

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

Edda



R. J. GLENDINNING
HARALDUR BESSASON
EDITORS

EDDA: A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA ICELANDIC STUDIES

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Haraldur Bessason

Robert J. Glendinning

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ROBERT J. GLENDINNING and HARALDUR BESSASON

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Abbreviations

<i>AnM</i>	<i>Annuaire Mediaevale</i> (Duquesne University)
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Arkiv för nordisk Filologi</i>
<i>ANO</i>	<i>Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie</i>
<i>APS</i>	<i>Acta Philologica Scandinavica</i>
<i>AR</i>	Vries, J. de, <i>Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte</i> . 2nd ed. 2 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1956-7.
<i>Archiv</i>	<i>Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen</i>
<i>AUS</i>	<i>Annales Universitatis Saraviensis</i> (Universität des Saarlandes)
<i>Beitr</i>	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur</i>
<i>DA</i>	<i>Dissertation Abstracts</i>
<i>DAI</i>	<i>Dissertation Abstracts International</i>
<i>FMAS</i>	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
<i>GR</i>	<i>Germanic Review</i>
<i>GRM</i>	<i>Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift</i>
<i>HES</i>	<i>Harvard English Studies</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>ÍF</i>	<i>Íslenzk fornrit</i>
<i>JAF</i>	<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JFI</i>	<i>Journal of the Folklore Institute</i> (Indiana University)
<i>KHL</i>	<i>Kulturhistorisk leksikon för nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid</i>
<i>MÆ</i>	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Maal og Minne</i>
<i>Neophil</i>	<i>Neophilologus</i>
<i>NM</i>	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>NoB</i>	<i>Namn och Bygd</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Migne, Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>

<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>SN</i>	<i>Studia Neophilologica</i>
<i>SnE</i>	Jónsson, Finnur, ed. <i>Edda Snorra Sturlusonar</i> . Copenhagen, 1931
<i>SS</i>	<i>Scandinavian Studies</i>
<i>SBVS</i>	<i>Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>ZfdA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur</i>
<i>ZfdPh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie</i>

POEMS

<i>Akv</i>	<i>Atlaqviða</i>
<i>Alv</i>	<i>Alvíssmál</i>
<i>Am</i>	<i>Atlamál</i>
<i>Br</i>	<i>Brot af Sigurðarqviðu</i>
<i>Fm</i>	<i>Fáfnismál</i>
<i>Gðr (I,II,III)</i>	<i>Guðrúnarqviða</i>
<i>Ghv</i>	<i>Guðrúnarhvot</i>
<i>Grm</i>	<i>Grímnismál</i>
<i>Grp</i>	<i>Grípisspá</i>
<i>Háv</i>	<i>Hávamál</i>
<i>HH (I,II)</i>	<i>Helgaqviða Hundingsbana</i>
<i>HHv</i>	<i>Helgaqviða Hiǫrvarðzsonar</i>
<i>Hlr</i>	<i>Helreið Brynhildar</i>
<i>Hm</i>	<i>Hamðismál</i>
<i>Hrbl</i>	<i>Hárbarðzlióð</i>
<i>Hym</i>	<i>Hymisqviða</i>
<i>Ls</i>	<i>Locasenna</i>
<i>Od</i>	<i>Oddrúnargrátr</i>
<i>Rm</i>	<i>Reginismál</i>
<i>Sd</i>	<i>Sigrdrífomál</i>
<i>Sg</i>	<i>Sigurðarqviða in scamma</i>
<i>Vkv</i>	<i>Völundarqviða</i>
<i>Vm</i>	<i>Vafðrúðnismál</i>
<i>Þrk</i>	<i>Þrymsqviða</i>

Editors' Foreword

The collection of essays presented here was conceived and planned when two International Saga Conferences (Edinburgh and Reykjavik) had provided a focus and stimulus for those interested in saga research. Since no similar stage had been created or even proposed for the advancement of scholarly endeavours in the area of Eddic research, it was and continues to be the editors' hope that this volume may, in its own way, represent itself as an international forum for Eddic scholarship. Three further Saga Conferences (Oslo, Munich and Toulon) have taken place while our volume has been in preparation. As a result, some of the works referred to by the authors as forthcoming have since been published. However, progress in Eddic studies has always run slow and deep, and we are confident that this volume will offer a useful and stimulating collection of ideas and will bear fruit in future Eddic scholarship.

A word must be said about the editing process involved in the publication of the twelve articles which follow. Inevitably the twelve manuscripts, as they reached the hands of the editors, contained divergent principles and methods for dealing with the format of citations, source references, and other more or less technical matters such as the spelling of proper nouns. Although it may not always be apparent, nor in total have been completely successful, the editors have attempted to introduce a uniform convention for this aspect of the twelve articles. The decisions made in this respect will displease some and perhaps find complete favor with none. For this the editors apologize and in defence plead only that the necessity of the attempt seemed obvious. Apologies are offered especially to the authors for this editorial interference, and it should be explicitly stated once again that responsibility for the format of everything relating to documentation in the articles rests with the editors.

Among the many specific problems encountered, special mention should be made of the troublesome Icelandic 'þ' symbol. This has been replaced by 'th' in proper nouns (except in quotations, titles and bibliographical references) in order to make the articles more readable for those without a knowledge of Icelandic or Old Norse. With this one exception the form of proper

nouns transmitted in the original (edited) texts has been retained. On the decision of the editors this principle was disregarded only in the case of Professor Haugen's article, where English is the sole linguistic vehicle. In names and quotations from the *Poetic Edda* the edition used, unless otherwise stated, was *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, hrsg. von Gustav Neckel, I. Text, vierte umgearbeitete Auflage von Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg, 1962).

Two articles have been translated: Régis Boyer's "The Composition of *Völuspá*" was translated from the French by Julian Thorsteinson; Heinz Klingenberg's "Types of Eddic Mythological Poetry" was translated from the German by Doris Schmierer, Julian Thorsteinson and R.J. Glendinning. The index was prepared by Julian Thorsteinson with some help from Christine Bundesen and Charlotte Chranowski.

The editors wish to thank all those whose kind assistance has made the volume possible.

Robert J. Glendinning
Haraldur Bessason

EDDA: A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

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The *Edda* as Ritual: Odin and His Masks

Orð mér af orði orðz leitaði. *Hávamál* 141

The skalds demonstrate by their use of kennings with mythical content that they knew many myths: but they do not tell them, they only allude to them. Snorri in his *Edda* found it necessary to tell the myths in narrative prose, so that his Christian readers could appreciate the obsolescing allusions. In justifying this practice he proceeded to rationalize and euhemerize the myths, treating them, in short, from an antiquarian point of view. But in the anonymous *Elder Edda* the allusions are acted out, and the myths are in no way rationalized or deprecated. The gods are treated seriously, as real creatures, having supernatural but real adventures, described and identified by their powers and attributes. We are no longer in Snorri's world of medieval and scholastic learning, but in a world he could only half understand, the world of Norse myth.

It is therefore unconvincing when some scholars have attributed some or all of the Eddic poems to Christian poets. In spite of the less than luminous characters possessed by some of the gods, there is no trace of the Christian view that they were demons and devils. If there are Christian influences, as in the character of Balder, they have tolerantly been absorbed into the religion, which was not fiercely exclusive, dominated by the jealous god of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Like the Greek gods of Homer and Hesiod, they could commit adultery, steal, and deceive, without losing credibility as gods. In the sixth century B.C. the writer Xenophanes could reject the idea of anthropomorphic gods, but this did not, as Mircea Eliade has pointed out, "necessarily imply rationalism or atheism."¹ The same is true, I suggest, of the poets of the *Elder Edda*.

The problem of the original purpose and the audience of the Eddic poems has haunted scholars for a long time. But if we accept the premise that they were composed by pagans, we must presume that in some form or other most of them go back at least to the Viking Period. We are in somewhat the

position of scholars who attempt to assess the religious significance of the Greek gods. To cite Eliade again: "Homer was neither a theologian nor a mythographer. . . . He had composed his poems for a specific audience: the members of a military and feudal aristocracy. . . . He avoided evoking religious or mythological conceptions that were either foreign to his essentially patriarchal and military auditors or in which they took little interest. Concerning all that could be called the nocturnal, chthonian, funereal side of Greek religion and mythology, Homer says next to nothing."² There is excellent reason to suppose that very much the same is true also of the poets of the *Edda*.

If we turn to the first page of the main manuscript of the *Edda*, we are immediately confronted with an audience and a speaker. In dramatic words the sibyl, the soothsaying woman, addresses her distinguished listeners:

Vsp 1 Hearing I ask of the holy races,
The sons of Heimdall,
You will, Father-of-the-Slain, that well I tell
Old tales of men I remember best.³

This solemn appeal to the gods assembled in their hall, like the king's or chieftain's warriors in theirs, could well be the opening of a religious service, a cultic occasion. For the Father-of-the-Slain at whose command the sibyl is speaking is Odin himself, and the holy races to whom she is speaking are the gods, and by implication the battle-scarred and war-trained men who one day would fight the good battle for mastery of the universe on Odin's side against the evil Jotuns, whom we usually call 'Giants,' though this is something of a misnomer, as we will see. The question I wish to raise is simply this: how great is the step between the ritual occasions when the gods were worshiped and when they were offered sacrifices of animals and even men, and the occasions when the Eddic poems were recited? Just as in the case of the Greeks, we have no solid information about the cult, only the reports of outsiders and of late, more or less unreliable sagas. But anyone who reads the *Elder Edda* cannot help but feel that many a time he is present at the feast itself, that he is hearing words which could have been spoken there.

One reason for this overwhelming feeling is that most of the poems consist of direct speech, either in monologue or dialogue form. The first poem, *The Prophecy of the Sibyl*, is spoken *in toto* by the Sibyl and is a powerful survey of the entire cosmogony, from the creation of the earth out of chaos, to the

The Edda as Ritual

introduction of evil and strife in the world, and finally the last battle which ends with the death of the gods and giants alike, but also the rise of a new earth on which the gods come back in purified form. The second poem is spoken by Odin himself, and is called *The Speech of the High One*; in this he develops at great length how men should live and get along in what was obviously an insecure world, where kinship, friendship, hospitality, and moderation were vital virtues, but where a reputation for courage and honor was what won a man eternal life. This is followed by *The Lay of Vafthrudnir*, where Odin leaves his wife Frigg to engage in a dialogue on numinous wisdom with a giant named Vafthrudnir; it is all dialogue, except for one stanza. Then comes *The Lay of Grimnir*, in which Odin visits the hall of a king of the Goths named Geirrod, who binds him up and puts him between two fires for eight days and nights without either food or drink, until Geirrod's son, Agnar, gives him a horn of mead. Then Odin's tongue is loosened, and he returns the favor by giving Agnar a lecture on mythology, which goes on for nearly fifty stanzas. In the poem entitled *The Lay of Harbard*, Odin, in the guise of Harbard 'Graybeard,' engages in a dialogue with Thor, who thinks he (Harbard) is a ferryman and asks for a ride over the sound. In the *Flyting of Loki*, we are treated to a whole banquet scene of the gods, where the villain Loki vilifies each of the gods in turn. One scholar has called it "a divine comedy in one act" (Heusler), and that it certainly is, though hardly one we would want to ask our maiden aunt to attend.

It is this high degree of performance-oriented quality about the poems that has convinced me that we are very close to having something like a text for cultic occasions in the poems of the *Elder Edda*. They are all relatively short, and even those that are not monologues or dialogues tell a story rapidly and with much use of conversation. The argument has been made with special forcefulness (by Dame Bertha Phillpotts) for a poem about the god Frey, one of the fertility gods, who sends his messenger Skirnir to win for him the beautiful daughter of one of the Jotuns, Gerd. Frey represents fertility, Skirnir means 'the shining one,' or 'the sun,' and Gerd can be interpreted as 'yard,' or 'field,' and the charms used to win her are such as would win the heart of any maiden. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the poem could be the scenario of a ritual drama in which the fertility of the fields in spring was promoted by this little love play between a god and his mistress. We know from Tacitus that Frey's father Njord, who at this early period is female, was carted around the fields of Germany in the first century A.D. with a male priest to help fertilize the field. The sexual symbolism of the plow that turns the furrow is not far to seek.

There can be no doubt that Odin is the most fascinating and challenging of the Norse gods. He appears in the *Edda* as ruler of the gods, and also as their father, a patriarch in an aristocratic society, with its own high-walled fortress, called *Asgard*, set squarely in the middle of *Midgard*, Middle Earth, which in turn is surrounded by *Jotunheim*, the home of the Jotuns, or evil forces. We know that he was worshiped by all the Germanic peoples, for his name is known in Old English and Old Saxon as *Woden* and in Old High German as *Wotan* or *Wuotan*. All of these show an initial *w*, which was regularly lost in Scandinavian in the sixth century, giving the name *Óðinn*. The root of the name is a Germanic word **wōðu-* meaning 'frenzy' or 'madness,' as was still clear to the Christian writer Adam of Bremen in the eleventh century, when he translated it into Latin as *furor* or 'frenzy.' The word *wood* meaning 'mad' is good Old English also and was known in English as late as Shakespeare's time. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* he puns on the two meanings of the word by having Demetrius say, as he is lost in the forest, "And here am I, and wood within this wood, / Because I cannot meet my Hermia" (II.i.192-93). But Odin's frenzy is clearly a kind of magic ecstasy, for he is also the god of magic and of poetry, a combination that Shakespeare was also aware of. In the same play he wrote of "the poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling," and said "the lunatic, lover, and the poet are of imagination all compact" (V.i.7-8). What we would like to know is whether this name of Odin's or Odin himself goes further back, into Indo-European times. There is no other god so named, but his name is cognate with the Latin word for prophet *vates* and the Irish for poet *faith*. Behind all of them is a verb that means 'to blow,' and we are reminded that words for 'spirit' and 'soul' like the Greek *psyche* and Latin *spiritus* all come from words for 'breath' or 'breathing.'⁴

In linguistics the techniques for establishing the nature of the common ancestral language from which the ancient and modern Indo-European languages are descended were developed in the first half of the nineteenth century and are well-established and reliable. This discovery was followed by a vast amount of effort in the area of myth to establish similarly a common Indo-European religion by comparing the available myths preserved from India to Iceland. Max Müller was perhaps the most important scholar who tried to accomplish this end, basing his research on the work of Jacob Grimm, who was one of the great founders not only of comparative historical linguistics, but also of mythology and folklore. Most of this work proved to be premature, but in recent years scholars have returned to the

problem, and with new, often startling results. The one who has advanced this analysis farthest is the French professor of religion at the Collège de France, Georges Dumézil, whose book *Gods of the Ancient Northmen* I have edited and (with the help of my students) translated into English.⁵ The perspectives he opens for tying up the various mythologies into some sort of Indo-European religion are exciting indeed, and well worth serious consideration. When I first encountered Dumézil's work in my teaching of Scandinavian mythology, I was willing to listen to him and trust him in part because of his familiarity with linguistic methodology, as shown by his work on Georgian and other languages of the Caucasus. By now, several of his books have appeared in English, as well as a full study of his work and principles in a book entitled *The New Comparative Mythology*⁶ by C. Scott Littleton. I have made my own comment on Dumézil explicit in an article I wrote some years ago, showing how the tripartite structure which Dumézil proposes for Indo-European religion can also be analyzed into binary structures.⁷

Some scholars have tried to show that Odin was a latecomer in the Germanic pantheon, but it has been the great service performed for us by Dumézil that he has established the existence of a tripartite set of functions performed by the Indo-European gods, regardless of their names. In his view Odin is the representative of the first and highest function, that of *sovereignty*. Not only is he the ruler of the gods, but he is also their keeper of sacred knowledge, the high priest who combines in his person two qualities, the ability to rule and the secret lore that is the essence of religious and magical power. As such he is primarily the god of the rulers, held in greater awe than any of the others; he corresponds in this respect above all to Varuna in the mythology of the *Rig-Veda*, who like Odin has "ambiguous, disquieting, almost demonic aspects."⁸ This was the god of the Brahmins, the highest caste.

Dumézil's second function is that of *force*, the ideal of the warrior class, represented in the *Veda* by Indra and in Germanic myth by Thor. There is nothing complicated about Thor; he is the bulwark against the evil incursions of the giants, and while his strength is respected, our Eddic poems present him mostly in a comic aspect. Odin taunts him by saying that *he* gets the earls, while Thor gets the slaves after death. There is clearly an opposition within the world of gods between the sly magician Odin, with the crafty Loki at his side, and the mighty Thor, who alone can drive Loki away and tie him up. One can visualize a comic performance of such poems as the *Lay of Thrym*, where Thor has lost his hammer and has to disguise himself as Freya to get it back, or the episode in which Thor goes out fishing with the giant

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