

## CHAPTER 14

### MITHOTHYN, THE MEAD-SPIRIT, IN SAXO GRAMMATICUS' HISTORY OF THE DANES<sup>605</sup>

The Eddas may be best known source of Nordic heathen lore, but Saxo Grammaticus' *History of the Danes* rivals the *Ynglingsaga* of the Norwegian *Heimskringla* as a source of mythical tales euhemerized into history. In the first book of Saxo, there is an episode where a divine being – Mithothyn – usurps Odin's throne. Here, some light will be shed on the means by which Saxo constructed this tale from his mythical sources, and the relationship between Mithothyn and Madhu, the mead spirit of Aryan myth, will be discussed.

In Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* there are two episodes where Odin is displaced as king of the gods, one involving Mithothyn, and the other involving Oller.<sup>606</sup> The latter has been equated with Ull, whose story Rydberg has excellently integrated into the story of the siege of Asgard.<sup>607</sup> But this equation is incorrect, and Saxo's tale clearly involves an incorrect and late syncretism of several mythical themes, which shall be distilled here.

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<sup>605</sup>This article was originally published in *Renewal Magazine*, Jan/Feb 2012, without the footnotes and annotations. This variant was originally written as a commentary on Book One, Chapter Seven of Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, part of a nine volume commentary and annotated translation I have in progress, and has been submitted to several academic journals. Thus, the style of notation in this chapter is somewhat different than other chapters.

<sup>606</sup>Mithothyn is Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* ("Saxo") 1.7.1 – 1.7.3 ; Oller is Saxo 3.4.9-3.4.13; Oller is found in the Eddas as Ullr, the step-son of Thor, whose story Rydberg integrates into the larger tradition of the siege of Asgard by the Vanir.

<sup>607</sup>Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology* I, 235-238; Also Dumézil's *Haddingus*, 93-105.

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## THE USURPATION MOTIF

The key motif in which Mithothyn plays his role is that of “the usurpation,” where a lesser divine figure supplants Odin in his capital.<sup>608</sup> This motif attaches to three divine figures in Saxo, and syncretism between the stories of these figures appears throughout the *Gesta Danorum*.<sup>609</sup> The first usurper is Frey, whose dominance at Uppsala is associated with the theme of the “changes of the sacrifices” that appears in four tales of Saxo other than those of Oller and Mithothyn, as well as in the *Ynglingsaga*.<sup>610</sup> The second usurper is Loki, who

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<sup>608</sup>“Cuiu secessu Mithothyn quidam praestigiis ceber, perinde ac caelesti beneficio vegetates, occasionem et ipse fingendae divinitatis arripoit barbarasque mentes novis erroris tenebris circumfuses praestigiarum fama ad caerimonias suo nomini persolvendas adduxit.” *Gesta Danorum* 1.7.2; “Quo denis ferme annis divini senatus magistratum gerente” *Gesta Danorum* 3.4.11.

<sup>609</sup>i.e., each time Saxo presents the tale of Odin being usurped, he integrates into his tale attributes borrowed from several originally separate stories of “usurpation”.

<sup>610</sup>“Frey built a great temple at Uppsala, made it his chief seat, and gave it all his taxes, his land, and goods. ... When it became known to the Swedes that Frey was dead, and yet peace and good seasons continued, they believed that it must be so as long as Frey remained in Sweden; and therefore they would not burn his remains, but caled him the god of this world, and afterward offered continually blood-sacrifices to him, principally for peace and good seasons. When it became known to the Swedes that Frey was dead, and yet peace and good seasons.” *Ynglingsaga* 12-13.

Hadding institutes sacrifices to Frey: “Siquidem propitiandorum numinum gratia Fro deo rem divinam furvis hostiis fecit. Quem litationis morem annup feriarum circuitu repetitum posteris imitandum reliquit. Froblot Sueones vocant.” *Gesta Danorum*, 1.8.12.

Hother resigns from his battle with Baldur during the time sacrifices were offered to Frey in Uppsala: “Fro quoque deorum satrapa sedem haud procul Upsala cepit, ubi vterem litationis morem tot gentibus ac saeculis usurpatum tristi infandoque piaculo mutavit. Siquidem humani generis hostias mactare aggressus foeda superis libamenta persolvit.” *Gesta Danorum* 3.21.13.

Starkad is at Uppsala at the time of the sacrifices: “Ubi cum filiis Frø septennio feriatu ab his tandem ad Haconem Daniae tyrannum se contulit, quod apud Upsalam sacrificiorum tempore constitutus effeminatos corporum motus scaenicosque mimorum plausus ac mollia nolarum crepitacula fastidiret. Unde patet, quam remotum a lascivia animum habuerit, qui ne eius quidem spectator esse sustinuit. Adeo virtus luxui resistit. Itaque cum Hacone classem in Hiberniam extulit, ne vel ultima rerum humanarum imperia Danicis armis intacta consistent.”

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wages war against the Aesir, and is found in the three efforts of Harald to usurp Ragnar Lodbrog. Loki's wars are associated with the motif of the "war with the south" in which the king of Denmark battles a revolt, often involving "Jutland" and allies in Saxony or Scлавia.<sup>611</sup> The third usurper is Ullr, who seizes the throne of Odin upon the conclusion of the war of the Vanir against the Aesir.<sup>612</sup> These three tales<sup>613</sup> may be cognate developments from a common root, but they are sufficiently distinct themes at the time of Saxo's writing to constitute separate "species" of motif within the same motif "family."<sup>614</sup>

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*Gesta Danorum* 6.5.10.

Halfdan III goes to Uppsala and is told to institute sacrifices to his brother: "Quam cum sterilitatis vitio obnoxiam animadverteret maximamque prolis creandae cupidinem haberet, conciliandae ei fecunditatis gratia Upsalam petit responsoque monitus suscitandae subolis causa fraternis primum manibus parentare, postquam oraculo paruit, optatae rei solatium impetravit." *Gesta Danorum* 7.10.1.

<sup>611</sup>The three efforts of Harald to usurp Ragnar Lodbrog are: *Gesta Danorum* 9.4.9 - 12, where he is joined by "Iuti ac Scani"; *Gesta Danorum* 9.4.15 - 16, where we are told that Ragnar "insuper Saxoniam, quod eam asylum hostium Haraldique profugium crederet, oppugnare constitueret"; and, *Gesta Danorum* 9.4.36 - 37, where Harald is assisted by "Lodowicus Maguntiae constitutum auxilia petiturus accessit," who insists that Harald embrace a differing form of worship – that of Christ. Harald then "in territorio Sleswicensi dicadum Deo aedem collicita moliebatur impensa," and then "vero profugus fortunate as sacrilegium transtuit."

The association of Harald with Loki in the *Gesta Danorum* is a more complex topic than can be addressed in a footnote. A good example is that of the story of Harald Hyldetand, *Gesta Danorum* 7.10.4, which states, "Cuius buccam Wesetus ita absque vulneris inflictione fuste quassavit, ut binis eam dentibus vacuefaceret." Cp this with the store of Brok and Loki, "Þá tók dverginn þveng ok kníf ok vill stinga rauf á vörrom Loka ok vill rifa saman munninn, en knífrinn beit ekki. Þá mælti hann, at betri væri þar alr bróður hans, en jafnskjótt sem hann nefndi hann, þá var þar alrinn, ok beit hann varrarnar. Rifaði hann saman varrarnar, ok reif Loki ór æsunum. Sá þvengr, er muðrinn Loka var saman rifaðr, heitir Vartari." *Skaldskaparmál* 43.

<sup>612</sup>Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I 235-238.

<sup>613</sup>Or any two of them.

<sup>614</sup>The various episodes in Saxo do not vary at random, nor are they generally products of Saxo's imagination. The different heroic figures he depicts vary the motifs in their stories based upon their shared attributes, a proof of which will take a book – one that is being worked upon. As a single illustrative example, the motif of "burning to death" which figures in the story of Mundilfori, the moon king, such as under the epithet Gewar in *Gesta Danorum* 3.4.14 – appears in the story of Frode as "being heated," often as a detached element or at the point in the story where Frode should, as Mundilfori, burn – i.e., as Frode I, *Gesta Danorum* 2.4.3 "sed armorum pondere et corporis aestu strangulatus interit"; as Frode III, *Gesta Danorum* 5.3.20 "Tandem redditus calor figure hebetatos artus spiritu vegetiore firmabunt"; as Frode IV, *Gesta Danorum*

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As Dumézil has noted, the story of Mithothyn is inserted into Hadding's tale because of the syncretism of Hadding and Njord, and the importance of the story of the war of the Aesir and Vanir to the mythical epic of Njord's exploits.<sup>615</sup> As told in *Voluspa*, Gullveig<sup>616</sup> enters Asgard and engages in seid magic, for which she is burned in Odin's hall.<sup>617</sup> The Vanir demand compensation and blame Odin himself for having practiced seid.<sup>618</sup> Odin throws his spear – Rydberg says to initiate war with the Vanir, Dumézil says in an effort to conclude it.<sup>619</sup> Rydberg has associated this tale with the tale of the woman from the Vanir who brought seid magic to Asgard; the bearer of that magic is Ljot (Ljod), the handwoman of Freyja, who is Angrboda in disguise.<sup>620</sup> In fact, this woman assists the giants in kidnapping Freyja in the

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6.5.19 “Qui cum convivii simulatione exceptum regem incendio consmere statuisset”; as Frode V *Gesta Danorum* 7.1.7 “igne deinde penatibus applicato.” These two both share the common attribute of “keeper of the World Mill,” and appear to be confused on that basis.

<sup>615</sup>Dumézil, *Haddingus*, 93-105; Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology* I 210-213, and in the surrounding material; both reference *Ynglingsaga* 4 and *Voluspa* 21-26.

<sup>616</sup>Whom Rydberg notes is identical to Loki's bride Angrboda-Aurboda.

<sup>617</sup>*Voluspa* 21-26 and Rydberg's excellent discussion in *Teutonic Mythology*, I 204-213, on the episode, and 213-235, on the identity of Gullveig-Heid with Angrboda and Aurboda. Also *Volsunga saga* c.ii.8, et seq., for Ljod.

<sup>618</sup>During the seduction of Rind.

<sup>619</sup>“When Odin, by hurling a spear, had indicated the treaty of peace between him and the Vans was broken,” Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology* I, 235-235; “[The episode of high magic] consists in the spear that Odinn hurls at the enemies, a gesture that we know from analogous scenes in several sagas usually results in victory for Odinn's side. But this time, it must be assumed, this sovereign magic does not have its usual definitive effect ...” Dumézil, *Handingus* 99.

<sup>620</sup>Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology* I 204-235. This is a complex argument drawing from the Eddas, Saxo and the Volsung saga. To summarize: Gullveig and Heid are known to be the same through their identity in *Voluspa* 21-26. Hrimnir appears in *Volsungasaga* c.ii.8 with a daughter Ljod, Freyja's handmaiden. *Hyndluljod* 30-32 tells us Heid is Hrimnir's daughter. In *Hyndluljod* 40-41, Loki eats the heart of a burnt woman and becomes impregnated by it. This woman, Aurboda is equated with Angrboda, *Voluspa* 40. Aurboda appears as a handmaiden of Freyja in *Fjollsvimsmal* 38. Gullveig-Heid-Angrboda-Aurboda is the giantess who brought seid to Asgard, and Freyja is the first of the Aesir to practice seid: “Freyja kendi first med Asum seid,” *Ynglingsaga* 4. Thus, Angrboda likely brought seid to Freyja. The implications for Saxo are below.

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story of Syritha<sup>621</sup> and Ottar,<sup>622</sup> which appears in Saxo.<sup>623</sup> These events bring about the great Winter War.<sup>624</sup>

### MITHOTHYN – MADHA AND THE CONFUSION WITH GULLVEIG

Mithothyn has been interpreted, incorrectly, as Mjotudh-inn, and thus thought to mean either “judge leader” or “anti-Odin.”<sup>625</sup> While Nordic epithets are often kennings and involve plays on words and multiple meanings, this name is comparable in structure to the epithet Midvitnir for Mjodvitner, and means “mead-Odin” and “mead-spirit.”<sup>626</sup> As such, Dumézil is correct when he equates this figure with Kvasir and with the Vedic Indian myth of Mada.<sup>627</sup> Kvasir is the deity formed from the joined spit of the Aesir and Vanir whose birth cements their peace.<sup>628</sup> He is later killed by two dwarfs and poured into the three wells, Hvergelmir, Urd’s well, and Mimir’s well, as detailed by Rydberg.<sup>629</sup> Similarly, Mada is a deity whose birth ends the war between Indra

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<sup>621</sup>ON “cow-rider.”

<sup>622</sup>Odr, both names of Swipdag-Ericus-Storkadr.

<sup>623</sup>“Eiusdem rei cupidus gigas, cum aequae se effectu vacuum animadverteret, feminam subornat, quae, cum obtenta virginis familiaritate eius aliquamdiu pedisequam egisset, hanc tandem a paternis procul penatibus, quaesita callidius digressione, seduxit; quam ipse mox irruens in artiora montanae crepidinis saepa devexit.” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* 7.4.1-7.4.8 The identity of Ottar, Odr and Svipdag is discussed Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I 757 and 772-780.

<sup>624</sup>The war waged to recapture the goddesses of fertility, whose kidnapping by the rebel smiths has brought about the great winter. See Chapter 11.

<sup>625</sup>Dumézil says this in *Mitra-Varuna*, 122, positing, presumably, a common root with “mediator,” or, alternately, Mith- as a derivative of Nith-. In a footnote to this later work, though, Dumézil agrees with “mead spirit,” *Haddingus*, 104, n.19.

<sup>626</sup>Dumézil, *Haddingus* 104, n.19.

<sup>627</sup>Dumézil, *Haddingus* 103-104.

<sup>628</sup>As the mead god, he may be related to the wine god discussed in Chapter 9, and his death may represent the triumph of the Indo-European over the religion of the Great Mother.

<sup>629</sup>“létu renna blóð hans í tvau ker ok einn ketil, ok heitir sá Óðrerir, en kerin heita Són ok Boðn,” *Skaldskaparmál* 58; Discussed in Rydberg *Teutonic Mythology*, I 518-521 “Urdar Magn, svalkaldr saer, Sonar dreyri,” quoting *Gudrunarkvida*, ii, 21.

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and the Asvin and whose death leads to the creation of the mead.<sup>630</sup>

The first paragraph of the Mithothyn story<sup>631</sup> states that “the kings of the north, desiring more zealously to worship his deity, embounded [Odin’s] likeness in a golden image; and this statute, which betokened their homage, they transmitted with much show of worship to Byzantium.”<sup>632</sup> This is Saxo’s interpretation of the statements in *Voluspa* regarding Gullveig’s coming to Asgard.<sup>633</sup> Saxo does not appear to understand the term “Gullveig,” and interprets it as meaning a golden idol rather than a woman; he then adds the idea that the gods “showed homage” to it.<sup>634</sup> We are then told “Frigga, desiring to go forth more beautified, called smiths, and had the gold stripped from the statue<sup>635</sup>.” This has been linked to the story of Brisningamen, but it should be linked more closely to the story of Freyja being the first in Asgard to practice *seid*, a form of evil magic which she had learned from her serving woman Ljot – Gullveig or Angrboda in disguise.<sup>636</sup> Frigg “turns to the service of her private wantonness” because the *seid* magic has corrupted her.<sup>637</sup> Similarly, in the story of Syritha and Ottar, Syritha cannot be broken from the trance she has come under when she is enslaved and made “to tend goats” by a giant woman.<sup>638</sup> The

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<sup>630</sup>Cited, presumably from the Vedas, in Dumézil, *Haddingus*, 104.

<sup>631</sup>Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.7.1.

<sup>632</sup>Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.7.1-1.7.3 for the story; 1.7.1 for the quote: “Cuius numen Septentrionis, reges propensiore sultu prosequi cupientes effigiem ipsius aereo complexi simulacro statuum suae dignationis indicem maxima cum religionis simulatione Byzantium transmiserunt.”

<sup>633</sup>*Voluspa* 22; Dumézil agrees, *Haddingus* 101-102.

<sup>634</sup>Given the interweaving of themes, Saxo seems to know there is a larger story here, though, like many modern scholars, he seems unsure what the story is. As a Euhemerist and Christian, an evil idol among the pagans seems appropriate.

<sup>635</sup>“Frigga, quo cultior progredi posset, accitis fabris aurum statuæ detrahendum curavit.”, Saxo *Gesta Danorum* 1.7.1.

<sup>636</sup>Saxo identifies Frigga and Freyja. Rydberg believed Frigga was Freyja’s mother and Njord’s sister, *Teutonic Mythology* I, 155-158. For Freyja’s handmaiden, see n 12. above.

<sup>637</sup>“Cuius ingenio simulacrum demolita aurum publicæ superstitione consecratum ad private luxu instrumentum convertit.” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* 1.7.1.

<sup>638</sup>“Ut ad silvestris cuiusdam immanisque feminae tugurium perveniret.” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*

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fact that Frigga “calls smiths” to strip the gold from the statue also recalls to mind the story of Helga, Starkad and the goldsmith, during the reign of King Ingeld, who can be shown, from comparison to the Ingialds of the *Ynglingsaga*, to be largely a manifestation of Loki.<sup>639</sup>

After the smiths strip the statue, we are told “Odin hanged them, and mounted the statue on a pedestal, which by the marvelous skill of his art he made to speak when a mortal touched it.”<sup>640</sup> This is the myth of Mimir’s head, but it is inserted into the separate narrative of the corruption of Frigg-Freyja by Gullveig and the *seid*.<sup>641</sup> The narratives are related – Mimir is beheaded by the Vanir and his head is sent back to the Aesir shortly after the exchange of hostages that ends the first war in the world described in *Voluspa* and the *Ynglinga saga* – but the narrative of the burning of Gullveig precedes that war.<sup>642</sup>

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7.4.4. During this entire episode, Freyja is clearly under a spell, which Ottar cannot break “Cuius obtutum omnibus ingenii nervis emollire connisus, cum demissum oculorum eius habitum nulla penitus arte flexxisset, invictae severitatis perseverantiam”, and which Saxo represents as “excellent modesty” in his peculiar fashion. “adeo spectatae pudicitiae erat,” both 7.4.1.

<sup>639</sup>“Cuius sororem Helgam guidam auri opifex, obscurae stirpis, blanditis compositus ac variis instructus munusculis, quibus muliebris maxime cupiditas capitur, in mutuas faces amatoria comitate pertraxerat.” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* 6.6.2. A few of the interesting points here is that, in addition to being a goldsmith, the goldsmith is “low-born”, thus of the race either of elves or giants. Ingiald’s eating of the heart in *Ynglingsaga* 38 is clearly Loki’s consumption of Angrboda’s heart in *Hyndluljod* 41. Cp “Svipdag took the heart of a wolf, roasted it on the tongs, and gave it to the king’s son Ingiald to eat, and from that time he became a most ferocious person, and of the worst disposition” and “Loki af hiarta lindi brendu, fann hann haalfsuidinn hugstein konu; vard Loptr kvidugr af konu illri; thadan era a folldu flagd hvert komit.” A full discussion of either of these comparative myths is beyond the scope of this footnote.

<sup>640</sup>“Quibus Othinus suspendio consumptis statuam in crepidine collocavit, quam etiam mira artis industria ad humanos tactus vocalem reddidit.” Saxo *Gesta Danorum* 1.7.1.

<sup>641</sup>The identity with Mimir’s head was first noted by Petrus Erasmus Mueller in his notes to his 1858 edition *Gesta Danorum*, discussed in Dumézil, *Haddingus* 97. The story is *Ynglingsaga* 4, “[The Vanir] took Mimir, therefore, and beheaded him, and sent his head to the Asaland people. Odin took the head, smeared it with herbs so that it should not rot, and sang incantations over it. Thereby he gave it the power that it spoke to him, and discovered to him many secrets.” Saxo appears to believe that Mimir’s head is Gullveig-Heid, which he has interpreted as “Golden mead - head”.

<sup>642</sup>Rydberg arranges the precise sequence of events in a lengthy discussion in *Teutonic Mythology*, I 204-251.

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Later, “Frigga ... submitted herself to the embraces of one of her servants,” a statement generally related to her intercourse with Ve and Vili, the brothers of Odin, during his absence from Asgard in *Ynglingsaga*.<sup>643</sup> Here, though, it precedes the departure of Odin from Asgard and is, in fact, a motive for it, and one wonders if this is not the intercourse of Freyja with her servant Svipdag-Ottar, particularly as it is “by this man’s device she broke down the image,” much as Ottar frees Syritha from a spell placed upon her by a giantess.<sup>644</sup> Svipdag-Ottar, being of the Ivaldi race – the elves – would be a figure properly described as “servant”; he and his father Egil, as well as, less often, Egil’s brothers Volund and Hyuki, are always described as “peasants,” “servants,” and “of common birth” in Saxo’s heroic versions of the Teutonic epics.<sup>645</sup>

Unlike in *Ynglingsaga*, in Saxo, Odin’s departure from Asgard is given a motive.<sup>646</sup> “Wounded by the double trespass of his wife, resented the outrage to his image as keenly as that to his bed; and, ruffled by these two stinging dishonors, took to an exile overflowing with noble shame, imagining so to wipe off the slur of his ignominy.”<sup>647</sup> Whether this was or was not Odin’s

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<sup>643</sup>“Frigga ... uni familiarium se stupro subiecit,” Saxo *Gesta Danorum*, 1.7.1; her affair with Ve and Vili occurs in *Ynglingsaga* 3, “It happened once that Odin had gone to a great distance, and had been so long away that the people of Asia doubted if he would ever return home, that his two brothers took it upon themselves to divide his estate; but both of them took his wife Frigg to themselves. Odin soon after returned home, and took his wife back.”

<sup>644</sup>“cuius ingenio simulacrum demolita,” Saxo *Gesta Danorum* 1.7.1. The story of Syritha and Ottar is Saxo *Gesta Danorum* 7.4.1 – 7.4.8. Syritha is clearly under a spell, 7.4.1. She is kidnapped by a woman and taken to the land of giants, 7.4.2. While there, she is made a goat-herder by a giant woman, 7.4.4, and cannot be broken from the spell, until Ottar finds her at the home of Ebbo – a name of Egil – and frees her with “fire.” 7.4.7-7.4.8, which we know from comparison is an expression of his magical nature. Discussed in detail in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 773-777.

<sup>645</sup>For instance, Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* 7.3.1, where Ebbo, i.e. Egil, is described as “a rover of common birth”, among many examples.

<sup>646</sup>*Ynglingsaga* 2-3 says merely “Often [Odin] went away so far that he passed many seasons on his journeys ... It happened once ... Odin had gone to a great distance, and had been so long away that the people of Asia doubted if he would ever return home.”

<sup>647</sup>“Duplici itaque ruboris irritamento perstrictus plenum ingenui pudoris exsilium carpsit eoque se contracti dedecoris sordes aboliturum putavit.” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.7.1.



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motive in the myth is unclear, as it is in the assigning of motives that Saxo most often manifests himself, and Rydberg believe strongly that Odin left Asgard because of Odin's own involvement in the practice of seid magic.<sup>648</sup> Further, this myth likely relates to the proto-Indo-European myth, known prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in the Hittite and Mitanni world in the form of the myth of Telipinu and others, of the withdrawal of the storm god from the Earth and the accompanying departure of fertility<sup>649</sup> – a myth cycle certainly relating to what Rydberg has termed the story of the Winter War, in which the smiths are the ones who withdraw from the world, taking with them, to the side of the powers of the giants, the fertility with which they once blessed the earth.<sup>650</sup> In *Voluspa*, Odin and the Aesir are driven from Asgard by the Vans, and it is possible – really, almost likely, as the circumstances of the departures are so different --that two separate trips taken by Odin from Asgard are being syncretized.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>648</sup>During the seduction of Rind to produce Vali. The story is Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 3.4.1-3.4.8; discussion in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 210-212. Rydberg also notes *Skaldskaparmal* 2, “Seið Yggr til Rindar,” “Odin won Rinda with seid magic.” Also compare the kenning for Odin as “the god’s atoner,” *Skaldskaparmal* 55.

<sup>649</sup>The Hittite and Hurrian versions of this myth would have been unknown to Rydberg, who wrote before the Hittite language was known, and likely Dumezil as well, though both should have been familiar with the Indo-Iranian variants. The myth of Telipinu is from the “Old Kingdom” period of the Hittites and is given in Hoffner, Jr, *Hittite Myths*, Society for Biblical Literature / Scholars Press, 1998, 11-22, but 21-22 in particular. “[The Storm God of the Sky set out toward the steppe], the meadow, [and the moor(?). He carried off plenty, prosperity and abundance. The storm god departed] and barley [and wheat] no longer [ripened]. Cattle, sheep] and humans did not [become pregnant]. And those who [were pregnant did not give birth] from that time.” And so on. There is amazing similarity here between this departure and that of the smiths as given in Rydberg as the cause of the Winter War, and the story of the departure of the Ribhu in the Vedas. Telipinu, in general, syncretizes better though with the Vedic Indra, and thus a full discussion of the iterations of the “storm god” in Indo-European myth exceeds the scope of this footnote. The Old Kingdom Hittite text dates to the 18 century B.C., making it one of the oldest known myths of any culture in the world, and almost certainly an Indo-European myth dating to before the dispersion from the Asian homeland c. 2200 B.C.

<sup>650</sup>Discussion in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 171-200.

<sup>651</sup>*Voluspa* 24, “brotinn var borðveggr borgar ása, knáttu vanir vígspá völlu sporna.” Rydberg relates this to Fridleif’s siege in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 6.2.1 – 6.2.10, and equates Fridleif’s actions with Njord’s, discussion in *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 235-251. One of the complaints of the Vanir about Odin’s punishment of Gullveig-Heid is that he, too, had practiced seid, interpreted by Rydberg, *ibid*, from Saxo *Gesta Danorum* 3.4.9. The departure of Odin from Asgard as

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Mithothyn is a difficult character because his story involves several distinctive themes. The first is the change in the form of sacrifice.<sup>652</sup> Mithothyn “said that the wrath of the gods could never be appeased nor the outrage to their deity expiated by mixed and indiscriminate sacrifices, and therefore forbade that prayers for this end should be put up without distinction, appointing to each of those above his especial drink-offering.”<sup>653</sup> The term “those above” is reference to the three categories of magical being distinguished by Saxo early in the story of Hadding.<sup>654</sup> The division of the sacrifices by three is the slaughter of Kvasir to fill three bowls, or the slaughter of Mada to establish the mead.<sup>655</sup> Dumezil rightly links this to the conflict between Romulus and Numa Pompilia in Roman myth over the nature of sacrifice, and his *Mitra-Varuna*, even more than his *Haddingus*, is enlightening in this regard.<sup>656</sup> The division of the mead amongst the gods – the “change in the form of sacrifice” brought by Mithothyn — ends the war between the Aesir and the Vanir, as it ends the war between Indra and the Asvin.<sup>657</sup>

### KVASIR, IVALDI, MIMIR AND LOKI

A question that should be asked at this point is whether Kvasir can be equated

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punishment for practicing seid appears to have ended the war of the Aesir and Vanir, but it then cannot have also preceded or been the cause of that war.

<sup>652</sup>Cp Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.8.12, 3.2.12, 6.5.10, 7.10.1.

<sup>653</sup>“Hic deorum iram aut numinum violationem confusis permixtisque sacrificiis expiari negabat ideoque iis vota communiter nuncupari prohibebat, discreta superum cuique libamenta constituens.” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.7.2.

<sup>654</sup>Saxo says “deorum et numinum,” but the division by three, instead of by many, which follows indicates a relationship with the classes of being Saxo has delimited.

<sup>655</sup>Dumezil, *Haddingus*, n 19 to 104.

<sup>656</sup>Dumezil, *Mitra-Varuna*, 47-64; Dumezil sees the alternation of kings in the early history of Rome as comparable to the alternation of the Vedic sun and moon kings, and their conflict over sacrifices as part of a larger dichotomy in the nature of their being.

<sup>657</sup>Dumezil, *Haddingus*, n 18 to 104; he references a fuller discussion in his *Loki*, 102-104.

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with Ivaldi or Mimir.<sup>658</sup> Kvasir is “the spit,” but he is also the one so full of the mead of wisdom that he chokes on himself because he is not being asked questions fast enough to get out all of the answers he is creating.<sup>659</sup> This idea may link to the motif of “drowning in the mead” that one finds in the story of kings such as Hunding, with which the Hadding story concludes, and Fiolnir of the *Ynglingsaga*.<sup>660</sup> The story of the slaughter of Kvasir would give a better motive for Mimir’s death than the inadequacy of Hoenir (“the stork”).<sup>661</sup> There is also the linguistic similarity between the Vedic Tvastir/Tvashtri, who can be equated with Mimir, and the name Kvasir.<sup>662</sup> Arguing in favor of a syncretism with Ivaldi is that Mithothyn flees to Phaeonia, which is generally translated as “Finland,” though Dumezil notes it is more likely the Danish isle of Fyen.<sup>663</sup> Whether this was an effort by one of Saxo’s sources to euhemerize the term “nation of Finn,” a reference to Ivaldi’s name, Finn, or to link to the separate tradition of Odin’s travels told in *Ynglingsaga* is unclear.<sup>664</sup> And, despite these intersections of motifs associated with Mimir and Ivaldi with Mithothyn, there is no clear identity.

It also has to be asked whether the “changes in the sacrifices” that occur during the reign of Mithothyn are related to the “changes in the sacrifices” that occur during the reign of Frey at Uppsala.<sup>665</sup> Where details are given, Frey’s

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<sup>658</sup>Ivaldi is Svigdur, the “champion drinker,” and Mimir oft appears in Nordic myth as “Guthmund,” the underworld god who always feasts. See discussion in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I 309-351 and 652-656.

<sup>659</sup>“Dvergarnir sögðu ásum, at Kvasirhefði kafnat í mannviti, fyrir því at engi var þar svá fróðr, at spyrjakynni hann fróðleiks.” *Skaldskaparmál* 57.

<sup>660</sup>“Cumque exsequendi officii gratia regiam perlustraret, offenso gradu in dolium collapsus interclusum humore spiritum reddidit.” Saxo *Gesta Danorum* 1.8.27; also *Ynglingsaga* 14.

<sup>661</sup>*Ynglingsaga* 4; For Hoenir as “the stork,” see discussion in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 738-739.

<sup>662</sup>Discussed in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 874-884.

<sup>663</sup>To which Odin travels in *Ynglingsaga* 5; Dumezil, *Haddingus*, n4 95.

<sup>664</sup>For Ivaldi as Finn see Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I 177, 992-993.

<sup>665</sup>Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.8.12, 3.2.12, 6.5.10, 7.10.1.

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sacrifices involve “dusky” and “human” victims, though accounts also point to “effeminate” jugglers, in the manner of Mithothyn’s court.<sup>666</sup> This linkage needs further examination in the context of the efforts of figures like Harald to usurp and change the religious form, and the historical background of efforts to introduce the cults of Eric and Christ into northern Europe during the latter part of the first millennium A.D.<sup>667</sup>

Regardless, at the end of Mithothyn’s life, it is clear that Mithothyn has been syncretized with Loki.<sup>668</sup> The key is the description of his barrow: “Even in his death his abominations were made manifest, for those who came nigh his barrow were cut off by a kind of sudden death; and, after his end, he spread such pestilence that he seemed almost to leave a filthier record in his death than in his life: it was as though he would extort from the guilty a punishment for his slaughter. The inhabitants, being in this trouble, took the body out of the mound, beheaded it, and impaled it through the breast with a sharp stake; and herein that people found relief.”<sup>669</sup> This is not a “generic vampire myth,” as Elton has dismissed it, nor is it “Viking colorization,” to borrow Dumézil’s uncharacteristically unenlightened term.<sup>670</sup> This means of death occurs only

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<sup>666</sup>“Siquidem propitiandorum numinum gratia Frø deo rem divinam furvis hostiis fecit” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.8.12; “Siquidem humani generis hostias mactare aggressus foeda superis libamenta persolvit” 3.2.13; “quod apud Upsalam sacrificiorum tempore constitutus effeminatos corporum motus scaenicosque mimorum plausus ac mollia nolarum crepitacula fastidiret” 6.5.10.

<sup>667</sup>Harald’s usurpations appear in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 9.4.9-11, 9.4.15-16, and 9.4.36-37. On the introduction of the cults of Eric and of Christ, see discussion in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, 1,805 - 808.

<sup>668</sup>Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1.7.2.

<sup>669</sup>“Cuius extincti quoque flagitia patuere, siquidem busto suo propinquantes repentino mortis genere consumebat tantasque post fata pestes edidit, ut paene taetriora mortis quam vitae monumenta dedisse videretur, perinde ac necis suae poenas a noxiis exacturus. Quo malo offusi incolae egestum tumulo corpus capite spoliant, acuto pectus stipite transfigentes; id genti remedio fuit.” *ibid.*

<sup>670</sup>Elton’s introduction and Dumézil, *Haddingus*, 27-38; the idea that the Nordic mythical cycle consists of a *random* collection of motifs was first postulated by Eugen Mogk and was part of a larger political movement to deconstruct and dissolve the idea of a common Indo-European Tradition and culture – a movement that gained strength through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the ideas

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one other time in Saxo – during the story of Asmund and Asvid.<sup>671</sup>

### ASMUND AND ASVID

In Saxo's Asmund and Asvid, a similar confusion occurs between Mimir and Loki. Early in Asmund's story, he engages in the mythical journey to Gudmund's realm – a mythic motif whose general outline is given in Rydberg, and which occurs over and over again in Saxo.<sup>672</sup> He “wandered over the dreary ridges, and at last, destitute of horse and clothing, ate fungi and mushrooms, and wandered on aimlessly till he came to the dwelling of King Biorn.”<sup>673</sup> This Biorn “ruled in the province of Wik, and had a son, Asvid.”<sup>674</sup> Asvid is, not surprisingly, a name of Mimir.<sup>675</sup>

Asmund, in this story, is acting as Heimdal.<sup>676</sup> The key here is not only that he is a “son of Alf” but the tale of his mutilation:<sup>677</sup>

“Asvid had come to life in the nights, and in [Asvid's] continual struggles had wrenched off [Asmund's] left ear; and there was to be seen the horrid sight

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of “material culture” and opposition to “comparative” methods in archaeology and anthropology, largely as a result of its adoption, financing and backing by the Soviet Union and affiliated, primarily Jewish, scholars in the United States. Dumezil, in fairness, partially deconstructs this school's attacks on Hadding's saga.

<sup>671</sup>Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 5.11.1-5.11.5.

<sup>672</sup>This journey generally involves crossing a sea and then a forest, or a river and a bridge. Extensive discussion in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 306-351. Cp with, say, the story of Thorkill traveling to Gudmund's realm, Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 8.14.6-8.

<sup>673</sup>“Vastaque pererrantem iuga tandem equo et vestibus destitutum fungos et tubera peredissee, ad ultimum in Biononis regis penetralia fortuito devenisse progressu.” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* 5.11.1.

<sup>674</sup>“Biorno vero in Wik provincial, cui Asuithus filius erat,” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 5.11.1.

<sup>675</sup>Asvid, meaning “Asa-friend,” see discussion in Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 364-365.

<sup>676</sup>Asmund, meaning “Asa-mund” or “Asa-protector,” in the sense of “Asa-borg.”

<sup>677</sup>For the relationship with the name Alf, see my essay, unfortunately publication still pending, on the sixteen manifestations of Alf in Saxo Grammaticus. For the story of Heimdal's loss of his ear, *Voluspa* 27.1-2; “Veit hon Heimdallar hljóð of folgit und heiðvönum helgum baðmi,” Larrington translates the disputed term for “horn” or “ear”, somewhat inexplicably, as “hearing”.

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of a raw and unhealed scar.”<sup>678</sup>

The fight between Aswid and Asmund is the battle between Loki and Heimdal – the battle between the unpure and the pure fire that is detailed in Rydberg.<sup>679</sup>

The conclusion of the story brings us back to Mithothyn:

“For soon I cut off his head with my steel, and impaled his guilty carcasse with a stake.”<sup>680</sup>

This is the only other time a figure in Saxo meets Mithothyn’s fate, and, like Mithothyn, it is a figure with some characteristics like those of Mimir, and some characteristics like those of Loki.

Why Mimir and Loki are being syncretized is not obvious. Mimir and Kvasir appear to be syncretized on the theme of “the mead”, and that Loki is being brought into the story of the war of the Aesir and the Vanir because of Loki’s association with Gullveig-Heid.<sup>681</sup> Interestingly, the episode of Starkad and the goldsmith, which has parallels to that of Frigg and her servant, occurs during the reign of Ingeld, who is a figure who, like Loki, also consumes a beast’s heart and is made evil by it.<sup>682</sup> There may also be a general confusion of Kvasir and Frey, on the theme of the changes in the sacrifices, and then a confusion of Frey and Loki on theme of usurpation.

Mithothyn is not, though, the mysterious story it, at first sight, appears

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<sup>678</sup>“Quibus Asuithus noctibus redivivus crebra colluotione laevam illi aurem abruperat, foedumque indigestae ac crudae cicatrices spectaculum apparebat.” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 5.11.3.

<sup>679</sup>Loki and Heimdal battle for Brisngamen *Skaldskaparmal* 16; on the pure and impure fire, see Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 586-600.

<sup>680</sup>“Nam ferro secui mox caput eius perfodique nocens stipites corpus,” Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 5.11.4.

<sup>681</sup>Loki consumes her heart, *Hyndluljod*, 40-41, discussion Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 213-217.

<sup>682</sup>Starkad and the goldsmith, Saxo *Gesta Danorum* 6.6.2-6.6.12; Ingiald and the consumption of the beast’s heart is *Ynglingsaga* 38.

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to be. Elements of it can be definitely derived from known Eddic poems and tales, and there are clear Indo-Iranian parallels that shed light on the motives and roles of the characters involved. Further, even where the origin of the themes are obscure, an analysis of the patterns of the stories that appear in Saxo allow one to distill the nature of the figures portrayed, even if some questions remain.