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THE SOURCES OF *SKÁLDSKAPARMÁL*: SNORRI'S INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Discussion of the sources of *Skáldskaparmál* in the past has mainly been concerned with two related issues, first the accuracy with which Snorri reproduces pre-Christian tradition in his work, and thus his reliability as a witness to that tradition, and secondly the extent to which his work is influenced by the Christian, Latin thought of the Middle Ages. With regard to the first of these issues, there has been speculation about the possibility that Snorri or people of his circle may actually have invented myths as well as altering or modifying those they inherited from the past. One particular aspect of the second issue is the question whether Snorri himself could read Latin. Recent work has started from the assumption that he could, and has concentrated on attempting to identify the Latin writings he may have used (Margaret Clunies Ross 1987; Ursula and Peter Dronke 1977). Many scholars have taken for granted that Latin books would have been available to Snorri; characteristic is Halldór Halldórsson in *Old Icelandic heiti in Modern Icelandic* (1975), who, having pointed out that Oddi, where Snorri was brought up, was a place where learning, including Latin learning, had been highly developed in the 12th century, says: 'Of course, these points do not suffice to prove that Snorri knew Latin. But the very fact that in the *Skáldskaparmál* he attempts to apply certain classificatory principles to the stylistic devices used in Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian poetry indicates some sort of schooling' (p. 11), and adds in a footnote (on p. 12): 'Most scholars who have dealt with Snorra Edda, such as F. Jónsson, Heusler, Nordal, Meissner and E. Ó. Sveinsson, disregard the question of whether Snorri knew classical rhetoric or not . . . Stefán Einarsson is fully aware of the fact that Snorri knew Latin . . . Unfortunately, St. Einarsson does not furnish any evidence for his assertion, but I think he is right.' It is one of the purposes of this

paper to examine whether there *is* any evidence for the assertion, and whether it can be upheld.

Skáldskaparmál consists mainly of a collection of extracts from poems that illustrate the use of kennings for various things, and a collection of narratives that purport to give the origins of various kennings; it begins with a narrative about the origin of the poetic art itself. Part of the work is in the form of a dialogue between Ægir and Bragi. This is probably inspired by the account of the feast Ægir held for the gods described in the prose introduction to *Lokasenna* (PE 96), an episode also used by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 33.

The poems Snorri quotes and the prose stories he retells were probably all known to him from oral tradition; many of the prose narratives may themselves be based on poems. It is possible that some had already been written down by the time of Snorri's work, though little trace of such codification has survived. Some eddic poems, certainly, seem to have existed in written form by about the beginning of the thirteenth century, but the evidence indicates that skaldic verse, unless it was being newly composed by a literate poet, was only written down in the form of quotations embedded in prose narrative, and few of the verses Snorri quotes in *Skáldskaparmál* had been already used in this way. He quotes a huge number of verses in his *Edda*, and many more in *Heimskringla*, and the survival of a large proportion of skaldic verse is due to its incorporation in Snorri's writings; he must have known an enormous amount of verse by heart. It is presumed that he acquired much of this from his education in the household of Jón Loptsson at Oddi.

Some parts of *Skáldskaparmál* are based on complete poems (or substantial parts of them) either eddic or skaldic, for instance *Rígsþula*, *Þórsdrápa*, *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Húsdrápa*, *Grottasǫngr* and other poems now lost, e.g. one which gave information about the river Vimur. Snorri may have known these either from oral tradition or from written versions, if such existed in his time, though many of the longer verse quotations in *Skáldskaparmál* have been suspected of being interpolations, since they are not in all MSS and seem to upset the organisation of the work. The same kind of sources are the main basis of *Gylfaginning*, however.

Some of the narratives in *Skáldskaparmál* are derived from earlier written sagas. Most notable of such sources is *Skjöldunga saga*, probably compiled from poems and stories in the second half of the twelfth century at Oddi to celebrate Jón Loptsson's descent from the kings of Norway. This saga must have been the primary model for Snorri's *Ynglinga saga* (he names it as a source, *Heimskringla* I, 57), and also provided material

for the chapters in *Skáldskaparmál* on Hrólfr kraki and Fróði and the mill Grotti; whether he found the entire poem *Grottasöngur* in the saga too is difficult to say. The extracts from *Bjarkarmál* may also be from this saga, and also the account of Hjaðningavíg (see Finnur Jónsson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931, lvi; the story also appears in *Ragnarsdrápa*, and a later literary version of it is found in *Sorla þátr* in *Flateyjarbók*).

The chapters on *otrgjöld* and the Gjúkungar are likely to be derived from an earlier version of *Völsunga saga* (though the *Sigurðar saga* mentioned in *Háttatal* was probably not a written source); there are also similarities to the narratives part in prose and part in verse in the *Poetic Edda*. The account of Hølgí and his burial (ch. 56) may be derived from an early *Hlaðajarla saga*.

The genealogical chapters towards the end of *Skáldskaparmál* (ch. 64), about Halfdan the old and his sons, have a relationship to a text that probably, like *Skjöldunga saga*, *Völsunga saga* and *Hlaðajarla saga*, originated in learned historical writing of the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries: the fragment *Hversu Noregr byggðist* in *Flateyjarbók* I, 22–30 (another version of this, labelled *Fundinn Noregr* in editions of *Fornaldar sögur*, forms an introduction to *Orkneyinga saga* in *Flateyjarbók*). The relationship of these texts with each other and with *Snorra Edda* cannot be said to be clear (Finnbogi Guðmundsson thought it possible that Snorri himself compiled the present introduction to *Orkneyinga saga*, and that the *þátr Hversu Noregr byggðist* in *Flateyjarbók* was a later redaction of this), but the content seems at any rate to be native genealogical and historical or mythological lore. *Hyndluljóð* may be another product of the same kind of learned historical speculation.

The various lists of *heiti* in the latter part of *Skáldskaparmál* may be partly based on already existing *pulur* such as those that are included in some manuscripts at the end of *Skáldskaparmál*, although Snorri must have collected many items himself from skaldic poems that he knew and from his own vocabulary. Twelfth-century poets like Einarr Skúlason had already shown an interest in collecting lists of poetical expressions, and *Alvíssmál* may be a product of the same kind of learned compilation. It is difficult to be certain, however, which of the *pulur* may actually be based on *Skáldskaparmál* itself (or indeed have been compiled by Snorri). The short collections of examples of poetic language printed by Finnur Jónsson as *Den lille Skálda* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931, 255–9) may also be older than *Skáldskaparmál*, or they may be extensions of Snorri's work, like the additions to *Skáldskaparmál* in *Codex Wormianus*, but it is likely that Snorri was not the first to begin to classify and collect

examples of poetic diction, just as Rognvaldr Kali's *Háttalykill* shows that he was not the first to codify metrical variations.

The sources of *Skáldskaparmál* are therefore broadly of two kinds, Norse poems, most of them at any rate originally oral, and learned, but vernacular, historical writings of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. There does not seem any need to assume extensive oral prose stories or folk-tales among Snorri's sources: the above list seems to account for most of his material. Where he seems to narrate myths that go beyond the extant poetical versions it is likely that he has expanded on hints in poems known to him, as for instance when he expands a rather obscure reference in *Vafþrúðnismál* into a story of a flood (*Gylfaginning* ch. 7)—though in some cases his expansions may be partly based on folk-tales or be paraphrases of lost poems. Many of his narratives should perhaps be described as reconstructions of myths (similar to the reconstructions of history we find in sagas) based on allusions and hints in early poems, such as the story of the origin of poetry and the story of the building of Ásgarðr. The only material that has its origin in foreign (and originally Latin) writing is the references to the Troy story in the so-called *Epilogus*. It is because this is the only part of *Skáldskaparmál* not based on native sources that some scholars have thought it likely that this is not Snorri's work, but this judgment is based only on the presupposition that Snorri would not have used such material himself, or that if he had used it he would have used it differently. The fact that this section is not in all manuscripts is not sufficient reason to reject it, since it is not at all certain that the Uppsala manuscript should be taken to represent the content of Snorri's original work better than the *Codex Regius*, *Codex Trajectinus* and *Codex Wormianus*, and references to Troy appear in parts of the Prologue that are in the Uppsala manuscript, as well as perhaps in *Heimskringla* (there called *Ásgarðr* or *inn forni Ásgarðr* in accordance with *Gylfaginning's* identification of these with Troy). But whether or not the references to Troy were included by Snorri, whoever wrote them had a very inadequate understanding of the Troy story. They are full of misunderstandings and mistakes, and the writer does not seem to know much of the actual events that were narrated in the Medieval Latin versions of Homer and in the Norse *Trójumanna saga*. It is likely that he had heard a somewhat garbled account of it, but had not actually read any version of the story himself, though there are indications that he may have had some knowledge of a version of *Trójumanna saga*, and perhaps also of *Breta sögur*. There is a striking correspondence in one of his untraditional details about the Troy story that corresponds closely with

the version of *Trójumanna saga* in *Hauksbók*, and that is the name Volucrontem, corresponding to Polypoetes in the original story. This may have been taken by Snorri from a version of *Trójumanna saga*, or vice versa, and in any case seems to be derived from a misreading of a text where the initial *p* was mistaken for an insular *v* and the medial *p* for a *c* or *r*; the person who made these mistakes can hardly have been expert in reading insular Latin manuscripts. There is also an interesting correspondence between the Prologue to *Snorra Edda* and the *Hauksbók* version of *Breta sǫgur* in the name Loricus, which is probably an error for Locrinus. (See Faulkes 1978–9, 122–4.)

The classification of the kennings and *heiti* in *Skáldskaparmál* under their respective referents, and the order in which they are arranged, has been said to be similar to that in some medieval encyclopaedic writings (Bede, Isidore, Honorius). Again, there are similarities, but these are not so great as to convince me that Snorri had actually read any medieval Latin encyclopaedia, only that he knew what they were like. His ordering of topics seems quite natural for someone of his interests and with the materials he had to deal with, and does not have to be derived from any foreign model.

The classification of rhetorical devices in *Skáldskaparmál* has some similarities to that of Latin treatises on rhetoric, though in fact the closest analogy to Snorri's description of the kenning at the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál* is in Aristotle:

Er sú grein svá sett at vér kǫllum Óðin eða Þór eða Tý eða einhvern af Ássum eða álfum, at hverr þeira er ek nefni til, þá tek ek með heiti af eign annars Ássins eða get ek hans verka nokkvorra. Þá eignask hann nafnit en eigi hinn er nefndr var, svá sem vér kǫllum Sigtý eða Hangatý eða Farmatý, þat er þá Óðins heiti, ok kǫllum vér þat kennt heiti. Svá ok at kalla Reiðartý. (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931, 86)

(This category (kenning) is constructed in this way, that we speak of Óðinn or Þórr or Týr or one of the Æsir or elves, in such a way that with each of those I mention, I add a term for the attribute of another Áss or make mention of one or other of his deeds. Then the latter becomes the one referred to, and not the one that was named; for instance when we speak of Victory-Týr or Hanged Týr or Cargo-Týr, these are expressions for Óðinn, and these we call *kennt heiti* (periphrastic terms); similarly if one speaks of Chariot-Týr.)

The passage in Aristotle's *Poetics* (XXI. 11–13) that deals with this figure of speech is as follows (he is speaking of metaphor used 'in the way of analogy'):

When, of four terms, the second bears the same relation to the first as the fourth to the third; in which case the fourth may be substituted for the second

and the second for the fourth. And sometimes the proper term is also introduced besides its relative term. Thus a cup bears the same relation to Bacchus as a shield to Mars. A shield therefore may be called the cup of Mars and a cup the shield of Bacchus. Again evening being to day what old age is to life, the evening may be called the old age of the day and old age the evening of life.

There is no likelihood that Aristotle was available in Iceland in the thirteenth century and the similarity must be fortuitous, and Snorri cannot be said to have based his description closely on any foreign one. Similarly his use of the term *fornafn* indicates some familiarity with Latin grammatical concepts: he uses it once in *Háttatal* to mean ‘pronoun’ (*pronomen*), but in *Skáldskaparmál* he clearly means what the Romans called *pronomination* and the Greeks *antonomasia*, the use of a description to replace a proper name. He divides kennings and *heiti* further into *viðkenningar* and *sannkenningar*. In spite of the etymology of the term *sannkenningar* (= ‘true kennings’), it does not seem that Snorri is contrasting literalness with the use of metaphor; some of his examples of *sannkenningar* would probably be analysed by modern readers as metaphorical, and moreover it is not in connection with *sannkenningar* that Snorri discusses metaphor. The element *sann-* in the term as it is used in *Skáldskaparmál* seems to be related to the idea of the essential nature of the persons referred to, in the term as used in *Háttatal* to the word *sanna* in the sense of affirm (since the examples are all of affirmatory or intensive attributives and adverbs; they refer to what can truly be said to be the case). In distinguishing *viðkenningar* and *sannkenningar* Snorri seems to be attempting to distinguish descriptions based on accidents from those based on essences in the Aristotelean sense; all his examples of *viðkenningar* seem to describe people in terms of their ‘accidental’ attributes (possessions, relationships) while his examples of *sannkenningar* both in *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* are descriptions in terms of inherent or innate qualities. In *Skáldskaparmál* all the examples are descriptions of people, but in *Háttatal*, some of them are of things or actions. In both parts of the work, most of the examples of *sannkenningar* are not kennings in the modern sense of the word since they are not constructed with the use of base-words and determinants. His account of *nýgjörvingar* makes it clear that with this term he is thinking of something like extended metaphor or allegory, but Snorri in general shows little interest in metaphor and figures of speech—strange if he had read any of the standard classical or medieval treatises on rhetoric. He sees poetical language largely in

terms of substitutions of one name for another, rather than in terms of transference of meaning. He describes and exemplifies *nýgjörvingar* in a number of places in both *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931, 121, 156, 190, 215, 217–18), but always with the implication that it is somewhat exceptional. Even kennings which seem to us obviously metaphorical, such as when gold is called fire of the sea or poetry the ship of the dwarfs as well as ale of dwarfs, are explained by Snorri in terms of substitutions, and the fundamental kenning type as arising from the events of a particular story (e.g. substitution of a word for sea for the name *Ægir* as a variation on the kenning-type ‘fire of *Ægir*’, based according to Snorri on the story of how *Ægir* used gold as a source of light when he entertained the *Æsir* to a feast (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 33); the use of *lið* as a word for ale and for vessel, so that other words for ship could be used instead as a variation of the kenning-type ‘mead of the dwarfs’ which arose from an episode in the story of the origin of poetry (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 3; in his account of the origin of the mead of poetry at the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál* however, he seems to favour a metaphorical interpretation of the latter: ‘We call poetry . . . dwarf’s transportation because this mead brought them deliverance from the skerry’). Indeed Snorri’s interest in word-play, which he calls *ofljóst*, both as a device in itself and as a generator of kennings, does not seem to be justified by its frequency in recorded verse (see in particular *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 74 and *Háttatal* stanzas 17–23), while he gives rather little space to metaphor (*Háttatal* stanza 6 and the commentary on it, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931, 121, 156, 190). There are many of the normal terms and concepts of classical rhetoric for which he has no equivalent (and which he does not discuss), and his system of classification does not resemble closely any existing classical or medieval *Ars Poetica*, nor have any verbal similarities been demonstrated between any passages in *Skáldskaparmál* and any other *Ars Poetica*. (Halldór Halldórsson (1975, 21–7) has argued for the influence of Quintilian on Snorri’s description of *fornafn*, *viðkenning* and *sannkenning*, but the similarities are not such as to suggest that Snorri actually knew the text of Quintilian or that of any other Latin writer on rhetoric.) The beginning of *Háttatal* is the passage which is most similar to a classical treatise, though the closest analogy I have found is in Fortunatianus. *Háttatal* opens as follows:

Hvat eru hættir skáldskapar?
 Prent.
 Hverir?

Setning, leyfi, fyrirboðning.

Hvat er setning háttanna?

Tvent.

Hver?

Rétt ok breytt.

Hverning er rétt setning háttanna?

Tvenn.

Hver?

Tala ok grein.

Hvat er tala setningar háttanna?

Prenn.

Hver?

Sú er ein tala, hversu margir hættir hafa fundizk í kveðskap höfuðskálda.

Önnur tala er þat, hversu mörg vísuorð standa í einu eyrindi í hverjum hætti. In þriðja tala er sú, hversu margar samstöfur eru settar í hvert vísuorð í hverjum hætti.

Hver er grein setningar háttanna?

Tvenn.

Hver?

Málsgrein ok hljóðsgrein.

Hvat er málsgrein?

Stafasetning greinir mál allt, en hljóð greinir þat at hafa samstöfur langar eða skammar, harðar eða linar, ok er þat setning hljóðsgreina er vér kōllum hendingar. (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931, 213)

(What kinds of verse-form are there in poetry?)

They are of three kinds.

What are they?

Those that are in accordance with rule, or licence, or prohibition.

What kinds of rule for verse-forms are there?

Two.

What are they?

Normal and varied.

In what does the normal rule for verse-forms consist?

In two things.

What are they?

Number and distinction.

What kinds of number are there in the rule for verse-forms?

Three.

What are they?

One kind of number is how many verse-forms are found in the poetry of major poets. The second is how many lines there are in one stanza in each verse-form. The third is how many syllables are put in each line in each verse-form.

What kinds of distinction are there in the rule for verse-forms?

Two.

What are they?

Distinction of meaning and distinction of sound.

What is distinction of meaning?

All meaning is distinguished by spelling, but sound is distinguished by having syllables long or short, hard or soft, and there is a rule of distinctions of sound that we call rhymes.)

Ars rhetorica III of Fortunatianus (4th century AD; Halm 1863, 120–21, with the text corrected from Faral 1924, 55 n. 2) begins thus:

Quot sunt generales modi dispositionis?

Duo.

Qui?

Naturalis et artificialis, id est utilitatis.

Quando naturalem ordinem sequemur?

Si nihil nobis oberit in causa.

Quid si aliquid occurrerit necessitate utilitatis?

Ordinem immutabimus naturalem.

Et quid sequemur?

Artificialem.

Quot modi sunt naturalis ordinis?

Octo.

Qui?

Totius orationis [per partes], per tempora, per incrementa, per status, per scriptorum partes atque verba, per confirmationis ac reprehensionis discrimen, per generales ac speciales quæstiones, per principales et incidentes.

Again, it is unlikely that Snorri can have known Fortunatianus, and the topic is different (*Háttatal* is on metre, Fortunatianus on rhetoric). Apart from the general similarity of style, the most striking thing in Snorri's account is his use of the terms *setning*, *leyfi*, *fyrirboðning*, but these are used in relation to the rules of metre and verse-form, not, like the corresponding medieval Latin terms *pars praeceptiva*, *pars permissiva*, *pars prohibitiva*, of categories of grammar and figures of speech. One methodological feature Snorri shares with both classical and medieval theorists is that his categories in *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* are not mutually exclusive but overlapping: he divides *heiti* into *kend* and *ókend heiti*, the former being the same as kennings, the latter as (simple) *heiti*; *sannkenningar* can be in the form of kennings and can also be simplexes, and all of these, and *við(r)kenningar* as well, can operate as *fornqfn*. It seems that Snorri knew what classical treatises on language and rhetoric were like, but there is no indication that he ever actually read one. He arranges his classification like them, but his categories are different. Both

in his treatment of metrics and that of rhetoric he seems to have made no close use of Latin writers, though echoes of them can be discerned here and there (it is interesting that Snorri uses so many terms taken from elementary grammar and applies them to rhetoric and metre). But there is no likelihood that he had read either Fortunatianus or Quintilian. Snorri's concern is with the structure and function of nominal groups in poetical language, not with categories of meaning, and not with poetic structure on a higher level either, showing that he was not acquainted with twelfth-century theory any more than with classical. The way in which an Icelandic writer dealt with figures of speech who had read Donatus and Priscian and other text books can be seen in the third and fourth *Grammatical Treatises*.

Otherwise *Háttatal* is mainly based on and structured round Snorri's own poem in honour of King Hákon and Earl Skúli. The identification of features of verse form owes a lot to Hallr Þórarinnsson and Rognvaldr Kali's *Háttalykill*, but the space devoted to some kinds of variations of the hending system shows that he was particularly interested in the poetry of some particular early skalds, such as Bragi, Egill, Kormakr and Einarr skálaglamm, who are also quoted frequently in *Skáldskaparmál*. Many features selected for exemplification in *Háttatal* probably derive from Latin poetry, but not directly: *refhvarf*, for instance, does not appear often in Norse verse and almost certainly is imitated from Latin, but Snorri has only developed the examples of *Háttalykill*. Similarly *kimblaband* and *hrynhenda*, some kinds of *runhenda*, etc., may all have had their origins in foreign poetry, but had been used by poets in Scandinavia before Snorri and were not his own importations. There is no evidence in *Háttatal* that he read Latin poetry (or French). Thus, though many of the variant verse forms Snorri illustrates in *Háttatal* may have their ultimate origins in medieval Latin or French verse, most of them would have been known to Snorri from Rognvaldr's *Háttalykill* or other earlier Norse poetry, and it is unlikely that he himself was responsible for adapting any foreign poetical devices into Icelandic verse from his own reading (or hearing) of foreign poetry.

As far as *Gylfaginning* is concerned, the only parts that are not clearly based on native oral sources are the Prologue and the occasional references to Troy in *Gylfaginning* itself. These also have for this reason been supposed to be not Snorri's work, but there is no need to think him incapable of such writing. The prologue indeed seems to me a masterly theoretical account of the origin of heathen religions which may in some ways be historically accurate. The theological opening, the brief account

of geography, and the references to Troy all go back ultimately to Latin writings, and the author shows some knowledge of contemporary theological controversies, e.g. about the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the limits of human reason (see Faulkes 1983). But he is not himself attempting to reconcile reason and revelation and is not himself a scholastic writer. And again there are no quotations or verbal correspondences that can be pointed to to indicate precisely what texts were used as sources, and the most likely thing is that Snorri gained all this knowledge orally from people who had read Latin works—either formally in a school (at Oddi?) or informally by talking to learned men, such as Styrmir, a man of Latin learning who was known to Snorri. The geography, it has recently been pointed out by Rudolf Simek (1990, 189–92), could easily have been acquired from looking at a map or diagram of the world such as existed in many medieval MSS, rather than from reading a Latin text. In any case, many pieces of classical geography and indeed theology had been translated into Icelandic in the twelfth century, though it is unnecessary to suppose that Snorri had read any of these translations himself. The references to Troy, as has been pointed out above, show no detailed knowledge of the story, indeed conflict at many points with the standard Latin versions, and it looks as though the whole immigration theory was borrowed from *Skjöldunga saga* with only slight additions based on Snorri's own reasoning or imagination and a smattering of information derived from talking with someone who did know the Troy story. It seems to me inconceivable that anyone of Latin learning could be so ignorant of this story.

Neither the theory of euhemerism nor the allegorical application of Norse myth to classical legend need be based on reading Latin works or translations, since the essential ideas were available in native works before Snorri's time (the allegory used in the *Epilogus* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* 1931, 87–8) is strikingly lacking in any tendency to provide moral interpretations of the allegory: the writer simply makes Norse mythological stories perversions of events in the Troy story, almost treating myths as *romans à clef*, so that one set of pseudo-historical events corresponds to another. If the details of the Troy story in *Snorra Edda* are based on a written source at all, they are probably based on a version of *Trójumanna saga* (and possibly *Breta sögur*), which would then join the list of early learned vernacular histories used by Snorri such as *Skjöldunga saga*, rather than on any Latin version; but it is doubtful whether they are based on knowledge of a written text at all. One only has to read the books of writers who did use Latin sources, such as Saxo

Grammaticus or Óláfr hvítaskáld to see how different Snorri is, both in style and content, and the difference is presumably that he based most of his work on native traditions and had not read widely in Latin.

The prologue and *Gylfaginning* also use *Háleygjatal* and *Ynglingatal* and maybe other Norse genealogies, and these are also among Snorri's sources for *Heimskringla*. In that work he also made great use of skaldic verse, though in a different way from in *Skáldskaparmál*—here it is as sources for historical facts, and he discusses their usefulness in his prologue, where he also speaks of the accounts of learned men, some of which may have been oral. *Heimskringla* is however largely based on historical writings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, including Ari, Eiríkr Oddson's *Hryggjarstykki*, *Ágrip*, the earliest lives of St Óláfr and Óláfr Tryggvason, and maybe those of other kings; and also the compilations *Fagrskinna*, *Morkinskinna*, *Orkneyinga saga* and *Færeyinga saga*. All these were vernacular histories except the two sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason by Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson.

It seems to me significant that Snorri nowhere refers to Latin writers or claims (even falsely) to be quoting them. He does not even, as far as I remember, quote from the Bible. Most medieval authors make some pretensions to Latin learning and air whatever authorities they have knowledge of, and include at least tags and snippets of quotations. Snorri nowhere even mentions the name of a Latin writer (except Sæmundr the wise, who is not referred to as an author), though he does name some of his vernacular sources, and quotes from them extensively and almost verbatim on occasions.

He probably did not in fact use Gunnlaugr's life of Óláfr Tryggvason, and one might speculate that this was because of its hagiographical approach which Snorri may have found unacceptable, tendentious, or simply unusable; or because of its language. He did make use of Oddr's life, of which two versions of a translation survive, though the passages Snorri has used are not close to either version. He may have used the original, which is now lost, or possibly the discrepancies are because he made free use of the translations. But it may be that his variations indicate that he did not in fact have access to the original, or that there was a third vernacular version that he made use of. In any case this is the only Latin book which there is any likelihood that Snorri used, and it is doubtful. It is striking that it appears that he made no use of Sæmundr the Wise, Theodoricus, *Historia Norwegiæ* or Adam of Bremen. Snorri must be the only major medieval historiographer of whom it can be said that he made hardly any use of Latin sources. And it is not because there were

not any available in Iceland and Norway, nor because he had any aversion to using written prose sources. Similarly, it is very surprising that Snorri appears to have made no use of Saxo Grammaticus' work in his *Edda* (Saxo seems to have made free use of Icelandic sources), though it must surely have been available in Iceland, even though the work does not seem to have existed in many medieval manuscripts (some scholars have argued for the use of Saxo in *Knýtlinga saga*, though others (e.g. Weibull 1976) have posited a common source). Again, it may be that Snorri did not like Saxo's style and approach, but it is perhaps more probable that he simply couldn't read it.

Egils saga, which many have thought also to be by Snorri, used similar sources to *Heimskringla*; in addition a version of *Landnámabók* may have been used. With the events that are supposed to have taken place in England, it is striking how great are the discrepancies from English sources, and it seems unlikely that the author had access to any documents either in Anglo-Saxon or Latin. There is no evidence that Snorri in any of his writings used the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: such dates as correspond to English sources are derived from Anglo-Saxon regnal lists and genealogies, which he certainly had access to, but which he could of course have used without having a knowledge of the language in which they were written, since the information he takes from them is mostly just proper names and figures. An example is his statement in *Heimskringla* I, 153 that King Æðelstan ruled for 14 years, 8 weeks and 3 days. This was not derived from any narrative source, but from a version of the compilation of royal genealogies and regnal lists found in Árni Magnússon's copy of material from the lost *Codex Resenius* (Faulkes 1977, 187).

If we turn from the content of Snorri's writings to his style and rhetoric, he is of course noted for his use of the so-called 'native' saga-style—restrained, free of over-blown rhetoric, sparing in use of figures of speech. In fact many have supposed that he was in large measure responsible for the development of the saga-style as we know it in the family sagas, and for Icelandic prose having avoided following the path of imitation of Latin prose style. Just as Saxo Grammaticus gives an impression of what *Gylfaginning* would have been like if it had been written by an ecclesiastically trained scholar, so Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga* and the extracts from Gunnlaugr Leifsson's underline the difference between the style of secular Icelanders and that of ecclesiastical ones; *Sverris saga* also has a very different style and approach from *Heimskringla*. I believe the difference is largely one of dependence on Latin models. In fact in *Heimskringla* one of the ways of distinguishing passages derived from

Snorri's ecclesiastical predecessors' work from his own is by the style—certain passages that he has taken verbatim from earlier histories are easily distinguished from his own writing by their more latinate style which betray their clerical origin. I think it would scarcely be possible for a writer trained in Latin grammar and rhetoric to write as Snorri does; Latin style was held in such high regard in the Middle Ages that anyone who was able to reproduce it could not have avoided it. It is not just that Snorri favours the 'humble style' like many other thirteenth century writers; he does not seem to have a high, rhetorical style, and rarely uses either metaphor or symbolism—except in his poetry, which like other skaldic verse, makes extensive use of figures of speech. Snorri does not make use of loan-words or tags of Latin origin, and there is not even in his case any reason to suppose the knowledge of florilegia or anthologies of Latin epigrams or poems to explain any echoes of Latin literature. He does not parade his learning—he may have had little to parade.

I would like to pause for a moment on the name *Edda*. I and others recently have returned to the old view that the most likely origin of the name of Snorri's work is that he himself coined the term on the basis of the Latin word *edo* on the analogy of the derivation of *kredda* from *credo*, a derivation which is transparent from the account of Prádr's *kredda* in *Færeyinga saga* which Snorri certainly knew. The word *Edda* would then be a deprecatory or hypocoristic term for 'a little *ars poetica*' just as *kredda* means 'a sort of creed—but not the official one'. The main objection to this derivation is not that Snorri would have been incapable of making it, but that *edo* does not ordinarily have to do with composition of poetry, though it can refer to the production ('giving forth') of literary work. I think this pseudo-learned formation represents just the sort of partial understanding of a learned language that one might expect from someone on the fringes of the world of learning, who was not over-awed by it but had a limited understanding of it.

A similar smattering of learning appears in Snorri's double use of the word *fornafn*—once as a grammatical term, once as the supposed Icelandic equivalent of a rhetorical one. He has only half absorbed the concept. This is analogical with the way in which Snorri has cast *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* in the form of Latin treatises, but without maintaining the form right through, which shows only partial absorption of the methods of the learned treatise. Snorri emulates learned Latin treatises as modern philologists emulate modern scientific treatises—without reading them (and he gets some of the concepts wrong, as philologists get relativity or the laws of thermodynamics wrong; so also Snorri gets the Troy story wrong).

Snorri's prologues, as has been pointed out by Sverrir Tómasson in his recent book on the prologues in Icelandic writings (1988), are not as deeply influenced by the conventions of Latin learned prefaces as the prologues in other Icelandic books. That to *Snorra Edda*, particularly, is by no means normal in its content and style; the various versions of the prologue to *Heimskringla* and *Óláfs saga helga* refer to some of the topics normal in a learned preface, particularly in the account of sources and authorities, but have nothing about the purpose or origin of the work, and Snorri's only apologies are for talking too much about Icelanders and for using poems as sources. The latter point shows some acquaintance with current learned concerns about the relative reliability of verse and prose as sources for historical writing, and Snorri shows his usual unabashed independence from normal learned conventions in insisting that poems can be a source for historical truth if there is reason to think that they are contemporary and uncorrupted in oral tradition—like many others of Snorri's attitudes, so unexpected in a medieval writer that it tempts us to call it an anticipation of modern attitudes. Again, the prologue to *Sverris saga* shows us what the prologue to a historical work by a really learned writer should be like.

Snorri, it seems, was not 'learned' in the sense of having had an education in Latin literature. He gained his learning, his knowledge of historical and theological concepts, from Ari, *Skjöldunga saga* and other vernacular Icelandic histories of the preceding generation. De Vries (1964–7, II 226) has suggested that there may also have been among his sources for both *Heimskringla* and *Skáldskaparmál* notes, *schedae*, by Sæmundr the wise, though it would be difficult to demonstrate this.

So much for content and style. Let us now consider briefly Snorri's attitudes of mind, the way he presents and interprets his material. His normal interpretation of myth, when he interprets it at all, is euhemeristic, that is he, like many medieval historiographers, assumes that gods and their deeds did have objective existence, but that they were really humans who came to be worshipped as gods after their deaths. This concept is widespread in Latin mythology, but was also well established in vernacular Icelandic writing before Snorri's time, and he could well have got it from Ari and *Skjöldunga saga*. Only rarely does Snorri flirt with other kinds of interpretation, such as allegory—historical allegory in the Epilogue in *Skáldskaparmál*, moral allegory in the names of some of the Ásynjur in *Gylfaginning* and in the story of Þórr and Útgarðaloki. The absence of moral allegory and the reluctance to interpret myths morally at all is one of the most striking differences between Snorri as mythographer

and most writers in other languages, not only Latin but Anglo-Saxon (Ælfric and Wulfstan). Aetiology, etymology and word-play are Snorri's preferred ways of interpreting the origins of both myths and kennings. Just as the closest parallel to his account of the kenning is in an author, Aristotle, that he cannot possibly have read, so the most similar treatment of mythology is found in Hyginus, another author that it is inconceivable that Snorri read, whether or not he knew Latin: the similarity must therefore again be coincidental. The third Vatican mythographer (the twelfth-century Alberich of London) he is not like in his manner and tone. Nor does Snorri use the other interpretation of heathen gods beloved of ecclesiastics, that they are really devils trying to deceive human beings into false worship. Although deception is at the heart of *Gylfaginning* as concealment is Snorri's characterisation of the underlying nature of the kenning, the deception is the trickery of Loki-like figures rather than that of the devil, and I am not persuaded that the concept of demonic deception is to be found in Snorri's work. It is the same with his historiography: like the sagas of Icelanders, *Heimkringla* seems to lack a clear ideology, or else it adopts a stance of careful detachment. It is not only secular but lacks the universal characteristic of Latin writers, a clear moral and political standpoint. His characters, moreover, are quite unlike those either of the saints' lives or of ecclesiastical history.

It is not that Snorri is not an intellectual writer, or that he is unlearned and naïve. But his learning seems to be exclusively in native historiography and poetry. He is actually rather ill-informed about both classical story and classical theory. But his thinking is analytical and in its own way didactic. *Skáldskaparmál* is written to instruct young poets. But his habits of mind and way of thinking are not those of the cleric educated in Latin, though parts of the prologue to his *Edda* come quite close to ecclesiastical thought. Impressive though the parallels to it in scholastic theological writers are, he remains much less abstract in his thought than they are, and again the most striking thing is the total lack of quotations or tags from Latin authors. The most there is is a distant reminiscence of passing remarks of such writers as Abelard, Honorius Augustodunensis, or Guillaume de Conches. Snorri does not think like a scholastic theologian, and it is absurd to think that he read any scholastic writers. His knowledge of their ideas, such as it is, must come at second hand from hearing his compatriots preaching and commenting on sacred texts. I do not think that the ordering of his material in *Skáldskaparmál*, or that in the prologue to his *Edda*, is so strikingly like that of medieval Latin writers that it is necessary to assume that he had read them. His order is

logical, and so is theirs, and thus they are similar. He does not write as an encyclopaedist; he is not explicating the ‘truth’ about the universe, nor the concepts about the universe he attributes to heathen poets; he uses aetiology not to explain the origins of things, nor to explain what heathens thought the origins of things in general were, but to explain archaic poetical references. He is explicating poetry, and his manner and method seem to me to be totally Icelandic.

I think it hardly possible that Snorri could have read writers like Peter Comestor, Honorius Augustodunensis and Guillaume de Conches, extracted material from them to use in his writings, and remained totally untouched by them in other ways (stylistically, in attitudes and so on). But it is a question whether in the Middle Ages it was possible to develop a facility for abstract thought and analysis without a Latin background, to be able to handle ideas and become self-conscious as a writer without a school training. There is a limit to the possibility of retaining independent habits of thought in spite of extensive reading. Most writers about Old Icelandic literature still assume that there was a native secular culture in many respects separate from the ecclesiastical Latin culture of medieval Europe, and recently the tendency has been to claim that Snorri participated in the latter as much as in the former. I would like to question this claim. Unlike Latin writers, Snorri’s writing, in modern critical jargon, is not metaphorical but metonymical; in Schiller’s terminology he is naive rather than sentimental. He is neither a theologian nor a mythologer, but a historian in all his writings.

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