



Queen Ingigerðr with her daughters, among them Ellisif, wife of King Haraldr (see pp. 19, 20).

HARALDR THE HARD-RULER AND HIS POETS

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I WAS IN SOME DOUBT WHAT TITLE TO GIVE THIS TALK, and especially how I should render the nickname of our hero: *harðráði*. Some translators give it the form *Hardrada*, which means nothing at all in English; others adopt neo-archaisms: *Hardrede*, *Hardredy*, which mean little more. In the end, I decided that 'tyrant' or 'hard-ruler' was as near as I could get.

But then another problem arose: when did Haraldr acquire this nickname? It is not applied to him in any contemporary poetry which we know, nor even in historical prose, but seems to creep gradually into chapter-headings and regnal lists, probably during the latter half of the thirteenth century.

If Haraldr's contemporaries and the early writers did not know him as *harðráði*, what did they call him? The foreign historians, French as well as English, when they gave Haraldr a nickname, invariably called him *har fagera*, *harvagrur* or suchlike. Already the Old English Chronicle D, one of the principal representatives of the northern recension, knows him under the nickname *har fagera*. This version was written hardly later than the end of the eleventh century, and some other foreign historians, writing a good while earlier than the Norwegian or Icelandic ones, give him the same nickname.¹

I do not know how this should be explained. It may be that our hero inherited his nickname from his illustrious ancestor, Haraldr hárfagri, Haraldr the Fine-haired, and that his contemporaries knew him under that name, while Norwegians or Icelanders of a much later age developed the suitable nickname *harðráði*. This king was certainly tyrannical; he was *harðráár*.²

Although other explanations are possible, I must not delay

¹ See J. Earle and C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, II (1899), 256.

² In the *Háttalykill* (str. 39), composed about the middle of the twelfth century, or a little earlier, the adjective *harðráðr* is applied to Haraldr, as it was applied to some other chiefs. It is not used as a nickname. Cf. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla* (Íslenzk fornrit XXVI-XXVIII, 1941-51), III, xxxix, footnote 1.

longer over the king's name. In this year we celebrate, or mourn, his final defeat and death at Stamford Bridge on 25 September, 1066. Today, I wish to think of Haraldr, not as a soldier, nor even as a statesman, but rather as a patron of poets.¹

We read of many kings of Norway how highly they esteemed their poets. In the court of Haraldr Finehair they occupied the highest place after the king himself.² You could see by their splendid red cloaks and painted shields, by their golden arm-rings and swords adorned with silver, that they were friends of the king.³

A century or so later, the Icelandic poet, Sighvatr, approached St Ólafr in Þrándheimr. He had made a poem about the king and asked him to listen. Ólafr said that he did not like poetry, and refused to hear it. But perforce he did, and rewarded the poet with a gold ring weighing half a mark.⁴ Not only did Sighvatr become Ólafr's chief poet, but also his intimate friend and counsellor.

Why was it that, at first, the Christian king refused to listen to poetry? It was probably because of its strong pagan associations, its rich allusion to the precious mead of Óðinn, its heathen imagery. Sighvatr largely purged it of such things and made poetry acceptable to a Christian king.

We may wonder why the Norse kings prized poetry so highly as they did. I think the answer was given plainly by St Ólafr. Before the battle of Stiklastaðir, he summoned his poets, and told them to keep out of battle, but to watch and to make poems about it afterwards.⁵ In other words, the rulers regarded poetry as a monument, one which would preserve their memory as long as the northern lands were peopled.

More evidence of the esteem in which kings held their poets comes from the *Skáldatal*, a list of poets probably drawn up in

¹ For convenience, scaldic poems will generally be cited according to the page and strophe numbering of *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, B, I, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1912), hereafter called *Skj.* B, I. Neither the text nor the interpretations there given are necessarily followed. The reader may also consult *Skj.* A, I (1912).

² *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ch. 8.

³ *Haraldskvæði*, *Skj.* B, I, 24-5 (str. 18-19).

⁴ *Heimskringla, Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 43.

⁵ *ibid.*, ch. 206.

Iceland in the thirteenth century.¹ The poets are grouped under the names of those princes whom they served, whether in Norway or elsewhere. One section of the list is devoted to poets who worked for kings of Norway.

We may run through this list until we come to Haraldr the Hard-ruler. Under his name we find no less than thirteen poets and from other sources we could add more. No king of Norway was himself a better poet, and none showed a deeper appreciation of the art than Haraldr did; none expressed his views about it in more forthright terms. The various versions of Haraldr's life give many illustrations of this.

We may remember that after Haraldr returned from the east (1046), he made terms with his nephew Magnús, son of St Ólafr. Magnús stepped before his uncle, holding two reeds. He presented one of them to Haraldr, saying 'with this reed I give you half of Norway'.² For a short time, until the death of Magnús, the two were joint kings of Norway. Sometimes they were on good terms, sometimes not so good. On this occasion, their relations were not bad, and they were dining in the same hall.³ The poet Arnórr Þórðarson, distinguished for his verses about the Jarls of Orkney, had recently arrived, and he had made two lays, one about each king. He was busy tarring his ship, when the kings' messengers came, summoning him to their presence to deliver his poems. Arnórr hurried to the court, not even bothering to wash off the tar. He chose to recite the poem for Magnús first, for Magnús was the younger, and the young are often hot-tempered.

Arnórr began his poem, and it is called *Hrynhenda*.⁴ It opened with strophes about the Jarls of Orkney and about Arnórr's own experiences in the west. King Haraldr interrupted and said to Magnús: 'How is it, Lord, that you can sit down under this lay, while he is talking of his own adventures and those of the Jarls in the west?' Magnus said that he was sure that he would be

¹ The most recent edition of the *Skáldatal* is that of Guðni Jónsson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (1949), pp. 339 ff. Cf. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, III (1887), 251 ff.

² *Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1932), p. 94.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 116-18.

⁴ Text, *Skj.* B, I, 306 ff. The name is found in several sources. The poem is also called *Hrynjandi* (?) and *Magnúsdrápa*. See Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie* (2nd ed., 1920-24), I, 608.

praised warmly enough before the lay was ended, and indeed he was.

When the lay for Magnús was finished, Arnórr delivered the one which he had made for Haraldr. It is called *Blágagladrápa* (Black Goose Lay, Raven Lay?) It is described as a good poem but, when it was finished, Haraldr was asked which of the two he thought the better. He answered that he could see the difference between them. The Black Goose Lay would soon fade into oblivion, and none would know it, but the lay about Magnús would be repeated so long as the northern lands were peopled. Haraldr's prophecy was fulfilled. There are nearly twenty strophes which we can confidently assign to the *Hrynhenda*, but none which seems to belong to the Black Goose Lay.

Here we have an example of a poem of which the royal critic approved. We shall come later to some of which he did not approve.

We may consider what Haraldr admired in the *Hrynhenda*. In the first place, it is composed in a measure which was, in those days, unusual. I know of only one older example, the fragment *Hafgerðingadrápa* (Tidal Wave Lay) composed c. 986 by a Hebridean on an Icelandic ship making for Greenland.¹ It is not likely that Haraldr had heard that, or that he would have admired it if he had.

The measure, itself called *hrynhenda* (*hrynhendr háttr*), differs from the normal Court Measure (*dróttkvætt*) in several ways. Instead of six syllables with three stresses, its lines consist of eight syllables with four stresses. Nevertheless, the *Hrynhenda* maintains the alliterative, riming and strophic systems established in the *dróttkvætt*, as well as the trochaic line-ending. Not only does it preserve the trochaic ending, but, throughout the line, the *hrynhenda* favours the trochaic foot more strongly than does the *dróttkvætt*, and it is chiefly this which distinguishes its rhythm.

Some have believed that the *hrynhenda* developed from the *dróttkvætt* by the addition of one trochaic foot to the three-footed *dróttkvætt*. It is more probable, especially since the first example we

¹ The refrain of the *Hafgerðingadrápa* is found in versions of the *Landnámabók* (ed. Finnur Jónsson (1900), pp. 35, 156); see also Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga* (Íslenzk fornrit iv, 1935), p. 245 (*Grænlandinga saga*).

know is the work of a Hebridean, that the *hrynhenda* was influenced by a foreign model, conceivably Irish,¹ but more likely Latin.

The impulse which prompted the *hrynhenda* has been seen in hymnal measures, such as:

ýmnum dícat túrba frátrum,
ýmnum cántus pérsonét . . . ²

This has affinities with a later, more familiar, end-riming form, which is more insistently trochaic:

stábat máter dólorósa
iúxta crúcem lácrimósa.³

The *hrynhenda* has no end-rime, and its trochaic movement gives it a jingling, rushing tone, as the name *hrynhenda* implies. The general effect is rather like that of the *Hiawatha* or the *Kalevala* in English translation. I may quote a few lines of Arnórr's poem:

Ljótu dreif á lypting útan
lauðri. Bifðisk gullit rauða,
fastligr hneigði furu geystri
fýris (?) garmr, um skeiðar stýri (str. 10).

When there are more syllables to play with, eight instead of six, the rimes are, of course, easier to manipulate than they are in the *dróttkvætt*.

The flowing rhythms of the *hrynhenda* are, to me, less pleasing than those of the more staccato *dróttkvætt*, but Haraldr was probably struck by the unusual form. We may remember how,

¹ Octosyllabic measures with trochaic line-ending are known in Irish. See G. Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics* (1961), p. 54.

² See A. Heusler, *Deutsche Versgeschichte*, I (1925), 305; further Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslenzkar Bókmenntir í Fornöld*, I (1962), 130 ff.

³ H. Lie, in *Maal og Minne* (1952), pp. 80 ff., severely criticizes Heusler's conclusions, but the criticism seems to lack substance. Lie sees the foreign influence, not in Latin hymns, but rather in rimed prayers, quoting as an example:

Salve, meum salutare,
Salve, salve, Iesu care,
Cruce tuae me aptare
Vellem vere, tu scis quare . . .

The sung melody, Lie suggests, would obscure the trochaic rhythm. However, this would depend on the melody chosen, and the same piece could sometimes be sung, and sometimes chanted or recited.

about a century earlier, Egill Skalla-Grímsson went into the presence of his old enemy, Eiríkr Bloodaxe, in York, and redeemed his head with his astonishing *Höfuðlausn*, an end-riming poem of a type hardly heard before or since.

But there is more than form to admire in Arnórr's *Hrynhenda*. In the surviving strophes the poet tells little of his own adventures, and nothing of those of the Orcadians. The substance is not rich, but the richness is in description and in the lavish praise of the young king.

Magnús himself is called the Skjoldungr (str. 4), as if he belonged to the royal house of the Danes. The term was hackneyed and faded by the time of Arnórr, but it had heroic associations. Magnús is also the Yggr or Óðinn of battle (*rimmu Yggr*, str. 5), the reddener of the tongues of the wolf-pack (*ulfa ferðar tungu rjóðr*, str. 5), reddener of the plumage of Óðinn's mew (*Yggjar mäs fiðrirjóðr*, str. 6). Ancient heroic legend is not forgotten for, in allusion to the legend of the *Völsungar*, armour is the clothing of Gjúki's kinsmen (*Gjúka ættar klæði*, str. 9).

The poet describes Magnús's ship as she puts to sea. This ship, the *Visundr* (Bison), had been built by Magnús's father, St Ólafr. Glowing with her gilded prow, on which was carved a bison's head, the ship was like the sun rising in a cloudless sky (str. 17), or even like a troop of angels gliding over the slopes of Meiti, i.e. the rolling waves which are the domain of a mythical sea-king.

Like other kings, Magnús is praised for his generosity, for he is the terror of plundered gold (*ótti fengins golls*, str. 16). He upholds the law; he is the enemy, the oppressor of thieves (*hlenna dolgr*, str. 17; *hlenna þrýstir*, str. 12).

Magnús must be praised for his victories in war. He claimed, and indeed made good his claim, to be king of Denmark as well as of Norway. He was thus overlord of the Wends in Jómsborg (Jomne), and his greatest victories were over that barbarous heathen race.

When he heard that men of Jómsborg had revolted, Magnús sailed there with an enormous fleet, and Arnórr rejoices in the grief of the Wends (str. 11). Magnús captured the city and set fire to it, and the poet gives a rich description of the towering flames and the terror which they struck into the hearts of the

heathen (str. 12). But the Wends were evidently not crushed for, soon afterwards (1043), they attacked Denmark with a gigantic force.

According to a prose account¹, Danes and Norwegians were vastly outnumbered. The Danes were afraid and talked of flight, but Magnús was inspired by a dream of St Ólafr mounted on a white horse. When day broke, the chime of a bell was heard in the sky, and the Norwegians recognized it as that of the bell *Gløð* in St Ólafr's church in Þrándheimr. The battle was fought in south Jutland and, according to Arnórr (str. 13), there was a pile of Wendish corpses so high that packs of wolves which had gathered from afar could not climb to the top.

According to one of Arnórr's strophes (str. 1), all princes are worse than Magnús. There will be none so great before the sky is rent. In these lines, Arnórr expressed a sentiment common to many poets of the north: it will be the end of the world (*Ragnarök*) before so noble a prince, even so beautiful a woman, shall tread the earth again. Indeed, no poet expressed the thought so forcefully as Arnórr did when he commemorated Þorfinnr, Jarl of Orkney, who died *c.* 1064. Before so great a chieftain shall be born in Orkney, the bright sun will turn black, the earth sink into the dark sea, waves will roar on the mountain tops, and the sky, the load of the dwarf, will break:

Björt verður sól at svartri,
 sökkr fold í mar dökkvan,
 brestr erfiði Austra,
 allr glymr sjár á fjöllum . . .²

Reading the *Hrynhenda* alone, we may not gain so favourable an impression of the poetry of Arnórr as he deserves. But it may give some idea of the value that princes placed on poetry to read that Magnús gave Arnórr first a gold arm-ring and later a whole merchant-ship with all its cargo as a reward for his poem. King Haraldr gave him a spear inlaid with gold. The poet promised Haraldr that if he lived longer than the king, he would make a memorial lay about him. This he did; it is a skilful lay, conventional

¹ The fullest account, not altogether credible, is given in *Morkinskinna* (or rather its derivatives). See *Morkinskinna*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 41-6.

² *Skj. B*, I, 321.

in form and imagery. Arnórr was a pious Christian and, in lines with which the poem seems to close, he prays to the guardian of Greece and Russia (*Girkja vörð ok Garða*) for the soul of Haraldr. When he called God by such a term, Arnórr was using something more than a stereotyped phrase. He must have thought of the long periods which Haraldr had spent in those distant lands.¹

Haraldr's favourite poet was not Arnórr, but Þjóðólfr, who spent many years in his company. Like Arnórr, Þjóðólfr was a thoroughly professional court poet and the prose stories about him, whether accurate or not, give a vivid picture. He was not a lovable person; he was vain and jealous, but yet a devoted and loyal servant of the king. We know nothing of Þjóðólfr's origins, nor even whether his father was called Arnórr or Þorljótr. We learn only that he was brought up in the north of Iceland and that his family was very poor.

When Þjóðólfr was at Haraldr's court, another poet arrived from northern Iceland, and this was Sneglu-Halli, a court buffoon, who quickly won the favour of the king.² As might be expected, Þjóðólfr was jealous; he told the king that Halli had come to Norway without even avenging his father. This was true enough, but Halli's reasons were good. Halli, in his turn, told the king that Þjóðólfr had certainly avenged his father, and only too well, because they had eaten the one who killed him. How could such a thing happen, because there were no cannibals in the north? The explanation was a simple one. Þjóðólfr's father had a large family, and they had little to live on but the charity of neighbours. One, more generous than the rest, gave Þjóðólfr's father a half-grown calf. He was leading the calf home on a rope, with one end fastened round his own neck. He climbed over a wall, not knowing that there was a deep ditch on the other side. The result was that the calf was left on one side of the wall, and Þjóðólfr's father hanging by his neck on the other. His children had lost their father, but they enjoyed the veal.

This story may be taken as a slanderous joke. There is another,

¹ This seems more probably than that Arnórr used the term as merely stereotyped form. Such terms were, of course, sometimes used as stereotypes. See R. Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden* (1921), p. 378.

² *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson in *Íslensk fornrit IX* (1956), 261 ff.

in the same source, which illustrates Þjóðólfr's proficiency as a poet, and tells something about the king's taste.

Þjóðólfr and the king were walking down the street, when they passed a house in which a tanner and a blacksmith were quarrelling and hurling insults at each other until they came to blows. 'We must get away from here,' said the king, 'but you make a poem about the quarrel, Þjóðólfr.' Þjóðólfr said that this was not a fit subject for the king's chief poet, but the king said he must do as he was told, and the subject was a more difficult one than he might think. He must represent the two hooligans as other than they were; the one must be the giant Geirrøðr and the other Þórr. We know the story of Þórr and Geirrøðr chiefly from Snorri's *Edda*¹ and, in other forms, from *Þorsteins þáttur*² and Saxo's history.³ Snorri's version is among the most vivid of those stories which tell of Þórr's encounters with giants. After some adventures, crossing a raging torrent, dividing the world of gods from that of giants, Þórr came to the house of Geirrøðr. The giant challenged him to sports. He took up a bar of red-hot glowing iron with his tongs and hurled it at Þórr, but Þórr caught it in iron gloves and hurled it back. The giant took refuge behind a pillar, but Þórr threw the glowing iron through the pillar, through the giant, the wall, and out onto the earth.

Haraldr and Þjóðólfr may have known this myth from the terribly intricate *Þórsdrápa*⁴ of Eilífr Goðrúnarson, who worked in the late tenth century. However that may be, the story shows the interest which both Haraldr and his chief poet had in an ancient myth. I shall not attempt to translate Þjóðólfr's strophe, but this has been done by L. M. Hollander.⁵ In substance it runs like this: Þórr of the great bellows (the blacksmith) hurled the jaws' lightning from the house of quarrels (hurled insults from his mouth) at the giant of goat-meat (the tanner). The Geirrøðr of tanning tools gladly seized with his hearing tongs (ears) the glowing irons of the magic forge.

¹ *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1931), pp. 105 ff.

² *Þorsteins þáttur Bæjarmagns* in *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda*, IV, ed. Guðni Jónsson (1950), 321 ff.

³ *Gesta Danorum*, Liber VIII.

⁴ *Skj. B*, I, 139.

⁵ *The Skalds* (1945), pp. 190-1.

The king praised the poem and told Þjóðólfr to make another. This time, the blacksmith must be Sigurðr and the tanner the dragon Fáfnir. The result, in free translation, was:

Hammer-Sigurðr the serpent,
 savage, egged to vengeance;
 the dragon, skin-scraping,
 scaled down from the boot rocks.
 Dreaded was the dragon
 —dressed his claws in leather—
 till the long-nosed tong-king
 tore the ox-skin adder.¹

Both of these verses show admirable dexterity and approach technical perfection. But what we must chiefly admire is the ability of a poet, with myth, diction and metrics at his finger-tips, to turn strophes like these at a moment's notice. The story may well be true, but even if it is not, it shows what was expected of a court poet.

There is another tale which illustrates the severe demands made on such a poet.² Sailing off the coast, the king came upon a fisherman. He called to him and asked if he could make poetry. 'No, my Lord,' said the fisherman, but the king pressed him and so he agreed to make a verse as long as the king would reply with another. The fisherman then produced an elegant verse, telling how he had lately caught a struggling haddock and how, long ago, he had wielded a gold-hilted sword and plunged his spears in blood. The king was struck by this verse, and rightly suspected that this was no ordinary fisherman, but must have lived among noble men. He answered in his own verse and then turned to Þjóðólfr and told him to make one. Þjóðólfr was conventional as usual, and told of the king's victories over Danes and Saracens. The verse was good enough in itself, but the king detected a

¹ Sigurðr eggjaði sleggju
 snák váligrar brákar,
 en skafdreki skinna
 skreið of leista heiði.
 Menn sáusk orm, áðr ynni,
 ilvegs búinn kilju,
 nautaleðrs á naðri
 neflangr konungr tangar. (Cf. *Skj.* B, I, 350.)

² *Morkinskinna*, ed. cit., pp. 247 ff.

metrical fault, which many might overlook. The fourth line read:

grǫm en þat var skǫmmu.

If I understand the king's criticism correctly, he thought that *grǫm / skǫmm-* did not make full rime (*ekki jafnhátt*). We would rather say that the first foot was too short, too light. It looks thus as if the king heard something wrong and could not clearly analyse it.¹

The chief poem of Þjóðólfr known to us is called *Sexstefja*,² a name found in two texts. It seems to mean 'the poem with six refrains'. We can find only one refrain in it now, and this may suggest what a stupendous poem it must have been when it was complete.

Editors of scaldic poetry include thirty-five strophes under the title *Sexstefja*. We cannot be sure that they all belong here, but we may suggest that some other strophes and half-strophes, which editors do not include, belong to this poem.

As we read it, the *Sexstefja* traces the course of Haraldr's life, immortalizing the achievement of the 'burner of Bulgars' (*Bolgara brennir*, str. 1), as the king is flatteringly called. It opens with the escape of Haraldr, then only fifteen years old, in disguise, after the death of his half-brother, Ólafr the Saint.

The descriptions grow richer when the poet passes on to Haraldr's adventures in the east, telling of his victories in Sicily, Africa and Greece. We may say that the poet magnifies the achievements of his king in those distant lands, for the Greek sources tell that Haraldr was no more than a minor officer in the imperial forces.³ But I do not think that we should blame Þjóðólfr for this. As we are told in a version of Haraldr's life,⁴ it was Haraldr himself who related that he had captured eighty cities in Africa, and that is what Þjóðólfr tells in the *Sexstefja* (str. 2). Again, it was Haraldr himself who put out the eyes of the Emperor of Greece (str. 6). If the king told this himself, there were few in Norway to gainsay him.

The poetic style of Þjóðólfr, at least in the *Sexstefja*, is not

¹ Cf. Finnur Jónsson, *Stutt íslensk Bragfræði* (1892), pp. 7-8.

² *Skj. B*, I, 339-46.

³ See Sigfús Blöndal, *Væringja Saga* (1954), pp. 112 ff.

⁴ *Morkinskinna* (= *Flateyjarbók*), ed. cit., p. 64.

unusually complicated, and his diction is comparatively simple. The kennings are seldom of more than two elements, and allusions to myth and legend of the heathen age are used sparingly. We may examine one or two of these, for there is nothing which gives clearer insight into the education of a poet of this time than his use of kennings of that kind.

In the third strophe of the *Sexstefja*, Þjóðólfr uses two kennings of the type *offjósti*, or word-substitution. They both apply to the land of Africa. The first is *elja Rindar*, which I can translate only as 'the rival mistress of Rindr'. Now Rindr was the mistress of Óðinn, who bore Váli to avenge Baldr. Óðinn had another mistress, and she was Jörð, mother of Þórr. But the name *Jörð* means 'earth, land' and, therefore, *elja Rindar* means 'land', in this case the land of Africa.

In the same strophe, the poet calls the land of Africa *Ánars mær*, 'daughter of Ánarr'. Now Snorri tells that Ánarr (Ónarr) was the father of Jörð.

We might wonder whether such kennings would be readily understood by an audience of the eleventh century. I think they would, at least by educated men, for they belong to an old and well-established type.

In the *Ragnarsdrápa* (str. 5),¹ Bragi, the oldest of the scaldic poets whose work we know, tells how the young heroes, Hamðir and Sǫrli, were pelted with the 'hard clods of Óðinn's mistress', i.e. they were pelted with hard clods of earth, stones. Kennings closer to Þjóðólfr's *Ánars mær* were used by the Norwegian Guttormr sindri in a lay about Hákon the Good² and by Hallfreðr,³ while still a pagan, in a lay about Hákon the Great (str. 5). The first calls the land *Ónars fljóð*, and the second *dóttir Ónars*.

In str. 14 of the *Sexstefja* we find an expression which is, at first sight, puzzling. As I construe it: *stóðu Finna gjöld í skjöldum*, 'the tribute of the Lapps stood (fast) in the shields'. I doubt whether we could understand these words without the help of the *Qrvar-Odds Saga*,⁴ hardly older than the late thirteenth century. There

¹ *Skj.* B, I, 2.

² *ibid.*, p. 55.

³ *ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴ Ed. R. C. Boer (1892), ch. 6.

we read of magic arrows won from Gusi (Gusir), king of the Lapps. These arrows are called *Gusis nautar*. Snorri¹ quotes some rather obscure lines assigned to Hofgarða-Refr, probably an older contemporary of Þjóðólfr, in which arrows seem to be called *Gusis nautar*; in a word-list² they are called *Gusis smíði*.

I may be caught in a circular argument, but I think the explanation of these kennings for arrows shows two things. Firstly, it shows the great age of some traditions preserved in late Heroic Sagas, which we regard suspiciously. Secondly, it shows how much an educated audience of Haraldr's time was expected to know. If the hearer knew the legend of the king of the Lapps, the picture would rise to his mind; if he did not, the expression would be meaningless.

Þjóðólfr uses some other kennings of legendary or mythical content, but for the moment I shall pass them by. What does Þjóðólfr admire about his king? How does he describe him? His praises are conventional. All kings are praised for their generosity, even Haraldr, who was a skinflint. He was the 'hater of the fire-red land of the serpent' (*hǫtuðr tandrauðs ormtorgs*, str. 2), i.e. the hater of gold, the one who gives it away. He sows the seed of Yrsa's son (*grð Yrsu burðar*, str. 27) or the corn of Kraki (*Kraka barr*, str. 27) on the hawk's lands (*hauks kǫlfur*) of the poet, i.e. he puts gold rings on the poet's arms. The allusion is, of course, to Hrólfkraki, who strewed gold on the fields so that his greedy Swedish pursuers would stop to pick it up.³

But the kennings and other expressions used to denote Haraldr are concentrated more on his success in battle, his hard rule and tyranny. We have already seen Haraldr as the 'burner of Bulgars', and similar thoughts are developed about his dealings with his own recalcitrant subjects in Upplönd, Raumaríki and Heiðmörk. 'The towering wolf of the roof' (*hár hrótgarmr*, str. 20) was employed to put them in their place, i.e. their houses were burnt down.

Like other princes, Haraldr is the 'promoter of battle' (*dolgstærandi*, str. 10) and 'of the storm of spear-points' (*odda skúrar*

¹ *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. cit., p. 176.

² *Skj.* B, I, 665.

³ *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. cit., pp. 139 ff.

herðir, str. 28). He is especially the 'feeder of the raven' or 'battle starling' (*folkstara feitir*, str. 10); he is the 'one who overcomes the sorrow of the wolf' (*eyðir heiðingja sútar*, str. 6), i.e. he feeds the wolf. Þjóðólfr uses rich kennings for 'carrion, corpses'; they are the 'corn of the blood-grouse' (*blóðorra barr*, str. 30), the 'seed of the blood swan' (*sveita svans grð*, str. 30), which is mown down by Óðinn's scythe.

I mentioned an occasion on which Þjóðólfr was guilty of a metrical error. It is striking how few of these he committed. It is well known that, according to the strict rules of *dróttkvætt*, there should be half-rime or consonance in the odd lines and full rime in the even lines. This rule develops gradually. Bragi, the oldest scaldic poet known, used both half rime and full rime, but almost at random, and many of his lines have no rime at all. Few poets before Þjóðólfr followed this rule so strictly as he did, and his exceptions are so few that they may arise from corruption. In his use of rime and half rime, I should mention a minor point of philological rather than literary interest. The older scalds regarded *ø* (the u-umlaut of *a*) as equivalent or nearly equivalent to the original *a*, and thus as full rime. They seem gradually to hear a difference between the two sounds and, in the late twelfth century, the rime *ø/a* is abandoned. The progress of this change has lately been studied carefully,¹ and a new explanation has been offered. I incline to favour an old explanation that, for a century or so after the umlaut took place, the sound of *ø* did not differ so widely from that of *a* that scalds felt it necessary to distinguish them. Þjóðólfr and his contemporary Arnórr generally treated *ø/a* as full rime, but sometimes they treated them as half-rime. In other words they regarded the two sounds as the same and yet different. I shall not belabour this point, since it is better suited to a separate note.

It is clear that Haraldr admired Þjóðólfr as a poet. Some readers may wonder why, and opinion about him in recent times has been sharply divided. Erik Noreen writes:² 'Þjóðólfr is the correct, measured courtier. This is seldom a pleasing type, and

¹ Hreinn Benediktsson, *Acta Philologica Scandinavica*, xxvi (1963), 1 ff.

² *Den norsk-islandske poesien* (1926), p. 242.

therefore we shall not delay longer over him.' Thus, Þjóðólfr, Haraldr's chief poet, is dismissed.

A very different view of Þjóðólfr was expressed by Guðmundur Þorláksson,¹ who said that Þjóðólfr could 'without doubt, be reckoned as one of the greatest, if not the very greatest of the golden age of scaldic poetry'. Þjóðólfr's poems showed creative poetic spirit, a rare command of language, a clear and vivid presentation of the events which he described.

Finnur Jónsson² expressed less extreme views. He admired Þjóðólfr's skill, but thought his verses lacked personal feeling. They are, in fact, generally stiff and unemotional, lacking the intensity of the great masters, Sighvatr, Egill, Eyvindr, Bragi. Þjóðólfr was a professional court poet and, through his work, the achievements of his patron were to be remembered. It is largely through this that they have.

The tales about Þjóðólfr may not show him a lovable person, but there is no doubt that he was a sincere and loyal servant of the vain, arrogant Haraldr. One source³ tells that he died with Haraldr at Stamford Bridge. He took part in this disastrous battle, and cannot have survived it long, for nothing is heard of him afterwards.

Þjóðólfr's last two verses were made during this battle, one before and one after the death of Haraldr. In the first, he says that he will not desert the young sons of the king, Magnús and Ólafr, even though Haraldr fall. The battle must go as God wills.

In his last verse, after Haraldr is dead, Þjóðólfr says that men have paid a bitter price, and the army is in sad plight. It was on a useless errand that Haraldr had brought his men from Norway.

Þjóðólfr was not a poet without sentiment, but discipline had overwhelmed him.

I have talked about Haraldr's chief poet, and would like to mention some of the lesser ones. One Bolverkr, is said to be the brother of Þjóðólfr. Eight strophes⁴ and half-strophes are ascribed to him, and they appear to be from one sequence addressed

¹ *Udsigt over de norske-islandske Skjalde* (1882), p. 110.

² *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie* (2nd ed., 1920-4), I, 614.

³ *Hemings þáttur Áslákssonar*, ed. G. Fellows Jensen (1962), p. 54.

⁴ *Skj.* B, I, 355 ff.

in the second person (*viðmælt*) to Haraldr. They must be composed after 1048 because one of them contains an allusion to Haraldr's expedition to Denmark in that year. In form the verses of Þólværkr are strict and regular. The poet describes the adventures of the king in Bláland, evidently a part of Africa, and in Sicily and, occasionally, his descriptions are rich and vivid. In one strophe he tells of the arrival of the young Haraldr in Constantinople; he sees the gleaming metal roofs of the city and the beautifully boarded boats approaching the harbour.

A minor poet of more than ordinary talent was Valgarðr á Velli, who probably came of a family at Vøllr in Rangárvellir. We have eleven of his strophes and half-strophes, and these also seem to be from one poem addressed to Haraldr in the second person.¹

The verses are regular, as are those of most professional poets of this age. The syntax is simple and the kennings few although the descriptions are lavish. We read of raging, towering flames hurling red-hot embers from the soot as the houses burn (str. 2), of the sorrows of women whose land is laid waste (str. 3), of wolves hurrying to devour the slaughtered enemy (str. 7). To look into the jaws of the dragon-head on the king's ship was like looking into fire, a blazing furnace (str. 10).

Illugi Bryndœlaskáld² is also named as one of Haraldr's poets, but we have only slight fragments of his work, far less than we could wish. The four half-strophes preserved are rather curiously constructed. Lines 1 and 4 form a kind of frame for lines 2 and 3. In lines 1 and 4 the poet praises the king, telling how he defeated Franks and subjected southern lands to the Emperor Michael Katalaktis. But lines 2 and 3 are about an entirely different subject, the legend of the Vølsungar. The generous man (Sigurðr) pierced the dark fish of the forest (the dragon) (str. 1); he roasted his bitter heart (str. 2); it was not easy for him to reach the house of Brynhildr (str. 3); the son of Buðli (Atli) invited his kinsmen to his house (str. 4). Illugi seems to place Haraldr on a level with the legendary hero Sigurðr. A rather similar device had been used by Kormákr in a lay about Jarl Sigurðr.

¹ *Skj.* B, I, 360 ff.

² *ibid.*, p. 354.

I remarked that no king of Norway was a better poet than Haraldr, but that was not to make any great claim. Nineteen strophes, or parts of strophes, are assigned to him. The first was made at Stiklastaðir, when St Ólafr tried to dissuade his brother from joining the battle, since he was only fifteen years old. The most famous of Haraldr's verses form a series called *Gamanvísur*,¹ and Haraldr made them in Hólmgarðr (Novgorod) on his way home from the east. They are addressed to his future wife, Ellisif (Elizabeth), daughter of Jarisleifr (Jaroslav) and his queen, Ingigerðr.² There were originally sixteen of these strophes.

Haraldr boasts of what he had done in Sicily and elsewhere and, in the refrain, he complains that the goddess of the gold ring, the Russian maid, gives him the cold shoulder. The surviving strophes of the *Gamanvísur* are pleasing enough, but it is plain that they are not the work of a professional poet, and Haraldr allows himself such liberties as he would not tolerate in Þjóðólfr. Some of his lines have full rime in place of half, others half rime in place of full, and some no rime at all.

The last two of Haraldr's verses were made at Stamford Bridge, and a rather interesting, if not altogether credible, story is told about them. The first is in the simple measure *fornyrðislag*, which presents few difficulties of interpretation. It reads:

Framm gongum vér
í fylkingu
brynjulausir
und blár eggjar;
hjalmar skína,
hefkat ek mína;
nú liggr sknúð várt
at skipum niðri.

'We march forward in battle-array without our corselets to meet the dark blades; helmets shine, but I have not mine, for now our armour lies down on the ships.'

As soon as he had spoken this verse, Haraldr said: 'This is a bad verse, and another and better one must be made.' He made

¹ *Skj.* B, 1, 328 ff.

² See frontispiece.

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another, and this one is in *dróttkvætt*; it is rich in kennings and metrically perfect:

Krjúpum vér fyr vápna,
valteigs, brökun egi,
svá bauð Hildir, at hjaldri,
haldorð, í bug skjaldar;
hátt bað mik, þars moettusk,
menskorð bera forðum,
Hlakkar íss ok hausar,
hjalmstofn í gný malma.

‘We do not creep in battle under the shelter of shields before the crash of weapons; this is what the loyal goddess of the hawk’s land (woman) commanded us. The bearer of the necklace told me long ago to hold the prop of the helmet (head) high in the din of weapons, when the valkyrie’s ice (sword) met the skulls of men.’

At last, Haraldr had become a professional poet of the kind which he himself admired.

When Haraldr died at Stamford Bridge, the Viking Age was ended. A chapter in the history of Norse literature ended too. Never again did court poets reach the same standard as they had reached in the reign of Haraldr.

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I wish to thank Mr P. R. S. Moorey, of the Ashmolean Museum, for putting me onto the track of the illustration here reproduced as a frontispiece. It is of a fresco, probably of the eleventh century, in the church of St Sophia in Kiev. I would also like to thank Dr I. Grafe and the Phaidon Press for supplying the block, which is taken from V. Lazarev, *Old Russian Murals and Mosaics* (1960), p. 237.