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OLD NORSE «SIGNÝ»:
FROM MYTHIC EPITHET TO HEROIC ANTHROPONYM†

Il presente studio analizza la lettura della variante (Signyiar) nella copia del Codex Regius del poema mitologico in antico norreno «Haustlong» come una lectio difficilior autorevole, che evidenzia un epiteto arcaico per lo stesso mare o per l'epifania marina di una dea. Insieme ad altre lectiones difficiliores della copia del Codex Regius viene riconosciuto un mitologema il quale definisce la dea sostanzialmente come una reificazione della poesia elegiaca collegata alla figura di vargr con siginificato e di 'fuorilegge' e di 'lupo' attraverso il genere poetico denotato come varg-lióð, 'le canzoni del criminale o del lupo'. Due sviluppi convergenti hanno contribuito alla reinterpretazione di questa figura come un'eroina dalle sembianze umane di nome Signý. Da un lato ci fu la tendenza a storicizzare i miti come carmini eroici, da cui deriva la fonte principale della storiografia leggendaria. Dall'altro, il rafforzarsi dei contatti con il Continente accelerò un influsso del materiale su Sigurðr, figlio di Sigmundr Volsungr, il quale doveva essere riconciliato dalla tradizione eroica scandinava di Helgi e Sinfiotli, membri degli Ylfingar, letteralmente 'figli del lupo'. Quale conseguenza dell'amalgamare insieme queste due stirpi eroiche sotto un unico progenitore, emerge il bisogno di una sorella incestuosa per Sigmundr Volsungsson Ylfingr al fine di spiegare la paternità di Sinfiotli. Quando la retorica figurativa del mito di Signý condizionato da arcaiche teorie di semiosi, fu interpretata come riferita ad un essere umano, lo schema narrativo di questa dea aveva tutti i requisiti per essere il tassello mancante nella genealogia eroica in modo tale da incorporare la versione eumerizzata. Data l'apparente somiglianza tra l'epiteto arcaico della dea con l'antroponimo antico-alto tedesco Signiu, tale forma venne adottata per introdurre Signý Volsungsdóttir nella tradizione norrena dei Volsungar.

In linguistic terms, names can be distinguished as signs with the potential to have referents without predicating any information about those referents. Mythological names would appear to pose a semantic conundrum, in that they refer to entities of debatable metaphysical status, whose referential domain may never be identified unconditionally

† For the system of abbreviations used in citing Germanic source material and the lemmatization of the Norse, Anglo-Saxon and Gothic lexicon, see the introductory note to my *Figures of Authority in the Old English 'Exodus'*, «Anglistische Forschungen», 262, Heidelberg, Winter 1999, pp. xiii-v. The orthographic system used to normalize Norse manuscript spellings follows that of A. NOREEN, *Altnordische Grammatik*, 2 voll., I, 36-46 [§§ 22-50] Tübingen, Niemeyer 1923⁴.

with that in which the listener or reader actually finds himself.¹ The alterity which informs mythology precludes a bare one-to-one relationship between sign and referent. The aim of this study is to compare two Old Norse texts originating in two different ages and belonging to differently marked genres but linked through a common name, *Signý*, in association with three thematic elements: fratricide, incest, and poison. From this comparison, I intend to show how a mythological epithet *Signý* could have come to be recorded as the name for the incestuous sister of the Germanic hero Sigmundr in the Norse literary tradition.

The more ancient of the two texts is the scaldic poem 'Haustlǫng', attributed to the ninth-century Norwegian poet Þjóðólfr ǫr Hvini.² This paper represents part of a larger project to explicate how the poem develops an aetiology for the poetic genre of elegiac or eulogistic verse, hence the discussion herein will be limited strictly to the literary reception of the poem, particularly with regard to the name *Signý*.³ The fact that a compound *sig-ný(r)* can be interpreted as an archaic kenning referring equally to a sea-goddess as to a giantess permits an alternative analysis which can enrich the reading of Þjóðólfr's poem, while the dexterity with which such a term has been employed in 'Haustlǫng' ensures it as the authorial reading. Yet the appreciation of both the formal expression and the cognitive structures which in form it may have become increasingly opaque in the literary period.

The first eight chapters of *Vǫlsunga saga* offer a comparandum.⁴

¹ For names as a distinguishing feature of myths from other forms of traditional tale, see W. BURKERT, *Structure and history in Greek mythology and ritual*, «Sather Classical lectures», 47, Berkeley, Univ. of California Pr. 1979, pp. 22-6.

² *Den norske-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. by F. JÓNSSON, 4 voll., A.I (1912), Copenhagen, Gyldendal 1912-1915, pp. 16-21.

³ *Figures of Authority*, esp., pp. 170-84; *Poetic Pedigrees in Medieval Scandinavian Historiography*, in *Lingue e Letterature Germaniche fra XII e XVI secolo, Atti del XIX Convegno dell'Associazione Italiana di Filologia Germanica*, ed. by F. FERRARI and M. BAMPI, «Labirinti», 76, Trento, Università degli Studi 2004, pp. 113-95; *Classical Models for Medieval Scandinavian Mythography*, in *Nord ed Europa. Identità scandinava e rapporti culturali con il continente nel corso dei secoli*, ed. by G. CHIESA ISNARDI e P. MARELLI, Genova, Tilgher 2004, pp. 81-95; *On Wind and Waves*, in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives*, ed. by A. ANDRÉN, K. JENNBERT and C. RAUDVERE, Lund, [in press.]. On 'elegiac' as a genre within Old Germanic, as well as specifically Old Norse, poetry, see J. HARRIS, *Gödsögn sem hjálp til að lifa af*, in *Heidin minni*, ed. by H. BESSASON and B. HAFSTAÐ, Reykjavík, Heimskringla 1999, pp. 47-70, with references.

⁴ *Vǫlsunga saga ok Ragnars saga lodbrókar*, ed. by M. Olsen, «Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur», XXXVI, Copenhagen, Møller 1906-1908, pp. 1-20.

This saga traces the genealogy of the Vǫlsunga dynasty from an origin among pagan gods in order to celebrate the Norwegian king Hákon, born in 1204 as the illegitimate son of Hákon Sveinsson. As mediaeval historiography, the saga adopts a rhetoric whereby legendary material is construed as historical fact, so that material reference is consistently privileged in the interpretation of sources, often with a heavy tolerance for the extraordinary or macabre. Unlike almost all the rest of *Vǫlsunga Saga*, no earlier source material has been identified regarding the earliest generations of the Vǫlsungar clan, through the generation of Sigmundr and his twin sister *Signý*.

Beyond providing the Vǫlsungar's eponymous ancestor with a pedigree of three generations, the so-called 'minimal *ætt*' required of any free man in early Scandinavian society, the first two chapters develop a systematic analysis of faithlessness among allies.⁵ The progression begins with Sigi's murder of his hunting companion and betrayal of his neighbour, Skaði; this is complemented by Sigi's being betrayed and killed by his wife's brothers, which leads to the reciprocal vengeance of Sigi's son Reyrrir upon his uncles. By the time Vǫlsungr is conceived, treachery has escalated from the level of being among those who appertain to no common group beyond society at large to that of being among kinsmen by marriage but not by blood, to blood kinsmen who, however, belong to different patriline. These last two phases are repeated within Signý's generation, by her husband Siggeir and her twin brother Sigmundr, respectively. The climax consists of Sinfiǫtli's slaying of his own half-brothers, although the saga-narrative has been engineered so that Sinfiǫtli's victims are still of different patriline. Yet the biological tie between murderer and murdered will draw no tighter within the saga.

Only two earlier sources have been identified which explicitly allude to the relationship between Sigmundr and Sinfiǫtli; the name *Signý*, however, remains linked to these heroes only in *Vǫlsunga saga*.⁶ Of

⁵ On the 'minimal *ætt*', see T. ANDERS VESTERGAARD, *The system of kinship in early Norwegian law*, «Mediaeval Scandinavia», XII (1982), pp. 160-93 (pp. 174-9).

⁶ The fragment of an otherwise lost poem on Sigmundr and Sinfiǫtli cited in *Vǫlsunga saga*, chapter eight (i. e. *Fas I* [*Edda*, ed. by G. NECKEL, rev. by H. KUHN, Heidelberg, Winter 1983⁵, p. 321]) is unlike all the references to Sigmundr in the poetry collected in the *Codex Regius*, in that he is depicted within an predicational relationship other than that of a genitive possessor. The oldest Norse association of Sigmundr with Sinfiǫtli is 'Eiriksmál' (5/1 [FINNUR, *Skjaldediktung*, A.I. (1912), p. 175]), on whose relative date see: K. VON SEE, *Zwei eddische Preislieder*, in *Festgabe für Ulrich Pretzel*, ed. by W. SIMON, W. BACHOFER and

these two, the only source likely to have been available to the compiler of *Völsunga Saga*, would have been the references within the verbal exchange of Guðmundr Granmarsson and Sinfiotli within the Eddaic poem ‘Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri’ (32-46).⁷ A rhetorically simplified paraphrasis of this verbal exchange is included in chapter nine.⁸ Within the Old English *Beowulf*, verses 874b-84a elliptically recount the adventures of Sigemund, the son of Wæls, and his lone companion Fitela.⁹ While the Old English analogue may differ in some points from the Norse *Völsungr* tradition, it does corroborate several fundamental presuppositions behind the Signý episode in *Völsunga saga*, particularly the perfidiousness of the two heroes’ *firen-verk* in the Norse tradition (*HHund* 1 41/10) compares closely to their *fæbðe ond firena* as recorded in *Beowulf* (879a).¹⁰

The *senna* between Guðmundr and Sinfiotli partakes of the ancient

W. DITTMANN, Berlin, Schmitt 1963, pp. 107-17. Note that the motif of Sigmundr acquiring a sword from an Odinnic figure is supported by ‘Hyndloliód’ 2/5-8 (*Edda*, p. 288). While the association of Sigmundr and Hermódr here is again paralleled in *Beowulf*, ‘Hyndloliód’ appears to have reached its recorded form only very late within the Norse tradition (K. VON SEE *et al.*, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 6 voll. [projected], III [2000], Heidelberg, Winter 1997 –, p. 689). Aside from *Völsunga saga*, the only clear statement as to Sigmundr’s paternity of Sinfiotli is in the prose bridge ‘Frá dauða Sinfiotli’: [Sinfiotli] *var elztr hans* [i.e. Sigmundr’s] *sona* (NECKEL, *Edda*, p. 162 [l. 2]; cf. p. 154 [l. 12]).

⁷ NECKEL, *Edda*, pp. 135-7. On the date of this material, see A. BUGGE, *Arnor Jarlaskald og det første kvad om Helge Hundingsbana*, «*Edda*», I (1914), pp. 350-80 (esp. p. 379). For a more recent overview, see VON SEE, *Kommentar*, IV (2004), pp. 163-4.

⁸ OLSEN, *Völsunga saga*, pp. 22-3. On the saga author’s use of poetic sources generally, see R.G. FINCH, *The treatment of poetic sources by the compiler of «Völsunga saga»*, «*Saga-Book*», XVI (1962-1965), pp. 315-53, as well as *idem*, «*Atlakviða*», «*Atlamála*» and «*Völsunga saga*», in *Speculum norroenum*, ed. by U. DRONKE and others, [Odense], Odense University Press 1981, pp. 123-38.

⁹ Fr. KLAEBER (ed.), *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, Boston, Heath and Co. 1950³, p. 33. I regret not having been able to see R. NORTH, *Metre and meaning in «Wulf and Eadwacer»: Signý reconsidered*, in *Loyal letters*, ed. by L.A.J.R. HOUWEN and A.A. MACDONALD, «*Medievalia Groningana*», XV, Groningen, Forsten 1994, pp. 29-54. This article appears to take up W.H. SCHOFIELD’s argument (*Signý’s lament*, «*Publications of the Modern Language Association*», XVII [1902], pp. 262-95) that the poem *Wulf and Eadwacer* (*The Exeter Book*, ed. by G.P. KRAPP, «*Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*», III, New York, Columbia Univ. Pr. 1936, pp. LIV-VII, pp. 179-80, and pp. 320-1) is a riddle with ‘Signý’ as its solution.

¹⁰ KLAEBER, *Beowulf*, p. 159 [n. 875-900]. For the interpretation of these terms, see M.S. GRIFFITHS, *Some difficulties in «Beowulf», lines 874-902*, «*Anglo-Saxon England*», XXIV (1995), pp. 11-45 (esp. pp. 20-5). Griffiths’ suggestion that *eam his nefan* (881a) alludes to an incestuous relationship (pp. 25-8) appears overly subtle, as it ignores the isolated position of *Beowulf* within the surviving Old English corpus, and hence the number of cognitive and linguistic structures it uniquely attests.

Germanic flying genre, whose prototypical pragmatic context concerns the verbal confrontation of two human contenders regarding the background and abilities of the respective adversaries. Insofar as the accuracy with which allegations were lodged was a paramount criterion for the reception of the flying, the *senna* could be considered as important an historical witness as any encomium.¹¹ What marks out Guðmundr and Sinfjötli's *senna* as a distinct sub-type of flying, is the use of mythological allusions to augment the rehearsal of the past deeds of the two heroes, which are foreshortened and considerably degraded in terms of their rhetorical finesse in the prose paraphrase recorded in *Völsunga saga*. Insofar as Guðmundr is described as *goðborinn* "of divine descent" (*HHund* 1 32/1), this hybrid *senna*-form may constitute yet another step along the passage from the mythological to the historical within the Norse literary tradition.¹²

The three themes of 'fratricide', 'incest' and 'poison' have been formulated according to concrete terms common to all three texts. In the contemporary language of anthropology, fratricide and incest might best be considered in reference to the network of exogamous patrilineal descent groups which operated to some extent in early medieval Scandinavian culture.¹³ Within such systems, females are born into the clan of their father (O.N. *ætt*) but must eventually be married into another clan, where they will bear offspring who are members of the new clan by birth, without the mother herself ever becoming a member of her husband's clan. The classic dilemma for women in such systems occurs when men from the paternal group come into conflict with those in the marital group, prototypically involving a woman's brothers against her husband and his brothers. Insofar as incest involves uniting the male relative by birth and husband in a single figure, it can be seen as an escapist strategy for avoiding this pitfall. Adoption represents another avenue to achieving comparable functional ends, in that groups of males can add to their membership directly, obviating

¹¹ For the genre, see C.J. CLOVER, *The Germanic context of the Unferð episode*, «Speculum», LV (1980), pp. 444-68 (esp. pp. 454-5). For Snorri's apology for the use of scaldic encomium in his historiography, see *Heimskringla*, ed. by B. AÐALBJARNARSON, 3 voll., I, «Íslenska Fornritfélag», 1941, p. 5.

¹² On divine ancestry as an heroic tradition, see A. FAULKES, *Descent from the gods*, «Mediaeval Scandinavia», XI (1978-1979), pp. 92-125. It should be noted that Sigmundr himself may have been considered divine, as his name appears within a list of Óðinn-beiti (*dul* IV jj 6/5).

¹³ VESTERGAARD, *System of kinship*, pp. 176-7.

the need for exchanging females altogether.¹⁴

Poison instead applies to an ancient semiotic theory whereby semiosis is reified in terms of liquids. These can be produced by speakers and consumed by hearers. In a society like that of Medieval Scandinavia, which anthropologists term “honour based”, the need to uphold the public reputation of oneself and one’s group is imperative.¹⁵ Thus, speech acts can be classified according to the social effect upon one’s repute, just as liquids can be classified according to their physiological effect upon a living organism. Hence, blame or scorn can be thought of as analogous to poison, while praise might be paired with some life-giving or -enhancing concoction.¹⁶

The materialist tendencies of literary Icelanders’ appropriation of the poetic past come out clearly in the claim made both by the redactor of the *Codex Regius* and by the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* that Sigmundr and his sons were immune to poison.¹⁷ If we take Bragi enn gamli Broddason’s kenning for the cosmic serpent Jǫrmungandr *brök-kvi-áll Vǫlsunga drekko* “the eel which agitated the drink of the Vǫlsungr” (*Rdr* 18/3-4) as an elaboration of the type *ǫlunn eitrs* (*Nj* 9/5, 7), then the syntactic equation of *Vǫlsunga drekka* with *eitir* is most likely explained by the fact that calumny (O.N. *níð*) is the proper poetic genre for the Vǫlsungar’s exploits.¹⁸ Guðmundr refers to this genre as *varg-lióð* ‘criminal songs’, upon which Sinfiǫtli was brought up (*HHund* 1 41/3), as opposed to the *forn spiǫll* ‘ancient tales’, of which noble princes keep great store (36/2).¹⁹ Indeed, the equation between *níð* and *eitir* is so strong, that the former term can be used to represent

¹⁴ For an anthropological overview, see W. SHAPIRO, *Ritual kinship, ritual incorporation and the denial of death*, «Man», n.s., XXIII (1988), pp. 275-97. On the similarities between marriage and fosterage, see K. HASTRUP, *Culture and history in medieval Iceland*, Oxford, Clarendon 1985, pp. 98-100.

¹⁵ M. CLUNIES ROSS, *Ðórr’s honour*, in *Studien zum Altgermanischen*, ed. by H. UECKER, «Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde», XI, Berlin, de Gruyter 1994, pp. 48-76 and Tafeln 1-3 (pp. 49-51, with references).

¹⁶ See my *Classical models*, pp. 90-92, 94.

¹⁷ NECKEL, *Edda*, p. 163 [ll. 12-14]. OLSEN, *Vǫlsunga saga*, p. 15; cfr. J. SIGURÐSSON *et al.* (eds.), *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 3 voll., I (1848-52), Hrafn, The Arnarnagæan Legate 1848-87, p. 370.

¹⁸ For the kenning type [fish] [poison]^{GEN}, see R. MEISSNER, *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, «Rheinischen Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde», I, Bonn, Schroeder 1921, p. 114 [§ 36.e].

¹⁹ For the type of social context behind which the Ylfingar’s wolfish lifestyle is haranged, see O. HÖFLER, *Kultische Gebeimbünde der Germanen*, 2 voll. [projected], I (1934), Frankfurt am Main, Diesterweg 1934-, pp. 197-206.

Jǫrmungandr's poison directly: *naðr níðs ó·kviðenn* 'an unabashed adder of calumny' (*Vsp* 56/11-12).²⁰ The incredible constitution of Vǫlsungr thus arises from nothing more than an approach to the source material oblivious to the cognitive functions which inform it. Without such background, one has only the skeletal analogy of the Vǫlsungar drinking poison just as other men drink mead.

Of course these themes operate within a global inventory of interconnected cognitive structures, in whose expression the Old Norse system of kennings represent a rhetorically elaborate, and perhaps most widely known, predicational type. The historical challenge in working with early Norse poetry like 'Haustlǫng' is reconstructing the lexicon of cognitive functions, as well as the cognitive grammar whereby these were articulated, as they obtained in Scandinavian cultures prior to the Conversion. For as the end of the Viking period gave way to the beginning of Iceland's literary age in the early twelfth century, the introduction of European social, scientific, and philosophical ideas contributed to a radical restructuring of the codes Scandinavians had used for expressing concepts and beliefs.

Standing in the exact middle of this episode in 'Haustlǫng', verse seven represents a turning point in the narrative. The reciprocity of Loki and Þiazi, each firmly bound to the other, renders them for a moment indistinguishable. Yet it also marks the beginning of their two female counterparts, Iðunnr and Skaði, coming into focus as distinctly different figures.

7/1 Þá varð fastr með fóstura *Then was the cargo of Signý's arms [the cargo of the waves], which all the gods "eye", fast in bonds with the foster-father/son/brother of the qndurgoðs í bǫndom. snow-shoe deity.*

(*Haustl* 7/1-4)²¹

However, the form *Signý* is recorded in only one of the three surviving texts of the poem (⟨Signýiar⟩ 7/2, var. R.: ⟨Sigyniar⟩ var. WT).²² While editorial tradition going back at least to the eighteenth century prefers the reading with *Sigyn*, found in both the *Wormianus* and *Trajectinus* manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, I believe that the *Codex Regius* reading

²⁰ U. DRONKE (ed.), *The Poetic Edda*, 5 voll. [projected], II (1997), Oxford, Oxford Univ. Pr. 1969-, p. 151 [n. 53/13]. See also my *Classical Models*, p. 91.

²¹ FINNUR, *SkjaldeDigting*, vol. A.I (1912), p. 18.

²² Ivi, p. 17.

represents yet another of the *lectiones difficiliores* for kennings which it alone records.²³ The fact that the *Uppsaliensis* manuscript altogether lacks both the long extracts from ‘Haustlǫng’ may be cause to wonder whether their inclusion of his scaldic source was intended by Snorri himself, especially as that of Iðunnr is presented apart from Snorri’s own telling of the mythologem.²⁴ The Regius text shows itself to be the best text for the critical discovery of Þjóðólfr’s authorial intent, insofar as it preserves a coherent set of readings whose sense is most at variance with Snorri’s reception of the poem.

As a name for a Norse goddess recorded in both *Snorra Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*, Iðunnr is unusual for being homophonous with the names of several historical Scandinavian women, from Iceland, Norway and the British Danelaw.²⁵ Yet in the best documented case of an Old Scandinavian pagan cult, that of the last non-Christian ruler of Norway, Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson, a pair of female deities were worshipped as sisters: the better documented, Þorgerðr, went by a rather unremarkable woman’s name, while her more obscure sister, Irpa, went by an epithet rather fittingly signifying “the dark one”.²⁶ Yet this second, descriptive type of divine appellative is clearly closer to the more or less archaic denominations current for the goddesses of pan-Scandinavian cult as unambiguously attested in the poetic tradition: *Frigg* “beloved”, *Freyia* “lady”, *Skaði* “harmer”. The few dithematic appellatives which do show up in the older poetry, like *Mar-dǫll*, fall distinctly outside the parameters of historical anthroponyms. Moreover, the semantic interplay of the components in such compounds often suggest origins in meaningful predications, whereas Old Germanic anthroponymy generally operated according to principles oblivious to, if not preclusive of, predicational relationships between the constituents of dithematic names.

²³ Compare *ylgr* (2/2), *Gnæfar* (2/5), *fǫðor* (8/4), of *Ðrunne* (8/5), *Pungr’s* (8/6), *sæfar* (11/1). On the interpretative practices involved in the only other instance of *Signý/Sigyn* in scaldic poetry, again with the authorial form rendered problematic by divergence amongst the manuscripts, see my ‘Poetic Pedigrees’, pp. 189-90.

²⁴ JÓN, *Snorra Edda*, I (1848-52), pp. 208-14 [Snorri’s prose account] against 306-14 [‘Haustlǫng’].

²⁵ E.H. LIND, *Norsk-Islandska Dopnamn*, Uppsala, Lundqvist 1905-1915, col. 619; see also J. DE VRIES, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 2 voll., II 333 [§ 559], «Grundriss der germanischen Philologie», XII, Berlin, de Gruyter 1956².

²⁶ N.K. CHADWICK, *Dorgerðr Hölgabrúdr and the “Trolla ding”*, in *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe*, ed. by C. FOX and B. DICKINS, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press 1950, pp. 395-417 (esp. pp. 400-3).

Following the form ⟨sigyn⟩ in both the *Regius* and *Hauksbók* versions of ‘Vǫluspá’ (35/5), the *Wormianus* and *Trajectinus* manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* read ⟨sigyniar⟩ at ‘Haustlǫng’ 7/2.²⁷ While *Sigyn* does not seem to be historically attested as an anthroponym, it can be analysed according to the conventions of human anthroponymy as a compound of “victory” and “(female) friend”.²⁸ The variant form consistently found in Snorri’s prose references to Loki’s wife in the *Uppsaliensis* manuscript of *Snorra Edda*, ⟨sigun⟩, as well as ⟨sigunn⟩ from the *ǫðular* fragments AM 757 a 4° and AM 748 II 4°, and the sporadic variants ⟨sygin⟩ (*W*, cf. ⟨lygin⟩ *R* with ‘l’ for long ‘s’) and ⟨sig^vn⟩ (*R*: abbreviated for ⟨Sigrun⟩ or ⟨Sigun⟩) in the other texts of Snorri’s prose all register tendencies to further integrate the Eddaic name into the system of human anthroponyms.²⁹ Effectively these variants bring the name closer to that of *Iðunn(r)*, whose most remarkable feature as an anthroponym would be its nearly isolated proterotheme.³⁰

Any modern linguistic etymology of *Iðunnr* must favour a deverbal origin, with *ið-* a reflex of the prefix comparable to Latin *re(d)-*. With reference to the ancient trope of speech as regurgitation, the deverbal stem could either be the ancient Indo-European root **ued/t* ‘quellen’, which may have formed the basis of Norse *unnr* ‘wave, river’, so that *Iðunnr* could be translated as something like ‘backwash’.³¹ Given her role as a goddess of elegiac expression, however, Gothic **wunns*, attested only as *wunnim* for Gk. *παθήμασιν* (II Tim 3.11), might be considered: it derives from the same Indo-European root **uen* ‘überwältigen, gewinnen’ as that of Norse *vinna* ‘to obtain, achieve’.³² A hypothetical Norse **unnr* might be contrasted with another Norse hypothetical, **yn*, as a cognate Old English *wynn* ‘joy’ (< **wunnio-*),

²⁷ NECKEL, *Edda*, p. 8; see also the identical form at line five to the prose epilogue to ‘Lokasenna’ (p. 110).

²⁸ DE VRIES, *AR*, II 332 [§ 558]; see also LIND, *Dopnamn*, col. 901; NOREEN, *Altnordische Grammatik*, I, p. 171 [§ 235, Anm. 4].

²⁹ For the variants, see JÓN, *Snorra Edda*, I (1848-1852), pp. 27, 184, 208, 268, 556.

³⁰ The only other ‘dithematic’ name in *id-* is *Idmundr*, in the apparently twelfth-century bridal-quest prelude to ‘*Helgiqviða Hjörvardarson*’ (2/2), as well as in the prose introduction (Neckel, *Edda*, p. 140 [l. 7]). The correspondence of *Sig·unn(r)* : *Id·unn(r)* :: *Sig·mundr* : *Id·mundr* is noteworthy. On the age of the bridal quest, see TH.M. ANDERSON, «*Helgaqviða Hjörvardarsonar*» and *European bridal-quest narrative*, «*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*», LXXXIV (1985), pp. 51-75 (p. 53).

³¹ H. RIX, *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben* [LIV], Wiesbaden, Reichert 1998, pp. 599-600 [s.v. **ued* ‘quellen’].

³² Cf. *sveik ept* (*Haustl* 12/2) with a feminine singular subject required in all three MSS.

deriving from the Indo-European root **uenH* “liebgewinnen”, like the verb *una* or the abstract *ynðe*.³³ Given that the deeds (O.N. *iðer*) of the successful lead inevitably to victory (O.N. *sigr*), and that a Norse term *yn* (Þul IV v 5/6) is recorded as a synonym of *unnr* “river” (Þul IV x 3/5; cf. *brún·akrs bekkjar dís* [*Haustl* 9/5-6]), one may well ask whether *sig·yn* is not simply the most elaborated form of an encryption for *ið·unnr* in her triumphant aspect, perhaps building upon Þjóðólfr’s tmesis in ‘*Haustlǫng*’.³⁴ Hence a form *Sig·yn* could be interpreted as a transformation of ether etymology, according to the polyvalent semantics that so often hallmarks Norse mythological appellations.

Doubts about ‘*Haustlǫng*’ openly naming a goddess as either *Signý* or *Sigyn* are furthered by strict legal sanctions against publically composing verse about women, with such compositions being denoted as *man·sqngr*. Any male who was discovered as the author of poetry referring to a woman outside his *tutela* (O.N. *mund*) could be legally processed and held forfeit of his life.³⁵ If this held true for human women, why should it not for cult deities? Notably, when the Christian faction prepared to precipitate a cult war with the heathen contingent at the Icelandic Alþing around the turn of the millennium, HjalTI Skeggiason composed a blasphemous verse about a goddess.³⁶ On the other hand, Jarl Hǫkon Sigurðarson was both an extremely active patron of poets and a dedicated adherent to indigenous religious practice, so that almost everything we know about early scaldic mythological poetry is linked to him, yet open reference to *Þorgerðr* is never recorded, despite the survival of several oblique allusions to her, rhetorically not unlike Þjóðólfr’s encryption of the name *Iðunnr* in ‘*Haustlǫng*’.³⁷ Within the narrative of ‘*Vǫluspá*’ itself, such a process is acted out: a divinity

³³ RIX, *LIV*, pp. 623-4 [s.v. **uenH* ‘liebgewinnen’].

³⁴ On *unnr* in Norwegian river names, see O. RYGH, *Norske elvenavne*, Kristiania, Cammermeyer 1904, s.v. *unnr*.

³⁵ See I. MATYUSHINA, *Ólafr Helgi and scaldic love poetry*, in *Sagas and the Norwegian experience*, ed. by J. RAGNAR HAGLAND *et. al.*, Trondheim, 1997, pp. 435-44 (pp. 436-8).

³⁶ For the context, see *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. by J. BENEDIKTSSON, «Íslenzk fornrit», I, Reykjavík, Íslenzk fornritfélag 1968, pp. 14-8. For the interpretation of the verses, see F. GENZMER, *Der Spotvers des HjalTI Skeggiason*, «Arkiv for nordisk filologi», n. s., XL (1928), pp. 311-4. The choice of the typological epithet *Freyia* is here primarily conditioned by the need for pan-Icelandic scope, as decentralized Scandinavian cult probably used names of local venne in ritual.

³⁷ For scaldic encryption techniques used for the names of characters presented as historical women in the sagas, see R. FRANK, *Onomastic Play in Kormakr’s Verse*, «Mediaeval Scandinavia», III (1970), pp. 7-34.

identified as *Gull·veig* (21/3) is invoked by her followers under the etymologically transparent sobriquet *Heiðr* “the bright one” (22/1).³⁸ As a taboo moniker, *Gull·veig* could easily have arisen for a blond-haired woman with an ordinary dithematic name ending in *-veig*.³⁹

Despite the fact that its Old German cognate *Siginiu* is attested already in documents of the ninth century, there is very little evidence as to historical bearers of the Old Norse name *Signý* prior to the thirteenth century, by which time German influence in culture and trade was becoming increasingly developed.⁴⁰ The strongest evidence for *Signý* having any currency in Scandinavia before this period lies in the toponym *Signýjarstaðer*, cited in *Landnámabók* as lying in Hálsveit in Borgarfirði.⁴¹ Wherever the aetiology proves feasible, *-staðer* names in *Landnámabók* are attributed to founding settlers and their kin, incorporating either their given names or by-names, even when these are dithematic, like *Jarðlangstaðer* after a supposed *Þórgeirr jarð·langr*.⁴² Otherwise Icelanders recalled women named *Signý* as either remote Norwegian ancestors, in what may be the narratological kernels of eventual *fornaldar sögur*, or as minor supporting characters supplying the period backdrop for *Íslendinga sögur*.⁴³ The evidence for *Signý* as a

³⁸ On the significance of these appellatives, see DRONKE, *Poetic Edda*, II (1997), pp. 41-2, 129, 131-2 [nn. 21/3 and 22/1].

³⁹ E. g. *Alm-*, *Bøð-*, *Hall-*, *Rád-*, *Rann-*, *Sol-*, or *dór·veig*. For a discussion of previous attempts to analyse the name as predicational, see M. CLUNIES ROSS, *Prolongued Echoes*, 2 voll., I (1994), «Viking Collection», 7, 10, [Odense], Odense Univ. Pr. 1994-98, pp. 204-5.

⁴⁰ E. FÖRSTEMANN, *Altdeutsches Namenbuch*, 2 voll., Bonn, Hanstein 1906-1916, col. 1330. See also LIND, *Dopnamn*, coll. 883-884.

⁴¹ *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, ed. by JAKOB, pp. 56-7 [§§ S17, H17], as well as 72 [§ S32] and 75 [§ S35], and *Borgarfirðingar sögur*, ed. by S. NORDAL and G. JÓNSSON, «Íslenzk fornrit», III, Reykjavík, Íslenzk fornritfélag 1938, p. 298 [*Hardar saga*, cap. 1].

⁴² *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, ed. by JAKOB, pp. 90, 91 [§§ S25, H25]. The only exceptions are the four sites named *Hofstaðir* (pp. 78, 79, 125, 154, 236), *Tialdstaðir* (pp. 362, 363), which is given an explicit aetiology, and *Pursstaðir* (pp. 90, 91), which may be the exception which effectively casts doubt upon the toponymic method of *Landnámabók*: the temptation of bolstering land rights by attributing sobriquets to distant ancestors may not have been worth the ignominy of having to claim an ancestor with “ogre” as a nickname. While relatively late, theophoric place names is *-staðer* are recorded on the Scandinavian peninsula for Niðr and Freyia: see DE VRIES, AR, Karte IV at vol. II pp. 194 [N° 18] and p. 198 [§ 468]; Karte X at vol. II, p. 309 [N° 18] and p. 310 [§ 535].

⁴³ In the former category: *Signý Óblaudsdóttir* and *Signý Sighvatsdóttir* (*Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, ed. by JAKOB, pp. 150, 166, 167; and 248, 249, 260, 261, respectively), to which might be joined the Norwegian *Signý Bersadóttir* (*Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. by J. KRISTJÁNSSON, «Íslenzk fornrit», IX, Reykjavík, Íslenzk fornritfélag 1956, p. 237 [*Valla-Ljóts*

Viking-Age Norse anthroponym is paradoxically weaker than that for *Iðunnr*.

The precise scope for invention left by tradition to the author of *Völsunga saga* is difficult to determine.⁴⁴ According to Guðmundr's *senna*, Sinfiotli as *stiúpr Siggeirs* (*HHund I* 41/1) required an absentee father, yet Sinfiotli's own patrilinear claim to be an *Ylfingr* (34/5) rendered it difficult to reconcile these two facts in a heroic way. The mother of a *stiúpr* must either be a widow, divorcee, adulteress or victim of rape, and Sigmundr's early death became always less of an option as the number of heroic sons attributed to him increased. If *ylfingr* is intended as a clan name established by birth, any pretence at the relationship with Sigmundr as a maternal uncle recorded in *Beowulf* could only spell incest for Sinfiotli's mother.

In response to Guðmundr's taunt that Sinfiotli is ignorant of ancient tales (36/1-4), he counters with a mythic allusion which typologically resembles situation depicted for Hildir and the Hiaðningavíg in 'Ragnarsdápa'. Yet given that the context is set in Óðinn's hall (38/4) and the berserker-like nature of the nine wolfish brothers which the disruptive witch nurtures, the closest mythological comparandum may be Gullveig in 'Völuspá'. The identity between Gullveig and Skaði requires a close analysis of the relationships between 'Haustlǫng' and the *Hauksbók* recension of 'Völuspá' which is beyond the scope of the present paper. Such an assumption would explain the mythological train of thought which connects Guðmundr's reply to Sinfiotli's comparison of him to the witch he claims her to have been.

For the moment, let us consider whether the name *Signý* could have come to the author of *Völsunga saga* as he contemplated the mythical allusions to Guðmundr's reply, insofar as Loptr's encounter with ðiazí is being alluded to (42/1-8):

saga, cap. 2]), given her connection to a father-in-law Sigurðr (AM 496 4^o) or Sigmundr (AM 161 fol.). To the latter category belong the wives of ðorkels silfra (*Vainsdœla saga*, ed. by E.ÓL. SVEINSSON, «Íslenzk fornrit», VIII, Reykjavík, Íslenzka fornritafélag 1939, pp. 110-3), Ketill rípr (ibid., p. 324 [Hrafn Pátrr Guðrúnarsonar, cap. 3]) as well as Signý Otkel-sdóttir (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. by E.ÓL. SVEINSSON, «Íslenzk fornrit», XII, Reykjavík, Íslenzka fornritfélag 1954, p. 133). Höfler thought the Signý figure in *Völsunga saga* influenced by the *fornaldar sögur* (*Kultische Geheimbünde*, pp. 190-7).

⁴⁴ I regret not having been able to see the article by A. HAGGERTY KRAPPE on the motif of Signý's incest (*Zw Wielandsage*, «Archiv für das Studium des neueren Sprachen und Literaturen»), n.s., LVIII (1930), 9-23; LIX (1931), 161-75; LX (1931), 161-75; LXI (1932), 1-9 (esp. § v 'Wielands Rache').

- 39/1 'Nio átto við
á nese Ságo
ulfa alna.
Ek vas einn faðer ðeira!'
- [*Sinfiotli said:*]
'Nine wolves you had reared on Sága's headland. I alone was their father!'
- 40/1 'Faðer vasattu
Fenres ulfa
qllum ellre
svá at ek muna
5 Sítsk þik geldo
fyr Gnipalunde
þursa meyar
á Þórsnese.'
- [*Guðmundr said:*]
'As I recall, you were not the father of the wolves of Fenrir, older than them all, since the maids of ogres gelded you before the fire-grove on Þórr's headland.'
- 41/1 'Stiúpr vartu Siggeirs!
Látt und stöðom heima
varglióðom vanr
á viðom úte.
5 Kómo þér ógogin
qll at hendi
þá er bræðr þínom
bríóst raufaðer!
Gørðer þic frægnian
af firinverkom!'
- You were Siggeir's stepson.
You lay at home beneath the homestead, accustomed to the criminal songs from out in the forest. Every kind of disaster came your way, when you had torn open the breast of your brother
You got yourself a reputation from the crimes you carried out.'*
- 42/1 'Þú vart brúðr Grana
á brávell!
Gullbitloð vart
gør til rásar.
5 Hafða ek þér móðre
mart skeið riðit
svangre und sðle
simul forbergis!'
- 'You were Grani's bride on the plain of the eye brow [in your mind?]'⁴⁵
With a golden bit in your mouth, you were ready to race. I had ridden you a long course, agitated and hungry under the saddle for the baleful boaster's ox/giantess/pole!'⁴⁶*
- (HHUND I 39/1-42/8)⁴⁷

Once decyphered, Guðmundr's rhetoric leaves little doubt as to the identity of the mythologem which informs his rebuttal (*Haustl* 5/1-9/4). The adjective *svangr* is taken directly from 'Haustlqng' (6/2) þiazi's equine form is the only element lacking in 'Haustlqng' as a source, yet þjóðólfr's epithet *sig-ný(r)* provides a trigger for its introduction.

⁴⁵ Compare the kennings for forehead within the description of Fyllr: *fall-sól bráa vallar Fyllar* (*Eyv Lv* 9/1-2), *bekkiar brísings brún-akrs dís* (*Haustl* 9/1-2):

⁴⁶ For *bergi-* as an allomorph of *berki-*, see my *Poetic pedigrees*, n. 191 at p. 146.

⁴⁷ NECKEL, *Edda*, p. 136. See F. STRÖM, 'Nið', 'erg' and Old Norse moral attitudes, London, Viking Society for Northern Research 1974, pp. 15-6.

The idea of the horse having a golden bridle plays upon the kenning type [gold] = [speech] [giant]^{GEN}, the chronologically earliest examples of which may include: *Þiāza þing-skil* (*Bjark* 6/3).⁴⁸ In part this plays upon Þjóðólfr's description of Þjazi as a wisely speaking bird: *marg-spakr mǫr val-kastar bǫro* (3/5-6). Yet the image of a golden bit further plays into the brief elegiac poem on the Weyland figure, which I have dubbed 'Vólundarkviða', preserved as the stanzas traditionally numbered ten, eleven and twelve of 'Ynglingatal'.⁴⁹ Here the protagonist is portrayed as taming the *svalr hestr Signýiar vers* "the cool stallion of Signý's man" with a *taurr* "a (golden) neck-ring" (*Yt* 10/8-12), presumably serving as a bit. Since the figure of *Þiāzi eum* Jǫrmungandr combines coreferentially the concept of a staff, *gandr* (cf. *stǫng*, *simull*) and a ring or fetter of the kenning type [ring/fetter] [earth/sea]^{GEN}, the two fetish objects may only merge conceptually so long as Þiāzi's identity as the cosmic serpent remains recognizable. On Þiāzi's identification with Jǫrmungandr, see my *Classical models*, pp. 92-94.

Insofar as hanging was an archaic punishment for adultery at least among the Continental Germanic peoples, Weyland's escape from like punishment might be signalled by such an expression.⁵⁰ Yet the elegiac further states that with that same *gull-men* Weyland was at *Lopte hóf* (10/5-8): equally "elevated into a Loptr" as "hoisted into the sky".⁵¹ I have argued that 'Haustlǫng' superimposes a coherent set of allusions to the Weyland story within the myth of Iðunnr, whereby Þjazi corresponds to Níðhǫðr in the heroic analogue and Skaði to a combination of both Bǫðvildr and Níðhǫðr's unnamed queen. In the Eddaic 'Vólundarkviða', the hero can be said to ride Níðhǫðr only implicitly and figuratively, whereas the 'riding' of Bǫðvildr is presented both as factual and heterosexual. The epithet *sig-ný(r)* bridges the two works so as to evoke Þiāzi's equine epiphany through the conceptual structure [ship] = [horse] [mariner]^{GEN}.

If, at least in the synchronic terms of the post-Conversion period,

⁴⁸ For the type, see MEISSNER, *Kenningar*, pp. 227-8 [§ 87.f]

⁴⁹ See my *Poetic pedigrees*, esp. pp. 122 [text and gloss], 147-8.

⁵⁰ On hanging, see: F. STRÖM, *On the sacral origin of the Germanic death penalties*, [trans. by Donald Burton], «Kungl. Vitterthets historie och antikvitets akademiens handlingar», LII, Stockholm, Wahlström & Widstrand 1942, p. 122.

⁵¹ R. CLEASBY and G. VIGFUSSON, *An Icelandic - English Dictionary*, ed. by W.A. Craigie, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1957², s.v. 'hefja' [senses A, A.4]; *Ordbog over det norrøne prosa-prog*, ed. by B. HAGSTRÖM *et al.*, 13 voll. [projected], I (1995), Copenhagen, Det Arnamagnæan Kommission, 1989-, coll. 658 [s.v. 'at' sense I.B. 1] and 665 [sense I.D. 14].

we take the kenning type [gallows] = [horse] [criminal]^{GEN} as conceptually unmarked in relation to the ritual variant [horse] [Óðinn]^{GEN}, *svalr hestr Signýjar vers* need not refer to Óðinn so much as Loki in his role as *ó-svírande ása*, hence *vargr í véom*.⁵² In this state of ritual pollution, Loki uses Þiazi to purge himself. Loki's epithet *ulfs faðer* represents a sort of absolution, whereby the pollution is alienated from the transgressor and deposited somewhere else. The fact that Fenrir will grow into a cosmic menace intimates the inherent dangers of such a stratagem when not carried out adequately.

Völsungr saga opens with exactly such a trope: Sigi is outlawed as being *vargr í véom*.⁵³ The interpretation of *Signýjar verr* as *vargr* appears essential to the name *Signý* being drawn into the heroic elaboration of the *Völsungar* as *Ylfingar*. Guðmundr's conceptual superimposition of himself as Loki, *ulfs faðer*, over Sinfiotli Ylfingr signals a sort of generic fluidity in which strict distinctions between mythological and heroic, hence historical, had not yet become firmly established. Increased cultural contacts with Continental Germans may have facilitated the transfer of *Signý* from its original mythic sphere to an exclusively heroic one. To the extent that *Signý* could be confused with an anthroponym, its function as a poetic epithet which protected the secrecy of the cult name for the goddess being worshipped may have been fatally impaired. Hence the need to remodel it, as in the case of *Sigyn*, into a compound more distinctly marked as mythological, if not abandon *Signý* to the heroic milieu entirely.

⁵² For an Óðinnic reading of this kenning, see my *Poetic pedigrees*, p. 190.

⁵³ OLSEN, *Völsunga saga*, p. 2.

II
Onomastica toscana