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LASSE MÅRTENSSON OCH VETURLIÐI ÓSKARSSON

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Innehåll

Reflections on the Creation of Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda

Heimir Pálsson

Even since Elias Wessén (1889–1991) published his introduction to the facsimile edition of Gks 2367 4to in 1940,[1] the majority of scholars seem to have accepted the Wessén's suggestion that idea with regard to the composition of Snorri's Edda, that Snorri began by composing *Háttatal*, and then moved on to a draft of *Skáldskaparmál*, which was followed by the composition of *Gylfaginning*, a revision of *Skáldskaparmál* and the composition of his Prologue. The following article will begin by examining and then questioning the logic behind Wessén's argument. The second half will then outline what the present author feels to be a more sensible logical explanation for the systematic creation of the Edda.[2]

The Prose Edda

The work dealt with in this article is usually called *The Prose Edda*, *The Younger Edda* or *Snorri Sturluson's Edda* in English.[3] This study

[1] *Codex Regius of the Younger Edda*. Introduction to Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Aevi xiv: 5–32.

[2] With thanks to Vésteinn Ólason, Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, Anthony Faulkes, Terry Gunnell and the anonymous peer reviewers of Scripta Islandica.

[3] The texts in R, T and W are so similar that traditionally they are treated as representing the RTW-version of Edda. This question will not be discussed in this article and with regard to the questions under discussion in this article, for these versions it is sufficient to look at

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will focus on the creation of this work, with a careful consideration of the medieval manuscripts that matter in this connection. These will be referred to here with the following most used abbreviations:

- **A** AM 748 I b 4to. Written around 1300. Facsimile in Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Ævi 17 (1945). Text in Edda Snorra Sturlusonar II 1852, 397–500. For description, see Finnur Jónsson, Inledning 1931, xiv–xvi and xxxiii–xxxv.
- **B** AM 757 a 4to. Written around 1400. Text in Edda Snorra Sturlusonar II 1852, 501–72. For a description, see Finnur Jónsson, Inledning 1931, xvi–xvii and xxxv–xxxvi.
- **R** Gks 2367 4to. Codex Regius. Written around 1300–1325. Facsimile in Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Ævi 14 (1940). Text in Snorri Sturluson, Edda 1998, 2005 and 2007. For a description, see Finnur Jónsson, Inledning 1931, iv–v and xviii–xxv.
- **T** Utrecht 1374. Codex Trajectinus. Written around 1600. A paper copy of a lost parchment manuscript that had almost the same text as R. Text in De Codex Trajectinus van de Snorra Edda 1913 and Snorra Edda 1975. Facsimile in Codex Trajectinus: The Utrecht Manuscript of the Prose Edda (1985) (Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile XV).
- **U** DG 11 4to. Codex Upsaliensis. Facsimile in Snorre Sturlasons Edda (1962). A literal transcript with paleographic commentary is given in Snorre Sturlassons Edda 1977. Normalised text in Snorri Sturluson, The Uppsala Edda 2012.
- **W** AM 242 fol. Codex Wormianus. Written around 1350. Facsimile in Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Ævi II (1931). Transcript in Edda Snorra Sturlusonar 1924.

When referring to the manuscripts as distinct from the versions that they contain, they are here referred to as Gks 2367 4to and DG 11 4to respectively.

As Elias Wessén's theory about "how the Edda came into existence"

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the text as it appears in R. On the other hand, the Uppsala-manuscript, the DG 11 4to, is the only text witness of the U-version and it is thus necessary to distinguish between the manuscript and the version of the Edda that lies behind it. When it comes to *Skáldskaparmál* in particular, the editor of the DG 11 4to seems to have made very important deviations from the U exemplar being followed. – All references to Snorri's Edda in this article refer to Anthony Faulkes' editions (Edda 1998, 2005 and 2007) for the R-version and to Heimir Pálsson's edition (Edda 2012) for the U-version.

has been dominant for the last seven decades, the article will begin with a discussion of this argument before going on to an outline of what the present author believes to have been a more likely process.

The Process

In 1950, two of the best known philology scholars in Scandinavia, Jón Helgason (1899–1986) in Copenhagen and Anne Holtsmark (1896–1974) in Oslo, edited a textbook entitled Snorri Sturluson: *Edda: Gylfaginning og prosafortellingene av Skáldskaparmál*.[4] This edition was a volume in the series Tekster og lærebøger til universitetsbrug, and soon became a form of Bible for students (and teachers) of Norse philology (not only in Scandinavia), especially because of the exemplary and scientific treatment of the text that it contained, and also its cautious normalisation. The Introduction (Innledning) was written by Anne Holtsmark, who stated that Sigurður Nordal and Elias Wessén had explained the genesis and structure of the Edda as follows:

> Den første av disse to [Nordal and Wessén] viser hvordan skaldediktningen i løpet av 12. århundre var kommet i en krise, den kjempet på to fronter, mot geistligheten, som måtte se med mistro til all den hedniske mytologi som kom frem i kjenningene, og mot de moderne enkle og lettfattelige danseviser som sang seg inn i alles hjerter og fikk folk til å glemme fornskaldene. Wessén har ved analyse av hele Edda lykkes å komme til en rimelig forklaring på verkets merkelige komposisjon.
>
> Snorra Edda består av 4 deler: 1. Prolog, 2. Gylfaginning, 3. Skáldskaparmál, 4. Háttatal. Av disse 4 avsnitt er det siste skrevet først.[5] Snorre kom hjem fra et besøk hos den norske konge, Håkon Håkonssønn, og Skule jarl i 1220. Han diktet ett kvad om dem begge, inneholdet er lite merkelig, men formen desto mer enestående; det er 102 strofer i 100 forskjellige versemål. Diktet heter

[4] In this edition, Jón Helgason and Anne Holtsmark (without mentioning it), actually went even further in re-arranging the material than the redactor of DG 11 4to did, when he/she moved some of the myths from *Skáldskaparmál* to the second scene of *Gylfaginning*, and then all the remaining tales (including those illustrating kennings for gold), to the end of the book.

[5] This theory originated in Wessén's introduction to the CCIMÆ xiv and was fully accepted all over the world: see for example Ciklamini (1978: 43) and Jónas Kristjánsson (1988: 175–8). There have been, of course dissenting voices. For example Peter Orton wrote: "We do not know in what order these four parts of the work were written" (2007: 309).

> Háttatal og var ferdig vinteren 1222–23. Til dette kvadet skrev han en metrisk kommentar. Men han var klar over att det også trengtes en språklig teori til skaldediktningen; man kan uttrykke seg på 3 måter sier han, kalle en ting med det den heter, bruke et „heiti" eller en „kjenning". Han samlet eksempler på hvordan skaldene brukte heiti og kjenninger, ordnet dem systematisk. Men mange av kjenningene lot seg ikke forstå uten att han fortalte de sagatåttene som var opphavet til dem, det ble både gudesagn og heltesagn, Tjatse som stjal Idun, hvordan Odin fikk tak på Suttungsmjøden, Rolv Krakes ferd til Uppsala og gullet han „sådde" på Fyresvollene, Grottekvernen som malte gull til Frode, hele Volsungesagaen i tett sammendrag. Mens han holt på med dette, må han ha fått ideen til å skrive Gylfaginning. Det var hele den hedenske mytologi han nå foresatte seg å skrive (Holtsmark 1950: xi–xii).[6]

As Holtsmark mentions, in his facsimile edition of Codex Wormianus in volume 2 of CCIMAE (1931), Sigurður Nordal had revived his earlier theory (in Snorri Sturluson 1920) about the cultural situation to which Snorri was reacting in compiling his Edda: "Foreign cultures, Christianity and the invasion of dance and ballads, with very free alliteration and inexact rhymes, did threaten the poetic tradition that must be saved."[7] It is evident that his edition of the Codex Regius of Snorri's Edda in CCIMAE 14, Elias Wessén not only accepted Sigurður Nordal's theory, but added a new and fascinating account of Snorri's composition of the work. Wessén described the importance of the Edda in almost effusive terms: "Snorri's Edda is one of the most remarkable works of Icelandic literature, or, indeed, of the whole literature of the world" (1940: 7). In similarly effusive terms, he claimed that Snorri's work had been of most importance for posterity because he had saved the old poetic tradition, at least the kennings,[8] and that the information he provided about the old religion was unique: "Without Snorri, our knowledge of the belief of our forefathers would be much more limited than it is now. […] the most important effect of Snorri's Edda was perhaps that it led to the writing

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[6] When Holtsmark wrote her essay on "Edda, den yngre" in KLNM, she repeated her account of Wessén's theory without critical discussion (Holtsmark 1958: 475–8).

[7] In the second printing of his book about Snorri, Sigurður Nordal formulated this idea as follows: "Hirðmenn konunga, jafnvel í Noregi, voru hættir að meta dróttkvæðin jafnmikils og þeir höfðu áður gert, hættir að nema þau og leggja á sig að skilja þau. Annað var tilkoma nýs kveðskaparstíls, sem var jafneinfaldur að kveðandi sem orðalagi, stíls dansstefjanna" (Sigurður Nordal 1973: 80).

[8] For a discussion and explanation of this important term, see Whaley 2007: 486–8.

down of the Eddic poems, thus preserving them for posterity" (Wessén 1940: 8–9).[9]

Everything was very clear. For the scholars, there were no serious manuscript problems: According to Wessén, "Codex Regius is […] that of the mediæval manuscripts which is closest to Snorri's text" (Wessén 1940: 6–7).[10] This argument had earlier been made by the two celebrated scholars Finnur Jónsson (1898) and Gustav Neckel (1920), and for Wessén, there was no reason to doubt anything they said, even though Finnur Jónsson had later (1931) admitted that in certain places U might well contain the most original text, and that both in prose and poems extensive additions could be found in R.[11]

In his 1940 edition, however, Wessén pointed out that in and around the *Edda* many philological problems remained which had not yet been solved. He added: "We shall here only dwell on one or two problems, the central questions as to how the remarkable work came into existence, and why it came to embody precisely what it does" (Wessén 1940: 10).

This argument was, of course, largely an extension of Sigurður Nordal's earlier theory. Wessén continued (1940: 14):

> But even though, thanks to Sigurður Nordal, the appearance of a textbook on poetics at the beginning of the 13th century has thus become more understandable, another question, much more urgent, will obtrude itself: that of the composition of the work. Why does Snorri's poetics embody precisely the works that it actually does? How is it that he begins with a mythology, and passes on to stylistic and metrics? Can Snorri be imagined to have had this plan clearly before him from the beginning?

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[9] It is worth noting that in 1952 the Leipzig scholar Walter Baetke wrote "Soviel auch schon über die Snorra-Edda geschrieben worden ist, besteht doch über den eigentlichen Sinn und Zweck des Buches noch immer wenig Klarheit. Das liegt z.T. daran, daß es sich aus mehreren Teilen sehr verschiedenen Charakters zusammensetzt, deren innerer Zusammenhang nicht ohne weiteres deutlich ist" (reprinted in Baetke, Kleine Schriften 1973: 206). The theory of the four very different natures of the parts of the Edda will be discussed below.

[10] Despite all research, even today this argument seems to have become almost a mantra, as can be seen, for example in Solvin's statement (2015: 6) that: "det er håndskriftet *Codex Regius* (*R*) som regnes for å representere Snorres arbeid mest nøyaktig (Faulkes 1998: xi–xii; Sävborg 2012)."

[11] Those words refer to *Þórsdrápa* (Edda 1931: xxi), the *Ragnarsdrápa* stanzas on Hjaðningavíg (Finnur Jónsson 1931: xxiii), the accounts of Trója and Hector (Finnur Jónsson 1931: xxvii), various interpolations from "the old Sigurd-saga" (Finnur Jónsson 1931: xxii) and so on. For discussion of the different ages of the Edda versions, see further Heimir Pálsson 2012, and for a different opinion, Sävborg 2009 and 2012.

This is very important. The author envisaged in Wessén's vision is like a modern writer, sitting at a desk; for a figure like this it would be natural to start with an overall plan of the Edda as an aesthetic whole. Wessén, however, was far from alone in thinking in this way.[12] The common picture of Snorri we encounter in the scholarly literature at that time is that of a composing genius who can easily be compared to the authors of the sagas. It seems to have been commonly forgotten at the time that *Gylfaginning* is an organised collection of myths and mythological information that had been formed part of the oral knowledge of the society for centuries and that *Skáldskaparmál* would be the first attempt to systematically assemble in writing a range of knowledge that had previously been seen as necessary for poets (at least as far back as since the ninth century) in the geographical area known as *dǫnsk tunga*, the area where people spoke Norse and composed poetry in that language.[13] The picture of Snorri that the present author would like to present is somewhat different, reflecting the description Vésteinn Ólason has earlier given of the prose found in the *Edda*:

> Lausu máli verksins má […] skipta í þrjár bókmenntagreinar eftir rithætti: 1) fræðandi (didaktíska) texta í formála, hluta Skáldskaparmála og skýringum við Háttatal, 2) sögur og önnur forn fræði lögð ásum í munn, og 3) skáldaðar kynjasögur (fantastíska frásögn), sem Snorri hefur samið sjálfur, þ.e. rammafrásagnir Gylfaginningar og Skáldskaparmála[14] (Vésteinn Ólason 2001: 53).
>
> The prose sections of the work can […] be divided into different literary genres on the basis of style: 1) the informative (didactic) text of the *Prologue*, part of *Skáldskaparmál* and the Commmentary on Háttatal, 2) stories and other ancient knowledge which is placed in the mouths of the æsir, and 3) fictive fantasies (fantastic narratives), which Snorri has written himself, that is the frame narratives of *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* (Translated by Terry Gunnell).

Clearly here Vésteinn Ólason sees both the *Prologus* and the commentary on *Háttatal* as being the work of Snorri, and this may well be the case in

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[12] Sigurður Nordal is very clear on this point: "Líklegast er, að hann hafi sett ritin svo vandlega saman í huga sér, áður en tekið var til þess að rita, að ekkert uppkast hafi verið gert, litlu eða engu breytt frá því sem fyrst var ritað (1973: 67).

[13] Even in preserved stanzas ascribed to Bragi Boddason, one of the earliest Norse skalds (c. 850?), display a highly skilled poet using *kennings* that reveal a solid knowledge of poetical style and religious beliefs.

[14] For a discussion of the framework of *Skáldskaparmál* and *Lokasenna*, see Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014 I: 223.

part, although the author of both works clearly views as well the didactic material in *Skáldskaparmál* as the myths contained in *Gylfaginning* as being ancient knowledge that has been reorganised. The only purely original material is likely to be the framing commentaries of the material which have parallels in the first section of *Hymiskviða* and the prose introduction to *Lokasenna* in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda.[15]

Háttatal, a poem praising King Hákon and Earl Skúli, seems to have a unique status among the various parts of the *Edda*. It is clearly the only part of the work that was actually composed by Snorri from scratch.[16] Moreover, as Wessén wrote, "[t]he poem *Háttatal* is the only part of the Edda that can be dated with certainty. […] it was composed in the winter of 1222–23, neither sooner nor later" (Wessén 1940: 14). This was an idea already apparent to Konráð Gíslason.[17] As Konráð noted, during the years 1218–20 Snorri had been visiting Earl Skúli and King Hákon in Norway. He then came home to Iceland in the autumn of 1220. Generously enough, Konráð Gíslason then gave Snorri a year and a half to prepare the composition of a eulogistic poem of 102 stanzas as thanks for the hospitality and precious gifts he had received in Norway. Later scholars, however, seem to be a little more careful. The most common dating is 1220–25. All the same, one could argue that it is quite possible that some preparation for the poem was done in Norway before Snorri left. No one knows for certain when the poem was ready to be sent to its recipients. Snorri did not travel back to Norway to deliver the poem in person, so he must have sent it in written form.

One key problem is that we cannot be certain of the nature of the original text that was probably sent to Norway.[18] The poem in its extant form in all the manuscripts is accompanied by a commentary which it is almost impossible to imagine having been sent to the earl and the king. This commentary led Wessén to state: "Háttatal has a double aim; it is also

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[15] For further discussion of Edda and *Hymiskviða* and *Lokasenna* see Gunnell 1995: 218 and 225–229.

[16] It is worth noting that even though, according to Vésteinn Ólason, the *Edda* was probably Snorri's first written work (Vésteinn Ólason 2001: 59), in other words his first work in prose, he, before composing *Háttatal*, had composed praise-poetry for Sverrir Sigurðarson, Ingi Bárðarson, Skúli Bárðarson (two poems), Hákon galinn and Kristín Nikulásdóttir.

[17] Konráð Gíslason's dating of *Háttatal* appears in his article on the oldest runic inscriptions in *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed* 1869: 148: "Háttatal maa derfor uden Tvivl være blevet til efter Vinteren 1221–1222 og før det Tidspunkt, da Ribbunge-Factionens midlertidige Ophør (der indtraf i 1223) blev bekjendt i Island."

[18] For discussion of this question, see further below.

meant to be a book of practical metrics. When Snorri composed the poem he was already occupied with his metrical interests" (Wessén 1940: 16, see further below). Of course, nobody would compose a poem like *Háttatal* without having great interest in poetic metres, but that does not mean that the poem was planned to form part of a textbook. It is essentially a collection of examples of different verse-forms and variations in prosody.

Háttatal and the Skaldic Language

Wessén's theory about the order of composition of the various parts of the *Edda* suggests that *Háttatal* was composed first and then *Skáldskaparmál* which was designed to explain the complicated poetic diction of the poem. This was then followed by *Gylfaginning* which was meant to shed light on the pagan background of the poetic language. If this was the case, one can expect to see signs of this process in both the explanations of the poetic imagery and the particular myths that were chosen to be included. We will now proceed to examine whether this is actually the case.

Those who try to read medieval skaldic poetry in the 21st century usually mention three features which pose the chief obstacles: the comparatively free word order, the *kennings* and the poetical appellations (*heiti*). The word order of *Háttatal* actually contains very little that does not have parallels in earlier poetry, even if some of the verse forms are really stylistic variations in which word order is very important. With interpreting *heiti*, both medieval and modern readers are given great help by the form of the name-lists (*þulur*) which follow the Edda in some manuscripts and may well be older than Snorri's work.[19] The *kennings*, however, often need explanatory stories. Thus, in order to understand the *kenning Þórs fangvina* ("Thor's [female] wrestling partner"), used by Egill Skallagrímsson's grandfather, Kveldúlfr (Íf. 2 1933: 60), it helps to know the story about Þórr visiting Útgarða-Loki and wrestling with *Elli* ('Old Age') who, as everyone knows, finally defeats everybody (cf. Edda 2005: 43).

Skáldskaparmál teaches us kennings in two ways. First of all, there are the lists of *kennings*, which as a rule answer to question "Hvernig skal

[19] For a discussion of the *þulur* see Anthony Faulkes 1998: xv–xviii. Faulkes' conclusion is: "It seems clear that whether or not they were intended to be included as a part of *Skáldskaparmál*, the *þulur* appended to the work in RTABC were not compiled by Snorri himself, and may have been added by another hand" (p. xviii).

kenna …" ("How shall so and so be referred to?") A good example is the list of kennings for Þórr:

> Hvernig skal kenna Þór? Svá at kalla hann son Óðins ok Jarðar, faðir Magna ok Móða ok Þrúðar, verr Sifjar, stjúpfaðir Ullar, stýrandi ok eigandi Mjǫllnis ok megingjarða, Bilskirnis, verjandi Ásgarðs, Miðgarðs, dólgr ok bani jǫtna ok trǫllkvinna, vegandi Hrungnis, Geirrøðar, Þrívalda, dróttin Þjálfa ok Rǫsku, dólgr Miðgarðsorms, fóstri Vingnis ok Hlóru (Edda 1998: 14).
>
> How shall Thor be referred to? By calling him son of Odin and Iord, father of Magni and Modi and Thrud, husband of Sif, stepfather of Ull, ruler and owner of Miollnir and the girdle of might, of Bilskirnir, defender of Asgard, Midgard, enemy and slayer of giants and troll-wives, killer of Hrungnir, Geirrod, Thrivaldi, lord of Thialfi and Roskva, enemy of the Midgard serpent, foster-son of Vingnir and Hlora (Edda 1987: 72).[20]

A poet who knew such a list by heart was well off.[21]

It seems that *Háttatal* contains some 236 *kennings*.[22] By far the majority of them are what we might call standard or classical *kennings*, commonly found in both heathen and Christian poetry. In a few cases, we find a heathen god's name in *kennings* for warriors (Baldr, Gautr, Týr, Njǫrðr), but these names are so common in poetry that we hardly need any explanation, and they cannot be taken as a part of an especially heathen vocabulary. Of the 236 *kennings*, there are actually only eleven that could be hard to understand without knowing a myth or tale about the gods; of these, nine seem to allude to tales that were obviously widely known. These *kennings* are:

(1) fengr Yggs (mead of poetry, poem), st. 31
(2) hrannir Hárs saltunnu (mead of poetry, poem), st. 31
(3) fagrregn Mardallar hvarma (gold), st. 42
(4) hringdropi (gold), st. 42
(5) mála Úlfs bága (land, Norway), st. 3

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[20] In this article, translations from the *Edda* are taken from Anthony Faulkes's Everyman translation (1987) for the R version, and the same translator's translation of the U version in the Viking Society edition of *The Uppsala Edda* (2012).

[21] *Skáldskaparmál* provides great help in understanding *Háttatal* through its impressive collection of examples taken from poems, most of which take the form of half-stanzas by known poets. If you knew how to solve the riddles of these stanzas, *Háttatal* would be easy.

[22] The number is a little uncertain because in a few cases it is not obvious whether we are speaking about a *kenning* or simply a compound. For example, should *mann-Baldr* be regarded as a *kenning* for "man", or as a compound meaning "an unusually good man"? For a complete list of the *kennings* in *Háttatal*, see the Appendix.

(6) rúna Míms vinar (land, Norway), st. 3
(7) móðir mellu dólgs (land, Norway), st. 3
(8) garðr Þundar grindar jaðra (shield), st. 58
(9) þilja Hrungnis ilja (shield), st. 30

As can be seen above, seven of the nine *kennings* in this list appear in just three stanzas dealing with poetry, gold and the kingdom, and do not demand much guesswork to be understood. The first part of stanza 58 deals with preparation for a battle, and when it is stated "sjá megi *garð*" in the first half of the stanza, the likelihood is that a shieldwall is being referred to. St. 30 addresses a warrior, and when one hears the noun *askr* (tree), one automatically assumes that reference is being made to a weapon or a means of protection. *Þil* is then the likely root of a *kenning* for a shield.

The names Yggr and Hárr found in these *kennings* are said to be among Óðinn's names known from both the Eddic poems and Snorri's *Edda*, and the numerous parallels that exist to the *kenning fengr Yggs* ('Óðinn's booty') make that *kenning* close to a cliché. *Hrannir Hárs saltunnu* ('the waves of Óðinn's hall-vat') is nonetheless only recorded here, *saltunna* being is a rather unpoetic word for the contents of the vats Són, Boðn and Óðrerir. All of these mead-*kennings* are nonetheless very conventional and unlikely to create any real problem for the listener/reader.

The two gold-*kennings fagrregn Mardallar hvarma* ('the fair rain of Mardoll's lids'), and *hringdropi* ('ring-droplet') are so conventional that they would hardly have needed any explanation either. Both in *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* we learn that Mardǫll was one of the names of Freyja, and that Freyja, when mourning for her husband, wept golden tears.[23] *Hringdropi* meanwhile alludes to the magic ring *Draupnir*, mentioned both in *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskapamál*. *Gylfaginning* states: "Honum fylgði síðan sú náttúra at hina níundu hverja nótt drupu af honum átta gullhringar jafnhǫfgir" (Edda 1998: 47) ('It afterwards had the property that every ninth night there dripped from it eight gold rings of the same weight': Edda 1987: 50).

The *kennings* for land (5–7) in strophe 3 in *Háttatal* are not based on any known tale about Óðinn and his affairs with the goddess or giantess Jǫrð, Þórr's mother, although that type of kenning seems to have been very well

[23] Both the name Mardǫll and information about the golden tears is also found in the *þulur* (Edda 1998: 115, stanza 435).

known. *Noregs konungatal*, an anonymous poem composed at Oddi in praise of Snorri's foster-father, Jón Loptsson, when Snorri was a youngster contains the following *kennings* for land: *Þundar beðja*, *Hárs víf*, *Yggs man* and *man Yggjar*, all of which have the same structure and meaning. This poem was definitely among the poems Snorri knew very well.

To the mythological *kennings* noted above, we can add another very impressive *kenning* found in stanza 7: *Vindhlés hjálms fylli*. Faulkes's translation 'Vindhler's helmet-filler [Heimdall's head, i.e. a sword]' is in full harmony with the Edda. In both *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* we read that Heimdallr's head was called 'sword' and that a sword was called 'Heimdallr's head', but we get no explanation for this in the books in question, only a hint that we might read more in *Heimdalargaldr*, a poem neither work says anything about, apart from the fact that according to the Edda, Heimdallr himself there stated that he had nine mothers (Edda 2005: 26 and 1998: 19). It is easy to see that there must once have been a tale or a myth about this, but it is clear that Snorri either did not know it or decided that he had no use for it.

The greater part of the other *kennings* found in *Háttatal* relate to the battlefield, what happens there and the actors in battle ((generous) chieftains, soldiers, weapons, fighting, blood; ships; parts of the human body and so on). (For a complete list see the Appendix below.) This semantic battlefield contains almost 190 kennings, but hardly any one of them is especially difficult to interpret for anyone who has even minimal experience of interpreting skaldic poetry. As in all traditional verse, gold and poetry are popular themes in the *kennings*.

From *Skáldskaparmál* to *Gylfaginning*?

When presenting *Gylfaginning* Wessén wrote:

> *Gylfaginning*, in respect of art is […] the most valuable part of the Edda. To Gylfaginning as a whole the same applies as we have already said about the legends and myths of Skáldskaparmál. The chief object of these is probably to explain the periphrases and modes of expression of skaldic poetry. But they also exist for their own sake. Snorri is not only a theorist, he is also an artist, a narrator. Gylfaginning contains exclusively mythological material without any direct allusion to its bearing on poetry. It is such matter as the skald was bound to know, because his art was constantly concerned with these ideas. But apart

> from this the old mythology was in itself interesting and entertaining, Snorri relates the tales with artistic skill (Wessén 1940: 21).

Two serious questions arise here: First of all: Would an early 13th century poet have been constantly concerned with heathen mythic ideas? The answer is most likely a strong negative. While many of the *kennings* had a heathen background, by this time most of them would probably have become linguistic clichés: *Yggs full*, for example, simply meant 'poem'. Nobody needed to think of Óðinn stealing the mead of poetry to understand it. The second key question to consider is whether the chief object of the myths in *Gylfaginning* was ever to explain the poetic language of *Háttatal* and *Skáldskaparmál*? The answer to this question is bound to have importance for our understanding of the purpose of of the *Edda*.

Wessén's final words on *Skáldskaparmál*, leading on to his discussion of *Gylfaginning*, are as follows:

> The myths and legends contained in Skáldskaparmál are very loosely inserted and present a striking contrast to the dry lexicalic exposition in the rest of the work. In respect of style, Gylfaginning as well as Háttatal are *uniform*, Gylfaginning being throughout in the narrative style, Háttatal in the theorising: Skáldskaparmál, on the other hand, is stylistically *divided*. This in reality gives us the key to the question that we have raised and tried to answer, how the Snorri-Edda came into existence. It is impossible that Skáldskaparmál can from the beginning have been composed in the form that has come down to us. It must be due to a later adaption by Snorri, in which he added the legends and the frame story. The legends can easily be eliminated, and there then remains a systematic description of skaldic language, very similar to that in Háttatal of the different kinds of metres. This must have been the original Skáldskaparmál (Wessén 1940: 20–1).

There is no doubt that Wessén was right when he defines the myths and legends in *Skáldskaparmál* as "a striking contrast to the […] exposition in the rest of the work," the "rest of the work" here meaning the rest of *Skáldskaparmál*. One wonders whether this could be a key to the still bigger question of how the Edda as a whole came into existence. It is worth bearing in mind that Wessén's unshakable belief that the Edda must be thought of as a whole prevents him from noting some very important things.

The first feature that Wessén ignores concerns the connection or lack of connection between *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* which would potentially help to explain why the two works are found together as part

of an apparent "whole". What follows is a list of information given in both *Gylfaginning* and the *kennings* contained in *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal*:

1) The killing of Ymir and the creation of Earth described in *Gylfaginning* (Edda 2005: 11–12) certainly provide material for a number of *kennings*. Quotations from the Eddic poems *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* support this creation myth: "Ór Ymis holdi / var jǫrð of skǫpuð, / en ór sveita sjár, / bjǫrg ór beinum, / baðmr ór hári, / en ór hausi himinn" (Edda 2005:12) ("From Ymir's flesh was earth created, and from blood, sea; rocks of bones, trees of hair, and from his skull, the sky") (Edda 1987: 13).

   All the same, for *kenning*-building, it might be argued that the skalds did not in fact need the original of this story, for the lists contained in *Skáldskaparmál* underline quite clearly that the earth can be referred to as *Ymis hold* 'Ymir's flesh' (Edda 2012: 152 and 153), the sea as *Ymis blóð* 'Ymir's blood' (Edda 2012: 154 and 155) and heaven as *Ymis haus* 'Ymir's skull' (Edda 2012: 151). Lexicon Poeticum also has one example of *Ymis hauss* (head) and one of *Ymis blóð*, but both are preserved only in the Edda.[24] When it comes down to it, no example from the medieval poetry can be found of any *kenning* for earth itself built on this source.
2) In *Gylfaginning*, the sister and brother, *Sól* and *Máni*, are said to be the daughter and son of *Mundilfœri* (R) (*Mundilferi* in the DG 11 4to), and that Sun was married to a man who in R is named *Glenr* (in the DG 11 4to *Glórnir*). In *Skáldskaparmál*, we then learn that Sun can be referred to as wife of Glenr (R and U) and this is confirmed by a half-stanza by Skúli Þorsteinsson which, according to Lexicon Poeticum and The Database of Skaldic Poetry, is the only known example of the *kenning* in question.[25]
3) The creation of humans (Askr and Embla) and dwarfs or the acts of the nornir (Urðr, Skuld, Verðandi) mentioned in *Gylfaginning* (Edda

[24] The Database of The Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages includes one further example taken from a *lausavísa* in the young romance Friðþjófs saga (*Ymis hauss* 'Ymir's head').

[25] In the eddic poem *Vafþrúðnismál* st. 23, we read that Mundilfœri was the father of Moon and Sun. St. 25 states that Dellingr was the father of Day and Nǫrr the father of Night. In Snorri's Edda, meanwhile, the Night's father is said to be Nǫrfi or Narfi in R (Edda 2005: 13) and Nóri in U (Edda 2012: 20). Neither of the versions quotes *Vafþrúðnismál* in this context. For further discussion of this family, see Haukur Þorgeirsson 2008.

> 2005: 13, 15–17 and 18) does not bring about any *kennings*, even if quite a number of dwarf-names appear in skaldic poetry. These, however, can all quite easily be traced back to the lists in *Vǫluspá* or *þulur*.

It is clear that these few *kennings* mentioned here do not need the explanations given in *Gylfaginning*. Explanations for them could easily have been found in a number of other places.

In general, the lack of *kennings* mentioned in *Skáldskaparmál* which are built on myths and tales given in *Gylfaginning* is striking. The latter work seems to have another focus as a compact history of the world of gods and men, starting with the creation and ending with *ragnarøkkr*, the fatal end of the gods' life or the twilight of the gods.[26]

Also worth noting with regard to the asserted connection between *Skáldskaparmál* and *Gylfaginning* is the fact that Óðinn in *Gylfaginning* is never presented as the god of poetry or even the god who gave the mead of poetry to gods and mankind. The presentation of Óðinn here is almost word for word identical in both U and R. The DG 11 4to states:

> Óðinn er œztr ok elztr ásanna. Hann ræðr ǫllum hlutum ok svá sem ǫnnur goðin eru máttug, þá þjóna honum ǫll svá sem bǫrn fǫður.
>
> […]
>
> Óðinn heitir Alfaðir því hann er faðir allra goðanna. Hann heitir ok Valfǫðr, því at hans óskasynir eru allir þeir er í val falla. […] Hann heitir ok Hangaguð ok Happaguð[27] ok Farmaguð[28] (Edda 2012: 34 and 36; cf. Edda 2005: 21).
>
> Óðinn is highest and most ancient of the Æsir. He rules all things, and mighty though the other gods are, yet they all submit to him like children to their father.
>
> […]

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[26] The word tends to be normalised as *ragnarǫk,* interpreting the second element of the word as *rǫk* 'fate'. Recent research (Haraldur Bernharðsson 2007) has nonetheless indicated that the form *-røkkr* is probably the earlier form. Snorri's *Ragnarøkkr* and Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* may thus be regarded as being more correct. *Vǫluspá* (st. 58) uses the neuter pl. form in *um rǫm ragna røk*.

[27] Here R has *Haptaguð*, which perhaps simply means "supreme god, the god of gods" (*hǫpt* = "gods").

[28] This name possibly relates to the transport of the mead from Hnitbjǫrg to Ásgarðr, if the mead is taken to be Óðinn's cargo (*farmr*), in which case it would constitute the only reference in *Gylfaginning* to Óðinn in his role as god of poetry, cf. the *kenning farmr Gunnlaðar arma* ("cargo of the arms of Gunnlǫð"), i.e. Óðinn.

> Óðinn is called All-father, for he is father of all the gods. He is also called Valfǫðr (father of the slain), since all those that fall in battle are his adoptive sons. […] He is also called Hangaguð and Happaguð and Farmaguð (Edda 2012; 35 and 37).)

This information is followed by a list of Óðinn's names that can almost all be found in the Eddic poem *Grímnismál* (sts 46–50).

It is significant that the myth about the mead of poetry is not told in *Gylfaginning* either. If we are to believe that *Gylfaginning* was designed to fill in the gaps in *Skáldskaparmál*, as Wessén suggested, one might argue that this absence is highly odd. One might surmise from it that the author (or storyteller) has completely forgotten what the main aim of the Edda as a whole was (if its aim really was to teach young skalds how to compose traditional poetry). One is drawn to wonder whether this was ever the aim behind the composition of *Gylfaginning*.

There is no place here to compare in detail the ways in which *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* introduce and explain the various gods and mythical beings mentioned in both works. There are few contradictions here. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that few kennings mentioned in *Skáldskaparmál* receive support from the stories given in *Gylfaginning*. One notes, for example that while the Frey *kenning bani Belja* 'Beli's slayer' appears in *Vǫluspá* (st. 52) and *Belja dólgr* 'Beli's enemy' in *Skáldskaparmál* (Edda 1998: 18; Edda 2012: 144), no account of their conflict ever appears in *Gylfaginning*.

There are several more interesting lacunae in Edda: (1) The discussion of *Háttatal* (above) mentioned *Heimdalar hǫfuð* ('the head of Heimdallr': Edda 1998: 19; Edda 2012: 146), but no story (a myth?) is ever given to explain why a sword is named so. (2) The fight between Loki and Heimdallr over *Brísingamen* which apparently took place at Singasteinn near Vágasker (Edda 1998: 19; Edda 2012: 146) is never given any explanation either. (3) One also wonders why Loki is called *þjófr hafrs* ('thief of a goat': Edda 1998: 20; Edda 2012: 148); and (4) why Hrungnir is called *Prúðar þjófr* ('thief of Þrúðr': Edda 1998: 69; Edda 2012: 182)? (5) Who were Vingnir and Lóra (Edda 1998: 14; Edda 2012: 138), apparently the foster-parents of Þórr?[29] (6) Why are whales called Viðblindi's boars?

[29] In the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, Þórr is called *Hlórriði* and in the *Prologue* in R, it is stated that "the first Trór, whom we call Þórr, had a foster-father called Loricus who was married to a Lora or Glora. Trór killed both of them" (Edda 2005: 5). One wonders whether

The explanation we are given here (Edda 1998: 63; Edda 2012: 170) is far from satisfactory. (7) What about the stories behind the deaths of Þrívaldi, Keila, Hangankjapta and Svívǫr, to name just some of the *jǫtnar* Þórr apparently fought (Edda 1998: 17; Edda 2012: 142 and 144)? (8) Why is *Viðarr* called *þǫgli* ('the silent': Edda 2005: 26; Edda 2012: 46)? None of these questions are ever answered by *Gylfaginning*.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above is simple: Clearly the myths and stories narrated in *Gylfaginning* have hardly any relation to the skaldic *kennings* listed in *Skáldskaparmál*. From this point of view alone, it seems evident that *Gylfaginning* was not compiled to help with poetic diction, as many scholars have previously suggested.

The Beginning and the End: The *Prologue* and the Commentary on *Háttatal*

When discussing Vésteinn Ólason's theory of the composition of the *Edda*, mention was made of his words about the author of the didactic text in the *Prologue* and the comments on *Háttatal*. When it comes down to it, it should be remembered that scholars are still not in agreement about whether Snorri was the author (or one of the authors) of those texts.[30]

It should be borne in mind that none of the preserved versions of Snorri's Edda contain a heading for the introductory text usually called the *Prologue* (Icelandic: *Formáli*). Indeed, partly because of the different levels of manuscript preservation, we actually get different texts for the Prologue in the main manuscripts. Codex Wormianus, the latest (except for Codex Trajectinus), has the longest *Prologue*, while DG 11 4to, possibly the earliest manuscript, but not necessarily for that reason containing the oldest version, has the shortest text. The first leaves of Codex Regius and Codex Trajectinus are lacking, but with the aid of four paper manuscripts written in the 17th century, which were possibly derived from R before the first leaf was lost, Anthony Faulkes (1979) has reconstructed the *Prologue* of R in a very convincing way, making it possible to clarify

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there is a link between these two Þórrs, but we do not seem to get any help from the Edda with these matters.

[30] For a discussion on the *Prologue*, see, for example, Heinrich Beck 2007 and Viðar Pálsson 2008. For a discussion on the Commentary see, for example, Anthony Faulkes 2007: ix–xi.

the connection between the different versions. For the present study, however, authorship itself is not the important issue. The main thing is that the *Prologue* is seemingly not an introduction to the Edda as a whole but rather just to *Gylfaginning*. It is worth noting that there is little clear connection between *Skáldskaparmál* and the *Prologue* and none at all between *Háttatal* and the *Prologue*.[31]

For more than a century, the discussion of the *Prologue* has first and foremost addressed two questions: a) was the *Prologue* compiled by Snorri himself? b) where are the closest models for the Euhemerism and history of mankind presented in the Prologue?[32]

With regard to Snorri's role here, one might state that it is very likely that Snorri wrote, or made his helpers write, some introduction to the work on mythology he had created or was going to create in *Gylfaginning*. His original text may very well have included much of what we meet in the R or U versions of the *Prologue*, but it is more or less impossible to reach a final answer to this question.

With regard to the Euhemerism found here, the explanation of the heathen gods being earthly kings or chieftains that came to be worshipped after their deaths is usually traced back to the Greek philosopher Euhemeros (the third and fourth century BC).[33] It is not at all clear where Snorri got this idea from. It had been used in Icelandic historiography long before, as we can see from Ari Þorgilsson's genealogy of the Breiðfirðingar and the Ynglingar (Swedish kings) in Íslendingabók (Íf. 1, 1968: 27) and from the earlier noted poem *Noregs konunga tal*, composed in Oddi when Snorri was a teenager, which apparently built on the historical writings of Sæmundr Sigfússon.[34] It is thus easy to approve what Ursula and Peter Dronke wrote:

> […] we would suggest that some of the emphases Snorri gives in his Prologue are akin to those given by some of the greatest twelfth-century Christian

[31] When we read in the program-clause in R that "Christian people must not believe in heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than that in which it is presented at the beginning of this book, where it is told what happened when mankind went astray from the true faith" (Edda 1987: 64–5, cf. above). This may well suggest a clear link to the *Prologue*. All the same, FG 11 4to only has "Christian people are not to believe or be convinced that it has been thus" (i.e. literally true; Edda 2012: 91). It is possible that the wording of does not imply anything other than that the Prologue was written before *Skáldskaparmál*.

[32] For further discussion see Faulkes 1978–79, 1983 and 1993,

[33] Euhemerism is discussed in all the major works on the Edda. See especially Holtsmark 1964: 9–16.

[34] For the text, see Skjaldedigtningen I A 579–89.

> platonists – by William of Conches, Thierry of Chartres, Hugh of Saint-Victor, Bernard Silvestris, and Alan of Lille. There is nothing in Snorri's Prologue to show that he had works by these men at his elbow (though that he had read some of their writings cannot of course be ruled out). Much, however, suggests to us that Snorri had become familiar with some of their most remarkable ideas – perhaps through conversations with scholars who had studied in France, or through teachers who had undergone this platonising influence. Above all, we believe a certain influence, direct or indirect, was possible because Snorri would have found in twelfth-century Latin humanist speculation much that was congenial to him, much that he could absorb because of its kinship with his own attitude to myth and the temperament with which he approached mythological speculation (Dronke 1977: 168–9).

And Anthony Faulkes wrote:

> But though the ideas of the prologue can be paralleled in various works, it is difficult to know which, if any, the author was actually acquainted with; and if his ideas were derived from Latin authors, it is difficult to say how far his knowledge was at first hand and how much reached him orally through the general dissemination of ideas in literary circles in Iceland. The analogies between the earth and living creatures (*SnE*, pp. 1/22–2/8) are developed much further than in any other medieval writer I know, and in a very individual way, and the author might have arrived at them independently. Nevertheless, the similarities with European writings, though they do not prove dependence, show that the author was thinking in a similar way to medieval Latin writers, and was not following a specifically Norse train of thought (Faulkes 1983: 32).

The traditional idea is that in the *Prologue* Snorri was protecting his *Edda* against the criticism he might expect from his Christian countrymen. However, in a recent study, Viðar Pálsson (2008) has pointed out that other Icelandic thirteenth-century scholars such as Snorri's cousin Sturla Þórðarson themselves very frequently used heathen metaphors when writing in Icelandic without receiving any criticism from Christian preachers.[35]

In Wessén's opinion what mattered most with regard to the *Prologue* was that:

> […] Snorri gives two different explanations of the Asa religion in the Prologue: a religious historical one, and an euhemeristic prehistoric one. The exposition in Gylfaginning also accords with this. There Snorri distinguishes between the

[35] In his article from 2008, Viðar Pálsson has a concise review of the earlier discussion of this matter.

> human Æsir, the Asa people, who immigrated into Sweden from Troy, and the gods in which they believed, the divine Æsir. To the former belonged the Odin who in a three-headed shape narrates the myths to Gylfi-Gangleri, to the latter the Odin of whom he told him, the Allfather (Wessén 1940: 24–5).

This, of course, ties the *Prologue* to *Gylfaginning*, but makes no reference to any other part of the book.

With regard to the commentary on *Háttatal*, as noted earlier, in all medieval manuscripts of *Háttatal* the poem is accompanied by a commentary which Wessén called "a theory, in part subtle theory" (Wessén 1940: 16). On the opening of it he commented as follows:

> Number is said to be threefold: the number of metres, the number of lines in each strophe, the number of syllables in each line. Distinction is twofold: sound and ring, by which assonance and alliteration are referred to.[36] The abstract nature of this interpretation is very striking. This is in part due to the theme itself; it is a glorious achievement to be able to account for the elements of verse at all in the 13th century. Snorri uses Icelandic words and tries to create a native nomenclature. The system of underlying ideas is to a great extent learned and foreign, borrowed from abroad, the model being Latin scholastics. At the beginning, and partly also in the sequel, the exposition takes the form of questions and answers. But it is not as in Gylfaginning a particular person who asks and who answers, nor is there any concrete situation which gives rise to the colloquy, it is merely a stylistic form of exposition. It recalls the Latin textbooks of the Middle Ages, in which the pupil puts the questions and the teacher replies. And doubtless it had such a learned model.
>
> In the commentary on Háttatal we encounter Snorri as a scholar, a systematist (Wessén 1940: 16).[37]

It is worth noting that Wessén fails to notice here the ten examples Faulkes

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[36] Here in the original, it is a question of the terms *málsgrein* and *hljóðsgrein* which Faulkes translates as "distinction of meaning and distinction of sound" (Faulkes: 1987: 165).

[37] It should be noted that, as noted above, even if it is fully possible that Snorri was the original author of the Commentary it is very difficult to imagine that he ever meant the Commentary for the receptors, King Hákon and Earl Skúli. Most likely they would have had enough difficulties in understanding the poem itself. A detailed commentary on the metrics would not make this any easier. In actual fact, no sources ever tell us that the king and earl ever heard the poem, either from Snorri's mouth or in a written form which was sent to them. The common belief is that Snorri sent the poem to Norway as he seems to have done with the poems for Sverrir, Ingi and Earl Hákon galinn noted above (cf. Vésteinn Ólason 2008: 27).

listed of "the commentary not fitting the verse" (Edda 2007: viii), and the important observation that the same writer makes a little later:

> The description of the *kenning* and particularly of the *sannkenning*, the meaning of the word *fornafn* and the exemplification of *nýgjǫrvingar* are rather different in *Skáldskaparmál* from what we find in *Háttatal* (Faulkes 2007: ix).

Neither Faulkes nor others have found these to be sufficient reasons to believe that Snorri was not the author of the Commentary. Nonetheless, there is some reason to imagine that other authors at later times, especially those wanting to use *Háttatal* as kind of a poetic textbook, would have added to the text of the Commentary which would, like the other parts of the Edda, have been seen as a work in progress. Despite Wessén's words on the learned model, it is noteworthy that no scholar has ever been able to find a Latin model for the Commentary – or even for the *Edda* as a whole.[38]

One important feature of both *Háttatal* and the Commentary in this regard, however is the variation in the names given to the different metric forms in different sources. The table in Appendix II contains those names drawn from the DG 11 4to, R and those found in the list of strophes in DG 11 4to in comparison to the names found in *Háttalykill enn forni* as published in Jón Helgason's edition of the text from 1941. The table underlines even more clearly the degree to which names themselves were a work in progress. It is very difficult to establish which names have their roots in Snorri's original work.

Looking back

The first part of this article has examined the various possible arguments given for supporting Elias Wessén's theory from 1940 that the Edda was composed back to front, the author starting with *Háttatal* and then proceeding to the first version of *Skáldskaparmál*, then writing *Gylfaginning* and returning to *Skáldskaparmál*, without totally succeeding in giving that section as convincing a structure as that given for *Gylfaginning*.

[38] Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (2016: 83) mentions that "hliðstæður" (parallels) could be found, but these are not the same as sources. For the search for Latin models see, for example, Halldór Halldórsson 1975, Ursula and Peter Dronke 1977, Faulkes 1983, and Clunies Ross 1987.

Wessén's argument is that the *Prologue* was then written last or at least after *Gylfaginning*. As was pointed out at the beginning of this study, this argument depends to a large degree on our seeing the author as a supreme genius who gradually created the overall masterpiece of the Edda step by step. As has been noted, later scholars have tended to accepted Wessén's ideas without critical discussion.

To briefly sum up what has been stated above, it seems evident that a close reading of the text of the various parta of the *Edda* does not provide any support for Wessén's theory. On the contrary, it shows that there is actually very little connection if any between the three different parts of the work, and that *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* in particular seem to build upon two very different corpora of material, the one mythological (with able assistance from Eddic poetry) and the other poetic (drawing in particular on skaldic poetry). There is no obvious indication that the author was planning *Skáldskaparmál* when compiling *Gylfaginning* or vice versa.

With regard to dating, as has also been noted above, Wessén's theory suggests that the whole of the *Edda* must have been compiled between 1222 and 1225, a dating that most have accepted but may have to be revised.

This has led to Vésteinn Ólason's statement that:

> […] þrír meginbálkar verksins eru svo ólíkir bæði að efni og formi að það getur virst hæpið að líta á þá sem hluta af einu 'verki' sem beri vitni um sjálfri sér samkvæma ætlun og framkvæmd eins höfundar, jafnvel þótt mark sé tekið á þeim orðum Uppsala Eddu að Snorri hafi sett þá alla saman í eina bók (Vésteinn Ólason 2001: 47).
>
> […] the three main parts of the work are so different in both form and content that it may seem somewhat dubious to regard each of them as being part of a single "work" which bears witness to it having a joint plan and production by a single author, in spite of the words of the Uppsala Edda that Snorri had put all of these parts together in a single book (Translation: Terry Gunnell).

The examination given above has indicated that the main parts of the Edda are not only quite unlike each other but also unconnected to that degree that each of them is quite capable of having lived its own life.[39]

[39] This is very clear in the manuscript tradition of *Skáldskaparmál* preserved both in AM 748 and AM 757 together with material from other works (see Faulkes 1998: xl–l). From the seventeenth century, one might add Jón Guðmundsson's *Samantektir* (see Einar G. Pétursson 1998). The same idea is clearly demonstrated in editions like those of Jón Helgason and Anne Holtsmark (1950) and that of Guðrún Nordal's (2011) in which tales from

The final part of the article will move on to a discussion of the possible backgrounds of *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*, considering what each of these works reveal about their possible origins.

The Stories in *Gylfaginning*

As is well known, the first 20 chapters of *Gylfaginning* tell us about the places and inhabitants in the realm of the gods. Most of this knowledge concerning the gods seems to be drawn from the didactic Eddic poems *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*, and the axis of time mostly from *Vǫluspá*. However, it is noteworthy that when it comes to the myths dealing with Þórr and the other gods, Eddic poetry is far from having been sufficient as a key source.[40] A few examples will suffice to underline this point.

The first god to be told about in any detail in *Gylfaginning* is *frumkveði flærðanna* 'the originator of falsehoods' (Edda 2005: 26), Loki Laufeyjarson. While Loki is attached to a long list of *kennings* in *Skáldskaparmál*, it is noteworthy that no examples from poetry are given to support them.[41] The same applies to Loki's children and the poetical names and personifications of Hel's furniture, service and servants, none seem to be mentioned in verse outside the *þulur*.[42] Is is also interesting to see that neither Fenrisúlfr, the Miðgarðsormr nor Hel get any special treatment in *Skáldskaparmál* although both *Fenrir* (either in the form of the destroying wolf or as a common noun given for any wolf) and *Jǫrmungandr*/*Miðgarðsormr* appear in lists of *kennings*, although the latter only appears in

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Skáldskaparmál are selected and added to *Gylfaginning* as part of what the editors call "*Snorra-Edda*".

[40] It is interesting that the tale told in *Þrymskviða* is not found in *Gylfaginning*, and the fact that Þórr's contest with the Miðgarðsormr in *Gylfaginning* (Edda 2005: 44–5) is in several important ways quite different to that told in the Eddic poem *Hymiskviða* (Eddukvæði I 2014: 399–407) (Edda 2005: 44–5). Some myths obviously came directly from oral tradition.

[41] Meissner (1921, 255) does mention a few Loki-kennings, but apart from the two that are used in *Vǫluspá* and *Lokasenna* these are only found in *Haustlǫng* and *Þórsdrápa*, both of which are preserved in the R version of the Edda.

[42] In *Gylfaginning*, we find *Eljúðnir* ('storm-soaked', Hel's hall), *Hungr* ('Hunger', her dish), *Sultr* ('Famine', her knife), *Ganglati* ('Lazybones', the slave), *Ganglǫt* ('Lazybones', her serving maid), *Fallanda forað* ('Stumbling block', her gate), *Þolmóðnir* ('patient one', her threshold), *Kǫr* ('sickbed', her bed), and *Blíkjandabǫl* ('Gleaming-bale', her bed-curtains) (Edda 2012: 48 and 49; 2005: 27).

connection with its final fight with Þórr. Seemingly, Snorri found little support for these ideas in preserved poetry.

Of special interest among the stories about Loki is the myth of the conception of Sleipnir, the most important aspect of the story being the building of the wall around Ásgarðr.[43] The situation of this story is tragicomic: the gods seem to know in their hearts that they will lose the final fight against the *jǫtnar* (and other chaotic forces), and they try everything to prevent *Ragnarøkkr*, even hiring a master builder from among the *jǫtnar* to build this fortification to protect them from the *jǫtnar* themselves. The contract between the Æsir and the builder is partly Loki's work, and therefore it becomes his task to force the *jǫtunn* to fail to fulfil his contract without the Æsir breaking their side of the bargain, so that the Æsir can then give Þórr his usual task, that of killing the *jǫtunn*.

The above was a brief summary of how the tale is told in *Gylfaginning*, and even though the author then quotes *Vǫluspá* (sts 25–6) about the Æsir breaking their oaths, it is worth noting that it is not this story the quote from the poem itself is referring to. This passage in the poem seems to be about a fight between the Æsir and some enemies, who are usually taken to be the Vanir. This identification of the enemy is based on the complicated information in the lines "knáttu vanir vígspá/vǫllu sporna" in stanza 24.[44] To make a long story short, we may simply quote the latest edition of *Vǫluspá* (2014) and the statement by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason that: "Here two myths seem to have been combined: the war with the Vanir (cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 23 and Yngl, ch. 4) and a story about a builder who built a fortification for the Æsir (cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 42 […])."[45]

This is a very complicated matter. Snorri obviously knew the two myths, one telling about a war with the Vanir, the other dealing with the fortification-builder. It is possible that as a Christian storyteller, he felt that he did not have to treat either very seriously and took the liberty of combining them. All the same, this gives a good warning against using *Gylfaginning* as a means of explaining *Vǫluspá* and against using the account of the war between the Æsir and Vanir in *Ynglinga saga* to interpret both.

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[43] The rubric in the DG 11 4to is: *Frá því er Loki gat Sleipni við Svaðilfera* ('Of how Loki begot Sleipnir with Svaðilferi': Edda 2012: 60 and 61). In other words it is Loki and Sleipnir who are the main issue here, rather than the conflict between the gods and *jötnar* (or Vanir?).

[44] It may be worth noting that *Vanir* here could be plural masculine of the adjective *vanr* ('used to'), in which case it can be argued that the Vanir are never mentioned in *Vǫluspá*.

[45] Eddukvæði I, *Íf*. 2014, 297: "Hér virðist blandað saman tveimur goðsögnum: styrjöld við vani (sbr. Gylf, 23. kap., og Yngl, 4. kap.) og sögn um smið sem reisti ásum borgarvegg (sbr. Gylf, 42. kap. […]"

The best known and highest valued of all the tales in *Gylfaginning* are those which according to the headings in DG 11 are called 'The Story of Þórr and Útgarðaloki' and 'How Þórr Went to Fish for the Miðgarðr Serpent', which precede the final episodes about Baldr's death and *Ragnarøkkr*.[46]

The story about Þórr's encounter with Útgarðaloki is some 25% shorter in the DG 11 4to than in R, and rather well told even in this shorter version. The longer version in R is nonetheless among the highlights of the whole Edda. Considering this, it is interesting that this vivid story should only give rise to one unique kenning: *Þórs fangvina* ('she who wrestles with Þórr' = Old Age), found, as mentioned above, in a stanza by Kveldúlfr, Egill Skallagrímsson's grandfather.[47] Þórr himself is called *fangvinr Hafla* (a *jǫtunn*) in a stanza by Grettir Ásmundarson (Íf. 7 1936: 156). It is also worth noting that *Lokasenna* and *Hárbarðsljóð* are the only Eddic poems to mention a detail (the same one) in the story, that of Þórr hiding in a giant's glove. Nothing is said about the other episodes.

The fight between *Miðgarðsormr* and Þórr has clearly been one of the most popular and best known of the Old Norse myths. Once again, the version in the DG 11 4to is less than half the length of the text in R, but it contains all the same story-motifs. The most important difference is that according to the DG 11 4to Þórr kills the *jǫtunn*, while in R he is only said to have thrown him into the sea. The name of the *jǫtunn* in DG 11 is Eymir, while the other manuscripts all call him Hymir. The differences here could very well be due to a mishearing. The two versions could be a neat example of two different reconstructions made and passed on by learners/listeners.

Those are just a few examples of the tales told or mentioned in *Gylfaginnning*. With regard to the reasons for their inclusion is it evident that none of them are told because the poetic imagery in other parts of the work needs explanation. They are given essentially because they are entertaining and culturally informative. In short, they have value in themselves. It is also noteworthy that in choosing accounts, the author (or redactor) is not guided by those accounts which are already in existence in poetic form. He has no compunctions about choosing accounts that seem to have been passed on in prose form. This is certainly the case in

[46] The rubrics in the DG 11 4to are: "Hér hefr sǫgu Þórs ok Útgarða-Loka" (Edda 2012: 64) and "Hér segir frá því er Þórr fór at draga Miðgarðsorminn" (ibid.: 72)

[47] As noted earlier, *Skáldskaparmál* makes no mention of Þórr wrestling with Elli ("Old Age") in either a list of *kennings* or in a verse quotation.

the tale of Hymir above, and it is quite obvious also in the description of the final fight, *Ragnarøkkr* (cf. Heimir Pálsson 2014a: 191–205).

All in all, the myths preserved in in *Gylfaginning* give us good reason to believe that they have a background in Snorri Sturluson's upbringing in Oddi where it is likely that he heard stories about the gods, told not for believers but as entertaining narratives in their own right. This is given some support by the account telling of how when he was an infant, the housewife in Reykjaholt threatened to make his father one-eyed like Óðinn. We can be quite certain that this was a tale he heard more than once.[48]

The Role and Origin of *Skáldskaparmál*

As noted above, according to Wessén and his followers, *Skáldskaparmál* was originally written to explain the complicated language of poetry used in *Háttatal*. The study of *Háttatal* and its *Commentary* given above reveals that this is unlikely to have been the case. On the contrary, it seems likely that when the poet was composing *Háttatal*, he already knew of the content of *Skáldskaparmál* (even if he had not written it down). It is probable that what he knew about poetry, he had learned at Oddi, and that he later went on to gather some of that knowledge in a textbook in which he stated a peculiar description of the goal behind the work:

> En þetta er nú er segja ungum skáldum þeim er girnask at nema mál skáldskapar ok heyja sér orðfjǫlða með fornum heitum eða girnask þeir at kunna skilja þat er hulit er kveðit: þá skili hann þessa bók til fróðleiks ok skemtunar. En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna svá þessar sǫgur at taka ór skáldskapinum for[nar ke] nningar þær er hǫfuðskáld hafa sér líka látit. En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa heiðin goð ok eigi á sannyndi þessar sagnar annan veg en hér finnsk í upphafi bókar er sagt er frá atburðum þeim er mannfólkit viltisk frá réttri trú […] (Edda 1998: 5).
>
> But these things have now to be told to young poets who desire to learn the language of poetry and to furnish themselves with a wide vocabulary using

[48] The tale about Þorbjörg Bjarnardóttir trying to stab Sturla Þórðarson (Hvamm-Sturla) in the eye can be read in *Sturlu saga* (Sturlunga saga I 1946: 109). This might be compared to the episode in *Hákonar saga*, when Earl Skúli ordered Snorri Sturluson to compose a strophe on Gautr Jónsson, pointing out that he had only one eye as Óðinn (*Hákonar saga* 2013: 42). Clearly the motif of the one-eyed god was well known in the 12th and 13th centuries in both Iceland and Norway. See also Viðar Pálsson 2008.

> traditional terms; or else they desire to be able to understand what is expressed obscurely. Then let such a one take this book as scholarly inquiry and entertainment. But these stories are not to be consigned to oblivion or demonstrated to be false, so as to deprive poetry of ancient kennings which major poets have been happy to use. Yet Christian people must not believe in heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than that in which it is presented at the beginning of this book, where it is told what happened when mankind went astray from the true faith […] (Edda 1987, 64–65).[49]

This description of the aim of the work follows an introductory statement about the nature of poetry. Scholars have occasionally commented on the fact that it appears in a slightly strange place.[50] It is essentially only relevant to *Skáldskaparmál* but really no other section of the Edda since it underlines the idea that teaching of the art of poetry is about to start.

Learning by heart was perhaps the most common pedagogic method in schools during what we refer to as the medieval period. More than half of *Skáldskaparmál* seems to take the form of material designed for this kind of education in the art of poetry:

a) Lists of *kennings* and *heiti* (poetical names)
b) Examples of poetry (some 260 in the DG 11 4to; and 411 in R 517 if we include the *þulur*)
c) Myths and tales related to the *kennings* (especially in R)

One can assume that lists and poetic examples of this kind would have been used as part of the poetic training that the young Snorri received at Oddi before he started composing verse in praise of kings and chieftains.

It is likely that education in poetry comprised of two features: Learning the language of poetry, *kennings* and *heiti*, and getting practice in allite-

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[49] The text given here is that of R. In DG 11 4to it is almost exactly the same as far as the word *skemtunar*. DG 11 then proceeds: ”En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna þessar frásagnir eða taka ór skáldskapnum fornar kenningar er hǫfuðskáldin hafa sér líka látit. En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa né á sannast at svá hafi verit” ‘But these narratives are not to be consigned to oblivion or demonstrated to be false, nor are ancient kennings that major poets have been happy to use to be removed from the poetry. Yet Christian people are not to believe or be convinced that it has been thus’ (Edda 2012: 90–1). If this wording is the original formulation, these words obviously have no relevance to either the *Prologue* or the myths told in *Gylfaginning*. In some editions and essays (see, for example, Edda 1819), this address to young poets has been called “Eptirmáli” (Epilogue), essentially because of its unclear connection with the main text. It nonetheless seems more likely that it should be regarded rather as a preface to *Skáldskaparmál*.

[50] For a discussion see Vésteinn Ólason 2001: 58–9.

ration, assonance, and rhythm by learning a great deal of traditional poetry by heart.[51]

Presumably the vocabulary was taught in the shape of lists of the same type that were later used in *Skáldskaparmál*, and the half-stanzas then helping with memorizing.

With regard to the dating of *Háttatal* and *Skáldskaparmál*, it is worth bearing the following in mind. If we believe *Skáldatal* and Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson composed his first poem in praise of a king for Sverrir Sigurðarson who died in 1202. Even though the poem might have been composed after the king's death, the poet would still only have been a little more than 20 years old at the time. As has been noted earlier, Snorri later composed other works in praise of Ingi Bárðarson (Earl Skúli's brother), Earl Hákon *galinn* (the half-brother of Skúli and Ingi), and Kristín, Hákon's widow, and at least two poems about Earl Skúli *before* returning home from Norway in 1220. These five or six poems must have been composed at least two years and maybe as many as twenty years earlier than *Háttatal*. In other words, it was an experienced poet who composed the epitome of prosody *Háttatal*, and of course, a poet, who, like poets of previous generations, had learnt the language and versforms of poetry, as has been noted above.

An interesting comparison may be found in the poet (and presumably priest) Einarr Skúlason who composed the poem *Geisli* in memory of King Óláfr Haraldsson (which was recited in Niðaróss in 1153). This is a work of 71 stanzas in *dróttkvætt* without a single heathen *kenning*,[52] although the same poet demonstrates elsewhere (for instance in his *Øxarflokkr*[53]), that he knows full well how to use *kennings* for gold based on the tears of Freyja or the name of her beautiful daughter, Hnoss. Snorri mentions Einarr in *Skáldskaparmál* (Edda 1998: 95) as a specialist on the names of Ægir's daughters, the waves of the sea.

There is little question that both Snorri Sturluson in Oddi and Einarr Skúlason, presumably in Borgarfjörður, would have learnt the art of poetry in the same way. As noted earlier, the DG 11 4to contains some 260 verse quotations in its version of *Skáldskaparmál*, and even more

[51] Even in the twentieth century Icelanders used this kind of training to gain what in Icelandic is called *brageyra* ("an ear for verse"), see Heimir Pálsson 2014b.
[52] Skj. A I: 459–73. The only possible exception here is the mention of Óðinn's raven Huginn, which appears in stanza 29 in a *kenning* for carrion as raven's food. Nonetheless, one can assume that *huginn* was simply a common noun for a raven in Einarr's poetic language.
[53] Skj. A I: 477–79.

examples are found in RTW, mostly because of the long poems quoted *in extensor* here. One can be certain that any student who had memorized more than 250 examples of verse would have attained an intuitive feeling for the rhythm and alliteration, short and long vowels and short and long syllables for which Snorri gives no rule in either *Skáldskaparmál* or the commentary to *Háttatal*. Indeed, for those who knew enough quotations, no rules were necessary.[54]

The Corpora of Stanzas and the Dating of the *Edda*

In the Viking Society edition of The Uppsala Edda (Edda 2012) there are 264 numbered stanzas quoted in *Skáldskaparmál*. In Anthony Faulkes's Viking Society edition of R (Edda 1998) the number is 411, and if we subtract the 72 stanzas included in the long quotations mentioned above, the number is about 340. Most of the stanzas that are found in the Gks 2367 4to but not in the DG 11 4to are attributed to poets mentioned earlier in the DG 11 4to, and only four names in the R-version are new: Kolli, Steinarr, Bǫlverkr and Njáll Þorgeirsson, of whom only the last is known from other sources (particularly Njáls saga) where he is not at all celebrated as a poet and seafarer as he is in the Edda.

DG 11 4to contains the names of 63 poets, of whom eight were Norwegian, and one from Orkney. As far as we know, the other 54 were Icelandic. If we accept Wessén's dating of *Skáldskaparmál* as having been composed as late as 1225 or even later, it is a little strange that we do not find a single quotation from the 13th century and none at all from the poem that according to Wessén had started it all, *Háttatal*.

Whether they originally come from written or oral sources, it is obvious that, as noted above, the selection of stanzas and half-stanzas in *Skáldskaparmál* was made for the purpose of exemplifying the *kennings* and *heiti* in the lists, and that both the quotations and the lists formed part of

[54] It is a little difficult to see what Arngrímur Brandsson (Skj. A II: 348) and Eysteinn Ásgrímsson (Skj. A II: 394) mean when they talk about *reglur Eddu* in the middle of the fourteenth century (see Sverrir Tómasson 1996: 9). In fact the rules (*reglur*) contained in the Edda are very few. Probably the two poets are talking about the "rules" of *kennings*, i.e. how to refer to this and that. What they are careful not to do in their religious poetry is to use heathen *kennings*, and maybe in that connection all *kennings*. Their use of rhyme and alliteration shows that they knew full well how to arrange all the linguistic ornaments within the verse form.

material that had most likely been used for the training of poets over some generations. This idea is supported by the following:

Of the aforementioned 264 stanzas or half-stanzas quoted in DG 11 4to, it is worth bearing in mind that some 200 are only preserved in the *Edda* even if the skalds concerned are mentioned and quoted in several other sources. When we add that only around 25 of these stanzas are also found in Heimskringla (in which Snorri quotes around 600 stanzas), the obvious conclusion must be that in the Edda and Heimskringla he was working with two very different corpora, one of which was used to illustrate poetic style and especially *kennings* and *heiti*, while the other was used as historical source material, especially connected with the history of Norse kings.

As has been stressed above, Snorri almost certainly received his training in composing traditional poetry during his years at Oddi. As has also been noted, the procedure involved in this learning most likely was twofold, involving learning by heart lists of *kennings* and *heiti* and learning by heart a lot of half and whole stanzas of *dróttkvætt* exemplifying the *kennings* and *heiti*.

What do the Tales in Skáldskaparmál tell us about the Composition of the Edda?

As has been regularly pointed out by scholars, the aim of *Skáldskaparmál* seems to have been to organize and preserve the traditional training material used in the training of young poets in writing, in short to create a kind of textbook. However, some unsolved problems clearly remained for the scribe or compiler.

Obviously some of the *kennings* mentioned in *Skáldskaparmál* needed explanatory stories. This applies as already mentioned for example to *kennings* like *Víðgenrir Vimrar vaðs* (Þórr), *Hrungnis iljablað* (shield), *Óðreris alda* (poetry), *Fróða meldr* (gold), and *Kraka sáð* (gold) and many others, none of which are explained by the stories told in *Gylfaginning*. There is little question that some explanatory myths or tales needed to accompany the work, either in *Skáldskaparmál* itself or in some other linked work.

RTW contain four myths told in the following order in *Skáldskaparmál*: (1) *The abduction of Iðunn* (Edda 1998: 1–3), (2) *The myth of the mead of poetry*, (Edda 1998: 3–5), (3) *the story of Þórr and Hrungnir* (Edda 1998: 20–2), and (4) *the story of the giant Geirrøðr and Þórr* (Edda 1998:

24–5). It is noteworthy that the first of these, telling of Iðunn and Þjazi, actually does not serve to explain any *kenning*, except for the epilogue to the tale which explains why gold is called *munntal jǫtna* (the 'mouth-tale of *jǫtnar*') and the speech of *jǫtnar*.[55]The myth of the mead of poetry on the other hand lies behind a great many *kennings* and is absolutely necessary as a means of interpreting the language of poetry. The tales about Þórr's fight with Hrungnir and Geirrøðr meanwhile explain one *kenning* each: *Hrungnis iljablað*, and *jǫtunn Vimrar vaðs*.[56] All of these myths were told in *Skáldskaparmál* in R(TW) but in the DG 11 4to they were moved to the end of *Gylfaginning*.[57]

It is obvious that when placing these myths in *Skáldskaparmál* the author meant them to explain *kennings*. The same clearly applies to other tales told in *Skáldskaparmál* which are not all tied to the lives of the gods. Some deal only with earthly heroes. In R, it is a question of five tales explaining *kennings* for gold: those explaining the *kennings Ægis eldr* ('Ægir''s fire' Edda 1998: 40–1), *hár Sifjar* ('Sif's hair' Edda 1998: 41–3), *oturgjǫld* ('Otter-payment'[58] Edda 1998: 43–51), *Fróða mjǫl* ('Fróði's meal' Edda 1998: 51–2),[59] and *sáð Kraka* ('Kraki's seed' Edda 1998: 58–59). In the DG 11 4to, these tales are all found at the end of *Skáld-*

[55] This is of particular interest because in *Skáldskaparmál* in R, the myth is placed very close to the beginning and at some distance from the account of Iðunn (where long quotation from the poem *Haustlǫng* mostly dealing with Æsir and Þjazi is given). At the end of the story, we are then given an explanation of the *kenning munntal jǫtna* and the story of Skaði and Njǫrðr. Neither of these accounts actually has very much to do with Iðunn.

[56] It is thus interesting that in both versions of *Skáldskaparmál*, a half-stanza by Úlfr Uggason is followed by the same *kenning*-explanation (almost verbally): "Hér er hann kallaðr jǫtunn Vimrar vaðs. Á heitir Vimur er Þórr óð yfir þar er hann sótti til Geirraðargarða" (Edda 2012: 142) ('Here he is called the giant of Vimur's ford. Vimur is the name of a river that Þórr waded when he was on his way to Geirrøðr's court': Edda 2012: 143; cf. Edda 1998: 17). This quotation occurs several pages before the tale is told in Gks 2367 4to, and is not corrected when the tale is moved in the DG 11 4to. While for two of the myths (Þórr's adventures), the exemplar seems to have been if not the same then comparatively similar, in the case of the abduction of Iðunn and the myth about the mead the exemplar provided in the DG 11 4to was quite different (cf. Heimir Pálsson 2012: xliv–xlvii).

[57] The headings and certain errors in the DG 11 4to (cf. Edda 2012: 86–90) that arise from moving the myths indicate that this was a change that was most likely made in the DG 11 4to itself, rather than in an earlier copy of the U version. It was proposed in the 2012 edition of the DG 11 4to that we should talk about two scenes in the DG 11 version of *Gylfaginning*.

[58] RTW includes the additional long tale of the *Rhinegold* and the *Vǫlsungs* and *Gjúkungs*. For a discussion for this, see Faulkes 1998: xxiv.

[59] Here R adds *Grottasǫngr*, which as a rule is considered to be later interpolation (see, for example, Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014: II, 176.)

skaparmál apart from the tale of Ægirs fire. The version of the tale about Grotti given here is also very short.[60] In addition to these, the tale about *Hjaðningavíg* is given in order to explain *kennings* for battle we get (Edda 1998: 72; Edda 2012: 234).

The differences between R and the DG 11 4to with regard to the myths quoted in *Skáldskaparmál* are revealing. They are very probably best explained by the two manuscripts being based on versions created by two different redactors who had very different opinions about what a good textbook should be like. On the basis of the way he has carefully positioned the stories in *Skáldskaparmál*, the redactor of the R version seems to have believed it was best to alternate between lists of kennings and illustrative verse quotations on the one hand, and then entertaining and informative stories. The editor of the DG 11 4to on the other hand saw it most effective to isolate the material that should be learned by rote from the tales. Once again, the implications are that we should regard the Edda as having been a work under construction.

Conclusions

The first part of this article has argued that a close reading of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* raises a number of important questions about Elias Wessén's argument about the *Edda* having been composed back-to-front, beginning with *Háttatal*. It also raises questions about the usually accepted suggestions that Snorri composed the Edda in the years after 1222.

A close examination of the material contained in *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* also shows that there is actually little or no connection between these two parts of the *Edda*, and that the only connection between *Háttatal* and *Skáldskaparmál* is that the *kennings* used in *Háttatal* have many parallels to those found in the lists and poetic examples given in *Skáldskaparmál*. On the other hand, it seems highly questionable that this part of the *Edda* was essentially written as a means of explaining *Háttatal*.

[60] All of these tales except that of Ægir's fire are found in Edda 2012: 234–44. The tale about Ægir's fire nonetheless adds very little to what is said in the prose introduction of *Lokasenna* in Gks 2367, making it difficult to decide whether it is deliberately (or by mistake) dropped in the DG 11 4to, where we simply are simply given the information that gold can be called Ægir's fire (Edda 2012: 162). It is also worth bearing in mind that the Grotti-tale in the DG 11 4to seems to build on other source than in R.

On the basis of the above considerations of the text and content of the *Edda* one can state the following: Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* did not initially take the form of one single work but rather three or four,[61] and we should take seriously and literally the words of the heading in the the DG 11 4to that state that "hana hefir saman setta Snorri Sturluson" (this work was put together by Snorri Sturluson), something which appears at least to underline his role in the eventual form of the work.

This idea is of course not a new one. In this context, it is worth bearing in mind the words of three earlier scholars.

In his work on Snorri (1920) Sigurður Nordal naturally dealt with the *Edda* along with other works. Here Sigurður states directly that he believes *Gylfaginning* to have been composed before *Skáldskaparmál*. With regard to the Edda as a whole, he writes:

> Það er […] ekki ósennilegt að hugsa sér tvö skeið í þroska Snorra, hið fyrra fram yfir utanförina, þar sem aðaláhuginn er á skáldskap, hið síðara eftir utanförina, þar sem sagnaritunin er í fyrirrúmi. Edda er til orðin í nánu sambandi við kvæði Snorra. Líklegast þykir mér, að báðir fyrri hlutar hennar séu til orðnir á undan Háttatali, og þegar Snorri kvað það kvæði, hafi hann slegið tvær flugur í einu höggi, og fult eins mikið hugsað um að hann var að bæta þriðja og síðasta hlutanum við Eddu sína eins og að hann var að mæra þá Hákon og Skúla (Sigurður Nordal 1920: 22–3).[62]

> It is […] not unlikely that there were two main periods in Snorri's development as a writer, the first coming before he goes abroad, in which his main attention is paid to poetry, and the second after his time in Norway, when the historian comes to the forefront. The *Edda* came into being in close connection with Snorri's poetry. I think it most likely that both of the first parts had been composed before *Háttatal*, and that when Snorri composed that poem he was actually killing two birds with one stone, was thinking as much about developing the third and final part of the Edda as he was about praising Hákon and Skúli (Translation: Terry Gunnell).

In his *Sagalitteraturen*, the same scholar wrote:

> *Edda* (*Snorra-Edda*) er det eneste af Snorris skrifter, der tilskrives ham i et bevaret haandskrift af selve bogen. Dens sidste del er Háttatal, afsluttet i vinteren 1222–23. At Edda er fuldført omkring denne tid, men paa grundlag af ældre forarbejder, kan betragtes nogenlunde sikkert (Sigurður Nordal 1953: 219).

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[61] No position is taken here as to the earlier noted questions of whether the same author composed (or helped compose) both the *Prologue* and the Commentary to *Háttatal*.

[62] The second edition of the book from 1973 is shortened in various ways. This quote is missing from that edition.

In his introduction to the Íslenzk fornrit edition of Heimskringla Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson gives a brief review of Snorri's life, saying the following about his years in Reykjaholts between 1206 and 2018:

> Á þessum árum kann Snorri að hafa samið Eddu – nema Háttatal.[63] Við þá rannsókn dróttkvæða, sem því var samfara, hlýtur hugur hans að hafa hneigzt enn meir að sögum Noregskonunga, og jafnframt hefir honum orðið ljóst, að í kvæðunum fólst mikið söguefni, sem sagnaritarar höfðu ekki fært sér í nyt. Ritun Eddu hefir orðið Snorra bæði hvöt til þess að fást við konungasögur og hinn bezti undirbúningur að því (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941: xxiv).
>
> It was during these years that Snorri may well have composed the Edda – except for *Háttatal*. During his research into *dróttkvæði*, which must have taken place at the same time, his mind must have turned ever more to the history of the Norwegian kings, and it must have become clear to him that the poems contained a great deal of historical material which historians had not yet made use of. The composition of the Edda must have not only encouraged Snorri to work on the kings' sagas but also offered the best form of preparation for that work (Translation: Terry Gunnell).

There can be little doubt that Bjarni had received Wessén's introduction or at least heard news of it (communications between Iceland and the continent were somewhat uncertain during the war years). It might explain the footnote in which he takes back everything stated in the main text. As noted above, very few of the half-stanzas contained in *Skáldskaparmál* are also used in Heimskringla which somewhat weakens the logic of Bjarni's argument.[64]

The present investigation reaches a similar conclusion, in other words that more investigations need to be undertaken into the Edda, special attention being paid to the nature of each of the individual parts, *Gylfaginningu* (along with the *Prologue*), *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal* (along with the Commentary). Such investigations may well provide an answer to the problems of the *stemma* of the various manuscripts which seem to have arisen largely because scholars have been searching for a single original model that would lie behind all three works.

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[63] In a footnote, here, Bjarni writes: "Ekki er víst, að Edda hafi að neinu leyti verið samin fyrr en eftir útkomu Snorra 1220" ("It is not certain that any part of the *Edda* was composed before Snorri came home from Norway in 1220").

[64] To those scholars statements we can add Vésteinn Ólason previously quoted words about the three main parts of the work beeing "so different in both form and content that it may seem somewhat dubious to regard each of them as being part of a single "work"".

As has been suggested above, the collection of material for *Gylfaginning* almost certainly took a long time and even though it is probable that this work began during Snorri's years in Oddi, it is far from certain that a final version of it was completed before he moved to Borg or even Reykjaholt. No suggestions will be made here about the nature of this collection, but there is reason to imagine that the account given in the DG 11 4to of Freyr's courting of Gerðr (Edda 2012: 54) was based on that given by another storyteller or performer than the one who lies behind the account in RTW (Edda 2005: 30–32) and that the more detailed account replaced the earlier, more fragmentary account.

It is probable that Snorri's main role in the composition of *Gylfaginning* involved deciding the best form of organisation for the mythological accounts and that the time structure of *Vǫluspá* had a key role in this. Naturally one can expect that Snorri's own hand can be seen in the nature of the accounts.

The collection of material for *Skáldskaparmál* was probably different in nature to that which lies behind *Gylfaginning*. The lists of *kennings* would probably have been used for many years as part of the training for prospective poets, and thus preserved in the people's memories. They were almost certainly from the start accompanied by examples, which did not merely serve as a means of helping poets remember them. As Sigurðar Nordal wrote:

> Undirstöðuatriði eins og setning stuðla og höfuðstafa, um áherzlur og samstöfulengd, voru þann veg vaxin, að sá sem ekki lærði þau af sjálfum sér með því að heyra kvæði, gat aldrei orðið skáld (Sigurður Nordal 1920: 95).
>
> The basis premises, such as the placement of alliteration [*stuðlar* and *höfuðstafir*], of stresses and the length of syllables, were of a kind that those who did not learn them themselves from hearing poetry could never become poets (Translation: Terry Gunnell).

This is perhaps a little strong, but is reminiscent of what has been stated above about the role that learning by heart played in gaining *brageyra* (an "ear" for poetry). On the other hand one can expect that Snorri and his assitants will have taken great care with the organisation of the work, and done their best to fill in gaps in the collection of examples and so on. A large majority of the named poets appear to have come from the west and north of Iceland, but very few from the south. While this does not need to tell us much about the nature of the collection of material itself, it may well point to a large amount of material having been added to the

collection after Snorri had moved to Borgarfjörður. As with *Gylfaginning*, it is tempting to imagine that new and better versions of stories (and verses) would have replaced older ones when they came to light, as appears to have been the case with the myth of the poetic mead.

Hopefully the scholars of the future will sharpen the images that we have at present of Snorri's Edda, and not least our understanding of the purposes and background of its various parts, taking care to avoid romantic generalisations about the overall nature of the work.

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Appendices

I. Complete list of kennings in Háttatal (the numerals refer to the stanza numbers)

askr Hrungnis ilja þilju = warrior (30); auðgjafi = wealth-giver (13); auð-Týr = generous prince (48); auðviðr = man (48); árr ógnar = warrior (62); Baldr hjarar = warrior (43); baugstökkvir = generous ruler (47); bál Rínar = gold (91); bekkr blíðskálar = ale (87); bekkr sveita = bleeding wound (6); bifsœkir alms = warrior (31); blakkr brims = ship (35); blakkr Haka = ship (38); bláskíð barða = ship (79); blik brimlands = gold (45); borðgrund = sea (74); borg vilja = breast (51); brandr val-lands = goldring (44); brim horna = ale (25); brimdýr = ship (74); brjótr ítrs auðs = örlátur maður (ég) (27); byrskíð = skip (74); deilir gulls = generous ruler (2); deilir styrjar = military leader (21, 28); draugr hjarar = soldier (47); drift boga = hail of arrows (62); duna geira = battle (53); dynbrími hræs = clashing sword (50); dynbrunnr hræs = blood (32); dýr unna = ship (28); eisa fens = gold (26); eisa lýsheims = gold (22); eisa Yggs drósar = sword (50); eldr Hlakkar = battle (57); eljunstrǫnd = breast (63); eyðir baugvalla = soldier (83); él brynju = hail of missiles (62); fagrdrasill lǫgstíga = ship (22); fagrregn Mardallar hvarma = gold (42); fellir dolga = soldier (30); fengr Yggs = poem (31); fet arnar þrábarns = eagle's claw (32); fjall svana = wave (76); fjallvargr = wolf (53); fleinbraks fúra

stillir = soldier (2); fleinstýrir = solder (29); fleinþollr = soldier (75); fold fjǫrnis = head (62); folkskúr = rain of weapons (62); friðbygg Fróða = gold (43); friðrofi ljóss lagar elds = generous man (69); frost Mistar = sword (61); fættir menja = generous man (45); fǫt Hjarranda = mail-coat (53); galdr skjaldar = battle (58); galli orms = winter (83); galli strúgs = wine (25); garðr Þundar grindar jaðra = shield-wall (58); Gautr stála skúra = soldier (55); geðveggr = breast (50); glóð Hlakkar = sword (50); glóð lýslóðar = gold (45); glóð rimmu = sword (57); glygg Gǫndlar = battle (59); glymr skjalda = battle (55); gnapturn aldrs = head (50); Grana þungfarmr = gold (41); gríma grundar gjaldseiðs = helmet of terror (?) (15); Grótta glaðdrift = gold (43); grund heila = head (63); grundar vǫrðr = king (90); gullbroti = generous man (47); gullsendir = generous man (61); gunnhættir = soldier (43); gunnseiðr = sword (2); gunnstari = raven (92); Gyllir unnar = ship (19); gætir fira = king (13); hafhreinn = ship (19); hagbál lagar = gold (44); hagl sóknar = hail of missiles (62); Hamðis fang = mail-coat (2); hati Ægis báls = generous man (3); haukr Hlakkar = raven (5); herðir folka = ruler (37); hestr festa = ship (71); hestr rasta = ship (34); hestr svanfjalla = ship (83); hildigǫltr = helmet (2); hjaldr-Týr = soldier (53); hjalm-Týr = soldier (35); hjálmlestir = soldier (59); hjálms fylli Vindhlés = sword (7); hjǫrtr stinga = ship (73); hlemmidrífa Hildar = battle (54); hlíð fjǫrnis = head (65); hlífgrandi = sword (17); hlunnviggr = ship (74); hlymr Gungnis = battle (52); hlynr rasta = ship (19); hnigfákr Haka = ship (71); hniggrund hafbekks = sea (75); hnigþili randa = shields (?) (59); hoddspennir = generous man (29); hoddstiklandi = generous man (39); hof hugtúns = breast (50); holt heila bæs = head (2); hrafns munnroði = blood (5); hrannir fella hræs = blood (60); hrannir Hárs saltunnu = mead of poetry/poem (31); hrannláð = sea (35); hregg Hrundar grundar = battle (61); hreggǫld Hristar = battle (59); hreintjarnir horna = ale (24); hringdropi = gold (42); hringskemmir = generous man (47); hríð vopna = battle (65); hrími hrælјóma = battle (61); hyrr hjálma = sword (58); hættir vígs = soldier (41); ilstafna sveiti = blood (32); ís álmdrósar = sword (60); jaðarr fólks = king (55); jǫfurr vindræfrs = god (12); klettr herða = head (65); land svarðar = head (57); leið vala = arm (48); limgarmr = storm (78); lundr hjarar = soldier (60); malmskúr = battle (39); mann-baldr = outstanding person (36); mála Heðins = battle (49); mála úlfs bága = earth (3); meginskíð fleina lands = spear (65); meiðr sævar rǫðuls = man (17); meldr Fenju = gold (43); menglǫtuðr = generous man (95); menstiklir = generous man (44); merkir blóðsvara = soldier (92); morðflýtir = war-leader (39); móðir mellu dolgs = earth (3); mót málms = battle (52); mætir oddbraks = soldier (70); naðr sóknar = sword (6); nauð boga = arm (48); oddr hrænaðra = spear-point (79); ǫrbrjótr odds bláferla = soldier (31); orðsasker = teeth (87); ormr vals = sword (6); otrgjǫld = gold (41); ógn naðrs = winter (83); ógnsvellir = battle-increaser (39); ramsnákr rógs = sword (6); randgarðr = shield-wall (79); rauðsylgr bens = blood (56); raukn kjalar = ship (77); regn Mistar = hail of missiles (62); reið heiðar = arm (48); reiðmálmr Gnitaheiðar = gold (41); reinn Røkkva = ship (72); reitr vals = arm (42); rekr ǫldu loga = generous man (17); remmi-Týr rógleiks = soldier (14); rjóðr hjǫrs = soldier (41); rǫf Ránar = gold (26); rǫst jastar = ale (25); rógálfr

= soldier (75); rúna Míms vinar = earth (3); Ræki-Njǫrðr rjóð-vendils randa = soldier (13); rǫf spannar = gold (44); samþykkjar søkk = gold (?) (43); seimgildir = chieftain (29); seimþreytir = generous man (32); seimþverrir = generous man (47); sendir vandbaugs = chieftain (28); serkr styrs = mail-coat (7); setr buðlunga = state (15); sig-Njǫrðr = soldier (55); skattr Niflunga = gold (41); sker liðar = gold (46); skerðir hringa = generous man (63); skerðir Mistar lauka grundar = soldier (85); skerðir Skǫglar serks = soldier (64); skipandi marblakks = sailor (46); skíð hlunna = ship (76); skotskýrir = hail of arrows (16); skúr hjálma = battle (57); skúr Hlakkar = battle (64); snarvinda ský lindar = battle (32); sneiðir seima = generous man (71); snerpir Hlakkar = chieftain (42); sœkir síks glóðar = soldier (17); sóknvallar svellir = battle increaser (61); sprund Hjaðningar = battle (49); stafr gunnveggs = soldier (61); stallr gelmis = arm (2); stefnir stálhrafna = sailor (59); stiklir mens = generous man (60); stígr kjalar = sea (76); stígr sefa = breast (6); stóð Róða = ships (21); stærir hjaldrs = battle increaser (39); stœrir styrs = battle increaser (68); stǫkkvilundr stála = soldier (63); støkkvi-Móði styrjar glóða = soldier (85); støkkvir stáls dynblakka = sailor (31); sveiti sœfis = blood (54); sverð góma = tongue (85); sæfuni = gold (46); sǫngr sverða = battle (16); tjald Hǫgna meyjar = shield (49); tjǫld móðsefa = breast (50); treystir folka = ruler (34); undgagl = bird of prey (62); valbjórr = blood (11); valdi styrjar = chieftain (63); valdr stála = soldier (44); valdr vígfoldar vandar = soldier (30); vandbaugsskaði = soldier (86); varrsíma = line of wake (35); vápnrjóðr = soldier (16); veðr Sköglar = battle (54); veggr Sigars = shield (59); vegr Haka = sea (76); vellbrjótr = generous man (16); vellbroti = generous man (46); verbál = gold (46, 93); viðr randa = soldier (45); vitar valstaðar = goldrings (86); vígdrótt = army (16); víg-Gjǫll = flowing blood (6); yskelfir = soldier (11); ýtandi auðs = generous man (46); þjóðár hræs = flowing blood (7); þollr grœnna skjalda = soldier (30); þollr jǫru = soldier (53).

II. The names of metrum in Háttatal in different sources

List in DG 11, fol. 48r (U) Edda 2012: 260	Háttatal DG 11, (fol. 48v–56r) Edda 2012: 262–306	Háttatal Gks 2367 (R) Edda 1999: 3–25	Háttalykill
Dróttkvæðr háttr	Dróttkvæðr háttr		Hl 3 (no name)
Kendr háttr	Kendr háttr	Kendr háttr	
Rekit	Rekit	[Rekit]	
Sannkennt	Sannkent	[Sannkenning]	
Tvíriðit	Tvíriðit	Tvíriðit	
Nýgervingar	Nýgjǫrvingar	Nýgjǫrvingar	
Oddhent	Oddhent	[Oddhent]	

List in DG 11, fol. 48r (U) Edda 2012: 260	Háttatal DG 11, (fol. 48v–56r) Edda 2012: 262–306	Háttatal Gks 2367 (R) Edda 1999: 3–25	Háttalykill
	Qnnur oddhending		
Sextánmælt	Hér segir af sextán málum	Sextánmæltr háttr	Hl 21 sextánmælt
Áttmælt	Áttmæltr háttr	Áttmælt	Hl 38 áttmælt
Fjórðungalok	Inn þriði	[Hinn þriði]	
Stælt	Enn fjórði / inn fimmti	Stælt [Hinn fjórði]	
Hjástælt		Hjástælt	
Langlokum	Inn sjaundi	[Hinn sjaundi]	Hl 30 langlokum
Afleiðingum		[Inn átti]	
Drǫgur	Drǫgur	Drǫgur [Inn níundi]	
Refhvǫrf	Hér segir um refhvǫrf	Refhvǫrf [in mestu]	
Qnnur refhvǫrf	Annat refhvarf	Qnnur refhvǫrf [in mestu]	
Þriðju refhvǫrf	Mestu refhvǫrf	En mestu refhvǫrf[inn þriði]	
		In minni refhvǫrf	
Qnnur en minni		Qnnur in minni	Hl 28 refrunur hin mæiri
En þriðja		[In þriðju] In minztu	Hl 20 redrun hin minni
Refhvarfabróðir		Refhvarfabróðir	
Dunhent			Hl 33 dunhent
Tilsagt		Tilsagt	Hl 34 tilsegjandi
Orðskviðuháttr		Orðskviðuháttr	
Álagsháttr		Álagsháttr	Hl 40 álagsháttr
Tvískelft		Tvískelft	Hl 41 skjalfhent
Detthent		Detthendr háttr	Hl 18 detthent
Draugsháttr		Draugsháttr	Hl 36 no name
Bragarháttr		Bragarbót	
Liðhendum		Riðhendr	
Veggjat		Veggjat	
Flagðalag		Flagðaháttr	Hl 32 flagðalag

List in DG 11, fol. 48r (U) Edda 2012: 260	Háttatal DG 11, (fol. 48v–56r) Edda 2012: 262–306	Háttatal Gks 2367 (R) Edda 1999: 3–25	Háttalykill
	[skjálfhenda]	In forna skjálfhenda	
Þríhent		Þríhent	Hl 6 JR þríhent (name added by Jonas Rugman)
		Hinn dýri háttr	Hl 9 Hinn dýri háttr
	[skjálfhenda en nýja]	Tiltekit	
		Greppaminni	Hl 23 greppaminni
		Liðhendur	
		Rétthent	
	Hin minni alhenda	In minni alhenda	
		Alhent	
	Stamhent	Stamhendr háttr	
		Samhent	
		Iðurmælt	Hl 29 iðurmælt
		Klifat	Hl 12 no name
		Stúfr	
		Meiri stúfr	Hl 31 alstýft
		Hinn mesti stúfr	Hl 5 – no name
		Skothendr	
		Liðhendr	
		[Ragnar loðbrók]	
		Torf-Einars háttr	
		Egils háttr	

Summary

Since Elias Wessén's facsimile edition of the *Codex Regius of the Younger Edda* (1940) most scholars have agreed (if a little hesitantly) with his theory that the *Prose Edda* was composed back to front, and that *Háttatal* was the first part to be written. This theory has also played an important role in the dating of Edda. The present article begins by investigating the arguments that lay behind Wessén's conclusions

and finds them to be very weak. On the basis of the discussion conducted here of the potential connection and lack of connection that exists between *Háttatal*, *Skáldskaparmál*, *Gylfaginning* and the *Prologue*, the conclusion is that as several Icelandic scholars have earlier hinted, it is necessary for future scholars to carry out more research into the various parts of the *Edda* as individual works rather than as a whole. As is shown, there is good reason for postulating that the corpus of tales that lies behind *Gylfaginning* was probably essentially gathered during Snorri's years in Oddi (1180–1198) and that this might also apply to the corpus of stanzas and lists of *kennings* that form the lion's share of *Skáldskaparmál*, even if the final touches to these didactic works was written later, perhaps during Snorri's years in Reykjaholt (after 1206 and before the visit to Norway in 1218). This might explain why earlier efforts to find a single archetype for the *Edda* as a whole have hitherto been more or less in vain: The likelihood is that for *Edda* as a whole there was not just one archetype but it is more a question of three works which were later assembled into one, along with a *Prologue* which may have previously accompanied a version of *Gylfaginning*.

There is little question that the poet who wrote *Háttatal* in 1222–25 had already attained training in composing verse that provided him with a detailed knowledge of the poetic language, *kennings* and *heiti*. However, with regard to the potential connection between *Háttatal* and the rest of the *Edda*, it needs to be borne in mind that there was actually very little need to explain the poetic language used in the poem. On the contrary: anyone trained in listening to skaldic poetry could most likely have understood almost all of the roughly 230 *kennings* in the poem, very few of which actually build upon tales told in *Skáldskaparmál* and *Gylfaginning*.

It seems likely that Snorri's main innovation for the cultural history of Iceland with the various parts of the *Edda* was his organisation of the extant heathen mythology and the materials that had been used to train poets over the centuries. In short, his skill here was more that of an editor more than of a creative author. Indeed, this is reflected in in the DG 11 4to manuscript in Uppsala, which states that he '*setti saman*', or compiled existing knowledge about the heathen gods and the traditional poetry.

Keywords: Edda composition, dating of Prose-Edda, Gylfaginning, Skáldskaparmál, Háttatal, Prologue, textbooks

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