anglicised, and names from sources in other languages are typically given in the same form as in the edition that is referred to (e.g. Starkatherus, Othinus).

Many of the scholarly works quoted in this thesis, however, use adapted forms of Old Icelandic and other proper names. In particular, in earlier scholarship the name Óðinn is commonly given as Odin or Othin. Proper names in quotations are left in the form used by the authors, but unadapted variants are used in the discussion or translations of quotations. It should be particularly noted that Peter Fisher’s English translation of *Gesta Danorum*, which is quoted throughout this thesis, tends to anglicise the Latin forms of proper names, but these forms are not used outside quotations.
CHAPTER 1

PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP AND THE ODINIC HERO COMPLEX

This dissertation revolves around the idea of reinterpretation and reconsideration, and it does so on more than one level. Firstly, as it is suggested by the title of the thesis, the representation of Óðinn and his connection to mortal heroes in the ‘mythical-heroic’ fornlægur is a reconsideration of a much earlier, pre-Christian tradition. Another level of ‘reconsidering the tradition’, however, is necessitated by the complicated history of scholarship on Óðinn, Óðinn worship and its representation in surviving sources. In particular, the concept of the Odinic hero — a mortal hero with a special connection to Óðinn — has been complicated by its many interpretations, which are diverse methodologically as well as chronologically. Although ‘Óðinn determines a mortal warrior’s career’ is clearly a prominent theme in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, running through a number of sources, it is impossible to approach this theme without first establishing what exactly today’s researcher understands as an ‘Odinic hero’ — and, for that matter, what makes anything ‘Odinic’.

The first section of this chapter will, therefore, consider and reconsider the history of scholarly approaches to Óðinn’s heroes, who tend to be either his protégés or his enemies, and often become a mixture of both. Once the scholarly status quo on this complicated subject is clarified, section two of this chapter will make a step further by enunciating the ‘Odinic hero complex’, a set of criteria that determines the choice of material for this thesis and helps its comparative analysis. As it will be shown, the Odinic hero complex is essentially a plot structure accompanied by a group of typical motifs. This complex manifests itself in a number of saga narratives, and therefore allows to consider some of the established tendencies in treating the ‘Óðinn’s protégé’ theme in the sagas.

1. THE ODINIC HERO THEME IN SCHOLARSHIP

1.1. The variants of the term

Before the term ‘Odinic hero’ and its use in scholarship are discussed in more detail, it should be noted that the terms ‘Odinic hero’ and ‘Óðinn-hero’ are used
interchangeably by the scholars, with no difference between them. The term ‘Odinic hero’ is used throughout this dissertation when its own methodology is discussed and analysis of the sources is performed; however, in the discussion of previous scholarship ‘Óðinn-hero’ may be used when the author has used this term in his or her work. ‘Odinic hero’ is also used to refer to the use of all these forms in scholarship.

In languages other than English and French, the term is usually a calque of héros odinique / Odinic hero, and is generally used in the same context as the English term, as will be shown below. The following forms may be considered as equivalents of the English ‘Óðinn-hero’ and ‘Odinic hero’:

- French: héros odinique, as in Dumézil’s works
- Icelandic: Óðinsheitja
- Swedish: Odinshjälte, Óðins-hjälte
- Danish: Odinshelt, Odins helt, occasionally Ódinnshelt
- German: Odinsheld, Odins Held
- Italian: eroe odinico
- Spanish: héroe odinico
- Russian: одиничный герой
- Ukrainian: одиничний герой

4 Occasionally, the forms ‘Odinic’ and ‘Óðinnic’ are used, including ‘Odinic hero’ and ‘Óðinnic hero’.
5 ‘Óðinn-hero’ is also used either with or without a hyphen; in this thesis a hyphen is always used for the sake of uniformity.
6 Patrick Guelpa, Dieux & mythes nordiques (Villeneuve-d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2009), 67. This work is an example of using the term without any reference to Dumézil, but confidently labelling Starkaðr as ‘héros odinique’; see sections 1.3 and 1.4 below.
12 Eduardo Peralta Labrador, Los cántabros antes de Roma (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2003),160.
14 A.Visotskiy, ‘The Odinic theme in Droplaugarsona saga’, Proceedings of the H.S. Skovoroda
In some cases, the form stems from a translation of Dumézil’s *The Stakes of the Warrior* (originally published in French as a chapter in the second volume of *Mythe et épopée*) or *The Saga of Hadingus*, but below references will be made only to the works where the term is used in the context of original research on Óðinn and the nature of his connection to mortal heroes.\(^{15}\) Occasionally, this term is borrowed from one language to the other without being translated, e.g. *Odinsheld* may be used in Spanish when German criticism is being discussed, but it hardly ever affects the meaning because, as will be shown, the use of this term tends to be vague in almost every context.\(^{16}\)

In Icelandic, Óðinsheita is used in the same context as the Dumézilean *héros odinique* concerning Hadingus and the mythological background of his career.\(^{17}\) The term, however, does not seem to be in wide use in Icelandic scholarship. In Swedish, *Odinshjälte* is sometimes presented as an immediate parallel to *héros odinique*, as in Andreas Nordberg’s discussion of the Dumézilean analysis of Hadingus and Starkadr. However, Olof Sundqvist used Ódins-hjälte in a wider, mythological context, arguing that Sigurðr’s affiliation with Óðinn could point at Guðrún’s implied identity as an Odinic *dis*. The established Danish term is *Odinshelt* or *Odins helt*; Jens Kristian Lindhart Boll discusses this term in the mythological context that underlies saga literature. In German the Odinic hero is, similarly, *Odinsheld* or *Odins Held* (e.g. Jan de Vries: ‘Starkad in der Vikarsage als typischer Odinsheld auftritt’). The Russian *одинический герой* is identical to the other variants, e.g. in the commentary to a recent edition of *Völsunga saga*.\(^{18}\)

This thesis uses its own definition of the Odinic hero, according to which a protagonist is classified as an Odinic hero if he is found in the centre of a specific narrative pattern that is described in detail below, but can be reduced to the

\(^{15}\) For an overview of Dumézil’s works on the Odinic hero, see section 1.3. For the use of the term in Dumézil’s works translated into other languages, see e.g. Georges Dumézil, *La saga di Hadingus. Dal mito al romanzo*, trans. by Elena Iacoboni (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2001),53, Georges Dumézil, *El destino del guerrero: aspectos míticos de la función guerrera entre los indoeuropeos*, trans. by Juan Almela (Mexico: Siglo veintiuno editores, 2003), 104.


protagonist first becoming Óðinn’s protégé and then being betrayed by him.

A brief history of the term’s use will be given below, focusing on Georges Dumézil’s influence; the controversy of subsequent wide application of the label ‘Odinic hero’ without determining this term outside Dumézilean framework; and finally the concepts of Odinic hero developed in the last decade by John McKinnell and Jens Peter Schjødt.

1.2. Early considerations

The idea that particular characters in Old Norse-Icelandic tradition appear to have a specific and close relation to Óðinn has been expressed since it first received substantial scholarly attention. This observation is immediately suggested by the material itself as the theme of Óðinn’s peculiar relationship to mortal heroes pervades the Icelandic sagas, especially fornaldrarsögur and konungasögur. This theme is also apparent throughout Saxo Grammaticus’ Gesta Danorum, which has always been considered an important source on Old Norse mythology, and the theme is occasionally referred to in relation to other sources like the Eddic poems (Reigs Mál, Hýndlúlíð). Early scholarship looked at this subject in the framework of its attempts to shed light on the mythological image of Óðinn and to boost understanding of pre-Christian Óðinn worship. Óðinn’s tendency to interfere in the lives of mortal heroes, not so characteristic of other gods, has been recognised as this deity’s characteristic trait since the turn of the twentieth century, when Elard Hugo Meyer described the connection between Óðinn and a mortal hero as specific for Old Norse-Icelandic tradition as contrasted to continental Germanic:

In den nordischen Fehden und Kriegen spielt das Schützverhältnis des Gottes auch zu einem einzelnen Helden, das in Deutschland nicht nachweisbar ist, eine große Rolle. Es endet häufig herbe überraschend damit, dass Odin plötzlich seinen Günstling ins Verderben stürzt, wie wenn er dessen Einkehr in Walhall nicht länger abwarten könne.19

In the Nordic [Scandinavian] feuds and wars, the god's [Óðinn's] protection of individual heroes plays a major role, which is not the case in Germany [continental Germanic sources]. This often ends with a bitter surprise when Óðinn plunges his favourite into ruin, as if he could no longer wait for his arrival to Valhöll.

Three features mentioned by Meyer are of importance here because they are characteristic of the majority of figures that later are described as Odinic heroes (compare the outline in 1.2):

1. The connection between the hero and Óðinn is individual, focusing on the hero figure rather than establishing a general connection between the transcendent and human worlds;

2. Óðinn’s influence on the hero is intrinsically twofold, apt to switch from benevolent to malevolent;

3. The two aspects of Óðinn’s influence reflect his complex mythological character that includes the interconnected roles of a victory-god and a death-god, and is connected to the myth of Valhöll and the einherjar.

This picture of the Odinic hero as intimately connected to the myth of Valhöll is peculiar in that, identified in 1903, it can be traced through the whole century, up to the work of Torfi Tulinius and Jens Peter Schjødt where this theme received a more detailed interpretation. After making the observation, Meyer illustrates it with the accounts of Hadingus in Gesta Danorum and Sigmundr and Sigurðr in Völsunga saga, whose Odinic connections, along with those of Starkaðr, later received most scholarly attention. Óðinn’s consistent presence in Völsunga saga and the detailed account of an Odinic sacrifice in Gautreks saga attracted early scholarly attention, which led to the interpretation of figures like Sigmundr, Sigurðr and Starkaðr in a mythical-religious framework. As early as in 1899, Hector Munro Chadwick observed Starkaðr’s connection to Óðinn as a reflection of actual Óðinn worship:

Starkaðr has usually been regarded as the typical Northern warrior of old time. This is true; but in reality he is far more. He is also the chief of the legendary Northern poets. If I am not mistaken, he was regarded in early times as the typical worshipper of Othin.

A decade later, Óðinn’s status as a ‘heroic’ deity was well-recognised in scholarship; however, it was also stressed by Hector Munro Chadwick that Óðinn’s tendency to affiliate himself with mortal heroes is of essentially different origin than in other major deities like Zeus, Óðinn being similar in this respect ‘rather with Hades — not

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as a chthonic being, properly speaking, but as a lord of the spirit world.\textsuperscript{23}

At around the same time, volumes of Axel Olrik’s \textit{Danmarks Heltedigting} started to appear in print, the first of which was in 1919 translated into English and entered wide scholarly discussion.\textsuperscript{24} Olrik’s work was the first fundamental monograph on what he himself identifies as ‘the Hrolf cycle’: the corpus of very differently dated texts, one of them lost, connected to \textit{Hrólf's saga kraka} in terms of theme and material. In chapter 7 of Olrik’s book, ‘Hrolf’s berserkers’, Hrólfr’s encounter with Óðinn receives an amount of attention only the hanging sacrifice in \textit{Gautreks saga} had received up to that point — from Chadwick. Olrik notes how Hrólf's saga kraka puts Hrólfr and his warband in the same framework with Harald Wartooth, Starkaðr and Sigmundr. He specifically notes the motif of Óðinn’s gift to Hrólfr:

\begin{quote}
This nightly figure of Othin, one-eyed, but otherwise human in appearance, is usual in the sagas. The offer of arms as a pledge of victory likewise is a well-known device. (Cf. Hyndluljóð ‘To Hermoth he gave helmet and byrnie, but to Sigmund a sword’). The omen of impending ruin occurs frequently in Saxo’s Norwegian sagas as well as in Icelandic literature. Just as in this saga Hrolf’s career is mysteriously guided by Othin, likewise the lives of other Danish heroes such as Harold Wartooth and Starkath also come under his influence when transplanted in Norn soil — the only difference being that in the case of Hrolf the god becomes his enemy.
\end{quote}

\textit{(HLD 355)}

Olrik’s work is important not only in that it secures Hrólfr kraki’s place in the row of Óðinn’s chosen heroes as early as 1903. After this \textit{Hrólf's saga kraka}’s Odinic theme did not receive focused scholarly attention for more than a century, until being considered in detail in Jens Peter Schjødt’s \textit{Initiation between Two Words}. Behind Olrik’s now hardly reliable thesis that a number of ‘Norn’ (Old Norse-Icelandic) narratives may be traced back to a Danish original, there is a consistent methodology and chronological framework. Olrik makes a balanced distinction between the indefinitely old oral tradition connected to actual pagan practices and what Stephen Mitchell will later call ‘the literary uses of Óðinn’.\textsuperscript{25} According to Olrik, the ‘Óðinn’s protégé’ paradigm is at least as old as the second part of the tenth century, based on his dating of \textit{Hyndluljóð} (HLD 355-356). When Hrólf's saga kraka as we know it was

\textsuperscript{23} Hector Munro Chadwick, \textit{The Heroic Age} (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1912), 424.
\textsuperscript{24} Axel Olrik, \textit{The Heroic Legends of Denmark}, trans. by Lee M. Hollander (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1919), x.
being composed or written, this traditional, arguably pre-Christian paradigm ‘furnished the model for Othin’s appearance in the Hrolf legend, where his presence was not essential at first’ (HLD 355). What Olrik refers to as the ‘not essential’ presence of Óðinn in the tradition preceding *Hrólfs saga kraka* is Bǫðvarr bjarki/Bjarki/Bjarco’s hostile remark towards Óðinn, which was probably present in the poem *Bjarkamál* (probably composed earlier than 1030).\(^{26}\) *Bjarkamál* survives only in fragments, but there is a retelling in *Gesta Danorum*, in which Biarco considers Óðinn his enemy, exactly as Bǫðvarr bjarki does in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Olrik’s conclusion is that the Odinic theme in *Hrólfs saga kraka* is a product of literary consciousness that worked with traditional material, developed and reconsidered its imagery to bind the individual parts of the narrative together. Hrólfr’s connection with Óðinn is convincingly shown to be a ‘cleverly thought out’ literary device that helps *Hrólfs saga kraka* achieve narrative integrity (HLD 356).

To sum up, Axel Olrik is the first scholar to put into literary-historical framework the narrative complex around Óðinn’s connection to his human protégé — or, as this thesis denotes it, the Odinic hero complex. This, of course, constituted only a minor part of his large-scale work that was in many aspects innovatory, combining a methodical study of oral and written narrative with a structuralist approach that was unusual in Olrik’s time.\(^{27}\) Recognised today as a classic of folklore studies, mostly famous for the concept of ‘epic laws’ formulated in his *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*, Olrik is better known for his theoretical works than for his contribution to the research in material on which he developed his methodological principles. It is unclear why his work on *Hrólfs saga* and Starkaðr was nearly forgotten, despite having received praise from Lee M. Hollander and Georges Dumézil. One could bring up as possible reasons Olrik’s controversial division of narratives into Danish and Old Norse, which soon became dated, or, on the contrary, Olrik’s early-structuralist methodology that went ahead of his time and was for that reason underappreciated. In the same wake as the efforts of the team from Indiana State University that translated and published some of Olrik’s theoretical work, this thesis builds on some of Olrik’s work on the Odinic theme in the sagas, developing some of his arguments and challenging others.

\(^{26}\) See 3.2 for the discussion of *Bjarkamál* as the source of the Odinic theme in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.

\(^{27}\) See e.g. *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 85.
In the 1920s and 1930s, scholarly attention in the field of Old Norse religion, myth and legendary tradition swayed towards historical-religious studies. Before Dumézil, little research was carried out into the literary and thematic connections between Óðinn and individual characters; the discussion was rather focused on the Germanic Männerbünde and historical pre-Conversion Óðinn worship. The findings of this scholarship are important for this thesis because it looks at the connection between Óðinn worship and the berserkir.

1.3. The Ódinic hero in Georges Dumézil’s works

Georges Dumézil should be credited as the scholar who coined the term ‘Odinic hero’ (French héro odinique) and introduced it into wide scholarly use. More importantly, he focused significant attention on the complexity and ambiguity of Óðinn’s connection to war and mortal warriors. Dumézil looked at this theme in detail, with his character-specific work on Hadingus and Starkaðr becoming most influential in later scholarship. The essential part of Dumézil’s contribution to the understanding of the theme is his overview of the ‘Óðinn — warrior’ relationship in a more general monograph on Old Norse mythology:

One is struck immediately... by the number of ties between Odin and battles, or warriors, in this world and in the next. He is rarely a warrior himself, except in the historisation of Ynglinga saga... where he is called hermaðr mikill ‘great warrior’, and marches from one context to the next. He is present in battles, grants victory on the spot, expresses his decision with precise gestures, and aims at the enemy army — at it alone, it seems — the paralysing ‘fetter’ he has in common with Varuna. From the frenetic type of the berserkir to the elegant type of a Sigurd, the distinguished combatants belong to him, participating according to their diverse natures.

As can be seen, Dumézil stresses that, because Óðinn himself does not demonstrate pronounced warlike qualities, his connection to the warrior-figures is usually not that of simple resemblance. In other words, a character does not have to demonstrate Óðinn-like qualities in order to be ‘Odinic’. It is the connection that matters, not any specific quality. A warrior’s connection to Óðinn is for Dumézil not only a

30 The argument of an ‘Odinic hero’ bearing similarity to Óðinn himself is most often given concerning Egill Skallagrímson and occasionally Starkaðr. It is clear that, in this case, different concepts are defined by the same phrase; see 1.1.3 for the discussion of a noble and illustrious Odinic hero as opposed to Starkaðr.
fundamental theme in Scandinavian mythology, but also a particular case of a pan-
Indo-European phenomenon. According to Dumézil, there are three specific functions
or ‘modes of action’ to which all major Indo-European deities can be assigned. In this
trifunctional system, Óðinn is a clear example of a deity of the first function, which is
connected to sovereignty and priesthood. Dumézil argues that a first-function god that
has few or no warrior traits himself, but demonstrates a specific connection to mortal
warriors, is an Indo-European archetype. Óðinn has, as Dumézil notes elsewhere, ‘the
double value — sovereign and warrior’ (Destiny xi). Outside Scandinavia this
situation is also reflected, among other examples, in the Rigvedic Mitrá and Hindu
Varuna. Other figures Dumézil argues to be typologically connected with Óðinn are
the Rigveric Rudra and the Hindu Śiva, who relates to Śiśupāla in a similar way as
Óðinn relates to Starkaðr.

Besides Gods of the Ancient Northmen, Dumézil published two works focused
on specific hero figures closely related to Óðinn; it may be argued that these two
works established the image of an Odinic hero in the next few decades of scholarly
discussion. The first of them, published in English as The Stakes of the Warrior, was
initially written as a part of a larger work Mythe et Épopée, and looks into the
parallelism between the Old Norse Starkaðr and the Hindu Śiśupāla. Dumézil’s
trifunctional hypothesis had reached the highest degree of elaboration by the time he
was working on Mythe et Épopée, and he uses it as the primary instrument of analysis
with the Starkaðr and Śiśupāla material. The main thesis is that there is an archetypal
warrior figure in Indo-European culture that is defined through its complex
relationship with a first-function deity, and the story of Starkaðr’s three crimes is a
reflection of that archetype.

A later work by Dumézil, The Saga of Hadingus: From Myth to Fiction, is a
close-reading analysis and interpretation of the Hadingus narrative in Book I of Saxo
Grammaticus’ Gesta Danorum.31 In that monograph Dumézil famously shows that the
Hadingus narrative is, in fact, a transposition of the myth of the Æsir-Vanir war into
the realities of Danish legendary history. Hadingus, according to this theory, is a
reflexion of the god Njörðr. Because in Gesta Danorum he is presented as a mortal
hero, the transition into the realm of the Æsir from the realm of the Vanir makes
Hadingus an Odinic hero with such features as an old, one-eyed magician helping him

31 Georges Dumézil, From Myth to Fiction: The saga of Hadingus (Chicago: The University of
in war, as well as his allegedly ritual death by hanging. *The Saga of Hadingus* made an important contribution to Saxo studies because it gave an insight into Saxo’s principles in treating his sources, ways of transforming ‘myth’ into ‘fiction’. For our understanding of the Odinic hero in Medieval Scandinavian literature, Dumézil’s analysis is equally important, and allows for more concrete conclusions than his work on Starkaðr because it has a more definite historical framework. Dumézil’s work shows that Saxo (or probably his source, where Njörðr had already been reworked into a mortal hero) had a ready paradigm to work with, which defined a warrior character connected to Óðinn. This paradigm clearly did not apply to the mythological source, because Óðinn’s help in war and death by hanging are motifs very unlikely to be associated with Njörðr in any way. Therefore, they were most likely borrowed from other Odinic hero narratives that were in circulation at the time. Chapter 6 of this thesis (6.1) will demonstrate that the paradigm applied to Hadingus in *Gesta Danorum* is a complex one, and has numerous points of connection with similar narratives in the Old Norse-Icelandic saga literature. At the time when Dumézil was writing, however, the scholarly work on identifying and defining this paradigm had not yet been undertaken (most importantly the work of Mitchell and Schjødt; see section 1.1.6). Even in *The Saga of Hadingus*, which is distinctly more on the literary-critical side compared to the predominantly mythocritical *The Destiny of the Warrior* and *The Stakes of the Warrior*, Dumézil builds his argument predominantly on the idea of the first function when he defines the Odinic hero. He is therefore dependent on non-Scandinavian parallels to develop his argument.

This comparative-mythological aspect of Dumézil’s methodology is clear from his change of mind in categorising Starkaðr between *The Destiny of the Warrior* (originally published as *Heur at malheur du guerrier: Aspects mythiques de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens* in 1968) and *The Stakes of the Warrior* (originally published as a part of *Mythe et Épopée* in 1969).32 Both works are focused on the hero Starkaðr, who, according to a number of sources, has a conflicted connection both to Óðinn and Þórr. *Gesta Danorum* and *Gautreks saga* agree in that Starkaðr, doing Óðinn’s bidding, betrayed his king Vikarr and sacrificed him to Óðinn. The names in *Gesta Danorum* are, correspondingly, Starkatherus, Othinus and Wikarus. The difference between Saxo’s account and *Gautreks saga* is that they

portray the relationship between Starkaðr and the gods quite differently. In Gesta Danorum, Othinus influences Starkatherus’s life in both positive and negative ways: he gives Starkatherus three lifetimes and dooms him to commit three terrible crimes in each lifetime, one of which is the betrayal and sacrifice of Wicarus. In Gautreks saga, Óðinn also manipulates Starkaðr into sacrificing Vikarr to him. However, in other aspects Óðinn’s influence on the life of Starkaðr is benevolent: Óðinn predicts that Starkaðr will have an unnaturally long life, victory in battles, the gift of poetry, respect of nobles and other awards that are easily associated with Óðinn as victory-god, god of poetry, god of the military aristocracy etc. Þórr, who hates Starkaðr for his giant origin, subverts Óðinn’s gifts from good into evil: Starkaðr will live three lifetimes but will commit three crimes; he will win battles but will always be gravely wounded; he will forget his poems immediately after composing them; he will be hated by common people while being respected by the nobles. The accounts of Óðinn’s role in Gesta Danorum and Gautreks saga clearly conflict with each other, and Dumézil seeks to explain this contradiction in two works, first The Destiny of the Warrior and a year later The Stakes of the Warrior.

In The Destiny of the Warrior Dumézil argues that Saxo’s account reflects the core element of the myth much better than Gautreks saga. Starkaðr, according to his discussion, is a second-function hero, a hero of the warrior type, similar to the classical Heracles and Bhīma of the Hindu epic Mahābhārata. Being a second-function hero, Starkaðr is closely associated with Þórr.

Within Dumézil’s Indo-European framework, héros Odinique is a reasonably strict term because it is derived from Dumézil’s trifunctional hypothesis, where Óðinn, together with Týr, is a first-function deity connected with sovereignty, aristocracy, magic and priesthood. A human character defined through this function can be called an Óðinn-hero or Odinic hero, like Hadingus. Likewise, a character connected with the second military function may be also called in Dumézil’s discussion a Þórr-hero. In Starkaðr’s case, for example, Dumézil over time changed his opinion about this character and decided that he had wrongly classified him as a Þórr-hero; Starkaðr, he argued, is an Odinic hero instead because he is a hero of the first, sovereign-aristocratic function (Stakes 5).

A product of work in comparative mythology, Dumézil’s categorisation has often been challenged by specialists in Old Norse-Icelandic literature who criticised the French scholar’s insufficient attention to the historical-cultural background of his
sources. Much critical attention was focused on Dumézil’s work on Starkaðr, whose connection with both Óðinn and Þórr continues to spark controversy. At the same time, Dumézil may be the most influential scholar who ever wrote about Starkaðr in particular and Odinic heroes in general; he is definitely the most referred to. He coined the term, he drew scholarly attention to the theme, and he in many ways defined future understanding of Odinic heroes. The reason for this may be that, despite the many questionable parts of Dumézil’s overall conception, there are clear criteria for defining an Odinic hero in his discussion. In Georges Dumézil’s work, an Odinic hero is a first-function hero from Scandinavian material who, because of his first-function nature, is also connected to Óðinn. The scarcity of material on Týr makes ‘first-function’ and ‘Odinic’ nearly synonymous in Dumézil, as long as Scandinavian sources are discussed. As long as Dumézil demonstrates Starkaðr’s first-function nature, which is exactly what he does in the first chapters of The Stakes of the Warrior, it is appropriate to denote Starkaðr as an Odinic hero in the framework of Dumézilean interpretation.

This broadness of interpretation leads to an underlying problem, however: from the described above point of view, most heroes are ‘Odinic’ in a Dumézilean way because, naturally, most ‘heroic’ characters belong to the aristocratic, first-function military elite. Symptomatic of this justified but methodologically dangerous broadness is a passage from The Destiny of the Warrior that opens Dumézil’s discussion of Starkaðr:

Scandinavian epic is rich in heroes. And the most illustrious betray a family likeness: all are beautiful, brilliant, young, sociable, beloved, of princely birth and eager for power, devoted to their homeland whether it be large or small. Sigurðr, Helgi, Haraldr; and the rest are certainly not interchangeable, but knowledge of one is the knowledge of them all. There is nothing surprising about this, and the designation given them by modern criticism provides an adequate explanation: they belong to the common type of the ‘Odinic hero’ [emphasis mine]. (Destiny 82)

It can be seen how Dumézil, either intuitively or relying on tradition, lists as ‘Odinic heroes’ the same characters as Axel Olrik referred to as having Odinic connections, and which will be grouped together and labelled as Odinic heroes in later scholarship (see section 1.4). The exception is, of course, Starkaðr, looked at in the Odinic context by Chadwick, Meyer and Olrik, and, thanks to Dumézil himself, considered a ‘typical

Odinic hero’ throughout the next decades. However, in *The Destiny of the Warrior*, the figure of Starkaðr is directly opposed to the illustrious Odinic hero, and the argument is built in such a way that the opposition is evident from Starkaðr’s characteristic traits:

Over against them, set apart, is Starkaðr, the Starkatherus of *Gesta Danorum*. Monstrous at birth, descended from giants, disfigured by horrible wounds, old before his time and of prolonged old age, surly, brutal, errant, solitary, with neither love or indulgence for the weakness of love, hardened by suffering, austere and frugal, with no other ambition than to fight at the service of frequently changing masters... such is the strange figure, intriguing rather than appealing, for whom Saxo Grammaticus hardly conceals his predilection.

(Destiny 82)

This opposition was not a problem for Dumézil himself later in *The Stakes of the Warrior*, where Starkaðr’s connection to Óðinn is described through the Indo-European framework. There are different Odinic heroes, he notes, and Starkaðr is of a ‘rare’ type. It will be seen, however, that in scholarship after Dumézil the Odinic hero will be understood, and even defined, in the light of all of Dumézil’s ideas even when they contradict each other.

### 1.4. The problems of application of the label ‘Odinic hero’ in scholarship after Dumézil

Dumézil’s huge influence on subsequent mythological criticism had led to excessive use and occasional misapplication of his concepts, which led to Dumézil himself noting the misuse of the label ‘Odinic hero’ in scholarship (Destiny 82-83). What makes the term ‘Odinic hero’ most problematic, however, is its close connection with Dumézil’s trifunctional hypothesis, which established a connection between, e.g., the Norse Óðinn, the Rigveric Rudra and the Hindu Śiva, as well as between Starkaðr and the Hindu hero Śiśupāla — in other words, the discussion within Indo-European background. Without the Indo-European parallels and therefore the clear concept of the first function of a deity, Dumézil’s notion of ‘Odinism’ becomes groundless. By using the term ‘Odinic hero’ after Dumézil, a scholar may be expected to either closely follow Dumézil’s views on Scandinavian mythology (and then take them into account); or develop a new concept of an Odinic hero, whether related to the Dumézilean one or not (and then discuss it). The third option would be to use ‘Oðinn-hero’ and ‘Odinic hero’ descriptively, rather than as a precise definition, referring

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34 See Stakes 139 for Dumézil’s development of the opposition between the ‘noble’ hero (e.g. Sigurðr) and the ‘dark’ hero (e.g. Starkaðr), but this time classifying Starkaðr as Odinic as well. In the same section Dumézil discusses his own ‘mistake’ of linking Starkaðr with the second function and Þórr.
simply to any hero that has a connection to Óðinn.\textsuperscript{35} Since Dumézil it has been in wide scholarly circulation for a few decades, but it has proven to be rather vague, denoting, basically, any character that has undertaken significant military exploits and has some connection with Óðinn. It is only through indirect reservations that concrete traits of an ‘Óðinn-hero’ can be observed. For example, Gabriel Turville-Petre mentions that Hadingus in \textit{Gesta Danorum} demonstrates ‘standard qualities of an Óðinn-hero’, but he never elaborates on what exactly these qualities are, ascribing them either to common scholarly knowledge or assuming that they are intuitively clear.\textsuperscript{36} Elsewhere, analysing the figure of Starkaðr, Turville-Petre says that Starkaðr differs from other Óðinn-heroes, and as examples of these he lists ‘Sigurd, Harald Wartooth and, if we may count him, Helgi Hundingsbani’.\textsuperscript{37} It can be assumed from this list that receiving Óðinn’s help at some point in his heroic career is for Turville-Petre a fundamental trait of an Óðinn-hero, since it is shared by Saxo’s Hadungus and Haraldus, Sigurðr both in \textit{Regimsmál} and \textit{Völsunga saga}, and Starkaðr according to \textit{Gautreks saga}. Helgi is helped by a \textit{valkyrja} rather than personally by Óðinn, which makes the last example questionable: does a contact with a \textit{valkyrja} or \textit{valkyrja}-like figure make a protagonist an ‘Óðinn-hero’? The reference to Óðinn’s unreliability in \textit{Helgakviða II} could also be the reason for this categorisation — but this motif is found elsewhere, e.g. in \textit{Hákonarmál}, which is not mentioned.\textsuperscript{38} One could also argue that Helgi’s labelling as ‘Odinic’ is perhaps a borrowing from Dumézil who mentioned him in passing in \textit{Destiny of the Warrior} (Destiny 82). It has been shown above, however, that outside

\textsuperscript{35} An example when such use is justified is, e.g., Heather O’Donoghue’s description of Egill Skallagrímsson as ‘an Icelandic Viking poet whose pagan beliefs, expressed vividly in his poetry, quoted copiously in the saga prose, mark him as a distinctively Odinic hero’. In a monograph dedicated to the reception of Old Norse mythological themes, the description above is simply a way to note that Egill is thematically connected to Óðinn, without any methodological association with the long and confused discussion of the Odinic hero as a specific phenomenon, whether in relation to Egill or not. Since O’Donoghue does not use the concept of Odinic hero for her analysis, this usage does not lead to methodological problems discussed in sections 1.4 and 1.5. See Heather O’Donoghue, \textit{English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014 ), 9.

\textsuperscript{36} Gabriel Turville-Petre, \textit{Myth and religion of the North: the religion of ancient Scandinavia} (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 217

\textsuperscript{37} Turville-Petre 207.

\textsuperscript{38} The idea that Helgi is, whatever the meaning behind it, an ‘Odinic hero’, has been relatively widespread in scholarship at least since the 1940s. However, as is usually the case with the Odinic hero theme, this notion was hardly ever explained. For example, in his commentary to the Dutch translation of the \textit{Poetic Edda}, Jan de Vries suggests that the mention of Óðinn in stanza 12 in \textit{Helgakviða II} demonstrates ‘dat Helgi een Odinsheld was’, but, understandably, the nature of a popular edition does not give an opportunity to elaborate on this thesis. See \textit{Edda}, ed. and trans. Jan de Vries (Amsterdam: N.V. Uitgevers-Maatschappij Elsevier, 1944), 159.
the trifunctional hypothesis, which Turville-Petre does not use, Dumézil’s notion of Odinic hero becomes too generously applied.  

Turville-Petre is clearly aware of this uncertainty, and that is why he makes the reservation in parenthesis. In point of fact, his monograph is not focused on this specific problem: its aim is to provide a general picture of pre-Conversion Scandinavian beliefs, of which Öðinn’s connection to particular heroes is only a minor aspect. From Dumézil and up to the 1990s, and occasionally up to today, the status of the Odinic hero theme is that of a minor aspect, brought around as a part of supporting argument rather than as directly analysed material, and vaguely defined through references to previous scholarship like Dumézil.

Because of this situation it is often not clear what exactly constitutes an Óðinn-hero or Odinic hero in most scholarly works after Dumézil. Since Turville-Petre’s *Myth and Religion of the North*, first published in 1964 and relatively often referring to ‘Óðinn-heroes’, there is often a delusive impression that the Odinic hero is a well-studied phenomenon in Old Norse-Icelandic scholarship. This impression is reinforced by the tendency, bordering on a scholarly commonplace, to note in passing that a particular trait is essential for the Odinic hero figure — or belongs, as Turville-Petre put it, to its ‘standard qualities’. This is especially characteristic of scholarship focused primarily on other subjects than the representation of Öðinn and his relationship with human protagonists. So, Jan de Vries in his study of Starkaðr narratives is mainly focused on the questions of transmission, but mentions, in order to support his argumentation, that ‘Starkad in der Vikarssage als typischer Odinsheld auftritt’ (‘Starkaðr appears in the Saga of Vikarr [Vikars þátr in Gautreks saga — E.M.] as a typical Odinic hero’). In a more recent French work, Starkaðr is even called an epitome of this phenomenon, the Odinic hero ‘par excellence’. The same expression, ‘Odinic hero par excellence’, is used in Todd Compton’s work, and again there is a substitution of notions: in Compton’s view, Starkaðr is primarily Odinic because of his poetic gift; however, this feature is characteristic of Starkaðr and Egill

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39 Another common trait behind some of Turville-Petre’s examples is a death that is connected to Öðinn; for example, Haraldus is killed personally by disguised Öðinn, and Hadingus hangs himself, which allegedly has ritual implications. However, other examples do not meet this criterion.


Skallagrímsson only, so it is hardly possible for Starkaðr to be the best example of a character type when this type consists of just two examples. In a similar way, Hadingus is called ‘typischer Odin-held’ (‘typical Óðinn-hero’) in Hermann Reichert’s lexicon entry, ‘dæmigerð Óðinshetja’ (‘typical Odinic hero’) in Svanfríður Óskarsdóttir’s work. Sigurðr also tends to be looked at in this respect — that is, as being the typical and foremost Odinic hero, the Odinic hero par excellence. However, perhaps because the Sigurðr material is not so prominently featured in Dumézil’s works, references to Sigurðr are not so prominent as to Starkaðr and Hadingus. This is ironic because it is Sigurðr that Dumézil referred to as ‘typical’ Odinic hero at some point (see 1.1.3).

One could argue that the notion ‘Hadingus or Starkaðr or Sigurðr is a typical Odinic hero’ has its roots in misinterpretation of George Dumézil’s work. There is nothing in Dumézil’s The Saga of Hadingus to characterise Hadingus as typical: he is, in fact, presented as a unique figure that is the result of reworking the mythical life of the god Njörðr into heroic imagery. His connection to Óðinn is, therefore, defined by the myth of Njörðr’s transmission from the world of the Vanir into the world of the Æsir, to which there hardly are other analogues. In Starkaðr’s case, it has been shown in section 1.3 that Dumézil not only never defined him as a typical Odinic hero, but, on the contrary, consistently stressed that Starkaðr’s relation to Óðinn is problematic and untypical, arguing that ‘Starkaðr himself is an Odinic hero, but of a rare type (in fact he is the only example), linked to the dark aspects of this complex god’ (Stakes 139). Tellingly, the only time Dumézil attempted to describe the Odinic hero as a type, his classification excluded Starkaðr, did not mention Hadingus, and was dismissed by Dumézil himself a few years later (see section 1.3).

Yet, the ‘typical Odinic hero’ myth has never been argued against, and therefore lives on. Characteristic of this scholarly confusion is a recent article, which claims that

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44 See, e.g., The Roots of Yggdrasill: The Edda. Skaldic poetry, The Sagas, ed. Olga Smirnitskaya (Moscow: Terra, 1997), 227 [Причины Игдрасиля: Эdda. Скальды. Саги, ред. Ольга Смирницкая (Москва: Терра, 1997), 227], where Olga Smirnitskaya describes Sigurðr as ‘the greatest Odinic hero’ and finds it a striking detail of Helreið Brynhildar that he goes to Hel in his afterlife rather than to Valhöll, which is closely associated with Óðinn. See also the analysis of Adam Oberlin’s article below.
Sigurðr, in the beginning strophes of Fáfnismál, represents a fully formed Odinic hero, who has received not only the patronage of the god but aspects of his persona as well — somewhat anachronistically basing that opinion on the evidence of Völsunga saga and Hermann Pálsson’s work on the possible Odinic traits in Gísla saga.\textsuperscript{45} Next, it is assumed that an Odinic hero is basically an equivalent of a fully initiated hero:

Sigurðr cannot prove his status as an Odinic hero (that is, fully educated in combat, mythological and religious wisdom and runes) to the serpent until their roles as bearers of mythical knowledge has been sufficiently affirmed.\textsuperscript{46} In other words, an Odinic hero is seen as a hero who demonstrates excellence in combat and ontological knowledge (supposedly Óðinn’s domain as seen from Vašprúðnismál, Grímismál). However, as will be shown below in detail, if these criteria are strictly applied to other material, Sigurðr will most likely be the only example of an Odinic hero, since mythological knowledge is not a trait that is associated with other characters labelled as Odinic heroes by other scholars. Even more importantly, although it is clear that Sigurðr receives Óðinn’s advice in Reginsmál, it is not clear to what extent the special connection between Óðinn and Sigurðr is a traditional element rather than a thirteenth-century interpretation of the Völsunga saga’s author-compiler, as will be demonstrated in chapter 2 of this thesis.

On the one hand, such problems can be easily attributed to a researcher’s own limitations. The article quoted above, for example, was published after Tulinius and Schjødt’s extensive work on Völsunga saga’s Odinic aspects, but those are not referred to.\textsuperscript{47} On the other hand, this particular use of the ‘Odinic hero’ concept is an individual example of a common fallacy — to which, as it has been shown above, even proficient research is prone.\textsuperscript{48} As this literature review aims to demonstrate, the main problem lies in the post-Dumézilean notion of an ‘Odinic hero’ itself, which lacks a consistent methodological framework as it lacks an association with concrete

\textsuperscript{46} Oberlin 109.
\textsuperscript{48} See also examples from Gabriel Turville-Petre, Jan de Vries and James Milroy’s work in sections 1.3-1.4, where the vagueness of the concept ‘Odinic hero’ either does not affect the main line of argumentation or is critically approached.
The vagueness of the concept of Odinic hero in post-Dumézilean criticism led to some scholars’ discarding it as a cliché that stands in the way of elaborated analysis:

If we assume, by generalising from the Gautreks saga story, that Starkaðr is an Óðinn-hero and therefore a type of the warrior aristocrat [emphasis mine — E.M.], we may see in this episode [in Gesta Danorum, where Starkaðr refuses to have his wounds tended by servants — E.M.] proof of his intolerance of the ‘common people’. But if we resist the temptation to put Starkaðr into these pigeon-holes, we may give the story a more careful and different reading.

It had never been clearly established before Milroy’s article that an Óðinn-hero or Odinic hero is specifically a warrior-aristocrat. As was demonstrated, the only common feature of Odinic heroes, as they are described by various scholars, is any connection to Óðinn at all. It seems reasonable to assume that it is this broadness of concept that led to further generalisation, among other things ascribing to a presumably Odinic hero any traits associated with Óðinn. Although Óðinn worship’s association with an aristocratic military elite is a well-established notion, many of the heroes connected with Óðinn do not have specific traits that reinforce this connection, or in any way distinguish them from other heroes. All the prominent warriors of the heroic tradition and fornaldarsögur are a part of military elite, whether they are connected to Óðinn or not, because this is where a warrior character belongs from both the social and literary-traditional points of view. There are, in fact, only two characters who are both connected to Óðinn and are somehow involved in the opposition between the military aristocracy and the common people. The first of them is Starkaðr who, according to Gautreks saga, is destined by Óðinn to be respected by nobles, but destined by Þórr to be detested by commoners. The second one is, arguably, Bóðvarr bjarki, who defends the farmer’s son Hótttr from berserkir, and eventually helps Hótttr to enter the military elite himself. The social implications of this last episode, however, are debatable — Jens Peter Schjødt has demonstrated, in fact, that Hótttr’s change of character and status rather has an initiatory meaning linked to the rest of Hrólfs saga kraka’s narrative (Initiation 322-326). It complicates

Milroy’s argument even further that, before Schjødt’s 2008 article, *Hrólf’s saga kraka* was seldom read in the Odinic framework, and when it was, the opposition between Hǫtttr’s humble origin and Hrólf’s military-aristocratic court was never brought into the argument. The affiliation between the historical Óðinn-worship and military elite is, of course, a well-studied phenomenon.\(^5\) It is therefore natural that many Odinic heroes in the wider sense — that is, characters with Odinic connections and traits — are affiliated with the military elite — most *fornaldarsaga* characters are, as a matter of fact, because of the genre’s usual subject matter. Whether this should be regarded an essential trait of an Odinic hero, however, is a problematic question.

To sum up, it is not clear which traits associated with Óðinn in mythology should be considered essential for defining an Odinic hero in the scholarship of the 1960s and later. The theme of poetic talent can be taken as an example of this unclear trait. Egill and Starkaðr are skalds, meanwhile Hadingus and Sigurðr apparently are not. All of them have a connection to Óðinn and have been often looked at as Odinic heroes. Their connection to Óðinn is obviously different, but all of them are designated as ‘Odinic heroes’ by scholarly tradition, which has led to much misunderstanding as in Milroy’s article discussed above. It has already been mentioned that the theme of poetry in Odinic context is important for some heroes and nonexistent for others. Besides that, the material is strikingly heterogeneous. Starkaðr and Sigurðr, despite both having been considered as typical in their relation to Óðinn, are in fact consistently presented as contrasting and even antagonistic figures in the sources (e.g. Starkaðr’s humiliating defeat to Sigurðr in *Norna-Gests þáttr*) and in scholarship.\(^5\) In terms of genre, the sources are even more problematic. Some of the material, like the stories of Hadingus and Haraldus (Harald Wartooth), is given only in *Gesta Danorum*. The Völsungs’ or Starkaðr’s affiliation to Óðinn is attested to by a variety of sources, *fornaldarsögur* as well as earlier texts like *Gesta Danorum* and Eddic poetry (in the Völsungs’ case — see 1.9).\(^5\) By contrast, Hrólfkr kraki’s complex and well-developed Odinic relationship is found only in the difficult to date but

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\(^5\) See also chapter 2 for sources and parallels to the Odinic material in *Völsunga saga* and Chapter 6 for the discussion of the Starkaðr material.
presumably late *Hrólf's saga kraka* (see 3.2). Finally, among these legendary figures, all of whom have actually met Óðinn according to at least one source, an irregular case is that of Egill Skallagrímson, who belongs to the completely different aesthetic-ideological system of the *Íslendingasögur*. Despite this stand-alone status in terms of genre, his features of wolfishness, ugliness and poetic talent have been convincingly argued to have Odinic nature, often with connection to the figure of Starkaðr in different sources.\(^54\) Needless to say, the heterogeneity of material, which ranges from the *Íslendingasögur* to the fornalddarsögur and Saxo’s narratives, means that representation of Óðinn in them will differ from each other, and so will that of an Óðinn-worshipper or Odinic hero. Despite these limitations, scholarly discussion needs generalisations that transgress genre borders in order to perform any kind of analysis. This means that a new, working definition of ‘Odinic hero’ was long due by the 1990s, and it is only natural that new approaches to saga criticism contributed to the development of this theme as well.

### 1.5. New approaches to studying the Odinic hero

It has been shown that ‘Óðinn and mortal’ is a complicated theme that embraces a wide variety of sources and characters, and has been a cause for scholarly difficulties. A notable feature shared by the studies looked at in section 1.4 is that none of them, in fact, focused on the Odinic hero as a theme or recurrent character, relying on an intuitively apparent phenomenon rather than analysing it. However, with the rise of scholarly attention to the fornalddarsögur in the last decades of the twentieth century, this theme attracted more intense scholarly attention.

A landmark for the study of the Odinic hero, as well as for scholarship on fornalddarsögur and their sources overall, was the publication of Stephen Mitchell’s *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* in 1991.\(^55\) In his assessment of saga genres and their nomenclature, Mitchell points out a type of saga narratives historically defined as ‘mythical-heroic’, and gives the examples of Óðinn’s influence leading to Vikarr’s death in *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka* and Gautreks saga as a probable reflection of religious practices in pre-Christian Scandinavia.\(^56\) He notes that this type of saga is the most important for the scholars of the ‘mythical school’ of the 1950s, such as Georges


\(^{56}\) Mitchell 40-41.
Dumézil and Otto Höfler. In his own analysis of ‘Odinic theophanies’, however, Mitchell notes the complexity of material and its often contrasting approach to picturing the heathen past in general and Óðinn in particular. He notes the distinction between two major tendencies of introducing Óðinn in the fornaldarsögur: accounts that are consistent with the pre-Conversion material coexist with the theme of denial of Óðinn in texts like Hrólfs saga kraka, Órvar-Odds saga and Ketils saga hængs. The nature of this duality, argues Mitchell, is not obvious: some important appearances of Óðinn are found only in late manuscript tradition, while the denial theme may not be immediately linked to Christian views, but rather to the concept of belief in one’s own strength. Mitchell’s consideration will be especially important for further research on Odinic heroes because it establishes a connection between the idea of Óðinn’s unreliability, the influence of Christian ideas on saga narratives, and the theme of the Noble Heathen (as discussed by Lars Lönnroth on different material two decades earlier). Noting that ‘the relationship between the literary uses of Óðinn and the facts concerning the actual religious practices of pagan Scandinavia is convoluted and often misunderstood’, Mitchell establishes a scholarly viewpoint that demonstrates awareness of both genre and structure, and allows for a more consistent analysis of the theme in the future.

This new approach, articulated by Mitchell and demonstrated by an increasing number of scholars of mythological material in fornaldarsaga texts, gave an opportunity for important new insights in the related fields, including the Odinic hero theme. In fact, the development of this particular theme was inevitable as the new views on treating mythological material in the fornaldarsögur and other sources, and the connection to mortal warriors, is an important aspect of Óðinn. John McKinnell’s Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend is an example of a work that defines the Odinic hero for methodological purposes and contributes to the understanding of this theme, although the overall theme of the work is different and broader. While looking at the larger theme of contact with ‘otherness’ in Old Norse mythology, he

58 Mitchell 61-62.
61 John McKinnell, Meeting the Other in Norse myth and legend (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 172-180.
devotes to this topic a short but illuminating chapter in his book, where he draws a thematic parallel between Óðinn’s relation with feminine ‘otherness’, such as the figures of giantesses, and that of an Odinic hero. McKinnell’s interpretation of what is an Odinic hero is simple but more than sufficient to be the basis of his observations: this is either Óðinn’s protégé or, ‘by a simple Christian reversal’, a character who opposes Óðinn.\textsuperscript{62} Most importantly for our understanding of the Odinic hero theme, McKinnell provides evidence based on a range of sources that there are common motifs and groups of motifs connected to Odinic heroes in different narratives. Those motifs are thematically connected to the allegedly earlier mythological narratives about Óðinn himself, but the Odinic hero seems to be an individual concept with its own set of associated features and even persistent plot structures, which are different from the Óðinn stories. McKinnell neither directly defines the Odinic hero through these literary structures, nor does he argue with previous notions. However, his work is important for our understanding of the Odinic hero in that, firstly, it is independent from the post-Dumézillean discussion. Secondly and most importantly, it directly implies that a certain character type, such as the Odinic hero, may be closely associated with recurring sets of motifs and plot structures, which emerge in texts that are set apart both chronologically and in terms of genre. An Odinic hero for McKinnell is, therefore, a literary-cultural construct rather than just a character type — which is an important development, on which this dissertation will methodologically rely. Another important aspect of McKinnell’s contribution to understanding the Odinic hero theme is his point of view on this theme, which he considers in the context of liminality, a situation of encountering ‘the other’. The Odinic hero, as will be shown below, is indeed most often presented in the liminal mode of existence, and is to a large extent determined by it. Just three years after the publication of McKinnell’s monograph, Jens Peter Schjødt will consider this connection in detail, including, on the material of \textit{Gesta Danorum}, the twofold liminality of a protagonist who is on the one hand connected to the uncanny feminine otherness, as Óðinn is in the myth, and on the other hand connected to Óðinn, which for a human being is also a liminal contact:

\textit{We thus come across a liminal scenario, which contains the feminine and the sexual as well as}

\textsuperscript{62} John McKinnell, \textit{Meeting the Other in Norse myth and legend} (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 172-173.
Schjødt’s monograph *Initiation between two worlds: structure and symbolism in pre-Christian Scandinavian religion*, is undeniably the most in-depth investigation into the Odinic hero theme since Dumézil and up to today. Even more importantly, it develops an analytical viewpoint that allows to consider ‘neither the rituals nor their reconstruction, but rather... an attempt to reveal the semantic universe within which the structure and symbolism of initiation take place’ (Initiation 13). This is a huge step forward for scholarship on Óðinn, as it both develops a more cross-disciplinary methodological approach to the material, and enhancing the understanding of Óðinn and Odinic heroes in general, especially as long as the possible pre-Christian religious roots of the Odinic hero theme is concerned. Looking at how a myth or ritual (such as the Odinic consecration) manifests in saga literature has been an important line of research since e.g. Olrik and Höfler, but neither of the two early researchers had a sufficient methodological instrumentarium to support these observations. The shift from merely ‘reconstructing’ the original pagan beliefs from later sources to a more synthetic view, independent from such notions as ‘original’ and ‘secondary’, is the attainment of the last century that both history of religion and allied subjects can make use of. Since the attention to details in the sources, which support his theoretical constructions, is arguably Schjødt’s strongest point, his work will be mostly referred to in the corresponding chapters (mostly 2, 3), where the evidence might either support of oppose the ideas expressed in *Initiation between Two Worlds*. In order to undertake such analysis, however, an independent approach to the texts should be developed. Therefore, the next section deals with the choice of material in the thesis and its approach to this material.

2. THE ODINIC HERO COMPLEX

As the outline of the scholarship has demonstrated, ‘Odinic hero’ is hardly a clearly defined concept. It is possible, however, to observe a number of features that warrior figures connected to Óðinn tend to share in common, as has been noted in scholarship and may be observed in the sources. Leaving aside the Dumézilean generalisation that
a first-function hero should be affiliated with a first-function deity, such as Óðinn, the following features apply to the many of the characters described as Odinic heroes:

1. **Óðinn’s help.** The Odinic hero is, in the world of John McKinnell, ‘Óðinn’s protégé’, and therefore is portrayed as someone who receives Óðinn’s help. Although the mere indication of Óðinn’s benevolence may be a rhetorical figure indicating military success, it is quite common for Óðinn to literally help heroes, in fornaldarsaga narratives as well as other sources. Óðinn’s help usually takes the form of a gift or advice that proves to be useful in warfare. Clear examples include Óðinn’s many gifts and pieces of advice to the protagonists of Völsunga saga (and occasionally its poetic sources), Hrani’s advise and gifts to Hrólf in Hrólf’s saga kraka, or the Odinic old man’s advise to Hadingus in Gesta Danorum. Axel Olrik considers this theme a reflection of an important aspect of the historical Óðinn worship, and quotes Hyndluljóð to support this notion (HLD 355). Jens Peter Schjødt elaborates this idea by suggesting that Óðinn’s gift, especially the gift of a weapon, is for an Odinic hero a resolution of in initiation rite that confirms his status as well as affiliation with Óðinn.

2. **Odinic death.** The Odinic hero tends to die an Odinic death, i.e. a death which in the narrative is associated with Odinic imagery. A clear example of this is a death that is personally orchestrated by Óðinn; once again, Völsunga saga provides many examples, as do Hrólf’s saga kraka, Gautreks saga, Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana and in at least two narratives in Gesta Danorum. In the above listed texts Óðinn is personally present, or is strongly implied to be, at the place of a character’s death; however, Hadingus hanging himself has been convincingly interpreted as an Odinic death.

3. **The presence of berserkir and the Mannerbund.** An Odinic hero is often a part of what may be called a Mannerbund, usually a group of twelve warriors (in Hrólf’s saga kraka, Óðinn creates such a warband). Alternatively, he is famous for defeating such groups (most evidently Ásmundr berserkjabani and, once again, the protagonists of Hrólf’s saga kraka). The group of twelve tends to be described as berserkir or be somehow similar to berserkir, suggesting another Odinic connection. This feature is far less evident than Odinic help and Odinic death, and is the most difficult one to adequately establish; Lars Lönnroth calls a group of twelve in Germanic tradition a ‘cliché or a
conventional pattern’. There is, however, a strong scholarly tradition of considering how the ‘[Odinic] myths... partly adopt imagery from the cult’, and the association between the Indo-Germanic Männerbünde, berserkir, Óðinn and Odinic heroes has been discussed and re-evaluated from Axel Olrik and Otto Höfler to the works of Kris Kershaw, Jens Peter Schjødt and recently Roderick Dale, who warns that ‘berserkir were almost certainly associated with Óðinn, but it is possible to over-emphasize this interpretation of their role, because little is known about the actual extent of their association, and it may have been solely one of belonging to a sphere governed by the god’ (see 1.6). In this light, it is definitely worth to consider in more detail the extent of association between the literary berserkir and the literary Odinic hero, which may, in its turn, shed new light on the more historically-oriented research.

4. **Shapeshifting and bestiality.** Similarly to the concept of a Männerbund, but not necessarily in connection with it, the theme of bestiality and shapeshifting narrows the distance between an Odinic hero and a berserkr. An Odinic hero often possesses animal traits, usually those of a wolf or a bear. Examples of this are Sigmundr and Sinjótr’s transformation into wolves in Völsunga saga, and Böðvarr bjarki’s transformation into a bear in Hrólfss saga kraka; Egill and even Starkaðr have also interpreted this way. Bestiality may be projected into something fought by the protagonist; so, in Book II of Gesta Danorum Biarco defeats a monstrous bear, meanwhile in Hrólfss saga kraka Böðvarr bjarki transforms into a bear. Likewise, Sigmundr in Völsunga saga both defeats a monstrous she-wolf and transforms into a wolf himself.

So, if the most consistent scholarly attitudes to the Odinic hero are combined, two

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65 By now, the fact that berserkir were at least at some point associated with bestiality and shapeshifting seems to be a scholarly consensus, even though the precise nature of this connection is of course subject to debate. For an recent argumentation for the berserkir’s totemic roots, as well as polemics with earlier scholarship, see ‘The Notion of Berserkir and the Relation Between Óðinn and Animal Warriors’, *Proceedings of the 13th International Saga Conference The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham: The Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 3. For a recent detailed overview of the problem and further reading see Dale 120-127, 57-69.
tendencies can be articulated:

1. The Odinic hero is both helped by Óðinn and dies because of him;

2. The Odinic hero is somehow connected to berserkir, either by being one of them or fighting them, or possessing bestial traits (or, by an inversion, fighting monsters).

It is not too difficult to see that Jens Peter Schjødt’s picture of the literary uses of Óðinn, Óðinn’s warriors and the berserkir relies on the assumption that these two ideas are closely interconnected. His work, however, is based on supertemporal paradigms rather than close-reading literary analysis of the sagas from which the material is taken. In order to make further steps in this direction, it is necessary to undertake a comparative analysis of as many relevant sources as possible. In order to do this, this thesis introduces an analytical tool called the Odinic hero complex, which is based on the observations made above.\textsuperscript{67}

\textit{Figure 1. The Odinic hero complex}

As it is shown in the figure, the basis of the complex is the plot about a protagonist who is helped by Óðinn but then betrayed by him. If this happens to a character, he will be called an Odinic hero in this thesis. The whole story of Óðinn’s help and betrayal will be called the Odinic hero plot. So, if a text contains the Odinic hero plot, it will be considered in the thesis.

**Examples of texts containing both elements of the Odinic hero plot.** Volsunga saga and Hrólfs saga kraka are both focused on characters who are helped and betrayed by Óðinn, which is why these sagas have thesis chapters dedicated to them (see chapters 2 and 3 correspondingly). Hadingus in Saxo Grammaticus’s Gesta Danorum is helped by an unnamed but clearly Odinic old man, and dies by hanging, so this narrative also contains the Odinic hero plot, albeit in a less evident form (see 7.1). All the three texts mentioned above also happen to contain many motifs from the triangle in the upper part of the figure, which backs up the Odinic hero complex as an actual paradigm in saga literature.

The upper part of the figure contains a number of secondary motifs that suggest the Odinic hero’s association with berserkir and Männerbünde. If taken independently, these motifs are in general very widespread in saga literature, and their mere presence in the text will not lead to it being analysed in the thesis. However, this thesis will consider texts that contain at least one element of the Odinic hero plot (either Odinic help or Odinic death), and at least one motif from the subordinate part of the complex.

**Examples of texts containing only one element of the Odinic hero plot, as well as some secondary motifs of the complex.** The characters of Hálfís saga ok hálfsrekka are never helped by Óðinn in any way, but their death can be described as Odinic, and the hálfsrekkar are a band of twelve; therefore, Hálfís saga qualifies and yields interesting parallels with other sources (see chapter 3). Similarly, Vita et Passio Waldevi relates how Siward of Northumbria is presented with a banner and military advise by an Odinic old man, but no Odinic death follows, and the text switches to a completely different style at this point. However, Vita et Passio Waldevi also gives an account of Siward’s descent from a polar bear, so we consider that the Odinic hero complex is present in this text (see 7.2).

It is evident that defining the Odinic hero as above drastically narrows the material. Many of characters that clearly are both Odinic and heroes do not fit this scheme, as
this figure demonstrates:

![Diagram of the Odinic hero complex](image)

*Figure 2. The relation of the Odinic hero complex as defined in this thesis to other Óðinn-related material*

This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the fact that it leaves aside the figure of Egill Skallagrímsson, whose connection with Odinic imagery is well-studied. *Egils saga* demonstrates not only a clearly direct association of the protagonist with with Óðinn in *Sonatorrek*, but also suggests berserkr-connected bestiality and shapeshifting in the figure of Kveldúlfr. However, while being essential for our understanding of Óðinn, *Egils saga* does not contain the fundamental structure this dissertation is looking at, which is the Odinic hero plot. Therefore, *Egils saga* is not considered in this thesis, even though at times its argumentation builds upon the scholarship on Óðinn and/or berserkir, for which *Egils saga* is of course an important source.

Such a concept as the Odinic hero complex, one could argue, is impossible to introduce without distorting the material to fit into the scheme — exactly what James Milroy was against when he refused to ‘pigeonhole’ Starkaðr.\(^68\) It should be noted, however, that the Odinic hero complex is formal not because of its artificiality, but rather because it relies on narrative elements and their satellite motifs rather than on

the more obscure thematic level, and describes a literary-structural phenomenon that actually existed in Iceland at the time when the most important fornlæg were being written. Transmission and change of context could even lead to the existence of the Odinic hero complex technically without Óðinn. For example, the account of Siward digri’s early exploits in the Anglo-Latin Vita et Passio Waldevi contains important elements of the complex, including an Odinic encounter. However, the ‘old man on the hill’ met by Siward is never identified, and the hagiographical context together with the explicitly positive connotation of the episode lead to the assumption that this figure has not been understood as Óðinn either by the author or compiler or by the intended audience (see 3.6 for a detailed discussion of Vita et Passio Waldevi). The Odinic parallels to this episode in Vita Waldevi, however, are quite clear. From a broader perspective, both Siward and e.g. Egill are ‘Odinic’, but the nature of the material that connects them to Óðinn is strikingly different and requires different methodological approaches. Finding an approach that suits a group of sources, which is unified by common features relevant for the research, is here the primary aim.
CHAPTER 2

VÖLSUNGA SAGA

1. INTRODUCTION

Of all the material relevant to this research, the most suitable text to start the analysis is, for several reasons, Völsunga saga. Firstly, it is probably the most famous saga narrative associated with the Odinic theme, with Sigmundr a model of the ‘Odinic hero’ that often reappears in the following tradition. Secondly, Völsunga saga is an early text of its kind: it survives in a manuscript from ca. 1400 together with Ragnars saga loðbrókar, but probably was composed much earlier — as R.G. Finch argues, between ca. 1200 and 1270. Starting the analysis with this text will, therefore, allow a rough chronological consistency throughout the thesis, even though the dating of the other, probably later, texts is also problematic and will be discussed in their corresponding chapters. The third reason to start with Völsunga saga is that it stands out among other sagas of its kind as a text with well-preserved sources, since most of its text stems directly from versions of the Eddic poems found in Codex Regius.

This thesis focuses on the Odinic hero as saga protagonist, which means that its aim is to describe the means of representation of a certain character type in Icelandic sagas. This character type is undoubtedly connected to a memory of pre-Christian belief as well as to older narratives, such as Eddic poetry that survived in Medieval Iceland. One important reason for this is that many of the sagas dealing with an Odinic hero as protagonist go back to very old and influential narrative traditions; this is especially the case with Völsunga saga and Hrólfís saga kraka and the traditions that precede them that could be described as corpora of texts connected with the Völsungs and Skjöldungs.

Extensive research has been carried out on those narrative traditions, but this work has no ambition of saying something new in this field. Its object of consideration is rather the saga texts themselves, their structure and the ways they represent characters and plot situations.

A retrospective view will be used whenever necessary, with an awareness that pre-written tradition is almost always a speculative field. This applies to Völsunga saga to a lesser extent than to some other sagas observed in this work, since most of
its immediate sources survive and the relationships between them and the saga text are well-established.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOLARSHIP

Unlike most other fornaldarsögur, Völsunga saga has been extensively analysed, not only recently but since the nineteenth century, and there is a considerable body of scholarship connected to this text. Chronologically, as Ragnhild Boklund-Schlagbauer noticed, this scholarly work can be roughly divided into two categories: firstly, research of the period when scholars were mostly interested in source problems; and secondly, newer works when ‘begann sich Wissenschaftler mit der Saga als eigenständigen Werk zu befassen’. Boklund-Schlagbauer mostly connects this newer trend with the name of R.G. Finch. This division reflects the change of scholarly attitude towards Völsunga saga, but simplifies the situation, since even when scholars were mostly looking at literary transmission, they also contributed to an understanding of the texts that were a part of this process.

Given the number and diversity of academic works on Völsunga saga, it will be easier to review these thematically rather than chronologically, dividing scholarly works into several categories corresponding to different trends in research, its main objects of consideration and methodology. It should be noted, of course, that any arrangement will be conventional and more or less artificial, as, in fact, few works would fall into one category only. There were, however, quite distinctive trends towards considering this text as a part of the ‘Nibelungen legend’ and the Völsung-Nibelung cycle:

- focusing mainly on the text’s own structure and poetics in relation to its sources;
- as a reflection of Old Norse myth (and sometimes as remote evidence for pre-Christian religious practices).

As can be seen from the title, this dissertation falls into the second category,

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69 See Ragnhild Boklund-Schlagbauer, Vergleichende Studien zu Erzählungskulturen im Nibelungenlied und in nordischen Fassungen des Nibelungenstoffes (Kümmerle Verlag: Göppingen, 1996), 153, where brief overview of scholarship on Völsunga saga is provided.
since it requires the evidence of mythology and religion studies as supportive material. The association of Völsunga saga with Odinic myth and its treatment in the text itself, on the level of structure, are therefore two topics that are the most relevant to this research and a more detailed account of them will thus be given than of the first category.

2.1. Völsunga saga and its sources as a part of the ‘Nibelungen legend’. The ‘original form’ of the Sigurðr-Siegfried narrative

The earliest works mentioning Völsunga saga looked at it, and at the whole Völsung-Nibelung corpus, as a primarily historical source, preserving memory of events ranging from the fifth to the eleventh centuries AD. A considerable body of research has been carried out in this field, with Scandinavian material usually seen as a sideline on the continental material. This Scandinavian material encompassed mostly Völsunga saga itself and, more importantly, its earlier Eddic sources. The saga and its source poetry were usually seen as a more or less complex literary unity.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, it became increasingly clear, especially in the light of Karl Lachmann’s research, that the fictional element in the ‘Nibelungen legend’ had been underestimated. Scholarly interest gradually shifted, therefore, from the supposed historical roots of the Nibelungenlied and related texts to the narrative tradition behind them. This tradition has, basically, two variations: Scandinavian (The Poetic Edda, Völsunga saga) and continental (Nibelungenlied, Anhang zum Heldenbuch). The drastic difference between their versions of the Guðrún-Kriemhild legend has been the subject of a long debate between Andreas Heusler and his followers, who argued that the Burgundian-Gothic heroic themes came to Scandinavia through Germany, and the scholars who, opposed to the Heusler

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70 Detailed bibliographies on the origins of the Nibelungenlied are provided by Hermann Fischer, Die Forschungen über das Nibelungenlied seit Karl Lachmann (Leipzig, 1874); Theodor Abeling, Das Nibelungenlied und seine Literatur (Leipzig, 1907).
72 See, e.g., Johann-Christoph Gottsched, De temporibus teutonicorum Vatum mythicis (Leipzig: Lipsiae ex Officina Breitkopfia, 1952), x.
School, argued for the transmission of material during the Migrations (VS xvi-xxi). Investigations in this field continue to this day, but scholars do seem to agree that ‘the German version of the Burgundian catastrophe is adapted from an older tradition to which V[ölsunga] Saga is more faithful’ (VS xxi).

It should be noted that, during the development of the literary-critical approach to fornaldarsögur and its application to Völsunga saga, it has not lost its importance as source evidence in the studies of the Völsung-Nibelung cycle and contacts between the traditions connected to it. An important work here is Theodore M. Andersson’s The Legend of Brynhild, which makes a neo-Heuslerian approach to the reconstruction of the Nibelungenlied’s sources in connection with other texts belonging to the cycle.  

### 2.2. Völsunga saga’s relation to its sources

The fact that Völsunga saga was usually seen as a not very significant part of the Völsung-Nibelung cycle does not mean that it never received scholarly attention as a separate text — for instance, in 1876 Barend Symons published his dissertation on the ‘so-called Völsunga saga’, where he performed some textual analysis and briefly but comprehensively observed the text’s connections to Ragnars saga and especially to the Eddic poems. Such investigations, however, were rare. It was not until the early twentieth century that scholarship began to focus on the saga text itself, especially on the principles of treatment of the poetic sources by the author-compiler. A milestone in this field was Per Wieselgren’s Quellenstudien zur Völsungasaga, a monograph giving linguistic analysis of the saga parallel to its known Eddic sources and registering all the alterations made by the compiler as he was reworking poetic material into prose. Quite in the spirit of his time, Wieselgren attempts to reconstruct lost sources (like Sigurðar saga). The aim of his book is, therefore, to provide the saga with as complete background as possible and, as its reviewer hoped, to ‘take [Old Norse scholars] back to still earlier stories’. Ironically, the effect of

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78 Barend Symons, Untersuchungen über die sogenannte Völsunga saga (Druck von E. Karras: Halle, 1876).
79 Per Wieselgren, Quellenstudien zur Völsungasaga (Tartu, 1935).
Wieselgren’s monograph was quite the opposite: it provoked a scholarly discussion of the saga compiler’s motivation as he edited the sources and reworked them into saga prose.

If we consider Per Wieselgren’s work in the framework of today’s saga scholarship, his approach to the saga as a literary work seems pretty traditional for his time, as he considers it rather a poor and inconsistent compilation made from Eddic verses rather than a work of some independent value. On the other hand, Wieselgren’s monograph demonstrated an unusual attention to the saga text itself, and was praised for that reason by those frustrated by the earlier scholarship:

The everlasting discussion of ‘sources’ is a poisonous nuisance, inherited from the pragmatic nineteenth century, and it is pointless unless it leads up to the positive achievement of the last link in the chain. Unfortunately, the poet [i.e. the author-compiler of Völsunga saga — E.M.] usually has to be content when we have proved that most of his ideas were borrowed.81

The immediate results of Wieselgren’s textual analysis have become a basis of further investigations that emerged with the growing interest in the poetics of fornalðarsögur. Today, scholars seem to have come to an agreement that the author-compiler had some sort of systematic approach to the material, though there are few common ideas of what exactly his literary conception was.

One of the scholars who regarded Völsunga saga as a work of art was R.G. Finch, who published extensively on this saga and also prepared an edition and translation of its text (VS). He also produced a detailed, text-based study of the saga compiler’s approach to his poetic sources that refers to Per Wieselgren’s Quellenstudien zur Völsungsasaga, but tests his results by literary rather than linguistic analysis. Finch analyses corresponding passages from surviving Eddic poems and the saga text and, generalizing the observations he had made, formulates the principles of the compiler’s treatment of the sources, his attitude to poetic vocabulary, syntax and other features such as the numerous epithetical words and phrases of the heroic poetry. Furthermore, Finch looks upon the compiler’s treatment of mythological and supernatural subjects and notes, in general, a tendency to reduce the number of supernatural elements in the saga compared to its source poetry.

Finch argues with Wieselgren, who earlier claimed that the author-compiler, out of principle, excluded all the sentimental elements from his text, as well as

gruesome and cruel episodes.\textsuperscript{82} In Finch’s opinion, these elements were excluded not for the reason of their own qualities, but rather because the compiler preserved only what fitted his picture of ‘saga-style’, which often manifested itself in simply cutting out the unnecessary detail. Finch’s view of this problem is important since it reflects the author-compiler’s effort to create an appropriate style for a saga-narrative dealing with mythological and heroic subjects, though Finch does not go into much detail on this subject.

Finch’s ideas clearly show that his view of \textit{Völsunga saga} grows out of Per Wieselgren’s work, to which he refers, but at the same time he disagrees with Wieselgren in his most important conclusions, explains the compiler’s motivation in cases Wieselgren regarded as flawed\textsuperscript{83} and attempts to prove that the compiler ‘is in fact surprisingly consistent and logical in his handling of material’.\textsuperscript{84} According to Finch, ‘…Wieselgren’s criticism of the compiler’s lack of consistency is ill-founded’, though, in fact, it can be explained by the fact that Wieselgren’s book appeared in 1935, long before the recent interest in \textit{fornaldarsögur} as works of art.\textsuperscript{85} Wieselgren has no theory that would explain disagreements of this saga’s text because he was, in fact, never looking for such a theory.

‘Throughout this study the term ‘compiler’ has been used. Should it not perhaps yield to ‘author’?’,\textsuperscript{86} — wonders Finch at the end of his article. In today’s saga research, the latter is almost always the case.\textsuperscript{87} In 2002, Manuel Aguirre argued vehemently for the saga’s artistic qualities and identified a few consistent compositional strategies in the saga-text, finding a definite narrative and thematic structure to the text.\textsuperscript{88} Aguirre analyses the saga’s problematic parts (especially the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Finch2} Finch, 333-34.
\bibitem{Finch3} Finch, 347.
\bibitem{Finch4} Finch, 350.
\bibitem{Finch5} Finch, 353.
\bibitem{Aguirre} Aguirre 5-37.
\end{thebibliography}
Brynhildr episodes), traditionally explained by inconsistent compilation of contradictory sources, and comes to the conclusion that

- the ‘lack of unity’ the text has been charged with is nowhere much in evidence;
- the fabled inconsistencies in Brynhild’s character are illusory;
- the study of narrative structure brings to light the double thematic structure of the saga.\(^89\)

This argument relies on the assumption that numerous ‘repetitions’, lying on the surface of the narrative, are in fact systematic and fit a few patterns that lie, according to Aguirre, behind most of \textit{Völsunga saga}’s episodes.

Although some of Aguirre’s arguments are problematic, methodologically his view of the saga is an example of the general rise of interest in \textit{fornaldarsögur} as independent works of art with more of less conscious authorship. This attitude is shared by this dissertation as well, especially in the case of \textit{Völsunga saga}, which, as will be demonstrated below, gives substantial evidence of purposeful reworking of the sources.

\textbf{2.3. \textit{Völsunga saga}’s mythological pretext}

The type of \textit{fornaldarsögur} that could be described as mythical-heroic sagas has long been regarded as a source of information about Old Norse mythological or religious tradition — and, most importantly for this discussion, about Odinic cults. \textit{Völsunga saga} is, alongside \textit{Gesta Danorum}’s first books, one of the central sources for any investigation of the subject. The saga and its sources have long been considered to provide important information about Old Norse mythology and religion, especially in relation to Odinic cults.\(^90\) With this connection, mention must be made of the fact that \textit{Völsunga saga} itself has traditionally been regarded as less valuable evidence than its source, not only because it was a much later work, but also because of the fact that ‘The supernatural and mythological references of this source dwindled away until comparatively few remained. And yet — none of these omissions in any way

\(^90\) Investigations in other large themes connected to \textit{Völsunga saga} and especially its source material, such as the serpent-fighting motif or the awakening of Brynhildr as a part of Indo-European solar myth, will be left aside here.
materially affected the main outlines of the narrative... [In Volsunga saga] the mythological and supernatural elements were on the whole expendable’. 91 Up to today, in studies dealing with long-term literary transmission the saga comes to the foreground only when it can provide material not surviving elsewhere, for instance, when it preserved stanzas corresponding to the ‘Great Lacuna’ in Codex Regius. 92 It was not until the first third of the last century, with Per Wieselgren’s work, that an interest in the saga text started to emerge.

Even if all the late sagas, as scholars agreed, provided but a vague literary memory of the mythological past, the information this text contains is still priceless when the surviving material about pre-Christian Germanic cults is so scarce overall. The importance of fornaldarsögur to scholarship in this particular field, for which other historical evidence is scarce, was noted recently by Jens Peter Schjødt — rather retrospectively: since the previous century and up to today, historians of religion rely heavily on fornaldarsögur as a source of information about the cult of Óðinn, although the approach to this material has altered greatly throughout the last century. Even in studies focused on ancient history, culture and religion, some form of literary analysis has always been necessary as long as they used literary material. This is especially important for legendary sagas, created and written down centuries after paganism was a part of people’s lives. Ritual and mythology, the main object of interest for a historian of culture and religion, have always been blended with each other, and the relationship between them is complicated. Furthermore, there is no ‘pure’ mythology in any of our sources: mythological images and legendary tradition become incorporated into literary narratives that change their form historically; as time passes, different genres become dominant. A fornaldarsaga from this point of view is a very late literary product, and any conclusions on the presumably earlier material included into them can be made only after an analysis of these texts’ structure and context.

An example of early systematic studies in this subject is H. Munro Chadwick’s work, most importantly his monograph The Cult of Othin, which tries to encompass all the known sources and pays special attention to literary texts. 93

Chadwick, whose work is based to a large extent on fornaldarsaga material, including that from Völsunga saga, acknowledges that these sagas are late and quite problematic texts, and even apologises for their extensive use in his work; he justifies it, however, by his conviction that ‘much of the material which they contain is considerably older’. 94 Chadwick refers, where possible, to its earlier poetic sources, not to Völsunga saga itself, but he draws important parallels to Sigmundr’s death episode in the saga. 95 Although Chadwick’s research is in the history of Old Norse religion, it contributed, as often happened, to saga scholarship as well. Arranging saga motifs systematically and complementing them with other evidence created a frame of reference for future investigations, allowing the recognition of certain motifs as ‘Odinic’, e.g., the motif of (sacrificial) hanging 96 or stabbing with a spear. 97

An important branch of research in mythology, history and religion that bears upon a number of fornaldarsögur, with special focus on Völsunga saga, is the investigation of shapeshifting in Old Norse literature. This theme inevitably leads to berserkir and úlfhéñnar figures that have been described as having connection to Odinic cults. 98 As accumulated knowledge opened the door to generalization, new readings of the saga emerged. Thus, Jens Peter Schjødt, who as a historian of religion specialises in rendering of material preserved in fornaldarsögur, sees the shapeshifting episode in Völsunga saga as a reminiscence of ancient initiatory rites, comparing it to the blood-drinking episode in Hrófls saga kraka and a number of other saga scenes.

2.4. Völsunga saga’s literary-historical background

As has been shown, scholarly attitudes to the structure of Völsunga saga have never been uniform. As a starting point, it is now well established due to Wieselgren’s monograph that the text is a product of consistent reworking of Eddic poems into saga prose. Very diverse theories, however, have been put forward about its literary technique and the ideas behind the compiler’s or author’s attitude to the structuring of

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95 Chadwick, 15-16.
96 Chadwick, 16-20.
97 Chadwick, 15-16.
the saga. A researcher focusing on *Völsunga saga* today is, therefore, in a difficult situation, as every new reading of this text is going to compete with a dozen others. Acknowledging the difficulty of the situation, this discussion aims to reconsider the role of Odinic imagery in *Völsunga saga* rather than give a quietus to the argument on the saga’s poetics and ideology.

Indeed, *Völsunga saga* is made very special by the fact that the pagan theme — or, more precisely, the Odinic theme — becomes central there. Even compared to other early mythical-heroic sagas, like *Hervarar saga* with its Gestumblindi episode, *Völsunga saga* is particularly focused on this topic, to the extent that the whole narrative can be read as systematic discourse on the relationship between an active hero and his destiny personified by a pagan deity.

Before moving on to *Völsunga saga* itself, it should be emphasised that this text’s interest in the legendary past is not specifically Icelandic or Scandinavian. It is shared by other early fornaldarsögur, but should also be seen in the context of wider European literature, since, as Margaret Clunies Ross has noted, ‘the development of the fornaldarsaga was a part of a general arousal of interest in the legendary past in medieval European literature of the twelfth century and beyond, witness Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Walter of Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*, both extremely popular works, and both influential in Scandinavia’. By the end of the thirteenth century, which was probably the time *Völsunga saga* was written, attention to the pagan past in the sagas was not a novelty. In fact, basing his argument on the example of *Sturlunga saga*, Viðar Pálsson has convincingly demonstrated that pre-Christian mythology was, during the saga age, a natural part of the audience’s cultural background, and it is in this context that the rise of fornaldarsaga should be understood.

*Völsunga saga* has a few features that are crucial for further argument and that will be taken as starting points.

First of all, it is evident, especially in the light of Wieselgren’s work, that *Völsunga saga* is a written text. It was composed by an individual consciousness and perhaps never transmitted orally in the form we know it. The narrative tradition behind the saga is, of course, very old, as testified by the Eddic poems on which the

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saga is based, and archaeological evidence.\textsuperscript{100}

It is certain that the author-compiler had before him a collection of Eddic poetry very similar to Codex Regius, and relied on it heavily. Codex Regius poems ‘involved’ this way in the creation of Völsunga saga are, in fact, very diverse, are dated quite differently, probably come from different backgrounds and are connected to each other mostly by recurring characters and by the fact they were selected by the compiler of Codex Regius.

3. \textit{Völsunga saga}’s references to Óðinn and their significance for the narrative

‘Hér hefr upp ok segir frá þeim manni, er Sigi er nefndr ok kallaðr, at héti son Óðins’: this is the very first phrase in Völsunga saga’s text, which starts the saga by indicating the eponymous family’s divine origin. It is hardly a coincidence that Óðinn’s last appearance in the saga is in its very last paragraph, and this time in connection with death rather than with birth and origin, advising the means to kill the otherwise invulnerable Völsung heroes Hamðir and Sǫrli. This circular plot structure, created either consciously or, less probably, spontaneously, is heavily supported by a network of recurring motifs interwoven into the narrative.

The Völsungs are identified as Óðinn’s offspring already in the first chapter. This idea is duplicated in the clearly folklore-inspired story of Völsung’s birth, where the queen cannot conceive until Rerir eats an apple brought by a valkyrie on Óðinn and Frigg’s command. The idea that the Völsungs descend from Óðinn, introduced in the opening lines of Völsunga saga, joins together all the recurring motifs described below, which are either explicitly or supposedly connected in the saga to the Odinic theme.

Very often Óðinn personally assists the protagonists in their enterprises. The fact that Óðinn is a recurring character in Völsunga saga is well known, and yet it may be useful to make a survey of his participation in the story.

In all, according to Völsunga saga, Óðinn personally takes part in the career of almost every significant Völsung: Sigi, Rerir, Sigmundr (and Sinfjóþli), and especially

\textsuperscript{100} For the representation of the Völsung material on carved stone monuments see Marjolein Stern, ‘Runestone images and visual communication in Viking Age Scandinavia’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Nottingham, 2013), 45-47, 196-198.
Sigurðr who encounters him three times; Óðinn also appears at Hamðir and Sǫrli’s death (VS 78) and advises against them. Helgi is an exception here — his story, given in chapter 9 (VS 14-17) follows Helgakviða Hundingsbana I quite closely, though Helgi’s relationship with the valkyrie Sigrún could theoretically be also worked into the argument.

Almost all the mentions of Óðinn in Völsunga saga are, therefore, connected to a specific hero. This is reflected in the titles listed below, given in the same order as in the saga.

3.1. Sigi’s ancestry

Sigi, the ancestor of the Völsungs, is believed to be a son of Óðinn (VS 1). Óðinn is therefore connected to all the characters of the saga, both by this ancestry and by the fact that he takes part in their undertakings.

3.2. Óðinn helps Sigi

When Sigi is outlawed, Óðinn follows and helps him to establish himself as a warrior, to later become a chieftain and finally a king. The logical sequence is outlined quite clearly in the saga:

Óðinn fylgir honum nú af landi brott, svá langa leið, at stóru bar, ok eigi létti hann fyrir en hann kom honum til herskipa. Nú tekr Sigi at leggjast í hernað með þat líð, er faðir hans fekk honum, áðr þeir skildu, ok varð hann sigrsæll í hernaðinum. Ok svá kemr hans máli, at hann fekk herjat sér land ok riki um síðir.
(VS 2)

Óðinn followed him out of the land, for a long way, and did not leave him until he came to some warships. Then Sigi started raiding with his men that his father had assigned to him before they parted, and he was fortunate in his warfare. And it befell him so, that he won for himself some land and a kingdom at last.

This is a pattern to be found elsewhere further in the saga, most clearly in the episodes of Sigurðr’s vengeance for his father (VS 28-29) and his killing of Fáfnir (VS 30-31):

- Óðinn helps the hero in some way
- The hero undertakes some dangerous enterprise
- The hero is victorious, as the victory has been symbolically bestowed on him from the beginning.

Gudmund Schütte argued that Sigi himself ‘is obviously a hypostasis of Odin, who was also known also as Sigfadir and Sigtyr, the god of victory, and whose principal
sanctuary in Sweden, according to the Snorra Edda, was Sigtuna (‘the town of Sig’).¹⁰¹

### 3.3. The birth of Völsung

Further on, Öðinn extends his patronage of the Völsungs from assistance in warfare to other spheres of life. Rerir, Sigi’s son, and his queen have no children and they pray that they might have a child. Öðinn answers their prayers and sends to them a valkyrie in the form of a raven, who drops an apple on Sigi’s lap. After eating that apple, the couple are able to have a son:

Rerir fekk sér nú herfang mikit ok konu þá, er honum þótti við sitt hæfi, ok eru þau mjöð lengi ásamt, ok eigu þau engan erfingja ok ekki barn. Þat hagnar þeim bæðum illa, ok bíja þau goedin með miklum áhuga, at þau geti sér barn. Þat er nú sagt, at Frigg heyrir bæn þeira ok segir Öðni, hvers þau bíja. Hann verðr eigi þrífraða ok tekr óskmey sína, döttur Hrimnis jötuns, ok fær í hendi henni eitt epli ok biðr hann fiera konungi. Hann tók við eplinu ok brá á sik krákum af þess, er hún kemr þar, sem konunginn er ok sat á haugi. Hann lét falla eplin í kné konunginun. Hann tók þat epli ok þóttist vita, hverju gegna mundi; gengr nú heim af hauginum ok til sinna manna ok kom á fund drottningar, ok eir þat epli sumt. Þat er nú at segja, at drottning finnr þat brátt, at hún mundi vera með barni.

(VS 2-3)

Now Rerir won a lot of booty and a wife whom he found most suitable for himself, and they lived well together for a long time, but they had no heir and no child at all. That grieved them both, and they prayed eagerly that they might have a child. Now it has to be told that Frigg heard their prayer and told Öðinn about it. He did not hesitate and summoned his valkyrie, daughter of Hrímnir the jötun, put an apple into her hand and told to bring it to the king. She took the apple, turned into a raven and flew until she found the king, who was sitting on a mound. She let the apple fall on the king’s knees. He took the apple and thought that he knew what the matter was. He went home from the mound and came to the queen, and ate a part of the apple. Now it is to be told that the queen soon felt that she was going to have a child.

A bird as magical helper is number 553 in the Aarne-Thompson tale type index, and a child born after his parents have eaten a magical fruit (or sometimes a fish) is 705A. An apple, stresses Hilda Ellis Davidson, is an especially important symbol of fertility in Germanic and Celtic mythologies.¹⁰² The typically folktale chain of events is put in Völsunga saga into a mythological framework. Further in the saga, the raven motif is reduplicated in another episode of clearly folktale origin, where a raven brings a healing or resurrecting herb to Sigmundr and Sinfjötli (VS 11). In the latter case, the appearance of the raven is not explained, but it could be suggested, on the analogy with Rerir’s case, that the herb is sent to Sigmundr intentionally, as divine help.

¹⁰² Hilda Ellis Davidson, Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 181.
The place where the raven finds Rerir, a mound, can on the one hand be described as a liminal location, a source of supernatural gifts, including those connected with fertility and with the cult of ancestors.\textsuperscript{103} On the other hand, sitting on a mound can be interpreted as an occupation that signifies a king’s authority.\textsuperscript{104}

On the whole, this episode serves in the saga as a duplication of the divine origin motif (number 1 on this list). It is interesting that, in contrast to his more usual connections to power or death, Óðinn is here associated with life and fertility. This association contrasts dramatically with Óðinn’s catastrophic interference in the last lines of the saga (number 11), where he finally eliminates the Völsungs who descend from him.

3.4. Rerir’s death

Shortly after his son is conceived, Rerir falls ill during an expedition and dies; it is stated that he ‘meant to join Óðinn, and this was considered by many people a good thing in those times’ (‘sækja hein Óðin, ok þótti þat morgum fýsiligt í þann tíma’ VS 3). Although ‘to join Óðinn’ may be read as simply a paraphrase for ‘to die’, the extension about people’s opinion suggests that simply death is not meant here. It is clear, in the context of Sigi and Rerir’s connections with Óðinn, as well as their descendants’, that Rerir’s desire to ‘join’ his grandfather should have a special significance. Furthermore, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the way Rerir dies is similar to Óðinn’s own death according to Ynglinga saga, where Óðinn dies of sickness, and before that has himself marked with a point of a spear to ensure that he goes to Goðheimr in his afterlife to reunite with his friends (‘fagna þar vinum sínum’).\textsuperscript{105} Immediately after that Njörðr, who also dies of sickness, has himself marked for Óðinn before his death (‘lét hann marka sik Óðni, aðr hann dó’, ‘He had himself marked of Óðinn before he died’).\textsuperscript{106} The story of Rerir’s death is clearly based on this tradition.

3.5. Óðinn gives the sword to Sigmundr

Chapter 3 of Völsunga saga contains the famous ‘sword in the tree’ episode, where

\textsuperscript{103} Hilda Ellis Davidson, \textit{Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 130.

\textsuperscript{104} Compare \textit{Þrymskvida}, stanza 6: ‘þýrmr sat á haugi, / þursa dróttinn’, ‘Þrymr was sitting on a mound, / King of the giants’ (Edd. I, 423)


\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ynglingasaga}, 13.
Óðinn, disguised as a one-eyed old man, enters King Völsungr’s hall during the wedding of his daughter Signý and King Siggeir. He plunges a sword into the truck of the large apple-tree, barnstokkr, which stands in the middle of the building, and says that the one who is able to pull out the sword will receive it from him as a gift. No one is able to pull the sword out except for Völsungr’s son Sigmundr, which provokes Siggeir’s jealousy and anger and starts a feud between Siggeir and the Völsungs (VS 4-5).

Although the sword in the tree motif is not paralleled by Völsunga saga’s possible sources, the idea that Sigmundr received a sword from Óðinn is expressed in Hyndluljóð:

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gaf hann Hermóði
hjálm ok brynju
en Sigmundi
sverð at þiggja.
(Edd. 460)
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He [Óðinn] gave to Hermódr a helm and a mailcoat, but to Sigmundr a sword to own.

This gift of a sword can be considered as a model for all of Óðinn’s gifts in Völsunga saga, since it is one of the few examples paralleled by some other text. Sigmundr’s career starts with obtaining this sword, curiously similar to the Arthurian legend of the sword in the stone; this suggests, according to Jan de Vries, an association of the weapon with power and authority. Indeed, Sigmundr becomes a powerful king afterwards (VS 14), but in the end is deprived of the sword and authority, together with his life, by Óðinn in person — similar to the way in which the sword was given to him (VS 20-21; see below).

On the other hand, Hilda Ellis Davidson stresses the role of the barnstokkr (‘child-trunk’) in the preservation of the family and the idea of fertility, and draws a number of parallels to the Völsunga saga episode that also feature a ‘guardian tree’ standing either in or beside a house. Those trees are usually associated with a family’s prosperity and childbirth — and so is, metonymically, the saga’s sword in the tree.

The owner of the sword, according to this logic, should be considered as the paragon of the family’s glory, and continue the lineage with his children. Considering that the scene takes place at a wedding of a Völsung princess and King Siggeir, Sigmundr is

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108 Hilda Ellis Davidson, ‘The Sword at the Wedding’, Folklore 71:1 (1960), 4-5.
definitely the ‘wrong’ person to get the sword.

The ‘luck’ of a family must largely depend on the successful bearing and rearing of sons, and there is a general belief that when the guardian tree is destroyed, the family will die out. In view of all this, it seems reasonable to suppose that at the wedding it should have been Siggeir, the bridegroom, who drew the sword from the tree, and that its possession would symbolise the ‘luck’ that would come to him with his bride, as well as the successful continuation of his own line in his sons, to be born of the marriage. But the sword was refused him, and this may well have seemed a deadly insult. Moreover, we know that it later came about that Signý’s only surviving son was Sinfjótrli, born of an incestuous union with her brother Sigmundr, the owner of the sword, while no son survived to carry on the inheritance to King Siggeir. This gives a new and tragic significance to the scene in the hall and helps to explain the intensity of Siggeir’s anger.109

It can be understood from the saga that Sigmundr is able to pull out the sword because he is chosen by Óðinn to own this weapon. The same sword later will be inherited by Sigurðr and used to slay Fáfnir, encompassing thus the very idea of the family’s glory. On the other hand, the sword becomes the cause of Sigmundr’s mortal enmity with Siggeir and the death of many Völsungs. This is a clear example of how Óðinn’s gifts, as well as his advice, tend to be represented as ambivalent.

The saga’s account of Sigmundr and Sinfjótrli’s strife with Siggeir has also been connected with Odinic imagery, but, since those connections are questionable, they will be considered in the section 4. The next episode where Óðinn clearly takes part in the saga’s events is the death of Sinfjótrli.

3.6. Sinfjótrli’s death

After Sinfjótrli is poisoned by his stepmother Borghildr, Sigmundr leaves for the wilderness, carrying his body. The following chain of events takes place there:

Sigmundr ríss upp ok gekk harmr sinn nær bana ok tók likit í fang sér ok ferr til skógar ok kom loks at einum firði. Þar sá hann mann á einum báti litulm. Sá maðr spyr, ef hann vildi þiggja at honum far yfir fjórðinn. Hann játtar því. Skipit var svá littit, at þat bar þá eigi, ok var likit fyrst flutt, en Sigmundr gekk með firðinum. Ok því næst hvarf Sigmundi skipit ok svá maðrinn.
(VS 18-19)

Sigmundr rose, stricken by grief, took the body and went into the woods. In the end he came to a fjord. He met a man in a small boat there. The man asked if he wanted to be carried to the

other side of the firth, and Sigmundr agreed. The boat was too small to take them both, so the corpse was taken first, and Sigmundr walked along the firth. Then both the man and the boat vanished from Sigmundr’s sight.

It is generally agreed that Óðinn is the man in the boat who takes the dead Sinfjótli with him. Such a Charonic passage across a river or other body of water is a common part of Indo-European imagery of life and death.\(^\text{110}\) In Old Norse tradition, it is particularly associated with Óðinn (e.g., in Harbarðsljóð, where he appears as ‘ferjakarlinn með skipit’, ‘ferryman with his boat’, Edd. I, 388).

The passage quoted above, together with the preceding account of Sinfjótli’s poisoning, corresponds almost precisely to the Eddic Frá dauða Sinfjótla or Sinfjótalok — a short prose fragment that in the Codex Regius connects Helgakviða Hundingsbana II and Reginsmál.

Sigmund carried him a long way and came to a long and narrow fjord, and there was a little boat with a man inside. He offered Sigmundr to carry him to the other side. But when Sigmundr put the corpse into the boat, it was fully laden. The man said Sigmundr had to go around the fjord. Then the man pushed off the boat and disappeared.

As can be seen, the texts are very similar except for minor details (a forest is not mentioned in the Edda, and Volsunga saga does not stress that Sigmundr’s way was long), and this scene was, most certainly, adapted directly from the Poetic Edda. It is even possible that the manuscript used by the author-compiler included a version more similar to what can be seen in Volsunga saga. The resemblance is not only between the texts themselves; they also occupy the same position in larger texts in which they are included: in Volsunga saga this episode, as well as in the Codex Regius, is set after an account of Helgi’s deeds and before the story of Sigurðr’s youth, including his meeting with Hnikarr.

The main significance of Sinfjótli’s death episode for this research is that it is one of the three appearances of Óðinn in the text that has clear parallels outside Volsunga saga, the other two being Fjólnir’s conversation with Sigurðr (number 9) and the death of Hamðir and Sórlí (number 11). It should be noted, however, that Sinfjótli’s death in the Poetic Edda and the Fjólnir episode are probably direct

borrowings from a manuscript similar to the *Codex Reguis* and should be treated as borrowings, in contrast to Hamðir and Sǫrli’s death that is attested to in *Gesta Danorum* and can be seen as a part of a wider tradition (see section 3.11).

### 3.7. Sigmundr’s death

The account of Sigmundr’s fall in battle is, probably, the clearest example of the ‘Ödinic death’ in saga literature:

> Ok er orrosta hafði staðit um hríð, þá kom maðr í bardagann með síðan hött ok heklu blá. Hann hafði eitt auga ok geir í hendi. Þessi maðr kom á möt Sigmundi konungi ok brá upp geirinum fyrir hann. Ok er Sigmundr konungur hjó fast, kom sverðit í geirinn ok brast í sundr í tvá hluti. Síðan sneri mannfällinu, ok váru Sigmundi konungi horfin heill, ok fell mjøk líðit fyrir honum. Konungrinn hliði sér ekki ok eggjar mjøg líðit. Nú er sem mælt, at eigi má við margnum. Í þessari orrostu fell Sigmundr konungr...

*(VS 20)*

Fighting continued for a while, and then a man entered the battle, wearing a black cloak and a hat. He was one-eyed and had a spear with him. He made way towards King Sigmundr and raised his spear. And when King Sigmundr struck violently, his sword hit the spear and broke apart. Then the tide of battle was reversed; fortune turned from King Sigmundr and he suffered heavy losses… In that battle King Sigmundr fell…

Although a single eye and a spear are Óðinn’s traditional attributes, his alias in this is significantly different from the others: he is represented as a warrior-figure in high-status clothes (dyed *blár*) rather than the humble-looking stranger more usual for the saga, like the barefoot wanderer (3.5) or the ferryman (3.6). Óðinn’s figure in *Völsunga saga* is a confluence of the many variants of the theme ‘Óðinn in human disguise’, which is perfectly explained by the narrative logic, since his image is dependent on the narrative situation: on the battlefield he is a warrior, at a wedding a stranger and in the wilderness a *skæggmaðr*. On the other hand, this diversity of motif variants suggests that the author dealt with a wide range of sources and fused them together in his work. Notably, Sigmundr is aware of Óðinn’s presence and says to Hjǫrdis: ‘Vill Óðinn ekki, at vér bregðum sverði, síðan er nú brotnaði’ (VS 21, ‘Óðinn does not want me to strike with the sword, so it is broken’). Ironically, it is the same sword that was given to Sigmundr by Óðinn earlier, and later Óðinn will appear again to assist Sigurðr in his vengeance for Sigmundr.

### 3.8. ‘Skeggmaðr’ helps Sigurðr to choose Grani

According to the saga, Sigurðr’s horse is, along with the sword Gramr given to Sigmundr, another of Óðinn’s gift to the Völsungs. Once again, Óðinn appears as a
wandering stranger; once again, as after Sinfjötlí’s death, he meets the hero in the woods. Similar to the account of Sigmundr’s death, the stranger is directly identified as Óðinn in the end.

Annan dag eptir för Sigurðr til skógar ok mætir einum gömlum manni með síðu skeggi. Sá var honum õkunnigr. Hann spyrr, hvert Sigurðr skyldi fara. Hann svarar:
‘Hest skyldum vér kjósa. Ráð um með oss.’
Hann mælti:
‘Þorfum ok rekum til árinnar, er Busiltjörn heitir.’
(VS 23-24)

The next day Sigurðr went to the forest and met an old man with a long beard there. That man was unknown to him. He asked where Sigurðr was going.
‘I want to choose a horse for myself,’ he said. ‘Give me advice about it’.
‘Let us drive the horses to the river that is called Busiltjörn,’ said the man.
They drove the horses into deep water, and all of them turned back except for one horse. That was the horse Sigurðr took. It was grey, young, large and handsome. It had not been mounted before. Then the man with the beard said:
‘This horse descends from Sleipnir. Care for it well and it will grow to be better than any other horse.’
Then the man disappeared. Sigurðr called the horse Grani, and it was the best of horses. The man he had met was Óðinn.

Here, as well as in Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Óðinn is associated with a border represented by a piece of water. This time, however, the idea of liminality is connected not with death, but with the horse’s ability to cross world-boundaries, shared with its ancestor, the mythical Sleipnir, as Grani will prove to be the only horse able to cross the wall of fire that surrounds Brynhildr.

No other sources directly suggest the connection between Grani and Sleipnir (or any other parts of the Odinic complex). Piøreks saga af Bern tells simply that Sigurðr tamed the horse, which was exceptionally good but wild. An indirect connection was suggested by Michael Hart in his paper at the International Saga Conference in Aarhus, where he argued that the motif of the horse as Óðinn’s gift in Volsunga saga might go back to Óðinn’s ancient shamanic role as a horse-god, and supported this idea by parallels with Gautreks saga, where Hrosshárs-Grani is one of Óðinn’s names.111 It should be stressed, however, that Gautreks saga’s evidence is no less problematic than that of Volsunga saga, since they were both composed in late Medieval Iceland.

The episode (VS 28-29) is modelled on Regínsmál where, in a similar situation, Óðinn boards Sigurðr’s ship and gives him advice before his battle with the sons of Hundingr. The saga quotes stanza 18 of Regínsmál:

Hnikarr hétu mik, 
þá er Hugin gladda, 
Vólsungr ungi 
ok vegit hafða. 
Nú máttu kalla 
karl af bjargi 
Feng eða Fjólni. 
Far vil ek þiggja. 
(VS 29, compare Edd. II, 300-301)

I was called Hnikarr when I gladdened Hugin, o young Vólsungr, and slayed people; now you can call the man on the rock Feng or Fjólni; I would accept passage.

Fjólni gives Sigurðr important advice and disappears, after which Sigurðr is victorious in the battle; compare the similar sequence in Sigi’s career (VS 2) and in Sigurðr’s later fight with Fáfnir (VS 30-31).

Fjólni is one of Óðinn’s well-attested names, found among other sources in Grímnismál, Gylfaginning and the list Óðins nöfn in Skáldskaparmál. More or less the same dialogue is found in Norna-gests þáttr. Boarding the hero’s ship during a storm is a typical topos of the disguised Óðinn; the clearest parallel featuring the sea voyage theme is perhaps Hadingus’ similar encounter with an Odinic stranger during a storm in Book I of Gesta Danorum (GD I, 126).

3.10. Óðinn gives Sigurðr advice before his fight with Fáfnir

Similar to the Grani episode, chapter 18 features a mysterious long-bearded man who advises Sigurðr how to slay Fáfnir and then disappears, his advice ensuring Sigurðr’s victory over the serpent (VS 30). The episode has no parallels in the surviving versions of Sigurðr’s fight with Fáfnir, but the motif of Óðinn’s advice that helps to win the battle is common elsewhere.

112 For the discussion of the corresponding stanzas of Regínsmál and their parallels see Klaus von See et al., Kommentar zu den Liedern den Edda, 7 vols. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1997-2012), v. 320-52.
113 von See 321.
3.11. Hamðir and Sǫrlí’s death

The forty-fourth (and the last) chapter of Völsunga saga tells the story of Hamðir and Sǫrlí’s vengeance on King Þórmunrekr, who had killed their sister Svanhildr; this is based the Eddic poem Hamðismál. According to both Hamðismál and Völsunga saga, Hamðir and Sǫrlí invade Þórmunrekr’s hall and manage to mutilate the King. They fight the hall’s defenders and cause great damage; no weapon harms them. Then, in the saga’s version, Óðinn interferes once again:

Þá kom at einn maðr, hár ok eldiligr, með eitt auga ok mælti:
‘Eigi eru þér visir menn, er þér kunnið eigi þeim mönnum bana at veita.’
Konungrinn svarar:
‘Gei’ oss rão til, ef þu kannt.’
Hann mælti: ‘Þér skuluð berja þá grjóti í hel.’
Svá var ok gert, ok þá flugu ór òllum áttum steinar at þeim, ok varð þeim þat at aldrlagi.
(VS 78)

Then appeared a one-eyed man, grey-haired and elderly, and said: ‘You are no wise people if you do not know how to kill these men.’
The King answered: ‘Give us advice on this, if you can.’
The man said: ‘You should stone them to death.’
That was done, and stones flew at them from everywhere, and that was the end of them.

These are the last lines of the saga. Stanza twenty-five of Hamðismál, containing the advice to stone the brothers, goes as follows:

Þá hraut við
inn reginkunngi
baldr í hrynju,
sem bjorn hryti:
‘Grýtið ér á gumna,
alls geirar né bíta,
eggiar né éam
Jónakra sonu.’
(Edd. II, 412)

Then bawled the god-born warrior in mail-coat, as a bear could roar: ‘Throw stones at them, whom spears do not harm, neither (sword-)edges nor iron, the sons of Jónakr.’

As can be seen, nothing in the poem identifies ‘reginkunngi baldr’ as Óðinn. 115 The narrative rather suggests this to be Þórmunrekr, because the stanza immediately follows Hamðir’s mocking words addressed to him, and presumably the very moment when Þórmunrekr’s limbs were cut off. Ursula Dronke reads the stanza this way, supposing that Þórmunrekr knows the means to kill his enemies because of his divine origin or because he is close to death and this state gives him supernatural

115 See Klaus von See et al., Kommentar zu den Liedern den Edda, 7 vols. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1997-2012), vii, 969.
knowledge. By ascribing the advice to stone Hamðir and Sǫrlí to Óðinn, Völtsunga saga follows a tradition alternative to the Codex Regius, found in Saxo Grammaticus’s account of Jarmerík’s (Iamericus’s) death in Book 8 of Gesta Danorum. There Svanhild’s brothers (Hellespontines) are made invulnerable by spells of ‘a witch called Gúþrun’, who most certainly corresponds to the Guðrún of Icelandic tradition (GD Fisher I, 258). She blinds Jarmerík’s warriors, but then Othinus (one of Saxo’s several Odinic figures) appears, counteracts her magic and advises them to stone the Hellespontines:

Eo tumultu superuenies Othinus mediosque præliantium globos appetens Danis, quos paterne semper pietate coluerat, ademptum præstigii usum supera uirtute restituit. Hellesponticos uero corpora aduersum tela carminibus crebro silice conuerb erandos esse perdocuit. Ita utrumque agmen mutua cęde consumptim interiit. Iamericus utroque pede ac manubus spoliatus trunco inter exanimes corpore rotabatur. (GD I, 554)

In the mêlée Odin appeared, seeking the very thick of the fighting, and by his divine power counteracted the sorcery to restore the Danes’ stolen vision, for he had always fostered them with a fatherly attention. Although the Hellespontines habitually used charms to toughen their bodies against weapons, he taught Danes how to pound them severely with a hail of stones. In this way each band was destroyed in the mutual slaughter. Jarmeríck’s mutilated, lopped of both its feet and hands, rolled among the dead.

Finnur Jónsson supposed that the author-compiler, when composing the finale of Völtsunga saga, used not the variant of Hamðismál known to us from the Codex Regius but a later non-extant variant, where Óðinn’s intervention is included. The existence of such a variant is possible but questionable, since Hamðismál as we know it is built around the personal conflict between the brothers and Jǫrmunrekr: they want revenge on Jǫrmunrekr; Jǫrmunrekr threatens them; they wound and mock him; finally, he orders them killed with stones, but ends up dead himself. It is plausible to assume, therefore, that the interpretation of ‘Grytið ér á gumna...’ as Óðinn’s words rather than Jǫrmunrekr’s is a conscious narrative decision made by the author-compiler of Völtsunga saga, probably inspired by a source that was not the version of Hamðismál he was working with. Even if Finnur Jónsson’s hypothesis is correct, however, the author-compiler clearly wanted to finish the saga with Óðinn’s

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117 GD I, 258. As it is evident from the quote, Jarmerík is shown here as a Danish king, and Gothic like elsewhere, since Saxo identifies different people, including the Goths and Winnili, with the Danes — probably on the grounds of their connection with Mars or Wodan; see GD Fisher II, 140-41.
appearance, as he most likely omitted the finale of *Hamðismál* — Hamðir and Sǫrli’s final dialogue from stanzas 26-30 (Edd. II, 412-413). This way, *Völsunga saga* is effectively finished with Öðinn’s interaction, quite similarly to how its narrative starts and develops.

This continuity of the Ódinic theme, so pronounced in *Völsunga saga*, is clearly not the case with its source. Eddic parallels exist for only two or three of the episodes described in the list above: that of Sinfjǫtli’s death, and the stranger’s advice to Sigurðr (VS 29) which is a clear parallel to *Regínsmál*. The case of *Hamðismál* and the fall of Hamðir and Sǫrli (VS 78) is, as discussed above, problematic.

Although there are no Eddic parallels for the story of Sigmundr’s sword, given and then shattered by Öðinn, there is other evidence than in *Völsunga saga*, that supports the image of Sigmundr as an ‘Öðinn-hero’. Important for this argument is this character’s position in Valhǫll according to *Eiríksmál*; both Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli are present there as einherjar, which could theoretically suggest a traditional connection between those two figures and specifically Ódinic imagery (or, on the other hand, could mean nothing in particular: it is quite possible that the author of *Eiríksmál* just picked two famous names from legendary-heroic tradition to set a proper background for Eiríkr. We do not know if the legend of Sinfjǫtli’s death, preserved in the Poetic Edda, already existed when *Eiríksmál* was created; the fact that it is written in prose suggests that it may be later than the poetry it accompanies). Finally, a late connection between Sigmundr and Öðinn survives in Norwegian folklore that, according to Hans Ross, imagines Sigmundr to be ‘foremost in Oskoreia, riding ahead of everybody’.119 Ásgårdsreia (Nynorsk ‘Oskoreia’), or the Wild Hunt, is in Germanic medieval tradition strongly associated with Öðinn, who is sometimes imagined as its leader,120 and the image of the Wild Hunt itself has been considered in connection to valkyrja figures.121 Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the name Sigmundr is listed in *Skáldskaparmál* as one of Öðinn’s names.122 As it has been shown, Öðinn eight times personally takes part in the saga’s events, and three

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121 Franz Josef Vonbun, *Beiträge zur deutschen Mythologie* (Chur: Druck und verlag von Leohn Hitz, 1862), 15.
122 On Öðinn’s names corresponding to the names of ‘his favourite heroes’, see Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 62. Svipdagr and Hǫtt in *Hrólf’s saga kraka* also bear Öðinn’s names and are involved in a clearly Ódinic storyline, especially Svipdagr, who loses one of his eyes in a battle.
more times affects the storyline in some other way. In all those cases, he is associated with his traditional mythological roles: he either bestows gifts and victory or represents the characters’ deaths. In a few cases, those of Sigmundr and Hamðir and Sǫrli (and arguably Randver), Óðinn appears in person and provokes the protagonist’s death, performing in this way his function as a death-deity. This aspect of Óðinn’s figure is structurally emphasised by the closing position of the Hamðir and Sǫrli episode. 3.11 is an indication of the Vǫlsungs’ connection to Óðinn. All other episodes fall quite distinctively into two categories, reflecting two aspects of Óðinn, who is both a victory-god and a death-god:

- In six cases, Óðinn gives the hero advice or a gift, which is sometimes inseparable (as in the case of Grani). This gift or advice secures their victories and their rise to power.
- In three cases, Óðinn plays the role of a death deity: he either receives the dead heroes (Rerir and Sinfjǫtli) or drives them towards their end (Sigmundr).

The last example, not listed above, is the death of Hamðir and Sǫrli and the finale of the saga. It curiously belongs to both categories, and is at the same time a subversion of both: Óðinn appears and gives advice that decides the outcome of the battle — but this time he advises against the Vǫlsungs, bringing their end. Considering the whole story of Óðinn’s interference in the saga, this is a high-impact finale — too much so, perhaps, to be just an adoption from a now-lost source. In fact, the Odinic theme in Vǫlsunga saga is quite consistent and well-structured, which is not the case with the Codex Regius poems as a whole. This observation supports Finch’s and Aguirre’s argument that the author-compiler uses the poetic material for his own artistic intentions rather than is entirely dependent on it. In other words, Óðinn’s image in Vǫlsunga saga is a thirteenth-century construct based on traditional material rather than just a retelling of this traditional material. Such artistic independence makes Vǫlsunga saga a valuable document that reflects the Medieval Icelandic attitude to the mythical-heroic Vǫlsung corpus; on the other hand, this means that a researcher should have serious reservations when treating the Vǫlsunga saga material as a source for studies in mythology and history of religion. When discussing the Odinic motifs in the saga, this especially applies to the episodes where the mythological connections are presumable rather than self-evident.

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4. **Presumably Odinic Motifs in Völsunga Saga**

4.2. The problem of interpreting motifs

Section 3 above deals with the saga’s explicitly Odinic episodes that often involve the god’s immediate, personal participation in the story. Even when Óðinn is not identified (like, e.g., in Sigmundr’s death episode or after Sigurðr’s choosing Grani), there can be little doubt that it is he who gives Sigmundr the sword, receives Sinfjötli’s body, repeatedly assists Sigurðr, and advises Þormunrekr’s warriors how to slay Hamðir and Sórlí. There are, however, less clear examples that have been often read by scholars in mythological, and especially Odinic, context, and observed as motifs connected to saga representation of ancient initiatory rites (references to those opinions will be given in discussions of specific passages).

The following Völsunga saga episodes can be, and have been, read as implying reference to Óðinn and Óðinn-worship.

- In chapter 8, Sigmundr and Sinfjötli transform into wolves, who are in Old Norse mythology known as Óðinn’s beasts. Given the clear initiatory structure of the episode, parallels may be drawn with Sigmundr and Sinfjötli’s shapeshifting and the úlfhéðnar of Ynglinga saga — probably a warrior cult also associated with Óðinn.

- At the very end of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli’s life in the forest in their wolf-shape (chapter 8), Sinfjötli accidentally gets either mortally wounded or killed by Sigmundr. Later, Sigmundr manages to either cure or resurrect Sinfjötli with a magical leaf brought by a raven. Jens Peter Schjødt mentions the connection between Óðinn and ravens (Initiation 309), and another argument that could support the hypothetical ‘Odinism’ of the raven episode could be a parallel with chapter 1, where Óðinn sends to Rerir a valkyrie in raven form to bring him a magical apple. Hilda Ellis Davidson, too, emphasises the association between birds, especially ravens, and Óðinn, among other things in Völsunga saga, though she does not mention this particular episode.124

- The presence in the narrative of Sigrún and Brynhildr, both identified as valkyrjaur, may signify a specific connection of the events to Óðinn — and

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may not. One should bear in mind that the main reason for those two characters being present in the same text is, as in the case of Völsunga saga, determined by the fact that Helgakviða Hundingsbana I and Helgakviða Hundingsbana II are found in the same manuscript, as are the Sigurðr poems (Sigdrifumál, Guðrúnarkviða I, Sigurðarkviða hin skamma, Helreið Brynhildar). This is, therefore, probably the weakest connection, as it does not seem possible to support it with anything but valkyrjur’ well-known connection to Óðinn.

- Jǫrmunrekr threatens to hang Hámðir and Sǫrlí when they come to his hall, death through hanging being conceived an Odinic. Jǫrmunrekr (in Hamðismál, Gesta Danorum and Völsunga saga) is particularly associated with hanging his enemies, which has been interpreted as a memory of a rite of sacrifice. This notion is partly based, however, on the assumption that the Odinic theme dominating Völsunga saga has also been the feature of the tradition behind it, which allows the assumption that motifs such as death by hanging could be seen as a part of a complex. This work tests this argument rather than relying on it, therefore the association between Jǫrmunrekr and hanging, and its possible Odinic context, will be left aside.

Aside from the possible allusions listed above, other supporting arguments have been put forward, e.g., that Svanhildr is a characteristic name for a valkyrja, which, together with Randver’s hanging, forms a group of Odinic motifs, which suggest that the ill-advisor Bikki should also (as in encounters with Sigmundr and Sigurðr listed above) be disguised Óðinn.125 In fact, views on how extensive Odinic allusions are in Völsunga saga depend to a certain extent on how critical a scholar is towards this conception.

Whether to evoke Odinic associations in those cases was the author’s intention or not is not entirely clear, and the picture becomes even more complicated if we consider the wolf episode, Sigrún and Brynhildr plots and the hanging motif in the light of the text’s sources, which are very diverse. Certainly, wolves, ravens and death by hanging are all associated with Óðinn in the mythological tradition, but the mere occurrence of these themes in Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, Sigdrifumál and Hamðismál does not mean that those poems are focused on the Odinic theme or that

they have been traditionally understood this way.

Animal imagery in chapter 8, connected with Sigmundr and Sinfjóþli’s life in Siggeir’s realm, is of specific importance here for several reasons. Firstly, its Odinic nature is a complicated feature. In the context of either this particular saga or other fornaldaþsogur, its connections to mythological imagery associated with Óðinn are quite strong, especially compared to the mere presence of valkyrie figures or the hanging motif. On the other hand, both the wolf episode and the raven episode have numerous and clear parallels in folklore outside Scandinavia, and quite often outside Europe. Such a wide background outside Scandinavia makes those connections problematic, strong as they are inside the particular text. This twofold nature of the wolf motif and the raven motif in the saga suggests that their interpretation as Odinic is chronologically late, and secondary, dating back to the time of Völsunga saga’s composition rather than to earlier tradition.

Below is a more detailed view of the problematic chapter 8 and, in particular, its shapeshifting imagery will be looked at. It will be shown that, contrary to Schjødt’s assumptions, this episode hardly shows any long-lived connection to mythological Odinic imagery that could precede the composition of the written saga. Most likely, the whole chapter 8 is an insertion composed by the author-compiler and based on folktale material, which was only partly and sometimes awkwardly adapted to the poetics of saga narrative. It is most probable, nevertheless, that the author-compiler understood wolves and ravens as Odinic, and for that reason chose narratives featuring them for this insertion.

4.3. Sigmundr and Sinfjóþli’s transformation into wolves

Sigmundr and Sinfjóþli’s temporary transformation into wolves in chapter 8 has been read as a warrior consecration rite associated with ulfhéðnar or ‘wolf-skins’, which Ynglinga saga mentions in Odinic context (1.1). The characters’ shapeshifting in this episode has been traditionally associated in scholarship with Óðinn’s ability to shapeshift, known from Ynglinga saga and from the Prose Edda.126

The initiatory nature of Sigmundr and Sinfjóþli’s vengeance episode is well

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studied, and the shapeshifting theme’s connection to úlfhéðnar can be easily worked into the argument. Such an understanding of the episode can be supported by a parallel with Bóðvarr’s transforming Hótttr into a warrior in Hrólf’s seaga kraka, a similarity mentioned by Jens Peter Schjødt.

Moreover, Kris Kershaw has connected berserkir and úlfhéðnar, observed in her study as ecstatic Germanic warrior-cults, with Óðinn’s einherjar. Sigmundr and Sinfjóti, at the same time, are figures traditionally connected to the Valhöll imagery even outside Völsunga saga, as far as we can judge from their role in Eiríksmál. The characters in Hrólf’s saga kraka, in a similarly initiatory background, are closely connected with the idea of berserkir — both in the actual storyline as they fight berserkir before and immediately after the episode, and through the supposed association of berserkir with bears (Bóðvar of Hrólf’s saga kraka shapeshifts into a bear, and the corresponding character in Gesta Danorum kills a bear). Although the parallel itself does not exactly prove the connection between wolves and bears in the sagas and legendary úlfhéðnar and berserkir, it establishes a tendency that is often found in the fornaldarsögur.

The story of transformation into animals through putting on the animal’s hide, and especially the allowance to temporarily put off the hide after a specified period of time (often accompanied by the motif of burning the hide), is a widespread folktale motif that has no Odinic implications per se. It is a common fornaldarsaga practice, however, to interweave folktale shapeshifting stories into the same plots as berserkir/úlfhéðnar legends, as can be seen from Bóðvar-Bjarka þáttr in Hrólf’s saga kraka. It is an open question whether the author-compiler of Völsunga saga had in mind the connection between wolves, úlfhéðnar and Óðinn, or not. Considering the accompanying imagery, it is possible. On the other hand, the werewolf folktale plot is a very widespread one and is found in many European traditions, and is not usually connected with Óðinn. This particular association in Völsunga saga is based, therefore, only on our general knowledge of Snorri’s Edda and skaldic poetry where

Óðinn is connected with wolves. The origin of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli’s transformation story does not survive and could be a late interpolation.

Another supposedly Odinic motif occurs when Sinfjötli, when in his wolf-form, is either resurrected or healed by a leaf brought by a raven — the raven, as Schjødt notes, being ‘Óðinn’s bird par excellence’ (Initiation 309). This motif supports his argument about the ‘Odinic’ nature of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli’s initiatory story, even though Schjødt never examines it in more detail. The way the raven motif is used in the saga, however, is from the literary point of view quite peculiar, and could probably shed some light on the structure of the text. The saga tells that Sigmundr and Sinfjötli, when in their wolf-shape, argue at one point and start fighting:

Sigmundr hlyepr at honum svá hart, at hann stakar við ok fellr. Sigmundr bítr í barkann framan. Þann dag máttu þeir eigi komast ór úlfahómnum. Sigmundr leggr hann nú á bak sér ok berr heim í skálann, ok sat hann yfir honum, en bað troll taka úlfhamina. Sigmundr sér einn dag, hvar hreysikettir tveir váru, ok bítr annarr í barkann órðrum, ok rann sá til skógar ok hefir eitt bláð ok færir yfir sárit, ok sprettr upp hreysíðtrína heill. Sigmundr engri út ok sér, hvar hrafn flýgr með bláðit ok færit honum. Hann dregr þetta yfir sárit Sinfjötla, en hann sprettr upp þegar heill, sem hann heði aldri sár verit. Eptir þat fara þar til jarðhúss ok eru þar, til þess er þeir ok brennma í eldi ok báðu engum at meini verða. Ok í þeim örskum unnu þeir morg fræðarverk í ríki Siggeir’s konungs. Ok er Sinfjötli er frumvaxti, þá þykist Sigmundr hafa reynt hann mjök.

(VS 11)

Sigmundr jumped on him so violently that he staggered and fell. Sigmundr bit him in the throat. That day they were unable to take off the wolf-hides. Sigmundr put him on his shoulder and carried him back to the hut, and watched over him, and wished that trolls would take the wolf-hides. One day Sigmundr noticed two weasels, one of which bit the other and then ran into the forest and returned with a leaf, and laid it over the wound. Then the other weasel jumped up, quite healthy. Then Sigmundr went out and saw a raven carrying a leaf, and he took it. He put it on Sinfjötli’s wound and he jumped up quite healthy, as if nothing had happened to him. After that they went to their underground dwelling and stayed there until they could take off the wolf-hides. Then they burned them in the fireplace and said no one would suffer from them again. As wolves, they did a lot of harm in King Siggeir’s reign. By then Sinfjötli had grown up and Sigmundr thought he had tested him thoroughly.

As can be seen, Sinfjötli’s death and immediately following resurrection, both caused by Sigmundr, are the culminating and final points of the characters’ lives as wolves and the initiatory preparation for their main deed, that is, their vengeance on Siggeir, for which Sinfjötli is ready once he is ‘tested thoroughly’. This initiatory nature of the episode, as we find it in the saga, is well-established and demonstrated in scholarship. Much more problematic, and left aside by Schjødt, is this episode’s explicitly folktales structure, of which the raven motif is, as will be shown, the most symptomatic.

The plot about a bird, most often a raven, that brings some magical means of
resurrecting a dead (always violently killed) hero, is present in folktales virtually all around the world. In Slavonic tradition, the protagonist’s death is particularly often followed by appearance of a raven that brings the ‘Water of Life’ or ‘living water’ (Russian ‘жива́я вода’), which has the power to resurrect the hero after he is killed by his adversaries. The death and resurrection are then followed by the final stage of conflict, ending with the hero’s triumph. In the Russian folktale Marya Morevna, the hero is killed and dismembered by his nemesis Koschei, but is brought back to life by his kinsmen, three shape-shifter-wizards, Raven son of Raven, Falcon son of Falcon and Eagle son of Eagle, after which he passes a number of tests and is able to kill Koschei¹³⁰ (this is the clearest parallel to Völsunga saga’s account of events described in chapter 8, where the werewolf episode is followed by rescue from the mound, after which Sigmundr and Sinfjötli finally confront Siggeir). In the Czechoslovak folktale Zlatovláška, the killed hero is brought back to life by magical Water of Life brought by a raven.¹³¹ A number of Burmese folktales also feature either resurrecting water or other magical means brought by a raven to bring the dead hero back to life: in Seven Sons of Old Lopo, a raven and a snake obtain a magical root to resurrect the hero,¹³² and Maung Young Yan sends a few ravens to get the reviving water.¹³³ The figure of the intermediary between the worlds, of course, can be different, though it tends to be a raven in surprisingly multiple cases, as listed above. Even when not a raven, it tends to be a bird: in the North Caucasus folktale Timar, the hero is resurrected by a magical bird’s feather,¹³⁴ and in the Burmese Why We Have Moon and Sun Eclipses a resurrecting root is brought by a nat (a spirit) in the form of a falcon.¹³⁵ The raven, however, is the most widespread type of the resurrecting figure, which is probably not surprising, considering this bird’s common association with wisdom, death and

¹³⁵ ‘Pochemu byvayut sonnechnyye I lunnye zatmenya (Why we have Moon and Sun Eclipses)’, in Skazky Narodov Birmy (Burmese Fairy-Tales), ed. V.B. Kasevich, Yu. M. Osipov (Moscow: Glav-Red-Vost-Lit, 1976), 151.
transgression, and its meaning for shamanic societies.\(^{136}\)

In this type of folktale storyline, the hero is usually resurrected with some kind of magical item or substance, usually magical water or, as in \textit{Völsunga saga}, some type of herb. It is impossible to establish exactly when the raven motif was incorporated into the saga, since no sources to the Sigmundr and Sinfjötli story survive. It is quite probable as well that one folktale interpolation, that of shapeshifting into wolves, resulted in further inclusion in the saga of other folktale motifs, since the entire episode starts to work as a fairy-tale with its own generic features, different from the traditional saga narrative.

The author-compiler, who had already made use of the shapeshifting folktale motif, and perhaps intended connection with Óðinn, could also bear in mind the god’s association with ravens when he was composing the entire text of the saga. This connection, then, is likely to be a late Icelandic association that never belonged to the legend of the Völsungs in the first place.

It can be added that the \textit{topos} of a raven saving the protagonist by bringing something vital to him, present in chapters 1 and 8 of \textit{Völsunga saga}, seems to be very old, appearing most famously in the Book of Kings where the ravens feed Elijah, and has been transmitted in the legend of St. Benedict and hagiographical literature. In the Book of Kings, the fact that Elijah is fed by a raven is interpreted as God’s miracle, since ravens are usually greedy (ravenous) birds.\(^{137}\) It is questionable in what relation Elijah’s raven plot, the very similar St. Benedict plot and the folktale motif stand to each other, but their transgressive meaning is evident in all three cases.

Sinfjötli’s resurrection fits perfectly into the initiatory scheme described above, as long as it is considered as a folktale plot only. When looked upon as a part of a saga narrative, however, it inevitably raises a number of interconnected questions, the most important of them the following:

- In the light of the folktale origin of the whole wolf skin episode and its parts, e.g., the resurrection by a herb, how valid are Schjødt’s taken-for-granted connections between the wolf-hides and the raven on the one side, and the Odinic imagery on the other?
- If we accept that there indeed is such a connection, are then the Odinic


implications behind the ‘testing of Sinfjötlí’ story a part of some tradition behind Völuspá, or was the parallel between the story’s werewolves and the raven and Odinic beasts made by the author-compiler?

From the pre-Wieselgren point of view on Völuspá as an awkward prose compilation of diverse sources, the answer to the first question would most certainly be ‘not valid at all’, and this argument would not go any further. There has, however, been a general agreement in the last decades that the author-compiler’s contribution to the saga structure is both systematic and significant. In the light of the saga’s recurrent motif of Óðinn’s patronage, and particularly the sword given by him to Sigmundr, it is very probable that the saga audience perceived those motifs as a part of the Odinic complex — especially the raven and herb motif, which would then recall the episode in chapter 1 of the saga, where a valkyrie transforms into a raven and, on Óðinn’s command, brings Rerir a magical apple.

If we, however, think of the transformation story covered in chapter 8 as an independent narrative, without the evidence of the rest of Völuspá, the connection of wolf-hides and the raven to Óðinn will seem highly improbable. As we have seen, the corresponding folktale plots are present in very different traditions. The Odinic associations in the ‘testing of Sinfjötlí’ episode are thus activated only in the context of Völuspá as we know it.

This brings us to the second question. The story of a cursed animal skin or hide that transforms the owner into the said animal (especially if the skin can be taken off regularly and eventually burned) is, as we have observed, extremely widespread in different cultures. So is the resurrection plot. The episode in Völuspá bears unmistakable signs of the narrative’s conscious adoption of saga-style, not always perfect and logical. For example, the original owners of the wolf-hides, a king’s sons, appear in the story without any explanation and immediately disappear from it once the wolf-hides are introduced into the plot. Sinfjötlí’s death and resurrection is not commented upon in any way, and the narrative is constructed in such a way that it is not evident that Sinfjötlí’s wound is mortal. Indeed, an actual death of the character followed by a resurrection, being a natural narrative element of a folktale, would ruin saga narrative, to which the topos of death and resurrection is extraneous. Sinfjötlí’s death, therefore, can be interpreted as a mortal wound from which the leaf miraculously heals him. This reduces the dramatic impact, characteristic of similar episodes in folktales. Another feature that decreases the significance of the episode is
the fact that the ‘dying and resurrecting’ theme is duplicated later in the chapter, much more effectively and at greater length, when Sigmundr and Sinfjötli are bound and put into a mound by Siggeir, and then escape. Being buried alive and breaking away from the burial mound is a clear parallel for dying and rising from the dead, which happens, as usual in a folk-story, immediately before the final confrontation that the hero or the heroes are to win. According to the same narrative logic, it is Siggeir who ‘kills’ them this way, while, when they are in wolf-shape, it is Sigmundr who wounds or kills Sinfjötli.

If the saga’s events, from Sigmundr and Sinfjötli’s transformation into wolves to their rescue from the mound, are observed as a logical sequence, the two ‘deaths’ make perfect sense. First, Sigmundr acts as an initiator towards Sinfjötli; he tests and consecrates him by ‘killing’ and then ‘resurrecting’ for a new life. Next, they both undergo a more serious test, to which the saga gives much more emphasis — that is, their escape from the mound where Siggeir buries them alive. With Sinfjötli’s ‘resurrection’ ends the heroes’ life in the forest in their wolf-forms; with their rescue from the mound ends a larger timespan that includes Sigmundr’s seclusion in the wilderness. As it was put by Schjødt, who analysed the events of chapter 8 exactly from this consciously unhistorical, diachronic point of view, Sigmundr can be seen as both an initiator to Sinfjötli and an initiate himself (Initiation 283). The initiation of Sinfjötli is his ‘testing’ in the wolf-form, while Sigmundr’s initiation takes place before and after it (his killing of the she-wolf, rescue from the pit, and finally breaking away from the mound together with Sinfjötli).

Indeed, the structure of the plot clearly demonstrates all the most important elements of the initiatory complex (testing, transformation, killing of adversaries in the liminal phase, ‘death’ and subsequent ‘rebirth’). It is hard, however, despite Schjødt’s implications, to say how ‘Odinic’ this initiation structure is of itself, without the association between wolves and úlfhéðnar and the raven and Óðinn’s ravens. This association, however, as has been shown, is specific for the saga, and in the case of the wolves-úlfhéðnar connection relies on evidence from other, even later fornaldarsögur. Óðinn is, of course, the god of death in one of his aspects and was himself resurrected, which could suggest a connection between the folktale motif and the mythological concept in the Norse material, but it is hardly possible to prove it.

Schjødt is aware of the dangers of his decidedly unhistorical approach, and stresses that, in the framework of structural analysis, his methodology is fairly valid
as long as it is not just specific texts that are analysed, but rather a corpus, a tradition, a narrative. ‘It could be an objection that treating various sources in this [uniform — E.M.] way indicates a lack of respect for the generic differences they clearly manifest, and that is true, but generic distinctions are only of secondary interest to the analysis of structures. If a series of pieces of information, taken from different sources about the same hero or the same subject and with a common basic narrative structure, together clearly point towards a connection with initiation complex, it is not expedient to reject this connection just because every piece of information is not found in the same source or within the same genre’ (Initiation 283-84). On the whole, Schjødt’s methodology indeed allows him to perform a substantial analysis that, on the other side, leaves many details uncovered or even misinterpreted, exactly because they depend on the disregarded historical-generic features of the text. It has been convincingly demonstrated by Schjødt and his predecessors that the story of Sigmundr and Sinfjotli’s isolation in the forest, as given in Volsunga saga, is initiatory, but this argument is attended by a number on uncertainties. It is clear that the initiatory nature of this particular episode, out of the saga’s context, is defined by its folk-tale origins. How closely then is this plot related to the traditional Volsung legend? Is the initiation structure in this episode connected, as Schjødt supposes, to specifically Odinic imagery?

As can be seen from folktales parallels listed above, the answer to the second question is ‘no’. Transformation into a wolf and resurrection by a raven are common folktale motifs found elsewhere in the Indo-European world without any comprehensible connection to anything that we know about Óðinn. However, inside Volsunga saga as a separate work of art created by an individual author, it is possible to trace this connection: it is supported by the recurrent Odinic theme, as well as by a particular parallel between two episodes in chapters 1 and 8, in which a raven brings a magical item from the Otherworld to assist the Völsungs. In the first case, it is told explicitly that the raven was a valkyrie sent by Óðinn; in the second case, it is logical to assume, in this particular text, a similar reading. It is quite possible that the author-compiler had this parallel in mind when he was composing the saga, and therefore the ‘Odinism’ of Sigmundr and Sinfjotli’s adventures is, in fact, artificial, literary, going back to the time when Volsunga saga as we know it was created and hardly earlier.
5. CONCLUSION: VÖLSUNGA SAGA’S ODINIC IMAGERY IN THE LIGHT OF ITS SOURCES

The traditional understanding of the Vôlsungs as Odinic should therefore be reconsidered. An Odinic background for virtually everything that happens to the Vôlsungs is evidently the case in Vôlsunga saga but, as we can see in the example of chapter 8, the author-compiler tends to introduce connections with Odinic imagery to material that originally might have never had them. The same tendency may be, with some reservations, traced throughout the rest of the saga, where we can compare the saga’s account to its Eddic sources. It has been considered how the characters’ Odinic encounters that those episodes form a logical and explicitly rhetorical structure, which could hardly be inherited from Vôlsunga saga’s sources. While the mere fact of Sigmundr and Sinfnjōtli’s traditional understanding as ‘Óðinn-heroes’ is supported by texts like Eiríksmál,¹³⁸ the late Medieval contribution to the development of this theme should not be underestimated.

Similar reservations have already been put forward by Otto Höfler, but his criticism of too straightforward an understanding of the Odinic theme in Vôlsunga saga was based mostly on observations of the ‘literary’ style in the episode of the ‘testing of Sinfnjōtli’.¹³⁹ This chapter’s analysis of the saga’s recurrent motifs, as well as consideration of some scenes in the light of their parallels in European folklore, demonstrates that what Höfler calls ‘literary’ constitutes not only the style of the saga, but the whole narrative and the structure of the saga on the macro-level.

Transmission of motifs is an uncertain area, since evidence that is now found only in Vôlsunga saga could originally be based on traditions that have not survived. What should be pointed out, however, is that we have no early parallels for the listed episodes. If we really accept our understanding of the author-compiler’s attitude to his sources, as shown in the example of wolf and raven episodes, the following imagery should be seen as, to a large extent, specific to the fornaldarsaga age.

To sum up, Vôlsunga saga shows some traits of conscious reworking of mythological, legendary and folklore material that forms its basis, performed in such a way that the theme of relationship between Óðinn and his chosen heroes should be emphasised and driven to the foreground of the narrative. Wherever the Odinic theme

¹³⁸ See Otto Höfler, Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen (Frankfurt am Main, 1934), 212.
¹³⁹ Höfler 201.
was clearly present in the sources, as in the case of *Reginsmál* and the saga account about Sigurðr’s vengeance for his father, the motif would be developed and duplicated. Where there are motifs that did not originally belong to the Odinic framework, as is most probably the case with the wolf-hides story in chapter 8 and Sinfjótrli’s healing-resurrection by a raven’s herb in the same chapter, those motifs are likely to be worked into this framework. The means of performing it are tellingly literary, belonging to the written era, such as parallelism between episodes belonging to different narratives, or the cyclic composition of starting the saga with an account of the Völsungs’ descent from Óðinn, and finishing it with their end, for which he is personally responsible.

Eddic parallels to the Odinic theme in *Völsunga saga* are substantial enough but should not be overestimated. It has been demonstrated that the theme in the saga is too concise, logical and well-developed to be a product of mere preservation of the sources. Either the older theme was systematically emphasised by the author-compiler, or derived from a younger tradition reflected also in *Gesta Danorum*. In either case, the result is a very specific reading of the older sources, which established a typical fornaldarsaga type of hero. It will be seen from the following chapters that the Odinic hero complex, while clearly having roots in mythology, is a late Icelandic phenomenon and exists within the genre of ‘mythical-heroic saga’. This is an important argument both for understanding the Icelandic fornaldarsogur, which aside from allusions to considerably older sources also have important interconnections, and our view of mythology, into which fornaldarsaga views are often, at the scholars’ own risk, ‘read’.
CHAPTER 3

HRÓLFS SAGA KRAKA

1. USE OF THE ODINIC HERO THEME IN HRÓLFS SAGA KRAKA

The connection between Hrólfr kraki and Óðinn is not so well-attested beyond the saga text as it is the case with the major characters of Völsunga saga (2.3). However, this connection is quite clear-cut in a þátr in Flateyjarbók titled Óðinn kom til Ólafs konungs með dul ok prettum (‘Óðinn came to king Ólafr with deception and trickery’). In this short text, the disguised Óðinn visits Ólafur inn helgi, and they speak of the old times their most famous kings. At some point, Óðinn asks Ólafr who of the ancient kings he would like to have been. Ólafr states that, although he would not want to be anyone else but himself, he would prefer to have Hrólfr kraki’s conduct and leadership, but still keep his Christian faith. Óðinn, still disguised as Gestr, suddenly becomes frustrated and asks why Ólafr would like to be like Hrólfr kraki and not some other king, handsome and strong without equal, capable of assigning victory to himself and to the others, and gifted in poetry. Apparently recognising Óðinn’s most famous powers in this description, the king attempts to strike Gestr with his prayer book, saying: ‘Þú vilda ek sízt vera, hinn illi Óðinn’ (‘You, evil Óðinn, is the least I want to be’).140

The relationship between Ólafr and Óðinn in this episode is that of direct antagonism, and Hrólfr kraki is seen as Ólafr’s closest alternative in the pagan world. Hrólfr’s best qualities, his conduct (afterð) and leadership or lordship (høfðingskapr), are presented in a direct opposition to Óðinn’s gifts, and therefore the reason for Óðinn’s frustration and his eventual moral defeat by a Christian king. Despite not being Christian like Ólafr, Hrólfr kraki is depicted, essentially, as anti-Odinic.

It is remarkable to observe how the same theme underlies the main conflict of Hrólfss saga krika, a text first found in a manuscript three hundred years younger than Flateyjarbók (2.2). In Hrólfss saga krika, Hrólf literally rejects Óðinn’s gifts, and makes Óðinn an enemy who eventually destroys him (3.4.4, 3.4.5). Nothing of the

kind happens in Völsunga saga where, even when Óðinn is clearly responsible for a hero’s defeat, the reaction is that of accepting fatalism (2.3.7). This contrast makes it even more remarkable to observe that Hrólfs saga kraka, as well as Völsunga saga, demonstrates a very complete version of the Odinic hero complex applied to Hrólf and his twelve followers. Óðinn’s help, his gift of a weapon, and finally Hrólf’s defeat orchestrated by Óðinn form the basic Odinic hero plot; all of the secondary motifs listed in 1.2 are also present in the saga. So, Hrólfs saga kraka is based on the same narrative structure as Völsunga saga, the Odinic hero complex, but the attitude to Óðinn is much more sophisticated and dramatic in Hrólfs saga kraka. While the author-compiler of Völsunga saga refrains from giving Óðinn’s actions either positive or negative connotation, Hrólfs saga kraka embraces Óðinn’s sinister ambiguity as well as the tragic position of a hero who becomes a victim of his betrayal. The conflict is complicated even further by the introduction of the Christian theme, notably absent in Völsunga saga, and in Hrólfs saga kraka reinforced by the Flateyjarbók parallel.

However, in spite of the ideological differences between the two sagas, they share in common more than just a narrative structure and a number of motifs described here as the Odinic hero complex. The most important and relevant features of the Hrólfs saga kraka that have been considered in the previous chapter, Völsunga saga, are as follows:

1) Both Völsunga saga and Hrólfs saga kraka belong to the type of fornaldarstögur labeled by Stephen Mitchell as ‘mythical-heroic sagas’. They draw upon, and are dependent on, a strong tradition connected to particular characters of mythical-heroic lore (e.g. Sigurðr, Jórmunrekr, Hrólf kraki etc). Variations of many narratives known from the sagas are found in indisputably earlier texts.

2) The sources for the saga are very diverse, ranging from Eddic poetry (as long as Bjarkamál can be labelled as ‘Eddic’) to folklore material.

3) The theme of relationship between Óðinn and a mortal hero is a central one in the sagas, and their plots tend to be driven by episodes either attended with Odinic imagery or featuring Óðinn as an actual character. This is different from the mere presence of the Odinic hero complex in a text: chapter 7, for example, deals with two narratives that formally contain the Odinic hero complex, but they inherit it from other sources and are not themselves making
a statement about Óðinn and Óðinn worship. By contrast, *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Völsunga saga* not just contain the same formal features listed in 1.2, but are evidently depicting the disastrous effect that Óðinn’s will has on a human life.

So, fundamental similarities between the two sagas — those concerning the genre, the sources and the theme — highlight the drastic difference between their treatment of both the main themes and the source material. This opposition, which will be considered in more detail in the following chapter, can be explained chronologically. Although *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans* is, as is often the case, a saga with problematic dating, the critics seem to agree that it should be much later than *Völsunga saga*, and further analysis is aiming to show how this text demonstrates a later and more complex approach to saga writing than *Völsunga saga* or *Hervarar saga*. This attitude will be demonstrated in the example of the Ódinic hero theme, which is a key theme in both narratives. As has been shown in the previous chapter, *Völsunga saga* provides a development of the Óðinn-hero legend in more or less in the form we know it from *Ynglinga saga* or from Saxo, a part of the relatively early, twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic written literary tradition that ‘bear[s] indisputable witness to a profound and genuine interest in the past, not least the pagan past’. In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, this interest takes a different form, aiming to reinterpret the myth of the Óðinn-hero from the Christian point of view, and introducing a conflict between the heathen world and the hero. For the Völsungs Óðinn is, according to the saga, an ancestor and an accepted divine ruler of their destinies, but for Hrólfur kraki he is a negative force that has to be opposed.

### 2. HROLFS SAGA KRAKA’S ORIGIN

The oldest surviving manuscripts of *Hrólfs saga kraka* are all from the seventeenth century, and, according to Desmond Slay’s work, some of them go back to a now lost original, probably from the sixteenth century. Although there are no earlier

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surviving manuscripts, a *Hrólfs saga kraka* is listed among the books kept in the Icelandic monastery of Móðruvellir in 1461. The exact dating of the text is therefore, due to the lack of genuine medieval material, subject to debate. For this work, however, approximate dating is as still confidently places the saga in the epoch after the classical thirteenth-century ‘saga age’, in the flowering of the relatively young genre of *fornaldarsögur* that are based on ancient heroic material but where ‘the elements of fiction and fantasy grow, till they predominate’.¹⁴⁴

The sources of the saga are chronologically diverse and naturally contradict each other in their image of legendary Denmark ruled by the Skjoldung dynasty. Leaving aside a supposed connection of the saga to *Beowulf*, where several kings of the Skjoldung dynasty are mentioned briefly, one of the oldest surviving manifestations of the ‘legend of Lejre’¹⁴⁵ is probably in *Grettasongr* (Eddukvædi II, 431-436), which presents an account of Hrólf’s incestuous conception and his antagonism with King Fróði.¹⁴⁶ The defence of Hleiðargarðr, featured in chapter 49 of the saga, is the theme of *Bjarkamál*.¹⁴⁷ Both poems are difficult to date, though, according to chapter 208 of *Óláfs saga Helga*,¹⁴⁸ *Bjarkamál* was considered ‘old’ (*Bjarkamál hin forn*)¹⁴⁹ already in 1030,¹⁵⁰ when it was recited before the Battle of Stiklarstaðir (Stiklestad) by the skald Þórmóðr Kolbrúnarskáld to King Óláfr the Saint before the battle was lost and the king killed, quite similar to the situation in *Bjarkamál*. Of all these sources, *Bjarkamál* is probably the oldest, even though the exact dating of it is subject to discussion.¹⁵¹ The actual text of the poem survives only

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¹⁴² The term was coined by Tom Shippey in his article *‘Hrólf’s saga kraka and the Legend of Leire’*, in *Making History: Essays on the fornaldarsögur Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, ed. Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010), 17-32.
¹⁴⁶ Since the poem is referred to as *Bjarkamál in forn* in chapter 208 of Óláfs saga Helga (see above).
¹⁴⁸ Axel Oliúk dates *Bjarkamál* ‘900 or shortly after’, see HLD 213. As mentioned above, Óláfs saga Helga suggests this poem was known as *Bjarkamál hin forn* as early as in 1030.
in scattered fragments found in the *Prose Edda* and in *Heimskringla*, six stanzas altogether. A full Latin retelling, however, is given in the second book of Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum* (GD 170-187), and chapter thirty-three of *Hrólfs saga kraka* also seems to contain a prose retelling of certain of *Bjarkamál*’s stanzas, as there are clear parallels with passages in Saxo and surviving Icelandic text, and these passages are syllogistically different from the remaining narrative.

The most extensive versions of the Lejre legend are given in the early thirteenth century, by Saxo Grammaticus in Book Two of *Gesta Danorum* (GD 136-189) and by Snorri Sturluson in *Ynglinga Saga*. *Skáldsáskarmál* also contains some King Hrólfr lore: the story about him being surnamed ‘kraki’, the Uppsala raid, a few skaldic stanzas and a fragment from *Bjarkamál*. There is little evidence of these works’ sources, though there are mentions of the Hrólfr story in such twelfth-century texts as *The Lejre Chronicle* and Sven Aggesen’s *Short History of the Kings of Denmark*. *Skjöldunga saga* gives a consistent version of the story but survives only in Arngrímr Jónsson’s Latin epitome written around 1570; the original text could be one of the sources of *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Finally,

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154 The origin of the *Bjarkamál* stanzas from Snorri’s Edda is questionable. For Olrik’s argument that they were not a part of the original *Bjarkamál* but rather were composed in Iceland see HLD192-196.

156 Skáldsáskarmál 58.
157 Skáldsáskarmál 58-59.
158 Skáldsáskarmál 60-61.
83

Bjarkarímur,\textsuperscript{163} composed about the beginning of the fifteenth century, centres on one of the main heroes of the Hrólf cycle, Þóðvarr Bjarki.\textsuperscript{164} In a sense, however, Hrólf saga still belongs as much to Scandinavian legendary history as to the fourteenth-century ‘present’: its subject matter, as the very term fornaldrarsaga suggests, is the Scandinavian heroic past and the lives of the saga audience’s distant ancestors.

3. **Genre and Subject Matter**

The material of Völsunga saga was, to a great extent, determined by the material in the collection of poems in a manuscript that the author-compiler followed quite straightforwardly. Despite the many important reinterpretations considered in the previous chapter, in all, the saga follows the collection from the beginning to the end. This is not a typical situation for a saga’s sources, and, since this dissertation considers the later Hrólf saga in the light of the earlier Völsunga saga, it should be remembered that the author of Hrólf saga kraka, or a number of its authors and editors, never had to adjust the narrative structurally to just one written source. This means more freedom in constructing the storylines and expressing any ideas that had to be expressed; the role of an author is larger in Hrólf saga kraka simply because an author would have more material and diverse traditions to choose from. Sagas, poems and folktales, and possibly rímur, have to be reworked into a new type of written narrative, the saga narrative, which had been fully developed by the fourteenth century, and not only had the tradition of the classical Íslendingasögur behind it, but also a tradition of dealing with mythical, heroic and legendary material. One could claim that, in terms of composition, Hrólf saga kraka is more mature than Völsunga saga.

In terms of subject matter, Hrólf saga kraka meets the definition proposed by Stephen Mitchell when he claimed fornaldrarsögur to be ‘Old Icelandic prose

\textsuperscript{163} ‘Bjarkarímur’, in Hrólf saga Kraka og Bjarkarímur, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 32 (Copenhagen: Møller, 1904), 109-163. Further quotations from Bjarkarímur refer to this edition with the page number in brackets.

\textsuperscript{164} It is not clear whether Bjarkarímur may be regarded as a source for Hrólf saga kraka because of both texts’ problematic dating. Oscar Ludwig Olson provides arguments for the saga’s influence on Bjarkarímur, which in this case is a later text: Olson, Oscar Ludwig, The Relation of Hrólf saga kraka and Bjarkarímur to Beowulf: A Contribution the the History of Saga Development in England and in the Scandinavian Countries (Marston Gate: Hard Press, 2012), 33-41. On the other hand, Björn K. Þórólfsson lists it along ‘the oldest rímur’. Finnur Jónsson dates Bjarkarímur approximately 1400 but even if this date is agreed upon, the question of its relation to Hrólf saga kraka remains open. See Stephen Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 168.
narratives based on traditional heroic themes, whose numerous fabulous episodes and motifs create an atmosphere of unreality’. Having no claim to comprehensively describe the literary phenomenon, this neat generalization describes what has historically been implied by terms like fornaldrasaga, legendary saga, mythical-heroic saga, viking romance, saga of the old times — and other similar umbrella terms that are convenient to use but make little contribution to understanding the essential features of this kind of saga literature. An early definition of fornaldrasögur by their subject matter, time and place of action was proposed at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Carl Christian Rafn and his predecessors and has survived since then, despite criticism. When speaking of the fornaldrasögur, most scholars seem silently to agree on what this term implies, meaning that they belong ‘to a period of history before the settlement of Iceland and before the conversion to Christianity’ and the abundance of fantastical elements.

_HrólfSaga kraka_ shares, therefore, its ambiguous position in Old Norse-Icelandic literature with the other fornaldrasögur created more or less at the same time. Despite being a relatively late text composed in Christian Iceland, it deals with an extremely old legendary tradition that goes back to the early Middle Ages associated with paganism. The Icelandic audience of _HrólfSaga kraka_ was divided from the Old Danish kings of Lejre by, one could argue, a Bakhtinian ‘absolute epic distance’ that makes specific historicity impossible; it is set in an ‘absolute past’ and creates not a concrete image but an ultimate picture of the audience’s heroic ancestors. However, the threshold that makes the aforementioned distance ‘absolute’ is not only created by the extremely large chronological gap, the transition from time’s quantity into quality. King Hrólf  lived, or was supposed to have lived, in the heathen era. The saga, on the contrary, was written in Christian times, when the position of old lore and its venerated heroes becomes contradictory and has to be reconsidered and reshaped, creating positive images to counterbalance the unacceptable features of the old paganism. The ‘absolute past’ of _HrólfSaga kraka_,

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165 Stephen Mitchell, _Heroic Sagas and Ballads_ (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 27
166 The history of genre nomenclature in Old Norse literature with focus on the fornaldrasögur is reviewed by Stephen Mitchell: Mitchell 8–43.
167 Mitchell 20.
168 Margaret Clunies Ross, _The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 76.
as well as all the *fornaldarsögur*, is, therefore, primarily a heathen legendary past. This inevitably raises the question of a good Christian’s suitable approach to heroes living in pagan times. Because of its very subject matter and time of creation, *Hrólfss saga kraka* cannot elude the conflict between the positive image of legendary kings and heroes and the fact that they all lived in a time when ‘the holy faith... had not been proclaimed... in the northern lands’ (‘*var ekki boðuð sú heilaga trú hér á nörnrlöndum*’, HSK 96). This leads directly to the image of the noble heathen in saga literature, and to the closely connected concept of *trú a matt sinn ok megin* (see e.g. HSK 96) and the concept of natural religion.  

When Lars Lönnroth introduced the term ‘noble heathen’ into wide scholarly use, he was relying on his analysis of the *Íslandasögur*. Naturally, in a *fornaldarsaga* this character type will be introduced by completely different literary means, even if the idea of an almost Christian morality in pagan times stays essentially the same across the genres. So, King Hrólf and his champions are described as being in conflict first with characters who are characterised as heathen or are so because of their essence: the berserkir, Aðils who is ‘hinn mesti blótmaðr’ (HSK 34-35), the álfir (HSK 30-32) and norns (HSK 95), and finally the god Óðinn himself (HSK 92-93, 105). On the other hand, the characters are definitely not Christian as well, even if their morals may be attractive from the Christian audience’s point of view. It is told in the saga that Hrólf and his champions are indifferent to pagan worship and rely only on their own valour:  

*En ekki er þess getit, at Hrólf konungr ok kappar hans hafi nokkurn tíma blótat goð, heldr trúðu þeir á mátt sinn ok megin...* (HSK, 96)  

But it is not told that king Hrólf and his champions had ever sacrificed to the gods, they rather had faith in their own might and main.

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172 Similar statements are made about a number of other saga characters who deny heathen sacrifice, such as Óðvar-Oddr (‘*Aldri vildi Oddr blóta; trúði hann á mátt sinn ok megin*’ (QOS 6), or king Hákon the Good: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: University College London, 2011), 101.  
173 The English phrase ‘trust (or believe) in one’s own might and main’ is a traditional way to translate the ‘*trúa á mátt sinn ok megin*’ formula in the sagas, for example, in Jesse Byock’s translation of *Hrólfss saga kraka*, Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards’s translation of *Óðvar-Ödds saga*, Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes’s recent translation of *Heimskringla* (see bibliography).
By the time of the saga’s culmination the characters’ indifference towards pagan deities gives place to open conflict. It will be shown how the theme of king Hrólfr and his champions’ confrontation with the hostile pagan world becomes more and more prominent in the saga, starting with the very first þættir and reaching its climax by the end of Uppsalaför and finally resolved in Skuldarbardagi, the final þáttr of the saga.

4. **THE SAGA’S STRUCTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ODINIC THEME**

4.1. **General overview**

There are six þættir in the saga: Fróða þáttr, Hróars þáttr ok Helga, Svipdags þáttr, Bǫðvarr-Bjarka þáttr, Uppsalaför and Skuldarbardagi. Some of the þættir, like Uppsalaför, are more or less integral in structure, though some of them include episodes that are quite diverse, especially Hróars þáttr ok Helga and Bǫðvarr-Bjarka þáttr. Every þáttr, however, tends to center around a protagonist: brothers Hróar and Helgi, Helgi, Svipdagr, Bǫðvarr Bjarki and Hjalti. The last chapters, those about the raid to Uppsala and the defence of Hleiðargarðr, have no single protagonist, and see Hrólfr and the band of his twelve followers as a unity.

It is noteworthy that Hrólfr himself, the saga’s eponymous character, is hardly ever the narrative’s focus: even in Uppsalaför, where Hrólfr is the leader of the expedition, the narrative tends to focus more on Bǫðvarr than on the king. As Tom Shippey put it, ‘the biggest lacuna of the saga... is simply Hrólfr’. It is only from Svipdags þáttr that the reader first learns about Hrólfr’s outstanding features (generosity, valour, mildness of character). This information, quite untypically, comes not directly from the narrative voice but from Svipdagr’s father, Svipr, who advises his sons to go to Hleiðargarðr (HSK 42-43).

Although there are six titled þættir in Hrólfs saga kraka, the structure of the saga becomes clearer if it is divided into four larger parts.

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1) *Fróða þáttr* and *Hróars þáttr ok Helga* tell about the lives Hrólfur’s father and uncle. Conflicts with Aðils and Skuld, the main antagonists in the finale of the saga, go back to these two þættir; both those characters are introduced as heathens and sorcerers associated with seiðr, and connoted very negatively.

2) *Svipdags þáttr* and *Bôðvars þáttr* tell about Hrólfur’s champions Svipdagr (and his brothers Beigaðr and Hvitserkr), Bôðvarr and Hjalti, and their adventures before they swear loyalty to Hrólfur. A number of initiatory episodes is connected with these characters, and the berserk-fighting theme is especially prominent in these two þættir.

3) *Uppsalafôr* tells about Hrólfur and his followers’ raid to king Aðils’ court in Uppsala. Óðinn appears as a character in connection with this expedition and changes his attitude to Hrólfur from benevolent to malevolent, which leads, according to the narrative’s logic, to the final catastrophe.

4) In *Skuldarbardagi*, Hrólfur’s hall is attacked by the forces of his half-sister Skuld, and this leads to the main characters’ defeat.

### 4.2. *Fróða þáttr* and *Helga þáttr*

As can be seen, chapters from one to five are united under the title *Fróða þáttr* which tells how Hrólfur’s future father, Helgi, and his brother Hroar, avenge their father Halfdan and acquire kingship. The events of this þáttr correspond roughly to *Skjoldunga saga’s* account. None of the characters of this þáttr feature in the saga’s dénouement, but Helgi plays a very prominent part later in the story. Compared to other episodes where poetic stanzas are rare, this first þáttr is rich in poetry.

*Fróða þáttr* is followed by the long *Hróars þáttr ok Helga*, or simply *Helga þáttr*, that covers the chapters from 6 to 12. The structure of *Helga þáttr* is complex and contains several interrelated episodes. The central one is the story of Hrólfur’s incestuous ancestry, with brief offshoots that deal with Helgi’s exploits and the story of Hroar’s ring. It is in this part of the story that Helgi’s ambiguous and sometimes contradictory character reveals itself: he is a forceful person, valiant and fierce but sometimes reckless and cruel. This can be seen from his encounters with Queen Ólöf as well as from the way he mutilates his nephew Hrókr. The story of Helgi’s...

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incestuous marriage to his daughter Yrsa also throws a rather grim light upon his character, which as well contributes to the image of Hrölf as a doomed king. It is in the finale of Helga þáttr, in chapter eleven, that Skuld features first, the daughter of the álfrona forsaken by Helgi, who is going to become a powerful sorceress and ultimately the bane of Hrölf kraki and his champions. Another important antagonist of king Hrölf is introduced in connection with Helgi’s unfortunate life: this is the evil king Aðils of Sweden, a sorcerer, sacrificer and the second husband of Hrölf’s mother Yrsa. Curiously, Hrölf gets all his supernatural enemies as a kind of heritage from his father. Compared to the rather detailed account of king Helgi’s life, nothing is told about Hrölf’s character and his reign in Hleiðargarðr except for a brief mention that he did not participate in his father’s raids.

4.3. Svipdags þáttr and Bóðvars-Bjarka þáttr

After king Helgi’s death, the story enters another stage, where Hrölf’s kappar are introduced into the narrative; those are Svipdags þáttr and Bóðvars-Bjarka þáttr (or Bóðvars þáttr), the closing part of which is sometimes credited as Hjalta þáttr. Svipdags þáttr introduces its eponymous character, the warrior Svipdagr who is looking for glory, and his conflict with king Aðils’ twelve berserkir. After achieving an uneasy victory over the berserkir, Svipdagr and his brothers Beigaðr and Hvítserkr come to Hleiðargarðr and become King Hrölf’s champions. In Hleiðargarðr Svipdagr meets another band of twelve berserkir who are this time Hrölf kraki’s elite troops. A dangerous quarrel starts between them and Svipdagr but king Hrölf interferes and averts the fight. The Hleiðargarðr berserkir disappear from the story, but only until Bóðvar-Bjarka þáttr where Bóðvar and Hjalti finally bring them down.

The structure of Bóðvars þáttr is complex, not only in terms of a structure heavy with subordinate storylines but also in terms of its sources: the text interweaves, quite similarly to Chapter 8 of Völsunga saga, heroic legends with folktale material.177 Bóðvars þáttr introduces two more champions into the saga: the bear-born warrior Bóðvar Bjarki, the future leader of Hrölf’s warriors, and young Hjalti, whom Bóðvar turns from a desperate coward into a bold hero. With Svipdagr, Bóðvar and Hjalti having joined Hleiðargarðr’s troops, the kappar stage ends, and

177 Friedrich Panzer, Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte, 2 vols (München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1912), ii, 262-263.
the narrative moves further on, to Hrólfr’s famous raid to Uppsala, which is also known from Snorra Edda.

The berserkr-slaying theme found both in Svíþjóðs þáttr and Æðvars þáttr, especially in connection to the bear imagery of Æðvars þáttr, is important for the understanding of heathen/Odinic themes in the saga, and will be looked at in more detail later. Those features, however, are more easily understood in the light of the saga’s main conflict that is given most clearly in Uppsalafør and Skuldarbardagi.

4.4. Uppsalafør

Uppsalafør features all the five champions presented in the previous þættir with seven more listed later, in all forming a band of twelve warriors, with Hrólfr as their leader. Æðvarr urges Hrólfr to claim his property from king Aðils, who was also one of the primary antagonists in Helga þáttr, and an expedition to Sweden is undertaken. On their way, the characters encounter a mysterious one-eyed farmer skilled in sorcery, clearly an Odinic figure, who is called Hrani and who helps them, ensuring their victory over Aðils. During their encounter, Hrani acts as an initiator as, during the character’s stay at his farm, he subsequently tests Hrólf’s followers with cold, hunger and with fire. Only twelve warriors are left in the end, and Hrani advises Hrólfr that only they are capable of the enterprise. This is a typical initiatory episode; extending the comparison with Völsunga saga, tests undergone by Sinfjötli come to mind here, where, as well, only those who had been tested can continue with the exploit (the Uppsala raid in Hrölf’s saga kraka and vengeance on Sigiir in Völsunga saga).

Although initiatory episodes tend to be present and prominent in the stories of Óðinn-heroes, it is untypical to have Óðinn himself as the initiator; as has been shown in Völsunga saga, supported by parallels, his role tends to be that of an advisor or bestower of a gift. Even in Gesta Danorum, the old one-eyed man only advises Hadingus to kill a lion and drink its blood, although in this connection one could speak of the theme of the disguised Óðinn as initiator there. In Hrölf’s saga kraka, the Odinic nature of the initiation episode is reinforced by the possible connection of the fire-enduring test with a similar ordeal in Grímnismál. This last test proves to be the most important one, as the fire-enduring theme is heavily stressed in the Uppsala episodes, and breaking out from a burning hall becomes one of the characters’ important exploits.
Later, when the heroes are returning from Uppsala victorious, they meet Hrani once again. He gives Hrólf a sword, a shield and a coat of mail. The paradigm of Óðinn’s gift is immediately recognisable: not only are his gifts usually war-related (compare e.g. 2.3.5, 2.3.8, 2.3.9, 2.3.10, 2.3.11, 7.2.2, 7.2.3), but this particular combination of a sword, a shield and a mailcoat evokes the list of Óðinn’s gifts to heroes in *Hymdallrjóð*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Biðum Herjaðór} \\
i \text{hugum sitja,}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hann geldr ok gefr} \\
gaf hann Hermóði \\
\text{hjálm ok brynju}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{en Sigmundi} \\
\text{sverðat þiggja.}
\]

(Edd. I, 460)

We ask for Herjaðór’s [Óðinn’s] favour; he pays and gives the price of gold [usually interpreted as gold given by a chieftain to his followers]; he gave Hermóðr a helm and a mailcoat, but to Sigmundr a sword to own.

So, Óðinn’s gift to Hrólf should be interpreted as an invitation to accept him as a ruler, to become in full an Ódinic hero. However, Hrólf refuses for the reason that the weapon and armour are *ferlig* (‘hatesome’, ‘monstrous’):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Þeir Hrólf konungr ok hans menn fóru nú veg sinn ok ríða þann dag nær allan. Ok sem nátta} \\
tök, finna þeir bæ einn ok kómu til dýra. Er þar fyrir Hrani bóndi ok býðr þeim allan greiðskap \\
o ok kallaði, at ekki hefði farit fjárrí eptir því, sem hann gat til um ferðir þeirra. Konungr sannar \\
þat ok kallar hann vera öreykblind. 'Hér eru vápn, er ek vil gefa þér', segir Hrani bóndi. \\
Konungr mælti: 'Ferlig vápn eru þetta, karl', en þat var skjöldr ok sverð ok brynja. Ekki vill \\
Hrólf konung þiggja vápnin. Hrani bregzt við þetta nær reiðir ok þykkir gerð til sin svívirðing \\
mikil í þessu.
\end{align*}
\]

(HSK 92)

Now king Hrólf and his men went on their way, and they rode nearly for the whole day. And when night fell, they found a farm and came to the door. It was Hrani the bóndi there, and he offered them all hospitality and said that their expedition ent not differently from what he told them. The king agreed and told that Hrani was really clear-sighted.

'Here are weapons that I want to give you’, said Hrani the bóndi.

The king said: ‘Those weapons are hatesome, old man’, and those were a shield, a sword and a mailcoat. King Hrólf did not want to receive them. [Now] Hrani is nearly furious, and he thinks he has been shown great disrespect.

The saga makes it quite clear that this episode provokes Óðinn’s wrath, so he makes the king lose his famous last battle, an account of which is given in *Skuldabarðagi*.

The act of refusal on its own must have broken the audience’s horizon of expectations since, from the many recipients of Óðinn’s gifts in Old Norse-Icelandic tradition, Hrólf is the only one to reject the gift. Even more remarkable here is the use of the
word *ferligr*. There is no evident explanation of how weapons and armour can be ‘monstrous’, and the situation is complicated even further by the fact that, when *ferligr* denotes physical ugliness in Old Icelandic, it tends to describe living creatures rather than artifacts.\(^{178}\) This dismisses the casual interpretation that the weapons are ugly or not well-made and therefore unfit for a king. So, the text obviously hints at Hrólfr’s irrational disgust of the mere idea of serving Óðinn, even though Hrani’s true identity is still unknown to him.

The account of Hrólfr’s fall is given in the last þáttr of the saga.

4.5. *Skuldarbardagi*

*Skuldarbardagi* is different from the other þættir of *Hrólfs saga kraka* in terms of source material, which was, most probably, some form of the now-lost heroic poem *Bjarkamál*. *Bjarkamál* is probably the earliest known text where Hrólf [kraki] is mentioned, and this makes Hrólfr’s last battle one of the most traditional parts of the story, in contrast to the arguably late interpolations like the story of Bǫðvarr’s parentage.

It is not clear how much of the original poem eventually made it to *Skuldarbardagi* as we know it. Axel Olrik approaches the saga text quite critically as a source on *Bjarkamál*, since it does not correspond structurally to *Bjarkamál*’s paraphrase in Book II of *Gesta Danorum* and lacks some of its material (HLD 185-188). Bǫðvarr’s curses towards Óðinn are, however, present both in the saga and in Saxo’s version of the story. This important sequence will be first considered according to the saga’s version, and then compared to *Gesta Danorum*’s account.

During the battle with Skuld’s troops, when Hjalti supposes that all of king Hrólf’s warriors are going to be guests in Valhöll that very day (‘vér skulum í Valhöll gista í kveld’), which is both a paraphrase for ‘death’ and an Odinic statement. Bǫðvarr, however, blames Óðinn for treachery and scheming and calls the god ‘sonrinn hinn fúli ok hinn ótrúi’ (‘son of the foul and unholy one’, i.e. the devil; HSK 104). So, Bǫðvarr rejects both Óðinn and the afterlife in Valhöll, and he does so in response to Hjalti’s fatalistic statement that accepts both, and would not look out of place in *Volsunga saga* (compare and contrast 2.3.7).

Bøðvarr’s response is perfectly in line with the Christian tradition of depicting pagan deities as evil spirits, even if the characters themselves never oppose to the heathen powers any faith except for that in ‘their own might and main’.

In Saxo Grammaticus’s Latin paraphrase of Bjarkamál, Biarco expresses his enmity towards Odinus in conversation with his wife Ruta, not with Hialto. Otherwise, the situation when the utterance is made, as well as its menacing meaning, is similar to the saga’s account:

Si potero horrendun Frigge spectare maritum,
Quantumcumque albo clypeo sit tectus et altum
Flecat equum, Lethra nequaquam sospes abibit:
Fas est belligerum bello prosterne diuum!
(GD 186-187)

If I should set eyes on the fearsome husband of Frigg,
though he is protected by his white shield and manoeuvres
his tall horse, he shall not go unhurt from Leire;
it is right to lay low the warrior god in battle.
(GD Fisher 62)

The presence of Biarco’s threats in a text composed long before Hrólfs saga, and most certainly in the lost Bjarkamál itself, suggests that the theme of Hrólfr’s strife with Óðinn is very traditional. It has already been shown how the same idea is taken up in Ólafs saga helga (3.1). However, even though the tradition behind this sentiment in Hrólfs saga kraka is long, its meaning clearly has been reinterpreted over time. While the saga is clearly composed from the Christian perspective, Axel Olrik convincingly argued against the assumption that the supposed author of Bjarkamál ‘denies Heathendom and adheres to Christianity’, or that in Bjarkamál Óðinn is depicted as an ‘evil and dangerous spirit’, which happens in Hrólfs saga kraka (HLD 155). According to Olrik, in Bjarkamál the conflict is seen from the heathen perspective: Bjarki’s loyalty to Hrólfr is so absolute that it means struggle against any power that opposes it, no matter how omnipotent. The scholar draws parallels between Bjarkamál and Sonatorrek and Hákonarmál: all of those three poems encompass the theme of struggle against death personified by Óðinn, and in none of them is it built on the opposition between paganism and Christianity (GD Fisher 131, 157-158, 175).

What makes the reader comprehend Bøðvarr’s words in Skuldarbardagi as a part of a conscious, ideological struggle, is the pretext given in the Hrani episodes,
and especially in the scene where Hrólfr refuses Óðinn’s weapons. Hrólfr is in the saga such an idealised figure, while everything heathen has such negative connotation, that Hrólfr’s moral superiority should be evident to the reader even leaving aside the audience’s supposed anti-pagan sentiment. There are no references to Hrólfr’s encounters with the disguised Óðinn either in Book II of Gesta Danorum, nor — quite certainly — in Bjarkamál itself, which starts with Hjalti’s call to arms. The first books of Gesta Danorum preserve quite a few examples of Óðinn-hero narratives with the Odinic hero interfering in the course of events (most importantly the stories of Hadingus and Harald), and the career of Rolf Krake is not one of them: Óðinn is present only in the dialogue between Biarco and Ruta. The Hrani episodes were most probably introduced into the saga to explain Bóðvarr’s outburst, inherited from Bjarkamál but lacking motivation in the saga’s framework; this hypothesis is supported by the fact that the motif of a ‘magical farmer’ is most clearly a phenomenon characteristic of Icelandic literature, not Old Norse tradition overall.\textsuperscript{179}

Thus, Bjarki’s threats towards Óðinn in Bjarkamál may have inspired the central conflict of the saga, that of the Hleiðargarðr heroes’ heroic trust in their might and main on the one side, and paganism, seen more precisely as Óðinn worship, on the other. The Hrani episodes in Uppsalaför, most probably developed to explain Bjarki’s hatred, have been already considered. Uppsalaför and Skuldarbardagi, united by the story of encounters with Hrani, together give an account of Hrólfr and his champions’ triumph and subsequent defeat — this is indeed the core of the story of Hrólfr kraki ok kappar hans. The earlier þættir tell the backstory of the most prominent of Hrólfr’s followers and prepare the reader for the culmination of Uppsalaför and the tragedy of the finale. What follows is an attempt to trace the saga’s most important themes back to those þættir.

The motifs of Odinic help and Odinic death have already been observed on the example of Völsunga saga, where the career of most of the characters follows more or less the same narrative scheme. Now that similar material has been observed in Hrölfssaga kraka, it is possible to look at the two texts in comparison, leaving aside for a moment the formal Odinic hero complex as described in 1.2. Then the narrative core of Hrölfssaga kraka as well as most episodes in Völsunga saga can be described as

\textsuperscript{179} Thor Ewing, Gods and worshippers in the Viking and Germanic World (Tempus: Chalford, 2008), 87.
follows:

1) An initiatory episode (or a chain of episodes) — e.g. Sinfinlí’s testing in *Volsunga saga* chapter 8. In *Hrólf’s saga* this is the episode where Hrani tests the heroes; a number of other initiatory episodes is found in *Bóðvar’s þátttr*.

2) Óðinn’s gift or advice is given before an important exploit, like a battle or a duel. In *Hrólf’s saga*, this is primarily Hrani’s refused gift, though his help before the raid to Uppsala also qualifies.

3) Subsequent victories and glory, ensured by the gift and/or advice; this virtually always follows any of the gift episodes with the exception of when Hrólfr refuses the gift. The initiatory episode with Hrani’s testing implies, however, that Hrólf’s triumph at Uppsala was in some way insured, or at least ‘blessed’ by Hrani.

4) Óðinn’s betrayal, which leads to the death of the protagonist. As it was noted in 1.2, death in a battle is the most usual way for an Odinic hero to die, with exceptions like Hadingus, who hangs himself, or Sigurðr, whose identity of an Odinic hero was most likely emphasised, and to a certain degree invented, by the author of *Volsunga saga*. The last þátttr of *Hrólf’s saga*, Skuldarbardagi, corresponds quite clearly to this stage.

5. **Initiation Structures in *Svipdags þátttr* and *Bóðvar’s þátttr***

Before joining king Hrólf as his champions, all the protagonists experience events that have a clearly initiatory sense. In Svipdagr’s case it is his victory over berserkir where he loses his eye, which introduces an Odinic theme. Bóðvarr also overcomes an antagonist, the Sami witch Hvit. Even more importantly, he drinks his monstrous brother Elgróði’s blood to become a stronger warrior (HSK 62, *Bjarkarimur* 135) and this way complete his initiation. This is not the only blood-drinking episode in the þátttr: forced by Bóðvarr, the coward Hóttir drinks the troll-dragon’s blood and changes drastically, becoming strong and brave (HSK 69, *Bjarkarimur* 140). Both blood-drinking episodes involve a struggle between the person who performs the initiation and the one who is being initiated: Bóðvarr

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180 For an analysis of a structure of initiation in the dragonslaying episode of *Hrólf’s saga kraka*, including the blood-drinking motif, see Initiation 312-325.
wrestles with Elgfróði (HSK 62) and Hjalti wrestles with Bǒðvarr (HSK 69) to test their new strength. Hjalti’s sham killing of the dragon may be regarded as another part of an initiation rite.\footnote{The initiatory meaning of this particular scene was discussed by Georges Dumézil, \textit{Gods of the Ancient Northmen}, ed. and trans. Einar Haugen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973),69-70.} Moreover, according to \textit{Bjarkarímur}, Hjalti kills another monster shortly after and rightfully becomes one of Hrólfr’s champions (\textit{Bjarkarímur} 139-142).

### The weapon
\footnote{The sword Gullinhjalti (‘golden hilt’) plays a special role in Hjalti’s initiation as Hrólfr’s champion and also provides him with a new name in this role. H.R.Ellis Davidson notes a special role of the sword-hilt in swearing the oath of allegiance in the Germanic world: Hilda Ellis Davidson, \textit{The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England} (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1962),76.} In the course of all the initiatory episodes except for Svipdagr, a weapon is involved, which can also have a ritual pretext. Bǒðvarr receives a magical sword that had been intended for him by his father (HSK 60). Hótttr, the future Hjalti, temporarily receives from king Hrólfr the sword Gullinhjalti\footnote{Bǒðvarr’s sword passed to him from his father, Gullinhjalti given to Hjalti by Hrólfr and finally the rejected sword given to Hrólfr by Óðinn may all be considered as parallels to Sigmundr’s getting his sword from the trunk of the tree, which starts his story as an Odinic warrior.} so that he could kill the dragon (HSK 70, in \textit{Bjarkarímur} 142 Hrólfr also throws him a sword). The new name he gets after undergoing the initiation is after this sword’s name. It is noteworthy that, when Hrólfr and his champions meet Óðinn-Hrani after their Uppsala raid, Hrani also intends to give the king a weapon and armour, this way, most evidently, making him consecrated to Óðinn as the god of war. Hrólfr, however, refuses to accept the gift (HSK 92). This is the only case of an unfulfilled rite in a long row of ritual-based episodes, many of which involve an initiatory weapon, and the most important one: it makes it clear that King Hrólfr and his champions do not belong to the Odinic world — the world of which they, a king’s warriors, would be a natural part.

### The name
\footnote{On the significance of the name in initiation rites see Arnold van Gennep, \textit{The Rites of Passage} (London: Routledge, 2004), 62. In narratives that are based on structures of initiation but do not preserve the memory of its initial meaning the change of name may be regarded as a accompanying motif to the initiatory episode.} The initiatory sense of the dragonslaying scene in \textit{Bǒðvars þáttir} is emphasised by the fact that after it Hótttr gets a new name, Hjalti (HSK 71). There is no particular naming episode connected with Bǒðvarr, but it is noteworthy that he is called simply ‘Bǒðvarr’ throughout all the account of his adventures, but in \textit{Skuldarbardagi}, after the list of Hrólf’s warriors (HSK 98), he is usually called ‘Bǒðvarr bjarki’ (HSK 98, 99, 101, 103, 104, 106). This can be regarded as a testimony of his new status. Some of Hrólfr’s champions have names connected with
Óðinn in some way, which reinforces their connection to the Odinic hero myth: Svipdagr’s name may be allusion to the hero of *Svipdagsmál* who is to guess Óðinn’s riddles; Hötttr appears as one of Óðinn’s names in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*.\(^\text{185}\)

**The supernatural advisor.** Both Svipdagr and Þóðvarr have supernatural advisors who in both cases are of their blood kin (a father or a brother) and tell them to go to Hrólf’s hall once the initiation story comes to an end. In *Svipdags þáttr*, this role is played by the character’s father Svipr; in Þóðvarr’s case, this advisor is his brother Elgfróði.\(^\text{186}\) Before joining Hleiðargarðr’s champions, the hero must undergo a quest, a consecration, and only after that can he be considered appropriate to become one of Hrólf’s *kappar*. The separate episodes of *Hrólf’s saga kraka* may be considered subordinate to the final tragedy of the characters’ confrontation with Óðinn and the following catastrophe.

It has already been noted that both *Svipdags þáttr* and *Þóðvars þáttr* are dominated by the berserkir-fighting theme, and that many of the episodes in those *þættir* have, similarly to Hrólf’s first visit to Hrani, an initiatory meaning. In fact, it has been noted by a number of scholars that in saga literature the berserkir-fighting motif (especially when a group of twelve berserkir are involved), sometimes substituted by the bear-slaying motif, is often a part of an initiation structure.\(^\text{187}\) Jens Peter Schjødt has observed of *fornaldarsaga* material that killing of the berserkir tends to be regarded as ‘a vague memory of some legendary hero who had a special relationship with Óðinn during an initiation which made him an Odinic hero — an initiation which consisted in ‘killing’ one or more berserkir who would sacrifice him,


\(^{186}\) Supernatural origin, clear in Elgfróði, is somewhat less evident in the figure of Svipdagr’s father who is presented as a human. However, the saga heavily implies that Svipr is not an ordinary human. As soon as he is introduced into the saga, the reader learns that Svipr lives “far from other men”, “hann bjó... fjarri þrum múnnum” (HSK 35), and people believe that this person is not exactly what he seems (“ók haði verit hinn mestí kappi ok eigi í öllu þar at hann var séðr’, HSK 35). Moreover, Svipr is ‘skilled in many things’ (“ók kunni hann márt fyrrir sér’, HSK 35), which is an even more evident cliché for describing a character with magical abilities.

that is, initiate him to the god by whom he is killed in the end. Schjødt’s theory may look bold, but examples from the sagas reinforce it, and it can be further supported by a similar episode from Órvar-Odds saga and Hervarar saga (see chapter 5).

6. HRÓLF’s CHAMPIONS AS THE ‘TWELVE BERSERKIR’

In Book II of Saxo Grammaticus’s Gesta Danorum Biarco kills a certain Agner — a clear parallel for Agnarr the berserk mentioned in Hrólf’s saga kraka (HSK 102, GD I, 38-39). Saxo also mentions the blood-drinking episode, in this text the monster killed by Biarco being a gigantic bear (GD I, 168-169). The variant of Hrólf’s saga kraka, where Bóðvarr kills a winged dragon, betrays its later origin with its chivalric sort of monster. Though there is no mention of Biarco’s bear nature in Saxo, who definitely used Bjarkamál and probably Skjöldunga saga, the bear-slaying motif may reflect the character’s connection with ancient bear cults and consequently with berserker figures. If we assume that there is indeed connection between berserker and bears, it is possible to argue that Bóðvarr’s killing of the monster is a kind of reduplication of the berserkir-fighting episode, if we take it that berserkir are somehow connected to bears (1.2).

One could even argue that it is because of this association with bears that the Bear’s Son folkstory later got attached to Bjarki’s character, though earlier this champion had been regarded merely as a berserkir-slayer. The character’s name, meaning ‘bear-cub’, could also be a point of departure. As proposed by Axel Olrik,

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188 Jens Peter Schjødt, ‘Óðinn, Warriors and Death’, in Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. Judy Quinn and others (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 147.


190 As argued by Hilda Ellis Davidson; see GD Fisher I, 38-39.

the idea of a ‘cub’ or ‘little bear’ would suggest that the hero had a father who shared this bear nature, as the story goes in *Hrólf’s saga kraka*. As a result, Bjarki, originally the character’s name, becomes his cognomen in the text of the saga, and Bòðvarr, which could originally be just a character’s cognomen with the meaning ‘warlike’, becomes his given name (HLD 255-256).

There are several reasons to consider *Hrólf’s saga kraka* as another development of the doomed berserkir-slayer motif. To start with, the final battle with Queen Skuld’s army demonstrates certain features that are very similar to the episode of Hjálmar and Òrvar-Oddr’s battle with Angantyr and his brothers (and it is *Hrólf’s saga kraka* that Schjødt refers to in his article, though, ironically, it is possible that *Hervarar saga* and *Òrvar-Odds saga*, unmentioned by Schjødt, demonstrate his ideas better). First of all, all the protagonists die an explicitly Odinic death. The saga heavily implies that the reason for the final catastrophe was king Hrólfr’s falling into the god’s disfavour by refusing his gifts and therefore patronage. Quite a few of them are also famous for their victories over berserkir. Svipdagr and Bòðvarr get involved into encounters with warbands of berserkir (Svipdagr does so twice), and Bòðvarr is especially famous for slaying a certain berserkir called Agnarr, which he recalls in the last battle: ‘Ek drap Agnar breserk ok eigi síðr konungr’ (HSK 102), ‘I killed Agnarr the berserk who was no less a king’.

One could notice how the theme of resentment against Óðinn’s will reduplicates itself in *Hrólf’s saga kraka*. On the one hand, the final episode includes Bòðvarr’s curses to the god (HSK 105), which is reminiscent of Biarco’s resentment against Óðinn in the corresponding episode in Saxo’s retelling of *Bjarkamál* (GD I, 186-187). On the other hand, it is Hrólfr himself, not Bòðvarr Bjarki, whom the saga presents as Óðinn’s antagonist in the first place. When the king denies Hrani’s gift, he metaphorically separates himself and his followers from ‘pagan’ ethics that in the saga are characteristic of negative characters like Aðils and Skuld, and this separation is unambiguously regarded as the cause of King Hrólfr’s fall, even if the defeated protagonists are granted moral victory.

This tradition of depicting berserkir-slayers in saga literature may throw a new light not only upon the meaning of *Hrólf’s saga kraka*’s final chapters where Hrani’s curse fulfils itself, but also upon the whole composition of the saga. Many critics

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192 Axel Olrik argues that this motif of Bòðvarr Bjarki’s confrontation with Óðinn goes back to pre-Christian times when Bjarkamál was created. See HLD 151-158.
noted that *Hrólfs saga kraka* had an episodic structure, which is sometimes understood as a weak structuring. This scholarly attitude is explicable. On the face of it, separate stories about Svipdagr, Boðvarr and Þótr-Hjalti are unified only by the fact that all of their protagonists finally make their way to Hleiðargarðr and become Hrólfur’s champions. Moreover, *Svipdags þátr* and *Boðvars þátr* contain repeated elements like the hero’s confrontation with a troop of hostile berserkir in a king’s hall (in Svipdagr’s case, this occurs twice in succession, first at king Aðils’s hall in Sweden and then in king Hrólfur’s Hleiðargarðr). Such a reduplication can be regarded as unoriginality or a careless compilation of oral sources where such repetitions are natural. This dissertation, however, observes *Hrólfur saga kraka* as a whole text that indeed is made from different episodes — but these parts are united by a common idea and corresponding motifs. After all the confrontations with berserkir are finished, in the final battle Hrólfur’s warriors are presented as twelve ferocious warriors themselves:

then started up Hrómundr the stern and Hrólfur the swift-handed, Svipdagr ok Beigaðr ok Hvitserkr hinn hvatti, Haklangr hinn setti, Harðrefill hinn sjauendi, Haki hinn frækni hinn áttundi, Þótr hinn miklaflaði hinn niundi, Starólfr hét hinn tiundi, Hjalti hinn hugþrúði hinn ellepti, Boðvarr bjarki hinn tólpti, ok var hann því svá kallaðr, at hann rýmði á burt þillum berserkjum Hrólfur konungs vegna þeira ofsa ok ójafnaðar, en drap suma, svá at engi þeira þreið lýðir honum...

(HSK 98)

It can be seen from this quote how Hrólfur’s twelve champions are opposed to the twelve negatively presented berserkir who are reminiscent of Angantýr and his brothers in the battle of Sámsey narrative (5) or the berserkir in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*. On the other hand, even if these characters are opposed to each other, there is a peculiar connection between them. As we have seen, many of

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193 For different opinions on this question see, e.g., Stephen A. Mitchell etc, ‘Interrogating Genre in the *Fornaldarsögur*: A Round-Table Discussion’, *Viking and Medieval Studies* 2 (2007), 275-96. Episodic structure is considered a common feature of *fornaldarsaga* as a genre, though this genre itself is not uniform and has diverse variations.

Hrólfr’s champions have Odinic traits, especially manifestly Svipdagr, and similar allusions appear from time to time in connection with Hrólfr himself and his family, starting with his uncle Hróarr once disguised as Hrani, which is Óðinn’s name later in the saga, and up to the actual encounter with Óðinn.

Since the motif of a band of twelve warriors holds a dominating position in the saga and is directly connected to its main theme, particular attention must be paid to it. As noted already, the twelve champions are referred to in Hrólfs saga kraka and in Bjarkarimur, that is, in Icelandic sources (HSK 98, 134, 143, 161). These are the most recent part of the Hrólfr kraki legendarium; the motif is not found elsewhere, including Saxo’s detailed account of the events. One objection may be raised against the idea that Hrólfr’s twelve champions are a late invention. The above list of Heiðargarðr’s champions belongs to chapter thirty-three of Hrólfs saga kraka (HSK 99-104), which is generally assumed to be based on Bjarkamál,195 possibly the oldest surviving representative of this legendary tradition. However, no other preserved version of Bjarkamál, other than the free prose rendering in the saga, features twelve warriors — neither Saxo’s account nor the stanzas preserved in Heimskringla and in the Prose Edda, so this motif quite possibly emerged when the legendary material was being reworked into saga narrative. This idea was emphasised by Axel Olrik:

Comparing the Biarkamal with the lay which is most closely related, The Lay of Innstein196 [from chapter XI of Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekk — E.M.], we appreciate at once the significance of its negative testimony; for in this lay now one and one the other of Half’s warriors, or else now half, now all of the twelve champions are named. The same is to be observed in the old Chanson de Roland about the twelve paladins. But the Biarkamal is indifferent to all of Hrolf’s champions except these two. There is but one possible explanation: the circle of twelve warriors did not exist at the time when the Biarkamal was first composed, and it never did exist in Danish tradition, but was added only in the Norn197 account.

(HLD 198-199)

In should also be noted that, as Lars Lönnroth argued, ‘twelve followers’ is a very widespread motif found in a number of important texts starting with the four Gospels, not to mention Charlemagne’s followers, as well as the adversaries of Dietrich von

195 Axel Olrik provides the surviving Bjarkamál stanzas and their parallels from Gesta Danorum and Hrólf’s saga kraka with a commentary on these texts’ relation to each other; see HLD 99-136.
197 According to Axel Olrik wish, the term ‘Norn’ is used in the English edition of Heroic Legends of Denmark to denote Norway and settlements to the West (Iceland, the Faroes, Orkneys and others). Olrik consistently contrasts this later literature with Old Danish tradition, in which, as Olrik argues, much of good Medieval Icelandic literature originated; see HLD xiv.
Bern and Walter of Aquitania. The exact origin of this motif in *Hrólfs saga kraka* is hardly possible to define; however, its parallels in saga literature testify to the theory that it occurred in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and probably not earlier. What is left of *Skjoldunga saga* supports this assumption: the account of Hrölf’s champions is not any more detailed than in *Gesta Danorum*, and no mention of twelve warriors is made.

In fact, the connection of the heroes to Odinic myth and — on the other hand — their confrontation with this god may be seen as a metaphor for the characters’ relationship with the pagan world overall. They cannot help belonging to it, yet they oppose it, trusting in their might and main instead of worshipping the pagan gods. Their enemies are *berserkir* who may be regarded as ferocious warriors consecrated to Óðinn as the god of war, and evil sorcerers like Aðils and Skuld who practise *seiðr*, also associated with Óðinn as the god of wizardry and delusion. The depiction of characters who find themselves in such an ambiguous situation is based on a long literary tradition that goes back to the times when paganism was alive, and the ancient image of Óðinn as a deceptive god. This deceptive nature is, however, understood in a simpler and broader way in this late saga (this is what Jesse Byock calls the ‘Christian rationalisation of the evil nature of pagan creatures’). According to this view, not only can Óðinn not be trusted because he lets down his chosen warriors, but the whole world where Óðinn is a supreme deity is corrupt and hostile to the positive characters. Surprisingly, even though the saga is very consistent in creating a very negative image of paganism, Christian beliefs are not opposed to it directly. Positive values are rather represented through several characters who, not being obviously Christian, deny paganism together with the vices that the saga associates with it.

7. **Conclusion**

Following the definition of the Odinic hero complex in 1.2, it is evident that it is

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present in *Hróf's saga kraka* in a very complete form, even more so than in *Volunga saga.* The Odinic hero plot is not reduplicated in *Hróf's saga* as it is in the *Volunga saga,* but its only occurrence is crucially important for the development of the events as well as for the ideological statement made in the end of *Hróf's saga kraka.* The secondary motifs (1.2) are present abundantly. There are instances of bear shapeshifting that in *Gesta Danorum* is paralleled by bear-fighting and in *Bjarkarímur* by wolf-fighting; there are at least three battles with groups of berserkir, meanwhile Hrófr’s retinue is presented as an Odinic warband of twelve. We can see a clear connection between the Odinic hero complex and initiation structures here as, starting with *Svipdag's þáttir,* initiatory structures dominate the plot.

These all are observations rather than findings, because *Hróf's saga kraka* pretty and *Volunga saga* have pretty much codified the Odinic hero complex. Structurally similar approach to Óðinn-related material in *Volunga saga* and *Hróf's saga kraka* has been a scholarly commonplace since early twentieth century (1.1), and when it comes to the connection between Óðinn, his gifts and death inflicted by him, and the berserkir (shapeshifters or members of a Mannerbund), *Hróf's saga kraka* is a starting point as much as it is research material. It is of great importance, though, that *Volunga saga* and *Hróf's saga kraka* demonstrate this structural parallelism, because these two texts have helped to define the Odinic hero complex and suggest its use in other saga material.

The most important feature in *Hróf's saga kraka* is not the mere presence of the Odinic hero complex, but how the saga approaches the narrative elements of the Odinic hero plot. If in i.e. *Volunga saga* the Odinic hero is an object (helped by Óðinn, killed by Óðinn), in *Hróf's saga kraka* he becomes an active agent who opposes Óðinn, death and the ‘pagan’ value system together with that. Set against the negative image of the pre-Christian world, impersonated by ‘the evil Óðinn’, is the protagonists’ heroism and their trust in their own might and main, seen as something that foregoes the Christian morality. It is clear from other sources, such as *Ólafs saga helga,* that the image of Hrófr kraki as an almost Christian, ‘anti-Odinic’ hero is a traditional one (3.1), and it is most likely based on an even earlier pre-Christian sentiment of resentment against Óðinn as the deity inflicting defeat (3.3.5). It will be demonstrated how this theme of resentment against Óðinn tends to attach itself to

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202 Complare 2.3. where encounters with Óðinn are multiple, and 3.4-3.5 where there are only three but all meaningful.
narratives containing the Odinic hero complex (compare 4.7, 5.5.1-5.5.2, 6.2.5).

Now, having looked at the two clearest examples of the Odinic hero complex in saga literature, this dissertation will move on to those where it is present in a less evident form. So, in *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka* Óðinn does not directly influence Hálfr’s career as he does in the cases of the Vòlsungs and Hrölf krun. It will be demonstrated, however, that Óðinn-related imagery can also effectively form an Odinic hero complex, which will be accompanied by the same initiation structures and secondary motifs as the two texts observed so far.
CHAPTER 4

HÁLFS SAGA OK HÁLFSREKKA

1. **HÁLFS SAGA OK HÁLFSREKKA’S PLACE IN THE DISCUSSION**

It is unlikely to be a coincidence how much *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka* shares in common with *Hrólf saga kraka*. A point of contact that is the most important for the current research is that both storylines deliver an explicitly Odinic theme that is associated, as in the case of *Völsvunga saga*, with the idea of sacrificial death. The similarity goes much further than this, though. There are obvious parallels between the storylines and imagery of the two texts; not less importantly, parallels may be drawn on the levels of composition and genre. Unsurprisingly perhaps, there is a long tradition of associating the two sagas with each other that goes back to the times when both stories were circulating in medieval Icelandic society, a beautiful illustration of this interconnection being *Tóka þátr Tókasonar*, a story where the protagonist tells about his visits first to king Hrólfr’s court and then to king Hálfr’s, and then St. Olaf makes the following comparison between the two rulers: ‘Auðsét er þat… at miklu sterkari hafa verit rekkar Hálfs konungs, en engi þykki mér verit hafa konungrinn samtôa œrvæi ok betr at sér en Hrólfkr kraki’ (‘It is evident… that Hálfr’s warriors are the strongest, but no king in those times was more magnanimous and generous than Hrólfkr kraki’). Today the tradition of connecting those stories is reflected in editorial practice, e.g. when the two sagas were published together in W. Bryant Bachman and Gudmundur Erlingsson’s translation.203

It is therefore very tempting for a saga researcher to assume a genetic connection between the traditions and the two written sagas that belong to them. Points of resemblance are numerous enough to form a system; many of them lie on the surface, starting with quite similar titles, and both stories being *fornaldarsaga* narratives with a very similar set of characters and more or less the same plot. A closer analysis, however, reveals that the idea of a relation between the two texts is problematic due to their different origin: while *Hrólf saga kraka* is primarily in prose, with extremely rare poetic quotes and one short fragment based on *Bjarkamál*,

Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka’s prose seems to be heavily dependent on the verse. Taking the very probable but problematic relation between Hrólfs saga kraka and Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka into consideration, this chapter will consider how the Odinic sacrificial theme is developed in the latter text in contrast to Hrólfs saga.

One could regard Hrólfs saga kraka as the more elaborate of the two narratives, with more a integrated storyline (despite its episodic structure) and a consistent development of the main theme, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter. The analysis on Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka will, therefore, depend on the phenomena observed and conclusions made in the previous chapter.

Since the analysis will take as a starting point the Odinic implications of the twelve berserkir-related figures of Hrólfs saga kraka, as well as their fall, it is essential to articulate how exactly to link Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka to Hrólfs saga kraka. Their connection will support a hypothesis on how those texts are related to create an appropriate background for looking at the Odinic theme in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka. This will be done by surveying the texts’ parallels and contrasting features, starting with the broadest and the most abstract and then going into more detail. So we will first consider the dating and genre of the sagas, then their structure, characters, main themes as well as minor details shared in common.

2. Structure of Hálfs Saga ok hálfsrekka

The most representative common feature of the texts is that the structure of both is to a great extent episodic, with many narrative offshoots that, on the face of it, do not seem to contribute to the main plot (that is, the storyline identified in the title, connected with king Hrólfr or king Hálfr and their retinues). In both cases the narrative does not focus on the exploits of the eponymous kings until quite late, by the middle or even end of the saga. Those culminations are preceded by an account of the lives of the kings’ predecessors, and by stories about their champions.

Although Hrólfs saga is divided into þættir and Hálfs saga is not, parallels may be drawn between the distribution of the material in both texts. In doing this, one should keep in mind that Hálfs saga is about a fifth of the length of Hrólfs saga, and contains long poetic quotations. Even if in terms of composition some parts may be similar, the account of Hrólfs saga will inevitably be more detailed and structured in a more complex way.
Chapters 1 — 9 of Hálf's saga centre around the lives of the eponymous king’s ancestors and his father, corresponding briefly to Fróða þáttur and Helga þáttur of Hrólfs saga kraka. The story of Hjörleifr inn kvensami (chapters 5-8), the protagonist’s father, forms an independent storyline in the same way as Helga þáttur does; Hjörleifr’s character also has much in common with Helgi’s image and role in the story, which will be discussed further. —

Chapter 10 gives an account of Hálfr’s group of devoted warriors. This kind of information is never provided in Hrólfs saga concisely but is rather dispersed over the narrative. A characterisation of king Hrólf and his retinue is given in chapter 22 of Hrólf's saga kraka in Svipr’s words. Stories about the king’s champions, similar to the anecdotes of Innsteinn and Útsteinn of Hálf's saga, are in Hrólfs saga numerous, long, overloaded with detail and occupy the whole Svipdags þáttur, Bǫðvars þáttur and the sometimes singled out Hjáltar þáttur, compared to one short chapter in Hálf's saga. On the other hand, however, chapter 10 in Hálf's saga and the two large þættir in Hrólfs saga have the same narrative function — they introduce the eponymous kings and their bands of followers. Structurally, in both sagas these parts come after the account of the king’s ancestors but precede the burning hall episode.

Chapters 11 — 13 tell about the fall of king Hálfr and his warriors, in which respect they are parallel to Hrólfs saga’s Skuldarbardagi, though the storyline and imagery are more reminiscent of Hrólfs saga’s previous þáttur, Úppsalafór. This will be looked at in some detail below.

Finally, chapters 14 — 16 tell about the vengeance for king Hálfr, like the last chapter of Hrólfs saga kraka. Chapter 17 forms an independent episode.

It can be seen in this context that the structures of the sagas are more or less parallel. This can be explained partly by the fact that they both follow to an extent a typical formula, but some of the common features are, however, less conventional — for example, the fact that the main character is not introduced before the middle of the narrative.

3. CHARACTERS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

Much more than the structure of the sagas, their characters, the relations between the characters and roles that they play in the story offer many points of resemblance. The protagonists and eponymous heroes of the sagas are a legendary Scandinavian king
and a company of his devoted warriors. All or a majority of them are named, but there is a character who plays the most dramatic part in the defence of his king before the main characters perish at the end of the saga. In Hálfís saga’s case this is Innsteinn who is also the main narrator of Innsteinskviða; in Hrólfss saga, this part is assigned to Bóðvarr bjarki and Hjalti, who are (perhaps not incidentally) the two speakers in Bjarkarimur, the poem behind Hrólfss saga kraka’s culmination.

The king’s father-in-law is the main antagonist in both stories; in both cases, he plots against the king and tries to destroy him by treachery when the king is visiting his house. The king’s mother and the antagonist’s wife, Hildr in mjóva in Hálfís saga and Yrda in Hrólfss saga, is characterised in much more detail, as is usual, in the much longer and more detailed Hrólfss saga kraka. Finally, the king’s father, who in both stories perishes just before the main character is introduced, is the most problematic and even tragic hero in both stories: both Hjörleifr and Helgi are depicted as erring and often unfortunate but at the same time noble characters. The last feature is especially stressed in Hrólfss saga kraka that in general tends to give more spectacular and romance-like versions of all events in comparison with Hálfís saga. It may be too early to draw any weighty conclusions at this stage but even these two examples testify to more extensive fictionalisation and probably to a more pronounced entertaining element in Hrólfss saga, and, by contrast, Hálfís saga’s more traditional way of representing the material.

4. **THE MOTIFS OF FIRE ORDEAL AND FIRE FUNERAL**

The hall-burning episode is central to both sagas, and comparison between the two accounts reveals intersections in the general course of events as well as in minor details. In the beginning, the stories in the two texts go as follows:

1. The king and his warband visit the king’s ominous father-in-law. Ádils in Hrólfss saga is characterised as an evil sorcerer and sacrificer while Ásmundr of Hálfís saga does not have equally pronounced supernatural features.
2. Before they go there, there are prophecies about the outcome: in Hrólfss saga, Óðinn ensures Hrófr’s victory; in Hálfís saga, Innsteinn foresees Hálfur’s fall.
3. In the hall and feast, their enemy makes an attempt to burn them inside (in Hrólfss saga twice, and both times without any success).
4. The heroes break down the wall of the burning house and engage in a battle.
In the following fight, Hálfr and his warriors perish — unlike in the account given by *Hrólfs saga*. Hálfr’s death is the core part of the narrative, culminating in *Innsteinskviða*, which is generally agreed to be the oldest part of the text. Whatever is the sequence in which different parts of the text were composed, Hálfr’s fall is central to the narrative. The importance of the death episode is stressed by an extensive use of poetic quotations, as well as by its place nearly at the finale of the saga, followed only by an account of its aftermath. *Uppsalaðr*, the þættir in *Hrólfs saga kraka* where the similar episode is given, is also stressed both structurally and thematically.204 Structurally, it comes after a row of quite similar episodes centered around Hrólf’s champions, and involves all of them as a warband for the first time. Furthermore, it is the first time we see the eponymous king as an active protagonist who is leading this warband. Thematically, *Uppsalaðr* crowns the idea of consecration and initiation that has been developed in the preceding episodes, and gives this theme an unexpected twist as Hraní’s gift is rejected by Hrólf, which breaks his connection to the pagan world and directly leads to the Skuldarbardagi’s catastrophe. In this respect, *Uppsalaðr* is a key episode in the saga, as *Innsteinskviða* and its accompanying prose is for Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka.

Systematic parallels and points of contact between the death scene in *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka* and *Uppsalaðr* in *Hrólfs saga kraka* draw particular attention to their contrasting features, especially to the fact that their finales are opposite to each other. *Uppsalaðr* virtually repeats Hálfs saga’s account with the exception of the fact that the actual death-scene is absent from *Uppsalaðr*. The matter is made even more complicated by the following þættir of *Hrólfs saga, Skuldarbardagi*, that gives an account of Hleiðargarðr's fall that is surprisingly similar to Hálfr’s death in many aspects; and the other important point of contact between *Hálfs saga* and *Skuldarbardagi* is that both episodes are based on heroic poetry (which makes Olrik suggest that *Innsteinskviða* was influenced by *Bjarkamál; HLD* 170-171).

Leaving for a while the hypothesis of contacts between the continental heroic songs, one could say that *Hrólfs saga* splits the story from *Hálfs saga* into two separate episodes, one about visiting a hostile king’s hall and the fire ordeal undergone there, and the other about the king and his warband’s death. The other possibility is that, vice versa, *Hálfs saga* gives a shorter variant of the story in *Hrólfs saga*.

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204 *Uppsalaðr* was in more detail observed as the culmination of *Hrólfs saga kraka* in the previous chapter. It is also emphasized by poetic quotations that are, overall, rare in the saga.
There are, therefore, two important parallels between the texts:

1. Chapters 11-13 of *Hálfss saga ok hálfssrekka* and chapters 43-44 of *Hróls saga kraka* that are a part of *Uppsalafor*. These are the hall-burning episodes, sharing the structure and a number of important motifs, as demonstrated above. *Hálfss saga* gives a poetic account of the hall-burning and brief prose commentary. *Hróls saga*’s chapters are more complex in terms of plot and are written in prose, though there is one stanza dedicated to breaking away from the fire. This could lead to the suggestion that *Hálfss saga* gives an earlier and more primitive variant of the story, though at this point it can be no more than a suggestion.

2. Chapter thirteen of *Hálfss saga ok hálfssrekka* and the whole last *þáttar* of *Hróls saga kraka* titled *Skuldarbardagi*. These are the two death-scenes. The account of *Hálfss saga* is in verse, *Innsteinskviða*; there is also a brief prose commentary. *Hróls saga* is, as usual, in prose, though it is commonly accepted that *Skuldarbardagi* is based on the lost *Bjarkamál*. However, those stanzas of *Bjarkamál* that would contain parallels to *Innsteinskviða* do not survive in the original, and it is an open question whether the similarities in the sagas can be explained by the older poems’ similarities, or later cross-influence in saga-age Iceland.

There may be various reasons for the later resemblance, one of which is the possible (though impossible to prove) relation between *Innsteinskviða* and *Bjarkamál* suggested by Axel Olrik (HLD 171). Olrik finds the similarities between *Innsteinskviða* and what is left of *Bjarkamál* consistent enough to establish close relationship and interconnection between the traditions. On the one hand, this chapter generally shares Olrik’s hypothesis that the traditions behind *Hálfss saga* and *Hróls saga* are related, and that numerous similarities between the narratives should be explained by one of the narratives’ influence upon the other, and not just by their use of common motifs and topoi shared by heroic poetry and mythical-heroic sagas. On the other hand, even though many of Olrik’s points of departure are reasonable, his conclusions are often problematic. For example, similarities between *Innsteinskviða* and *Bjarkamál* (or rather, in fact, *Hróls saga*’s retelling of *Bjarkamál*), observed e.g. by Olrik, can be attributed not to their relationship but rather to heroic poetry commonplaces. The analysis in Olrik’s monograph is made even more problematic by
the fact that today there is no full text of Bjarkamál, and one has to rely on Hrólfss saga kraka’s account. It is also possible and even very probable that some of the points of resemblance between Innsteinskiða and Skuldarbardagi can be explained by interconnection between the sagas or oral narrative traditions behind them, more recent than the era when Innsteinskiða and Bjarkamál were supposedly composed considering the popularity of both sagas.205

As can be seen from the outline, the main story of Hálfs saga, as well as in the culminating parts of Hrólfss saga (Uppsalafór and Skuldarbardagi), centres upon more or less the same motif. While Ásmundr of Hálfs saga generally succeeds in his plan, Aðils of Hrólfss saga suffers a shameful defeat, but a death episode quite similar to the account of Innsteinskiða immediately follows Hrólf’s exploit at Aðils’ court and is logically connected to it by the Hrani episode. The heroes undergo a Grimnismál-like trial by fire, first in Hrani’s house and then in Aðils’ hall; by enduring it first in an initiatory situation and then in reality, they become consecrated to Óðinn, but king Hrólf breaks this relationship and thus condemns himself and his followers. This story has its own rather rhetorical logic, as was demonstrated in the chapter on Hrólfss saga. The Uppsalafór!Skuldarbardagi account is much more complex, and corresponds much less to what can be called ‘saga style’, than the traditional ‘death by burning’ saga motif present in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka, or any Volsunga saga episode that features the idea of consecration and death.206 The circumstances of Hrólfss saga’s death episode are more complex, and, one could argue, more literary, more ‘written’, than the simpler account of Hálfr’s fall: the idea of battle with fate is symbolically reflected in the name of the antagonist, Queen Skuld, and the title Skuldarbardagi. Nothing like this is ever found in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka. Instead of Hrólfss saga’s two episodes connected by an Odinic framework and the idea of initiation, we have a very clear example of the traditional motif of death by burning in the hall, that also traditionally culminates with the protagonists’ death,207 instead of Hrólfss saga’s more complicated sequence of events.208

205 The first thing that testifies to popularity here is the sheer number of manuscripts in which the two sagas are preserved.
206 E.g. Sigmundr’s sword or Grani given to Sigurðr in Volsunga saga chapters 4 and 19.
208 The motif of hall-burning, with two future avengers who manage to escape the fire, is also found in Hrólfss saga kraka, not in the Uppsala Raid episode but rather in Fróða þáttr.
Let us look in more detail at how the hall-burning plot is delivered in both sagas. In *Hálfs saga* the narrative is, in the first place, poetical. The following stanzas from chapter 12 contain the motifs also found in a similar scene from *Hrólf's saga kraka*:

\[\text{Hrindum heilir hallar bjóri.} \quad \text{Nú taka súlur í sundr þoka.} \quad \text{Æ mun uppi, meðan öld lífr, hálfsrekka fór til hertoga.} \]

\[\text{Hart skulum ganga ok hlóða ekki við, verðr visis lið at vega með sóxum.} \quad \text{Þeir skulu sjálfr á sér bera blóðgar benjar, áðr braki létti.} \]

(HSH 12)

Let us completely break to wall of this house. Now the columns are already unstable. It will always be remembered, while people live, how the *hálfsrekkar* visited the ruler [Ásmundr].

We shall exit the house steadfastly and not retreat; we will fight with short swords, the king's followers. Let them inflict bloody wounds on themselves before the chaos will stop.

It is with these words that Innsteinn urges the warriors to break the wall and fight their enemies instead of being burned inside. After doing so, they enter their last battle with superior enemy forces. In *Hrólf's saga*, the warriors’ escape from the burning hall is also preceded by a speech of the king’s most famous champion, this time Boðvarr bjarki:

\[\text{Boðvarr mælti: ‘Illr dauðdagi er þetta, ef vër skulum hér inni brenna, ok kóra ek heldr at falla fyrir vápnum á sléttum velli, ok ill verða þá ævilok Hrólf's konungs, ef svá skal til ganga. Sè ek nú ekki annat råð vænna en ganga svá fast á, at undan gangi þilin, ok brjó tumst vér svá burt ór húsín, ef þat má leikast, — en þat var þó ekki barnaspil, húsit var randbyggliga smiðat, — ‘ok hafi svá hverr mann fyrir sér, er vér komum út, ok munu þeir þá enn skjótt blotna.’ ‘Þetta er þjóðráð,} \quad \text{segir Hrólf konungr, ‘ok þetta mun oss fullvel duga’.} \]

(HSK 43)

Boðvarr said: ‘It will be a bad death if we burn here, and I would rather choose to die from a weapon in the open field; and it will be an ill end to king Hrólf if that happens. Now I see no other choice than push so hard that the wood panels will go loose; and so we will break out from the house, if this works,’ — and it was no child's play, as the house was built soundly, — ‘and when we get out, each of us will fight one of them, so they will quickly get wet’. ‘This is good advice’, said king Hrólf, ‘and it suits us very well’.
Although the stylistic differences are apparent, a few important parallels can be drawn between this quotation and the preceding poetical fragment from Hálfs saga. Firstly, the two utterances share their function (an appeal to the warband before they break away) and attribution (both are delivered by a character who is clearly the first and best of the champions, Innsteinn and Böðvarr respectively). Secondly, they have similar imagery: both fragments feature a positive image of battle (and probably death in battle) that is contrasted to death in the burning house, and both contain a more or less graphic image of parts of the building being destroyed (‘Nú taka súlur í sundr þoka’ (HSH 12), ‘Sé ek nú ekki annat ráð vænna en ganga svá fast á, at undan gangi þilin, ok brjóturnar vör svá burt ór húsinu, ef þat má leikast…’. (HSK 43), ‘Nú taka þeir þetta til råðs, at þeir hlaupa á þilin svá hart ok heimsliga, at þau brotna í sundr, ok komast svá út’ (HSK 44)). The call to fight after breaking out of the house is also similar, albeit probably more optimistic in Hrólfs saga kraka.

There is another detail that could imply a connection between the two texts. Immediately after the breaking away episode, Hrólfs saga kraka mentions the king’s hawk flying around as if proud of a victory, which is later explained by the fact that he had slain all king Aðils’ hawks:

Ok í þessum harða bardaga kemr haukr Hrólfss konungs fljúgandi ór borginni ok sezt á þxl Hrólfss konungs svá láttandi, svá sem hann eigi miklum sigri at hrósa.
Böðvarr mælti: ‘Svá læt hann nú sem hann hafi nokkurn frama unniit.’
Sá maðr skundaði til eins lofts, sem haukana átt í geymdir, ok þykkir honum undarligt, at haukr Hrólfss konungs er í burtu, en hann fínr dauða alla hauka Aðils konungs.
(HSK 44)

During this hard-fought battle king Hrólf’s hawk came flying around the city, and he landed on the king's shoulder so triumphantly as if he was celebrating a great victory.
Böðvarr said: ‘He looks like he has committed something great.’
The man who was taking care of the hawks ran to the loft, and it seemed strange to him that the king's hawk had flown away, but then he found all the king Aðil's hawks dead.

This episode is reminiscent of a motif in the opening stanza from chapter twelve in Hálfs saga and its accompanying prose. The prose text states at the moment when the house has caught fire:

(HSK 12)

But he woke up first of the hálfsrekkar, and the hall was almost full of smoke. ‘Now the hawks will get sooted’, he said. Then he lay down and fell asleep.
The same image can be seen in the poetical part uttered by Innstein:

\begin{verbatim}
Rýkr um hauka
i höll konungs.
(HSH 12)
\end{verbatim}

The hawks in the king’s hall are getting sooted.

Although the mere presence of the hawk motif in both scenes cannot testify to a connection between them on its own, it qualifies as a supporting argument. The short episode in Hrólfs saga does not seem to contribute to the action in any other way than laying emphasis on Hrólfr’s triumph; it achieves a new meaning, though, if we compare the scene with Hálfss saga ok hálfsrekka’s similar scene where the image of (supposedly) Hálfr’s dead hawks is clearly associated with his fall. If we assume that the audience of Hrólfs saga had the Innsteinn poetry in mind, these two hawk episodes could make an effective contrast, especially considering all the other similarities between the scenes.

The view presented here may be opposed by Hubert Seelow’s argument that, in the quoted passage from Hálfss saga, haukr is a poetic word for ‘warrior’ (he supports this by the usage of the word haukmaðr referring to a brave person later in the text). In Hrólfss saga kraka, on the other hand, the story clearly features an actual hunting hawk. Even though Seelow’s argument sounds reasonable, if the Hrólfs saga episode is a case of reception, the reception could easily be accompanied by a literal interpretation of poetic terms. It is tempting to propose that the much more optimistic account of Hrólfss saga could have been composed as a reaction to the solemn picture of heroic death of Hálfss saga. It is possible to argue that the difference between the hall-burning episodes in Hrólfss saga and Hálfss saga emphasises the line between sagas dependent on heroic tradition, and a later saga type, markedly fictional, dependent on its commonplaces and, last but not least, essentially written in form.

Another objection may be raised against von Seelow’s argument in the light of the Odinic background of the hall-burning scenes, which will be looked at in more detail below, and the general importance of the sacrificial theme in both sagas. Considering the well-studied connection between funerals, especially fire funerals, and rites of sacrifice,\footnote{Munro H. Chadwick, The Cult of Othin: an essay in the ancient religion of the north (London: C. J. Clay and sons, 1882), 22-23.} one could regard the death scene in Hálfss saga as a saga paraphrase of a sacrifice myth. In this case, the presence of hunting hawks makes
perfect sense in the scene since hawks as well as dogs, wolves and horses, according to the evidence we have,\textsuperscript{210} were once birds typically used for Odinic sacrifices as well as in fire funerals:

\textit{…At all events at the great nine-yearly sacrifices [...] animals were offered together with men; these were, in fact, not edible animals such as offered as a meal to Fró and other gods, but precisely the same animals which were usually burned upon the pyre at funerals, namely horses, dogs and hawks}.\textsuperscript{211}

It is important that the slaying of hawks links funerals to sacrifices and thus can be seen as a key element introducing the sacrificial theme. The hawk-scene in \textit{Hrölf\s saga kraka} could, therefore, not only be foiling \textit{Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka}’s account, but also foreshadowing Hrólfr’s confrontation with Hrani. There was no sacrifice, implies the saga. Even the king’s hawk was not sacrificed but, on the contrary, has killed Aðils’ hawks. Hrólfr’s victory is absolute, and he does not depend, at least morally, on the pagan gods. If he has to perish because of this — and the tradition has it that he perished — this will happen afterwards, but the tale of the raid to Uppsala is a tale of triumph, both over actual enemies and over fate or \textit{skuld}, which will still overcome the heroes in the future. This explanation of the hawk-scene in \textit{Hrölf\s saga} is, of course, no more than guesswork, though it fits quite well with Hrólfr’s role as the ideal hero of the heathen era, opposed to the heathen gods.

\textit{Hrölf\s saga}, it must be emphasised, itself has a long oral tradition behind it and therefore cannot be simply regarded as ‘derived’ from \textit{Hálfs saga}. The question is whether certain scenes in \textit{Uppsalaför} could be influenced by \textit{Innsteinskviða} and related poetry preserved in \textit{Hálfs saga}. If the hypothesis is correct and some elements of \textit{Hrölf\s saga kraka} really have been influenced by the tradition connected to \textit{Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka}, \textit{Uppsalaför} and \textit{Skuldarbardagi} should be regarded as a whole, as corresponding to the same episode. \textit{Innsteinskviða} and, therefore, \textit{Hálfs saga}’s culmination are dominated by one prevailing theme — heroic death. \textit{Hrölf\s saga kraka}, before bringing the heroes down, first emphasises the heroic, glorious element of the story. Chapters 11-13 of \textit{Hálfs saga} describe a catastrophe; \textit{Uppsalaför}, on the

\textsuperscript{210} Chadwick, in the course of his monograph, gives commentary to two examples from Saxo Grammaticus, one from Adam of Bremen and one from \textit{Thietmari Chronicom}. See Munro H. Chadwick, \textit{The Cult of Othin: an essay in the ancient religion of the north} (London: C. J. Clay and sons, 1882), 16-18, 24-25.

other hand, is a triumph, and its contrast with Hálfr’s fall must have made the triumph even brighter in the eyes of the audience who knew both traditions. This triumph, however, does lead to a catastrophe that breaks out in Skuldarbardagi. In terms of the plot, Uppsalafr and Skuldarbardagi are connected to each other by the two Hrani episodes, exactly as Óðinn’s image generally connects the ideas of glory and death. Let us then contrast the development of the Odinic theme in Hrólf’s saga kraka with the situation in one of its assumed sources, Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka.

5. The Odinic Theme in Hálfs Saga ok Hálfsrekka

The previous chapter has demonstrated that in Hrólf’s saga kraka the theme of Óðinn’s warriors is developed gradually and implicitly, becoming more evident in Bóðvars þáttr as the action achieves culmination — in the Hrani episodes and immediately after them. Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka, being basically a collection of poetry with accompanying prose, does not really develop any themes by working them into the plot.

The main point of departure is that the Odinic theme is present in the saga rather extensively for such a short text, and is always introduced in the aspect that is central for this research, i.e. in connection with doomed heroic figures. On the surface of it, this may be seen as another point of resemblance with Hrólf’s saga kraka where this theme is, as it has been shown, essential for the main conflict. A problem arises when we look upon the specific quotes from Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka, all of which concern poetical fragments and almost never (with the exception of chapter one) have any parallels in the accompanying prose. The use of Odinic themes in heroic poetry is often conventional and traditional, while in later saga narratives it can be reconsidered and introduced purposefully, as in Hrólf’s saga kraka, which may be regarded as a general tendency in a written text that distances itself from the oral tradition behind it (HLD 213). The poetical evidence should, therefore, be taken with caution.

Poetic tradition and especially Eddic poetry is, of course, very important background for the type of fornaldrarsögur that some scholars define as ‘mythical-heroic sagas’.\(^\text{212}\) Völsunga saga is a relevant example here, but not very typical, since the parallels between saga episodes and fragments of older poems are rarely as clear

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as in the case of Volsunga saga and the Sigurðr poems.

It has been shown that theme of dying by fire is very explicit in Hálfs saga, but in Hrólfss saga kraka’s similar episode, Uppsalafjr, this theme is blurred: the danger of death in the burning hall is just one of the adventures of the protagonists, neither the culmination of the saga nor even something that happens to any of the characters.

Let us now, leaving aside the fire ordeal episodes and their possible Eddic connections, consider the quotations from Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka that assume a connection to the theme of Óðinn’s warriors. One of them, quite similar in spirit to Böðvarr’s resentment in Skuldarbardagi, is found in chapter thirteen where Innsteinn says about Hálfr’s fall:

Eigum Óðni
illt at gjalda,
er hann slikan konung
sigr ðænti.
(HSH 13)

Evil should be done to Óðinn because he took victory from such a king.

A similar sentiment is then echoed by Útstein:

Ek hefi hjarta
hart i brjóstí,
siz mér i æsku
Óðinn framdi.
(HSH 15)

My heart is hard in my breast since Óðinn helped me in my youth.

This stanza is of particular interest for us because Útsteinn connects with Óðinn not Hálfr’s death, as in the previous example, but rather his own fate in which heroic might is tied to misfortune, and blames the god for bestowing this fate on him. Exactly this dichotomy, as we have seen in the examples of Volsunga saga and Hrólfss saga kraka, is characteristic of the Odinic hero theme. If the first quoted half-stanza, though it fits our framework very well, may be an accidental reference to common mythological knowledge about Óðinn causing the death of warriors, the Útsteinn stanza simply implies too much to refer to a general background. In fact it tells a story of Útsteinn receiving from Óðinn the (fatal) gifts of non-human strength and extraordinarily long life, as was articulated by Hubert Seelow regarding this particular stanza:
Schicksal hat ihm ein langes Leben zugedacht und Öðinn schenkte ihm schon in jungen Jahren ein tapferes Herz. Hier wird [...] die übermenschliche Tapferkeit Útsteins [...] mit dem Walten Odins erklärt, doch anders als in den beiden genannten Beispielen, wo Odin für die negative Entwicklung der Dinge verantwortlich gemacht wird, schreibt Útstein hier seine Heldehaftigkeit der ganz besonderen Gunst Odins zu. 213

Fate has bestowed on him a long life, and Óðinn gave him a brave heart at an early age. Útstein’s superhuman strength is explained by Óðinn's influence, and unlike the two other examples [in the poetry of Hálf's saga ok hálfsrekka] where Óðinn is blamed for the negative development of the events, Útstein explains his own heroism by Óðinn's special favour.

The two quoted passages, especially the last one, fit perfectly the framework of the Odinic hero theme, and it can be assumed from the last one that somewhere back in the transmission Útstein (or any other character the last quoted stanza was attributed to) could once have been a protagonist of the same type as Sigmundr and Sigurðr or king Hrólfr’s champions, even if only hints to this are made in the poetical parts of Hálf’s saga ok hálfsrekka.

6. THE PROTAGONIST AND THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

As it has been demonstrated in the chapter on Hrólf’s saga kraka, throughout most of the storyline the eponymous hero is an idealised king-figure, static and even lacking initiative, rather than an active hero. The latter role is taken on by Bǫðvarr, Hjalti, Svipdagr and other champions of Hrólfr’s court. This situation is reminiscent of the chivalric literature model, most significantly the Charlemagne cycle and the Karlamagnús saga, or — typologically — with the Arthurian cycle. King Hálfr, however, is never presented as a king ruling in his hall, with the exception of Tóka þáttr Tókasonar where he is contrasted to Hrólfkr kraki. Hálf’s saga, however, gives us a figure of warband chieftain, not a feudal ruler. Hálfr, pretty much like Sigmundr and Sigurðr is a hero who happens to be a king, the ‘heroic’ aspect of the character being dominant.

The conflict between Hrólf and Aðils, as well as between Hálfr and Ásmundr, may be seen as a late manifestation of a fundamental theme in epic literature and heroic poetry — the confrontation between a ‘settled king’ and an ‘intruder hero’. 214 It is remarkable that both Hrólf, excessively represented exactly as a ‘settled king’, and

Hálfr, represented this way at least in *Tóka þáttr Tókasonar*, clearly play the hero’s part:

The hero arrives at a court, usually of which he has at least heard, accompanied by a band of warriors. This band is rarely large enough to be called an army and never strong enough to overwhelm the settled community by sheer force... The most important fact to be determined is the purpose of the visit, and in this regard there is a good deal of difference between the epics...

A king’s hall, either the one in Uppsala or Hleiðargarðr, is the setting for most of *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and indeed the conflict of virtually every single episode involves a static sovereign (either Hrólfr or Aðils), who reigns in the hall, and a stranger champion, who is a guest or intruder in the same hall, and changes the situation there by his deeds, while the king is regarded as a preserver of stability. The main theme of the episode is that the arriving hero faces some challenges in the king’s hall, like fighting berserkir or monsters (those types of antagonists, as has already been shown in the previous chapter, can be interchangeable in the tradition, especially when the berserkir are substituted by bear figures). Anybody or anything the hero opposes, however, is a part of the static king’s reign, and therefore any conflict described is essentially a conflict between the hero and the king.

The pattern of conflict between settled king and intruder-hero is thus essentially a study of transfer of power or, in other terms, the problem of kingship. In none of the major classical and medieval epics are we presented with a ‘normal’ king, that is, with a king at the peak of his physical prowess, fully in control of his kingdom, with no problems, actual or potential, in his relations with his subjects or within himself. The sovereign may be powerful, with a slight flaw, or be guilty of temporary weakness or aberration, or he may be weak and totally unworthy of his office.

From this point of view Hrólfr kraki’s figure is ambiguous (which, from a critical point of view, could be seen as inconsistency). In most of the saga he is, in Jackson’s terms, a ‘settled king’ and ‘preserver of stability’, and then he acts as an intruder-hero in *Uppsalafór*, with Aðils presented as the flawed sovereign. Before *Uppsalafór*, Hrólfr’s image as a settled ruler is very consistent. He does not ever leave

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216 Svipdagr both in Uppsala and Hleiðargarðr, Bóðvarr and Hjalti in Hleiðargarðr.
217 Bóðvarr and Hjalti in Hleiðargarðr, the entire Hrólfr’s band in Uppsala.
218 Jackson 15.
219 Jackson 13.
Hleiðargarðr, and his main virtues are generosity and justice (and not bravery, though it is implied he is ideal in every respect). Furthermore, he plays the part of the static ruler, as contrasted to a ‘dynamic intruder’ hero, at least thrice. The first episode of this kind is when Svipdagr, who has already visited Aðils’ court, encounters Hrólfr’s berserkir. The second episode, structurally divided into two, is Boðvar and Höttur-Hjalti’s confrontation with the same band of berserkir. Finally, there is the troll-dragon’s attack upon the lands around Hleiðargarðr, and the story of Boðvar and Hjalti’s fighting this dragon. Despite being an undoubtedly positive figure, in all these three cases Hrólfr is portrayed as a passive ruler who needs the active hero’s help, while Aðils is always presented as a negative variant of the same image, a flawed ruler who is challenged by the hero who comes to his hall.

Hrólfr’s image is, therefore, rather contradictory. One could suppose that it is his playing the opposite narrative roles that made some scholars wonder whether the audience was supposed to take Hrólfr as a hero seriously, when in fact he does not very much contribute to the action compared to active heroes like Boðvar and Svipdagr. This contradiction could be solved by the hypothesis that Hrólf's saga kraka initially existed in the oral tradition in a form that was more or less similar to the Charlemagne or Arthurian model, that is, a cycle of narratives dealing with champions at a static and idealised king’s court. The idea of Hrólfr as an active hero could be a result of the saga’s conscious reworking and introduction of new episodes, based on Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka as well as on independent tradition.

7. Conclusion

Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka is an essential piece of evidence for this discussion because it proves that the Odinic hero complex actually works. In Hrólf's saga kraka and Volsunga saga, the theme of Óðinn’s help and betrayal is so well-developed that it would be unrepresentative to base the argumentation just on the analysis of these two very special texts. In particular, Hrólf's saga kraka has become for Jens Peter Schjødt something like a codifier of the Odinic warrior myth that includes initiation, death and a distorted memory of berserkir as Óðinn’s consecrated warriors. Since the Odinic


See in particular Jens Peter Schjødt, ‘Óðinn, Warriors and Death’, in Learning and Understanding...
hero complex is essentially a formalised and simplified form of this semantic system, it is necessary to see if this unity is present in a wider range of sources. Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka is one such source. Formally speaking, it only contains one element of the Ódinic hero plot, namely the Ódinic death, and the secondary motif of the warband of twelve (see 1.2). Furthermore, the Ódinic death is not so clearly defined in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka as it is in Hröf s saga kraka and Völunga saga, where Óðinn is present as an actual character destroying the protagonists, while in Hálfs saga he is only referred to in poetic stanzas. However, a closer look at the stanzas reveals that the motif of Óðinn’s help is also present in Útstein’s poetic narrative about his life, as he suggests that Óðinn has given him bravery and long life. Together with another reference to Óðinn in the poetic stanzas this gives a picture of an Ódinic heroic life that is not too different from the accounts of Hröf s saga kraka and Völunga saga. Óðinn bestowes on Útsteinn the gift of bravery and long life, similar to Starkaðr (see 6.2, 6.4), but then betrays him, which leads to resentment against Óðinn. Innsteinn even expresses the desire to take vengeance on Óðinn for the death of his king, similar both to Bǫðvarr bjarki in Hröf s saga kraka and Starkaðr in Gautreks saga, who also lost his king Víkarr because of Óðinn’s actions (see 6.2 for the comparison of the three characters). In order to reinforce the theme of Óðinn’s fickleness, as well as his sinister nature, the author-compiler of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka even found it appropriate to start the saga with an account of Óðinn’s deceit of Geirhildr and Víkarr’s birth, even though plot-wise it has no connection with the rest of the events. It is possible that the account of Víkarr’s birth in the beginning of the saga was meant not only to remind the audience of Óðinn’s treacherous nature, but also to draw a parallel between Útstein’s situation in the end of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka and Starkaðr mourning the death of Víkarr in Gautreks saga. In either case, it is clear that the author-compiler of Hálfs saga demonstrates a very conscious approach to structuring, which goes far beyond simple transmission of material. Since the analysis of Völunga saga has lead to similar conclusions (2.5), it is safe to suggest that fornaldarsögur are consistently self-reflective in their treatment of Ódinic material, even when it is not evidently reinterpreted from the Christian perspective as it is in Hröf s saga kraka.

The obvious structural parallelism between the finale of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. Judy Quinn (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 137-151.
hálfsrekka and the last two þættir of Hrólfs saga kraka suggests an influence of one of the texts on the other, most probably Hálfs saga influencing Hrólfs saga. More importantly for this discussion, the parallelism between the two hall-burning episodes reinforces the initiatory, presumably Odinic background of this sequence in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka. The liminality of the fire ordeal in Hálfs saga is echoed both by a similar passage’s interpretation in Uppsalafor (Hrólfs saga kraka), where it is essentially an Odinic initiation, and by the transgressive and also clearly Odinic imagery of Grimmismál. Once again, as it was also the case in chapters 2-3, initiatory structures prove to be closely associated with the Odinic hero complex. On the one hand, this supports the argumentation of Schjødt’s Initiation between Two Worlds and Óðinn, Warriors and Death, suggesting that the principles described there are fundamental in Old Icelandic cultural-mythological memory. On the other hand, the analysis in chapters 2-4 brings forth an important factor which was not taken into consideration by Schjødt: the author-compilers’ active and conscious reworking of the material with the Odinic theme in mind.

This is the preliminary conclusion we can make in the basis of analysis undertaken in chapters 2-4. Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka in the last text analysed in this dissertation in whole; in contrast, chapters 5-7 will deal with individual episodes or þættir. So far, we have looked at two texts demonstrating full versions of the Odinic hero complex, and one text with only a part of the complex, following the principles described in 1.2. Hrólfs saga kraka contains the whole complex, including the complete Odinic hero plot and all the secondary motifs. Völsunga saga also contains the complete Odinic hero plot and many of the secondary motifs, although it does not have the motif of twelve warriors or berserkir. Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka contains a rather pronounced Odinic death and references to Odinic help, which arguably qualifies for the complete Odinic hero plot; it also features the ‘twelve warriors’ motif. In the next text, or rather two interconnected texts, the presence of the Odinic hero complex is even more fragmentary than in Hálfs saga, but the structural situation is similar: the Sámsey complex, on which chapter 5 will focus, contains a rather well-pronounced Odinic death, as does Hálfs saga, and it also deals heavily with the ‘twelve warriors or berserkir’ motif. However, this time the twelve berserkir are not the characters themselves, but rather their adversaries. Jens Peter Schjødt has argued that the idea of fighting the berserkir, who are in certain fornaldarsögur a literary reflection of Óðinn’s consecrated warriors, is a reversal of the protagonist’s berserkr
identity: ‘a vague memory of some legendary hero who had a special relationship with Óðinn during an initiation which made him an Odinic hero – an initiation which consisted in ‘killing’ one or more berserkir who would sacrifice him, that is, initiate him to the god by whom he is killed in the end’.222 Chapter 5 will consider this notion in relation to new material.

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CHAPTER 5

THE SÁMSEY COMPLEX

1. DEFINITION OF THE BATTLE OF SÁMSEY COMPLEX

In contrast to the previous discussion, this chapter will consider not a whole saga but rather an episode that is found, in more or less the same form, in two different fornaldarsögur. The story of the battle on Sámsey is found in Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra (also known as Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks) and Qrvar-Odds saga; there is also an account of the same episode in Book VI of Gesta Danorum, as well as a rich ballad tradition which will not be considered here because of its late origin. The episode is an account of a battle between the sworn brothers Hjálmarr and Órvar-Oddr on the one side, and the twelve sons of Arngrímr on the other. Although Hjálmarr is not a prominent character in either of the sagas, this episode, culminating in his death, focuses on him much more than on Órvar- Oddr or the sons of Arngrímr — despite their major parts in the narratives as a whole. Furthermore, both saga versions of the episode are built around a long poem usually referred to as Hjálmar’s Death-Song, as well as several separate stanzas.

The battle on Sámsey episode is one of the clearest manifestations of the ‘battle against a band of berserkir’ theme that has already been discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation, and has been labeled as a secondary motif in the Odinic hero complex (1.2). The following analysis, therefore, will be partly developed from the chapter 3 analysis of Hröf’s saga kraka. A group of motifs, connected by a common theme and a common Odinic protagonist, manifests itself quite similarly in Hröf’s saga kraka and in the texts belonging to the Sámsey complex. It will be shown in the discussion below that Odinic hero imagery works in this episode in pretty much the same way as in the last þáttr of Hröf’s saga kraka, and that this parallel can shed new light on the problematic but frequently suggested connection between berserkir, the theme of berserkir-fighting and Odinic motifs in the sagas.

Another aspect of the episode that will be considered in this chapter is its

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223 For the analysis of the ‘Eddic’ nature of this poem, which seems to be significantly older than the text, see e.g. Lars Lönnroth, ‘Hjálmar’s Death-Song and the delivery of Eddic poetry’, Speculum 46:1 (1971), 10-20.
location on Sámsey in most sources except some ballads. Samsø, called Sámsey in Old Norse sources, is an island in the Danish bay of Kattegat that is associated with pagan worship in a number of Old Norse texts. The question of Sámsey’s supposed heathen ‘background’ is important for the analysis of this episode because it could be an evidence for the connection between the motif and the berserkir-fighting, Odinic imagery and actual Odinic cults, which Jens Peter Schjødt was taking for granted.

His important but speculative theory has already been discussed in connection with Hrólfss saga kraka, and will be addressed throughout the dissertation. The Sámsey complex contains all the elements crucial for Schjødt’s theory and, as it will be demonstrated, is thematically and structurally quite similar to the last þátr of Hrólfss saga kraka, which is crucial to Schjødt’s discussion. In this light, Sámsey’s pagan associations provide valuable material for putting to test the supposed mythological roots of the ‘Odinic hero’ complex in Icelandic sagas. A bit disappointingly perhaps, the existing evidence fails to provide unambiguous arguments for or against the Sámsey battle’s ritual pretext. At first sight, the evidence seems to support Schjødt’s argument, but serious counter-arguments emerge when the historical and literary background of the sources is considered.

2. THE CHOICE OF MATERIAL

This chapter deals with Òrvar-Odds saga and Heiðreks saga, which contain other Odinic material than the Sámsey complex, such as the famous episode with Gestumblindi’s riddles. It has already been clarified that the Odinic theme in general, and even the theme of Óðinn’s disguise as a mortal, is broader than the theme of this research, which only deals with narratives demonstrating the Odinic hero complex (1.2). So, this chapter only looks at an individual episode that is present, with some variations, both in Òrvar-Odds saga and Heiðreks saga. It is worthwhile, therefore, to consider briefly the material in the two sagas that is connected to Óðinn but not featured in this discussion.

224 In this chapter, the Old Norse form Sámsey will be generally used to refer to this island as it is presented in literary tradition, but the modern name Samsø will be used when geographical and historical features of the actual island are brought into discussion. The same concerns Hlésey (modern Læsø).

Apart from the Gestumblindi sequence, an Óðinn-related storyline that is present in the source sagas but is not discussed in this chapter is Ævar-Oddr’s dealings with Rauðgrani, who is said in the saga to be disguised Óðinn. Unlike Gestumblindi’s riddles, the Rauðgrani episode is of some interest for this dissertation: firstly, it is one of the examples of disguised Óðinn trying to conduct the hero’s life and especially his battles; secondly, it gives the element ‘Grani’ in Óðinn’s alias, similar to the Hrosshárs-Grani of Gautreks saga. References to this episode are made where it is relevant for the discussion. It should be noted, however, that Rauðgrani is a part only of the later manuscript tradition of Ævar-Odds saga.226 The Sámsey episode, by contrast, is likely to be one of its oldest components, with a parallel in Gesta Danorum and apparently independent versions in Heiðreks saga and Ævar-Odds saga, most probably recorded independently from oral tradition.227 Furthermore, there is quite strong evidence that the story of the battle on Sámsey was transmitted separately, which can be observed in a large number of later ballads on the subject.228 It seems logical to suggest that the Rauðgrani and Sámsey episodes, although both a part of Ævar-Odds saga (or, more precisely, one of its later variants), are not in fact connected to each other and give no reason to see Oddr as an ‘Odinic hero’ in the context of the whole saga, which is fragmentary in structure and in development of which Rauðgrani plays no crucial role.

3. THE BATTLE ON SÁMSEY COMPLEX IN OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC LITERATURE

By the ‘Battle on Sámsey complex’ I mean the whole Medieval Scandinavian tradition dealing with the battle between Hjálmarr and Angantýr, both the surviving sources and the assumed tradition of transmitting this plot in oral or written form. Heiðreks saga and Ævar-Odds saga are of particular interest for this dissertation because it focuses specifically on how saga narratives are constructed, and they both will be discussed below in more detail.

Besides the two sagas, the most important text for this discussion is an episode

given by Saxo Grammaticus in Book V of *Gesta Danorum* (GD I, 350-353). As it is often the case, Saxo’s narrative is brief, probably a summary of his source. However, the most important elements of the saga account (discussed below) are present: twelve sons of Arngrimus (Arngrím) are listed; Hialmerus and Aruarodd (Hjálmarr and Órvar-Oddr) fight them on Sampso (Samso), in the course of which only Aruarodd survives. The story of the wooing of Ingibjörg is absent from the narrative, and the adversaries apparently meet each other by chance, whereas in both sagas Sámsey is arranged as the place of battle beforehand. The dialog between Hjálmarr and Órvar-Oddr, which is of primary importance for this chapter, is absent from *Gesta Danorum*. The main importance of this episode in Saxo for this thesis is, therefore, that it simply exists and bears witness to early oral transmission of the Sámsey story outside Iceland. We are dealing, therefore, with old and widespread legendary material, popular enough to spawn a rich ballad tradition. Of primary interest for us, however, is the Icelandic version of the story and the treatment of Hjálmarr and Oddr’s images in the two sagas that give an account of the Sámsey battle.

Although there are important variations, the accounts of the Sámsey battle in *Heiðreks saga* and *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* are quite similar. The following key elements are given in both texts in the same order.

Hjálmarr and Órvar-Oddr arrive at Sámsey with two ships to fight Angantýr and his brothers. They both leave the ships for a while, and upon returning find the whole crew killed by the twelve sons of Arngrimr.

In *Hervarar saga*, Hjálmarr and Oddr exchange stanzas before the battle, the most important of which are the ‘Óðinn’s guests’ dialogue: Hjálmarr suggests that he and Oddr are going to ‘become Óðinn’s guests’ the same evening and Oddr answers with a structurally similar stanza where he predicts the same fate for the berserkir. *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* repeats the same two stanzas and then develops the same theme even further, introducing two more stanzas: one is uttered by Angantýr and condemns Hjálmarr and Oddr, and the second is, once again, Oddr’s structurally similar answer. In *Heiðreks saga*, Oddr argues with Hjálmarr’s fatalistic attitude to the forthcoming battle; in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, Oddr with his stanzas stands against the same death imagery, but this time it is associated with both Hjálmarr and Angantýr. Such a situation is perfectly logical in the light of the battle’s finale, where Hjálmarr and Angantýr kill each other and Oddr is the sole survivor. Ironically, the ideological conflict underlying the Sámsey episode is not between the actual enemies,
Hjálmarr/Oddr and the berserkir, but rather between Oddr, who expresses the will to live in the stanzas, and everybody else starting with Hjálmarr. Órvar-Oddr is, of course, exactly the type of character whose primary function is to miraculously survive whatever the story will throw him into: this is determined in the very beginning of Órvar-Odds saga where a sorceress predicts he will live for three hundred years. Various plot devices typical for a late fornaldarsaga, such as an impenetrable silk shirt or the magical arrows, support Oddr’s invulnerability, and indeed it is the magical shirt that saves him this time. The character of Hjálmarr is drastically different and much more traditional. When Oddr gets involved in the conflict between Hjálmarr and Angantýr, he, metaphorically speaking, gets into an earlier fornaldarsaga subgenre, a mythical-heroic narrative instead of his usual sequence of voyages and adventures.

4. Parallels between the Battle on Sámsey complex and Skuldarbardagi (Hrólf’s Saga Kraka)

There are at least three important features that the Sámsey episode and Skuldarbardagi share in common:

1. The ‘Óðinn’s guests’ dialogue;
2. The use of trúa á mátt sinn ok megin formula;
3. The treatment of the theme of berserkir.

4.1. The ‘Óðinn’s guests’ dialogue

This is an argument between two allied and closely related characters who are going to enter a decisive battle: one of them brings forward the ‘Óðinn’s guests’ rhetorical figure (Hjálti, Hjálmarr) and the other deconstructs it (Bǿðvarr Bjarki).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature in common</th>
<th>The Battle on Sámsey complex</th>
<th>Hrólf's saga kraka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The dialogue takes place before or during an important battle where the characters are likely to die.</td>
<td>The dialogue takes place before a battle between the sworn brothers (Hjálmarr and Órvar-Oddr) and the sons of Arngrim.</td>
<td>The dialogue takes place during a battle between the defenders of Hleiðargarðr and Skuld’s army (the Škuldarbardagi).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The two speakers are closely related to each other.</td>
<td>Hjálmarr and Órvar-Oddr are friends and fóstbrœðr (sworn brothers).</td>
<td>In Hrólf's saga kraka, Boðvari saves Hálti (Hóttr) and helps him to become a warrior. (Boðvari) Bjarki and Hálti are traditionally connected because they are the two speakers-protagonists in Bjarkamál.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the speakers expects they will die, and the idea of becoming ‘Óðinn’s guests’ is introduced as a rhetorical figure for dying.</td>
<td>Heiðreks saga has Hjálmarr make this statement in prose, and then a stanza is given below:</td>
<td>Hjalti says:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>þá mælti Hjálmarr til Odds, ‘Sér þú nú, at fallnir eru menn okkrir allir, ok sýnisk mér nú likast, at vör munum allir Óðin gista í kveld í Valhǫllu’.</td>
<td>...En eigi skal nú við hlífast, ef vör skulum í Valhöll gista í kveld, ok víst hfallum vór aldri hitt slik undr fyrir sem hér eru nú, ok hefir oss lengi fyrir boðat þessum tíðum, sem nú eru fram komin.’229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fara halir hraustir af herskipum, tólf menn saman tíralausir; vit munum í aptan Óðin gista tveir fóstbrœðr, en þeir tólf lífa.229</td>
<td>(HSK 104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Note the fatalism of Hálti’s last remark: the situation has been predicted long ago (arguably by Hrani, or by the álfrona to Helgi); it could not be avoided. It is also Hjálmarr’s conviction that death in the forthcoming battle cannot be avoided. Hálti and Hjálmarr both provide the fatalistic thesis, and Órvar-Oddr and Boðvari the antithesis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

229 Then Hjálmarr told Oddr, ‘Do you see that all our men have fallen? I think it is most likely that we will all be Óðinn’s guests in Valhöll tonight.’
In Óðinn’s guests, two sworn brothers, and those twelve shall live.

(…) Strong warriors are leaving the warships, twelve wicked men together; we will be this evening Óðinn’s guests, two sworn brothers, and those twelve shall live.

231 But we should not hold anything back if this night we are going to be guests in Valhöll. Certainly we have never seen such a wonder as what we now have encountered, although he have been warned of this long ago, and so it happened.

230 This evening we will be Óðinn’s guests, two sworn brothers, and they twelve will live.

232 Oddr answered: ‘I do not incline to spend this evening with Óðinn. All those berserkir will be dead before evening, and we two will live’.
Similarly, Ævar-Odds saga gives Oddr’s answer in a briefer poetic form:

En því eino orþe hnektak:
skolo í aptan Óþen gista
tolf berserkir, vit tveir lifa.\(^{233}\)

(Ǫrv. 53-54)

As can be seen from the table, the Sámsey battle episode and Skuldarbardagi show considerable structural parallelism: similar couples of characters in similar situations have very similar dialogues, in which the same mythological imagery is used in the same way. Moreover, there are other points of contact that will be discussed in subchapters below. This parallelism hardly makes it possible to securely argue for one tradition’s influence on the other (in the light of dating, it would be the Sámsey episode on Hrólf’s saga kraka), but it helps to establish a relationship between the ideas that underlie both texts.

4.2. The use of trúa á mátt sinn ok megin formula

The character who speaks against the perspective of becoming ‘Óðinn’s guest’ (Bǫðvarr Bjarki, Ævar-Oddr) is in both cases associated with the trúa á mátt sinn ok megin formula.

(...) I say in answer to your words: they will be Óðinn’s guests this evening, those twelve berserkir, and we two will live.

\(^{233}\) There are many men assembled here against us, mighty and powerful, coming from all directions, so that there is no defence against them; but I do not see Óðinn among them. I suspect, however, that he must be hovering here and plotting against us, this foul and untrue son of Herjan [the Devil]; and I tell you that if I ever spot him I will squeeze him as a despicable little mouse. That poisonous creature will be put to shame if he falls into my hands. Everyone would feel great wrath if he saw his king treated so badly as we now see ours.

\(^{233}\) And I reproach your words: this evening, the twelve berserkir will be Óðinn’s guests, and we two will live.
Oddr did not care about sacrifices and rather trusted in his own might and main… Ingjaldr, at that same time, was a great man for sacrifices. (ǪRV. 6)

It can be seen that in both cases trúa á máttsinn ok megin is directly contrasted to pagan worship and sacrificing. It was demonstrated in Chapter 4 how Hrólf's saga kraka contrasts the protagonists’ belief ‘in one’s own might and main’ to negatively connoted imagery of heathenism and death, of which Óðinn-Hrani is emblematic. No similar conflict is evident in the Sámsey episode, although the sons of Arngrím are not without connections to Odinic imagery (see the subchapter The theme of berserkir below). In the framework of the whole Ǫrvar-Odds saga it can be argued that Oddr is a character who is opposed to fate and death in general (see especially Ǫrv. 10-11).

### 4.3. The theme of berserkir

The themes of berserker-slaying, berserkir in general and, more specifically, a band of twelve berserkir are prominent both in Hrólf's saga kraka and the Samsey complex. The connection is much more complex than the mere presence of berserkir in the episodes, and is presented in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature in common</th>
<th>The Battle on Sámsey complex</th>
<th>Hrólf's saga kraka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The protagonists are presented as</td>
<td>In both saga versions, Hjálmarr kills Angantýr, and Ǫrvar-Oddr kills Angantýr’s</td>
<td>In Skuldarbardagi, Bǫðvarr boasts about slaying Agnarr the berserker: ‘Ek drap Agnar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Aldri vildi Oddr blóta; trúði hann á máttsinn ok megin… Ingjaldr var eigi enn mesti blótmaðr. | En ekki er þess getit, at Hrólfur konungr ok kappar hans hafi nokkurn tíma blótat goð, heldr trúðu þeir á máttsinn ok megin... | But it is not told that king Hrólfur and his champions had ever sacrificed to the gods, they rather had faith in their own might and main. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>slayers of berserkir.</th>
<th>eleven brothers. According to <em>Ǫrvr-Odds saga</em>, Hjálmar and Ǫrvar-Oddr earlier defeated a band of berserkir in Sælund (QRV. 35-36).</th>
<th>berserk ok eigi síðr konungr’ (HSK 102), ‘I killed Agnarr the berserker who was no less a king’. Svipdagr and his brothers, Bǫðvarr and Hjálti have fought bands of berserkir earlier in the narrative.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a tendency to present berserker-slayers as berserkir themselves.</td>
<td>In all saga versions, Hjálmarr recites a stanza that contrasts him and Ǫrvar-Oddr, ‘the foster-brothers’, with the berserkir: Fara halir hraustir af herskipum, tólf menn saman tíralausir; vit munum í aptan Óðin gista tveir fóstbrœðr, en þeir tílf lifa. (Herv.6)</td>
<td>After Bǫðvarr, Hjálti, Svipdagr and Svipdagr’s brothers defeat bands of twelve berserkir, they themselves become a band of this kind.235 In <em>Hrólfs saga kraka</em> and <em>Bjarkarímur</em>, Bǫðvarr Bjarki can transform into a bear, while in <em>Gesta Danorum</em> Biarco is famous for killing a bear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a band of twelve berserkir or warriors, and the list of their names appears in the battle episode as a literary device.</td>
<td>A stanza containing the names of Armgrímr’s sons is recited by Hjálmar in <em>Ǫrvr-Odds saga</em> (QRV. 52). H and U versions of <em>Heiðreks saga</em> give the list of Armgrímr’s sons earlier in the prose, and R lists six of them (Herv.3, 69).</td>
<td>A list of Hrólfr’s twelve followers is given in <em>Skuldarbardagi</em> (HSK 98).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The band of twelve berserkir has Odinic origin.</td>
<td>In H and U versions of <em>Heiðreks saga</em>, the twelve sons of Armgrímr are Óðinn’s descendants of the fourth Hrólfr kraki’s band of twelve is Óðinn’s creation, because the rest of Hrólfr’s followers cannot endure his tests with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

generation: their mother is Eyfura, daughter of Svafrlami the son of Óðinn (Herv.2).

fire, cold and hunger (HSK 75-78).

The tendency to describe berserkir-slayers as berserkr is very much in the line of Jens Peter Schjødt’s discussion of a fight with berserkir as an (Odinic) ritual, where he mostly used the evidence of Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana and Hrólfs saga kraka.\textsuperscript{236} As was mentioned in connection with Hrólfs saga kraka, this view is problematic for two reasons: firstly, it relies on the image of berserkir as warriors consecrated to Óðinn, which is problematic itself, and secondly, it does not take into account that the meaning of berserkr had become rather broad by the time most fornaldarsögur were written.

It can be seen from the examples above that the berserkir are indeed presented as supernatural figures, often with Odinic connections, and the importance of fighting them receives structural emphasis in the sagas, even though it cannot be said for sure whether the motif of such battle has a ritual pretext or not.

5. ÓDINN AND SÁMSEY

It has been demonstrated that the Sámsey episode, especially according to saga evidence, fits very well Jens Peter Schjødt’s theory about ritual and specifically the Odinic pre-text of the ‘battle with a band of berserkir’ literary theme. This storyline, both in Òrvar-Odds saga and in Heiðreks saga, contains the same elements that were essential for his analysis of Hrólfs saga kraka, as shown in the table.

The most famous example here is Lokasenna 24, where Óðinn is associated with Sámsey as a place where he practised seiðr. Such a connection, however, will stay speculative, especially given Samsø’s central location in Kattegat: an island that is important for navigation is quite likely to feature in many independent traditions. Arguments may be made both for and against Samsø’s supposed Odinic connections; the most noteworthy supporting argument is the generally accepted interpretation of Onsbjærg, now a village on Samsø in Onsbjærg Sogn, as ‘Óðinn’s mountain’.\textsuperscript{237} On

\textsuperscript{236} Jens Peter Schjødt, ‘Óðinn, Warriors and Death’, Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. Judy Quinn (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 145.

\textsuperscript{237} Samsøs stednavne, ed. Stednavneudvalget (København: 1 Kommission Hos G.E.C.Gad, 1922), 48.
the other hand, place-names derived from Óðinn’s name (or names) are quite widespread in Scandinavia and there may be nothing significant in Onsbjerg’s location on Samsø. Eric Christiansen, for example, sees Onsbjerg as one of the Óðinn place-names in Denmark that supposedly have been centers of royal power and makes a connection between kingly power and Odinic cults, in which context Onsbjerg is not very different from, say, Odense, Oddense, Vojens, Onsved and Onsild, to mention Danish place-names only. If Christiansen’s explanation is correct, the connection between Onsbjerg and Lokasenna’s evidence becomes significantly weaker.

More uncertainties emerge if we consider Lokasenna 24 from the literary point of view. In the Poetic Edda, Danish place-names are not very common, and their usage is limited to a few texts. There is also a tendency to connect activities of the gods with these locations. The Kommentar zu der Liedern der Edda, along with Lokasenna 24, quotes Hárbarðsljóð 37, which is particularly similar to Lokasenna 24 in that it sets Þórr’s fight with ‘brides of berserkir’ on another Danish island Hlésey (modern Læsø, situated also in the Kattegat, as well as Samso, but further to the north). In this context, the mention of Sámsey/Samsø may be seen as a literary device of connecting mythological characters with real Danish locations. If Lokasenna here follows the same pattern as Hárbarðsljóð, it is natural to conclude that Lokasenna 24 does not provide sound reasons to connect Sámsey with Óðinn worship or the Odinic myth. Sámsey (and not any other Danish island) could be mentioned there either because it was associated with Óðinn or simply because it was a well-recognised place-name.

Further evidence of Sámsey being regarded a worship place, definitely heathen if not necessarily Odinic, is Ragnars saga loðbrókar’s mention of a trémaðr (‘wooden man’) located on the island. This trémaðr was ‘worshipped with sacrifices, in the south of Sámsey, to bring about the deaths of men’:

þá vark blótinn
 til bana mönnnum
 í Sámseyju
 sunnanverðri.

This connects Sámsey at least with pagan worship in general, though attempts can be made to connect Sámsey’s ‘wooden man’ to Óðinn worship — mostly on the basis of

 Hávamál 49’s idea is giving clothes to such ‘wooden men’ that are echoed by the trémaðr’s complains about his nakedness in Ragnars saga. The trémenn of Hávamál are also been interpreted as idols. This supposed connection between the trémenn and Óðinn, however, is even more speculative than in the case of Lokasenna, which at least connects Sámsey with Óðinn’s own actions. In the case of Hávamál and Ragnars saga, all a scholar has is the presence of the same motif (the naked or clothed trémaðr) in two texts, one of which is connected with Óðinn and the other set on Sámsey. The idea of bana mōnumum could be theoretically connected with Óðinn’s function as a death-god, but again, this assumption is too obscure and impossible to prove.

It can be seen that both cultic connections, considered above, of Sámsey are ambiguous. On the one hand, they make it possible to suggest that the setting of the battle with Angantýr on this particular island could be connected with the traditional ‘Odinism’ of this location. On the other hand, there are sound arguments against this. We will move to the next section bearing the Sámsey evidence in mind.

6. THE DEATH OF INGIBJÖRG

‘The voluntary death of the widow or betrothed of a king or a hero who has fallen in battle is found in many heroic stories and also in the legendary sagas, particularly in the case of heroes associated with Odin’, remarks Hilda Ellis Davidson concerning the story of Gunnhild’s death from Book I of Gesta Danorum, and supports this by a reference to Ibn Fadlan’s account of a young woman’s sacrifice (GD Fisher II, 33). Although Davidson does not mention the Hjálmarr of the Iceladic sagas, it could be tempting to connect her thesis with the story of Hjálmarr and Ingibjörg, who either died of grief (Ǫrvar-Odds saga) or committed suicide (Heiðreks saga) upon the news of Hjálmarr’s death. As has been shown above, Hjálmarr, although never dealing with Óðinn directly, fits very well the Odinic hero paradigm. However, Davidson’s assumption seems problematic on a few levels. On the one hand, the motif of a beloved woman’s suicide does not seem particularly associated with Odinic heroes in the sagas. The Brynhildr of Sigurðarkvöða in skamma (and, therefore, Völsunga saga) is probably the only one to come to mind immediately, and

she seems to be a good example, given the connection with the fire funeral suggested by Davidson. However, as has been shown in detail by Theodore Andersson, the case of Brynhildr is complicated; the scholar brings up convincing evidence, for example, that Brynhildr’s suicide is not a traditional motif, and was probably modelled on the death of Virgil’s Dido.²⁴⁰ And although this ‘idiosyncratic deviation from the common version’ found its way to Völsunga saga, it is well-known how dependent the author of Völsunga saga was on his source material in terms of plot development. It is hardly possible, therefore, that Brynhildr’s suicide is connected in any way with Sigurðr’s supposed Odinic nature, bearing in mind especially that, from what we observed in Chapter 2, most of the Odinic motifs connected with Sigurðr are most likely the author-compiler’s innovative treatment of the theme rather than a traditional feature of the character.

The ‘suicide of a dead warrior’s beloved’ motif is widely represented in heroic tradition (as Hilda Ellis Davidson notes herself), and the critical majority of cases have nothing to do with Odinic imagery. Most similarly to Ævar-Odds saga, Aude of La Chanson de Roland collapses and dies from grief upon hearing of Roland’s death. Girl kills herself after lover’s death is T81.6 in Stith Thompson’s motif-index; it is attested in traditions from all over the world.²⁴¹ In the light of this, despite Davidson’s argument, it is hardly possible to build Ingibjørg’s death into the Odinic hero framework.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has observed the parallels between Skuldarbardagi, the last þáttur of Hróðs saga kraka, and the battle on Sámsey episode in Ævar-Odds saga and Heiðreks saga. It was found that the dichotomy of heroic fatalism and will to live is presented in the three texts in a strikingly similar way, involving the same type of double protagonist (Hjálmar — Ævar-Oddr and Hjalti — Bǫðvarr), very similar dialogue with recurring imagery and the same plot situation, involving the berserkir-fighting theme. In both cases, the myth of Valhöll and Odinic imagery had the same functions and connotations, although the Odinic theme is more prominent in Hróðs

²⁴¹ Stith Thompson, Motif-index of folk-literature, 5 vols (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955), v, 346.
saga kraka than in the Sámsey complex.

The chapter also looked at possible external evidence for the Sámsey episode’s Odinic connections to find whether there is immediate mythological tradition behind the Sámsey complex (and therefore, apparently, Skuldarbardagi) or not. The evidence seems to be unconvincing, especially the supposed connection of T81.6 motif with ‘Óðinn-heroes’. As was the case with Volsunga saga (Chapter 2 of this thesis), the Odinic hero theme appears, both in Heiðreks saga and in Œrvar-Odds saga, to be a late saga-age Icelandic construct. This assumption, however, will be tested on further material.
CHAPTER 6
GAUTREKS SAGA

1. INTERPRETATION OF THE ODINIC THEME IN GAUTREKS SAGA

When discussing the Odinic hero theme in the sagas, there are probably only two ways to consider Gautreks saga and the famous episode of Vikarr’s sacrifice to Óðinn. The first one would be to start the discussion with this episode and define it as a typical example of the ‘Óðinn — mortal warrior’ relationship. This episode is still often referred to in this context; in this respect, not much has changed since Chadwick who suggested that Starkaðr ‘was a typical worshipper of Óthin’.

The other way, taken by this dissertation, is to postpone the discussion of Vikarr and Starkaðr until almost the very end of the discussion exactly for the reason that it has been given such significance. When arranging the material of this dissertation in a particular order, the decision was made to start with the texts where the theme of the relationship between Óðinn and a mortal warrior is the main theme of the narrative, and the conflict is clear-cut. As it will be seen, this is not the case with Gautreks saga, a text with a complicated episodic structure, obscure editing history and, most importantly for this thesis, a complicated treatment of mythological tradition behind it which attracted the attention of Dumézil, his followers and critics.

No attempt has been or will be made here to enter the vast field of Dumézilean scholarship as the theme of this thesis lies in the field of literary, rather than mythological, criticism. As contrasted to Dumézilean mythocritical studies, the scholarship on Gautreks saga itself, as a product of the Icelandic Middle Ages, is not an old phenomenon. This study will focus on a very specific topic, the use of the ‘Odinic hero’ structure in Vikars þátrr, the second þátrr of the saga included only in the second, presumably younger version of the text.242

Given the abundant scholarship on the Starkaðr tradition, it will be useful to articulate what this chapter does not seek to cover:

- The image of Starkaðr in the whole vast body of material dealing with this

character — or, to borrow Jan de Vries’ term, die Starkadsage.243 Although I will address a number of works in this field, most importantly Georges Dumézil’s, it is the saga Starkaðr and his role in Víkarr’s career that is the focus of this discussion. Víkarr’s story is paralleled in Book VI of Gesta Danorum, and other evidence will be brought in as well, but its role is merely supportive.

- The analysis of Gautreks saga as a whole in any of its two variants, since the material relevant to the theme of the thesis is found only in Víkars þáttir. This chapter relies, with some reservations, on Dennis Cronan’s recent analysis that also provides an overview of the earlier scholarship.244 Cronan’s is one of the first systematic studies of the text as a whole, except for Elizabeth Ashman Rowe’s research, and provides a close reading of all the three þættir.

2. The Odinic hero complex in Víkars þáttir

Víkars þáttir and chapter 1 of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekkja contain the complete Odinic hero plot. The Odinic death is, obviously, Starkaðr’s sacrifice of Víkarr. The Odinic help is present in two episodes: first in Hálfs saga, when Óðinn helps Geirhildr win the brewing contest, and then in Víkars þáttir when Óðinn bestows his many gifts on Starkaðr. Víkars þáttir also features a warband of twelve which, as it will be seen, shares much in common with the warbands in Hrölf's saga kraka and Hálfs saga ok


For an early attempt to see Starkaðr as a uniform character in a variety of sources see Jan de Vries, ‘Die Starkadsage’, Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift 36 (1955), 281–97.


hálfsrekka. It is clear, therefore, that Vikars þátr qualifies for the analysis. However, in order to get a better grasp of common features in texts from chapters 2-6, the following discussion will consider the important parallels between the narratives independently from the Odinic hero complex, as it has routinely been done throughout chapters 3-5.

When looking back at the sources analysed in the previous chapters, one can see at least six common elements present in Vikars þátr and chapter 1 of Hálfs saga on the one side, and the previously analysed material on the other side. The meaning of these motifs in the context of the saga may be problematic and will be discussed later, but the mere presence of them in the text, where they presumably build a system, will be a point of departure. Number one is found in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka, the rest of material in the younger Gautreks saga.245

1. **Vikarr’s parentage.** Although this episode in absent from Gautreks saga itself, chapter 1 of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka has Óðinn involved in the circumstances of Vikarr’s birth and his parents’ marriage. At the same time, he also determines Vikarr’s later death in an Odinic sacrifice that takes place in Gautreks saga. As has been shown in chapter 2, Óðinn’s ambivalent connection both with the birth and death of a protagonist underlies the discourse of Volsunga saga. Although the episode is found in a text different from Gautreks saga, it is clearly a part of the Vikarr narrative in saga tradition.

2. **Structures of initiation.** Vikarr is to Starkaðr, roughly, what Bœðvarr is to Hjálti and Sigmundr to Sinfjórtli — he initiates him into being a warrior. In the case of Hrólfs saga, the similarity with the Vikarr-Starkaðr episode is of special importance because, as in Hrólfs saga, the initiation precedes the

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245 It could be tempting to include in the list the episode from Gesta Danorum that describes Starkaðr's fight with a band of berserkir, especially considering how important a part of the Odinic hero complex, i.e. the berserkir-fighting motif, has proved to be in Hrólfs saga kraka and the Battle of Sámsey complex presented in Ævar-Ódds saga and Heiðreks saga. This episode is, however, left out of the discussion for three reasons. Firstly, the chapter, as its title suggests, is centred on the Vikarr narrative, and to consider all the extensive and complicated Starkaðr material that is not connected to the story of Vikarr would be a transgression of the aims of this study. Secondly, not only is it from Gesta Danorum rather than an Icelandic saga but also from an episode that has no parallel in any preserved saga text, which makes the supposed connection to Gautreks saga even weaker. Finally, as will be seen, the Odinic hero narrative simply does not function outside the story of Vikarr as the saga presents it. A thorough investigation of Saxo's prose is required to show whether Starkaðr's fight with the berserkir, a widespread motif per se, can be worked into this dissertation's argument or not; the dissertation itself, building its discussion almost entirely on the analysis of saga text, lacks the methodological scope to answer this question.

An encounter between Starkaðr and twelve berserkir is mentioned in Gautreks saga (GS 25), but no fight takes place, and it is hard to say whether the presence of the band is significant or accidental.
creation of the king’s warband.

3. **The twelve champions.** Like Hálf (Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka) or Hrólf (Hrólf saga kraka), Vikarr becomes a leader of a warband. As has been shown in chapter 4, the band of twelve can function as an adversary figure while maintaining its connection to the myth of Valhöll; however, the examples of **Hrólf saga** and **Hálfs saga** are more immediate parallels to the use of the motif in Gautreks saga.

4. **The leader.** The warband has a prominent leader on whom the narrative tends to be focalised — in Vikarr’s case this is Starkadr, in Hálf’s case Innstein, in Hrólf’s case Bôðvarr bjarki. Interestingly, all the three figures are associated with the heroic verse that is a part of the corresponding sagas: Innsteinn is the speaker in Innsteinskviða, Bôðvarr bjarki, together with Hjálti, recites Bjarkamál (in Hrólf saga kraka, a prose paraphrase of Bjarkamál is given), and, finally, Vikarsbalkr is attributed to Starkadr. All three poems describe the death of a great king (Hrólf kraki, Hálf or Vikarr) and contain the motif of blame to Óðinn. The crucial contrast between the theme of fidelity, which is central for Innsteinskviða and Bjarkamál, and Starkadr’s unwilling betrayal, is of key importance for the understanding of the þáttr, and can be also seen as a point of connection between the figures exactly because the contrast between Innstein’s and Bôðvarr’s loyalty and Starkadr’s betrayal is so clear-cut, and the themes of loyalty and betrayal are presented with the same dramatic effect in the poetry as its main theme. It can be argued that the texts examine the same problem approaching it from opposite sides.

- **Loyalty in Skuldarbardagi (the last þáttr of Hrólf saga kraka).** In respect of Hrólf saga kraka, the prose retelling of Bjarkamál in chapters 50 and 51 is for this discussion of primary importance for two reasons: firstly, we are looking at saga discourse rather than the whole corpus of texts that belong to the Hrólf kraki tradition; secondly, Bjarkamál does not survive, and the use of Saxo’s paraphrase is attended by additional difficulties.

   Having said that, the theme of loyalty seems to be no less central to the prose of Skuldarbardagi than it is to Bjarkamál as we know it from Gesta Danorum and surviving verses. Firstly, most of the text of the chapters is made up by the dialogue between Bôðvarr and
Hjálti, which is also the structural basis of Bjarkamál, and their dialogue is essentially a narrative of their life at Hrólfur’s court. The dialogic narrative suggests that serving Hrólfur was the meaning of their life, and death for him in Skuldarbardagi is the only acceptable end.

- In Innsteinskviða the same retrospective narrative is presented in a similar way, more dramatically perhaps in that it takes place not before the king’s death but immediately after it. Its form is a monologue rather than a dialogue, as in Bjarkamál, but the imagery is similar — Innsteinn tells how he had served Hálfur immediately before his own death (HSH 13).

    Innsteinskviða and Bjarkamál share the same elegiac tone due to apparent genre similarities, both belonging to the type of heroic ‘death poems’ that share mode and imagery (such as the ‘laughter of death’ in the statement that ‘Hálfr konungr hlæjandi dó’) with such texts as Krákumál and Atlakviða. At the same time, it has been suggested by Axel Olrik that there is an immediate connection between the two poems: the Danish scholar finds the similarities between Innsteinskviða and what is left of Bjarkamál consistent enough to establish a close relationship and interconnection between the traditions (HLD 171). Interrelated or not, Innsteinskviða and Bjarkamál stand out from similar poetic works due to their specific mode in which a follower speaks about his king (and not, as it is more usual, the hero about his own life, as happens in Krákumál or Hjálmarr’s Death-Song). Surprisingly perhaps, the same attitude is shared by the Vikarsbalkr, although its background is strikingly different, perhaps the opposite to Bjarkamál and Innsteinskviða.

5. Blaming the gods. As was mentioned, in all the three cases the leader figure (Þórr, Innsteinn and Starkaðr) blames Óðinn for the death of their king (Hrólfur kraki, Hálfr and Vikarr, respectively). While being in the first place a rhetorical figure for grief over a warrior’s death, in these three cases its use qualifies as a topos because it appears in the same situation: the warband

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leader figure delivers a speech about their king’s defeat; Hrólfss saga and Hálfs saga also share with each other the situation of battle. On the generic-structural level, the use of the rhetorical figure of blaming Óðinn is also similar: in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka and in Gautreks saga it belongs to a quotation from pieces of heroic poetry attributed to the speaker, Innsteinskviða and Vikarsbalkr, and in Hrólfss saga kraka to a clear paraphrase of Bjárkamál, where [Bøðvarr] bjarki is the speaker, although the Bjárkamál stanza is not quoted itself (and, sadly, does not survive outside this paraphrase and Saxo’s figurative Latin paraphrase).

- We have already seen that in Vikarsbalkr, Starkaðr has not just to witness the death of his king, but he is personally responsible for it. It is clear from the text that Óðinn, disguised as Hrosshárs-Grani, brings the situation along; Starkaðr refers to the sacrifice without mentioning Óðinn directly and also refers to Þórr’s curses:

> Þess eyrendis,
> at Þórr um skóp
> mér niðings nafn,
> nauð marg mæl;
> hlaut ek óhróðig
> illt at vinna.

Skylda ek Vikar
i víði hávum
Geirþjófsbana
góðum of signa;
lagða ek geiri
grant til hjarta,
þat er mér harmast
handaverka.
(GS 25)

Then it was that Þórr created for me a wicked name, all kinds of misfortunes. I was forced, infamous, to commit villainous acts.
I had to consign Vikarr, the bane of Geirthjófr, to the gods on the high tree; I drove the spear through his heart; that was my most hateful deed (deed of my hands).

Although Óðinn is not blamed directly in the stanzas, he is mentioned earlier under his alias Hrosshárs-Grani, and the plural ‘gods’ in the second stanza, as noted by Georges Dumézil, should imply his involvement in the events (Stakes 27-29). In any case, the idea that Óðinn is guilty of Vikarr’s death is recurrent in Hálfs saga and Gautreks saga, and this parallel between the texts cannot be ignored.

6. The catastrophe. The role of Starkaðr left aside, Vikarr’s end is quite similar
the death of most of the Völsungs, which Óðinn tends to arrange. In Hrólfs saga kraka, Óðinn also stands behind the defeat of Hleiðargarðr culminating in the death of Hrólfr kraki and his twelve followers; although in Gautreks saga the fate of the warband after Vikarr’s death is unknown, it is clear that Vikarr’s end also means the end of everything that was connected with him. Neither of the parallels involve a literal sacrifice to Óðinn, as Gautreks saga does, but his involvement is always clearly articulated.

The mere presence of each of the listed motifs individually could not testify to any parallels because of how easily individual motifs are transmitted. However, the presence of five elements in a row bears, in the light of analysis from the previous chapters, almost indisputable witness to their interconnection, as also observed in the other texts. Even more noteworthy is the fact that, considered together, the five motifs that have parallels with the other Óðinn-hero narratives correspond to all the important events of the Vikarr narrative: the king is born, he gets established as a war leader, and eventually is driven to a catastrophe. After Vikarr’s death, the story does not get any further because it is centered around him. Chronologically and structurally, the events are limited to Vikarr’s life, and it is Vikarr (and not Starkaðr) whose fate determines the narrative.

3. ÓDINN AND ÞÓRR’S CONNECTION TO STARKARDR

Dean Miller, in his typically Dumézílean study, brings the dual opposition of Óðinn and Þórr to a fundamental level. Looking at various types of king-warrior relationships, Miller divides the Old Norse warrior figures into four types. These are based, firstly, on the nature of the warrior character himself (‘the axis of control’), and, secondly, on the warrior’s attitude towards the king figure (‘the axis of support’). The character’s position on the axis of control shows whether he leans towards rationality or culture or, on the contrary, towards irrationality and nature. Further, the axis of support indicates whether the character opposes himself to figures of power (negative pole) or is supportive towards them (positive pole). Miller puts the Starkaðr type on the lower side of the ‘axis of control’, associated with nature and irrationality, and on the positive side of the ‘axis of support’.
In Miller’s system, the ‘servant-hero’ Starkaðr falls towards the positive pole of the axis of support but on the negative pole of the axis of control, which shows ‘the dominance of the irrational or, more, of nature as opposed to culture’. This last feature is most clearly articulated, according to Miller, in Book VI of *Gesta Danorum* where Starkaðr criticises the unnatural luxury of king Ingelus’ courtly life. Starkaðr’s monstrous, to an extent berserkr-like nature also opposes Starkaðr to the idealised Þórr-warrior type, to whom Starkaðr is said to be ‘as negative to positive’. It can be concluded from Miller’s argumentation that it is Starkaðr’s imminent irrationality that subverts his loyalty to the king (or even kings, considering the stories of both Olo and Vikarr), and turns Starkaðr into the tragic traitor figure as contrasted to the ideal

248 Miller 146.
249 Miller 146.
king’s champion a Þórr-warrior is. Starkaðr’s connection — and, inseparably, confrontation — with Þórr is here for Miller of special significance: Starkaðr is, following his logic, also a ‘Þórr-warrior’, i.e. a loyal follower, but a flawed one. Finally, the diagram assumes affiliations between the figures not only vertically and horizontally, but diagonally as well: the berserkr and Þórr-warrior are presented as unquestioning in either opposition to the king or loyalty to him, and tending to die early, either in service or as an adversary, meanwhile Egill and Starkaðr are critical towards power figures (like Eiríkr blöðøx and Ingelus) and live to old age — in Starkaðr’s case supernaturally long. While not being the first scholar to draw parallels between Egill and Starkaðr, Miller puts their similarities in a completely different context.²⁵⁰

It is noteworthy that Miller, while associating the support-positive right side of the pole with Þórr, consistently describes both figures on the left pole of the axis of support as ‘Odinic’. This is perfectly logical in the light of well-studied Odinic connections of both Egill Skallagrímson and berserkr, suggested first and foremost by direct references to Óðinn in Egils saga and Ynglinga saga.²⁵¹ More problematic in this respect is that it is a commonplace in Egils saga scholarship that Egill himself, as well as his ancestors and most importantly his grandfather Kveldúlf, have distinctive bestial features that make them similar to berserkr — or, more precisely, to úlfhéðnar — because of Kveldúlf’s assumed ability to shapeshift into a wolf.²⁵² Miller, however, places Egill on the rational-cultural pole of the control axis because of his ‘high degree of intellect and manipulative skill’, opposing him to the chthonic and irrational berserkr despite the fact that no such opposition is apparent in the source material.²⁵³ However, since the cultural-natural opposition is an essential part of the researcher’s approach, it has to be accepted as a hypothesis to consider the theory as a


whole.

Another difficulty with Miller’s scheme is the whole Thorr-warrior type. As the researcher states himself, it is not based on any particular characters in Old Norse literature except for Þórolfr in Egils saga, which is mostly motivated by the contrast with Egill. Miller justifies his decision by putting it into a wider context:

[Although] the Thorr-warrior is a construction devised in and taken from Egil’s saga... I have no doubt that the type is widely seen, and individualised, for example, as a king’s standard-bearer, always a dangerous occupation or, in sea fights, the king’s forecastle man, who is often the same man as the standard-bearer. This standard-bearer/forecastle man is the synecdochical image of the king or chieftain standing before the warrior mass and must obviously be related to the king’s champion, seen in other I-E contexts.\(^{254}\)

While the type described above is undoubtedly well-attested in Old Norse as well as Indo-European tradition, a number of questions becomes necessary here, most importantly whether the connections with Þórr are consistent in the Old Norse version of this character. Þórolfr’s name is hardly a weighty argument here because of the high frequency of the ‘Þór-’ element in personal names. The level of generalization we see in Miller’s scheme is, of course, acceptable for a widely comparative study, while reminding us of the approach’s inevitable limitations. It should be stated explicitly here that, for Miller, as well as for Dumézil, Þórr is primarily a second-function militant deity, and the definition of a king’s loyal follower as a ‘Þórr-warrior’ relies heavily on this understanding. Dealing with Starkaðr’s case, however, Miller addresses concrete saga material like Þórr’s enmity towards Starkaðr in Gautreks saga. Miller’s argumentation as a whole, in fact, relies on the Dumezilean mythocritical model, which no attempt will be made here to test or evaluate. At the same time, it is clear that the methodology of Dumezillean criticism, including Miller’s work, is drastically different from the approach employed in this dissertation. Miller’s findings will, therefore, be used only as supporting evidence here, unless supported by other evidence.

Although the Óðinn-Þórr opposition is never articulated directly in relation to the scheme, Miller consistently stresses Odinic features in the Egill and berserkr types, as contrasted to the right side of the diagram which appears to be Þórr-dominated. This aspect of the system seems to reflect the ‘tension... between the

obedient warrior type ‘of Thorr’ and the disruptive type ‘of Odhinn [sic]’ that the scholar finds elsewhere in his material. From this point of view, Starkaðr’s figure is especially controversial, given the confrontation between the two gods concerning Starkaðr’s fate in Gautreks saga, and Óðinn’s plan to make Starkaðr betray Vikarr. The controversial interconnection of loyalty and betrayal, characteristic of Starkaðr’s character, Miller explains by the fact that Starkaðr’s service ‘seems to be cast in an Odhinnic mold [sic]’, unlike the idealised loyal service of the Þórr-warrior. At the same time, Starkaðr shares with Þórr-warrior the nature of the servant-hero, as contrasted to the berserkr and Egill types that Miller describes as explicitly Odinic.

Despite some of the questionable features that are described above, Miller’s theory provides a clear picture of the ambivalence that is always a part of Starkaðr’s character in the tradition. The connection of Starkaðr with the figures of Óðinn and Þórr are primarily the subject of debate, with some scholars trying to define Starkaðr as an Óðinn-hero and the others as a Þórr-hero. One could perceive that, when Georges Dumézil reconsidered his understanding of Starkaðr from a purely second-function ‘héros de Thor’ to ‘héros odinique’, the following criticism got separated between his two ideas (Destiny 83, 85-86, Stakes 12-19). It is understandable in this light that many scholars, like Miller, have tried to reconcile the contradictions of Starkaðr and tried to show how his image balances more than one identity. Most recently, William Layher proposed a synchretic understanding of Starkaðr’s character. The scholar assumes that, although the sources from before the saga age are not consistent with each other, in Gautreks saga Þórr and Óðinn act like metaphysical parents towards Starkaðr, creating his controversial, to an extent monstrous, heroic identity:

In the end, the oppositions do not cancel each other out. Instead, they work to transform Starkadr [sic] into a new, hybrid creature that is riven by irresolvable – even arbitrary – contradictions. Thus the saga author responds to longstanding inconsistencies in the Starkadr tradition by offering up a tidy explanation for that which had previously resisted easy explication. This episode in Gautreks saga asserts that Starkadr’s many transgressions of ethical, heroic, and somatic boundaries were not the fault of his bloodline or his lineage, that is, not caused by natural means, but were rather the result of an ill-fated and contentious ‘second birth’ at the hands of the gods.

Layher concludes that, since ‘the bloodline of the offspring is blessed by the seed of the Norse god (here it is Óðinn), while from the Other (i.e., Þórr) comes strength and

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256 Miller 146.
cunning, but also treachery, unpredictability', the very nature of Starkaðr is determined by the interaction of conflicting deities that shape his fate. A very similar picture can be seen in Miller’s scheme, achieved by methodologically very different research but also explaining Starkaðr’s tragical contradictions by the fact that the service of a ‘Þórr-warrior’ is cast in an ‘Odinic mold’.

As the interest in *fornaldarsögur* arose in the end of the last century, hardly any part of *Gautreks saga* attracted more scholarly attention than the assembly of the gods where Ôðinn and Þórr define the fate of Starkaðr — or Ôðinn does that alone, depending on the interpretation. The *þing* of the gods is the key episode that determines the action of the whole *Vikars þátr*: in the words of Georges Dumézil, ‘here it is the gods who direct the action, free to disappear afterward and to disinterest themselves, at least apparently, in the career they have arranged for the hero’ (Stakes 21). The question of what roles Ôðinn and Þórr play in determining Starkaðr’s fate, either in the saga or in tradition, is a complicated one, and it is therefore not clear what was the author-compiler’s understanding of the conflict, and even less what narrative tradition underlied the creation of *Vikars þátr*.

It is a well-studied controversy in scholarship that in *Gautreks saga*, Ôðinn and Þórr apparently engage in an open conflict with each other bestowing on Starkaðr their gifts and curses, while in *Gesta Danorum*, Ôðinn and Þórr never meet. Furthermore, in contrast with *Gautreks saga*, in *Gesta Danorum* Othinus is represented as mainly malevolent and Thor as unexpectedly benevolent, because Saxo regards his tearing off of Starkatherus’ superfluous four arms as a good deed that turns the hero from a monster into a human being. Georges Dumézil, however,

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259 The folktale connections of the *þing* episode may throw further light on Ôðinn and Þórr's influence on the fates of Vikari and Starkaðr. Stith Thompson (and, after him, Inger Boberg) quote *Curse given to negate good wish* as motif M416. Thompson gives the example of Starkaðr and connects this motif to F316.1, *Fairy's curse partially overcome by another fairy's amendment* – this motif is found in Aarne-Thompson type 410, the best-known example being *Sleeping Beauty* and its variants. Thompson also lists two immediate variations of M416: M416.1 is *Curse: appetite of twelve men*, which is given with the gift of twelve men's strength, and M416.2 *Curse: eternal life without eternal youth*. Even given the conventionality of Thompson's index, it is clear that the story of Starkaðr at the gods' council makes use of a widespread narrative element characteristic of folk-literature, which can be described, in outline, as 'if a curse is bestowed on hero, a blessing negates it; if a blessing is bestowed, a curse negates it'. Often there are both malevolent and benevolent supernatural beings who argue over the hero or heroine's fate this way, but in some cases (M416.1, M416.2) the subversion is just an innate part of a blessing or a curse. Given the flexibility of folktale structures, versions where Ôðinn and Þórr exchange blessings and curses, or where both are ascribed to Ôðinn alone, could simply coexist. See Ingrid M. Boberg, *Motif-index of early Icelandic literature* (Copenhagen: Munsgaard, 1966), Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of folk-literature*, 5 vols (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955).
believes Saxo’s account to be an idiosyncratic interpretation of a source narrative, which must have been closer to Gautreks saga than to Gesta Danorum’s version. There are two main arguments that support this interpretation, both from inside the saga and from earlier poetic sources. From the latter of special importance is Vetrliði Sumarlíðason’s Lausavísa that lists giants defeated by Þórr:

Leggi brautz Leiknar,
lamdir þrivalda,
steypdir Starkeði,
stett of Gjölþ dauða.260

You broke Leikn’s limbs, thrashed þrivaldi, overthrew Starkaðr, caused the death of Gjálþ.

Dumézil notes that the verb steypa, meaning ‘to hurl down, to overthrow’, definitely implies killing the giant Starkaðr and not simply ‘correcting him according to a better model’ (GD I, 380, Fisher I, 170), especially in the context of Þórr’s other victories over giants (Stakes 20-21). Shortly after Dumézil, John Lindow added an important contribution to the discussion of this stanza in connection to Starkaðr, showing that every giant or giantess mentioned there is connected, through either narrative context or name interpretation, with certain parts of the body — heads, legs, reproductive organs or, in Starkaðr’s case, arms.261 As William Layher later pointed out, the abnormality of those giants is exactly what makes them Þórr’s enemies: ‘while Vetrliði’s stanza praises Þórr for killing giants, on a deeper level Þórr’s rage seems to be directed at specific giants whose monstrous deformities made them even more threatening.’262 Deformity is overall a good word to describe the human Starkaðr, who is believed in Gautreks saga to have on his body scars from the arms torn from his giant grandfather, and who naturally draws Þórr’s hatred as well.

Secondly, from an in-text perspective, Dumézil offers an interpretation of a passage in Book VI of Gesta Danorum, which immediately precedes the story of Othinus’ fatal gifts to Starkaðr and has no apparent function in the narrative. In this passage is provided an opposing description of Othinus and Þórr:

Olim enim quidam magicę artis imbuti, Thor uidelicet et Othinus alique complures miranda prestigiorum machinatione callentes, obtentis simplicium animis, diuinatis sibi fastigium arrogare coeperunt. Quippe Noruagiam, Suetiam ac Daniam uanissimę credulitatīs laqueis circumuentas ad cultus sibi pendendi studium concitantes prēcipuo ludiinfationis suę contagio

At one time certain individuals, initiated into magic arts, namely Thor, Odin and a number of others who were skilled in conjuring up marvellous illusions, clouded the minds of simple men and began to appropriate the exalted rank of the godhead. Norway, Sweden and Denmark were ensnared in a groundless conviction, urged to a devoted worship of these frauds and infected by their gross imposture.

(Fisher 170-171)

This passage is followed by a rather lengthy passage concerning the naming of days of week after Óðinn and Þórr and their equivalents in Latin and Greek pantheons. After this interlude Saxo returns to Starkatherus and the story in which Othinus makes him kill Wikarus. The irrelevance of this passage to the narrative is self-evident:

If the interventions of Thor and Othinus are successive and without any element of rivalry and conflict, one point in Saxo’s composition arouses suspicion, namely the parallelism of the two gods, of their natures and their Latin interpretations, which, placed as it is between the birth and the career of the hero, constitutes a parenthesis within the story and interrupts it to no advantage. For what advantage is there in defining two gods in this way, one in terms of the other, in opposition to each other, when their interventions are entirely independent and not even complementary?

(Stakes 22)

Using the same approach to analysing the text of *Gesta Danorum* that he employed earlier is his discussion of Hadingus and Saxo’s interlude about the war of Æsir and Vanir in Book I, Dumézil suggests that in Saxo’s source there could have been present a conflict between Óðinn and Þórr, which Saxo reworked into the interlude containing general information about those two deities:

If Saxo has inserted here a contrastive definition of Thor and Othinus which is in no way necessary to the action as he describes it, it is undoubtedly because, in the Scandinavian saga of Starkaðr which he used, the character opposition of Thor and played at this point an important role.

(Stakes 33)

This is a plausible interpretation, although it could be argued that, because the passage is set exactly between the episode in which Thor tears off Starkatherus’ arms and the episode where Othinus manipulates Starkatherus into killing his king, Saxo could feel it appropriate to provide the reader with some background about those two deities. That could be the reason why he dwells upon general information, and not on the theme of rivalry between Óðinn and Þórr, which could be theoretically known to him from poems like *Hárbarðsljóð*. As Dumézil himself agrees, the role of Othinus in the story of Starkatherus and Wicarus is very characteristic of the traditional image of
Óðinn the deceiver and manipulator, the god who requires an unexpected price for his gifts (Stakes 24-26). One could even draw a parallel with chapter 1 of Hálfr saga ok hálfrsrekka, where Óðinn requires the same price — the life of Vikarr — from his mother Geirhildr in exchange for his help, which makes Vikarr ‘sold’ twice in the tradition: by his mother and by his follower.

It may be because of these considerations that there is a tendency in recent Gautreks saga scholarship to emphasize the role Óðinn is playing in the narrative to the extent that bórr’s connection with Starkaðr is being downplayed. Most notably, Dennis Cronan argues in his analysis of the saga that Óðinn manipulates the events of the þing to his own profit:

Although Dumezil... presents an excellent discussion of Odin’s long preparations for the sacrifice, he completely overlooks Odin’s manipulation of Thor’s hostility towards Starkad and his use of this hostility to control the events of the þing. On the other hand, his argument that Thor could have responded to the gift of three lives with a different curse is certainly valid. But the curse of three níðungsverk is the most likely response, since it strikes directly at Starkad’s identity through his honor as a warrior. Although the other curses suggested by Dumezil — three misfortunes or physical setbacks — are certainly plausible responses, they would not be nearly as effective. In any case, Odin had as many tries as he needed in order to elicit such a curse; if he had not succeeded with the gift of a triple lifespan, he could have presented other gifts (e.g. great honor that increases with each lifespan, undying fame, etc.) that could have provoked such a curse from Thor.

It is probably an overestimation to say that Dumézil ‘completely overlooks’ the interpretation of the saga where Óðinn has the assembly carry out his will; in fact, Dumézil muses upon the idea that ‘the crafty, Machiavellian Odin manipulated Thor, a character all of a piece, as a toreador ‘works’ the bull, announcing the gift of ‘three lives’ only to draw the response ‘with a dishonor in each’; and in the end, achieve his final aim — the sacrifice of Vikarr (Stakes 27). Later on, Dumézil evaluates arguments for and against this understanding, which he finds plausible but attended by a few difficulties which cannot be completely resolved. Dumézil draws the reader’s attention to the fact that both bórr and Óðinn are mentioned in Vikarsbálrk. So, if Vikarsbálrk is Gautreks saga’s source, the complex influence of the two gods was the case of the source material as well. In the end, Dumézil leaves the question open while Cronan insists on the Óðinn-centred interpretation.

It is important to remember, however, that, while involved in the same discourse, Cronan and Dumézil discuss slightly different subjects. While Dumézil

looks upon Gautreks saga as a document in which the Vikarr and Starkaðr story has been preserved, for Cronan the saga is a much more independent text, and the context of other þættir of Gautreks saga is for Cronan as important as earlier evidence of the narrative, like Gesta Danorum and skaldic poetry. The conclusions of the two scholars are also different. Dumézil tries to evaluate Óðinn’s role overall in the Starkaðr tradition — or, in Wilhelm Ranisch’s words, die Starkadsage. Cronan, at the same time, limits his view to the fornaldarsaga alone, and therefore can allow himself much more conclusive arguments.

The Odinic theme is prominent in both Dalafífla þáttr and Vikars þáttr, while the final Gjafa-Refs þáttr ‘contrast[s] the cost of gifts from Óðinn with the rewards of the gift of grace’. The negative image of Óðinn has been introduced only into the younger redaction of the saga, which involved the introduction of black-comical references to Óðinn and Valhall in Dalafífla þáttr as well as the inclusion of the whole Vikars þáttr in the saga. As we can see, the author-compiler of the younger Gautreks saga reinforces the theme of Óðinn’s influence to achieve his own artistic goals, and this context inevitably affects the way the events of Vikars þáttr are understood.

Vikars þáttr is especially noteworthy because it is built around the scheme of the Odinic hero complex we have observed in the previous chapters. In this sense, and in the terminology of this thesis, the ‘Odinic hero’ is Vikarr rather than Starkaðr, and, as Figure 3 shows, even if Starkaðr was completely taken out of the story the basic plot would remain, quite similar to the peripeteias of Volsunga saga. It is also telling that the conflict of the þáttr is resolved after Vikarr’s death, and what follows is simply the tragical aftermath, although Gesta Danorum and other sources suggest that the Starkaðr material must have been abundant in the Icelandic Middle Ages.

4. ODINIC HERO ELEMENTS IN THE IMAGE OF STARKADR IN VÍKARS ÞÁTTR

Despite the fact that the story centres around Vikarr, it is the reinterpretation of traditional material, connected mostly to the image of Starkaðr, that mostly contributes to the saga’s development.

It has already been pointed out that *Vikars þátr* demonstrates a very clear and well-cut example of the Odinic hero complex, involving the warband of twelve and Starkaðr as the warband’s leader, which makes Starkaðr similar to such characters as Bóðvarð bjarki and Innstein. As was shown in the analysis of *Hrólfs saga kraka*, initiatory structures and Odinic traits are characteristic motifs relating to prominent members of the warband. All those motifs are present in *Vikars þátr* in connection to Starkaðr, most notably the following:

1. **Vikarr makes Starkaðr a warrior.**
   It is noteworthy that clothes and weapon are mentioned twice in the short episode, stressing the change that Starkaðr is undergoing. Vikarr acts towards Starkaðr in a manner similar to how Bóðvarr (and, to a lesser extent, Hrólf kraki) treat Hóttr, meanwhile the gift of a weapon as literary rudiment of initiatory practices has been discussed in connection to both *Völsunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*.

2. **Starkaðr is a member and the leader of the warband of twelve.**
   It has been observed in chapters 3 and 4 that it is characteristic of the Odinic hero to either lead a group of twelve berserkir or fight against it, which in *Hrólfs saga kraka* constitutes a kind of unity and struggle because both motifs are widely represented.

3. **Starkaðr is, similar to Svipdagr in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, connected to Óðinn through his foster-father Hrosshárs-Grani.**
   In *Gautreks saga* this connection is even more pronounced than in *Hrólfs saga kraka* due to the fact that Hrosshárs-Grani is Óðinn. Svipr, however, is a similar figure in that he possesses magical powers and instructs Svipdagr in such a way that he fights the berserkir and ultimately becomes Hrólf kraki’s champion. Thus, Hrosshárs-Grani is an initiator to Starkaðr in the same way that Svipr is an initiator to Svipdagr.

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Theoretically, Starkaðr’s ‘berserk-like’ nature, as Miller puts it, could be worked into the argument, especially in connection with his fight against Angantherus (inarguably Angantýr) leading the band of berserkir in Book Six of *Gesta Danorum*. This could represent the berserkir/berserk-r-fighter complex as Schjødt describes it in connection to other texts (see Chapter 1). However, comparative study of the whole Starkaðr narrative tradition including *Gesta Danorum* falls beyond the scope of this discussion, and although it may be tempting to understand Starkaðr's imminent monstrosity as relating him with berserkir, it is methodologically dubious. While the rough comparison worked well for Miller's study where only the position on the ‘nature / irrational’ pole mattered, in more concrete text criticism the connection would be insufficiently justified.
Needless to say, in the light of Starkaðr’s betrayal all those elements take opposite meanings from those in Hröflfs saga kraka. One could say that Starkaðr is here a deconstruction of the ideally loyal follower like Bǫðvarr Bjarki — which could remind us of Miller’s þórr-warrior and this image’s relation-opposition to Starkaðr if not for the numerous Odinic connections that are characteristic of characters like Bǫðvarr and Svipdagr (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Both thematically and structurally, Gautreks saga is a more heterogeneous text than Vǫlunga saga or Hröflfs saga kraka, and therefore it is not dominated by a single theme such as the career of one or more Odinic heroes (like the Vǫlungs or Hröför kraki’s warband). Instead, Gautreks saga makes use of the Odinic hero complex in one of the þættir, Vikars þáttir, to demonstrate how Oðinn’s gifts lead to misfortune. In quite a different manner, the disasters and misery of those serving Óðinn are presented in Dalafjöla þáttir, while Gjafa-Refþa þáttir gives a picture of an alternative, more harmonious engagement with power and society.

5. THE AFTERLIFE OF SOME MOTIFS IN THE VÍKARR NARRATIVE

The following folktale was written down in England at the beginning of the last century:

Some years ago, when driving past a gallows standing in a field at Melton Ross, an old man told me a curious tale. He said, ‘Some hundred of years ago, three or four boys were playing at hanging, and seeing who could hang the longest in a tree. Just as one of them got up and put the noose on, a three-legged hare (the devil, sir) came limping past, and off the other lads ran after him, and forgot their comrade. They very nearly caught the hare several times, but he got away. And when they came back the lad in the tree was dead. That’s what the gallows was put up for’.

A similar story, but featuring beheading, is recorded in Germany and Poland: in the same way, the devil tricks the boys into actually executing their friend instead of just mocking the execution. The parallelism of these stories with Vikarr’s mock-sacrifice, turning out to be an actual sacrifice, is evident. However, the presence of the narrative in Gesta Danorum clearly shows that Vikarr’s mock-sacrifice is not a late folktale insertion made by the author-compiler, as it is, e.g., the case with the wolf-skins story in Vǫlungsaga saga, but rather the form in which the story was transmitted.

Although hardly possible to prove, it is more than likely that stories of this kind circulated in Iceland and continental Scandinavia after the younger Gautreks saga was created, which adds to the close association between Óðinn and the devil, characteristic of the period.\textsuperscript{269} Although an association between Óðinn and the devil is a commonplace in saga literature, in Gautreks saga this tendency, always in connection with folktale elements, becomes so consistent that it is worth looking at.\textsuperscript{270}

For example, although it is a commonplace in saga literature that Óðinn cannot be trusted and that he is a betrayer deity, it is not characteristic of Óðinn elsewhere to demand a price for his gifts. As a rule, the receiving of a gift initiates the character into the Odinic hero (like Sigmundr, Sigurðr, Siward digri and to an extent Hrólfr kraki; in Gesta Danorum Hadingus may be the best example). Although being an Odinic hero inevitably means violent death, it is always the death of the gift’s recipient, not anyone else presented as a price for this payment. However, in connection to Vikarr this motif is encountered twice, in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka and in Gautreks saga (paralleled by Gesta Danorum Book VI). When Óðinn tells Starkaðr that he has to repay his gifts, this is uncharacteristic but still recognizable because Starkaðr is a warrior, and defining a warrior’s fate is an activity closely associated with Óðinn.

In the commentary to Gesta Danorum, Hilda Ellis Davidson argues that in chapter 1 of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka, which gives an account of Vikarr’s birth, Óðinn acts in the uncharacteristic role of a fertility god, as he also does in Völsunga saga:

[The story of Gurith’s son in Book VI] agrees with the tradition of Gautreks saga that a son was promised to the mother of Vikar, and dedicated to Odin before his birth, and also with the incident at the beginning of Völsunga saga, when Rerir and his wife prayed for child and their request was granted by Odin and Frigg. It may be noted that in each case when a son is born as a result of an appeal to Odin, the boy becomes a great warrior, but meets his death by violence or in battle. (Fisher, II, 119)

It is tempting to follow this observation and to connect the character type, characterised by Odinic death, also to an ‘Odinic birth’. On closer examination it can be seen, however, that the connection between the episodes, proposed by Davidson, is

\textsuperscript{270} In nineteenth-century Europe, the motif of mock-execution is very closely connected with the theme of infernal powers. E.g., in Victorien Sardou’s 1887 drama La Tosca a mock-execution takes place, catastrophically turning out to be a real one and organised by the explicitly infernal antagonist. The same consistency is found in the recorded folktales. However, the chronological distance does not allow us to make any conclusive arguments and only proves that there is a strong connection between the two motifs.
problematic. In \textit{Völsunga saga}'s case, Óðinn answers a prayer of a childless couple and grants them a child; no subsequent sacrifice or payment is implied at the moment. In \textit{Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekkja}, there is no couple and no prayer for a child; the child, Vikarr, is rather a payment to Óðinn for helping Geirhildr in completing the task Alrekr had given her. It seems appropriate to quote the episode in full before continuing with the analysis:

Alrekr hét konungur, er bjó á Alreksstaðir. Hann réð fyrir Hróðalandi. Hann átti Signýju, döttur konungs af Vors. Kollr hét hirdmaðr hans, ok fylgdi hann konungi norðr í Sogn ok sagði konungi allmikit frá vœnleik Geirhildar Dríфsdöttur, þvi at hann hafði sét hana við mungátsgerð, ok kveðst honum unna þess råðs. Til fundar við Geirhildi kom Hótttr, er Óðinn var reyn达尔, þá er hún var at léreptum. Hann keypti þvi við hana, at Alrekr konungur skyldi eiga hana, en hún skyldi á hann heita til alls. Konungr sá hana, er hann för heim, ok gerði bruðlaup til hennar it sama haust.

Konungr launaði Koll vel trúleik sinn ok gaf honum jarlsdóm ok atsetu í Kollsey fyrir suunnan Harðsæ, ok er þat þjóðbyggt herað.

Alrekr konungur mátti eigi eiga þar þáðar fyrir ósamþykki þeira ok kveðst þá þeira eiga skyldu, er betra þel gerði móð honum, er hann keymi heim or leiðangri. Þær kepptust um ðgerðina.

Signý hét á Freyju, en Geirhildr á Hótt. Hann lagði fyrir dregg hráka sinn ok kveðst vilja fyrir tilkvámu sína þat, er var milli kersins ok hennar. Ën þat reyndist gott þol. Pá kvað Alrekr:

Geirhildr, getta,
gott er þol þetta,
ef þvi andmarkar
engir fylgja.
Ekk sé hanga
á hávum gálga
son þinn, kona,
seldan Óðni.

Á þeim misserum var fæddr Vikarr, sonr Alreks ok Geirhildar.

(HSH 1)

Alrekr was the name of the king who lived at Alreksstaðir. He ruled Hróðaland. He married Signý, the daughter of the king of Vors. Kollr was the name of one of Alrekr’s retainers, and he went to the king north to Sogn and talked to the king a lot about the beauty of Geirhildr Dríфsdöttir, whom he had seen making ale. He told the king it would be a good match. When Geirhildwas weaving, Hótt came to see her, but he was really Óðinn. He made a bargain with her that she should always call for his assistance, and then king Alrekr would marry her. The king saw her when he was returning home, and married her the same autumn.

The king rewarded Kollr for his loyal service, made him a jarl and gave him an estate in Kollsey, which is to the south of Harðsæ. That is a well-populated area.

King Alrekr could not keep both [wives] because of conflicts between them, and he said he would keep the one who would make better ale for him when he returned from an expedition. They competed with each other at brewing. Signý invoked Freya, and Geirhildr invoked Hótt. He spat into the yeast and said he would be back for what was between the cauldron and her. That indeed was good ale. Then Alrekr said:

Geirhildr, girl,\footnote{Cleasby-Vígfusson suggests that \textit{getta} is probably the same word as \textit{genta}.} this ale is good, I cannot complain unless there is a trap. I see hanging on the high gallows your son, o woman, sold to Óðinn.

The same half-year Vikarr was born, the son of Alrekr and Geirhildr.
This particular type of story is widely present in folklore and categorised as number 500 in Aarne-Thompson catalogue (the most popular of this type is Brothers Grimm’s folktale number 55, ‘Rumpelstilzchen’). While existing in numerous variants, the story tends to be built of the following elements:

- The heroine is to marry a king, or some other high-status person — here Geirhildr to Alrek;
- To get married, she has to complete a task that is connected to domestic activities, which is in most cases spinning or knitting, but here beer-brewing. Note that Geirhildr is weaving when Hótttr comes to visit her;
- A supernatural helper, in most cases a dwarf, assures that the task is completed, but demands the heroine’s child as payment (or sometimes the woman’s soul). Here this part is played by the disguised Óðinn;
- In most folktales, but not in Hálfí saga ok hálfsrekka, the heroine can get around the agreement by guessing the supernatural helper’s name.

As can be seen, chapter one of Hálfí saga contains all the characteristic traits of Aarne-Thompson 500 except for the last part. Another minor but characteristic folktale motif can be seen in Hótttr’s phrase where he asks for payment: ‘Hann... kveðst vilja fyrir tilkvámu sína þat, er var milli kersins ok hennar’, which is Geirhildr’s unborn son Vikarr, even though she does not yet understand that. In one of the variants of the Rumpelstilzchen story, the dwarf quite similarly asks that the woman gives him ‘what she has under her apron’, and she readily agrees, not knowing she is pregnant and thinking she has nothing there.272 A slightly remoter parallel (not involving the unknown pregnancy motif) is found in the Grimms’ Das Mädchen ohne Hände, where the Devil, in exchange for riches, asks the miller to give him what is behind his mill. The man agrees, not knowing that his daughter is there at the time sweeping the yard.273

Those parallels cast doubt upon Óðinn’s supposed role as a fertility god in relation to Vikarr’s birth in Hálfí saga (although in Völsunga saga, as we have observed earlier, this theme is well-developed). He rather plays here the role of a

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Rumpelstilzchen, a trickster who offers a bargain and plays with the wording of the agreement to deceive a person into giving their child to him.

It is natural that in folktales this figure is often associated with the Devil: thus, in an English variant of Aarne-Thompson 500, when the heroine supposes the dwarf’s name is Lucifer of Beelzebub, he laughs and says he is only remotely related to them. In some variants, the supernatural helper is directly introduced as the Devil. The connection with the Devil is, in fact, a recurring theme in folklore material that is connected to the Vikarr story in Gautreks saga: we have seen, for example, that in a few parallels to the mock hanging/beheading game the Devil is always responsible for one of the boys’ death. Although the mentioned folktale material was written down as late as the nineteenth century, the connection between Óðinn and the devil in Gautreks saga is quite possible as it is a generally well-attested theme in saga literature, most famously perhaps in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, where the devil in Óðinn’s form visits the king and tries to drive the king to oversleeping God’s service by his all-night tales about ancient times. Fornaldarsögur also provide a vast body of evidence of Óðinn’s demonization in Christian times, and so does translated literature. Furthermore, if we consider continental Scandinavian material as background, it is interesting to note that in Sweden, from late Medieval to Modern times, there was a particularly strong popular belief that one could acquire riches and prosperity by serving ‘the devil Óðinn’, which is reflected in several accounts of witchcraft trials. The examples, collected and analysed by Stephen Mitchell, are of particular interest of this discussion, because the theme of a bargain with Óðinn is a key theme in the Vikarr narrative: in Hálfís saga, his mother sells him to the god in exchange for help, and in Gautreks saga Starkaðr betrays Vikarr to Óðinn in a similar way; both receive Óðinn’s help in return, although the help is always ambiguous and the price is manipulated both from Geirhildr and Starkaðr rather than given willingly. On the one hand, we have seen how this ambivalence of help is characteristic of the Devil’s (or the Rumpelstilzchen’s) help in the traditional folktale. On the other hand, the folktale model is in the Vikarr narrative deeply intertwined with Óðinn’s mythological features: he is a god who cannot be trusted; he bestows both victories in battles (on Starkaðr) and death (on Vikarr). Finally, his help

to Geirhildr to brew the ale, as Annette Lassen justly observes, should be seen against the background of the myth of the skaldic mead in Snorra Edda, especially given that

When Alrek tastes the brew, he composes a verse about the beer and his vision of his son hanging as an Óðinn-sacrifice... Apparently the drink, fermented by the spit of Óðinn, has granted Alrek visionary powers, for this is indeed the way his son, Vikarr, is sacrificed to Óðinn later in Gautreks saga.276

It has already been observed how in Volsunga saga folktale motifs were intertwined in the episodes of Sigmundr and Sinjótrlí’s transformation into wolves, and then Sinjótrlí’s death and resurrection (see Chapter 2). Similarly, the Bear’s Son folktale type found its way into Bodvar Sáttr in Hrôlf’s saga kraka, as discussed in Chapter 3. It has been shown how in those texts, especially in Volsunga saga, the folktale motifs are most likely to be late interpolations, which stand out of the narrative and sometimes disagree with the remaining narrative, e.g. Sinjótrlí’s death and resurrection have no importance for the development and have to be forced into the conventional saga prose. We have seen, however, how differently from that are treated the narrative elements that open and close Vikarr’s sacrifice: firstly, the brewing of ale by Geirhildr; secondly and finally, the actual sacrifice scene. Both these episodes seem to be traditional, and the sacrifice is referred to in sources earlier than the sagas and independent from them, such as Gesta Danorum and arguably Vikarsbalkr. Further, both episodes are closely intertwined with mythological imagery, which underlies the action and sustains its narrative logic: Óðinn is associated with supernatural wisdom and the mead of poetry in the Geirhildr episode, while the absence of wind, which would require the sacrifice of Vikarr, brings to mind Óðinn’s powers over weather, as well as the fact that he appears both to Sigurðr and Hadingus during a storm. Finally, both the birth and the death of Vikarr, featuring Óðinn’s direct interference, have multiple parallels with folktales featuring the devil stealing children or destroying human lives. Based on those notable similarities, both thematic and generic, I suggest that the story of Geirhildr’s brewing must have been a stable and traditional part of the Vikarr narrative, and there could have existed a saga which included both those episodes and features Vikarr the Odinic hero as the main protagonist.

276 Annette Lassen, ‘Óðinn in Old Norse Texts other than The Elder Edda, Snorra Edda and Ynglinga saga’, in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia 1 (2005), 99-100.
6. CONCLUSION

Gautreks saga is a complicated text in general, and even more so when Óðinn-related material is concerned. It does not help that Vikars þáttir, the text containing the well-known account of king Vikarr’s sacrifice to Óðinn, in found only in the younger version of the saga, and is only thematically connected to the rest of the narrative while clearly breaking plot continuity. Making no pretense to definite conclusions on the Odinic theme’s development throughout all three þættir, this dissertation focuses on Vikars þáttir. Even in this individual þáttir, the comparative analysis based on the evidence of chapters 2-5 reveals a much more complex situation than in any of the previously considered sagas.

In bare outlines, Vikars þáttir blends together two narratives, which are likely to have existed more or less independently before that point. First of all, there is the rich Starkaðr material paralleled by Gesta Danorum and other texts. If all these sources are considered as a complex unity, them Starkaðr’s unnaturally long life, his conflicted character, his unhuman strength and physical ugliness both attributed to giant origins all result in a unique image that is, in James Milroy’s words, impossible to ‘pigeonhole’.277 While clearly associated with Óðinn, Starkaðr is also connected to Þórr, which caused much scholarly confusion, especially in the light of Georges Dumézil’s inconsistent theories.

However, if Vikars þáttir is considered independently from other sources on Starkaðr like Gesta Danorum and Norna-Gests þáttir, it becomes clear that Vikarr and not Starkaðr is the centre of the narrative. As a narrative about Vikarr, the þáttir demonstrates a surprisingly well-defined Odinic hero complex with Vikarr himself as the Odinic hero, and Starkaðr playing more or less the same functional role as Bǫðvarr bjarki in Hrölf’s saga kraka and Innestein/Útsteinn in Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka. The Odinic hero plot (1.2) is represented fairly completely, especially if chapter 1 of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka is taken into consideration. Then Óðinn’s support of Geirhildr, Vikarr’s mother, qualifies as Odinic help, as do to some extent Óðinn’s gifts to Starkaðr. Vikarr’s sacrifice is a very clear example of Odinic death. The secondary motif of twelve warriors is well-pronounced in the þáttir, and structural

analysis demonstrates several features in common with *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka* (6.3, 6.4).

Although the mere presence of the Odinic hero complex in *Vikars þáttir* is easy to establish, further analysis shows that the use of its elements drastically contrasts with the rest of the saga material considered in chapters 2-5. Firstly, both of the Odinic gifts in *Vikars þáttir* do not follow the paradigm well-established by *Hyndluljóð, Völsunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*. All Odinic gifts considered so far have been either weapons of pieces of military advise, given to the Odinic hero himself, and the two examples in chapter 7 will continue this tendency. In *Vikars þáttir* and chapter 1 of *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka*, Óðinn helps other people than Vikarr, even though this help leads directly to Vikarr’s death. Furthermore, it has been shown that both episodes featuring Óðinn’s help, as well as the sacrifice episode, have extensive folklore parallels that are commonly associated with the devil. This is untypical and shows that the material in *Gautreks saga* is genetically different from the rest of the sources. Even *Hrólfs saga kraka* with its Christian pathos adheres to the simple and recognisable paradigm ‘one-eyed old man presents military advice or a weapon to the hero’.

A plausible explanation for these irregularities would be that the author-compiler of the younger *Gautreks saga* adapted whatever material he had for *Vikars þáttir*, so that it would fit a familiar paradigm. He then structured the narrative so that it formed an Odinic hero plot, introduced the twelve warriors motif and initiatory episode with Vikarr and Starkaðr that is so reminiscent of *Bjövars þáttir*. This transformation of the material can be roughly depicted as follows:

**The Odinic hero complex**

- Óðinn secures yet unborn Vikarr as sacrifice (*Hálfs saga*)
- Óðinn makes arrangements for Vikarr’s death
- Óðinn has Vikarr killed by Starkaðr’s betrayal
  - Óðinn’s manipulation

**Starkaðr and Þórr**

- Þórr kills Starkaðr Áludrengr
- Þórr curses Starkaðr Stórvirksson to commit three *nótingsverk*
- The first *nótingsverk* is the killing of Vikarr
The use of the Odinic hero complex in texts like *Gautreks saga, Qrvar-Odds saga* and *Hervarar saga* shows that the Odinic hero complex was a productive narrative structure that, even without being at the structural and ideological centre of the text, works as a solid literary device. It will be demonstrated in the next chapter how the smaller bits of the structure find their way into mostly later sagas without sustaining the original meaning of this peculiar unity of character and plot structure.
CHAPTER 7

THE ODINIC HERO IN LEARNED LATIN TRADITION

1. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO NON-SAGA TEXTS FEATURING THE ODINIC HERO COMPLEX

It has been shown that the Odinic hero complex is mostly a saga phenomenon. This determines two essential features of this plot. Firstly, it can be seen as a product of Icelandic, rather than continental, literature. Secondly, because of the apparent lack of the Odinic hero complex in the sources of the sagas, it is most likely a relatively late construct that reflects Christian views on Óðinn, Óðinn worship and the pagan era in general. Such is, in very brief outline, the outcome of the analysis performed in chapters 2-6, which look at manifestations of the Odinic hero complex in saga texts.

This last chapter looks at two texts that contain the Odinic hero plot but stand aside from the rest of the material for a number of reasons. The main one is that both texts — *Gesta Danorum* and *Vita et Passio Waldevi* — are very different from the *fornaldarsögur* both in terms of language and genre as they belong to the learned Latin culture (and, for that matter, to very different subgenres of it). There is also a significant chronological gap between the Latin texts and the sagas analyzed earlier, with *Gesta Danorum* confidently dated late twelfth century and different parts of *Vita et Passio Waldevi* written in the early thirteenth century, while most of the *fornaldarsögur*, although difficult to date, are usually considered to be much later. Finally, *Gesta Danorum* and *Vita et Passio Waldevi* come from Danish and English backgrounds respectively (the latter apparently influenced by the culture of the Danelaw), which also substantially separates them from the Icelandic material.

In Saxo’s case, it has to be mentioned that any comparative study of *Gesta Danorum* and Icelandic material is attended by specific methodological difficulties as well that arise from the nature of this text. The most important problem arises from the lack of material and therefore uncertainty in the questions of influence and transmission. It is the subject of a scholarly debate that stretches over more than a century, whether the mythological and heroic material in the first nine books of *Gesta Danorum* was based on Icelandic or continental sources, and, if the latter were made use of, whether they were mostly Norwegian or Danish. With *Vita et Passio Waldevi*,
the situation is even more controversial because this text comes from a mixed Anglo-
Scandinavian background, and it may be hard to distinguish between different types
of the surviving variant’s sources.\footnote{See, for example, Arthur Brodeur's criticism towards the methodology of Cyril Wright who tends to interpret a substantial part of Anglo-Latin legendary narratives as having ‘the form of the saga’: Arthur G. Brodeur, ‘The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England by C. E. Wright’, The Journal of American Folkllore 54 (1941), 88-90.}

The status of those two texts in this thesis is, therefore, controversial. In terms
of material, they provide important scholarly evidence, but in order to properly
evaluate this evidence, a new methodological apparatus is required that could
adequately consider the discourse typical of learned Latin culture. It should also
consider the individual cultural backgrounds of \textit{Vita et Passio Waldevi} and \textit{Gesta Danorum} and, most importantly, the nature of any connection between these texts and
oral narrative tradition of the Scandinavian world. This analysis falls out of the scope
of the rest of this dissertation in many ways but, on the other hand, the research’s
framework would be incomplete if Latin sources were not taken into consideration.

The connection between \textit{Vita et Passio Waldevi}, \textit{Gesta Danorum} and the
Icelandic sagas may be emphasised by the fact that both narratives featured in this
chapter, although technically quite remote from saga literature, are both known in
scholarship as ‘sagas’: Georges Dumézil titled his monograph focused on the
Hadingus narrative \textit{From Myth to Fiction: The Saga of Hadingus}, and researchers
have consistently characterised pieces of information on Siward digri as ‘\textit{disjecta membra}’ (scattered pieces — E.M.) of a \textit{Siwards saga}. In both cases, the reason for
this is the assumption that a pre-existing traditional narrative or ‘saga’, otherwise not
surviving, had found its way into the Latin text. It should be noted, however, that
while both texts undoubtedly build upon traditional material, the term ‘saga’ in
relation to them cannot be used strictly because of the many difficulties attending the
adaptation of traditional material, the original form of which is unknown to us, into a
learned Latin narrative. Although Dumézil’s monograph is dedicated almost
completely to the methods of literary adaptation that were supposedly applied by Saxo
to his sources, no equally fundamental study has been performed on \textit{*Siwards saga}. It
should be remembered therefore that any notion of the original ‘sagas’ behind the
Latin text stay, so far, as scholarly guesswork and require a correspondingly careful
critical approach. The accounts in \textit{Gesta Danorum} and \textit{Vita et Passio Waldevi} do not
seem to be interrelated in any other way than that the Odinic hero complex is
apparently present in both of them, and will therefore be considered in two individual sections.

To sum up, this chapter will be dedicated to brief analysis of the two Latin sources where the Odinic hero complex is present, namely Book I of Gesta Danorum that contains the story of Hadingus, and a section in Vita et Passio Waldevi titled Gesta Antecessorum Comitis Gualdevi that deals with Siward digri’s youth. Even though this discussion has to stay schematic, it will, on the one hand, throw some new light on the results that have already been achieved, and, on the other hand, will outline the possibilities for further research that would go beyond the scope of saga literature alone.

2. HADINGUS AS AN ODINIC HERO

2.1. Overview of the Hadingus material

About a half of Gesta Danorum’s Book I is constituted by a narrative about the legendary Danish king called Hadingus who rises to power with the help of a one-eyed stranger (in the light of Icelandic sources easily identified as Óðinn) and dies by hanging himself in a supposedly ritual way, which is also commonly understood as an Odinic death.\(^{279}\) No direct parallels to this story survive, so one has to rely only on Saxo’s interpretation of his source or sources.

The Hadingus narrative’s Odinic nature has been interpreted, among others, by Georges Dumézil. The scholar understood Hadingus as the god Njórðr presented as a human hero, whose is divided between the contrasting worlds of the Vanir and the Æsir. Accordingly, the life of Hadingus is divided into the ‘Harthgrepa phase’ (named after Hadingus’ wet nurse and mistress), connected with sensuality, incest and low magic, and the ‘Odinic phase’, connected with warlike exploits, high magic and normal marriage.\(^{280}\) This, according to Dumézil, explains the Odinic encounters that take place in the narrative immediately after Harthgrepa’s death. Without aiming to contribute to the discussion of the narrative’s mythological background, we will now focus on how exactly these encounters are presented in the text, and evaluate them in the light of the Odinic encounters of the sagas, which have been looked at in chapters


2, 3 and 5.

Through the course of Hadingus’ career, there are two episodes of the ‘encounter with Óðinn’ type. In both cases, the stranger is not identified in any way other than ‘old man with a single eye’ or just an ‘old man’, who in a saga would be immediately identified as Óðinn through a set of characteristic features (one eye, magical help in battle, appearance during a sea storm and other motifs, which are considered below in more detail). Despite all these Odinic traits of the old man who helps Hadingus, Saxo never indicates directly that this old man is equivalent to the false god and sorcerer Othinus, who in *Gesta Danorum* is a prominent character. It is not even clear whether, according to Saxo’s narrative, Hadingus met two different magical helpers or the same old man. Othinus, the old man from the first encounter and the old man from the second encounter could be conceived by Saxo as being three individual characters, or the two old men could be the same person but not Othinus, or, finally, Saxo could be implying that all three are the same person. This entirely depends on whether Saxo and his potential readers could identify motifs like one eye, old age, magical help in war and unreliability as Odinic.

The situation is made even more difficult by the fact that Othinus is introduced immediately after Hadingus’ first meeting with the old man, and the story of Hadingus is interrupted by a completely unrelated story from the life of Othinus, which is, in turn, evidently related to the stories of Brisingamen and Mímir’s head known from *Snorra Edda*. We will look at the first Odinic encounter and the accompanying digression, then at the second encounter.

2.2. The first Odinic encounter of Hadingus

The episode goes as follows. Hadingus is devastated by the loss of his foster-mother and lover, the giantess Harthgrepa, when a certain one-eyed old man ‘takes pity’ on the hero and sways him towards more warlike activities. The first thing the old man does is to bring Hadingus into friendship with Liserus, a pirate or a Viking, who becomes Hadingus’ foster-brother. Hadingus and Liserus then start a war against Lokerus, king of Curland, but are defeated. Then the one-eyed old man appears again, saving Hadingus and taking him to safety on horseback. When they arrive to the old man’s house, he heals Hadingus with a potion and utters a poem that, among other
things, contains tactical advice about the forthcoming encounter with Liserus. The old man’s ‘prophetic advice’ suggests that Hadinguis should let Lokerus’ men capture him, after which he will be condemned to be fed to wild beasts. Hadingus, however, will distract the guards with tales and wait until they fall asleep after feasting, which the old man will secure with his magic. Hadingus will meanwhile break his fetters and escape. Returning after a brief while, he will attack one of the animals and drink its blood. This, says the old man, will make Hadingus unusually strong.

After uttering the poem, the old man again sets Hadingus on his horse and takes him back to where he found him. During the journey, he covers Hadingus with a cloak and prohibits him from looking around, but Hadingus manages to notice to his wonder that they were riding over the sea. A brief mention is made that everything proceeded as the old man had prophesied, and the narrative moves to Hadingus’ other exploits.

As can be seen, this episode contains some of the themes that are strongly associated with Óðinn in Icelandic tradition. Thus, the ability to cross open water evokes Óðinn’s liminality connected with water borders attested to in Hárbarðsljóð and Völunga saga (Edd. I, 389-298 VS 18-19, 23-24). His ability to break chains with spells is mentioned in Hávamál (Edd. I, 352).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gestan Danorum</th>
<th>Icelandic sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The one-eyed old man, evidently disguised Óðinn, assists Hadingus with ‘prophetic advice’. This helps Hadingus to win a battle.</td>
<td>Völunga saga:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) Óðinn helps Sigurðr to choose a horse;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Óðinn advises Sigurðr before fight with Fáfnir;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Óðinn advises Jǫrmunrekkr’s warriors to stone Hamðir and Sǫrli.281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Hrólf saga kraka: Óðinn, |

281 It has been discussed earlier that the motif of Óðinn's advice is sometimes indistinguishable from the motif of Óðinn's gift, the former probably being a variation of the latter. However, this table provides only the most apparent parallels.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>disguise as Hrani, helps Hröfr to choose a group of twelve before the raid to Uppsala.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadingus becomes a sworn brother with Liserus.</td>
<td><strong>Hrölf's saga kraka:</strong> The relationship between Bóðvarr and Hótttr (Hjálti) is similar to sworn brotherhood and involves many initiatory elements, although no actual sworn brotherhood is mentioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ǫrvar-Odds saga</strong> and <strong>Heiðreks saga:</strong> according to both texts, Oddr and Hjálmar are sworn brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Völsunga saga</strong> operates with a double hero as well, this time the father and son pair (Sigmundr and Sinfjóðli), the former playing the role of initiator in relation to latter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadingus drinks the blood of an animal and becomes stronger.</td>
<td><strong>Völsunga saga:</strong> Sigurðr eats Fáfnir’s heart and bathes in his blood, which makes him invulnerable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                                                     | **Hrölf's saga kraka:**  
| 1) Hótttr drinks dragon’s blood (wolf’s blood in *Bjárkarimur* and *Gesta Danorum* Book II). This makes him strong enough to fight Bóðvarr as an equal.  
| 2) Bóðvarr drinks Elgfroði’s blood in order to become stronger.      |
Gesta Danorum is quite similar to the imagery in the sagas where the Odinic hero complex is present. Before making any conclusions based on this parallelism, we will consider Hadingus’ second Odinic encounter and its points of contact with Icelandic saga literature.

2.3. The second Odinic encounter of Hadingus

A while after the previously-considered episode, during a sea voyage to a battle with Biarmians, Hadingus notices an old man on the shore and takes him aboard. It is never mentioned that this is the same person as the one who helped Hadingus against Lokerus. The old man proves a good military advisor and teaches Hadingus a tactic that secures his future victory. This tactic is, minor details aside, the same wedge formation that Othinus (this time under his own name) will teach to Haraldus in Book VII. When the battle starts, the wedge formation works very effectively until the Biarmians turn to magic, conjuring up heavy rain. Then, however, the old man comes up with magic of his own and summons a cloud that stops the hostile storm. The battle is won by Hadingus and the old man departs, but not before he prophesies about Hadingus’ future. He foretells that Hadingus will die by his own hand rather than in battle, and advises that he should go in for glorious wars rather than petty ones, and fight in remote lands rather than at the borders of his kingdom. The death prophecy is fulfilled at the end of Book I but the other two pieces of advice, as noted by Paul Herrmann and discussed by Georges Dumézil, hardly make any narrative sense, as Hadingus fights only around Denmark both before and after the advice.282 This most probably testifies to the fact that much material of the original source has been preserved for the sake of erudition.

Once again, Óðinn’s abilities attested to in Ynglinga saga can be seen, such as prophetic knowledge and power over weather (Ynglinga 10). More importantly, the context of the encounter is the same as in Regínsmál and the corresponding part of Völsunga saga modelled on it (VS 28-29).

2.4. Blood brotherhood, monster fighting and consumption of

blood in the Hadingus sequence and in saga material

In many sources, the rite of sworn brotherhood is closely connected with (usually mutual) consumption of blood, although it is impossible to say whether this is due to the memory of real Iron Age ritual practices or because of the way brotherhood was traditionally represented. In the fornaldarsaga material, the theme of consumption of blood has a few other overtones: it tends to be not only connected with the brotherhood theme, but also with the theme of fighting a monster, in which case initiatory implications are evident in the episode. Although the motif of blood-brotherhood and the motif of drinking a monster’s blood exist independently, there are two episodes in Hrólfss saga kraka and Bjarkarímur where they are merged. In the Hadingus sequence, these motifs also appear together, and in order to evaluate this connection in Gesta Danorum, we will look first at the two sequences in the saga and the rímur, and then draw parallels with Gesta Danorum where the presence of the same sequence as in the sagas is, at first, not evident.

The most valuable account, because of its detail, is given in the episode where Bóðvarr bjarki meets his brother Elgfróði (HSK 60-62, Bjarkarímur 132-135). According to both Hrólfss saga kraka and Bjarkarímur, Elgfróði is Bóðvarr’s actual brother rather than a bloodbrother or a fosterbrother, and the motif of blood in a footnote is explained not by a brotherhood rite, as in Gesta Danorum, but rather by a folktale motif of one person knowing the other’s destiny. Nevertheless, the episode preceding Bóðvarr’s trip to Hleiðargarðr contains a remarkable initiatory sequence containing the motifs of fighting, monstrosity, blood-drinking and brotherhood. The episode is important enough to quote most of it, which will be followed by a consideration of the key elements that are in the quotation marked bold.

Here Bóðvarr is looking for Elgfróði, who, meanwhile, is living the life of an outcast and ‘kills people for their money’. When he finds Elgfróði’s dwelling, he enters it and stays there. When Elgfróði returns, he starts fighting the intruder who, for some reason not explained in the saga, stays hooded and does not reveal his identity to Elgfróði:

Elgfróði var þess hærðari undir hónum, ok eigast þeir við miklar sviptingar, ok þá ferr ofan hatt Bóðvars, ok þá knenn Fróði hann ok mælti: ‘Velkominn, frændi, ok hofum vit helzt lengi þessar sviptingar haft.’
’Ekki sakar enn til,’ segir Bóðvarr. Elgfróði mælti: ‘Varliagar mun þer þó enn, frændi, við mik at eiga, ef vit skulum þat þreyta, ok munu hér enn aflsmonary kenna, ef vit skulum eigast við ok ekki hlífast við.’
Síðan tók Fróði ok stjakaði honum. Þá mælti Fróði: ‘Ekki ertu svá sterkr, frændi, sem þér hæfir.’
Fróði nam sér blóð í kálfanum ok bað hann drekka, ok svá gerir Þóðvarr. Þá tók Fróði til hans í annat sinn, ok þá stóð Þóðvarr í sému sporum. ‘Helzt ertu nú sterk, frændi,’ sagði Elgfróði, ‘ok vaenti ek, at þér hæfi komit at haldi drúkrinn, ok þú munt verða fyrrmaðr flestra um afl ok hreysti ok um alla háðfengi ok drengskap, ok þess ann ek þér vel.’

Eptir þetta sté Fróði í begíti, er var þá honum, allt til lagklaufa. Þá mælti Fróði: ‘Til þessa spors mun ek koma hvæn dag ok vita, hvat í sporinu er; mold mun verða, ef þú verð söttaður, vatn, ef þú verðr sjóðauðr, blóð, ef þú verðr vápndaður, ok mun ek þá verð þína þín, þvi at ek ann þér mest allra minna.’

(Elgfróði’s grip was much stronger, and they fought with great turmoil, and then Þóðvarr’s hood fell off; and Fróði recognised him and said: ‘Welcome, kinsman, and let us rather not continue this struggle’. ‘No one is hurt yet’, says Þóðvarr. [Þóðvarr stays at Elgfróði’s place for a while.]

Then Fróði came to him and pushed him. Then Fróði said: ‘You are not so strong, kinsman, as it would fit you’. Fróði took blood from his calf and told him to drink [it], and Þóðvarr did so. Then Fróði took on him for the second time but Þóðvarr stayed at the same place.

‘Now you are strong enough, kinsman’, said Elgfróði, ‘And I hope that this drink is useful to you, and you will be the most remarkable of all men in strength and courage, and I gladly give this to you.

After that Fróði stepped on a rock that was nearby, and it went down up to the ankle. Then Fróði said: ‘I will come to this footprint every day and see what is inside. There will be soil if you die from illness, water if you drown, blood if you are killed with weapons, and I will then avenge you, because I love you most of all’.

Three important features can be distinguished in this sequence that will be important for further analysis:

1. **The two (blood) brothers in a battle.** Two protagonists fight each other without any, or little, external motivation, apparently to measure which of them is stronger.\(^{283}\) One of the characters is initially stronger and serves as the initiator (here Elgfróði). The other, who tends to be the protagonist, is initially weaker (here Þóðvarr). In a later episode, present both in *Hrólfs saga* and *Bjarkarímur*, Þóðvarr serves as the initiator and Höttir (Hjáltei) is the initié. The bond between the two characters is strong and resembles that of blood-brotherhood: note the part where Elgfróði swears to avenge Þóðvarr if something happens to him.

2. **The two stages of the fight.** During the first stage, the initié loses to the initiator (Þóðvarr has difficulties fighting Elgfróði; he is unable to stand when Elgfróði pushes him). During the second stage, which takes place after the

\(^{283}\) In the quoted episode, the initial fight is partly motivated by the fact that Elgfróði does not recognize Þóðvarr who is hooded, but this explanation is clearly not sufficient because it is clear that Þóðvarr himself wants to fight with Elgfróði and for that reason conceals his identity.
consumption of blood, the initié proves to be as strong as the initiator (Bǫðvarr is able to stand when Elgfróði pushes him for the second time).

3. **Drinking the monster’s blood.** The theme of monstrosity is consistently present in the fight sequence, closely connected to the theme of blood drinking. In all the sources, the initié drinks the blood of a monster, usually a wild animal, and becomes stronger. In the quoted episode of *Hrölfś saga kraka* and the corresponding episode in *Bjarkarímur*, this is manifested in Elgfróði’s half-human and half-elk nature; Bǫðvarr drinks the blood and becomes stronger. Later in *Hrölfś saga*, Bǫðvarr makes Hjálti drink the dragon’s blood (in *Bjarkarímur* this is a she-wolf’s blood and in *Gesta Danorum* a bear’s blood, as the type of monster fought by Bǫðvarr and Hjálti differs from source to source). Note how the inhuman nature of the strength associated with monstrous blood is consistently stressed in *Bjarkarímur*: first, Bǫðvarr calls Fróði’s strength ó ȓ i r (‘awful’, *Bjarkarímur* 134), and when Hjálti drinks the she-wolf’s blood he becomes ‘sterkr ok ramr sem tröl’ (‘stark and strong like a troll’, *Bjarkarímur* 140).

The same principal features as described in the list above can be found in *Gesta Danorum*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The two (blood) brothers</th>
<th>Hadingus and Liserus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The two stages of fight</td>
<td>The first battle against Lokerus is lost by Hadingus, and the second one, when he follows the old man’s advice, is won. It is never explained why the old man does not give his advice before the first attempt, which strengthens the hypothesis that the twofold structure must be borrowed from elsewhere and not invented by Saxo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking the monster’s blood</td>
<td>The old man tells Hadingus to drink the blood of a beast, which is going to grant him unusual strength (GD I 110-113).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the fact that Hadingus drinks the blood of a beast, it is mentioned earlier that Hadingus and Liserus mix their blood in a footprint to swear blood-brotherhood:

Siquidem icturi foedus ueteres uestiga sua mutui sanguinis aspersione perfundere consueuerant, amicitarum pignus alterni cruoris commercio firmaturi.
Now our ancestors, when they meant to strike a pact, would sprinkle their combined blood in their footprints and mingle it, so as to strengthen the pledge of their friendship. *(The History of the Danes, 24)*

The passage above is reminiscent of the account of *Hrólf’s saga* concerning Bóðvarr and Elgfróði, where the motif of blood in a footprint is also present. Although mixing of blood, especially in the ground, is a commonplace when describing blood-brotherhood, these seem to be the only two sources where the motif of blood in a footprint is mentioned in this context. Unfortunately, it is hard to evaluate the meaning of this connection without looking in more detail at Saxo’s background, but this connection nevertheless strengthens the hypothesis that the two texts are somehow connected to each other.

The description of Hadingus drinking the blood of a beast to gain inhuman strength constitute 10 lines in the old man’s 18-line stanza:

(GD I 110-112)

Inde pedem referens, ubi se mora paruula fundet,
Uribus in rabidum totis assurge leonem,
Qui captivorum iactare cadauera sueuit,
Inque truces armos ualidis conare lacertis
et cordis fibras ferro rimare patenti.

Protinus admissa uapidum cape fauce cruorem
Corporeamque dapem mordacibus attere malis,
Tunc nova uis membris aderit, tunc robora neruis
Succedent inopina tuis solidique uigoris
Congeries penitus neruosos illinet artus.

(GD Fisher I, 24-25)

Although the beast itself is introduced as *leon*, the meaning of this word, according to Hilda Ellis Davidson, seems to be general *(The History of the Danes, II, 31)*. She also draws parallels to the evidence of hunters drinking the blood of a slain animal, usually a bear, in Finland and Scandinavia. She proposes that in Saxo’s source the beast might have been a wolf because of the parallel with *Völsunga saga*, where Sigmundr and his
brothers are captured and devoured by a she-wolf until Sigmundr overcomes her.

The parallel with Volsunga saga is tempting to draw, especially considering that both there and in Bjarkaírum the monster is a she-wolf (ylgr). That, however, could easily be a coincidence. The parallelism with the two scenes in Hrólfs saga kraka including the simultaneous appearance of the motifs is listed in the table above. These seem to have worked as a system in Saxo’s source as they do in Hrólfs saga. The most important notion for this thesis is that in Gesta Danorum the whole episode is dominated by Óðinn’s figure, or, to put it more correctly, by an Odinic figure, since the old man is never directly identified as Odinus. This fact contributes to the discussion in chapter 3 of this thesis, where it is argued that Hrólfs saga kraka as a whole is driven by the Odinic theme, which starts developing long before Uppsalafjör. Concerning Saxo, the conclusions are much more limited, but it seems that a narrative had been used in his work where there was a direct connection between Óðinn, blood-brotherhood and monster-fighting. Since it has been argued in chapters 3 and 4 that the motifs of monster-fighting and berserkir-fighting are often substitutable, this also indirectly supports the argumentation in chapter 4.

As has already been mentioned, the ‘aged man with only one eye’, who supports Hadingus in warfare, is never named directly but is immediately recognizable, as is the case in most saga texts considered earlier. The stranger’s Odinic identity is further reinforced by the parallel between the Latin poem, which in Gesta Danorum is attributed to the old man, and Hávamál 149 and Ynglinga saga 7, where Óðinn’s ability to break fetters is referred to. It is even possible to assume that Saxo’s source followed the same pattern as Volsunga saga, where Sigurðr’s meeting with ‘Fjölnir’ or Óðinn is followed by a stanza uttered by Fjölnir. Although there is only one stanza in Volsunga saga, its direct source, Reginsmál, provides five more stanzas of gnomic knowledge addressed to Sigurðr, meanwhile the poem in Gesta Danorum, on the whole much more obscure, also takes the form of ‘prophetic advice’ useful for the next battle.

**2.5. Conclusions on the Hadingus sequence**

Although future research on the form and discourse in Gesta Danorum could throw more light on Saxo’s use of mythological material, the story of Hadingus from Book II, if looked at against the background of saga material, allows us to assert the
1. The complex of motifs traditionally connected with Odinic heroes is present in *Gesta Danorum* in a form notably similar to that in the sagas. This evidence leads us to accept that the Odinic hero complex, typical for the *fornaldarsögur* analysed in chapters 2-5, belongs to a very strong tradition that existed at least at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

2. More specifically, the story of Hadingus demonstrates a close connection between the motifs of encounter with disguised Óðinn, sworn brotherhood and initiatory drinking of animal blood. Although all those three motifs are widely present in heroic narratives and often function on their own, their association with each other in *Gesta Danorum* reinforces the structural integrity of the complex found in *Bóðvar's þáttr* from *Hrólf's saga kraka* and, to a lesser extent, in *Völsunga saga* and in the Sámsey episodes of *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* and *Heiðreks saga*.

As can be seen, even the first episode in *Gesta Danorum* Book I contains much of the imagery that is usually connected to the Odinic hero complex in the sagas, and the combination of both episodes adds even more to the parallelism. However, the accentuation is quite different in the sagas. For instance, the motif of blood-drinking plays an important role in *Völsunga saga* and in *Hrólf's saga kraka* and is even reduplicated, while in *Gesta Danorum* this motif is only briefly mentioned in the poetic stanza. That leaves room for the assumption that the motif of blood drinking might have been important in Saxo’s source, but in the reinterpreted account of *Gesta Danorum* became a rudimental feature. If this assumption is correct, this could mean that the Odinic hero plot existed in the thirteenth century more or less in the same form as in the *fornaldarsögur*. This fact would not be very illuminating of itself because the same complex is present in *Völsunga saga*, which is confidently dated to the late thirteenth century. While *Völsunga saga* was written in Iceland, Saxo’s immediate source in this particular case could be either Icelandic or continental, which also makes the situation equivocal and gives no real opportunity to judge if this interconnected group of motifs was an Icelandic or generally Scandinavian
phenomenon. Future research could shed more light on this problem; however, even at this stage the picture is widened by the presence of a similar motif group in a text written in Britain approximately at the same time.

3. The fornaldarsaga background of Siward of Northumbria

3.1. Overview of the material

Vita et passio Waldevi comitis (or simply Vita Waldevi) is a hagiographical Latin narrative about Earl Waltheof of Northumbria (1050 — 1076), which is preserved in a mid-thirteenth century manuscript, originally kept in Crowland Abbey. The scholarly consensus is that the texts in the collection must have been created around the last decades of the twelfth century and the early decades of the thirteenth century. The analysis in this chapter is primarily concerned with a short section that is contained in Vita Waldevi, titled Gesta Antecessorum Comitis Gualdevi. This is the third of a total of eight sections that build up the whole text. As the title suggests, this section deals with the story of Waltheof’s ancestors, most prominently with the career of Waltheof’s father Siward; it is preceded by summaries of Waltheof’s life and martyrdom in prose and verse, and is followed by longer accounts of Waltheof’s death, the subsequent deeds of his wife and, finally, an account of the twelve miracles performed by the saint. The structural role of Gesta Antecessorum is, as can be seen, very traditional for hagiographical literature — providing the saint with a dignified ancestry. Gesta Antecessorum is (unlike the rest of the manuscript) written in one hand, with only minor corrections made by another hand. Both have been dated to the early thirteenth century, most probably before the 1230s. Nearly two centuries after Siward’s death in 1055, the narrative is overwhelmed with fantastical elements, and it has often been noted that especially the account of Siward’s youthful deeds bear strong resemblance to the Old Norse-Icelandic fornaldarsaga tradition. Most importantly for this thesis, the motifs of bear parentage and dragonslaying in the Siward narrative work together with a typical Odinic encounter, which, as will be

286 Bolton 47.
argued, testifies to deep roots of the Odinic hero complex in the form we know it from *Völsunga saga* and especially *Hrólfss saga kraka*.

The historical Siward digri (‘glossus’) was a Northumbrian Earl of supposedly Danish or other Scandinavian origin, who ruled from 1041 up to his death in 1055. Along with bits of information that are reliable by the standards of modern historiography, there is a substantial body of pseudo-historical and legendary material connected to this character, which must have circulated in eleventh- to thirteenth-centuries Northumbria and later, finding its way, alongside *Vita Waldevi*, to such texts as Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum*. Scholars have frequently drawn parallels between the Siward material, found in different sources, and Old Norse-Icelandic literature, predominantly sagas. The list of motifs that had drawn such discussion is given in the table below.²⁸⁸

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### 2.6. Scandinavian parallels to legendary material about Siward of Northumbria in sources and in scholarship

Those of the following episodes that are important for the discussion will be quoted and analysed in more detail in the sections below (‘Siward’s bear ancestry’, ‘The Orkney dragon’ and ‘The Odinic encounter’). The table is provided for the convenience of reference.

²⁸⁷ For a review of scholarly discussion about Siward’s origin see Timothy Bolton, ‘Was the Family of Earl Siward and Earl Waltheof a Lost Line of the Ancestors of the Danish Royal Family?’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 51 (2007), 42.

²⁸⁸ The subsequent literature review looks exclusively at scholarly attention to ‘Siwards saga’ as a hypothetical literary work. For a review of historical research on the ancestry of Siward and Waltheof, see Bolton 42-43.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin British source</th>
<th>Account of the Siward tradition</th>
<th>Literary parallels</th>
<th>Historical context</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Vita Waldevi</em></td>
<td>Siward has descended from a polar bear and a noble lady.</td>
<td>The Bear’s Son folktale type is found in many Indo-European cultures</td>
<td>Nothing is known about Siward digri’s ancestry, but one of Siward’s sons was called Osbeorn (‘bear-spirit’), which could be hypothetically connected with the legend or may have inspired it.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The story of Ulvo’s origin in <em>Gesta Danorum</em> Book X</td>
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<td>Gesta Herewardi</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boðvarr-bjarka þátrr in <em>Hrólfs saga kraka</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In <em>Bjarkarimur</em>, the bear is specifically a polar bear</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Vita Waldevi</em></td>
<td>Siward has killed a dragon in Orkney.</td>
<td>Bear’s Son Folktale Type usually includes a fight with a monster.</td>
<td>Close to nothing is known about Siward’s career before he became the Earl of Northumbria. It has been suggested that the dragon episode was introduced as a parallel with Sigurðr’s killing of Fáfnir, due to the similarity of the names Sigurðr and Siward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parallels have been drawn with Sigurðr’s dragon fight, especially in the light of the following Odinic encounter, which is also characteristic of Sigurðr’s career according to <em>Reginsmál</em> and especially <em>Völsunga saga</em>, and to the career of Ragnar loðbrók. At the same time, Eleanor Parker believes that this episode has origins in hagiographical literature.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vita Waldevi</em></td>
<td>Siward has received advice and gift (a magical raven-banner Ravenlandeye) from an</td>
<td>General relation to the widespread ‘Odin’s gift’ motif has been noted. The</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

old man with distinctive Odinic traits.

scene has also been looked at in connection with dragonslaying, which could hint at parallelism with Sigurðr’s career.

**Historia Anglorum, Gestawalde**

In *Historia Anglorum*, Siward stoically reacts to the news of the death of his son [Osbjeorn], asking whether Osbjeorn had received his mortal wound in the front or the back of his body. Having heard that the wound was in the front, Siward is happy that his son had died a worthy death.

In *Gesta Waldevi* and *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Siward takes vengeance for his son after he hears the news.

**Egils saga** features a father asking where his son had received his mortal wound, as noted by Christine Rauer.290

Axel Olrik compared the *Gesta Waldevi* variant to an episode in *Ragnars saga* where the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók hear about his death.

**Historia Anglorum, Gestawalde**

Being seized by an illness, Siward abhors the idea of dying an unmanly death. He decides to at least put on his armor and arm himself in order to die like a soldier.

Cyril Wright cites parallels drawn with death of Starkatherus in *Gesta Danorum* and death of Egill in *Hákonar saga góða*.

**Vita Ædwardi Regis, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Historia Regum and Chronicon ex chronicis** agree that Siward died in York, but give no details.

The tradition’s strong tendency to adorn the life of historical Siward with (mostly legendary) motifs of Scandinavian origin is apparent in this list, but the nature of this tendency is attended by many difficulties. Scholarly suggestions about the form in which the Siward material had circulated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have been diverse and often contradictory: most scholars have suggested that there once existed a saga or saga-like narrative about Siward, but have never agreed what surviving material belonged there. Axel Olrik considered the material as ‘a Viking saga of the Danes in England’ and stressed that it was an important testimonial to the development of saga literature outside the Scandinavian world; at the same time, he

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points to the diversity of the Douai manuscript’s material, noting that ‘Siward’s fictious youth is like a romantic ‘fornaldarsaga’, the last part like an historical ‘Islendingasaga’, with its scenes of fight and revenge’.

The next detailed study of the material behind the *Siwards saga was undertaken by Cyril Wright in the framework of his study of saga narratives that may have existed in the Anglo-Saxon world. In the appendix to his monograph, he also published, with translations, fragments of materials he was working with, which were especially important for *Gesta Antecessorum* because of the fact that *Vita et Passio Waldevi comitis* has not been edited since 1854, and has never been translated from Latin. Despite its age, as well as some methodological inconsistencies pointed at by other scholars, Wright’s work continues to be an influential and maybe definitive work on the ‘Siwards saga’. It is, therefore, important to look in some detail at how it sees this complicated matter.

For Wright, a saga is ‘simply the story that has crystallised in the course of its oral transmission (in prose form) through a number of generations, round certain historical events and personages’. This generalisation has more impact on Wright’s analysis of the Siward narratives than the rest of material featured in the monograph, because most of the stories related to Siward are obviously related to the actual Old-Norse Icelandic sagas, which, in turn, have much more distinctive genre features than suggested in the definition of saga quoted above. This contradiction is resolved by leaving aside the complexity of the source material and regarding it as an integral body of material. Wright reads his material as ‘disjecta membra of a *Siwards saga* which must have been still current in Northumbria during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries’ and consistently maintains that all the sources go back to a single text.

For example, the Siward narrative in *Gesta Antecessorum*, which Olrik divided into two parts, Wright finds ‘complete in itself’, which even strengthens the underlying idea that all the material we have is adaptation and quotation of some uniform text.

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291 Axel Olrik, ‘Siward digri of Northumberland’, *Saga-Book 6* (1908-1909), 218
293 Wright viii.
295 Wright 129.
296 Wright 132, 135. Olrik also seems to believe in the existence of a single 'Siwards saga', which he suggests it to be complex in terms of genre – 'half fictious, half historical' (see Axel Olrik, ‘Siward digri of Northumberland’, *Saga-Book 6* (1908-1909), 218).
Although this thesis has no aim to enter discussion on the putative Anglo-Saxon saga, it should be noted for a clearer picture of the material it is dealing with, that there is in fact little evidence of a lost text where all the surviving material on Siward once belonged. The two episodes in Henry of Huntingdon (last in the table), in connection with which the *disjecta membra* phrase was initially used, do not necessarily belong to an integral narrative that does not survive. They could be separate anecdotes that share the concept of honourable death and correspondingly characterise Siward’s figure in common perception. These two stories tend to be used as a pair; for example, they appear in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, from which Shakespeare later adapted Siward’s character for *Macbeth*, immediately one after the other, without any other substantial information about Siward. Although the evidence of such a late text can hardly throw light on the form in which the Siward material was transmitted in twelfth- to thirteenth-century Northumbria, it shows that no other source had provided Holinshed with more than Henry of Huntingdon had already in the twelfth century – *disjecta membra* of a narrative which may have existed as a unity, or may not.

Although Wright’s work has been criticised for its methodological inconsistency, it established a general scholarly understanding of the Siward material, with Wright’s arguments often taken for granted in a number of works in neighbouring fields.297 Further contributions to the discussion, however, have been scarce, with a notable exception in the recent work of Eleanor Parker, who considered the hagiographical nature of the sources as well as their cultural-historical background in Medieval Northumbria and Yorkshire.298 Her article provides a long-expected elaboration of *Vita Waldevi*’s literary and cultural background, including important points of contact with the tradition connected to Ragnar lōðbrok and his sons, such as their possession of a raven-banner and, according to a redaction of the *Lund annals*, Ívar Ragnarsson’s ability to transform into a polar bear--both motifs present, in some form, in *Gesta Antecessorum*. While Parker’s article provides Wright’s arguments with dialogue they had needed, both developing some of his points and criticising others, especially on the nature of the oral tradition that preceded *Vita Waldevi* and the time of its transmission.

Most important for this thesis here is that the life of the Siward legend in Britain is a complicated matter and a subject of an ongoing scholarly debate. For this reason, it seems appropriate for this discussion to stay on relatively firm ground and take into consideration only the ‘fornaldarsaga’ part of Gesta Antecessorum as pinpointed by Olrik — starting with the account of Siward’s ancestry and ending with his encounter with the old man. This is a short fragment (about two pages of printed text) that survives in one manuscript, is written by a single hand and seems reasonably uniform in terms of genre, which gives to a non-Anglo-Saxonist the opportunity to throw some light on related Scandinavian material, despite the lack of scholarly consensus around the Siward legend as a whole.

The three episodes that constitute the fragment are the following:

- The legend about Siward’s lineage going up to a noble lady and a polar bear;
- Siward’s fight with a dragon (‘draco’) in Orkney;
- The Odinic old man’s gift and advice to Siward.

These will be looked at in the order in which they appear in the storyline, which also allows to lead the discussion from independent motifs to the broader Odinic theme. It will be argued that Siward’s bear ancestry establishes a berserker/bear connection, which is then supported by the Odinic theme introduced in relation to an initiatory monster-fighting episode, which is followed by the meeting with a gift-bestowing, Odinic, old man. It is well-attested in scholarship that the first two elements of this list, namely the bear ancestry and the monster-fight, constitute the so-called Bear’s Son Tale (das Märchen von Bärensohn, as Friedrich Panzer first put it). Widely attested in different cultures, mostly European, this folktale plot features a hero who is born from a bear and a woman and, having grown up, kills a monster, usually with magical or other extraordinary weapon. It has been shown in chapter 3 how in Hröðs saga kraka this folktale merges with the saga’s Odinic theme and the theme of berserker, connecting this mythological imagery with Bear’s Son Tale through the figure of Bǫðvarr Bjarki. As will be subsequently shown, a similar confluence takes place in Gesta Antecessorum. The folktale material intertwines with saga imagery, and this phenomenon can shed light on the presence of the Odinic hero plot both on the British Isles and in the Scandinavian world.
2.7. Siward’s bear ancestry

_Gesta Antecessorum_ opens with an account of Earl Waltheof’s ancestry, claiming that his family descended from a bear and woman of good birth. The narrative contains many elements that are important for the subsequent discussion, for which reason it will be wholly quoted:


Ancient traditions tell us that a certain noble man, by the permission of God and contrary to the usual manner of the human race, was begotten of a white bear as his father, a woman of good birth being his mother: [Ursus begat Spratlingus, Spratlingus Ulsius, Ulsius Beorn, surnamed Beresune, which is ‘Bear’s son’. This Beorn was a Dane by race, a distinguished nobleman and a famous soldier. As a sign, however, of the difference of species on the part of those who were his progenitors, nature gave him his father’s ears or those of a bear. In other respects, however, he resembled his mother’s race. But he [Beorn] after many trials of might and military service begat a son of courage and a worthy imitator of his father’s prowess. His name was Siward; and he, as if elated above himself because of his inborn valour, held in contempt only his right of birth, thinking it of slight esteem to succeed his father by virtue of heredity, and ordered a large and strong ship to be prepared for him, well-stocked in all necessaries both in armaments for the ship and victuals and equipment for the men.299

The traditional nature of this narrative is well-attested in scholarship — already in 1882 the Danish historian J.C.H.R. Steenstrup looked at _Gesta Antecessorum_’s parallels in respect to the bear origin myth,300 and two decades later Axel Olrik provided the text with folktale parallels. Although Friedrich Panzer’s fundamental study of the Bear’s Son Tale does not feature _Gesta Antecessorum_ or other Anglo-Latin sources, it gives a detailed overview of 202 folktale narratives of this type. Panzer’s material has been used for analysis. For convenience, the relevant information will be compiled into a table and discussed below.

It should be noted that only saga-influenced Latin texts (_Vita et passio Waldevi, Gesta Herwardi_ and _Gesta Danorum_) are present in the table alongside

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299 Wright’s translation, see Cyril Wright, _The Cultivation of saga in Anglo-Saxon England_ (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), 129-130.

Hróf saga kraka because they belong to the literary-cultural field that is considered in this chapter. Hróf saga kraka was chosen for comparison for methodological reasons: this text has already been analyzed, the fusion of folktale and mythological imagery in it demonstrated, and, most importantly, this saga shows a very clear example of the Odinic hero complex. Texts that do not meet the research’s requirements, either chronologically or because of questionable thematic parallelism, are not looked at here. Most importantly, the long and (to quote Magnús Fjalldal) frustrated scholarly debate on Beowulf’s relation with the Bear’s Son Tale and Scandinavian material (most importantly Grettis saga) will not be touched upon. It is sufficient to keep in mind that the Bear’s Son Tale is a widespread folktale plot, at least throughout Europe, that is also found in chronologically diverse sources — perhaps as early as in Beowulf. This means it could influence thirteenth- to fifteenth-century narratives both in Scandinavia and in the British Isles, either merging with them or co-existing as a parallel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motif</th>
<th>Gesta Antecessorum Book X</th>
<th>Gesta Danorum Book X</th>
<th>Gesta Herwardi</th>
<th>Hrólfs saga kraka and Bjarkarimur</th>
<th>Bear’s Son type folktales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The hero descends from a bear and a woman</td>
<td>Siward (in fourth generation)</td>
<td>Sven Estridsson, Ulvo</td>
<td>Biern, king of Norway; an unnamed bear monster</td>
<td>Þvarðr bjarki / Bjarki</td>
<td>The main character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are names in the lineage with an element meaning ‘bear’</td>
<td>Beorn (‘bear’) Beresune (‘bear’s son’); Siward’s historical son, Osbeorn, can be worked into the same paradigm.</td>
<td>Ulvo (‘wolf’) could be related: compare Úlfr (recte Úlf?) in Siward’s genealogy.</td>
<td>Biern (‘bear’)</td>
<td>Bjarki (‘bear-cub’) is the character’s name in Bjarkamál and Bjarkarimur and his cognomen in Hrólfs saga. In Hrólfs saga, his parents are called Björn (‘bear’) and Bera (‘she-bear’).</td>
<td>The main character often has a name of this type (Bjarndrengur, Peter Ær, Jean de l’urs, Giovanni dell’ Orso)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters who descended from the bear have physical animal traits, like a bear’s ears.</td>
<td>Yes — bear’s ears in Beorn Beresune</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Only feet and head on the bear monster are human</td>
<td>In Hrólfs saga, Þvarðr’s two brothers have monstrous/animal traits but Þvarðr is completely human. In Bjarkarimur, Bjarki has bear’s ears.</td>
<td>‘Half man, half bear’ is a common formula to describe the main character, who may have both human and animal physical traits. A number of folktales have the main character with a name meaning ‘bear’s ears’, and/or it is indicated that he has bear’s ears due to his origin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Warlike | Extensively | No | The bear | Þvarðr means | Not known |

303 See Friedrich Panzer, Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte, 2 vols (München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1912), 1, 17 for a detailed review of this theme in folktale sources.
304 For Olrik’s review of this material against the Gestas Antecessorum background see Axel Olrik, ‘Siward digri of Northumberland’, Saga-Book 6 (1908-1909), 219.
traits of the character who descended from the bear are emphasized.

The bear is killed, and the son violently avenges the father.

The character descended from the bear is a king or of royal blood.

The main character leaves his homeland looking for fame although he could be a king there.

Two important observations can be made from this table’s content. Firstly, there seems to be a strong connection between the sagas and the saga-influenced Anglo-Latin narratives on a thematic level, which makes these texts stand out against the folktale background. Secondly, there seems to be a specific connection between the accounts of *Gesta Antecessorum* and *Hrólfss saga kraka* since there are specific parallels between these texts that cannot be drawn elsewhere. The thematic connections will now be discussed in more detail below.

**Imagery of kingship and power.** Both the three saga-influenced Latin narratives and the account of Bǫðvarr’s career in *Hrólfss saga* revolve around the idea
of political power — to the extent in which a conventional fornaldbarsaga narrative can explore this theme. As it can be seen from the table, all of the protagonists descended from royalty and/or become important chieftains. Moreover, the theme of kingship is further stressed in the cases when the character leaves his inherited throne for a heroic future (Gesta Antecessorum, Hrólf’s saga kraka and, arguably, Beowulf). The folktales, by contrast, seldom feature characters with royal connections, and do not stress the theme of kingship even when the Bear’s Son is related to nobility. This distinction can be naturally explained by genre difference between sagas and saga-like narratives similar to Gesta Antecessorum, which tend to build upon the imagery of power, and folktales, which often feature characters of humble origin. In sagas and saga-like narratives, the themes of kingship and power tend to revolve around the theme of martial prowess, which is a defining characteristic of a saga character inspired by Scandinavian war elites.

**Martial prowess and berserkr connotations in the protagonist.** First of all, it has to be noted that the Bear’s Son Tale is, at the core, a monster-fighting tale that culminates in the protagonist’s victory over a supernatural enemy. This suggests on itself that the character is physically strong and capable of fighting. It is evident, however, that the three Latin narratives as well as Hrólf’s saga kraka take the theme of military skills and warlike characteristics much further than that, with the Latin narrative rhetorically stressing these qualities and Hrólf’s saga giving the name Þðvarr (‘warlike’) to a character elsewhere known as Bjarki or Biarco. Þðvarr’s ability to become a giant bear on the battlefield suggests that the concept of berserkr was easily read into bear ancestry stories at least in a saga context. The connection between the themes of bear origin and berserkr can be supported by the fact that, in relation to characters with bear ancestry, there is a tendency to use names related to wolves (Ulsius, Ulvo) alongside the more expected bear-names like Beorn, Biern, Bjarki etc. This may reflect the bear and wolf connections of berserkr and úlfhéðnar who are mentioned alongside each other in Ynglinga saga.

It can be seen that the parallels between Gesta Antecessorum and Hrólf’s saga kraka are striking, especially for two texts created in such different cultural contexts, and surviving in manuscripts divided by almost five centuries. In fact, every detail from the list is shared by the two texts except for the vengeance story (which, in Siward’s case, could be present in Henry of Huntington’s account of Osbeorn’s death scene, although this idea cannot not grounded well enough to become more than a
hypothesis). Most notably, in *Gesta Antecessorum* and *Hrólf's saga kraka* the bear origin narrative plays the same structural role — that of a starting point in a hero’s journey, for the sake of which he abandons the kingship he had inherited, and by the end of which journey he finds himself at a king’s court. Looking ahead, it is worth noticing that an initiatory monster-fight and an Odinic encounter are the main events of both heroes’ career.

The possible connections of characters characterised as Odinic heroes with *berserkir* and *úlfhéðnar*, especially in the context of shapeshifting into bears and wolves, has been already observed in the analyses of *Hrólf's saga kraka* and *Völsunga saga* respectively. In the capacity of a yet unproved theory it may be noted that, considering the plots’ obvious parallelism, the adjacency of bear names and wolf names fits into the *berserkirlúlfhéðnar* framework. At the same time, kingship and war are quite naturally two themes closely associated with Odinic heroes, who basically tend, with Óðinn’s aid, to rise to kingship through war. Although saga literature tends to be concerned with power in general, the distinction is plausible. The Bear’s Son folktale type is Indo-European and therefore universal, while the Odinic hero plot is, naturally, specifically Scandinavian; when the two themes interweave, the flexible folktale material acquires new ideological meaning. This hypothesis about the nature of Siward’s youth narrative in *Gesta Antecessorum* derives quite naturally from the conclusions of chapters 2-5; this is, however, but a hypothesis until it is supported by the evidence of the further two episodes.

However, before these two episodes are considered, it has to be noted retrospectively that the bear-*berserkir* connection has for a long time been taken for granted in relation to literary material that involves bear-fighting or bear parentage. Due to *Gesta Antecessorum*’s apparent Scandinavian parallels, this attitude applied to the Siward’s youth narrative as well, with an author of popular Yorkshire history suggesting already in 1865 that

> [Siward’s] grandfather was a Berserkir, i.e. one who fights in a Bear’s skin, which originated the tale that he was himself descended from a bear; an imputation to which his pointed ears lent some apparent probability.305

From today’s scholarly point of view, this notion, although an acceptable generalization in a popular work, is technically ungrounded. Firstly, the bear-*berserkir*

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305 J.G. Miall, *Yorkshire Illustrations of British History* (London: Hall, Smart & Allen, Paternoster row, 1865), 103.
connection is still sometimes regarded as questionable itself; secondly and even more importantly, the mere fact of reference to bears in the plot, even in text evidently inspired by Scandinavian literature, would not necessarily mean that the concept of berserkr is implied there in any way, even less that a historical berserkr could ‘originate the tale’ of bear ancestry. Most likely, both Book X of Gesta Danorum and Gesta Herwardi testify to the fact that the bear ancestry plot must have been in wide circulation at least in Denmark. It is understandable, therefore, that the possible berserkr implications in the Siward story have not received much elaboration in scholarship, and Siward’s bear origin has been conceived up to today to vaguely ‘have some basis in pre-Christian Germanic origin myths in general’. However, the Icelandic tradition of Odinic hero narratives, as shown in this thesis, shows too many points of contact with Gesta Antecessorum to be explained by accidental combination of similar motifs.

It has been mentioned that the structure of the Bear’s Son Tale suggests a monster-fight. In Hrólfs saga kraka, after leaving his kingdom in search of greater deeds, Bögvarr defeats a dragon in Hleiðargarðr. It may be a coincidence or a matter of the audiences’ taste that Siward’s monster was also a dragon, which has also drawn associations with Sigurðr, Ragnarr and Beowulf’s dragons. The next section aims to put the short account of Siward’s fight with the dragon in Orkney into the same context as the ancestry story, and discusses this episode’s significance for the whole narrative.

### 3.1. The Orkney dragon

Gesta Antecessorum’s account of Siward’s fight with the dragon is very brief, yet it has, understandably, featured prominently in scholarly discussion. The narrative relates:

> In insula autem illa habitabat draco quidam, qui erat non solum in bestiis, verum et in populo, strages maxima. Cujus fama ad aures Siwardi rerum gesta deferente, cum eo pugnam inire satagebat; non operas locans arenariorum more, sed robur corporis et animi virtutem in hoc declarans, eum devicit et ab insula effugavit.

In that island [Orkney], however, there was living a dragon, who was the cause of very great destruction not only among beasts but also among people. When the report of its doings

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reached the ears of Siward he was eager to engage it in combat; not hiring out his services in the manner of the combatant in the arena but in this demonstrating the strength of body as well as power of mind he overcame it and drove it in flight from the island.\(^{307}\)

Wright considers a dragon-story to be ‘property of no country in particular’ and pays little attention to this episode.\(^{308}\) Expectably, numerous parallels have been drawn to this brief episode of some fifty words. The figures most commonly invoked are the famous dragonslayers of Old Icelandic tradition, Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Ragnarr loðbrók. Both parallels can be, and have been, backed up by the accompanying material. In Sigurðr’s case, scholars have noted the cognation of the names Siward and Sigurðr. They suggested that the Orkney dragon parallels Fáfnir and the encounter with the Odinic old man parallels Sigurðr’s meetings with Óðinn (one attested in Reginsmál and three in Volsunga saga). The Ragnarr loðbrók parallel was developed by Eleanor Parker’s insight into the parallels of the Siward legend with British material connected to the sons of Ragnarr; the most important of these are the presence of the raven-banner motif in both narratives, and Ívarr’s transformation into a bear (Lund Annals) that could, according to Timothy Bolton, be related to the bear origin myth. Together with the dragonfighting episode, this group of parallels could theoretically establish the two traditions as at least remote analogues. Finally, Bøðvarr Bjarki’s dragon fight in Hleidargarðr (Hrólf’s saga kraka) has been mentioned as a possible analogue.

Bøðvars þáttr shares with Gesta Antecessorum a number of important elements, such as the protagonist’s bear parentage and the nature of the defeated monster, which is, like Siward’s dragon, uncharacteristically land-attacking rather than treasure-keeping (more on that below). The most evident problem with the Hrólf’s saga kraka episode is whether it can be identified as a dragon-fight at all: many scholars have argued that the dragon in Bøðvars þáttr might be a late innovation, inspired by chivalric narratives with its fashion for winged monsters. According to this interpretation, the dragon in Hrólf’s saga kraka took the place of a more traditional bestial monster killed by Bjarki in related narratives, namely a giant bear (Gesta Danorum) or a she-wolf (Bjarkarímur). In the same wave, Ludwig Olson has argued that Bøðvarr’s dragon fight is modelled on the folkloric Yule troll fight, and the change of an actual troll for a winged ‘troll-dragon’ complies with the taste of

\(^{307}\) Wright’s translation, see Cyril Wright, *The Cultivation of saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), 130.

\(^{308}\) Wright 134.
the time when the known form of *Hrólf's saga kraka* was written (3.2). The status of *Bóðvar's þáttr* in relation to *Gesta Antecessorum* has not been established consensually: most scholars briefly mention it, sometimes with reservations, without going into much detail and therefore suggesting that the parallels are determined by the presence of the same extremely widespread theme (dragon-fight or monster-fight). It does not help the discussion that, although a wide range of datings has been suggested for *Hrólf's saga kraka* (3.2), the earliest surviving manuscript is four centuries younger than the Douai manuscript containing *Vita Waldevi*.

Similar reservations can be made about the two other saga parallels, those with the two dragonslayings of the Völsung legend. It has already been mentioned that both Fáfnir and Ragnarr’s dragon are passive, hoard-guarding monsters who are approached by the active heroes who aim to get the treasure. Although it is noted in *Ragnars saga* that the dragon has to be fed, which is a concern for jarl Herruðr, it does not actively attack land and people as happens in *Gesta Antecessorum*.

New light was thrown on the nature of this controversial episode of *Gesta Antecessorum* with Christine Rauer’s *Beowulf and the Dragon*, where a chapter is devoted almost exclusively to Siward’s dragon fight with some parallels from other post-Conquest English narratives. Rauer demonstrates convincingly, on both thematic and phraseological levels, that the account of Siward’s dragon-fight is in fact very similar to the hagiographical tradition of dragon-fighting. The following features are characteristic of this tradition. Firstly, as the formula suggests, the monster is usually a serpentine, winged, fire- or venom-breathing dragon, which is aggressive towards the population of a land and towards cattle. This is clearly the case with Siward but can be contrasted with Sigurðr Fafnísbaní and Ragnarr loðbrók, who fought passive, hoard-guarding monsters. For convenience, these two types of dragon-fighting will be further labelled *saint’s life type* and *heroic type*, although Rauer does not call them that. Secondly, as Rauer notes, it is often the case in hagiographical narratives that a saint drives the dragon away from the land rather than kills it; this is also the case in *Gesta Antecessorum*, but quite uncharacteristic for a saga narrative. Rauer concludes that *Gesta Antecessorum* is ‘a rare variant which combines the paradigm of The Bear’s Son with a dragon-fight’ that is, arguably, ‘modelled partly

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on a hagiographical tradition, partly on Germanic legend’. It seems safe to assume that the monster-fight has become a dragon-fight under the influence of a hagiographical tradition, which provided the story with material, but the structure has been defined by the Bear’s Son Tale type.

Looking back at the bear origin story, one can see Siward’s dragon-fight as a contamination of three large literary themes: the Bear’s Son paradigm, which provides the story with the basic plot structure of bear origin and monster-fighting; the hagiographical dragonslaying tradition, which makes the monster a land-attacking dragon; and, finally and most importantly for this thesis, the Odinic hero complex characteristic of the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas. The Odinic hero complex links the bear origin story with berserkr and the concept of great martial ability, gives initiatory overtones to the monster-fight (which can be, or not be, a dragon-fight), and introduces an Óðinn-encounter into the story. The relation between these three large thematic trends is shown in the figure below.

Figure 5. The parallels to Gesta Antecessorum

In this figure, grey lines show connections between themes and motifs that in general exist independently, but sometimes tend to merge in collective imagination. For

example, the Bear’s Son folktale type is found around the world without any connection to Óðinn, but in Scandinavian context it is easily worked into the Odinic hero narrative through corellation of the bear origin motif with a berserkr’s bear nature, and the monster-fight, characteristic of this folktale type, with an initiatory fight that establishes the Odinic hero in his role. As shown in the figure, the image of Bǫðvarr bjarki in Hrólf's saga kraka is the result of exactly this contamination. A similar merging appears in a paradigm that requires any monster-fight, and eventually this place is taken by a dragonslaying episode, even if the material is not initially associated with a dragon figure. The reasons for this interfusion may vary; in Gesta Antecessorum the dragon was most likely introduced, as shown by Christine Rauer, under the influence of hagiographical literature.

3.2. Conclusion on Vita et passio Waldevi

It is clear from Figure 5 that the nature of the monster defeated by the protagonist is not relevant to the study, and may be determined by many factors like the influence of hagiographical narratives. In the light of the many apparent similarities between Gesta antecessorum and Hrólf's saga kraka, it would be tempting to suggest that the dragon in Bǫðvars þáttir is a close parallel to Siward’s dragon, but there is too little material to back this hypothesis, and only a detailed further study of this particular case could support this argument or prove it wrong. Neither Bjarkarimur nor Gesta Danorum support the relation hypothesis as they mention a bear or a wolf as Bjarki’s monsters. However, regardless of the possible parallelism between the Orkney and Hleiðargarðr dragons, important conclusions can be made confidently:

- The merging of the Bear’s Son paradigm with the Odinic hero complex, found in Hrólf’s saga kraka, is also attested in Vita et passio Waldevi, a thirteenth-century Anglo-Latin narrative influenced by a Scandinavian tradition.

- It is quite possible, in the light of the parallelism between sources, that Vita Waldevi and Bǫðvars þáttir have a common origin that has been connected both to the Bear’s Son Tale type and to some form of the Odinic hero complex.

There are reasons to assume, therefore, that the Odinic hero complex, more or less as it is present in Völsunga saga and Hrólf’s saga kraka, is at least older than the
thirteenth century. This is important because Hrólfss saga kraka’s dating is problematic (3.2), and further investigations could shed more light on it.

4. GENERAL CONCLUSION ON THE LATIN SOURCES

The analysis of the two Latin sources that demonstrate the Odinic hero complex, namely the Hadingus sequence in Gesta Danorum and the account of Siward’s early years in Vita et Passio Waldeiv, has yielded two important parallels with saga literature that makes use of this complex. Firstly, the motif of initiatory blood-drinking, which is present in Hrólfss saga kraka, also attaches itself to Hadingus in Gesta Danorum, and it does so in a clearly Odinic context. The presence of the initiatory blood-drinking motif both in Gesta Danorum and in Hrólfss saga contunies the long line of initiatory episodes connected to the Odinic hero complex. At the same time, the motif of blood-brotherhood in the Hadingus narrative evokes double protagonists in other considered narratives: Boğövarr and Hjalti in Hrólfss saga kraka and Hjálmarr and Oddr in the Sámsey complex. The connection between the Odinic old man and the blood-brotherhood of Hadingus and Liserus supports the hypothesis that both in Hrólfss saga and in the battle of Sámsey episode we are dealing with a distant reflection of an Odinic Männerbund. In a similar vein, the account of Siward digri’s bear ancestry shows that Vita et Passio Waldeiv’s source showed a close connection between berserkir and bestiality on the one hand, and the motif of Odinic hero plot on the other.

These two Latin sources drastically deepen the chronological perspective of this discussion. It is not mere speculation at this point that the Odinic/berserkir theme in Hrólfss saga kraka, technically a seventeenth-century text, may be very old: Gesta Danorum and Vita et Passio Waldeiv prove that it is at least older than these two texts.
GENERAL CONCLUSION

In order to shed some light on what Stephen Mitchell calls ‘the relationship between the literary uses of Óðinn and the facts concerning the actual religious practices of pagan Scandinavia’, this dissertation considered the literary form of the fornaldarsögur that centre around heroic figures depicted as Óðinn’s protégés. To formalise the discussion as well as the choice of material, the concept of the Odinic hero complex was introduced, which encompasses narrative structures, imagery and other material associated in the sagas with a protagonist helped and betrayed by Óðinn. This Odinic hero narrative has been looked at on the example of three fornaldarsögur, Völsunga saga, Hröðfs saga kraka and Gautreks saga, as well as learned Latin texts connected to saga literature. The analysis also relied on the evidence of saga narratives that do not explicitly demonstrate the complete Odinic hero complex as it is described in chapter 1, but contains significant thematic parallelism to the main sources; these secondary sources included Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka, Órvar-Odds saga and Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks. The evidence shows that the plot about a hero who receives Óðinn’s help and gifts, performs great deeds thanks to this help, but then is betrayed by Óðinn and perishes, has been a staple of saga literature throughout centuries: it is attested to as early as in around 1400 in Völsunga saga, and is still popular throughout the seventeenth century where the earliest manuscripts of Hröðfs saga kraka belong. This timespan is significantly widened if the now lost early narratives, which influenced Gesta Danorum and Vita et Passio Waldevi, are also labelled as ‘sagas’. On the surface, this consistency seems to support the hypothesis that there is a more or less direct connection between the material contained in the ‘mythical-heroic sagas’ and their pre-Christian roots.

However, a comparative analysis of the sources that make use of the Odinic hero paradigm demonstrates that there is a substantial diversity between them on ideological and structural levels. Manuscript traditions behind the sagas and their relationships with sources and parallels contrast with each other as well. Curiously, the most crucial distinction can be drawn between Völsunga saga and the rest of the material. The most important points of contrast are given below.

Firstly and most importantly, the overwhelming majority of the texts that employ the Odinic hero complex revolve around the idea that the protagonist’s relation to Óðinn is conflicted, dangerous and, in the end, fatal. The conflict with Óðinn tends to be the driving force of a narrative where Óðinn is physically present and plots against the hero, as it happens in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and in *Vikars þáttr* in *Gautreks saga*. The theme of resentment against Óðinn may be present on the thematic level in narratives where Óðinn does not participate in the action himself, but metonymically embodies death and defeat. This is the case in *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka* and the Sámsey sequence found in *Ǫrvar-Ódds saga* and *Hervarar saga*. The analysis of these three latter texts in chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated that both *Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka* and the battle of Sámsey complex are structurally and thematically related to *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and the concept of the band of berserkir, which either includes the protagonists or is opposed to them, is connected to the image of the malevolent Óðinn in all of these texts. It is shown in chapter 6 how the younger *Gautreks saga* works the themes of a warband of twelve and Óðinn as an enemy into the Starkaðr material, which clearly presents Óðinn as deceptive and evil. When set against this quite homogenous background, *Völsunga saga* stands out as very neutral in its attitude to Óðinn both from the author-compiler’s point of view and in the characters’ direct speech. As opposed to the dying Sigmundr’s calm acceptance of the fact that Óðinn ‘does not want [him] to wield his sword anymore’, in similar situations we see Bóðvarr’s intention to crush Óðinn ‘as a detestable little mouse’, Innstein’s wish to ‘do Óðinn harm’, and Órvar-Oddr’s detest of Valhöll that is reinforced by his identity of a noble heathen and subsequently a Christian who is hostile to paganism in general and to Óðinn specifically. Except for *Völsunga saga* and the Latin non-saga sources, Óðinn is always represented as the Odinic hero’s greatest enemy.

Scholars have described the pronouncedly negative attitude to Óðinn in *Hrólfs saga kraka* as Christian in its nature. Indeed, *Hrólfs saga kraka* demonstrates a very clear opposition between the diabolic pagan world and the idealised protagonists who, tragically, ‘have no knowledge of [their] Creator’. It has been shown in chapter 3 how the last chapters of *Hrólfs saga kraka* gradually introduce the Christian theme into the narrative, first by playing with the connotations of the word *ferligr* and then making the definitive statement quoted above. However, this Christian theme is not explicit in the parallels to *Hrólfs saga kraka*, which also present Óðinn in a very negative way
and, more importantly, all contain the theme of a hero’s enmity towards Óðinn. It is clear that Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka, Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks and Qrvar-Odds saga are nevertheless products of Christian consciousness, and it must inevitably affect the way they represent Óðinn. Völsunga saga, however, was also been written between three and four centuries after the Conversion, and its analysis — both performed in chapter 2 of this dissertation and by much earlier scholars like Per Wieselgren — shows that it is a very untypical text, which is basically a rewriting of a manuscript similar to the Codex Regius, but with the Odinic theme heavily reinforced. To sum up, the theme of the Odinic hero’s hostility towards Óðinn is a dominant one in the sagas that feature the Odinic hero at all. The odd example of Völsunga saga can be explained by the fact that its author-compiler was clearly trying to keep the narrative as close as possible to a collection of Eddic poems, and therefore could not bring into the saga new narrative paradigms that typically accompanied the Odinic theme.

Although the analysed sources are diverse ideologically, i.e. in how negatively they represent Óðinn-worship, there is a surprising homogeneity in terms of common motifs and imagery. Consistent with Jens Peter Schjødt’s view of the Odinic hero, there is an initiatory pretext to virtually all analysed narratives except for the rather fragmentary Sámsey sequence. The initiatory theme tends to be very pronounced and clear. So, in Hrólfs saga kraka it is reduplicated for every champion (Svipdagr, Bóðvarr, Hjalti) and then, via an Odinic encounter, for the whole warband and Hrölf kraki. In Völsunga saga, initiation structures are repeated for Sigmundr, Sinfjöstli and Sigurðr. Both in Hrólfs saga kraka and Völsunga saga, the themes of shapeshifting and blood-drinking are worked into the structures, and the evidence of Hálfs saga ok hálfsrekka, the Sámsey complex and Gautreks saga seems to prove Schjødt’s hypothesis of a close connection between berserkir, berserkir-slaying, shapeshifting and slaying a monster as variants of an initiatory rite connected to Óðinn. The learned Latin material contains elements from the same semantic field. In the Hadingus narrative, Gesta Danorum presents the motif ‘drinking the blood of a monster gives strength’ through an Odinic old man’s direct speech, evoking Bóðvarr drinking Elg-Fróði’s blood, Hjalti drinking the flying monster’s blood and Sigurðr eating Fáfnir’s heart. Siward digri, according to Vita et Passio Waldevi, shares the bear origin story with Bóðvarr, which could suggest an association with berserkir. The analysis of other narratives where the bear origin story is used, supports this hypothesis.

Once again, however, the evidence of Völsunga saga is fundamentally
different from the other examples. Although it contains all of the elements of the complex, they are scattered around the narrative rather than represent a logical unity similar to the last two þættir of Hrólfs saga kraka, and, one could argue, often look as if they are worked into the narrative by the author-compiler rather than like a natural part of the tradition. Sigmundr and Sinfinn’s transformation into wolves is a clear example of such irregularity. Although this shapeshifting episode is routinely interpreted as a reference to úlfhédnar and therefore a remnant of a very old initiation structure, the analysis shows that, most likely, it has been invented when the saga was being composed and written down. Furthermore, it has been shown in chapters 3 and 7 how the blood-drinking motif in the Odinic context tends to be associated with the theme of blood-brotherhood. The Sámsey sequence and Egils saga einhenda ok Æsmundar berserkjabana support this tendency by presenting two closely connected protagonists as berserkir-slayers. However, the Sigurðr narrative lacks any connection to this group of motifs associated with the Männerbund, and it is most likely that the motif of eating Fáfnir’s heart has always existed independently.

So, considering the findings of chapter 2 against the evidence received from the rest of the material, one will inevitably notice how Völsunga saga’s representation of Óðinn stands out. Surviving in but one copy, and strictly following a manuscript of the Poetic Edda, which was a close parallel to the Codex Regius, Völsunga saga is clearly a product of an antiquarian imagination that consciously constructs an image of heroic past determined by Óðinn’s will. In this respect, Völsunga saga is a valuable document that demonstrates thirteenth-century attitudes to the earlier poetic tradition. This leads us to an important conclusion: the association between Óðinn, berserkir, shapeshifting and initiation structures is a concept not unconsciously transmitted since pre-Christian times, but understood and used by thirteenth-century authors.

An important layer of evidence, which has been only touched upon in this discussion, is the figure of Othinus in Saxo’s Gesta Danorum. The scope of the dissertation allows for the comparative analysis of a part of the material that reflects the Odinic hero complex, but there are still many unanswered connected to Saxo’s treatment of mythological mad heroic material. A comparative study of the fornaldarsaga Óðinn and Saxo’s Othinus, focused on Saxo’s literary form and his use of rhetorical devices, would undoubtedly support some of this dissertation’s findings and challenge others, as well as provide the scholarly discussion with a better understanding of Óðinn’s image in Christian Scandinavia. That is, however, a
perspective for further work.
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