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**PHD THESIS SUBMITTED TO UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**

**2004**

**BRIGHT DREAMS AND BITTER EXPERIENCES: DREAMS IN SIX SAGAS  
OF ICELANDERS**

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## Abstract

This thesis is a contribution to the ongoing discussion of dreams in the *Íslendingasögur*. Most previous scholarship on this subject has dealt with one of the following: either attempted to identify a scheme to explain the origin of saga dreams (e.g. identifying influence from European dream-book theory on saga dreams), or attempted to explain the saga dreams using what can be referred to as the “matching approach”, that is taking specific elements from the dream and seeking to understand their relevance to the rest of the text.

My thesis hangs upon the following two hypotheses:

1. saga dreams are essentially inconsistent in their nature and therefore saga readers were required to bring to bear a variety of interpretative techniques when seeking to understand them, and
2. saga dreams use complex and multi-layered symbolism. The imagination of the medieval saga readership allowed and even expected dream-symbolism to operate on a number of levels and for dream-symbols to have a number of referents elsewhere in the text.

In order to test these hypotheses, I have reviewed all of the dreams in all of the *Íslendingasögur*, but chosen six particular texts to seek to understand how these authors used dreams. These texts are as follows:

*Droplaugarsona saga*

*Njáls saga*

*Laxdæla saga*

*Víga-Glúms saga*

*Gísla saga Súrssonar*

*Harðar saga*

I have devoted a chapter to each of these six sagas. For each dream I have written a ‘context’ that allows the dream to be understood. I have then presented a text of the dream alongside an English translation. Following this I have written a short commentary dealing with some of the textual problems in the passage, identifying the role of the dream and seeking to understand the way in which the medieval reader would have understood it, suggesting loans, analogues and analogies elsewhere in Norse literature.

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## Acknowledgements

I have been greatly assisted in the production of this work by the provision of a grant for three years from the Arts and Humanities Research Board, for which I am very grateful.

I would like to thank both my tutors Professor Richard Perkins and Dr Richard North for all their help, support and exacting standards. Inevitably any errors are entirely my own.

In addition I would like to thank Daisy Neijmann for additional language support, Christopher Saunders and the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* for providing advanced drafts of part of the forthcoming volume and to Bernadine McCreesh who also made available forthcoming material. I am grateful to my former tutors at Leeds for inspiring me to achieve in this rewarding area and to members of *Orðhenglar* past and present, in particular Peter Foote and Alison Finlay who have both offered encouragement and wisdom in equal measure. Thank you to my family for love and support.

Most of all, thanks to my wife, without whose encouragement this project would not have been started and without whose love it could never have been finished.

Jamie Cochrane, September 2004

## Chapter I: Introduction

### I.i Foreword

This thesis is a contribution to the ongoing discussion of dreams in the *Íslendingasögur*. Most previous scholarship has dealt with one the following: either attempted to identify a scheme to explain the origin of saga dreams (e.g. identifying influence from European dream-book theory on saga dreams), or attempted to explain the saga dreams using what can be referred to as the “matching approach”, that is taking specific elements from the dream and seeking to understand their relevance to the rest of the text.

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My approach is intentionally different from all previous scholars working in this area (see below). I am not seeking to describe a viking way of dreaming, nor am I seeking to suggest a single source from which saga literature received its rich tapestry of saga dreams. My method is to seek to explore saga dreams through a series of examples, working from the minutiae of understanding a single saga, towards gaining a greater knowledge of the medieval saga reader's understanding of dreams. I hope that each of my chapters, focussed on a particular saga, may contribute in some small way to the overall understanding of that text. However, these are not six individual studies, but chapters of an ongoing discussion. Accordingly I have kept the introduction of this thesis to a minimum, and reserved the argument, both general and specific, for the discussions of the dreams.

## I.ii Scope of survey

I have limited my discussion to the six texts listed above. The selection of these texts has been made according to the extent to which they fulfil the following criteria:

1. The saga has literary importance to the canon.
2. The dreams in the saga are a good illustration of a particular type of saga dream.
3. The dreams have a particular literary significance or interest for the saga reader.
4. The dreams show a particular interest in dreaming on the part of the writer.
5. Variation between the manuscripts of a particular saga throws interesting light on the dreams in that saga.

This selection is inevitably arbitrary. One might argue that *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* has several interesting and important dreams and is of greater importance to the canon than *Harðar saga*. Similarly, though not generally recognised as a great work of literature, *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* contains many of the best examples of word-play in saga dreams. Since my aim, however, is to illuminate the dreams contained in sagas rather than to make generalisations regarding the nature of sagas dreams, such an argument does not concern me. In order to test my hypotheses it is sufficient to test whether the saga readership would accept various means of dream interpretation and complex dream symbolism in a sample of sagas.

By ‘dream’ I refer to: “A train of thoughts, images or fancies passing through the mind during sleep,” (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1973, I, 606). A dream is still a dream, despite some validating factor upon waking indicating that the experience really happened, such as a token left by a dream-spirit. I do not include, however, supernatural experiences or visions that occur while a character is awake. Nor do I include trances or visions occurring in induced states of ecstasy. I have used the terms ‘dream’ and ‘vision’ to distinguish between sleeping dreams and waking visions, rather than to distinguish between symbolic and non-symbolic dreams as these terms are sometimes used. I have also deliberately avoided the use of Latin terms such as *visio* or *somnium*, unless specifically referring to Latin texts.

The six sagas are chosen from the corpus of the sagas of Icelanders, or *Íslendingasögur*. These are prose narratives written in Iceland, in Old Norse in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They are sometimes referred to as ‘Icelandic family sagas’. They tell of the deeds of Icelanders from the settlement (c.870) to the mid eleventh century. In order to place my six particular sagas in a context, I have considered the dreams in the remaining *Íslendingasögur*. For the purposes of this study I am considering thirty-nine texts published in the Íslenzk fornrit editions - these are

listed in the Appendix. There are some 111 definite mentions of dreams and dreaming in the sagas, and these are listed in the Appendix. Of these, about 100 are narrated to the reader in detail.

### I.iii Practicalities

I have referred to all sagas by name, but in the cases of sagas whose names include patronymics or nicknames, I have omitted these after the first mention (except where this may lead to confusion between texts). Thus *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa* is *Bjarnar saga*, and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Gísla saga*. For references I have always used the abbreviations set out in the *ONP Registre* (in a few cases this leads to surprising abbreviations, such as *GullÞ* for *Þorskfirðinga saga*, also known as *Gull-Þóris saga*). Manuscript names and dates are given in the form they appear in the *ONP Registre*.

Wherever possible I have sought to use the editions published in the Íslenzk fornrit series (published 1933-present). In the cases of the six sagas I have concentrated my attention on, I have sought to supplement these readings from critical or diplomatic editions. In all cases I have indicated the source of the reference using the saga abbreviation followed by the date of the edition: e.g. *Nj* 1954, indicates Einar Ól. Sveinsson's edition of *Njáls saga* (=Íslenzk fornrit 12). Where editions give chapter references these have been included (except where the chapters refer to part of a larger work). All Eddic verse is quoted from Gustav Neckel's volume (revised by Hans Kuhn) (*Edda* 1962). References to Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* are to Anthony Faulkes' edition 1988-1999.

References to books and articles have been given according to the guidelines outlined in the *MHRA Style Guide* using the author-date system (see *MHRA* 2002, 54-55). To avoid confusion references to introductions to saga editions have been referred to separately from their texts under the name of the editor. Unless otherwise stated all English glosses of Old Norse words come from Cleasby 1957 (though some archaisms have been updated).

I have sought to normalise Old Norse prose as unobtrusively as possible and wherever possible have retained the forms used in the Íslenzk fornrit editions. I have, however, normalised the text found in volume 13 of the series, which differs markedly from the other volumes. Skaldic verse has been quoted from the Íslenzk fornrit edition without any changes. Eddic verse has been quoted from Neckel's edition, without any changes.

The translations that are given alongside the text should be considered in the light of the commentary beneath them. This is particularly relevant to skaldic verse, where the translations inevitably form an interpretation of the text. Certain license has been used to attempt to make the translations more readable to a modern English reader. These include the removal of unnecessary phrases interrupting direct speech and



changes of some present tense verbs to past. I have not translated words such as *fylgja*, *dís*, *hugr* and *hamingja*, but detailed explanations of all of these words are given in the commentary.

### I.iv Previous criticism

In his 1887 book, *Saga Time*, J. Fulford Vicary includes a chapter entitled “Dreams of the sagas”. In this chapter (pages 16 to 52) Vicary describes dreams occurring in several sagas. Although his approach is essentially descriptive rather than analytical, Vicary (1887, 17) makes a number of interesting points, noting that “the fulfilment of these dreams is never in any case defective, although such fulfilment may be immediate or delayed for very many years”, but despite this “if there was a warning it was little noticed, although strong faith was attached to dreams”. Perhaps most interestingly, Vicary (1887, 16-17) draws a parallel between saga dreams and the construction of kennings in Norse poetry:

Swords are described as the fish-blade, meaning that the blade was like a fish; also Odin’s leeches, or as snakes with biting tongues. The sagas are often so full of periphrase, and the figurative meaning so dark, and taken at so great a distance from its original sense, that more thought must have been suggested to the mind than the skáld had conceived. This, no doubt, led the imaginations of people in the saga time to dwell on the nature and importance of dreams, with the result that we have the stories, if not the histories, of the dreams of persons who lived eight or ten centuries since.

Vicary therefore seems to equate the mind of an audience prepared to untangle the complexities of skaldic verse with a mind that would have an interest in decoding complex dreams. While undoubtedly a simplification, this explanation of the particular place held by dreams in the Icelandic mindset from the saga-age to the present may contain some truth. It also fits well with the work on puns in saga dreams a few years later, published in Wilhelm Henzen’s 1890 book.

Henzen’s book *Über die Träume in der altnordischen Sagalitteratur* is the first systematic approach to saga dreams. The first section (pages 1 to 17) considers the etymology of dream words in Germanic languages, in particular the distinction between those meaning ‘joyous noise’ and ‘dream’, and the tendency in Germanic languages to refer to dreamers in the accusative. The second section (*Teil I*, pages 18 to 33) considers the relationship between dreams and fate. The latter parts of the book describe the various different types of saga dreams, including fetch dreams (*der Fylgjentraum*), Christian dreams, and those involving living people, gods and other beings. Perhaps the most important contribution of Henzen’s book was identifying the importance of word-play and puns in saga dreams. Henzen identified two types of saga dream involving word-play: the *Redensarttraum* (‘set-phrase dream’) and the *Wortwitztraum* (‘pun-dream’). Henzen’s material comes from a wide range of sources.

He refers to dreams among the *konungasögur*, *biskupasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, *riddarasögur* and Eddic verses as well as the *Íslendingasögur*. Henzen's book remains one of the most detailed and useful analyses of saga dreams, although his purpose was not essentially a literary one, but to understand what Norsemen believed about dreams and dreaming.

Following Henzen, the next important contribution to the study of dreams is Sofus Larsen's 1917 article, "Antik og nordisk drømmetro". Larsen is the first to suggest a connection between saga dreams and the medieval dream-book the *Somniale Danielis*. Larsen's article is somewhat neglected by his successors. It appears in neither Haeckel's or Kelchner's bibliography. It was not until Gabriel Turville-Petre's 1958 article "Dreams in Icelandic Tradition" (reprinted in *Nine Norse studies*, 1972b), that Larsen's ideas are developed. He differs from Turville-Petre, however, in that he sees the influence of the *Somniale* as having occurred orally from Byzantium, rather than as the result of the availability of dream-books in Iceland. Although his views were partially vindicated by Turville-Petre's eventual publication of an Icelandic *Somniale Danielis* manuscript (Turville-Petre 1968), Larsen overstates the influence of dream-books on saga tradition.

Margarete Haeckel's 1934 book, *Die Darstellung und Funktion des Traumes in der isländischen Familiensaga*, was the first to deal with saga dreams as literary constructs. Haeckel concentrates on dreams in the sagas of Icelanders, estimating an average of three or four dreams per saga (Haeckel 1934, 4). She creates a distinction between the world-view (*Weltanschauung*) of dream-beliefs (i.e. what the vikings supposedly believed about dreaming) and the literary and stylistic uses of dreams in sagas and it is the latter areas where she concentrates her study. Haeckel groups saga dreams according to the motifs used, the way in which they relate to the waking world, the symbolism and the portrayal of the dreams in the text. The latter half of the book (*zweiter Teil*) concentrates on the function of these dreams, many, though not all, of which are prophetic. Haeckel, like Henzen before her, emphasises the close relationship between dreaming and fate within the sagas. Only a year later, and seemingly without having had access to Haeckel's book, Georgia Kelchner's book, *Dreams in Old Norse Literature and their Affinities in Folklore*, was published. The first two chapters (pages 1 to 10) are introductory. The third chapter (pages 11 to 16) groups dreams into those indicating adversity and those indicating prosperity. Of the adversity group Kelchner (1935, 11) notes that only small percentage of saga dreams relate to "calamities owing

either to the forces of nature or to the worries and tragedies of everyday life as distinct from those incident to strife and combat". In contrast adversity dreams in folklore are (Kelchner 1935, 11-12): "primarily concerned with peril arising from the forces of nature, from the activities of supernatural beings, from visitations of the dead, or from the general calamities of epidemic or famine". Chapters IV and V both discuss symbolic images in dreams. Chapter IV (pages 17 to 53) discusses dream spirits (fetches, guardian spirits, trolls and gods), whereas chapter V (pages 54 to 61) concentrates on what she refers to as "object symbolism". In chapter VI (pages 62 to 72) she discusses the appearance of people (both living and dead in dreams). Perhaps the most useful section of Kelchner's work is the 78 page appendix (pages 77 to 144), where she produces texts and translations of many of the saga dreams discussed in her work. This appendix includes dreams from some 22 *Íslendingasögur*, several *konungasögur* and *biskupasögur*, *fornaldarsögur*, Eddic poems, *Landnámabók*, *Íslendingabók* and *Sturlunga saga*. This has formed a useful source book for many scholars writing since. Nevertheless the appendix should be approached with some degree of caution. It is by no means comprehensive, even for those sagas that are included. For example Þorsteinn Ingimundarson's dream in *Vatnsdæla saga* is included, but Þorkell silfri's dream in the same saga is not, despite being discussed at some length on pages 20-22. There are occasional inaccuracies in translation and, by her own admission, translations of the skaldic verse are based upon Finnur Jónsson's Danish paraphrases rather than the original.

Peter Hallberg's 1956 book *Den isländska sagan*, (translated into English as *The Icelandic Saga*, 1962) contains a chapter about "Dreams and Destiny". Hallberg sees dreams closely intertwined with fate, and those sagas such as *Laxdæla saga* and *Gísla saga* in which we find the best examples of dreams "are also based on a pronounced fatalism" (Hallberg 1962, 87). Nora K. Chadwick's 1968 article "Dreams in Early European Literature" identifies a number of interesting parallels between dreams found in Norse and Celtic sources. Tree dreams in Norse literature have been the focus of two articles by Paul Schach "Some Parallels to the Tree Dream in *Ruodlieb*" (1954) and "Symbolic Dreams of Future Renown in Old Icelandic Literature" (1971). More recently Joan Turville-Petre has discussed the same subject in "A Tree Dream in Old Icelandic" (1988). Both have sought to trace the development of this motif from classical models.

Gabriel Turville-Petre's contribution to our understanding of the saga dream is considerable and diverse, including his handbooks *Myth and Religion of the North* (1964) and *Scaldic Verse* (1976); his article "Gísli Súrsson and his Poetry: Traditions and Influences" (Turville-Petre 1972c); and his edition of *Víga-Glúms saga* (second edition 1960). His most important contribution, however, is the three articles published between 1958 and 1968 on Icelandic dream tradition. In "Dreams in Icelandic Tradition" (Turville-Petre 1972b), he describes the wide variety of dream-symbolism both in saga dreams and in later folklore. He concludes the article by observing the prevalence of dream books in modern Icelandic, which he claims "derive largely from Pseudo-Daniel [i.e. the *Somniale Danielis*], although they are larded with dream-puns (especially those of names), native experience and prejudice, which could never have occurred to Pseudo-Daniel" (Turville-Petre 1972b, 46). When he wrote this article, Turville-Petre did not know of the existence of the Icelandic text of the *Somniale*, and merely suggests that it "exercised an indirect influence on early Icelandic poets and prose-writers" (47). Turville-Petre revisits a number of these ideas in "Dream Symbols in Old Icelandic Literature" (1966), in particular discussing *Gísla saga*. In the latter half of the article, Turville-Petre develops his views on the influence of the *Somniale*. Since his previous article he has discovered the existence of an Icelandic text of the *Somniale* in AM 764 4<sup>o</sup>. In 1968 Turville-Petre published "An Icelandic Version of the *Somniale Danielis*". In this short article he includes both an Icelandic text and English translation, together with a single page facsimile of the relevant leaf and a short commentary describing some of the relationships between the Icelandic version and other versions of the *Somniale*.

Since Turville-Petre's work, most contributions to the discussion have tended to focus on a single work, such as Richard Perkins' "The Dreams of *Flóamanna saga*" (1974-1977), Thomas Bredsdorff's "Sanddrømmeren: *Gisle Súrsson's saga*" (1964), Robert James Glendinning's *Träume und Vorbedeutung in der Íslendinga Saga Sturla Þórðarsons* (1974)<sup>1</sup>, and Peter Foote's "Three Dream-Stanzas in *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*" (1986). Perkins' article takes each of the thirteen dreams in *Flóamanna saga* in turn, discussing the textual problems of the dreams and identifying analogues. Bredsdorff's article concentrates on the dreams of Gísli Súrsson and

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<sup>1</sup> Glendinning also wrote two articles on the subject of dreams in *Íslendinga saga*: "The Dreams in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga Saga* and Literary Consciousness in 13<sup>th</sup> Century Iceland" (1973-1974) and "Saints, Sinners, and the Age of the Sturlungs: Two Dreams from *Íslendinga Saga*" (1966).

considers the idea of dreaming ‘true’ dreams as portrayed in his saga. Glendinning’s work on *Íslendinga saga* identifies the author’s literary use of dreams and suggests that Sturla Þórðarson used dreams to indicate moral judgements on characters and events. Both Dietrich Hofmann’s “Hrafnkels und Hallfreðs Traum: Zur Verwendung mündlicher Tradition in der *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*” (1976) and Hermann Pálsson’s “Hallfreðs Traum in der *Hrafnkels saga* und seine literarischen Parallelen” (1979) discuss the dream at the beginning of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*. Matthías Jónasson’s (1986) brief article includes a number of interesting observations, particularly regarding the literary use of dream in the *Íslendingasögur*. Matthías approaches the dreams from a post-Freudian perspective, observing the plausibility of many of them (although he stops short of suggesting that they actually occurred). Margaret Cormack (1994) discusses dreams in the sagas of Icelandic saints. Árni Einarsson (1997) describes the numerological methods behind the extensive description of the dream temple in *Rauðúlfs þáttur*, in his article “Saint Olaf’s Dream House: a Medieval Cosmological Allegory”. Árni’s explanations are illuminating, although he stops short of indicating whether the many learned medieval texts he cites were known directly to the author, or whether the author merely copied the motifs from elsewhere. Furthermore the relatively exceptional nature of *Rauðúlfs þáttur* means that it is hard to apply Árni’s theories to other saga dreams.

Since Kelchner, the only full length study devoted to saga dreams is Alexander Argüelles’ unpublished 1994 PhD thesis *Viking dreams: Mythological and Religious Dream Symbolism in the Old Norse Sagas*. Argüelles’ work is largely a response to Turville-Petre’s articles and the prevailing view that saga dreams were influenced by the *Somniale Danielis*. Argüelles compares what he refers to as the “dreamscape” of the sagas of Icelanders (which he sees as the “most indigenous class of Old Norse saga”(43)) against the Icelandic version of the *Somniale*. After the introductory section, Argüelles describes in depth the historical contextualisation of the sagas (pages 52 to 145) and the theoretical contextualisation of dreams elsewhere in European literature (pages 146 to 228). In the fourth section (229-314) Argüelles describes the “dreamscape” of the *Íslendingasögur* and *Íslendingaþættir*. This section concludes with a systematic presentation of the main symbols found in these texts (316-324). Argüelles presents these symbols as if he were writing a medieval dream-book, even mirroring the grammar of the actual Icelandic *Somniale*, for example (Argüelles 1994, 316): “If it is dreamed to you that the branches of a great tree cover a whole land, that means a sole

king will come to rule”. This shows a sense of humour on his part (as much of his dissertation is devoted to arguing against Turville-Petre’s theory of the influence of the *Somniale* on the sagas). It also provides a reference tool, though one only of limited use as most of the 63 entries carry a single reference. However it also exposes the reductive nature of Argüelles’ arguments. For example number 46 reads: “If it is dreamed to you that a goddess comes to you, the *hamingja* of your family will pass to you” (322). This clearly refers to Glúmr’s dream in chapter 9 of *Víga-Glúms saga* (see section VI.ii below). However one might argue that several of Gísli’s dreams in *Gísli saga* fit this topos, but have a very different meaning (similarly in the *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*, *ÞSHDr* 1950, 323-325). The presentation of the information in this way also does not allow for the many varied ways in which these symbols refer to their meanings. In fact throughout his dissertation Argüelles devotes very little space to textual understanding of the dreams. There is almost no comment on dream-puns, inconsistencies between dreams and fulfilment or textual variants. The fact that among the 63 entries there are no references to dreams in the *þættir* also calls into question Argüelles’ decision to treat the sagas and *þættir* as a single body of literature. The final two sections of Argüelles’ thesis are a comparative study of dreams in other saga genres (326-421) and a conclusion (423-440).

The most recent contributions to the study of saga dreams have been Hilda Ellis Davidson’s 2001 article “Dreams in Old Norse and Old Irish literature”, Lars Lönnroth “Dreams in the Sagas” (2002), Mona Hansen “Helbredelse gjennom inkubasjonsdrømmer – et blikk langsmed den antikke, kristne og den norrøne tradisjonslinjen” (2003) and no fewer than three papers at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference (Busygin 2003; Cochrane 2003; and McCreesh 2003).

## Chapter II. The dreams of *Droplaugarsona saga*

### II.i Introduction

*Droplaugarsona saga* is generally thought to be among the earliest *Íslendingasögur*, probably composed early in the thirteenth century (Finlay 1993, 143). The saga tells of the conflict between Helgi Droplaugarson and Helgi Ásbjarnarson, which culminates in the killing of the former, and the revenge of Grímr Droplaugarson upon Helgi Ásbjarnarson for the killing of his brother. The only complete manuscript of the saga is preserved in AM 132 fol. (*Möðruvallabók*). A fragment, AM 162 C 2-3 fol. is also extant, but of no relevance to the present discussion as it does not preserve the chapter including Helgi's dream.

### Editions:

*Dpl* 1902-1903 = *Droplaugarsona saga*. In *Austfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Jakob Jakobsen. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 29.

*Dpl* 1950 = *Droplaugarsona saga*. In *Austfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenszk fornrit 11.

### Translations:

*Dpl* 1997 = *The Saga of Droplaug's Sons*. Trans. Rory McTurk. In *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders IV*.



## II.ii Helgi's dream of wolves

### Context:

Helgi Droplaugarson is a young lawyer, whose ambition gets him into conflict with the *goði* (district priest-chieftain) Helgi Ásbjarnarson. They first come into conflict when Helgi and his brother Grímr kill a freed-man of Helgi Ásbjarnarson, Þorgrímr torðyfill for slandering their mother. This animosity presents itself in a series of lawsuits between the namesakes, culminating in Helgi Droplaugarson being sentenced to lesser outlawry. Despite his sentence, Helgi remains in Iceland and even continues to attend public meetings as if nothing has happened.

Prior to his dream, Helgi and Grímr are travelling home in a party of nine men, including a man named Þorkell, with whom Helgi has recently entered into a bond of friendship. The brothers have just visited Þorgrímr skinnhúfa to effect a divorce between him and their kinswoman Rannveig. As a parting gesture Rannveig throws her husband's clothes into the cesspit. Following their visit they return along Eyvindardalr. However, after their departure, Þorgrímr visits Helgi Ásbjarnarson, reminding him of a vow to confront Helgi Droplaugarson and musters a force of eighteen men to attack Helgi. At this point Helgi has the dream quoted below. Following the dream, the party are attacked by the eighteen men in Eyvindardalr before they can reach Kálfshváll. During the attack, all of Helgi Droplaugarson's party are killed or seriously injured. Helgi's younger brother Grímr later recovers from the wounds he receives at this battle to avenge his brother.

### Text:

*Dpl* 1902-1903, ch. 10, pp. 159-160.

*Dpl* 1950, ch. 10, p. 161.

Þá er þar til at taka, er Þorkell kemr í Fannardal til fǫruneytis við Helga Droplaugarson, ok váru þar um nóttina. Helgi lét illa í svefni, ok var hann þrim sinum vakðr á þeiri nótt. Þorkell spyrr, hvat hann dreymði. Helgi segir: "Eigi mun ek segja." Nú klæðask þeir. Helgi bað Þorstein sjá um kost Rannveigar. "Lát fylgja henni, ef þú vill, til bús Gríms, bróður

Now we take up the story where Þorkell arrived at Fannardalr and joined company with Helgi Droplaugarson and they stayed there overnight. Helgi was restless in his sleep and he woke up three times that night. Þorkell asked what he had been dreaming. Helgi said: "I will not say." Then they got dressed. Helgi asked Þorsteinn to take care of Rannveig's affairs: "Ensure she is accompanied, if you will, to the farm of Grímr

míns.” Þeir fóru fyrir dag útan ór Fannardal ok váru níu saman ok upp á heiði. Ok þá er lokit var brekkum ǫllum, hvíldisk Helgi, því at honum var orðit erfitt, ok lagði undir sik feld sinn. Þá kló hann kinn sína ok gneri hokuna ok mælti þetta: “Þat er vænna, áðr kveld komi, at þar klæi lítt. Eða er þér, Þorkell, nú jafnmikill hugr á at heyra draum minn sem í nótt?” Hann segir: “Eigi er mér nú minni hugr á því en þá.” “Mér þótti,” kvað Helgi, “sem vér færim þessa leið, sem nú fgrum vér, ok ofan eptir Eyvindardal til Kálfshváls. Þá runnu átján vargar móti oss eða tuttugu, ok var einn miklu mestr. En vér vildum á hválinn ok kómumsk eigi. En þeir sóttu at oss þegar, ok kleif einn í hoku mér ok í tanngarðinn, ok þá var ek vakðr.” Þá kvað Þorkell þat víst, - “at menn munu sitja fyrir þér. Mun þar vera Helgi Ásbjarnarson ok aðrir heraðsmenn, ok leiðisk nú yfírgangr þinn flestum mǫnnum heðra. Nú hofum vit mælt til vináttu með okkr, ok vil ek, at þú farir heim með mér, ok ver þar nokkura stund.” Helgi svarar: “Svá mun ek fara sem ek hefi ætlat.”

my brother.” They travelled before daybreak inland out from Fannardalr up onto the heath and there were nine of them altogether. Then, at the top of all the slopes, Helgi rested himself, because he was exhausted and laid his cloak beneath himself. Then he scratched his cheek and rubbed his chin and said this: “It is more likely than not, that before the day is out there won't be much there to scratch. Þorkell are you just as eager to hear my dream as you were last night?” He says: “I am no less eager for that now than then.” “It seemed to me,” said Helgi, “that we were going on the same road we are now travelling, and down along Eyvindardalr towards Kálfshváll. Then some eighteen or twenty wolves ran towards us and one was by far the largest. We wanted to get to the knoll, but did not manage that. The wolves attacked us at once and one climbed into my chin into the row of teeth and I woke up.” Then Þorkell said this was certain: “That men will be lying in wait before you. Helgi Ásbjarnarson will be there and other men of the district, and most people here are now tired of your tyranny. Now we two have pledged friendship between us, and I want you to come home with me and stay there a little while.” Helgi answered: “I will travel just as I had planned.”

### Commentary

Helgi's dream in *Droplaugarsona saga* is typical of those found in the *Íslendingasögur* in a number of ways. I will therefore use this section to describe a number of characteristics found in many saga dreams. First I will briefly outline fetch concepts found in saga dreams, then look at the wolf fetch in particular. Next I will outline the use of the dream in predicting the forthcoming battle and the function of the dream in the text. Following this I will describe some of the specific aspects of Helgi's dream and how they relate to the events they predict. Finally I will look at the narration of Helgi's dream in the saga.

### Animal dreams

Among the most common dream-symbols found in the *Íslendingasögur* are those of animals. Animal dream-symbols in Old Norse almost without exception represent people, each animal being symbolic of a single person. This is by no means uncommon in early literature. In *The Odyssey* (Homer 1946, 301-302) Penelope dreams of geese and an eagle, representing her suitors; an eagle is also used to represent Troilus in Criseyde's dream (Chaucer 1987, 502); in *The Song of Roland* (1957, 79) a hunting dog dream-symbol represents Roland and a leopard Marsilion; and in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Gabriotto dreams of his lover as a doe (Boccaccio 1972, 372-373). In saga dreams, however, animals often seem to be fetches: animal embodiments of part of the soul. Traditions of animal fetches are widely discernible in Old Norse. Kelchner (1935, 17) defines the fetch as follows:<sup>2</sup>

The fetch is the inherent soul, the accompanying counterpart or representation, of a living person. Usually invisible, it may, nevertheless, be seen in dreams and visions, almost always in the form of an animal. The possession of a fetch is universal, and its character coincides, in some salient feature or features, with the qualities and characteristics of the person to whom it belongs, or, especially in cases of hostility, with the attitude of its owner toward the dreamer.

Although this is a simplification, merging what may have originally been several distinct traditions, it is nevertheless a useful definition to be going on with. Else Mundal (1974, 26-27) lists some fourteen examples of animal fetch motifs (*dyrefylgjemotiva*) in sagas of Icelanders and twelve further examples in the *fornaldarsögur* and sagas of kings.<sup>3</sup>

It seems that early Germanic peoples believed that a part of the human soul could be represented by an animal. The fetch could only be seen under certain

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<sup>2</sup> The word 'fetch' is English, meaning "The apparition, double, or wraith of a living person" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, I 743). As far as I know, the word is not directly related to any Old Norse word. After some consideration I have followed Kelchner and Turville-Petre's examples and used this word to include both *fylgjur* and *hugir*. By doing this I have sought to avoid using either Norse term unless it is specifically mentioned in the text. For other definitions of animal fetches and on the subject of fetches in general, also see Henzen 1890, 34-38; Rieger 1898, 277-290; de Vries 1956-1957, I, §162, 225-226; Ström 1956-1978b, 38-39; Turville-Petre 1964, 227-230; 1972a, 52-58; and 1972b, 36-39; and Mundal 1974, 12-13 and 1993a, 624-625.

<sup>3</sup> Mundal, who is writing on fetches in general rather than specifically dream instances, includes only those examples where the word *fylgja* is specifically mentioned.

circumstances, often by those with second sight or in a dream. Certain individuals seem to have had the ability to give their animal fetch a substantial form (*hamr*), and use it to obtain information or even attack people. In other cases the fetch seems to have been involuntarily projected by its owner, as if the fetch were travelling several steps ahead of the person whose soul it represents. A fetch might be seen or even merely felt by members of a household shortly before the arrival of an unexpected guest or enemy (Strömbäck 1975a, 5-7).

This concept of the fetches is designated by several different words in sagas; words that inevitably originally had somewhat distinct meanings. The most common word is *fylgja* (often found in the plural as *fylgjur* or *manna fylgjur*). This word can also be used for female guardian spirits (who also appear in dreams), but these guardian spirits are thought to be quite distinct from the fetch concept (Ström 1956-1978b 38-39; Mundal 1993a, 624-625). *Fylgja* can also refer to 'a following', 'help', and 'guidance'. Given the similarity between *fylgja* ('fetch') and the verb *fylgja* ('to follow' or 'to accompany'), it is hard not to think of *fylgjur* as 'companion animal spirits' and no doubt some saga writers saw them in these terms. In fact etymologically the noun is probably related to *fela* ('to conceal') (de Vries 1962, 147-148; Turville-Petre 1964, 228), which would suggest a meaning closer to 'hidden animal spirits'. The concept of *fylgja* also seems to have been linked to superstitions involving the 'afterbirth' or 'caul', which could also be referred to as *fylgja* and it was probably believed that the afterbirth contained some part of the child's soul or spirit creating a strong link between the afterbirth and the fetch concept (Turville-Petre 1964, 228).

Another word used by saga-writers to refer to fetches is *hugir* (singular *hugr*). *Hugr* refers to 'mind', 'desire' and 'wish'. Vilhelm Grönbech (1931, I, 250) suggests a further meaning of 'courage'. Just as in modern English the heart is seen not only as the source of strong feelings and courage, but also courage itself (for example in phrases such as 'he took heart', 'he did not have the heart to do it'), so in Old Norse the word *hugr* seems to have encompassed both the mind itself and the thought, even the soul, existing within and resulting from it. One's *hugr* might encourage one to do something, giving the suggestion of an inclination or suggestion coming from within, a gut instinct, rather than a consciously thought out idea or plan. This can be seen from the passage above when Helgi asks whether Þorkell is just as eager to hear his dream as before (*Eða er þér, Þorkell, nú jafnmikill hugr á at heyra draum minn sem í nótt*; literally 'And Þorkell, is an equally big *hugr* on you to hear my dream as last night'). This internal

mind/thought/courage could apparently take on animal form in a manner similar to the *fylgja*. Given the close association of *hugr* with mind, intentions and inclinations, one might think of this as a person's intentions or inclinations (in the context of saga dreams usually aggressive intentions) reaching out towards their object. Óðinn's two ravens, named Huginn and Muninn, seem to represent personifications of 'thought' and 'memory' respectively in a manner similar to that of *hugir*. It therefore seems probable that the concepts of *hugr* and *fylgja* were originally quite distinct. However, since saga authors sometimes use the words interchangeably when referring to fetch concepts, the concepts seem to have been brought together and many saga authors did not distinguish between them. In the passage above the author avoids using either *hugir* or *fylgjur* to refer to the wolves in Helgi's dream, but there can be little doubt that he saw these dream symbols in some way as fetches.

### Wolf fetches

Of the animal fetches found in the *Íslendingasögur* the most common is the wolf. Although the wolf is not native to Iceland, the wolf image persisted as archetype throughout the saga-writing age. There are two words for wolf in Old Norse *úlfr* and *vargr*. These words are not quite synonymous. Cleasby (1957, 680) gives three basic meanings for the word *vargr*: (1) 'wolf'; (2) 'thief', 'robber', or 'miscreant'; and (3) 'outlaw'. This connection between wolves, criminals and outlaws shows the way in which the wolf symbolised the outside: it was beyond society, beyond rules and a force of chaos. The word *vargr* seems to have represented not only the wolf but also the shape-shifting werewolf (Gerstein 1974, 131-156). The word *úlfr* does not seem to have had this association with shape-shifting, though it does still have a negative connotation and can be used figuratively to mean 'an enemy'. The word *úlfr* is found in a number of compounds, such as *úlfhugaðr* ('wolf-minded' or 'evil') and *úlfúð* or *úlfhugr* ('savageness') (see Cleasby 1957, 668). These concepts were probably linked to the concept of someone with evil intentions, being able to send their fetch (*hugr*) to attack someone.

The wolf features prominently in Norse mythology. The sun and moon are constantly chased across the heavens by two wolves until Ragnarøkkr when they will be

devoured (*SnE* 1988, 14-15 and 49; *Vǫluspá* stanzas 40-41, *Edda* 1962, 9-10).<sup>4</sup> Giantesses often ride wolves (e.g. *SnE* 1988, 46), as do witches (see Tolley 1993, 321). However the most prominent wolf in the Old Norse mindset must surely have been the terrible Fenrir or Fenrisúlfr. This wolf, which was said to be the offspring of the god Loki and the giantess Angrboða, grew so large that the Æsir fettered him until Ragnarøkkr when he will get loose and devour Óðinn (*SnE* 1988, 27-29 and 50). Therefore the mythological archetypes of the wolf reinforce its association with barely constrained rage, chaos and impending disaster. These associations undoubtedly stand behind the use of the wolf-fetch in almost all Old Norse dreams.

Interestingly the wolf symbol does feature among the topoi listed in the Icelandic text of the *Somniale Danielis*, which says (Turville-Petre 1968, 33): *Ef þú sér varga sjá við óvinum þinum* ('If you see wolves, beware your enemies'). The Icelandic version of the *Somniale Danielis* found in AM 764 4<sup>o</sup> lists some eighty dream-types and the meanings that might be attached to them. These dreams are still set out in the alphabetical order of the Latin, from which they were presumably translated. The topoi preserved start from *naut* ('cow' – *bos* in Latin texts) and end with *viðsmjǫr* ('olive-oil' – *oleum* in the Latin) and it seems likely that the beginning and end of the text forming the model for AM 764 4<sup>o</sup> was missing. Turville-Petre (1968, 27) suggests that the Latin exemplar of AM 764 4<sup>o</sup> came to Iceland from England in the twelfth century. It is nonetheless possible that dream-books had some influence on saga dreams earlier, perhaps indirectly. The wolf topos in AM 764 4<sup>o</sup> corresponds well with the use of the wolf-fetch in saga dreams, though the *Somniale* does not specifically indicate (as many of the sagas do) that the wolves are fetches. Although the wolf topos occurs among those with Latin equivalents beginning with L (e.g. lion, Latin *leo*; wool, *lana*; to play *ludo*; and to litigate, *litigo*), which would correspond with Latin *lupus*, wolves do not appear in the Latin texts of the *Somniale* from which the Icelandic must originally be descended. I believe this is an interesting example of the saga dreams influencing the dream-book tradition. I suggest that the mention of wolves in the *Somniale* is a cunning forgery, inserted at the correct point during the process of its translation to increase its appeal to the Icelandic readership.

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<sup>4</sup> Ragnarøk(k)r ('twilight of the gods') is Snorri's term. In *Vǫluspá* the form is *ragnar rǫc* ('doom of the gods') (*Vǫluspá*, stanza 49, *Edda* 1962, 11).

There are eight dreams of wolf-fetches in the *Íslendingasögur*. In addition to Helgi's dream above, I will later discuss Gunnarr's dream in *Njáls saga* (see section III.iii), Gísli Súrsson's dream of the wolf (see section V.ii, also the man with the wolf's head V.vi) and Þorbjörg's dream in *Harðar saga* (see section VII.iii). The earliest preserved example of a dream of wolves in an *Íslendingasaga* is probably Gísli Þorgautsson's dream in *Heiðarvíga saga*.<sup>5</sup> Shortly before a battle Gísli stands in the field where the battle is going to take place, declaims a verse (which is largely incomprehensible in the extant text) and then tells his dream (*Heið* 1938, ch. 26, pp. 293-294):

Hann segir draum sinn, at honum þótti, sem þeir væri þar staddir á Gullteig, ok kæmi at þeim vargar margir ok ættisk þar við, ok var mikit um, - "ok ek þóttumk vakna við þat, er ek hljóp undan heim til bæjarins."

He said his dream. It seemed to him that they were stood in Gullteigr, and many wolves came there and fought there, and there was a great commotion - "and I thought I woke up at that point when I fled home towards the farm."

In *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* a farmer named Atli inn litli dreams of an attack on his farm by wolves led by a vixen (*Háv* 1943, ch. 19-21, pp. 349-350). In this case Atli seems to be seeing the fetches (he refers to them as *manna hugir*) of the attacking party, perhaps sent out by the sorcerer Þorgrímur Dýrason who lies beneath his cloak conducting some sort of means of divination.<sup>6</sup> Þórðr hreða has two dreams of wolves in his saga. The first foretells Þórðr's fight with some men from Norðrárdalur over a cloak he wants to purchase from a merchant (*Þórð* 1959, ch. 3, p. 179). The second shows greater similarity to Helgi Droplaugarson's dream, in that Þórðr dreams that eighteen wolves attack him, one of great size with a gaping mouth (*Þórð* 1959, ch. 8, p. 201). This foretells the attack on Þórðr by his enemy Qzurr Arngrímsson. Further dreams of wolf-fetches can be found in *fornaldarsögur*.<sup>7</sup> The wolf-fetch in Old Norse literature

<sup>5</sup> The dating of *Heiðarvíga saga* is complicated by the poor state of its preservation, however I subscribe to the traditional view dating it early, being written down in the last decades of the twelfth century or shortly after 1200 (Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 224).

<sup>6</sup> On the motif of lying beneath cloaks and Þorgrímur's behaviour see Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1978, 103-123.

<sup>7</sup> See for example *Vǫls* 1906-1908, ch. 27, p. 63 and ch. 37, p. 94 (compare *Atlamál* stanza 24, *Edda* 1962, 251); *Þorstvík* 1944, ch. 12, pp. 208-209; *HG* 1944, ch. 7, pp. 62-63 and ch. 12, pp. 76-77; and *Hróm* 1944, ch. 9, p. 284.

therefore indicates an impending attack of one's enemies.<sup>8</sup> In these cases appearance of the fetch in wolf form is indicative not only of the character of the person to whom the fetch belongs, but also of his relationship and intentions towards the dreamer.

#### The function of Helgi's dream in the saga

As probably the earliest preserved example of such a dream it is possible that the *Heiðarvíga saga* episode influenced some of the other texts and it seems likely that the writer of *Droplaugarsona saga* knew *Heiðarvíga saga* (Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 245-246). The dream in *Heiðarvíga saga* is only one of a series of omens indicating to the reader the impending battle; among these are a further dream (of a broken sword) and a vision of a river flowing through a building (*Heið* 1938, ch. 26, pp. 291-292). This is also the case in *Droplaugarsona saga*. Helgi's dream forms part of a series of omens portending the battle and Helgi Droplaugarson's death. These omens are as follows (in the order they appear in the text):

1. At the autumn assembly Helgi Ásbjarnarson comments that at a future meeting between himself and his namesake, they will not both leave unscathed (*Dpl* 1950, ch. 8, p. 156).
2. Helgi Droplaugarson's female friend Tófa Þorkelsdóttir weeps at his departure, saying he will not return from his journey (*Dpl* 1950, ch. 9, p. 157).
3. Helgi's dream and the itch on his chin.
4. One of Helgi's party angers an old woman named Þórdís by throwing a snowball at her. Þórdís potentially could have given them information about the ambushers, but instead curses them (*Dpl* 1950, ch. 10, pp. 161-162).

This is without including more subtle omens, such as the overwhelming feeling that the tension between the two Helgis must finally culminate in a battle; or the recognised saga

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<sup>8</sup> I have only found one example of a dream where the wolf concept is not considered negative. In *Þorvalds þáttur víðfjara* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, Bishop Friðrekr says that his mother once dreamed that he has a wolf's hair growing from his head. The Bishop claims this dream relates to the fact that he and Þorvaldr are now driven as wild wolves (*skæðir vargar*) away from the assembly (*Þorv* 1958, 297). Argüelles (1994, 368) identifies a dream in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (*HG* 1944, ch. 7, pp. 62-63) as evidence that "perhaps all along the wolf is a normal *fylgja* of an average warrior". However, firstly he overestimates the friendliness of the approach of a large force belonging to a rival King, even while on a friendly mission; and secondly, Hrólfr and his men return a second time on less amicable terms.



convention that any character who does not go abroad when sentenced to outlawry will inevitably come into conflict (e.g. Gunnarr in *Njáls saga*); or even the detail that Helgi leaves his sword at Eyvindará to be sharpened before he sets out. Furthermore, as in *Heiðarvíga saga*, the reader is well aware that eighteen men are waiting in the valley for Helgi, because their preparations have already been described. Therefore, well before the account of Helgi's dream, the reader is already aware of the impending battle.

Here we have a fundamental difference between modern literature (much of which places emphasis on surprise elements or plot twists), and saga literature, where the reader is often given advance notice of subsequent events. This is not to say that the saga author is unable to create tension. Indeed, the author uses the sequence of omens preceding the battle at Eyvindardalr as a narrative technique to build up tension, as the reader knows the battle is approaching and realises that this will be the point up to which the saga has been building. *Droplaugarsona saga* fits Theodore Andersson's model of introduction, conflict, climax, revenge and aftermath.<sup>9</sup> Almost everything in the saga has been gradually building towards this conflict between the two Helgis, which forms the climax in Andersson's model. The author uses these omens as devices to delay the climax, while constantly pointing forward to it, thereby heightening the reader's interest and creating a feeling of suspense, even though the reader knows what is going to happen. The dream is almost the last of these stalling techniques, teasing the reader with its deliberately specific indications of events that are almost upon him, while yet further delaying the battle itself.

#### The details of Helgi's dream

Even in his brief account of his dream in *Heiðarvíga saga*, Gísli Þorgautsson mentions several specific details that can be related to the battle in the waking world. In the dream Gísli thinks that he is in the field Gullteigr. This geographical detail is reflected in the waking world, as this is the location of the battle. The author of *Droplaugarsona saga* uses this same technique, but in much greater detail. Topographical and geographical details feature prominently in *Droplaugarsona saga*. No fewer than nineteen different locations are mentioned in the pages leading up to battle and it would seem likely that the author expected his readers to have at least some

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<sup>9</sup> In fact Andersson (1967, 289) feels *Droplaugarsona saga* fits his model almost too well, describing it as artificial saga and the build up to the battle as "like a paper cut-out, but effective nonetheless".

knowledge of the area where the battle took place. This is also true of the geographical detail within the dream. The reader is expected to know that the higher ground at Kálfshváll will be more defensible than the surrounding land. Using such specific geographical details has two further functions. Firstly, it stresses to the reader that the climactic battle really is now almost upon them. By the time he is relating his dream Helgi is already descending into Eyvindardalr, a feeling which is further underlined by Helgi's description of the road as that *sem nú fgrum vér* ("the same as we now are travelling"). Secondly, the specific topography of the dream can be related exactly to the topography of the saga battle, where Helgi is indeed attacked as he travels west along Eyvindardalr and wants, but fails, to get to the Kálfshváll hillock. Topographical or geographical details appear in many of the saga wolf dreams. In *Njáls saga* Gunnarr is riding past Knafahólar in his dream. In Þórðr's second wolf dream in *Þórðar saga hreðu* he is riding up over Hjaltadalr and approaching Viðvík when he thinks he is attacked. In Atli's dream in *Hávarðar saga* he sees the wolves approach the farm from the south, whereas in Þorbjörg's dream they leave the farm running westward. All these details are proved true in the corresponding scenes in the waking world.

As well as playing an important role in the dream itself, topography is also important to the narration of the dream. As mentioned above, the topography of the dream alerts the reader to the proximity of the climax, as the road that Helgi is describing in the dream is the very one he is now travelling. Also noteworthy is Helgi's own steadfastness and determination in continuing with his journey. Had he related his dream earlier it may have been easier for Þorkell to persuade him to return home with him. It seems that the surroundings mirror the inevitability of Helgi's death. From the point at the top of the heath, where Helgi relates his dream, his path proceeds downhill, directly and unstopably towards his fate.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A parallel can be seen between this and a scene in *Gísla saga*, where Vésteinn comments as he refuses to turn back despite receiving a warning from his foster-brother Gísli (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 12, p. 40): *falla vötn öll til Dýrafjarðar* ('all waters flow towards Dýrafjarðar'). As G.N. Garmonsway comments (1928-1936, 168): "in the most momentous decision of his [Vésteinn's] life, he is influenced by the mere accident of his surroundings ...". The fundamental difference between the two passages is that Vésteinn does not discover Gísli's message until too late through a series of accidents and so is unaware of the impending danger until he reaches the point he considers too close to turn back. In contrast Helgi, has already dreamt his dream, and so is aware of his fate. He contrives for the topographical detail of the landscape to ensure that he remains resolute and cannot be persuaded to turn back by Þorkell, by delaying the narration of his dream.

Another way in which saga writers link dreams of wolves to the battles which they usually foreshadow is by specifying the number of fetches which are seen in the dream. This motif is not found in the dream in *Heiðarvíga saga*, where there are merely said to be *vargar margir* ('many wolves'). It is, however, found in the dreams in *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Hávarðar saga*, *Harðar saga* and the second wolf-dream in *Þórðar saga*. In his article "The Fight in Eyvindardalr" Arnold Taylor (1981, 459-473) points out the importance of the number of participants on each side and describes this method of building up tension prior to the battle. As Helgi Ásbjarnarson sets out, the narrator stresses the number of men in the party (*Dpl* 1950, ch. 9, p. 160): *Nú fóru þeir heiman sextán saman til Hǫfða* ('then they travelled from home in a party of sixteen to Hǫfði'). Several of these men can be identified as follows: Helgi Ásbjarnarson, Þorgrímr skinnhúfa, Björn inn hvíti, Qzurr the farmer at Áss, Þórðr skarfr, two Norwegians named Sigurðr skarfr and Qnundr and the Hallsteinssons. The remainder were presumably either thralls or other unidentified men. When Hjarrandi from Qngulsá and his brother Kári join the expedition, this number is increased to eighteen, which is exactly twice Helgi Droplaugarson's force. At this point the narrator stresses the number of men in the party a second time, saying (*Dpl* 1950, ch. 9, p. 160): *Nú eru þeir átján saman* ('Then they were in a party of eighteen'). The number is stressed again when Helgi Droplaugarson and his companions first see them (*Dpl* 1950, ch. 10, p. 162): *Þá sjá þeir átján menn renna í móti sér* ('then they saw eighteen men charge at them'). By stressing the number in the ambush party the author has ensured that the reader equates the eighteen wolves of the dream with the eighteen men lying in wait. The specific number of wolves mentioned in the dream means the reader can be left with little doubt that each of these dream symbols represents one member of the party the reader already knows to be lying in wait for Helgi.<sup>11</sup>

Argüelles (1994, 242) observes that in several of the dreams the number of wolves is eighteen. There are eighteen wolves in Þórðr's second wolf dream (*Þórð* 1959, ch. 8, p. 201) and Atli's dream (*Háv* 1943, ch. 20, p. 349). To this list Argüelles also adds Þorbjörg's dream of eighty wolves in *Harðar saga*, which he suggests may be a scribal error mistaking *átján* for *áttatigir* (see chapter VII.iii below). Although he

<sup>11</sup> The fact that the wolves in Helgi's dream number either eighteen or twenty makes it seem slightly more realistic (he would not have had time to make an accurate count) and gives the episode a dream-like feel. As eighteen is the first number mentioned this does not prevent the reader equating the eighteen wolves with the eighteen attackers.

entertains the possibility that this consistency is the result of direct literary borrowing, Argüelles (1994, 242-243) suggests that the number eighteen is a particularly appropriate number for wolves to attack in:

Now, eighteen is a multiple of nine, and nine is the Norse cultural number par excellence. Icelandic heroes usually travel with small bands of companions. Heroic bands should be able to cope with two or even three times their number so could not respectably be overcome by nine wolves, though they could be by eighteen.

However, the build up of Helgi Ásbjarnarson's party to number eighteen is important to the heightening of tension in the narrative. Therefore the eighteen wolves in the dream in *Droplaugarsona saga* are based on the eighteen attackers in the waking world and not the other way round. In contrast, in neither *Hávarðar saga* or *Þórðar saga* is the number of men emphasised in this way. In fact both texts confuse the number of attackers.<sup>12</sup> It therefore seems possible that both these texts may have been at least partially influenced by *Droplaugarsona saga* in the number of wolves appearing in the dream.

Another motif commonly found in wolf-dreams is that the leader of the attacking party is somehow distinguished from the other fetches. This is sometimes done by representing the leader as an animal other than a wolf. For example, in the dream in *Hávarðar saga*, the leader of the band attacking Atli's farm is represented by a vixen, and this seems to represent the fact that Þorgrímur is skilled in magic (also see *Þorstvík* 1944, ch. 12, pp. 208-209); and in *Harðar saga* Hqrðr is identified as a rather sad polar bear. In both *Droplaugarsona saga* and the second dream in *Þórðar saga* (Þórð 1959, ch. 8, p. 209) this is done by mentioning that one of the wolves is larger than the others. As Þorkell's interpretation makes clear, the largest wolf represents Helgi Ásbjarnarson. There are a number of ways to account for the relationship of the large wolf-fetch to the character. It could be an indication of immense physical size or it could represent his leadership of the ambush party and pre-eminence as a *goði* in the district. The large wolf dream-symbol could also be interpreted as a representation of the degree of hatred and ill-will which Helgi Ásbjarnarson feels towards his namesake. If all the wolves

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<sup>12</sup> In *Þórðar saga* we are told Qzurr rides from home: *við inn níttjándra mann* ('in a party of nineteen men', Þórð 1959, ch. 8, p. 201), yet only eighteen wolves appear in the dream. Conversely in *Hávarðar saga* Þorgrímur attacks *við átjándra mann* ('in a party of eighteen men', Háv 1943, ch. 19, p. 349), yet nineteen fetches, including the vixen, appear in Atli's dream.

represent Helgi Droplaugarson's enemies, then the largest wolf is the man who feels the most enmity. This idea would be similar to the view of the *hugr* as representing men's intentions towards the dreamer. Therefore, although the author makes no specific mention of the *hugr* concept, his treatment of the dream symbols suggests a familiarity with it.

As well as the specific topographical details, specific number of fetches and distinction of the leading fetch, another way in which wolf-dreams are related directly to the battle is through specific actions, attacks or wounds made on or by the dreamer and the fetches in the dream. In *Droplaugarsona saga* one wolf (noticeably not the largest one, i.e. not Helgi Ásbjarnarson) climbs itself into his lower lip, probably in a scrabbling motion with its forepaws. This detail represents the wound Helgi receives in the battle, where he parries Hjarrandi's sword using his shield only for it to glance off into his teeth and remove his lower lip. Helgi further draws the reader's attention to this by commenting (*Dpl* 1950, ch. 10, p. 164): "*Aldri var ek fagrleitr, en lítit hefir þú um bætt*" ("I was never good-looking, but you haven't improved it much"). Thus Helgi's grisly laconic wit draws out the detail from the battle, and allows the reader to relate it to the prophecy. The same motif is reversed in *Þórðar saga*, where Þórðr wounds the largest of the wolf-fetches in his dream symbolising the wound he gives to Qzurr in the battle.

### The itch motif

The prediction of the wound in the dream is reinforced by the fact that, upon waking, Helgi scratches his chin. It would, of course, be natural for someone dreaming of being wounded on his chin to feel his chin upon waking. However, Helgi draws our attention to the prophetic aspect of this detail by commenting *Þat er vænna, áðr kveld komi, at þar klæi lítt* ('It is more likely than not, that, before the day is out, there will not be much there to scratch at'). The motif of an itch representing a future wound seems to have been a relatively widespread tradition. Flosi Þórðarson probably refers to the tradition when he says to Eyjólfur Bólverksson of their enemies (*Nj* 1954, ch. 142, pp. 391-392): *Þat hlægir mik nú ... í hug mér, at þeim mun í brún bregða ok ofarlíga kleyja, þá er þú berr fram vörnina* ('It makes me laugh ... in my heart, that they will be surprised, and their faces will itch, when you present the defence'). The motif is probably related to the Old Norse proverb: *illt veit er ofarlegar klæjir* ('When a head itches, it forebodes evil') (Almqvist 1991, 46 and references). Dag Strömbäck (1975a,

9-10) suggests that the same motif is linked to the Nordic concept of the soul (Norwegian *hug*; Old Norse *hugr*). According to Strömbäck, in Norwegian folk tradition, an itchy nose indicates the approach of a guest as his *hug* is affecting the host's nose. In *Orkneyinga saga*, Sveinn Ásleifarson rubs his nose and says that he has a *hugboð* ('premonition', literally 'message from a *hugr*') of the arrival of Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson (*Orkn* 1965 ch. 93, p. 247). Three examples of particular relevance to *Droplaugarsona saga* occur in *Sturlunga saga*. In *Íslendinga saga*, Sturla Sighvatsson wakes up and strokes his cheek (which will later be injured) and denies any meaning can be attached to dreaming (*ekki er mark at draumum*, *Stu* 1906-1911, I, 523). Later in *Íslendinga saga* Þórðr Andrésson has an itchy neck prior to his beheading at the command of Gizurr Þorvaldsson (*Stu* 1906-1911, II, 316). A third example comes in *Svínfellinga saga*, the night before Sæmundr Ormsson is beheaded (*Stu* 1906-1911, II, 124):

Um kveldit, er þeir gengu frá baði, mælti Sæmundr við konu þá, er honum þerrði, at hon skyldi gnúa þurrkenni um háls honum sem fastast, "því at mér klæjar þar mjök". Hon gerði sem hann mælti. "Ekki gnýr þú", segir hann. Tekr hon nú dúkinn ok gnýr sem tíðast. Um morgininn segir Guðmundr draum sinn.

That evening when they got out of the bath, Sæmundr said to the woman, who dried him, that she should rub the towel round his neck most firmly, "because I am very itchy there." She did as he said. "You're not rubbing," he said. She now took the towel and rubbed as hard as she could. In the morning Guðmundr told his dream.

There is no indication in the extant saga as to the content of Guðmundr's dream, but it seems highly likely to indicate Sæmundr's death. Thus in both texts there is an ambush of two brothers, preceded by a dream and an itchy body-part representing a wound.

#### The telling of Helgi's dream in the saga

The narration of Helgi's dream in *Droplaugarsona saga* is one of the earliest examples of a pattern that can be found again and again where dreams are narrated in the *Íslendingasögur*. The following pattern describes the way in which dreams are narrated in direct speech. The pattern can be broken down into five stages:

- i. The dreamer sleeps badly, while being watched by a companion.
- ii. The dreamer awakes and the companion asks about dream.
- iii. The dreamer relates the dream (possibly after some hesitation).
- iv. The companion interprets the dream.

## v. The dreamer reacts to the interpretation.

Admittedly not all stages in this pattern are present in all cases. Nonetheless most examples contain several of these elements. In the case of Helgi's dream, first we are told that Helgi is restless in his sleep (*láta illa í svefni*). This phrase, or variants of it, can be found in numerous sagas.<sup>13</sup> The phrase seems to indicate a physical motion made by the dreamer in their sleep as a consequence of the dream. In *Hávarðar saga* (*Háv* 1943, ch. 19-21, pp. 349-350) both Þorgrímr and Atli are said to be restless, and Atli is so restless that no one can sleep from the noise he makes. In an interesting variation of the motif, Sneglu-Halli is restless in his sleep (*láta illa í svefni*) shortly before his voyage from England (*Snegl* 1956, 291). He wakes to tell a foreboding but entirely fictitious dream (i.e. a dream he has just invented) designed to discourage some unwelcome Hebridean passengers from making the journey. It seems that the cunning Halli realised the importance of being restless while apparently asleep to give the impression that he was actually dreaming. In *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts*, Þorsteinn dreams that he descends into a burial mound. While his companion Freysteinn watches the sleeping Þorsteinn, he sees how restless he is (*ÞUxaf* 1991, ch. 6, p. 351): *lét hann illa í svefni, því at hann brauzk um á hnakki ok hæli* ('he was restless in his sleep, because he shook himself from head to toe'). Þorsteinn's movements in his sleep seem to correspond to him fighting the earth-dwellers in his dream and the same may be true of Helgi in *Droplaugarsona saga*.

During their restless sleep, the dreamer is usually watched over by one of his companions. The companion may have been asked to keep vigil (as in *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts*) or they may have been woken by the dreamer's restlessness (as in *Hávarðar saga*). In *Droplaugarsona saga*, it is not specifically stated that Þorkell watches over Helgi while he sleeps, but the fact that he immediately asks what Helgi had been dreaming implies that this is the case. In this way the reader is placed on the outside, witnessing the dreamer's sleep in the same manner as the companion and the dream is only revealed afterwards.

The text then describes the dreamer awaking. At this point the reader is usually still unaware of what has been dreamed. The companion then asks about the dream. In

<sup>13</sup> See for example *BjH* 1938 ch. 25, p. 177, *Flj* 1950 ch. 5, p. 224; *Fbr* 1943, ch. 23, p. 243 and p. 244, and ch. 24, p. 253; *Gisl* 1943, ch. 13, p. 43; *Gunnl* 1938, ch. 2, p. 53, *Kumbl* 1991, 454; *Laxd* 1934, ch. 48, p. 149; *Nj* 1954, ch. 62, p. 155 and ch. 133, p. 346; *Orv* 1943, ch. 4, p. 292.

the case of *Droplaugarsona saga*, Helgi is at first reluctant to tell his dream. I have already discussed the significance of this delay with regard to the topographical landscape of the saga, but it is also an example of a larger motif found in sagas where dreamers are reluctant to say their dreams. Further examples of dreamers reluctant to relate their dreams can be found in *Gunnlaugs saga* (Gunnl 1938, ch. 2, 53); *Gísla saga* (see section V.ii); and *Kumlbúa þáttur* (Kumbl 1991, 454). The reason for this reticence varies, but in Helgi Droplaugarson's case it is probably due to his reluctance to be persuaded to turn back and attempt to avert the dream prophecy. The very opposite might be argued for Þorsteinn in *Gunnlaugs saga* and Gísli in *Gísla saga*, who both seem anxious to prevent their dream-prophecies from being fulfilled.

Approximately two thirds of all dreams narrated in the *Íslendingasögur* are narrated entirely or partially in the first person.<sup>14</sup> The reasons for this tendency to tell dreams in direct speech are manifold. Firstly, the narrator maintains a greater degree of objectivity. Sagas are famously reticent in commenting on characters' feelings and emotions. Jónas Kristjánsson (1988, 213) comments on this reticence:

A saga-author does not know what his characters are thinking, and he is not allowed to guess at their disposition or mood. But he hears their words, and these make manifest their thoughts and opinions. Sagas usually contain much direct speech and dialogue. These both reveal and illuminate the mental world of the personae and fill out the narrative, carry it forward and give it life.

Although saga-writers did not consider dreams as products of one's psyche as modern psychologists do, dreams did nevertheless represent an internal and unproven experience which no-one other than the dreamer could know. William Ian Miller (1986, 103-106) comments on the potential use of false dreams in supporting prosecutions. *Sneglu-Halla þáttur* contains two false dreams (Snegl 1956, 285 and 292), which show the potential for dreamers to invent dreams. Therefore saga narrators often report on the external behaviour of the dreamer while they are asleep (which can be confirmed by the eye-witness accounts of the companion watching over the sleeping man), but in many cases the dreamer tells their dream in their own words. Secondly, the tendency for dreamers to speak their own dreams in sagas also fits with the tradition of dream telling and dream interpretation. Thirdly, from an artistic point of view, narrating dreams this

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<sup>14</sup> There are 100 dreams in the *Íslendingasögur* where the reader is given at least a brief description of the dream. Of these, 67 are narrated, at least in part, in direct speech.



way creates interesting and dramatic scenes, in which characters are not only seen to be confronting their fate, but also speaking it aloud directly to the reader. Finally, it allows the dream to be presented directly to the reader for interpretation, thereby engaging him in the text and avoiding overt comment from the narrator's voice on the subject of the dream.

Following the narration of the dream, the companion, in this case Þorkell, gives his interpretation. Dream interpretation was an important tradition in Old Norse literature and no doubt in Old Icelandic society too. In some cases dreamers bring their dreams to particular men with renown for interpreting dreams, such as Gestr in *Laxdæla saga* (Laxd 1934, ch. 33, pp. 88-91); the wise sage who interprets Kolskeggr's dream in *Njáls saga* (Nj 1954, ch. 81, p. 197); Hlíðar-Steinn in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* (ÞSH 1950, ch. 4, pp. 309-313); and Drauma-Finni in *Ljósvetninga saga* (Ljósv 1940, ch. 11(21), p. 58 and p. 60). In other cases, as here in *Droplaugarsona saga*, it is sufficient for the dreamer to discuss his dream with the companion who has witnessed his restlessness. The role of the dream interpreter in the saga is to ensure that the basic meaning of the dream is clear to the reader. In the case of Þorkell's interpretation in *Droplaugarsona saga*, he says that it is certain that men are lying in wait for Helgi. Þorkell does not explain the more specific details of the dream, which are left for the reader to interpret. He mentions that Helgi Ásbjarnarson will be in the party. This leads the reader to draw the conclusion that he is represented by the largest wolf-fetch without specifically saying so. Similarly Þorkell says nothing of the facial wound, which Helgi receives from one of the wolves, leaving it to the reader to equate this with the wound Helgi eventually receives in the battle. Þorkell's interpretation, therefore, ensures that all readers are clear as to the basic meaning of the dream, while simultaneously encouraging the readers to decode the dream for themselves thereby engaging their interest in the text.

The final stage of the pattern is some comment made by the dreamer upon the interpretation. These comments fall into broadly two categories: those who deny the interpretation, either by claiming that the dream is meaningless or giving it an alternative (and usually more auspicious) interpretation, and those who accept it. Helgi falls into the latter category and does not deny the truth in Þorkell's interpretation (indeed his delay in telling the dream suggests he already realises its meaning). However, he still makes some comment on the interpretation. Þorkell ends his interpretation by entreating Helgi to turn back and avoid the confrontation. Helgi

refuses saying: *Svá mun ek fara sem ek hefi ætlat* ('I will travel just as I had planned'), thereby accepting the truth of the interpretation and also his inability to change his fate. Helgi cannot change his fate. To do so would create a paradox, as he has already seen what must happen. This is not to say fate could not be swayed by human decision-making, but once a prophecy was made it seems to represent an unalterable course of events. Indeed to seek to alter one's fate to one's advantage seems to have been considered slightly suspect and perhaps unheroic. When Björn Hítðœlakappi's wife Þórdís discourages him from going to a shieling following a dream that portends his death, he comments (*BjH* 1938 ch. 32, 196): *Ekki læt ek drauma ráða fœrum mínum* ('I will not allow dreams to govern my journeys'). Skarpheðinn makes a very similar statement in *Njáls saga* (*Nj* 1954, ch. 118, p. 295): *Lítt rekju vér drauma til flestra hluta* ('We don't let dreams decide much for us'). Helgi seems to be of the same mind as Björn and Skarpheðinn in his refusal to change his plans following his dream, as he strides on down the slope towards his death.

### II.iii Conclusion

In conclusion, Helgi's dream represents an example of a wolf-dream predicting an imminent battle, of a sort that would have been familiar to saga readers. The dream uses traditional beliefs in fetches, accompanying animal spirits representing a sort of detachable part of the soul. However the dream itself is literary, carefully building tension for the reader by pointing forward to the saga climax, while delaying it. It seems possible that the author knew of the wolf-dream in *Heiðarvíga saga*, but he also may have had other models to work from. Unlike the *Heiðarvíga saga* dream, the episode in *Droplaugarsona saga* has been developed into a complete scene, narrated carefully and in detail so as to draw out the process of sleeping, dreaming, relating the dream, interpreting the dream and finally, commenting on the interpretation. This fully developed dream-scene is found in one way or another in a great many sagas and was clearly a favourite among both saga writers and audiences.

The saga stresses the supernatural accuracy with which the future is predicted. This is not some unclear ill-omen, but a perfect prophecy of the number of combatants, the location and the details of the battle. In this way the dream seems to lend itself well to what might be called the 'matching approach' of analysing medieval literary dreams.<sup>15</sup> This technique assumes that each detail mentioned in the description of the dream can be matched to a single referent in the waking world. In many regards, Helgi's dream fits this model; predicting the future battle, both for the character and the reader accurately and exactly. The fetch concept, associating a single beast in the dream to a person in the waking world lends itself well to this form of analysis. However *Droplaugarsona saga* is probably an early saga, and is in many respects a relatively straightforward one. The matching approach proves less satisfactory when applied to more complex texts.

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<sup>15</sup> The phrases "matching technique" and "matching approach" actually come from psychoanalysis. I have taken them from Benjamin Simple's (1995) study of *The Song of Roland*, where he argues that the medieval imagination could understand and even expected a more complex approach to symbolism than matching alone would allow.

## Chapter III. The dreams of *Njáls saga*

### III.i Introduction

*Njáls saga* is the longest and among the most famous of the *Íslendingasögur*. Despite its length, covering over 460 pages in the Íslenzk fornrit edition, the saga describes events covering only approximately 70 years (compared to *Laxdæla saga*, which covers some 180 years in many fewer pages). The saga can be divided into two parts. The first describes the biography of Gunnarr Hámundarson, climaxing in the attack on Gunnarr's farm at Hlíðarendi. The second builds up to the attack on Bergþórshváll and describes the vengeance that results from it. Although it was once believed that \**Gunnars saga* originally existed independently, this view is no longer widely accepted and more recent scholarship has tended to focus upon the integrity of the saga as a whole (e.g. Maxwell, 1957-1961; Allen 1971). Given the large size of the work it can be easy to overlook the important part played by dreams in the saga. There are in fact nine dreams in *Njáls saga*. These dreams vary considerably in the form they take, their meaning for the characters and their narrative function in the text.

The saga is thought to have been composed at a time between 1275 and 1290 (Vésteinn Ólason 1993a, 433-434). The popularity of the saga seems to date back to medieval times as there are over 20 surviving medieval manuscripts or manuscript fragments. The most important of these are AM 468 4<sup>o</sup> (*Reykjabók*); AM 133 fol. (*Kálfalækjarbók*); GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup> (*Gráskinna*); AM 132 fol. (*Möðruvallabók*); GKS 2868 4<sup>o</sup> (*Skafinskinna*); GKS 2869 4<sup>o</sup> (*Sveinsbók*) and AM 466 4<sup>o</sup> (*Oddabók*) (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 9-14; *ONP Registre*, 340-343). Most of the manuscripts contain lacunae. Einar Ól. Sveinsson identifies two main redactions, which he calls \*X and \*V. The \*V-class then divides into two further classes Y and Z. Within these classes there are several further divisions. This pattern is further complicated by several of the manuscripts appearing to be based on more than one redaction. For example the first and third parts of AM 466 4<sup>o</sup> are based on the X-redaction, but the central section shows greater similarities to manuscripts in the Y-redaction. Given this complexity, I have given a brief list of the most important manuscripts in which each dream is preserved as part of the commentary.

Verses figure only peripherally in the saga. There are only 23 *lausavísur* included in the main text of the Íslenzk fornrit edition, together with 11 stanzas of the so-called *Darraðarljóð*. These verses are largely confined to the latter half of the saga

(only five verses appear in chapters 1-99, two of which are mere couplets). In one redaction this balance is redressed. Several of the manuscripts in the X-class have 30 additional verses in the first half of the saga. These verses are generally thought to have been added after the saga was composed (see section II.iii below).

As well as the dreams discussed below, the text also includes a number of dream-like motifs experienced in the waking world. In chapter 12 Hallgerðr sends her foster-father Þjóstólfr to the magician Svanr for protection. Svanr has a fit of yawning and realises that the fetches (*fylgjur*) of Þjóstólfr's enemies are approaching (*Nj* 1954, ch. 12, p. 37). Later Þórðr leysingjason sees a goat lying in a ditch covered in blood, which Njáll interprets as his fetch (*fylgja*) with the blood representing his death (*Nj* 1954, ch. 41, pp. 106-107). In chapter 69 Njáll has a vision of the fetches (*fylgjur*) of Þorgeirr Starkaðarson and Þorgeirr Otkelsson making a journey to attack Gunnarr (*Nj* 1954, ch. 69, p. 170). This vision occurs when Njáll is awake, but the namesakes have both fallen asleep in a wood near Hlíðarendi. There are also several specific portents to the burning of Bergþórshváll with dream-like aspects. For example in chapter 125 a boy named Hildiglúmr sees a vision of a man on a grey horse inside a flaming circle who speaks a verse and then casts a flaming brand eastwards (*Nj* 1954, ch. 125, p. 320-321). In chapter 127 Njáll says that he seems to see that the gable walls of the building have collapsed and that there is blood on the table and food (*Nj* 1954, ch. 127, p. 324), a motif probably borrowed from *Heiðarvíga saga* (*Heið* 1938, ch. 26, p. 290). Much later in the saga, prior to the Battle of Clontarf, the viking Bróðir is plagued by a series of nocturnal visions each accompanied by a terrible clamouring (*Nj* 1954, ch. 156, pp. 446-447). In the first, he and his men are doused by rain of boiling blood; in the second, their own weapons attack them; and, in the third, they are attacked by malicious ravens. Each night one man on each ship loses his life as a result of the phenomena. I have not considered these to be dreams since, like the previous examples, there is no evidence that Bróðir is asleep. The visions are shared by Bróðir and his men and seem to be actual supernatural events occurring in the waking world rather than symbolic dreams. There are three further dreams, which I have not discussed in the examples below. In chapter 36 Hallgerðr's servant Kolr comments that he has dreamed that his killing of Svartr will result in his death (*Nj* 1954, ch. 36, p. 94). This confirms him in the eyes of the reader as a man fated to die. It further adds to the themes of fate and inevitability and, as with some of the examples below, it demonstrates how the lives of lesser characters are bound by fate to the central plot of the saga. In chapter 82 Gunnarr's

kinsman Þráinn Sigfússon attacks and kills the viking Kolr at the request of Earl Hákon. Shortly before the attack Kolr has a dream, though the only detail he reveals is that it somehow involves Hákon (*Nj* 1954, ch. 82, pp. 199-200). Similarly there is no indication of the content of Hildigunnr's dream in chapter 112 (*Nj* 1954, ch. 112, p. 282). This dream ensures that Hildigunnr is the first to find the body of her murdered son and therefore drives her to pursue vengeance all the more bitterly. It also provides her with the opportunity to collect Hǫskuldr's clotted blood in his cloak, which she later uses to incite Flosi to avenge her son. As none of these dreams are described, they cannot warrant much further discussion here.

**Editions:**

*Nj* 1875 = *Njála*. 1. Ed. Eiríkur Jónsson and Konráð Gíslason.

*Nj* 1908 = *Brennu Njálssaga (Njála)*. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. Altnordische saga-bibliothek 13.

*Nj* 1954 = *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk fornrit 12.

**Translations:**

*Nj* 1960 = *Njal's Saga*. Trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson.

*Nj* 1997 = *Njal's Saga*. Trans. Robert Cook. In *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders III*.

### III.ii Hǫskuldr's dream of the bear

#### Context:

Hrútr Herjólfsson is the hero of the very early chapters of *Njáls saga*. His marriage to Unnr Marðardóttir fails (on account of a curse placed on him by Gunnhildr, mother of King Haraldr gráfeldr). Hrútr behaves uncharacteristically obstinately when Unnr's elderly father, Mǫrðr attempts to recover the dowry forcing him to give up the case. After her father's death, Unnr runs short of money and asks her kinsman Gunnarr Hámundarson to revive the lawsuit and recover the dowry. Gunnarr turns to his friend Njáll Þorgeirsson for advice on how to accomplish this. Njáll devises a convoluted plan in which Gunnarr dresses as a fictional trader, Kaupa-Heðinn, travelling the district, visiting Hrútr's brother Hǫskuldr and selling poor quality wares to local farmers. In this disguise Gunnarr is able to approach Hrútr and get him to inadvertently assist in reviving the lawsuit without realising it. After serving the summons in this manner, Gunnarr leaves Hrútsstaðir and hides. After three days in hiding, he returns to his own district without coming into combat with Hrútr and his supporters. While Gunnarr is visiting Hrútr in disguise, Hrútr's half-brother, Hǫskuldr has a dream. Following his dream, Hǫskuldr goes to Hrútsstaðir, but is too late to apprehend Gunnarr. Ironically, when the case actually comes before the Alþingi, Gunnarr makes a mistake and resorts to giving Hrútr a similar challenge to that which he gave Mǫrðr earlier in the saga. The tables are finally turned on Hrútr. He is now an old man challenged by a young pretender and is forced to repay the dowry.

#### Text:

*Nj* 1875, ch. 23, pp. 93-94.

*Nj* 1908, ch. 23, p. 55.

*Nj* 1954, ch. 23, pp. 64-65.

Hǫskuldr vaknaði þessa nótt á Hǫskuldsstöðum ǫndverða ok vakði upp alla heimamenn sína. “Ek vil segja yðr draum minn,” segir hann; “ek þóttumk sjá bjarndýri mikit ganga út ór húsunum, ok víska ek, at eigi fannsk þessa dýrs maki, ok fylgðu því húnar tveir, ok vildu þeir vel dýrinu. Þat stefndi til Hrútsstaða ok gekk þar inn í húsinn. Síðan vaknaða ek. Nú vil

Hǫskuldr woke up earlier that night at Hǫskuldsstaðir and woke up all his householders. “I want to tell you my dream,” he said. “I thought I saw a large bear walk out from the house and I knew that the equal of this beast could be found nowhere. Two bear cubs accompanied it, and they were well disposed to the beast. It headed for Hrútsstaðir and went into the house there. Then I woke up. Now I

ek spyrja yðr, hvat þér sáð til ins mikla manns." Einn maðr svaraði honum: "Þat sá ek, at fram undan erminni kom eitt gullhlað ok rautt klæði; á hægri hendi hafði hann gullhring." Hǫskuldr mælti: "Þetta er engis manns fylgja nema Gunnars frá Hlíðarenda. Þykkjumk ek nú sjá allt eptir; skulu vér nú riða á Hrútsstaði."

want to ask you what you noticed about the large man." One man answered him: "I saw this, that from under his sleeve showed a gold border and red clothes and on his right arm he had a gold arm-ring." Hǫskuldr said: "This is none other than the fetch of Gunnarr from Hlíðarendi. I think that I now see everything accordingly, but we shall now ride to Hrútsstaðir."

### **Commentary:**

This dream, which forms part of a series of scenes involving the recovery of the dowry, is an animal fetch dream involving a bear fetch. The dream's function is to transport news between Hrútsstaðir, where the action is taking place, and Hǫskuldsstaðir, where the dreamer is. Despite this, it has little or no active role in the saga plot, since by the time Hǫskuldr arrives at Hrútsstaðir it is too late to prevent the deception. The dream is included in the saga for its narrative and aesthetic function and not for plot function. The dream is preserved in only four manuscripts (the remainder are damaged at this point): in the X-redaction AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, in the Y-redaction AM 466 4<sup>o</sup> and in the Z-redaction GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup> and GKS 2868 4<sup>o</sup>.

### The beguiling of Hrútr

The primary purpose of all the scenes surrounding the recovery of the dowry, including Gunnarr's deception of Hrútr, is to move the narrative focus away from Hrútr and Hǫskuldr in Hvammsfjörðr towards Njáll and Gunnarr in southern Iceland. The dominant characteristics of Hrútr in the early chapters are his great wisdom, physical strength and bravery. In the dowry scenes Hrútr is bettered on all three counts. He is outsmarted by Njáll's plan and then forced to back down in the face of a conflict with Gunnarr, who is both stronger and braver than he. The two brothers do not disappear from the saga altogether and are later reconciled with Njáll and Gunnarr. From this point on, however, the brothers will be characters peripheral to the main action, appearing at the Alþingi but taking little part in events in the south. Thus the saga author uses the dowry episode to draw our attention south and transfer characteristics from the established character of Hrútr to the recently introduced figures of Njáll and Gunnarr, thereby building up their reputation by comparison. If Njáll is wiser than Hrútr then he must be wise indeed and if Gunnarr is braver and stronger than Hrútr then



he will make a suitable hero for the coming chapters. The dream is part of this process, demonstrating the extent to which Hrútr is fooled by Njáll and Gunnarr.

The dream scene and Hǫskuldr's subsequent arrival at Hrútsstaðir is a common motif in Old Norse: the realisation just too late that one has been fooled. This motif is summed up by Hǫskuldr's words: *ek nú sjá allt eptir* ('I now see everything accordingly' (these same words are used by Ósvífr after the killing of his son Þorvaldr, *Nj* 1954, ch. 12, p. 37). Hǫskuldr's realisation that Kaupa-Heðinn is Gunnarr Hámundarson is an example of this motif of seeing clearly (just) after the event. Once Hǫskuldr has realised the truth it is all too apparent. He questions his householders, who now advance information about the clothes and jewellery Heðinn had been wearing; information that, with hindsight, makes it all too obvious that the trader was not who he had claimed to be. By the time Hǫskuldr has reached Hrútsstaðir, Gunnarr has already departed and nothing can be done. It is also noticeable that it is Hǫskuldr who has the dream and not Hrútr. Elsewhere in *Njáls saga*, Hrútr is the wiser of the two half-brothers, giving accurate advice and predictions of future events. Hǫskuldr, while not necessarily stupid, tends to take things on face value and relies on his brother's advice. This demonstrates just how totally Hrútr is beguiled by Njáll's trick. Hrútr's brother realises the trick too late, but Hrútr does not realise it at all.

### The bear fetch

Hǫskuldr's dream is the only point in *Njáls saga* where the word *fylgja* is specifically used in relation to a dream-symbol. As stated above, the word appears in several other places in relation to waking visions (*Nj* 1954 ch. 12, 37; ch. 41, p. 107; and ch. 69, p. 170). The choice of the bear fetch shows the hostility between Gunnarr and Hrútr, without prejudicing the reader against Gunnarr who will be the saga hero over the next 75 or so chapters. The bear is an aggressive, predatory beast and thus demonstrates the unfriendly intentions of Gunnarr towards Hrútr. It does not, however, represent an evil or dishonourable person in the same way as a wolf *fylgja* might have done. Other examples of bear fetches in Old Norse literature have mixed connotations. In *Atlamál* stanza 17, Kostbera dreams of a bear breaking up benches and killing people (*Edda* 1962, 250, also see *Vǫls* 1906-1908, ch. 36, p. 93). This fetch represents the treacherous Atli who later kills her husband Hǫgni. In Þorbjörg's dream in *Harðar saga*, Hǫrðr appears as a rather unhappy polar bear (see chapter VII.iii). This bear contrasts to the fire-breathing wolves, who represent Hǫrðr's companions in the dream.

Another similar example occurs in the *fornaldarsaga Orvar-Odds saga*, where Guðmundr dreams of the bear fetch of his kinsman Oddr, encircling an island with its hair standing on end and preparing to sink his ship (*Orv* 1943, ch. 4, pp. 292-293). In both *Njáls saga* and *Orvar-Odds Saga*, the bear fetch symbolises a man ill disposed and potentially dangerous towards the dreamer, but not an evil, intentionally malicious character. Further bear fetches also appear in dreams in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (*ÞorstVik* 1944 ch. 12, pp. 208-209) and *Sögubrot af nokkurum fornkonungum* (*Fornk* 1944, ch. 2, p. 16).

Richard North (1991, 169-171) has suggested that the bear may have specific relevance to Gunnarr's family. In *Landnámabók* a story is told about Gunnarr's maternal grandfather Stórólfr Hœingsson, who quarrelled with Dufþakr. This quarrel is represented symbolically in a vision of a man with second sight as a battle between a bear and a bull (*Ldn* 1968, II, 356). Stórólfr, who wins the dispute, is represented by the bear. Gunnarr's bear fetch therefore seems to be an inherent characteristic, descended from his mother's family. If North is right then this suggests a tradition whereby a particularly animal would be associated with a family. In *Vápnfirðinga saga*, Brodd-Helgi is represented in a dream by a fawn ox and his son Bjarni by a red ox (*Vápnf* 1950, ch. 13, pp. 48-49). *Þorsteins þátr uxafóts* contains an interesting episode in which an elderly kinsman named Geitir notices young Þorsteinn's bear-cub fetch (*ÞUxaf* 1991, ch. 5, p. 350). Geitir thinks it impossible for a bear fetch to be attached to a person of lowly descent, and therefore guesses the boy's true parentage, which had previously been unknown.

In the dream Gunnarr's bear-fetch is accompanied by two bear-cubs (*húnar*) who are well disposed to the bear. The choice of bear-cub as fetch, here complements the bear representing Gunnarr. Interestingly, in GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup> and GKS 2868 4<sup>o</sup> (i.e. the Z-class manuscripts) the companions are dogs rather than bears. There are other examples of bears mixed with other fetches in saga dreams, (see the examples already mentioned in *Harðar saga*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and *Sögubrot af nokkurum fornkonungum*). Nevertheless dogs are rarely found in Old Norse dreams (Turville-Petre 1968, 29-30) and therefore it seems most likely that this is a scribal error, with the word *húnar* ('bear-cubs') being mistaken for *hundar* ('dogs').

Hǫskuldr's dream as news-dream

Regarding supernatural intimations, visions and dreams in *Njáls saga*, Rory McTurk (1990-1993) categorises them as either precognitive, telepathic or retrocognitive. He describes Hǫskuldr's dream of the bear as "the only clear-cut instance of retrocognition in *Njáls saga*" (McTurk 1990-1993, 39). The saga states that Gunnarr goes to Hǫskuldsstaðir where he stays for the night. From here he goes to a farm neighbouring Hrútsstaðir (presumably setting off sometime in the day). At this nearby farm Gunnarr sells the farmer some shoddy wares and then flies into a rage when confronted about them. Hrútr then sends for Heðinn to confront him. Their conversation proceeds just as Njáll has predicted, with Gunnarr first slandering the men of various districts in Iceland and then tricking Hrútr into helping him to revive the lawsuit. Gunnarr goes to bed at Hrútsstaðir, but as soon as Hrútr is asleep he makes his getaway. Hǫskuldr's dream is narrated as happening the same night (*þessi nótt*) as Gunnarr leaves Hrútsstaðir. Although it is not specified in the saga, it is likely that Gunnarr leaves Hǫskuldsstaðir early in the morning, arrives at Hrútsstaðir sometime that evening and departs that night. Thus the first image of Hǫskuldr's dream, the bear departing from his house, occurs many hours before he dreams it. The dream then telescopes the time it takes Gunnarr to travel between the two farms and leaves out the incidental detail that he stopped at a neighbouring farm first. Given the fact that the dream only portrays up to the point where the bear goes into the house at Hrútsstaðir and does not cover his subsequent departure, McTurk is right in his assertion that the entire dream is retrocognitive, with Hǫskuldr envisaging Gunnarr's journey to Hrútsstaðir after it has happened. In this way the author uses traditional fetch motifs to portray the world in microcosm.

Although Hǫskuldr's dream occurs retrospectively, its role is to impart information. It functions as a news-dream, that is a dream which imparts information supernaturally quicker than would be possible without supernatural means. In fact, a dream of a fetch functioning as a news-dream is relatively uncommon. News-dreams are usually in the form of direct representation occurring simultaneously with the events they represent, such as Hersteinn Blund-Ketilsson's dream in *Hænsa-Þóris saga* (Hóns 1938, ch. 9, p. 24), or a visitation from a dream-man or woman who relates events retrospectively, such as the dreams of Illugi inn svarti and Qnundr Eilífsson of their respective sons in *Gunnlaugs saga* (Gunnl 1938, ch. 13, pp. 104-105). In *Njáls saga* the author has used the fetch dream to convey news. He does this partly due to his need to

condense the waking time, which is portrayed in miniature in the dream. The symbolic representation used in fetch dreams lends itself better to this than realistic direct representation. However the concept of the fetch is well suited to the theme of disguise. It is as if Gunnarr is able to put on a physical disguise, but cannot entirely conceal who he really is. He cannot fully hide his inner-self, his ancestry and its bear association or his intentions towards Hrútr, which are revealed in the dream-world through his fetch in the dream, just as his gold embroidered cuffs peep from beneath his disguise in the waking world.

### Conclusion

The first dream in *Njáls saga* is a bear fetch dream. Unusually for a fetch dream, this functions as a news-dream. The dream is part of a larger motif, whereby the deceiving of Hrútr by Gunnarr is uncovered just too late to be prevented. These scenes are essential for the transfer of the reader's interest from the brothers in Hvammsfjörðr, to Njáll and Gunnarr in the south and the dream is part of this transfer. The dream ensures that we have some sympathy for the brothers yet the choice of the bear fetch, which may have been dependent on pre-existing associations with Gunnarr's ancestry, ensures that his character is in no way tarnished in the eyes of the reader allowing him to develop into the hero of the first half of the saga.

### III.iii Gunnarr's dream of wolves

#### Context:

Gunnarr's dream occurs while he is travelling home along Þjórsá after visiting Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson at Tunga. He is accompanied only by his brothers Kolskeggr and Hjörtr. Immediately following his dream, Gunnarr and his companions are ambushed by a group of sixteen men including Starkaðr Barkarson, his three sons, their kinsman Egill Kolsson, Sigurðr svínhofði and a Norwegian named Þórir, who has joined them somewhat reluctantly. Gunnarr and his brothers retreat back to Rangá and make their defence. During the battle Sigurðr, two of the Starkaðarsons, Egill and two of his sons are all killed. The Norwegian, Þórir, kills Gunnarr's brother, Hjörtr, by striking him in the chest. Gunnarr, enraged, then kills Þórir by cutting him in two at the waist with his halberd. At this, Starkaðr signals the retreat, but does not escape until Gunnarr has inflicted a wound on both him and his son Þorgeirr.

#### Text:

*Nj* 1875, ch. 62, pp. 282-285.

*Nj* 1908, ch. 62, pp. 139-140.

*Nj* 1954, ch. 62, pp. 155-156

Nú er þar til at taka, at Gunnarr riðr austr yfir Þjórsá. En er hann var kominn skammt frá ánni, syfjaði hann mjök, ok bað hann þá æja; þeir gerðu svá. Hann sofnaði fast ok lét illa í svefni. Kolskeggr mælti: "Dreymir Gunnar nú." Hjörtr mælti: "Vekja vilda ek hann." "Eigi skal þat," segir Kolskeggr; "njóta skal hann draums síns." Gunnarr lá mjök langa hríð ok varp síðan af sér skikkjunni, ok var honum varmt mjök. Kolskeggr mælti: "Hvat hefir þik dreymt, frændi?" "Þat hefir mik dreymt," segir Gunnarr, "at ek mynda eigi riðit hafa ór Tungu svá fámennr, ef mik hefði þá þetta dreymt." Kolskeggr mælti: "Seg oss draum

Now there is this point to take up, that Gunnarr rode east over the Þjórsá. When he was a little way from the river, he became very sleepy and asked his companions to pause. They did this. He fell deeply asleep, but was restless in his sleep. Kolskeggr said: "Gunnarr is dreaming now." Hjörtr said: "I would like to wake him." "That should not happen," said Kolskeggr. "He should have the benefit of his dream." Gunnarr lay there a very long while and then threw off his cloak and he was very hot. Kolskeggr said: "What have you been dreaming, kinsman?" "Such have I dreamt," said Gunnarr, "that, if I had dreamt it earlier, then I would not have ridden from Tunga in such a small group."

pinn.”<sup>16</sup> “Þat dreymði mik,” segir Gunnarr, “at ek þóttumsk ríða fram hjá Knafahólum. Þar þóttumsk ek sjá marga varga, ok sóttu þeir allir at mér, en ek snerumsk undan fram at Rangá. Þá þótti mér þeir sækja at öllum megin, en vér vörðumsk; ek skaut alla þá, er fremstir váru, þar til er þeir gingu svá at mér, at ek máttu eigi boganum við koma. Tók ek þá sverðit, ok vá ek með, annarri hendi, en lagða með atgeirinum annarri hendi; hlífða ek mér þá ekki, ok þóttumsk ek þá eigi vita, hvat mér hlífði. Drap ek þá marga vargana ok þú með mér, Kolskeggr, en Hjörtr þótti mér þeir hafa undir ok slíta á honum brjósttit, ok hafði einn hjartat í munni sér. En ek þóttumsk verða svá reiðr, at ek hjó varginn í sundr fyrir aptan bóguna, ok eptir þat þóttu mér stökkva vargarnir. Nú er þat ráð mitt, Hjörtr frændi, at þú ríðir vestr aprt í Tungu.” “Eigi vil ek þat,” segir Hjörtr, “þótt ek vita vísan bana minn, þá vil ek þér fylgja.”

Kolskeggr said: “Tell us your dream.” “I dreamed this,” said Gunnarr, “I thought that I was riding past Knafahólar. There I thought that I saw many wolves and they all attacked me, but I retreated down to the Rangá. Then it seemed to me they attacked from all sides, but we fought back. I shot all of those which were in the lead until they were so close that I could not use my bow. Then I drew my sword and fought with that in one hand and thrust with my halberd in the other hand. I did not shield myself and I seemed not to know what shielded me. Then I killed many wolves and you were with me, Kolskeggr, but it seemed to me they overpowered Hjörtr and tore into his breast and one had his heart in its mouth. I thought I became so angry that I cut the wolf in two just behind its shoulders and after that the wolves seemed to flee. Now it is my advice, Hjörtr, my kinsman, that you ride back west to Tunga.” “I do not want to do that,” said Hjörtr. “Even though I know for certain of my death, I wish to accompany you.”

### Commentary:

Although not the climax of the first half of *Njáls saga*, the battle at Rangá represents an exciting episode in the story. The saga-writer uses a number of typical, even archetypical, motifs to build up the reader's expectation prior to the battle. Gunnarr's dream creates excitement by both foreshadowing and delaying the account of the battle. Although the author does not describe the dream symbols as *fylgjur*, given the evidence of the dream in chapter 23, together with the further mentions of *fylgjur* in chapters 12, 41 and 69, it seems likely that the author saw the dream-symbols in Gunnarr's dream as fetches. The author uses motifs common to a great many sagas, most noticeably to *Droplaugarsona saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*, to create a sort of mini-climax. Six manuscripts describe Gunnarr's dream. In the X-class: AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, AM

<sup>16</sup>At this point the manuscript AM 468 4<sup>o</sup> has been amended to read: *Gunnarr kvað* followed by a verse (see below); AM 133 fol. also contains the verse but without the introduction (*Nj* 1875, ch. 62, pp. 283-284 and *Nj* 1954 “Viðbætur”, 475.)

133 fol, and the fragment AM 162 B  $\delta$  fol. (another fragment AM 162 B  $\gamma$  fol. breaks off in the second line of the passage quoted above). In the Y-class: AM 132 fol. and AM 466 4<sup>o</sup>. In the Z branch: GKS 2869 4<sup>o</sup>. (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 102). The most striking difference between the redactions is that in AM 468 4<sup>o</sup> and AM 133 fol. Gunnarr speaks a verse which is not preserved in the other manuscripts (see below for this verse). In AM 468 4<sup>o</sup> this verse appears to have been added in a separate hand from that of the main text, at the bottom margin of fol. 32v.

### The narration of the dream

The entire episode at Rangá in *Njáls saga* shows considerable similarity to the battle between the two Helgis in *Droplaugarsona saga*, including the narration of a dream of wolves shortly before the attack. Both sagas follow broadly the sequence for the narration of a dream in the first person (see section II.ii above). Gunnarr becomes very tired suddenly and asks his companions to stop. Dag Strömbäck (1975a, 5-9) sees this tiredness as being caused by the influence of his enemies' fetches already affecting him and gives several further examples from sagas and numerous examples from Scandinavian folklore supporting the idea that the approach of someone's fetch could induce tiredness. One might also compare it with the fit of yawning suffered by Svanr before he realises that the fetches (*fylgjur*) of Þjóstólfr's enemies are approaching (*Nj* 1954, ch. 12, p. 37).<sup>17</sup> Like Helgi, Gunnarr is watched over during his sleep by his companions Kolskeggr and Hjörtr, who see that he is restless in his sleep (*lét illa í svefni* - identical in both sagas). While Gunnarr is sleeping there is the interesting dialogue between Kolskeggr and the youngest brother Hjörtr. Hjörtr, seeing Gunnarr's restlessness, wants to wake him, but Kolskeggr flatly refuses, wanting Gunnarr to have the benefit of his dream. Kolskeggr's use of the verb *njóta* ('to have the use or benefit of', or 'to profit by something') shows that dreaming in the saga world could be seen as a potentially enlightening experience. Although Gunnarr is restless and apparently in some discomfort, Kolskeggr believes that the dream will be a positive experience, presumably because of its potentially prophetic nature. Similar phrases also appear in *Orvar-Odds saga* (*Orv* 1943, ch. 4, p. 292), *Fljótsdæla saga* (*Flj* 1950, ch. 5, p. 224), and *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Fbr* 1943, ch. 23, p. 243). It seems that, despite most heroes

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<sup>17</sup> Alternatively Svanr's behaviour may relate to his attempts to breath in spirits in order to undertake some kind of séance (see Tolley 1995, 58; McKinnell 2001, 249).

being reluctant to let dreams govern their actions, dreaming was considered a positive experience from which one could benefit.

Upon Gunnarr's waking, Kolskeggr asks him about his dream and Gunnarr is at first evasive, saying that he regrets travelling with so small a force but without saying why. Only after Kolskeggr asks a second time does Gunnarr relate his dream (after his verse in some of the manuscripts). The dream is related in direct speech. However, unlike *Droplaugarsona saga*, there is no specific interpretation of the dream. Where the *Droplaugarsona saga* author felt the need to have Helgi's companion Þorkell interpret the general meaning of the dream (that Helgi Ásbjarnarson and his men were waiting in ambush), the *Njáls saga* author was confident his readers would be able to interpret the meaning for themselves. This is in keeping with the expectation that a saga composed in the mid to late period of classical saga writing such as *Njáls saga* (generally thought to be composed circa 1275-1290), would have greater confidence in its readers being familiar with motifs from earlier sagas. The expectation that the reader will be able to decode a wolf dream is indicative that this has now become a very familiar motif and shows the development in the reading as well as the composition of sagas during the thirteenth century.

Instead of interpreting his dream, Gunnarr merely tries to send his brother Hjórttr back to Tunga. This shows an implicit interpretation of the dream, as Gunnarr would not try to send his brother home unless he believed that he was in danger. This action corresponds to Þorkell inviting Helgi home with him in *Droplaugarsona saga*. Both are unsuccessful attempts to avoid the prophecy of the dream. In *Njáls saga* this attempt has been transferred from the companion to the dreamer. Unlike *Droplaugarsona saga*, it is not the death of the dreamer that has been foretold, but that of his companion. It is therefore the companion, Hjórttr, who has to complete the dream narration scene by commenting on the interpretation: *Eigi vil ek þat ... þótt ek vita vísan bana minn, þá vil ek þér fylgja* ('I do not want to do that ... even though I know for certain of my death, I wish to accompany you'). This corresponds with the steadfastness shown by Helgi: *Svá mun ek fara sem ek hefði ætlat* ('Thus I will travel just as I planned'). In this way both characters show both bravery and resignation in facing their deaths.

As in *Droplaugarsona saga*, the author of *Njáls saga* uses some of the subtler aspects of the dream to convey additional information about the forthcoming battle. In this case the specific number of wolves is not mentioned as they are merely referred to as *margir vargar* ('many wolves'), a phrase similar to that used by Gísli Þorgautsson in



*Heiðarvíga saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 1933, 121, see *Heið* 1938, ch. 26, pp. 294). As in both *Droplaugarsona saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*, specific geographical details in the dream represent geographical details in the battle. In the dream Gunnarr is riding past Knafahólar when the wolves attack, as he is when he is ambushed by Starkaðr and his comrades. He then retreats back to the Rangá in his dream, as he does in the battle. These actions have clear parallels in *Droplaugarsona saga*, where Helgi is unable to reach Kálfshváll and instead retreats to the edge of valley beside Eyrargilsá (although the latter part is not indicated in the dream).

Gunnarr's actions while fighting the wolves closely mirror his actions while fighting the ambushers. First he kills those foremost in approaching him with his bow - in the battle this is Sigurðr and Úlfheðinn (Starkaðr's overseer). Then the wolves come too close for Gunnarr to use his bow. In the battle Starkaðr urges his followers to approach more quickly to prevent Gunnarr from shooting them. In his narration of the dream, Gunnarr then describes fighting the wolves with his sword in one hand and halberd (*atgeirr*) in the other. He comments that he is not sure what is defending him (it would be normal to have a weapon in one hand and a shield in the other). This is roughly mirrored in the battle by Þorgeirr urging on Þorkr and Þorkell, saying (*Nj* 1954, ch. 63, p. 158): *Hlaupu vér at honum fram allir senn; hann hefir engan skjöld, ok munu vér hafa ráð hans í hendi* ('Let us run at him all at the same time. He has no shield and we will have him in our power'). Lars Lönnroth (1976, 129 note) sees Gunnarr's ability to defend himself as divine intervention:

One may conceivably interpret this statement as meaning that Gunnarr is protected by his *gæfa* or his *fylgja*, but, even so, the tone is Christian enough to suggest that the fatal powers are somehow operated by an Unknown God.

Although the battle at Knafahólar takes place prior to the account of the conversion in *Njáls saga*, Lönnroth quotes extensive examples which illustrate the way in which fate, both in a Christian and pre-Christian sense, acts throughout the saga. Gunnarr conforms to what Lönnroth (1969, 14-15) describes as a "noble heathen", and therefore such protection should not seem incongruous. Richard North (1991, 169-171) also suggests that it is Gunnarr's fetch, which he identifies as the same as the bear seen in Hǫskuldr's dream in chapter 23, that protects him. Interestingly this supernatural protection of Gunnarr during the battle is not brought to the fore in the actual description of the confrontation, rather in the description of the dream. After they have been urged forward, Þorkell and Þorkr attack. Gunnarr parries Þorkr's blow with the halberd

causing him to drop his sword and Gunnarr then swings his own sword chopping off Þorkell's head. These actions are described without any hint of an external agency protecting Gunnarr. In this way, the saga writer uses the dream to stress the fatalistic, mystical and perhaps even religious side of events, whereas the actual battle describes in more straightforward terms the brutal conflict of three men fighting for their lives against a force of ten times their number.

Kolskeggr fares well against the dream wolves, just as he does in the battle, but Hjörtr is bitten in the chest and a wolf tears out his heart. This rather gruesome and vividly described detail corresponds to the Norwegian Þórir killing Hjörtr with a blow to his chest. Gunnarr repays this in the dream by cutting the wolf in half behind its shoulders and in the battle by cutting Þórir in two at the waist. As in Helgi's dream in *Droplaugarsona saga*, the specific details of Gunnarr's dream, the actions and the wounds which Gunnarr and his brothers exchange with the wolves, mirror the actions and the wounds that will occur in the battle.

As already stated, *Njáls saga* is by far the longest *Íslendingasaga* and has two rather than one climactic episodes (Andersson 1967, 303-306). Given this great length the writer probably felt the need for several exciting episodes interspersed throughout the narrative to engage the reader's attention. These mini-climaxes maintain the reader's interest as the author gradually builds towards the dénouement. The battle at Knafahólar is clearly one of these mini-climaxes. It is also an important episode in Gunnarr's life. It firmly establishes Þorgeirr Starkaðarson and his father as embittered enemies of Gunnarr, both of whom pursue their vendetta vigorously and are directly responsible for the chain of events which lead to Gunnarr's death and both are present at the attack on Hlíðarendi, where Gunnarr dies. The battle at Knafahólar also has further ramifications, as it is during the prosecutions following the battle that we see the first legal confrontation between Njáll and Mjörðr Valgarðsson, which is essential in understanding Mjörðr's vendetta against the Njálssons in the second half of the saga. So, although not the climax of the saga, the author did want to build the battle into a climactic event, to endow it with additional excitement and moment to make it stand out from the surrounding scenes. What better way might the author find to heighten the reader's excitement at such a mini-climax than by modelling it on the climax of an earlier saga?

Gunnarr's verse in AM 133 fol. and AM 468 4°

Finally a few words may be said about the verse attributed to Gunnarr. The verse is as follows (*Nj* 1875 ch. 62, p. 284; *Nj* 1954, "Viðbætir", p. 475; *Skjaldedigtning* AII, 203; BII 216):

Þykkjumz, flýtir flokka,  
fámennr riðinn, sennu, -  
víst brá ek hrafnis á hausti  
hungri, - brott ór Tungu,  
því at, eldveitir öldu! -  
ek fýsumz þat lýsa;  
merg etr valr frá vargi  
villr, - dreymði mik illa.<sup>18</sup>

I thought that I, the accelerator of the quarrels of armies [the quarrels of armies i.e. battles; the accelerator of battles i.e. an army commander], had ridden away from Tunga with few men, - I broke the hunger of the raven [the hunger of the raven, i.e. the peace] in the autumn, because I, the granter of the fire of the waves [fire of the waves, i.e. gold; the granter of gold, i.e. man, warrior] had bad dreams; I urged myself to say this: "the wild falcon eats marrow from the wolf".

Many saga dreams are followed by verses spoken by the dreamer and therefore the scribe was probably following the example of such sagas as *Víga-Glúms saga* (see section VI.iii below), *Bjarnar saga* (*BjH* 1938, ch. 26, p. 178), *Gísla saga* (see section V below), *Gunnlaugs saga* (*Gunnl* 1938, ch. 11, p. 88) and *Heiðarvíga saga* (*Heið* 1938, ch. 26, p. 293), all of which have verses associated with dreams. Indeed even *Njáls saga* contains two dreams with associated verses (see sections III.v and III.vii below) (although in both of these examples the verse is recited by a dream spirit, and not by the dreamer). Therefore the inclusion of a verse as part of the narration of a dream fits well with saga style.

Nevertheless the *dróttkvætt* verse itself contributes little in terms of either artistry or intelligence to the dream scene. The verse mentions Gunnarr's bad dreams and the wish that he had brought a greater force with him from Tunga. The exact meaning of the rest of the verse is unclear. It uses relatively typical battle imagery. The hunger of the raven (meaning peace) relates to the familiar motif of ravens as birds of carrion feeding off corpses on battlefields and alludes to the raven's status as a symbol of Óðinn (god of war) for the same reason. The verse does mention a wolf, but this bears little relation to the wolves of the dream as described in the prose. The verse tells us that the warrior (one assumes Gunnarr) wants to declare that the falcon (*valr*) will eat

<sup>18</sup> *Þykkjumz, flýtir flokka sennu! riðinn fámennr brott ór Tungu, - víst brá ek hungri hrafnis á hausti, - því at, öldu eldveitir, mik dreymði illa; ek fýsumz lýsa þat; villr valr etr merg frá vargi.*

marrow (*mergr*; AM 468 4<sup>o</sup> has *margr* 'many'). This is presumably to show the warrior as being unafraid of the impending danger. Nevertheless, this bravado obscures some of the subtler points of the dream in the prose. For example, the stanza contains no mention of the death of Hjörtr, which features prominently in prose. It therefore pays no attention to the effect of the dream upon the dreamer. When he wakes up, Gunnarr attempts to avert the confrontation, for his brother at least. Gunnarr is not heading into battle with defiant courage and foolhardy heroism. He is afraid, not for his own life, but for that of his brother. This fact is entirely forgotten or ignored by the poet. The verse does not seem likely to have been composed under the circumstances described in the saga, nor does it seem to be part of the original material of the saga itself. It appears to be an attempt on the part of a copyist attempting to give Gunnarr's character greater depth by portraying him as poet as well as warrior (following a tradition of Egill Skalla-Grimsson, Björn Hítðlakappi and Kormákr Ögmundarson) and to give the wolf dream an additional sense of the moment.

### Conclusion

The second dream in *Njáls saga* creates tension, by simultaneously foreshadowing and delaying the battle at Knafahólar. The author is maintaining the reader's interest by creating a mini-climax. He does this at a point which is an important step leading directly towards the actual climax. To create this mini-climax he borrows the staging technique of a wolf dream occurring shortly before the battle, a motif he must have known from earlier sagas.

### III.iv Kolskeggr's dream of the shining man

#### Context:

Both Gunnarr and his brother Kolskeggr are sentenced to leave Iceland for three years on account of the killing of Þorgeirr Otkelsson. Only Kolskeggr leaves, however, vowing never to return to Iceland (*Nj* 1954, ch. 75, p. 183): *því at ek mun spyrja þik látinn, frændi, ok heldr mik þá ekki til útferðar* ('because I will hear of your death, kinsman, and then there will be nothing to draw me on the journey to Iceland'). One night in Denmark Kolskeggr has the following dream. Following the passage below, the saga makes no further mention of Kolskeggr.

#### Text:

*Nj* 1875, ch. 81, pp. 379-381.

*Nj* 1908, ch. 81, pp. 177-178.

*Nj* 1954, ch. 81, p. 197.

Eina hverja nótt dreymði hann, at maðr kom at honum; sá var ljóss; honum þótti hann vekja sik. Hann mælti við hann: "Statt þú upp ok far með mér." "Hvat villt þú mér?" segir hann. Hann mælti: "Ek skal fá þér kvánfang, ok skalt þú vera riddari minn." Hann þóttisk játa því; eptir þat vaknaði hann. Síðan fór hann til spekinga eins ok sagði honum drauminn, en hann réð svá, at hann myndi fara suðr í lǫnd ok verða guðs riddari. Kolskeggr tók skírn í Danmörku, en nam þar þó eigi ynði ok fór austr í Garðaríki ok var þar einn vetr. Þá fór hann þaðan út í Miklagarð ok gekk þar á mála. Spurðisk þat síðast til hans, at hann kvánaðisk þar ok var hofðingi fyrir Væringjaliði ok var þar til dauðadags, ok er hann ór sögunni.

One night he dreamed, that a man came to him. That man was of shining appearance. The man seemed to wake him. He spoke with him: "Stand up and come with me." "What do you want with me?" he said. He said: "I shall give you a bride and you shall be my knight." He thought that he agreed to this. After that he woke up. Then he went to a wise man and told him the dream and he interpreted it thus, that he would go to southern lands and become God's knight. Kolskeggr accepted baptism in Denmark but nevertheless he was not content there and he travelled east to Russia and was there for one winter. Then he travelled from there to Constantinople and joined the army. The last thing known about him was that he married there and was a commander of the Varangian Guard and was there until the day of his death and he is now out of the saga.

#### Commentary:

There are seven medieval manuscripts covering Kolskeggr's dream (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 102). In the X-class AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, AM 133 fol. and GKS 2868 4<sup>o</sup>; in the

Y-class AM 132 fol, AM 466 4<sup>o</sup>, AM 309 4<sup>o</sup> and in the Z-class GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup>. *Landnámabók* (*Melabók*) lists Gunnarr's brothers as Hjörtr, Helgi, Hafr and Ormr skógarnef (*Ldn* 1968, II, 353). *Njáls saga*, on the other hand, mentions only Hjörtr and Kolskeggr. Kolskeggr may be either a nickname ('coal-beard') for either Helgi or Hafr (Blöndal 1978, 196; Ellis Davidson 1976, 233), or an entirely fictional character invented by the saga author. Nonetheless Kolskeggr has an important role to play in the saga. Kolskeggr Hámundarson is Gunnarr's loyal and constant companion through the first part of the saga. He accompanies him on his travels abroad (chs. 28-32) and on his trips to the assembly (ch. 38), he warns Gunnarr of his wife's questionable connections (ch. 38), but is also capable of diplomacy (ch. 41). He is also a fearsome warrior, accompanying Gunnarr in the battles at Hof (ch. 54), and both battles beside the Rangá (chs. 63 and 72). As the passage above makes clear, Kolskeggr finishes his career far from Iceland in the renowned Varangian guard, famed personal guard of the Byzantine Emperor.

#### Dream visitations

Kolskeggr's dream is quite different from either Gunnarr's or Hǫskuldr's. Both previous dreams in *Njáls saga* have been symbolic dreams in which animals are used to represent future or current events. Kolskeggr's dream does not represent events in the waking world as such, rather is a visitation from a person with a message of importance for Kolskeggr. Some studies of literary dreams differentiate between "true-dreams" and "visions" (Le Goff 1988, 194; Fischer 1978, 11-12; Cormack 1994, 188). True dreams are the symbolic representations of real events (usually yet to occur) experienced in sleep. These dreams require interpretation, either made explicitly in the text by a character whom the narrator considers to be wise and therefore credible, or by the reader. A "vision" (according to this terminology) refers to a dream where a person is visited by a spirit (either natural or supernatural), who then interacts with the visionary in some way, perhaps telling of future events or giving aid or advice. These two groups might be approximately equated to the Macrobian categories of the *somnium* and the *oraculum* respectively (Macrobius 1952, 87-90; also see Kruger 1992, 21-24). To take two examples from *The Bible*: the Pharaoh's dream of the seven fat cows and seven thin (*Genesis* 41:1-5)<sup>19</sup> would be termed a true-dream; whereas the Angel of the Lord

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<sup>19</sup> All citations from *The Bible* are from *The New English Bible*, 1970; and *The Apocrypha* from *The New English Bible: Apocrypha*, 1970.

appearing to Mary's husband Joseph (*Matthew* 1:20-21) would be a vision. These categories do not directly correspond to Old Norse terms (Cormack 1994, 188 note). In the *Íslendingasögur* the terms *dreyma* and *draumr* are generally used to refer to all sleeping experiences and terms such as *vitran* ('a revelation') or *sýn* ('a sight') are rarely used where there is an implication that the witness is sleeping. For this reason, and because in modern English 'vision' tends to imply a waking apparition rather than something occurring in a dream, I have deliberately avoided these terms. Instead, I refer to the 'true-dreams' as 'symbolic dreams' and the 'visions' as 'dream visitations'.

#### Kolskeggr's visitation dream

Kolskeggr's dream visitation clearly represents a very different tradition of beliefs about dreams and dreaming from the symbolic dreams earlier in *Njáls saga* and in *Droplaugarsona saga*. Though it still requires a process of understanding, the basic meaning of Kolskeggr's dream is exposed and does not require interpretation in order to be understood. There are many such dream visitations in the *Íslendingasögur*. These dream visitations sit alongside the symbolic dreams (just as Kolskeggr's dream does) and for the saga reader such a mixing of traditions seems to have proved in no way incongruous. It seems that the saga reader who could believe that the fetches of Gunnarr's attackers became visible in a dream, could also believe that a shining man appeared to his brother. The proliferation of dream visitations in the *Biskupasögur* (Cormack, 1994, 185), together with the fact that many dream visitations in secular texts impart Christian messages, may suggest that the dream visitation is essentially a Christian motif. The evidence for this, however, is far from conclusive. By the time the sagas were written down, symbolic dreams and dream visitations sat easily side by side, though the latter lent themselves rather better to promoting Christian dogma than the former. This is not to say the author of *Njáls saga* was oblivious to the different types of dreams in his text; merely that he saw them all as dreams and of equal verisimilitude.

Although not all dream visitations necessarily demonstrate Christian influence, Kolskeggr's dream is very obviously associated with Christianity. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (*Nj* 1954, ch. 81, p. 197 footnote) suggests a passage in *Þorláks saga helga* as a model (*ÞBpB* 2002, ch. 5, pp. 148-149, also see *ÞBpA* 2002, ch. 5, pp. 54-55):

Á þeiri nóttu sýndisk Þorláki í draumi	That night a man of noble appearance and in
göfugligr maðr yfirlits með sæmiligum	wonderful clothes appeared to Þorlákr in a
búningi ok mælti: "Hvert hafí þér ætlat hingat	dream and said: "What business do you have on

<p>ørendi yðart ef þér megið sjálfir ráða?”          Þorlákr svaraði: “Ek veit eigi at hverju verða          vill.” Draummaðrinn mælti: “Veit ek at þú          ætlar hér konu at biðja. En þú skalt þat mál          eigi láta upp koma, af því at þér er önnur          brúðr huguð, ok er sú miklu æðri, ok öngar          skaltu aðra fá.”</p>	<p>hand here, if you yourself might decide.”          Þorlákr answered: “I do not know what I want”.          The dream-man said: “I know that you intend          to ask for a wife here, but you shall not allow          that to happen, because another bride is          intended for you, and that one is much higher          and you shall get no other.”</p>
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The beautiful clothes of Þorlákr's dream have become shining raiment in Kolskeggr's dream. This luminescence motif is a common feature of omens predicting great piety in a person's future (see for example Loomis 1948, 17-20). The luminescence motif is found in several saga dreams where dream-men impart specifically Christian messages (see for example *Hkr* 1945, *Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 112, p. 186; also *Þórh* 2003, 156-157). The dream-man's instruction for Kolskeggr to stand up (presumably because he is lying down asleep) is also something that is particularly associated with dreams of saints or pious men (e.g. *Nik* 1877, 33; *Pétri* 1874, ch. 13, p. 170; *ÓT* 1961, ch. 283, p. 341; *Stu* 1906-1911, I, 522).

*Þorláks saga helga* makes it quite clear that Þorlákr's dream is a revelation from God. On the basis of the dream Þorlákr, who had been planning to ask for a bride for himself, changes his plans and remains celibate, being consecrated Bishop of Skálholt in 1178. Kolskeggr on the other hand marries in Constantinople. If the man in Kolskeggr's dream is to be taken as either God or Christ, then the bride whom he grants Kolskeggr is an earthly one and not union to the church and faith as is implied in Þorlákr's dream. Similarly, the man in the dream tells Kolskeggr: *skalt þú vera riddari minn* ('you will be my knight'). The sage, whom Kolskeggr consults about the dream, interprets this saying: *hann myndi fara suðr í lönd ok verða guðs riddari* ('he would go to southern lands and become God's knight'). This therefore implies that the man in the dream is indeed God (or the agent of God) and that Kolskeggr will become his servant. This is at least partially fulfilled when Kolskeggr is baptised in Denmark, becoming Christian, and therefore at least in a sense a knight of God. Nonetheless the text is quite clear that Kolskeggr continues his journey and enters the service of the Emperor and is therefore his knight too. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (*Nj* 1954, ch. 81, p. 197 note) suggests that Kolskeggr is God's knight in so much as he battles heathen armies (as he surely would serving with the Varangians). However such an explanation is not really necessary. The writer of *Njáls saga* seems to have taken an explicitly Christian episode



from *Þorláks saga helga* and naturalised some aspects (such as the marriage), reducing their specifically Christian relevance, while making other aspects (such as the luminescence motif or the sage's interpretation) more overtly Christian. I believe to truly understand Kolskeggr's dream we have to understand it both in secular and religious terms. The man in the dream is both God and the Emperor; Kolskeggr marries both a real woman and his faith; and he becomes the knight of both God and the Emperor. Whereas Hǫskuldr and Gunnarr's dreams both lend themselves to matching each aspect of the dream to single events in the waking world, Kolskeggr's dream merges one idea into the next, implying more than a single meaning.

#### The role the dream in the saga

This brings into question of role of Kolskeggr's dream in the text. It is the first dream in the saga that might be said to have an active function in the saga plot. The dream removes Kolskeggr from the arena of *Njáls saga* completely and permanently. As his eldest brother, responsibility for avenging Gunnarr's death would naturally fall to Kolskeggr, along with Gunnarr's sons Hǫgni and Grani. Yet in the saga, Gunnarr is avenged by Hǫgni and Skarpheðinn Njálsson, whereby the author raises Skarpheðinn in our estimation, places the Njálssons firmly in the centre of the narrative and further cements together the two distinct sections of *Njáls saga*. Kolskeggr's dream is a convenient way of removing from the saga this possibly fictional character, who has been the hero's companion through the first half of the saga, but who needs to be distanced from events following his brother's death to allow Skarpheðinn to shine through. Kolskeggr has already vowed never to return to Iceland, as to do so would inevitably mean to hear of his brother's death, yet the author makes it clear that Kolskeggr is by no means culpable by placing him as far as possible from Iceland and giving him a spiritual calling.

The dream has a further part to play in the text than merely removing Kolskeggr from the saga. The dream introduces the theme of Christianity and conversion into the text. The conversion of Iceland is described in some detail in *Njáls saga*, with the author devoting chapters 100 to 105 to the subject. Kolskeggr's personal conversion foreshadows the political conversion that will occur in his homeland only a few years later. In this way the dream not only ties up some of the loose threads of the first half of *Njáls saga*, but also points forward to the second half. It is the final role of Kolskeggr, as shown by his dream, to become a true Christian and thereby contrast to his brother

who dies a noble pagan. Before Gunnarr makes his decision to remain in Iceland, Njáll predicts that, should he go, his journey abroad would be a great success (*Nj* 1954, ch. 74, p. 181). Gunnarr remains behind, yet Kolskeggr goes and lives the life that Gunnarr might have led.

### III.v Flosi's dream of Járngrímr

#### Context:

Following the failure to reach a settlement at the Alþingi over the killing of Hǫskuldr, Flosi Þórðarson leads a party to attack Bergþórshváll, where they burn the farmstead allowing only the women and children to leave. Of those inside the house, only Kári Sǫlmundarson escapes by jumping from one of the upper walls and fleeing under the cover of the smoke. Even while the fire in the farm is still burning the attackers realise their mistake, when Geirmundr, a kinsman of the Sigfússons, rides up and informs them of Kári's escape. Flosi advises his party to remain hidden on a nearby mountainside from where they witness Kári gathering support for the case against them and excavating the bodies from the ashes. After three days, Flosi advises against disbanding the party and suggests they ride to his farm Svínafell, where they remain until Christmas. At some point during the autumn or early winter Flosi has an ominous dream.

After Christmas, Flosi leaves Svínafell to gather support. At the Alþingi Kári and his comrades prosecute the burners. Due to errors in the prosecution fighting breaks out at the assembly where several of the burners are killed. Finally a settlement is reached where the burners are exiled into full outlawry with the exception of Flosi who receives lesser outlawry. Kári remains aloof from this settlement and therefore retains the right to pursue vengeance. After several further confrontations in the latter part of the saga both Flosi and Kári embark on separate pilgrimages to Rome. On their return to Iceland, Kári and Flosi are reconciled in the final chapter of the saga.

#### Text:

*Nj* 1875, ch. 133, pp. 698-701.

*Nj* 1908, ch. 133, pp. 315-318.

*Nj* 1954, ch. 133, pp. 346-348.

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 605; BI, 605.

Nú er þar til máls at taka at Svínafelli, at Flosi lét illa í svefni eina nótt. Glúmr Hildisson vakti hann, ok var lengi, áðr en hann vaknaði. Flosi bað hann kalla Ketil ór Mǫrk. Ketill kom þangat. Flosi mælti: "Segja vil ek þér draum minn." "Þat má

Now there is this matter to relate at Svínafell; that Flosi was restless in his sleep one night. Glúmr Hildisson tried to wake him and it was a while before he woke up. Flosi told him to get Ketill ór Mǫrk. Ketill came there. Flosi spoke: "I wish to relate to you my dream." "That is

vel,” segir Ketill. “Mik dreymði þat,” segir Flosi, “at ek þóttumsk vera at Lómagnúpi ok ganga út ok sjá upp til gnúpsins. Ok opnaðisk hann, ok gekk maðr út ór gnúpinum ok var í geitheðni ok hafði járnstaf í hendi. Hann fór kallandi ok kallaði á menn mína, suma fyrr, en suma síðar, ok nefndi á nafn. Hann kallaði fyrstan Grím inn rauða ok Árna Kolsson. Þá þótti mér undarliga: mér þótti sem hann kallaði Eyjólfr Bølverksson ok Ljót, son Síðu-Halls, ok nokkura sex menn. Þá þagði hann stund nokkura. Síðan kallaði hann fimm menn af váru liði, ok váru þar Sigfússynir, bræðr þínir. Þá kallaði hann aðra fimm menn, ok var þar Lambi ok Móðólfr ok Glúmr. Þá kallaði hann þrjá menn. Síðast kallaði hann Gunnar Lambason ok Kol Þorsteinsson. Eptir þat gekk hann at mér; ek spurða hann tíðenda. Hann kvezk segja mundu tíðendin. Ok spurða ek hann at nafni; hann nefndisk Járngrimr. Ek spurða, hvert hann skyldi fara; hann kvezk fara skyldu til alþingis. “Hvat skaltú þar gera?” sagði ek. Hann svaraði: “Fyrst skal ek ryðja kviðu, en þá dóma, en þá vígvöll fyrir vegöndum.” Síðan kvað hann þetta:

16. Høggorma mun hefjask  
herði-Þundr á landi;  
sjá munu menn á moldu  
margar heila borgir;  
nú vex blára brodda  
beystisullr í fjøllum;  
koma mun sumra seggja  
sveita dōgg á leggi.<sup>21</sup>

fine,” said Ketill. “I dreamed this,” Flosi said, “that I thought that I was at Lómagnúpr and I walked outside and looked up at the mountain peak. It opened itself up and a man walked out from the peak and he was in a goatskin jacket and had an iron staff in his hand. He started calling out and called to my men, some first and some later and named them by name. First he called Grím inn rauði and Árni Kolsson. Then it seemed strange to me, as it seemed to me he called Eyjólfr Bølverksson and Ljótr the son of Síðu-Hallr and a certain six men. Then he was silent for a little while. Then he called five men from our force and among them were some of the Sigfússons, your brothers. Then he called another five men and among them were Lambi and Móðólfr and Glúmr. Then he called three men. Last he called Gunnar Lambason and Kolr Þorsteinsson. After that he walked to me. I asked him for news. He said that he would tell me. I asked him his name. He said that he was named Járngrimr. I asked where he intended to go. He said that he would go to the Alþingi. ‘What are you going to do there?’ I asked. He answered: ‘First I will challenge the panels, then the judgements, and then sweep aside a battlefield for slayers.’<sup>20</sup> Then he said this:

16. A hardy Þundr of vipers [vipers i.e. swords; Þundr (Óðinn) of swords i.e. warrior] will raise himself in the land; men will see many brain-strongholds [brain-strongholds i.e. skulls] sent to the ground; now the beating noise of black spikes [beating noise of black spikes (spears) i.e. the noise of war] grows in the mountains; the

<sup>20</sup> The verb *ryðja* governs all three clauses. In the first two it seems to mean ‘to challenge’ in a legal sense, whereas in the last it seems to be more generally ‘to clear’ (see below).

<sup>21</sup> Verse 16: *Høggorma herði-Þundr mun hefjask á landi; menn munu sjá margar heila borgir á moldu; nú vex beystisullr blára brodda í fjøllum; koma mun sveita dōgg á leggi sumra seggja.*

Þá laust hann niðr stafnum, ok varð brestr mikill; gekk hann þá inn í fjallit, en mér bauð ótta. Vil ek nú, at þú segir, hvat þú ætlar draum minn vera." "Þat er hugboð mitt," segir Ketill, "at þeir muni allir feigir, er kallaðir váru. Sýnisk mér þat ráð, at þenna draum segi vit engum at svá búnu." Flosi kvað svá vera skyldu.

dew of blood [the dew of blood i.e. blood]  
will come on the legs of some men.

Then he struck the ground with his staff and there was a mighty crash. Then he walked into the mountain and I felt a fear. I want you now to say what you think my dream means." "It is my opinion," said Ketill, "that they will all be fated to die, who were called. It seems to me the best plan, that we tell that dream to no-one as matters stand." Flosi said it should be so.

### Commentary:

This dream is one of the most complex dreams in the *Íslendingasögur*. It is in the form of a visitation from a dream-man, named Járngrímr. Within this visitation dream, however, there is a symbolic dream in which the dream-man's roll-call of names represents the order of men's deaths. In addition to which there are specific hints foreshadowing the imminent confrontation at the Alþingi. The dream functions as a prophecy of future conflict, but also has a structural and temporal function in the saga. By predicting a series of future events in the saga rather than a single event, the dream forms a structure by which the reader can measure their path through the latter chapters of *Njáls saga*. The dream shows the complexity of Flosi's character, who, far from being a two-dimensional villain, is a man racked with fear of the future and guilt of the past. The dream intertwines historical material, learned influences and motifs culled from local legend, and remains a striking example of why *Njáls saga* is often considered the crowning achievement of Icelandic saga writing. There are seven manuscripts preserving this part of *Njáls saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 104). In the X-class AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, AM 133 fol. and GKS 2869 4<sup>o</sup>, and the fragment AM 162 B ζ fol; in the Y-class AM 132 fol, AM 466 4<sup>o</sup>; and in the Z-class GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup>. Given the complexity of the dream I will deal with it thematically, starting with an assessment of Járngrímr himself, then the summonses, followed by the foreshadowing of battle at the Alþingi and concluding with Járngrímr's verse.

### Járngrímr

When he is first introduced, the dream-man's name is not mentioned. The description is pervaded with alliteration. He is described emerging from the mountain peak wearing a goatskin jacket and holding an iron staff (*járnstafr*). Emerging from the

cliff, even in a dream, clearly suggests that this man is a supernatural being, perhaps some kind of *bergbúi* ('rock-dweller' or 'giant'). Norse literature contains a number of stories in which supernatural spirits live in rocks, cliffs or burial mounds (see for example *Þorv* 1958, 285-288; *Bergb* 1991, 442-450; *ÞUxaf* 1991, ch. 6, pp. 352-354; and *ÞÞ* 1961, 150). A story preserved in *Landnámabók* tells of one such *bergbúi*, who appeared to Björn Molda-Gnúpsson in a dream (*Ldn* 1968, II, 330-331). The *bergbúi* asks Björn to go into partnership with him, and Björn agrees. Later a ram comes to his goats. Björn's fortunes quickly change. He makes a great deal of money and becomes known as Hafr-Björn ('Ram-Björn'). It seems possible that similar folklore may have been associated with the mountain Lómagnúpr and have influenced the *Njáls saga* author, when he described Flosi's dream (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971, 16).

The goatskin jacket also probably implies that Járngrímr is non-human (Hermann Pálsson 1990, 63-65). Goats particularly seem to be associated with giants and rock dwellers, as in the example of Hafr-Björn's colleague. Geitir is a giant-name and Geitla a troll-wife name (*SnE* 1998, I, 111-112). In the manuscript GKS 2869 4<sup>o</sup> the goatskin is specifically grey, a reading that fits with the alliteration elsewhere in the passage and may indeed be original. This contrasts with the bright colours (particularly red) associated with expensive clothes and suggests a non-human *landvættir*, distanced from civilisation. One might think of the grey habitually worn by the demi-god Bárðr (*Bárð* 1991, ch. 8, p. 127; ch. 9, p. 129). Similarly the *járnstafr* ('iron staff') which Járngrímr carries, is certainly not the weapon of a human warrior. In *Heimskringla*, one of the *landvættir* who defend Iceland from the sorcerer of King Haraldr Gormsson is a *bergrisi* ('hill-giant') carrying a *járnstafr* (*Hkr* 1941, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 33, p. 271). Hermann Pálsson (1990, 64-65) lists several further examples of giants or monsters carrying *járnstafr*.

Járngrímr's name further emphasises these superhuman qualities. The first element of the name *járn* ('iron') clearly links to the *járnstafr* which he is carrying. It also implies connections with giants. In *Gylfaginning* we are told of a clan of troll-wives called the Járnvíðjur living in the wood named Járnvíðr (*SnE* 1988, 14; also see *Völuspá* stanza 40, *Edda* 1962, 9; *SnE* 1998, I, 122). Járnglumra and Járnsaxa are also names of troll-wives and Járnsaxi is a giant's name (*SnE* 1998, I, 82 and 112). Iron is of course essential in the forging of weapons and thus the first element of the name could also be associated with battle and war. The second element of the name, Grímr is a

common name used for Óðinn (*SnE* 1988, 21), which would seem to confirm Járngrímr's association with battle.

The name Járngrímr occurs in only one other saga. Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga* describes an encounter had by a man named Guðmundr guðþekkr one Christmas Eve (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 536):

Ok um kveldit, áðr hann fór heim, tók at dimma mjök. Þá gekk maðr at honum mikill ok ákafliga þrekligr; hann var í kufli ok lét slota hattinn. Guðmundr spurði, hverr hann væri. Hann kvezk Járngrímr heita. "Hvert skaltu fara?" sagði Guðmundr. "Upp í Hornskarp," sagði hann "ok þaðan til Akra, ok þaðan vestr til Línakradals." Síðan gekk hann á brott. Guðmundr leit eptir honum ok sá at svört bót var á milli herða honum. Fór Guðmundr heim ok vissi ekki til manna, er hann sá ljós ok menn. Þat sama kveld var veginn á Hornskarpi sá maðr, er Geirr het; Glámr svartmönungr vá hann, systursonr hans.

And during the evening, before he went home, it became very dark. Then a man walked to him, large and very broad; he was in a cowl and hat pulled down low. Guðmundr asked who he was. He said that he was named Járngrímr. "Where are you going?" said Guðmundr. "Up to Hornskarpr," he said "and from there to Akrar, and from there west to Línakradalr." Then he went away. Guðmundr looked after him and saw that there was a black patch between his shoulders. Guðmundr went home and lost consciousness as soon as he saw lights and men. That same evening a man was killed at Hornskarpr, who was named Geirr; Glámr svartmönungr, his nephew, slew him.

Guðmundr's experience is not a dream (it occurs on a fishing trip), but seems to be some kind of waking vision. There are a number of striking similarities between the passage and Flosi's dream in chapter 133 of *Njáls saga*. The most obvious similarity is that both the dream/vision-men have the same name. Both are said to occur near Christmas time. Both texts contain a dream/vision-man who is found nowhere else in their respective sagas and yet is not easily identifiable with a single deity or spirit. In both cases the dreamer/visionary asks the man's name and where he is heading and in both cases the response to the latter question symbolises the location where a confrontation will take place. In both cases the prophecy does not relate to the dreamer's death, but to someone else's. The *Íslendinga saga* episode is striking for its lack of cohesion to the rest of the saga. The visionary Guðmundr is not mentioned elsewhere and neither Glámr svartmönungr nor Geirr are of any direct importance to the saga plot. It is therefore possible that the episode in *Íslendinga saga* pre-dated its current context as a regional folktale. If this is the case then it is possible that the same, or a similar, story may have influenced *Njáls saga* (Einar Ól Sveinsson 1943, 11).

In fact Flosi's dream shows altogether more similarity to episodes from *samtíðarsögur* than to the *Íslendingasögur*. Dreams of a named dream-man or woman, who does not appear elsewhere in the saga, and in which the dreamer asks for news, are relatively uncommon in the *Íslendingasögur* (the only other example is Earl Gilli's dream, see section III.vii below). They are not so uncommon in the *samtíðarsögur*. Guðmundr's vision in *Íslendinga saga* has already been mentioned. Another similar example also occurs in *Íslendinga saga*, when the sixteen year-old Jóreiðr Hermundardóttir has a series of four dreams of a woman on horseback (*Stu* 1906-1911, II, 243-245). In the first two of these Jóreiðr asks where the dream-woman has come from. In the first dream the woman replies that she has come from *násheim* ('the land of the dead'); in the second, from the north of the district. In the third dream Jóreiðr asks the dream-woman's name, and she replies that she is none other than Guðrún Gjúkadóttir. In the first three dreams Jóreiðr asks direct questions about the well-being of men in the neighbourhood and receives riddling answers in both verse and prose. In the final dream the dream-woman is dragging Eyjólfur Þorsteinsson behind her horse as punishment for his torture of Hallr Gizurarson. These dreams share the following elements with Flosi's dream: the appearance of a non-human (though not strictly speaking super-human, Guðrún is nonetheless many centuries dead before she appears in Jóreiðr's dreams) and probably heathen character in the dream of a Christian; the speaking of a verse by the dream-person; the emphasis placed on the dreamer asking the name of their dream-person; the interest in the journeys of the dream-person (in Guðrún's case where she has been, rather than where she is going); the dreamer using the dream as an opportunity to ask for news; and the threat (or carrying out) of violence by the dream-person. Further examples from *Íslendinga saga* and in the separate *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* share many of these aspects (see *Stu* 1906-1911, I, 494; 508; and 517; also *Hrafn* 1960, ch. 7, p. 192; and ch. 14, pp. 218-220). It seems therefore that in these respects the *Njáls saga* author based Flosi's dream on a type that was used to record contemporary history, rather than those usually used by the authors of the *Íslendingasögur*. For the original audience of the saga, this must have had the effect of making Flosi's dream seem more accessible and more applicable to their own time, than the dreams of Gunnarr and Höskuldr earlier in the saga.



### Járngrímr's roll-call

Having emerged from the mountainside, Járngrímr begins to call out the names of Flosi's men. After each list of names, Járngrímr seems to pause. This divides the burners into groups and signifies not only the order in which they will die, but also separates each individual battle. There are five groups in all. Between groups 1 and 2 Flosi comments: *þá þagði hann stund nokkura* ('then he was silent for a while'). Between groups 2, 3 and 4 Flosi says: *þá kallaði hann* ('then he called'). The last group is introduced by *síðast kallaði hann* ('last he called').<sup>22</sup> I have set these groups out in tabular form together with a reference to the point in which this aspect of Flosi's dream is fulfilled:

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<sup>22</sup> The *þá* following the name of Árni Kolsson does not signify a new group, as it relates to the fact that Flosi finds the following two names (Eyjólfur Bølverksson and Ljótr Síðu-Hallsson) surprising and does not, in my mind, represent a significant pause. This is confirmed by the fact that all in group 1 (Grímr inn rauði, Árni, Eyjólfur, Ljótr and the further six men) are killed at the Alþingi in chapter 145.

**Table 1. The men named by Járngrímr in Flosi's dream**

Men named by Járngrímr	Fulfilment
<b>Group 1</b> Grímr inn Rauði Árni Kolsson Eyjólfur Þólværksson Ljótr Síðu-Hallsson Six unnamed men.	<b>Battle at Alþingi (<i>Nj</i> 1954, ch. 145, pp. 402-408)</b> Killed by Þórhallr Ásgrímsson Killed by Kári Killed by Kári Killed by unnamed man Unclear but may include Þorvaldr Þrum-Ketilsson
<b>Group 2</b> Five men including some of the Sigfússons	<b>Battle at Kerlingardalr (<i>Nj</i> 1954, ch. 146, ch. 146, pp. 417-418)</b> Þorkell Sigfússon killed by Þorgeirr skorargeirr Sigurðr Lambason killed by Kári Mörðr Sigfússon killed by Kári Leiðólfr Hámundarson inn sterki killed by Þorgeirr and Kári One unnamed man killed by the back-swing of Þorgeirr's axe
<b>Group 3</b> Five men including: Lambi Sigurðarson Móðólfr Ketilsson Glúmr Hildisson	<b>Battle at Skaptá (<i>Nj</i> 1954, ch. 150, pp. 430-432)</b> Killed by Kári Killed by Kári Not mentioned Þorsteinn Geirleifsson killed by Kári Gunnarr, bóndi í Skál, killed by Kári Unnamed man cut in-two by Kári
<b>Group 4</b> Three unnamed men	<b>Battle at Kringlumýrr (<i>Nj</i> 1954, ch. 151, pp. 434-435)</b> Glúmr Hildisson killed by Kári Vébrandr Þorfinnsson run through by Kári Ásbrandr Þorfinnsson both legs chopped off by Kári
<b>Group 5</b> Gunnarr Lambason Kolr Þorsteinsson	Killed by Kári in Orkneys ( <i>Nj</i> 1954, ch. 155, p. 443) Killed by Kári in Wales ( <i>Nj</i> 1954, ch. 158, p. 461)

In the first group Járngrímr names Grímr inn rauði, Árne Kolsson, Eyjólfur Bólverksson, Ljótr Síðu-Hallsson and six further men (whom Flosi does not name). Neither Árne Kolsson nor Grímr inn rauði have been mentioned in the saga prior to Flosi's dream in chapter 133. However, the fact that Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson prosecutes them in chapter 141 makes it clear that they were among the party that burned Bergþórshváll. Grímr is killed by Þórhallr Ásgrímsson in the blow that signals the beginning of the battle at the Alþingi, and Árne is killed in that same battle (*Nj* 1954, ch. 145, p. 402). In the manuscript AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, when Flosi tells his dream to Ketill, he indicates Grímr is his kinsman. This agrees with a statement in chapter 145, also only in AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, that Grímr and Flosi are related (*Nj* 1954, ch. 145, p. 402). Árne Kolsson is also killed at the Alþingi, by Kári (*Nj* 1954, ch. 145, p. 403). Neither Eyjólfur Bólverksson nor Ljótr Síðu-Hallsson were at the burning. Eyjólfur is introduced to the saga in chapter 138, where he is pressurised with threats and bribes into undertaking the defence of the burners. He is given a bracelet by Flosi, about which Snorri goði comments (*Nj* 1954, ch. 138, p. 369): *Þat er líkara, um þat er dómum er lokit, at þú vitir, hvat þú hefir þegit* ('It is more likely, that when the judgements are made, you will know what you have received'). He is not known from other sagas and was possibly a fictional figure introduced by the author as a counterpart to Mǫrðr, the scurrilous and greedy lawyer on the opposing side (Hermann Pálsson 1990, 65-68). Eyjólfur is killed by Kári during the battle at the Alþingi (*Nj* 1954, ch. 145, p. 408). Here the bracelet is mentioned again, stressing the fact that he has been brought into the conflict largely on account of his greed. In contrast, Ljótr is entirely innocent. He is first mentioned among Síðu-Hallr's sons in chapter 96. Later we are told that if he can make three trips to the Alþingi safely, he will become a great chieftain (*Nj* 1954, ch. 115, p. 287). The prophecy, although only mentioned in passing, adds a further element of tragedy to his death. Like Gunnarr, he has the potential to live a long and successful life, but this potential is not realised. When fighting breaks out at the Alþingi in chapter 145, Hallr suggests that he and Ljótr should attempt to separate the two parties. Ljótr agrees, but says that he will help Flosi should need arise. As Hallr and Ljótr approach the battle, Ljótr is hit by a spear thrown by someone in Guðmundr's force. In Flosi's narration of the dream, he tells Ketill: *Þá þótti mér undarliga: mér þótti sem hann kallaði Eyjólf Bólverksson ok Ljót, son Síðu-Halls, ok nokkura sex menn* ('Then it seemed strange to me, as it seemed to me he called Eyjólfur Bólverksson and Ljótr, the son of Síðu-Hallr and some six men'). Flosi finds this strange because neither Eyjólfur nor Ljótr were

members of the burning party, and he can therefore see no immediate reason why their deaths should result. From this we can see that Flosi has a very good idea of the meaning of his dream even before he relates it to Ketill.

Of the remaining six men which are named by Járngrímr at this point, only one can be clearly identified among the slain at the Alþingi; that is Þorvaldr Ketilsson, who is slain by Þorgeirr skorargeirr. He is introduced in chapter 134 when Flosi comes to Njarðvík to muster forces and was not involved in the burning. Both Þorvaldr and his brother Þorkell agree to accompany Flosi, much to the consternation of their mother Yngvildr who has had a dream indicating Þorvaldr's imminent death (see section III.vi below). Thus of the men killed at the Alþingi battle who appear in Flosi's dream, in the case of at least three of them, Þorvaldr, Eyjólfur and Ljótr, there are further premonitions, prophecies or omens indicating their imminent deaths. The remaining five men in this group are unnamed casualties of the battle, one of whom may be the man killed when Hólmsteinn Spak-Bersason throws a spear at Kári, who catches it and returns it killing a man in Flosi's force (*Nj* 1954, ch. 145, p. 403).

The second group that Járngrímr names are five men, including some of Ketill's brothers. This group relates to those men killed at the battle in chapter 146, where Kári and Þorgeirr skorargeirr attack the Sigfússons and their companions in Kerlingardalr. The five men Járngrímr mentions can be identified as Sigurðr Lambason, Mǫrðr Sigfússon, Leiðólfur Hámundarson inn sterki, Þorkell Sigfússon and a further unnamed man who Þorgeirr kills with the back-swing of his axe. The third group Járngrímr summons is of five men, including Lambi Sigurðarson, Móðólfur Ketilsson and Glúmr Hildisson. This group represents those killed by Kári beside Skaptá in chapter 150. There is, however, some discrepancy between Járngrímr's prophecy at this point and its fulfilment in the saga. In chapter 150 the deaths of Móðólfur and Lambi are clearly described together with that of a further member of the burning party, Þorsteinn Geirleifsson. One unnamed man is also killed, cut in two by Kári. Finally the narrator tells us that a farmer from Skál called Gunnarr is also killed (Skál was a nearby farm and it seems possible that he was guiding or accompanying the party). Although it is possible that he is among the party, Glúmr Hildisson is not mentioned throughout chapter 150 and is in fact killed in the subsequent battle in the next chapter. Thus, although the number of deaths in Járngrímr's prophecy is correct, Glúmr's death has been replaced, either by Þorsteinn, Gunnarr or the unnamed man. Given the accuracy with which the rest of the prophecy is fulfilled such a discrepancy can only be seen as

an accidental error (rather than a deliberate deviation from the prophecy). There is no evidence from the surviving manuscripts that this is a scribal change (i.e. there is no surviving version of the saga in which Glúmr is killed in chapter 150). The error may result from a change made by the author to his source materials. The motive for such a change may have been to disperse the important characters more equally across the battles. Neither Vébrandr nor Ásbrandr Þorfinnsson, who are killed in chapter 151, appear elsewhere in the saga. The author may therefore have decided to move the death of Glúmr from the earlier battle, where two important characters are killed, to the later battle, where no-one of note would otherwise be killed. However in the process of making this change he forgot to alter the prophecy to ensure it agreed with its fulfilment.

Of the following group (group 4) Flosi merely says: *þá kallaði hann þrjá menn* ('Then he called to three men'). This group represents the three men whom Kári kills in the battle at Kringlumýrr (ch. 151). Glúmr has already been discussed. The remaining two are the brothers Vébrandr and Ásbrandr Þorfinnsson (Þorbrandsson in AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>; *Nj* 1954, ch. 151, pp. 434-435 note). Vébrandr is run through by Kári and Ásbrandr loses both legs in the battle. The narrator does not specifically say that either is killed but their prospects do not look promising. Of the final group (group 5) Flosi tells us: *Síðast kallaði hann Gunnarr Lambason ok Kol Þorsteinsson* ('Last he called Gunnarr Lambason and Kolr Þorsteinsson'). This group does not actually represent a single battle but a series of killings carried out by Kári while abroad. Gunnarr Lambason is another of Ketill's nephews. He is spared by Skarpheðinn at the battle at Markarfljót (ch. 92) and is present at the burning (ch. 130). He is killed by Kári in Orkney, when he hears Gunnarr give a biased account of the burning, in which Skarpheðinn is said to have wept before his death. Kolr Þorsteinsson is killed by Kári in Wales, where he had been planning to settle (ch. 158). It is interesting to note that missing from this schema are the fifteen men who were killed at the Battle of Clontarf (ch. 157). This may indicate that the dream prophecies only those men who were killed as a direct result of their involvement in the burning, or as a result of actions arising from the burning (e.g. Eyjólfur and Ljótr). Although the deaths of the burners in Ireland speeds us towards the end of the saga and reduces the number of people against whom Kári can carry out his vendetta, they do not 'count' against the burning of the household at Bergþórshváll, and for this reason they are not relevant in Járngrímr's prophecy.

Thus the extent of the dream prophecy covers chapter 133 (where it occurs) up to the penultimate chapter in the saga (ch. 158). The dream clearly has the narrative function of forming a framework by which the remainder of the saga can be measured. The central and indeed almost the only concern of the final section of the saga is with Kári's vengeance. The saga is then divided up by the dream framework accordingly. The reader knows how near the conclusion of the text he is, by his progression through the five groups of men upon whom he knows vengeance will be meted. In this way the dream might be compared with other dreams which function as frameworks, such as Gísli's dream of the seven fires (see section V.iii), Guðrún's dreams of her future husbands (see section IV.iii), and, to a lesser extent, Þorsteinn's dream in *Gunnlaugs saga* (Gunnl 1938, ch. 2, p. 53-55). Gísli's dream forms a time-frame for the saga according to the years he will yet live, with each fire representing a single year. Guðrún's dreams structure her saga across her four husbands and to a lesser extent *Gunnlaugs saga* is structured in the same way. In the case of *Njáls saga*, we find the narrative divided according to the order in which the people who took part in the burning of Njáll will die.

Flosi's dream is referred to later in the saga. In chapter 150 Flosi warns Ketill to be careful (though he is careful not to reveal to Ketill's companions the exact content of the dream) (*Nj* 1954, ch. 149, p. 427):

Flosi svarar: "... Skaltú nú ok, Ketill, muna draum þann, er ek sagða þér ok þú batt, at vit skyldim leyna, því at margir eru þeir nú í fõr með þér, er kallaðir váru." Ketill mælti: "Allt mun þat fram ganga um aldr manna sem ætlat er, en gott gengr þér til vörunar þinnar."

Flosi answered "... Now, Ketill, you should also remember that dream, which I told you and you swore that we should conceal, because many of those who were called are accompanying you now." Ketill said: "Everything will go as it is intended regarding the lifespans of men, but you mean well by your warning."

The exchange between Flosi and Ketill is interesting because Flosi recognises in the gathered company the men named in the third group in his dream, and realises the likelihood of imminent conflict and their deaths. It is nonetheless strange that he should try to warn Ketill to beware, as he should realise that Ketill was not among those named in the third group and therefore safe. This is what Ketill refers to in his answer; his actions will not alter the fact that his companions are destined to die and he is not. The exchange reminds the reader of the prophecy, thereby building up anticipation of the

coming conflict. It also further adds to the tragedy inherent in the character of Flosi, as he watches his friends ride off, knowing that he will not see many of them again.

It is significant that the two names that Járngrímr does not speak are those of Flosi and Ketill, the dreamer and the man to whom the dreamer tells his dream. As in Helgi's dream in *Droplaugarsona saga*, the details that are not mentioned in the dream are almost as telling as those that are. Ketill encounters Kári at the battle in Kerlingardalr in chapter 146 but escapes due to the latter's reluctance to pursue him. Ketill narrowly misses being involved in the battle in chapter 150, when he leaves the party to ride on to Meðalland shortly before the attack. He is captured by Kári in chapter 151, but again given quarter. After the confrontation at the Alþingi, Flosi avoids encountering Kári. They meet briefly at the peace meeting where Þorgeirr skorargeirr comes to terms with the burners (ch. 147). He goes abroad in chapter 149 and the pair meet briefly in Orkney where Flosi is under the protection of the Earl (ch. 155). Then finally in chapter 159 Kári is shipwrecked near Svínafell and they are reconciled. Thus the two men who discuss the dream in chapter 133 are the only two who do not appear in the roll-call and therefore outlive all those who are named. Ketill and Flosi are therefore tragic figures, burdened by the knowledge that their friends will all die, but that fate has deigned to preserve them.

It is presumably for this reason that Flosi chooses to relate the dream to Ketill. This diverges slightly from the general motif whereby a sleeping character is watched over by another one, to whom he relates his dream upon waking (see section II.ii). Upon being woken (a detail that deviates sharply from the reluctance shown by Kolskeggr in waking his brother in chapter 62) Flosi already realises the meaning of his dream, and its significance for Glúmr who has been watching him sleep, and thus he calls for the one other man whose name was not mentioned by the dream-man, so that he might discuss the dream. Flosi and Ketill come to an agreement not to tell anyone the dream. It is possible that Flosi feels that by not spreading the dream he is reducing the likelihood of its coming true. It seems more likely, however, that his concern is that the prophecy is not spoken in front of those it concerns. Flosi seems to realise that it might be better for a doomed man not to know his fate.

#### Flosi's dream and the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great

Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1943, 6-8; 1954, lxxi-lxxii; and 1971, 15) was the first to notice the similarity between Flosi's dream and a passage in Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*.

This similarity has been reiterated many scholars since (Strömbäck 1968, 140-142; Boyer 1973, 19-20; Lönnroth 1976, 38 and 121-122; and Hermann Pálsson 1990, 63). The *Dialogues* of Saint Gregory the Great (Pope 590-604) proved both popular and influential throughout medieval Europe and were of great importance to the development of the genre of literary exemplum. They were probably translated into Icelandic during the twelfth century and are preserved in four manuscript fragments (Boyer 1993, 241). They appear to have become popular, perhaps because Gregory's demonstrative rather than didactic style was well-suited to readers familiar with saga style (Boyer 1973, 3). The *Dialogues* include many dreams and waking visions and even contain a discussion of the causes of dreaming (Gregory 1959, 261).<sup>23</sup> The first section contains the story of the monk Anastasius, who hears a voice speaking the names of monks from a mountain. In the monk's nocturnal auditory experience (it is not specifically said to be a dream) a total of nine names are called and, as in Flosi's dream, the order in which they are called represents the order of their deaths. The following is from one fourteenth-century Icelandic manuscript, AM 239 fol, of the *Dialogues* (*GregDial* 1877, 189; compare Gregory 1959, 31-32; and Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1943, 171; and 1971, 205-206):

Þá kom röðdin um nátt á hávu bjargi, því er ner var munklifinu, ok kallaði röðdin ok mælti: "Kom þú Anastasi!" En er hann var kallaðr, þá váru ok kallaðir sjau aðrir bræðr. Þá þagnaði röðdin lítlat þá stund, ok nefndi enn lítlu síðar enn átta munk. En er allir munkar heyrðu röðdina, þa var eflaust öllum, at andlát hans nálgaðisk ok þeira, er kallaðir váru. En er fáir dagar líðu þaðan, þá andaðisk Anastasius fyrstr, en þar eptir aðrir sjau hvern at öðrum, at þeiri skipun sem röðdin kallaði þá af hamrinum. En sá bróðir er röðdin þagnaði nokkura stund, áðr nefndr væri, hann lifði nokkura daga síðan, er aðrir váru andaðir, ok merkti sú dvöl raddarinnar þá stund, er hann lifði lengr en

Then during the night came the voice on the high cliff, which was near the monastery, and the voice called out: "Come Anastasius". And when he was called, then were also called seven other brothers. Then the voice was silent a short while, and a little later still named a further eighth monk. And when all the monks heard the voice, then it was without doubt to all that his death neared and also theirs, those who had been called. And when a few days passed from this, then Anastasius died first and then, after this, the other seven, one after the other in the order that the voice from the cliff had named them. And that brother, the one which the voice remained silent a short while before naming, he lived some days later, after the others were dead and that

<sup>23</sup> This passage (see Gregory 1959, 261) is not preserved in any of the manuscript fragments of the *Dialogues*. It is, however, preserved in Old Norse, incorporated into a life of Saint Nicholas (*Nik* 1877, 86-87).



aðrir, þeir er kallaðir váru.

short pause of the voice symbolised that he lived longer than the others, those who were called.

The chief similarities between the passages are as follows: one, a nocturnal messenger speaks a series of names of people who will shortly die; two, the messenger (a man in *Njáls saga*, a disembodied voice in the *Dialogues*) emerges from a cliff or mountain; three, in both passages there is the sense that the people named are somehow being called somewhere, the verb *kalla* ('to call' or 'to name someone') is used in Flosi's dream as it is in the Icelandic translation of the *Dialogues*; four, in neither case is the recipient of the aural vision/dream specifically told the meaning of the calling of these names yet in both it is readily apparent; five, both texts place considerable importance on the order of the names and its relation to the order of deaths; and finally and perhaps most noticeably, a pause (or pauses in *Njáls saga*) in the list of names indicates that the names listed after that pause will die at a later date. Coincidentally, one of the earliest surviving manuscript fragments of the Icelandic translation of the *Dialogues* was found in the church at Kálfafell, only a few miles west of Lómagnúpr (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971, 15; Strömbäck 1968, 140-142). Thus, it seems highly likely that the story of Anastasius and the mysterious voice was known in the vicinity of Lómagnúpr at the time the author of *Njáls saga* was alive and may explain why the story was associated with the area. Given the accurate geographical knowledge shown by the saga author at this point in his story, it is possible that he came across the story in AM 677 4 4<sup>o</sup> or a closely related manuscript and decided to rework it, based upon local geography, to his own artistic ends.

#### The dream's multiple referents

Although the author was probably inspired by the story of Anastasius, he has used the motif in a very different way. In the *Dialogues*, Anastasius' nocturnal experience is recounted as part of an exemplum on predestination, God's plan and the extent of man's free-will. Although undeniably contributing to these themes of predestination and free-will, Flosi's dream is not specifically about them. Rather, as already stated, the dream has a textual literary function informing the reader of forthcoming events and creating a structural framework for the latter part of the saga. The aural vision in Gregory's story does not have this framing function as the events that it predicts occur immediately following it in the text. The prophecy is the point of

the story, rather than a literary device within it. Furthermore the symbolic calling of the names of the fated men has a further resonance in the saga dream than in the *Dialogues*. Flosi's dream occurs only a few chapters before the burners are summonsed at the Alþingi (ch. 141). The calling of names resembles the legal process of summoning. The verb *kalla* (used both in Flosi's dream and in the AM 239 fol. translation of the *Dialogues*) not only means 'to call', but also 'lay claim to'. Through his naming of each of the burners, Járngrímr is perhaps claiming that each of their lives should be forfeit for their actions. Here, once again, the author of *Njáls saga* uses a dream to foreshadow several things at once. Primarily, the naming of the men refers to the order in which they will be killed, but the action of naming foreshadows the more immediate court case in which Flosi and the burners are inevitably about to become involved. This is brought to the fore in Járngrímr's words that he is heading to the Alþingi where he will prepare the field for battle. The dream apparition of Járngrímr tells Flosi that his legal defence is doomed and that some form of divine judgement has already been passed. Despite the proliferation in sagas of fetch dreams, which naturally lend themselves to singular referents, the medieval reader could contend with and perhaps even expected dreams in which symbols had multiple referents.

The action of calling the burners' names first subtly foreshadows the forthcoming scenes at the Alþingi. Following this, Járngrímr makes the connection specific. He tells Flosi that he is heading for the Alþingi and: *fyrst skal ek ryðja kviðu, en þá dóma, en þá vígvöll fyrir vegöndum*. *Ryðja* governs all three phrases: *kviðir* ('panels'), *dómar* ('courts' or 'judgements') and *vígvöllr fyrir vegöndum* ('battlefield for slayers'). In regards to the first two phrases, the verb seems to have a specifically legal connotation meaning 'to challenge' (compare for example with *Grg* 1852, I, 46-50 and 61-66). However, in regard to the third phrase, *ryðja* clearly has a more mundane meaning, 'to clear' or 'to sweep aside'. This linguistic sleight of hand cleverly reflects the events of the forthcoming chapters, as actions at the Alþingi quickly descend into violence. Thus Flosi's dream reminds the reader of the extent to which the battle at the Alþingi must have been seen as a total social breakdown. Although there are many moments of tension at the Alþingi described in *Íslendingasögur*, in all but a few occasions these tensions are resolved. For a pitched battle to break out in which the whole assembly was involved, was almost unthinkable and a threat to the very essence of Icelandic society. However this is exactly what happens in chapter 145 of *Njáls saga*. Such an event must have seemed like the ultimate breakdown of the social order,

an eleventh-century social Ragnarøkr. In this context, the verb *ryðja* has yet another connotation as it is used in *Völuspá* to describe the 'clearing' of the homesteads of men (i.e. the deaths of men) at Ragnarøkr (*Völuspá*, stanza 56, *Edda* 1962, 13). Flosi's dream builds up the expectation for such a conflict and further brings home its importance.

### Járngrímr's stanza

The verse that Járngrímr speaks in the dream further demonstrates the monumental significance of this battle. Dream-men or women speaking verses is a motif more commonly found in the *samtíðarsögur* than in the *Íslendingasögur*, where it is usually the dreamer who speaks the verse.<sup>24</sup> In Járngrímr's verse, he describes a warrior killing many men and the coming of war. The kenning for warrior is *Þundr höggorma* ('Þundr of swords', *höggormr* means 'viper' but is literally 'striking-snake' i.e. 'sword'). *Þundr* is a name for Óðinn, god of war (*SnE* 1988, 22). Given the context, we assume this warrior to be Kári. The phrase *beystisullr blára brodda* ('the beating noise of black spears', note the similarity between the black spears in this kenning and Járngrímr's iron staff) would seem to better reflect a single large battle like that at the Alþingi, than the series of skirmishes in the chapters following. Thus the verse would seem to refer both to Kári's serial killings prophesied by the first part of the dream and to the specific battle at the Alþingi. The echoing of the battle noise stresses again the monumental nature of this battle. Not only will the literal noise of the battle resound across the land, but its repercussions will be felt far and wide.

### Striking the staff and Járngrímr's disappearance

Járngrímr's final act before disappearing into the mountain is to strike his staff against the ground (in AM 133 fol. this action is emphasised by Járngrímr giving a tremendous shout as well). Hermann Pálsson (1990, 63) suggested that this aspect of the dream may have been influenced by a vision in the translated Saint's life

<sup>24</sup> Among the examples of dream-men or women speaking verses we have *Stu* 1906-1911, I, 494; 508; 514; and 517-521, II, 243-245; also *Hrafn* 1960 ch. 7, p. 192; and ch. 14, pp. 218-220. The only other examples in the *Íslendingasögur* that I know of are the verse spoken by Herfiðr to Earl Gilli later in *Njáls saga* (see section III.vii below) and the verses spoken by Gunnlaugr and Hrafn, to their respective fathers in *Gunnlaugs saga* (*Gunnl* 1938, ch. 13, pp. 104-105). Nonetheless verses are sometimes spoken by dream-men or women in *þættir* and shorter texts (e.g. *ÞSHDr* 1950, 323-325; *Kumbl* 1991, 454; *PorlJ* 1956 ch. 8, p. 228).

*Ambrósiuss saga biskups*, where Ambrose strike a staff three times on the ground (*Ambr* 1877, 50). The influence, however, is only superficial. In the Saint's life, the striking of the staff, which is probably a crosier rather than a weapon, is used to symbolise both the location of a battle and the time that will pass prior to it; whereas striking the ground in Flosi's dream merely represents the forthcoming battle at the Alþingi. The location of the blow does not indicate the location of the battle, nor does the number of strikes have any particular meaning as it does in *Ambrósiuss saga*.

The action of striking the ground with the staff and the resulting sound both represent symbolically (or aurally) the forthcoming battle. The connection between loud noises and battles is often made in skaldic verse. Kennings for 'battle' using aural metaphors are common (see Meissner 1921, 186-189 for examples) also see *hjálma dynr* ('din of helms') and *vigra dynr* ('din of spears') in the dream of Earl Gilli (see section III.vii below). Such an example is indeed found in Járngrímr's verse only a few lines before, *beystisullr blára brodda* ('the beating noise of black spears'). Given the familiarity of such imagery to the saga reader, together with the reminder of it in the preceding verse, it is probable that the reader should equate the loud noise made by Járngrímr's staff with the battle at the Alþingi.

The departure of Járngrímr into the mountain further confirms him as otherworldly, perhaps specifically from the world of the dead. Later in *Njáls saga* a man named Hárekr in the Orkneys sees the dead warriors from the battle of Clontarf. Hárekr rides and meets them beneath a hill, where both the warriors and Hárekr disappear (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 459). Járngrímr's disappearance recalls such incidents as the mountain opening up to allow a shepherd to overhear Þorsteinn Þorskabítr and his dead companions being greeted by their ancestors in *Eyrbyggja saga* (*Eb* 1935, ch. 11, p. 19), a story which has close parallels in two separate incidents in *Njáls saga* (*Nj* 1954, ch. 14, p. 46; and ch. 78, pp. 192-193). It also recalls the dwarf tempting King Sveigðir into a boulder in *Ynglinga saga* (*Hkr* 1941, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 12, pp. 27-28). This otherworldly motif may explain the sudden shudder of fear, which seems to rack Flosi at this point.

### Conclusion

Thus Flosi's dream has a number of apparent sources and influences, learned and popular, foreign and heterogeneous. Primarily, it seems to borrow from myth and folklore (in the giant-like qualities of the dream-man), from contemporary events and

the manner of their recording (Járngrímr's name, the description of his travels, and asking him for news), from saga and skaldic tradition (the verse) and from foreign literature (most noticeably the influence of the *Dialogues* on the roll-call of names). Furthermore the dream has a number of referents. It foreshadows the deaths of the various characters involved in the burning, further confirming their fated nature, and creates a structure for the remaining narrative. More specifically it points directly forward to the scenes at the Alþingi, in which legal mechanisms give way to violence, adding further weight to the almighty battle in chapter 145.

### III.vi Yngvildr's dream of her son's red clothes

#### Context:

In preparation for the court case at the Alþingi, Flosi begins to gather support. Among the farms he visits is Njarðvík where the brothers, Þorkell and Þorvaldr Þrum-Ketilsson live with their mother Yngvildr. Despite their initial reluctance he gains their support by paying them each three marks of silver. At this point Yngvildr who is stood nearby relates her dream. The two brothers agree to support Flosi, despite their mother's ominous dream. Þorkell is not mentioned again in *Njáls saga*, but Þorvaldr is killed by Þorgeirr Skorargeirr at the battle at the Alþingi with Skarpheðinn's axe Rimmugýgr (*Nj* 1954, ch. 145, p. 403).

#### Text:

*Nj* 1875, ch. 134, pp. 708-709.

*Nj* 1908, ch. 134, pp. 321-322.

*Nj* 1954, ch. 134, pp. 351-352.

Yngvildr, móðir þeira, var hjá stödd; hon grét, er hon heyrði, er þeir hétu alþingisferðinni. Þorkell mælti: "Hví grætr þú, móðir?" Hon svarar: "Mik dreymði, at Þorvaldr, bróðir þinn, væri í rauðum kyrtli, ok þótti mér svá þröngur vera sem saumaðr væri at honum; mér þótti hann ok vera í rauðum hosum undir ok vafit at vándum dreglum. Mér þótti illt á at sjá, at honum var svá óhægt, en ek máttu ekki at gera." Þeir hlógu at ok kváðu vera loklausu ok sögðu geip hennar ekki skyldu standa fyrir þingreið sinni.

Their mother, Yngvildr, was stood nearby. She wept when she listened as they promised the journey to the Alþingi. Þorkell said: "Why are you weeping mother?" She replied: "I dreamed that Þorvaldr, your brother, was wearing a red kirtle and it seemed to me to be so tight it seemed to be sewn onto him. It seemed to me he was also wearing red leggings beneath it, wrapped in tattered ribbons. It seemed an awful sight, because I knew he was in such discomfort and I might do nothing about it." They laughed at that and said it was nonsense and said her prattle should not stand in the way of their journey to the Alþingi.

#### Commentary:

There are seven manuscripts preserving this part of *Njáls saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 104). In the X-class AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, AM 133 fol. and GKS 2869 4<sup>o</sup>, and the fragment AM 162 B ζ fol; in the Y-class AM 132 fol, AM 466 4<sup>o</sup>; and in the Z-class GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup>. This dream demonstrates the saga writer's attention to detail. Þorvaldr Ketilsson's part in *Njáls saga* is small, as he is introduced merely to be killed off in the

battle at the Alþingi. Nevertheless this short scene fills out his character, showing that, although of only small concern in the narrative, Þorvaldr's death will be a great loss to his mother. In so doing, however, the author maintains the pace of his narrative, pointing forward to the conflict at the Alþingi and adding to the overall themes of fate and destiny.

The red clothes in the dream seem to represent Þorvaldr's violent death, through the association of the colour red to blood. Dreams of blood and gore are relatively common in Norse literature.<sup>25</sup> From such dreams it is a logical step to associate the colour red with wounds or death. In *Vatnsdæla saga* Þorkell dreams of a red horse, which he interprets as a good omen; but his wife gives the correct interpretation, which is that the horse represents a fetch (*manns fylgja*) and the red represents conflict (*Vatn* 1939, ch. 42, pp. 110-111). The horse in the dream is clearly coloured red, rather than covered in blood, otherwise Þorkell's mistake would not be possible. The same interpretation is also probably true of the red ox, which represents Brodd-Helgi in his dream in *Vápnfirðinga saga* (*Vápnf* 1950, ch. 13, pp. 48-49). Both these examples use fetch symbols, but the significance of colour can also be seen in other types of dreams. In *Hálfðanar saga svarta* in *Heimskringla*, Queen Ragnhildr dreams of a massive tree, which represents her son King Haraldr hárfagri. The lower parts of this tree are *rauðr sem blóð* ('red as the blood') (*Hkr* 1941, *Hálfðanar saga svarta* ch. 6, p. 90). This seems to represent the violence at the beginning of Haraldr's reign, as he battles gain control of all Norway.

The topos of white clothes being a positive dream symbol is very common in medieval dream-books (Fischer 1982, 46-48), its spread no doubt aided by its association with purity, righteousness and sanctity. Surprisingly, negative dreams of red clothes do not proliferate in the same way. Even when dreams of red clothes do appear, they do not necessarily represent negative fortune, for example (Fischer 1982, 46): *Rubeam tunicam habere significant hilaritatem* ('to have a red tunic signifies good humour'). It seems therefore that, although far from exceptional, the association

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<sup>25</sup> For examples see of blood in dreams see *Gisl* 1943 ch. 24, pp. 76-77; ch. 33, pp. 103-104; ch. 33 pp. 106-109; and ch. 34, p. 110; *Gunnl* 1938, ch. 11, p. 88; *Glúm* 1956a, ch. 21, pp. 71-72; *Stu* 1906-1911, I, 285; 494; II, 288). Although there are no dreams of blood in *Njáls saga* the author uses similar images in waking visions or miraculous occurrences such as blood appearing on the blade of Gunnarr's halberd (*Nj* 1954, ch. 72, p. 175), the rain of boiling blood falling on Bróðir and his men before the Battle of Clontarf (*Nj* 1954, ch. 156, p. 446), and the blood appearing on the priest's stole in Svínafell (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 459).

between red and inauspiciousness in saga dreams does represent a divergence from medieval dream-book tradition.

Yet it is possible that the red clothes in Yngvildr's dream have a secondary connection with avarice. Red clothes in Medieval Iceland would have been considered something of a luxury. In *Flóamanna saga* when Þórey answers the door to her foster-brother Kolr she seems to blush. In the fragmentary version of the saga, her husband Þorgils comments on this saying (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 19, p. 270): *ok gott herfir þér orðit fjár í framgöngunni, klæði rautt herfir þú fengit* ('you have come into the money, as you have been dressed in red clothes'). Although Þorgils' comment is intended metaphorically, it shows that bright coloured clothes were associated with wealth. Similarly the red and gold sleeve that pokes from beneath Gunnarr's disguise in chapter 23 of *Njáls saga* nearly gives away that he is not a poor hawker. In *Þorskfirðinga saga*, Þórir Oddsson dreams of a man in a red kirtle (*GullÞ* 1991, ch. 3, pp. 184-185). This is his dead kinsman Agnarr, whose burial mound Þórir is trying to break into. The red kirtle, which Agnarr gives to Þórir, turns out to be a great treasure protecting him from fire and weapons. If red clothes could be associated with wealth as well as blood, then in Yngvildr's dream they might represent not only Þorvaldr's death, but also the cause of it. Neither of the brothers have any real reason to become embroiled in the dispute over the burning and Flosi buys their support. Interestingly Þorkell Ketilsson, who seems to be the more dominant of the pair, also appears in *Droplaugarsona saga* where again his services are bought, in this case by Hrafnkell Þórisson to spy on Grímr Droplaugarson (*Dpl* 1950, ch. 14, pp. 176-177). He may have had a reputation as someone whose services might be easily bought and his nickname, fullspakr ('fully-wise'), which he seems to have inherited from his maternal grandfather, is clearly intended ironically, at least in *Njáls saga*.

The use of clothes to indicate the fate of someone in a dream is found in several dreams in Old Norse. As noted by both Henzen (1890, 43) and Turville-Petre (1972b, 32), the closest parallel to Yngvildr's dream occurs in *Sturlu saga* (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 106):

Ok litlu síðar dreymsði Pál Þórðarson. Hann þóttisk vera í skikktum linkyrtli. Ok eptir þat drukknaði hann á Ísafirði ok nokkurir menn við honum. Ok var þá svá ráðinn draumrinn, at linkyrtill sá væri báru stórar ok ljósar, er at honum gengi.

And a little later Páll Þórðarson dreamed. He thought he was in a ruffled linen kirtle. And after that he drowned in Ísafjörðr and several men with him. Then the dream was interpreted in this way, that the linen kirtle represented the large, white waves that washed over him.



In the dream the ruffles on the tunic visually represent the shape of the waves billowing around the drowning man's neck, and the white of the linen (linen was traditionally thought of as undyed) symbolises the white foam and spray. Another example is the dream of the Earl Hákon's slave Karkr in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (*Hkr* 1941, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 49, p. 297). While the Earl and his slave are hiding from King Óláfr in a pigsty, the slave dreams that Óláfr places a gold necklace around his neck. The Earl interprets this, that Óláfr will place a blood-ring around the slave's neck, and indeed the king later has him beheaded. In both these examples, as in Yngvildr's dream, the clothing of the person in the dream visually represents his fate. The specific details of Yngvildr's dream also relate to Þorvaldr's fate. The tightness of the kirtle seems to symbolise difficulty in breathing. This is also shown by the fact that Þorvaldr is in great discomfort in the dream. The tattered ribbons, which are wrapped around him probably visually represent the wounds which Þorvaldr will receive, in a similar way to the ruffles of the kirtle in Páll Þórðarson's dream representing waves, or the necklace round Karkr's neck.

Yngvildr's inability to prevent her sons from making the journey to the Alþingi is reflected in her dream as her inability to assist her son removing the restricting garments. Their mother's attempts to dissuade them prove futile. Her sons not only ignore her warnings, but belittle her intelligence by laughing and calling her warnings nonsense (*loklausu*) and prattle (*geip*). Dreaming and dream interpretation seems to have been particularly associated with women in the sagas. Of the 111 dreams in the *Íslendingasögur*, only 15 are dreamed by women (this is a significant number considering the much smaller role given over to women in the sagas in general). More striking, however, is the fact that whenever there is a disagreement between a man and a woman over the interpretation of a dream, it is always the woman's interpretation that is proved true. I have already mentioned the disagreement between Þorkell silfri and his wife over his dream in *Vatnsdæla saga* (*Vatn* 1939 ch. 42, pp. 110-111). I will deal with Kjartan's ridicule of Auðr and Guðrún's disagreement with Þorkell Eyjólfsson over his dream, both in *Laxdæla saga*, below (see sections IV.iv and IV.v below). In *Vápnfirðinga saga* Brodd-Helgi agrees with his foster-mother on the basic interpretation of her dream, that he will be killed but avenged by his son, but refuses to accept that it is his younger son Bjarni who will avenge him rather than his elder Geitir and of course it is she who is proved right (*Vápnf* 1950, ch. 13, pp. 48-49). Further examples can be

found in *Bjarnar saga* (BjH 1938, ch. 18, p. 158) and Oddr Snorrason's *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* (ÓTOdd 1932, ch. 1, p. 5). Such scenes have parallels in Eddic verse. In *Atlamál* (stanzas 10-20 and 21-29, *Edda* 1962, 249-251) both Kostbera and Glaumvǫr have ominous dreams about their respective husbands and neither Högni nor Gunnarr will accept their wives' interpretations of these dreams. In fact the only significant example of a woman misinterpreting a dream is Guðrún in *Guðrúnarkviða II*. Guðrún's husband Atli has a series of inauspicious dreams, to which Guðrún attaches auspicious or irrelevant interpretations (*Guðrúnarkviða II* stanzas 37-44, *Edda* 1962, 230-231). In this case, however, it seems likely that Guðrún's misinterpretations are deliberate and that she is already plotting the deaths of Atli and her sons. In the sagas and Eddic poetry, women clearly have a better understanding of dreams than men.

Thus with Yngvildr's dream the author introduces a character to be killed in that battle and, very briefly, he engages our interest with that character. Although Þorvaldr Þrum-Ketilsson may be a minor player in our narrative, for at least one person his death will be as great a loss as the killing of Njáll or Gunnarr. Yngvildr's dream provides a mundane and sentimental antidote to the political and legal scenes that follow. Nevertheless the author strays in no way from his larger purpose, as the dream scene deliberately echoes the themes and motifs of the larger story. It points directly towards the battle at the Alþingi and contributes to the overall themes of fate, destiny, wisdom and impetuosity and the question as to whether it is best to let dreams and superstition govern one's actions.

**III.vii Earl Gilli and the battle****Context:**

In chapter 152, Flosi and the remaining burners go abroad and get shipwrecked in Orkney where Flosi becomes a retainer of Earl Sigurðr. While Flosi is there, Sigtryggr, an Irish king, arrives asking for Sigurðr's support in his conflict against King Brjánn. Among the men who accompany Sigtryggr to the battle are fifteen of Flosi's men, though Flosi himself does not go. Flosi travels to the Hebrides to stay with Earl Gilli. Following several supernatural experiences the two sides meet on Good Friday and Sigtryggr is defeated, but not before Brjánn is slain. Among those killed in the battle are Earl Sigurðr and the fifteen men whom Flosi gave him as support. After the battle Earl Gilli in Orkney has a dream of a mysterious man. The Earl's dream occurs a full week before news of the battle arrives in the Hebrides.

**Text:**

*Nj* 1875, ch. 157, pp. 902-903.

*Nj* 1908, ch. 157, p. 418.

*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, pp. 459-460.

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 428-429; BI, 399.

Gilla jarl í Suðreyjum dreymði, at maðr kom at honum ok nefndisk Herfiðr ok kvazk vera kominn af Írlandi. Jarl þóttisk spyrja tíðenda. Hann kvað þetta:

23. Var ek þar, er bragnar bǫrðusk;  
brandr gall á Írlandi;  
margr, þar er mættusk tǫrgur,  
málmr gnast í dyn hjálma;  
sókn þeira frá ek snarpa;  
Sigurðr fell í dyn vigra;  
áðr téði ben blæða;  
Briann fell ok helt velli.<sup>26</sup>

In the Hebrides Earl Gilli dreamed that a man came to him and said that he was called Herfiðr and said that he had arrived from Ireland. The Earl thought that he asked this man for news. He said this:

23. I was there, where heroes battled one another; a blade resounded in Ireland; many weapons clashed in the din of helmets [din of helmets i.e. battle], there where shields met one another; I heard about their attack; Sigurðr fell in the din of spears [din of spears i.e. battle]; blood was already brought from wounds; Brjánn fell but won the battle.

<sup>26</sup> *Ek var þar, er bragnar bǫrðusk; brandr gall á Írlandi; margr málmr gnast í hjálma dyn, þar er tǫrgur mættusk; sókn þeira frá ek snarpa; Sigurðr fell í vigra dyn; ben téði blæða áðr; Briann fell ok helt velli.*

**Commentary:**

There are four manuscripts preserving this part of *Njáls saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 104). In the X-class AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, and AM 466 4<sup>o</sup>; in the Y-class AM 132 fol, and GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup>. GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup> appears to have become damaged and has been repaired by the replacement of several leaves including the section containing Gilli's dream during the sixteenth century (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1953, 13-14). This dream, which is part of a series of supernatural events surrounding the Battle of Clontarf, helps to demonstrate the monumental nature of the conflict. At the same time, however, it brings the reader's attention back to the central narrative of the saga following the Irish digression.

It seems probable that the chapters describing the Battle of Clontarf in *Njáls saga* come from a separate source, perhaps a lost *\*Brjáns saga* or *\*Sigurðar saga jarls* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, xlv-xlix; Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 292). The battle is described in several Irish sources, which agree on some, though not all, of the details found in the Norse accounts. Earl Gilli's dream is one of a series of supernatural events that follow the account of the battle in our text. These events are as follows:

1. in Caithness a man called Dǫrruðr sees twelve riders approaching a bower. He follows them and sees a grisly loom on which men's heads are used as weights and their intestines as threads. He hears women around the loom chanting verses.<sup>27</sup> They then tear up the cloth and each keep a piece (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, pp. 454-459);
2. something similar is seen in the Faeroes (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 459);
3. in Svínafell blood appears on the priests robes (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 459);
4. in Þvátta the priest sees a sea full of terrors beside the altar (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 459);
5. in Orkney a man named Hárekr sees Sigurðr and his men riding. Hárekr follows Sigurðr behind a hill where both of them disappear (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 459);  
and
6. Earl Gilli's dream in the Orkney.

All of the above occur before news of the battle has reached Orkney and, one assumes, Iceland. Thus the saga is signalling that the importance of the clash in Ireland is so great it will resound across the Norse world. The echoes of such a clash will first be felt

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<sup>27</sup> These verses seem to predate *Njáls saga* and Dǫrruðr may be a creation of the saga author to account for the word *darraðr* of which he was unfamiliar (Poole 1993, 121).

symbolically and supernaturally through such events, and later naturally as news spreads of the battle and names of the slain warriors.

The dream, as with all the above phenomena, are instances of what McTurk (1990-1993, 39-40) describes as telepathic events, i.e. occurrences happening at more or less the same time as the events that they describe or symbolise. For events 1, 3 and 4 the text specifically mentions that they occur on Good Friday. For the remaining events it is assumed that this is the case. Regarding Earl Gilli's dream, it is unclear whether this occurred the night before or after the battle or indeed during the daytime, but the supernatural nature of the information which is imparted to Gilli is stressed by the fact that the text tells us that news of the battle does not arrive in the Hebrides until a week later, when *Hrafn inn rauði* arrives.

Looking at the five supernatural events we find that they plot a broad course from Ireland (where the battle occurs), to the Faeroes, on to Iceland, back to the Orkneys and lastly to Gilli himself. Thus our attention is drawn away from Ireland, back to Iceland and specifically to Svínafell (Flosi's farmstead), then back to the character on whom the narrator was focussing prior to the Irish interlude. Thus, although the Irish interlude may owe its origins to a separate source, the author ensures that it is connected to his overall story. After the battle, he uses the five supernatural events, and in particular Gilli's dream, to return to his previous original story, while adding further moment to his portrayal of the battle in Ireland on Good Friday.

The dream most closely resembles Flosi's dream in chapter 133, as it is a visitation from a named dream-man, who is not elsewhere mentioned in the saga. The name of the dream-man varies across the manuscripts. AM 468 4<sup>o</sup>, AM 466 4<sup>o</sup>, GKS 2870 4<sup>o</sup> all give *Herfinnr*, whereas AM 132 fol. gives *Herfiðr* (the alternation between -nn and -ð is a common one in Old Norse, e.g. *maðr*, dative *manni*). Both names are relatively uncommon in Old Norse texts, only appearing once in *Landnámabók* and nowhere else in the *Íslendingasögur*. The first element *her-* seems to relate to the masculine noun *herr* ('host' or 'army'). This gives *Herfinnr* an Odinnic quality, perhaps even to be understood as 'host-finder'. Such a man is clearly a suitable figure to bring news of the monumental events in Ireland. Like Flosi's dream, Earl Gilli's dream shows greater similarity to the visitation dreams of the *samtíðarsögur* than to other dreams in the *Íslendingasögur*. As in Flosi's dream, we find a named dream-man, who does not appear elsewhere in the saga but cannot be directly identified with a pagan spirit (*Herfinnr/fiðr* stands in close relation to Óðinn but is not specifically said to be

Óðinn), we find the dreamer asking his dream-man for news, there is an interest in the journeys made by the dream-man and the dream-man delivers his message, at least partly, in verse.

The verse spoken by the dream-man to Gilli in his dream mentions the deaths of both Sigurðr and Brjánn and describes the events at Clontarf as they are presented in the saga (the same cannot be said for some of the verses spoken in Dǫrruðr's vision). Line two (*brandr gall á Írlandi*) is preserved verbatim in *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar*, although in the *drápa* the sense is different (*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 575; BI, 568). Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1954, xlvii-xlviii) suggests that the line is original to the Herfinnr verse, which he believes to be old and that the *drápa* has copied this verse (though by his own admission he lacks the evidence to substantiate this). If this is the case then the verse may predate the saga, and may have been composed in celebration of the battle. In addition to this Óláfr Þórðarson quotes the final line (*Briann fell ok helt velli*) in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* as an example of *isterologia* (*Gramm*<sup>3</sup> 1884, 111). Whether Óláfr knew the verse from its *Njáls saga* setting or elsewhere is unclear.

### III.viii Conclusion

Though *Njáls saga* is not famous for its dreams, the nine dreams contribute greatly to the narrative. Six of the dreams are narrated in detail. The author shows a considerable knowledge of different forms of saga dream, mixing animal fetch dreams with motifs culled from hagiography and local legend. Although the dreams add greatly to the theme of fate running through the saga, they do not present everything as being preordained. Rather they stress the way in which the choices made by men will lead inevitably to certain outcomes.

Regarding the dreams, we can see a clear distinction between Höskuldr and Gunnarr's dreams in the first half of the saga, and Flosi and Earl Gilli's dreams in the second half. The first pair are both animal fetch dreams, of the type commonly found in the *Íslendingasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur*. Alongside these dreams in the first half of the saga we also find several waking visions of fetches. By contrast, the latter pair of dreams show greater similarity to dreams found in the *samtíðarsögur* and are almost without parallel in the *Íslendingasögur*. Yngvildr's dream also has its only really close parallel in the *samtíðarsögur*. Alongside these, in the latter part of the saga, we find many specifically Christian supernatural occurrences accompanying the battle of Clontarf. In between these two groups we find Kolskeggr's dream, which relates specifically to his conversion and, by extension, to the conversion of Iceland itself. The author chose to consign his animal fetch dreams to the former half of his saga and his pseudo-contemporary dreams to the latter. Gunnarr and Höskuldr are thus placed in a heroic milieu. They are the great heroes of Iceland's past. This milieu is not strictly speaking pagan, indeed much about it points forward in time towards the conversion of Iceland (e.g. Gunnarr's miraculous defence at Knafahólar, as it is portrayed in his dream). It is, however, distinct and different from the time in which the author was writing, whereas the author depicted events later in the saga in a manner more associated with recording contemporary history. The effect on the original saga readership must have been to set the burning of Bergþórshváll and the subsequent acts of vengeance, while equally momentous, in a world much closer to that which the readership would have been living. Thus the dreams of *Njáls saga* may also have indicated to the original readership the way in which they were expected to understand the saga events.

## Chapter IV: The dreams of *Laxdæla saga*

### IV.i Introduction

*Laxdæla saga* is among the best and most popular of the *Íslendingasögur*. The first section concentrates on the life of Óláfr pái, the illegitimate son of Höskuldr Dala-Kollsson and Melkorka, the daughter of the Irish king Mýrkjartan. In chapter 31 Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is introduced. She is the heroine of the saga and the central character for the majority of the remaining 57 chapters. The saga describes her four weddings and the fate of each of her husbands. Most important of these is Bolli Þorleiksson, whose killing of his foster-brother Kjartan Ólafsson forms the saga climax. Themes relating to women and female experience run throughout the saga and link the chapters prior to Guðrún's introduction thematically to the later chapters (Auerbach 1998-2001, 31-36).

The saga was probably written in the middle of the thirteenth century (Sverrir Tómasson 1993, 387), and is preserved in 6 vellum manuscripts or fragments. There are also several paper manuscripts probably from now lost vellums. The manuscripts form two groups: Y, which includes the short text *Bolla þáttur* directly after the saga, and Z, which does not. The oldest of these manuscripts AM 162 D 2 fol. (part of the Z redaction), probably dates from the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Of the Y manuscripts, the most important and most complete version of the saga is AM 132 fol. (*Möðruvallabók*, c.1330-1370).

Heinrich Beck (1974-1977, 388) identifies dreams as one of seven narrative elements that recur up to ten times in *Laxdæla saga*. In fact dreams occur exactly ten times during the saga (although I have described them in five sections below). The dreams blend common saga elements together with folktale and motifs influenced from European medieval tradition. Guðrún's four dreams of her future husbands are among the finest in Norse literature.

In addition to the dreams described below there is one further dream. In chapter 63 Helgi Harðbeinsson wakes exclaiming (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 63, p. 186): *erfitt hafa draumar veitt í nótt* ('my dreams have proven troublesome in the night'). Helgi is later killed by a force of men including Þorgils Hölluson and the Bollasons.



**Editions:**

*Laxd* 1889-1891 = *Laxdæla saga*. Ed. Kr. Kålund. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 19.

*Laxd* 1934 = *Laxdæla saga*. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslensk fornrit 5.

**Translations:**

*Laxd* 1969 = *Laxdæla saga*. Trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson.

*Laxd* 1997 = *The saga of the people of Laxardal*. Trans. Keneva Kunz. In *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders V*.

## IV.ii Óláfr pái's dream of the ox's mother

### Context:

Óláfr pái has established himself as the most successful man of the district. Following a series of disagreements with his half-brother Þorleikr Høskuldsson, Óláfr offers to foster Þorleikr's son Bolli in an effort to seal their friendship. Bolli grows up alongside Óláfr's own son Kjartan. The narrator then tells of a mysterious ox named Harri, owned by Óláfr. This ox is dapple-grey, larger than other oxen with four horns. Two of these horns are in the normal places. The third goes straight upwards and the fourth comes from his forehead downwards in front of his eyes and is referred to as his ice-breaker (*brunnvaka* – 'a tool to get at water under ice'<sup>28</sup>). When Harri is eighteen his *brunnvaka* falls off, and shortly afterwards Óláfr has him killed. Óláfr has the following dream the night after Harri's death. The dream-woman's prophecy relates to the death of Óláfr's favourite son Kjartan, at the hands of his own foster-brother Bolli. Their conflict begins when Bolli decides to marry Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir (Kjartan's betrothed) while Kjartan is in Norway. After a series of incidents Bolli attacks Kjartan with the help of Guðrún's brothers. Rather than battle against his foster-brother, Kjartan throws down his weapons and is killed.

### Text:

*Laxd* 1889-1891, ch. 31, p. 106.

*Laxd* 1934, ch. 31, pp. 84-85.

Ina næstu nótt eptir dreymði Ólaf, at kona kom at honum; sú var mikil ok reiðulig. Hon tók til orða: "Er þér svefnis?" Hann kvazk vaka. Konan mælti: "Þér er svefnis, en þó mun fyrir hitt ganga. Son minn hefir þú drepa látit ok látit koma ógørviligan mér til handa, ok fyrir þá sök skaltu eiga at sjá þinn son alblóðgan af mínu tilstilli; skal ek ok þann til velja, er ek veit, at þér er ófalastr."

The following night Óláfr dreamed that a woman came to him. She was large and angry-looking. She began to speak: "Are you asleep?" He said that he was awake. The woman said: "You are asleep, but that makes no difference. You have had my son killed and given him to me mutilated and, for this I shall ensure that you shall have to see a son of yours most bloodied. I shall also choose that one, who I know is to you the most

<sup>28</sup> The scarcity of instances of this word makes its exact meaning somewhat in doubt. Zoëga (1910, 73), *ONP* (II, 868), and Fritzner 1886-1896 (I, 200) all describe it as tool for obtaining water from underneath ice or snow. Cleasby (1957, 83), however, associates the word specifically with oxen: "a third horn in the forehead of an ox with which he opened the ice during winter to get at the water".

Síðan hvarf hon á brott. Óláfr vaknaði ok þóttisk sjá svip konunnar. Óláfi þótti mikils um vert drauminn ok segir vinum sínum, ok varð ekki ráðinn, svá at honum líki. Þeir þóttu honum bezt um tala, er þat mæltu, at þat væri draumskrök, er fyrir hann hafði borit.

difficult to part with.” Then she disappeared. Óláfr woke up and thought that he saw a glimpse of the woman. Óláfr took the dream very much to heart and related it to his friends, but no interpretation was made that he was happy with. Those who seemed to him to interpret it best were those that said that it was a false dream that he had undergone.

### Commentary:

This dream seems likely to have originally been a folk story, perhaps arising to explain the place-names Harrastaðir and Harraból (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xliv). This folk-story has been incorporated into the saga to function as a prophecy of the death of Kjartan, and to instil a sense of menace and foreboding.

### Óláfr's dream as folktale

Oxen seem to have been appropriate sacrifices or ‘gifts’ (i.e. animals dedicated to a deity but not necessarily killed) for both Freyr and Þórr (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 9, p. 34; *Flóam* 1991, ch. 21, pp. 280-281). Nonetheless one cannot see Harri as a sacrifice, as it is his killing that angers the dream-woman. Rather both the ox and his mother relate to a rather different sort of god. In addition to the belief in the Æsir, Icelandic pagans would have also placed their faith in many smaller, local guardian spirits or *landvættir* (Jón Jóhannesson 1974, 118). These spirits came in a number of shapes and forms and often appeared in dreams. In *Hrafnkels saga*, Hrafnkell's father Hallfreðr is warned of an impending landslide by a mysterious spirit in a dream (*Hrafnk* 1950, ch. 1, p. 97; also see *Ldn* 1968, II, 299; *Brandkr* 1950, ch. 1, p. 183). In *Þorvalds þáttur víðfjara*, Þorvaldr's father Koðrán worships a spirit that lives in a stone, whom he refers to as his *spámaðr* (‘prophet’), who is said to make predictions and protect Koðrán's livestock (*ÓT* 1958, 285-288). The following episode in *Landnámabók* has already been mentioned in section III.v (*Ldn* 1968, II, 330):<sup>29</sup>

Björn dreymði um nótt, at bergbúi kæmi at honum ok bauð at gera félag við hann, en hann þóttisk játa því. Eptir þat kom hafr til

Björn dreamed one night that a rock-dweller came to him and invited him to go into partnership with him and he thought that he

<sup>29</sup> Here I have followed *Sturlubók* (ch. 329); *Hauksbók* (ch. 284, *Ldn* 1968, II, 331) is slightly different, but tells broadly the same tale.

geita hans, ok tímgaðisk þá svá skjótt fé hans, at hann varð skjótt vellauðigr; síðan var hann Hafr-Björn kallaðr.

agreed to this. After that a ram came to his goats and then his flock multiplied so quickly that he quickly became rich, then he was called Hafr-Björn.

Although the text does not specify such, it seems likely that the *bergbúi* who offers to help is the same as the billy-goat that increases the flock, demonstrating the close link between guardian spirits and the flocks, which were so important for the survival of Icelandic farmers. *Piðranda þáttur ok Þórhalls* makes mention of a bull called Spámaðr, suggesting that prophetic properties were occasionally attached to farm animals and perhaps even that certain animals were seen as guardian spirits (*ÞÞ* 1961, 146). This seems to be the case of Harri in *Laxdæla saga*. The saga tells us that one harsh winter he takes on the role of protecting the livestock of the farm, just as the *spámaðr* in *Þorvalds þáttur* was said to have done. The saga describes Harri leading sixteen cattle away from the farm to a place later called Harrastaðir, finding grass for them all winter (perhaps with the use of his *brunnvaka*), then returning them to the farm at a place later called Harraból. This story has all the signs of being an etiological folktale to explain these two place-names. If this was the case then it is possible that the dream of Harri's mother might also have been part of the same oral narrative. Such a tale might have been used not only to explain the unusual names, but also some great calamity that befell the people of the region. The kernel of chapter 31 of *Laxdæla saga* therefore is an oral narrative, in which a guardian spirit in the shape of an ox initially acted as protector, bringing luck to the occupants of a farm. The occupants inadvertently killed the ox, whereupon the mother of the guardian spirit turned the good luck into bad and replaced the guardianship with a curse.

#### The role of the dream in *Laxdæla saga*

If the story of Harri and his mother does pre-date *Laxdæla saga* it has, nevertheless, been carefully and cunningly integrated into the saga, both symbolically and in terms of narrative. It is possible to consider Harri and his relationship to Óláfr symbolically. Cattle quite literally symbolise financial security and agricultural success in early Iceland. A large herd symbolised great wealth and indicated a larger or more fertile farm that would have been required to support them. Óláfr's dream follows soon after the extensive description of Óláfr moving farm from Goddastaðir to Hjarðarholt, where his wealth and success is stressed by the fact that as the last of his livestock

leaves the old farm, the first are already entering the new (ch. 24). The ox represented a senior, male member of the herd. In the next chapter the wealth of Ósvífr Helgason's ancestry is stressed through the mention of Ósvífr's great-great-grandfather, Øxna-Þórir ('Oxen-Þórir') who owned three islands, each with eighty oxen. The link between cattle and financial/agricultural prosperity can also be seen in the use of cattle fetches in dreams, such as in *Ljósvetninga saga* (*Ljósv* 1940, ch. 11(21), p. 60; and ch. 16(26), p. 85) and *Vápnfirðinga saga* (*Vápnf* 1950, ch. 13, pp. 48-49). In these dreams oxen usually represent chieftains, compared to normal cattle which represent other farmers. Even Harri's name implies power and authority, as it is used as a *heiti* for generals or kings in skaldic verse (*Lexicon Poeticum*, 230-231; *SnE* 1998, I, 100). Thus the ox is at least partially associated with Óláfr himself who has been a great success, both as hero abroad and farmer at home (though not specifically a chieftain), but is becoming aged and will soon make way in the narrative for the next generation.

In the dream the dream-woman threatens Óláfr, telling him: *skaltu eiga at sjá þinn son alblóðgan af mínu tilstilli; skal ek ok þann til velja, er ek veit, at þér er ófalastr* ('I shall ensure you shall have to see a son of yours most bloodied. I shall also choose that one, who I know is to you the most difficult to part with'). Kjartan is not mentioned by name, but we have already been told that Kjartan is Óláfr's favourite child (*Óláfr unni mest Kjartani allra barna sinna*, 'Óláfr loved Kjartan most of all his children') (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 28, p. 77). Óláfr's love for Kjartan is further stressed in chapter 33 when Gestr predicts that Kjartan's success will be in the same measure as Óláfr's love for him (i.e. Óláfr loves Kjartan more, therefore he will be more successful) (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 33, p. 92). In this way the dream-woman's prophecy not only points forward to Kjartan's death, it also heightens its tragedy, stressing that it is the best and most beloved member of the household who will die. This creates a parallel with the curse made by Geirmundr gnýr on the sword Fótþítr, that it will cause the death of that man in Þuríðr's family (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 30, p. 82) *er mestr er skaði at* ('who is the greatest loss').

Although for the reader the function of the dream is to foreshadow Kjartan's death, adding a sense of inevitability to the impending doom, the dream-woman's claims that the tragedy will occur *af mínu tilstilli* ('by my means') suggest a causal link between the prophecy and Kjartan's death. It is common to find both a natural and supernatural cause for a single event. *Laxdæla saga* is an excellent example of this sort of multiple causality. It could be argued that Kjartan's death follows as a result of his

own decision to go abroad and refusal to consider Guðrún's request to accompany him. One might also see Bolli's decision to marry Guðrún, or King Óláfr Tryggvason's decision to delay Kjartan in Norway as causes. One might, however, also identify supernatural causes such as the curse laid upon the sword Fótbitr or Óláfr's dream of Harri's mother. In this way, the saga-writer uses predictions and premonitions, not only to foreshadow the climax of the saga, but to lead the action causally towards it. Furthermore the saga-writer structures his narrative so as to hint at the means by which these premonitions will manifest themselves. It is no co-incidence that in the very next chapter after Óláfr's dream, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is introduced. As the mysterious dream-woman leaves the stage, Ósvífr enters and, more importantly, his daughter, who will be the means by which Kjartan will lose his life.

#### The narration of the dream

Óláfr's dream is narrated in the third person (although the dream-woman's words are given in direct speech) and there is not the complex pattern of narration and interpretation found in dreams narrated in the first person. It is stated, however, that Óláfr tells a number of people his dream and gets them to interpret it. The interpretations that seem to satisfy him most are those, which assume he has suffered *draumskrök*. This unusual word is glossed by Cleasby (1957, 104) as 'a dream phantasm', by Fritzner (1886-1896, I, 262) as 'a dream with no meaning'<sup>30</sup>; and by the forthcoming *ONP* volume as 'phantasm, false dream'. It is formed from *draumr* ('dream') and *skrök* ('false story' or 'invention'). All three of these dictionaries only cite this example from *Laxdæla saga* and I know of no other examples. A similar concept is expressed by the word *draumaskrímsl* ('a dream monster' or 'phantasm') found in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (ÞorstVík 1944, ch. 12 p. 209) and *Nikuláss saga erkibiskups I* (Nik 1877, 33). In *Gunnlaugs saga Þorsteinn* comments: *Ekki er mark at draumum* ('there is no significance in dreams') (Gunnl 1938, ch. 2, p. 53). The same phrase is spoken by Sturla Sighvatsson in *Íslendinga saga* (Stu 1906-1911, I, 523). In each of these examples, the interpretation of the dream as meaningless proves untrue, but they do suggest that Old Norse writers were aware of the possibility of untrue or meaningless dreams.

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<sup>30</sup> "Drømmeri som ikke har noget at betyde".

Two common dream motifs

Óláfr's dream exhibits two common and probably linked motifs associated with dreaming in the sagas. In the dream the dream-woman asks Óláfr whether he is awake. Óláfr believes that he is, but she denies this, saying: *Þér er svefns, en þó mun fyrir hitt ganga* ('You are sleeping, but that makes no difference'). This motif also appears in *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Fbr* 1943, ch. 11, p. 174 and ch. 24, p. 255); *Flóamanna saga* (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 15, p. 260); *Hallfreðar saga* (*Hallfr* 1939, ch. 10, p. 191-192); *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (*ÓT* 1961, ch. 279, p. 332) and *Óláfs saga helga* (*Hkr* 1945, *Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 188, p. 340; *ÓHLeg* 1922, ch. 3, p. 2). The motif is also hinted at in *Knýtlinga saga*, where Sveinn is said to become sleepy before his vision of King Knútr, but nevertheless to think that he is more awake than asleep (*þóttisk hann heldr vaka en sofa*, *Knýtl* 1919-1925, ch. 68, p. 157). The motif can be summarised as follows: a dream-man or woman appears to the dreamer and asks whether they are asleep or awake, to which the dreamer responds that they are asleep, the dream-man or woman then contradicts this but claims that this does not matter as what will follow will happen as if he were awake. The motif can thus be divided into two parts, firstly the question as to whether or not the dreamer is asleep; and secondly the comment that this does not matter. The first aspect seems to be an observation on the way in which, while some dreams feel unreal and the dreamer is aware throughout that they are dreaming, others feel very real while the dreamer is sleeping. It is noticeable that all these examples occur in the visitation rather than symbolic dreams. Even though symbolic dreams were thought to be accurate indications of the future, they could not be confused with the waking world (which is understandable considering the use of symbols such as wolves which were not native to Iceland). Visitation dreams could be realistic and might indeed be confused with the waking world.

The second part of the motif is slightly harder to understand. Many of the texts give the dream-man or woman's words verbatim at this point, despite the rest of the dream being in indirect speech. In *Flóamanna saga*, Þorgils is told by Auðun, his dream-man (*Flóam*, ch. 15, p. 260): *þú sefr, en jafnt mun vera sem þú vakir* ('you are sleeping, but it will be the same as if you were awake'). In *Fóstbræðra saga*, Þorbjörg tells Þormóðr in a dream (*Fbr* 1943, ch. 11, p. 174): *þér er svefns, en þat eitt berr fyrir þik, at svá mun eptir ganga, sem þetta beri fyrir þik vakanda* ('you are sleeping, but that which will happen to you will follow, as though this happened while you were

awake').<sup>31</sup> Only if we compare the words of Óláfr's dream-woman with these other examples can we begin to understand their meaning. In each case the dream-spirit is telling their dreamer to pay attention because the actions occurring in the dream will have a direct effect upon the waking world. In *Flóamanna saga* Auðun gives Þorgils advice as to how he might defeat the berserker Surtr. In Þormóðr's dream in *Fóstbræðra saga*, Kolbrún touches his eyes, an injury which manifests itself in the waking world (and given the like motif in *Bárðar saga* (*Bárð* 1991, ch. 21, pp. 169-170) one might suppose even threatens his life). Indeed in all of the examples of this motif the dream might be said to have an active role affecting the saga plot. Thus the dream-woman's words in Óláfr's dream might be paraphrased: "Regardless of whether you are asleep or awake, my threat will be carried out and your son killed."

The other common motif found in Óláfr's dream is that when Óláfr awakes he seems to catch a glimpse (*svipr*) of the woman departing. This motif seems to be a validating factor demonstrating the realness of the dream (Henzen 1890, 63). Although Óláfr is dreaming, the woman really is there in the room with him. This explains the ability of such dream-men and women in visitation dreams to leave objects in dreams which are present when the dreamer awakes, such as when Auðun in *Flóamanna saga* returns a second time in Þorgils' dreams and takes a sword and exchanges it for an axe (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 16, p. 261-262) or Brynjarr in *Þorsteins þátr uxafóts* who gives Þorsteinn a purse full of gold (*ÞUxaf* 1991, ch. 5, p. 354). It also explains examples where dream-spirits injure dreamers in dreams (*Fbr* 1943, ch. 11, pp. 174-176; *Bárð* 1991, ch. 21, pp. 169-170 and *Vatn* 1939, ch. 36, p. 95). The motif of catching a glimpse of the dream-spirit seems to be linked to the motif of the spirit asking whether the dreamer is awake. In addition to Óláfr pái's dream, the two motifs are also found in Þormóðr's dream in *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Fbr* 1943, ch. 11, p. 175) and in Óláfr Haraldsson's dream in both *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla* (*Hkr* 1945, *Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 188, p. 340) and in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (*ÓT* 1961, ch. 279, p. 332).

### Conclusion

Óláfr's dream appears to have its origins in an oral tale, where a farmer inadvertently offended a local guardian spirit by killing an ox. The dream, however, has

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<sup>31</sup> In fact Þorbjörg's words vary in the four different versions of the saga. The AM 132 fol. (*Möðruvallabók*) version is given above, see *Fbr* 1925-1927 ch. 11, pp. 73 for the other versions.



been carefully integrated into the saga and contains a number of motifs commonly found in saga dreams. Symbolically the ox is associated with Óláfr's success and therefore his killing of it inevitably leads to disaster. The dream-woman's curse on his family is one of a number of causes that result in Kjartan's death and foreshadow his killing in chapter 49. The dream is surrounded in the saga by a number of similar predictions or premonitions of Kjartan's death, and directly before the introduction of Guðrún to the text.

### IV.iii Guðrún's four dreams of her future husbands<sup>32</sup>

#### Context:

Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is sent by her father Ósvífr to meet Gestr Oddleifsson at the baths in Sælingsdalr and to invite him to stay with them. After delivering the invitation Guðrún discusses her dreams with Gestr. Gestr explains that each of the dreams refers to one of Guðrún's future husbands. The first (represented by the headdress) is Þorvaldr Halldórsson to whom Guðrún is engaged by her father without her consent. While still married to Þorvaldr, Guðrún meets her second husband Þórðr Ingunnarson (the silver ring). It is Þórðr who devises the plan to allow Guðrún to divorce Þorvaldr by making him a shirt revealing his nipples and divorcing him on grounds of effeminacy. After Þórðr divorces his current wife, he and Guðrún marry. Þórðr later drowns in Breiðafjörðr in a storm created by some malicious sorcerers. After the death of her second husband Guðrún marries Bolli Þorleiksson (symbolised by the gold ring). Bolli is eventually killed by the brothers of Kjartan Ólafsson in revenge for Kjartan's death. Guðrún's final marriage is to Þorkell Eyjólfsson (the gold helmet). Þorkell drowns in Breiðafjörðr, following a trip to Hrútafjörðr to collect timber, which he has brought from Norway.

#### Text:

*Laxd* 1889-1891, ch. 33, pp. 109-113.

*Laxd* 1934, ch. 33, pp. 88-91.

Guðrún mælti: "Dreymt hefir mik mart í vetr, en fjórir eru þeir draumar, er mér afla mikillar áhyggju, en engi maðr hefir þá svá ráðit, at mér líki, ok bið ek þó eigi þess, at þeir sé í vil ráðnir." Gestr mælti þá: "Seg þú drauma þína; vera má, at vér gerim af nokkut." Guðrún segir: "Úti þóttumk ek vera stödd við læk nokkum, ok hafða ek

Guðrún said: "I have dreamed a great deal this winter, but there are four dreams which cause me great concern and nobody has interpreted them in a manner that satisfies me, even though I do not ask for wishful interpretations of them." Gestr then said: "Do tell your dreams, it may be that we can make something of them." Guðrún said: "I thought that I was stood outside, beside a

<sup>32</sup> Material in this section was presented as a paper at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, 14-17 July 2003 and at the Viking Society Student Conference, Leeds 21 February 2004. I am indebted to all those who made helpful comments and suggestions in the discussion following these papers. In particular suggestions by Ármann Jakobsson and Margaret Clunies Ross provided additional avenues of research.

krókfald á höfði ok þótti mér illa sama, ok var ek fúsari at breyta faldinum, en margir tölðu um, at ek skylda þat eigi gera. En ek hlýdda ekki á þat, ok greip ek af höfði mér faldinn, ok kastaða ek út á lækinn, - ok var þessi draumr eigi lengri." Ok enn mælti Guðrún: "Þat var upphaf at qðrum draum, at ek þóttumk vera stödd hjá vatni einu; svá þótti mér, sem kominn væri silfrhringr á hönd mér, ok þóttumk ek eiga ok einkarvel sama; þótti mér þat vera allmikil gersemi, ok ætlaða ek lengi at eiga. Ok er mér vāru minnstar vānir, þā renndi hringrinn af hendi mér ok á vatnit, ok sá ek hann aldri síðan. Þótti mér sá skaði miklu meiri en ek mætta at glíkendum ráða, þótt ek hefða einum grip týnt. Síðan vaknaða ek." Gestr svarar þessu einu: "Era sjá draumr minni." Enn mælti Guðrún: "Sá er inn þriði draumr minn, at ek þóttumk hafa gullhring á hendi, ok þóttumk ek eiga hringinn, ok þótti mér bœttr skaðinn; kom mér þat í hug, at ek mynda þessa hringr lengr njóta en ins fyrra; en eigi þótti mér sjá gripr því betr sama, sem gull er dýrra en silfr. Síðan þóttumk ek falla ok vilja styðja mik með hendinni, en gullhringrinn mœtti steini nokkurum ok stökk í tvá hluti, ok þótti mér dreyra ór hlutunum. Þat þótti mér líkara harmi en skaða, er ek þóttumk þā bera eptir; kom mér þā í hug, at brestr hafði verit á hringnum, ok þā er ek hugða at brotunum eptir, þā þóttumk ek sjá fleiri brestina á, ok þótti mér þó, sem heill myndi, ef ek hefða betr til gætt, ok var eigi þessi draumr lengri." Gestr svarar: "Ekki fara í þurrð draumarnir." Ok enn mælti Guðrún: "Sá er inn fjórði draumr minn, at ek þóttumk hafa hjálm á höfði af gulli ok mjök gimsteinum settan. Ek þóttumk eiga þā gersemi; en þat þótti mér helzt at, at hann var nokkurs til þungr, því at

certain brook and I had a hooked headdress on my head but it didn't seem to suit me and I was eager to alter the headdress, but many people said that I should not do it. However, I took no notice of that and I seized the headdress from my head and I threw it out into the brook and this dream continued no further." Guðrún continued: "The second dream began in such a way, that I thought I was stood beside a lake. So it seemed to me that a silver ring had appeared on my arm and I thought that I owned it and that it suited me very well. It seemed to me to be a wonderful treasure and I intended to own it for a long time. But then, when I was least expecting it, the ring slipped from my hand and went into the lake and I never saw it again. That seemed to me to be a much greater loss than I would have expected for the loss of a mere trinket. Then I awoke." Gestr answered only that: "That is no less of a dream." Guðrún continued: "This is my third dream, that I thought that I had a gold-ring on my arm and I thought that I owned the ring and it seemed to me to make up for my loss. I had an idea that I would enjoy this ring for longer than the previous one. However, it seemed to me, this treasure didn't become me that much better, not to the extent that gold is better than silver. Then I thought that I fell and tried to steady myself with my hand and the gold-ring hit some stone and shattered into two pieces and it seemed to me to bleed from the pieces. It seemed to me that I thought I felt as a result something more akin to grief than disappointment. It occurred to me that a crack had been in the ring and, when I studied the pieces afterwards, I thought I saw more cracks there. Nevertheless, I thought that it might still be whole, if I had taken better care of it and this dream continued no further." Gestr replied: "The dreams aren't drying up." Guðrún continued: "This is my fourth dream, that I thought that I had a helmet on my head of gold

ek fekk varla valdit, ok bar ek hallt höfuðit, ok gaf ek þó hjálminum enga sök á því ok ætlaða ekki at lóga honum, en þó steypðisk hann af höfði mér ok út á Hvammsfjörð, ok eptir þat vaknaða ek. Eru þér nú sagðir draumarnir allir.” Gestr svarar: “Glöggst fæ ek sét, hvat draumar þessir eru, en mjök mun þér samstaft þykkja, því at ek mun næsta einn veg alla ráða. Bændr mantu eiga fjóra, ok væntir mik, þá er þú ert inum fyrsta gipt, at þat sé þér ekki girndaráð. Þar er þú þóttisk hafa mikinn fald á höfði, ok þótti þér illa sama, þar muntu lítit unna honum, ok þar er þú tókt af höfði þér faldinn ok kastaðir á vatnit, þar muntu ganga frá honum. Því kalla menn á sæ kastat, er maðr lætr eigu sína ok tekr ekki í mót.” Ok enn mælti Gestr: “Sá var draumr þinn annarr, at þú þóttisk hafa silfrhring á hendi; þar muntu vera gipt öðrum manni ágætum. Þeim muntu unna mikit ok njóta skamma stund; kemr mér ekki þat at óvörum, þóttú missir hann með drukknun, ok eigi geri ek þann draum lengra. Sá var inn þriði draumr þinn, at þú þóttisk hafa gullhring á hendi; þar muntu eiga inn þriðja bónda. Ekki mun sá því meira verðr, sem þér þótti sá málmrinn torugætri ok dýrri, en nær er þat mínu hugboði, at í þat mund muni orðit siðaskipti, ok muni sá þinn bóndi hafa tekit við þeim sið, er vér hyggjum, at miklu sé háleitari. En þar er þér þótti hringrinn í sundr stökkva, nokkut af þinni vangeymslu, ok sátt blóð koma ór hlutunum, þá mun sá þinn bóndi vera veginn; muntu þá þykkjask glöggst sjá þá þverbresti, er á þeim ráðahag hafa verit.” Ok enn mælti Gestr: “Sá er inn fjórði draumr þinn, at þú þóttisk hafa hjálm á höfði af gulli ok settan gimsteinum, ok varð þér þungbær; þar munt þú eiga inn fjórða

inlaid with many gemstones. I thought that I owned a great treasure. But it seemed to me rather, that it was somewhat too heavy because I could barely control it and I carried my head leaning to one side, nonetheless I did not blame the helmet for this and I didn't intend to part with it. Despite this, it tumbled from my head and out into Hvammsfjörð and after that I awoke. Now all the dreams are related to you.” Gestr replied: “I can see clearly what these dreams are, but it will seem to you monotonous, because I will interpret them all in almost the same manner. You will have four husbands and I expect that, when you are first married, it will not be a love match on your part. When you thought you had a headdress on your head and it seemed to suit you badly, this means you will love him little and when you took the headdress from your head and threw it into the water, this means you will leave him. Because people say “thrown to the sea”, when someone gives up their property and receives nothing in return.” Gestr continued: “Your second dream was, that you thought that you had a silver ring on your arm. This means you will be married to a second great man. You will love him a great deal, but enjoy him but a short time. It would come as no surprise to me if you were to lose him through drowning and I shall consider this dream no further. Your third dream was, that you thought that you had a gold ring on your hand, this means you will have a third husband. That one will not exceed the other to the extent that that metal seems to you to be more rare or dearer, but it is in accordance with my belief that, at that time, there will have occurred a change in faith and that husband of yours will have taken that custom, which we think is greatly superior. When you thought the ring shattered in two, somewhat from your carelessness, and you saw blood come from the

bónða. Sá mun vera mestr hofðingi ok mun bera heldr ægishjálms yfir þér. Ok þar er þér þótti hann steypask út á Hvammsfjörð, þá man hann þann sama fjörð fyrir hitta á inum efsta degi síns lífs. Geri ek nú þenna draum ekki lengra." Guðrúnu setti dreyrrauða, meðan draumarnir váru ráðnir; en engi hafði hon orð um, fyrr en Gestr lauk sínu máli. Þá segir Guðrún: "Hitta myndir þú fegri spár í þessu máli, ef svá væri í hendr þér búið af mér, en haf þó þökk fyrir, er þú hefir ráðið draumana. En mikit er til at hyggja, ef þetta allt skal eptir ganga."

pieces, this means that husband of yours will be killed. You will then see most clearly the cracks which had been in the marriage." Gestr continued: "Your fourth dream is that you thought you had a helmet on your head of gold inset with gemstones, this means you will have a fourth husband. That one will be the greatest chieftain and will somewhat overawe you. When you thought it tumbled out into Hvammsfjörðr, this means he will visit that same fjord on the last day of his life. I will consider this dream no further." Guðrún turned blood red while the dreams were interpreted but said not a word on the matter until Gestr finished his speech. Then Guðrún said: "You would arrive at a fairer prophecy in this matter, if I had given you something better. Nevertheless thank you, you have interpreted the dreams. And there is much to think on, if all this shall come to pass."

### Commentary:

These dreams and their interpretations cover some 900 words or three and half pages in the Íslenzk fornrit edition. This makes them the second longest single piece of continuous narrative concerning dreams in the sagas of Icelanders.<sup>33</sup> The events, which the dreams foreshadow cover the remainder of the saga: some 44 chapters, 136 pages and 38 years, arguably the most impressive and dramatic prophecy anywhere in the *Íslendingasögur*. The dreams form a complex code to be decoded by the reader. Gestr's interpretations ensure that no reader is left uncertain of the basic meaning of the dreams, but more subtle details are left for the reader to interpret, thereby engaging his interest in the text.

### The narration of the dreams

<sup>33</sup> Only Þórhaddr's twelve dreams in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* are longer at just under 1100 words. In other groups of sagas the longest passage I know of is *Stjörnu-Odda Draumr* in which Oddi's dream is used as a narrative frame for a fantastic tale in *fornaldarsaga* style (*Stjörnu-ODr* 1991, chs 1-9, pp. 459-481).

Guðrún narrates her dreams consecutively in first person narrative, interrupted only by the narrator's *Ok enn mælti Guðrún* ('Guðrún continued') between the first and second dreams, and by brief asides from Gestr between the second and third, and third and fourth dreams. The passage conforms to the scheme for narrating a dream in the first person (see section II.ii), although the first stages are missing. There is no description of Guðrún asleep (this would not fit the context of Guðrún telling her dreams at the baths, and perhaps would have appeared unseemly). After the narration Guðrún comments on Gestr's interpretation, saying: *Hitta myndir þú fegri spár í þessu máli, ef svá væri í hendr þér búit af mér, en haf þó þökk fyrir, er þú hefir ráðit draumana. En mikit er til at hyggja, ef þetta allt skal eptir ganga* ('You would arrive at a fairer prophecy in this matter, if I had given you something better. Nevertheless thank you, you have interpreted the dreams. And there is much to think on, if all this shall come to pass.'). This corresponds to the final phase of the scheme (e.g. Helgi Droplaugarson's refusal to change his plans). The passage is similar to the final stanza of *Grípisspá*. Grípir has made a less than auspicious prophecy regarding Sigurðr's fate, but Sigurðr does not blame Grípir (*Grípisspá*, stanza 52, *Edda* 1962, 172):

‘Sciliomc heilir! Munat scoþom vinna,	Let us say fare well. One will not defeat fate.
nú hefir þú, Grípir, vel gort, sem ek	Now you have done well, Grípir, that which I
beiddac;	asked. You would soon say a more peaceful life
fliótt myndir þú fríðri segia	for me if you could do that.
mína ævi, ef þú mættir þat.’	

Guðrún's sensible reaction to her prophecy is therefore that of the heroic Sigurðr and a stark contrast to those saga dreamers who react angrily at the interpretation of dreams (e.g. *Gunnl* 1938, ch. 2, pp. 53-55; *Vápnf* 1950, ch. 13, pp. 48-49). Guðrún seems to accept her fate, or at least realises that Gestr is not to blame for it. The same sentiment is shown when Guðrún first mentions her dreams: ... *engi maðr hefir þá svá ráðit, at mér líki, ok bið ek þó eigi þess, at þeir sé í vil ráðnir* ('nobody has interpreted them in a manner that satisfies me, even though I do not ask for wishful interpretations of them'). This is a direct contrast to Óláfr pái's reaction to the interpretations of his dream in chapter 31. Both Óláfr and Guðrún tell their dreams to a number of different people in order to get different interpretations, but Guðrún does so in order to obtain an interpretation that she thinks truthful, whereas Óláfr prefers those interpretations which attach no meaning to his dream.

The dreams and their fulfilment in the saga

Guðrún's dreams are symbolic, but unlike many saga dreams, the symbols are inanimate objects and not fetches. The symbols are items of clothing and jewellery. Each item represents a man that Guðrún will marry. Her reaction in the dream to the dream-symbol reflects her feelings about the relevant marriage and the fate of the dream-symbol in the dream represents the outcome of each marriage and the fate of each husband. In terms of the saga, the dreams function as a structural device. They give the reader a glimpse of what is coming up, whetting their appetite. When Guðrún comments on Gestr's interpretation, that there is much to think about, or perhaps even, 'to look forward to', if all this is to come to pass, she is reflecting as much on the experience of the reader at this point in the text as upon herself. The reader can also plot their way through saga according to which husband, i.e. which dream, he is reading about. The same narrative technique is used in *Eiríks saga rauða*, where the sibyl's prophecy regarding Guðríðr's marriages forms a structure for that narrative (Conroy 1980, 116-125; see *Eir* 1935, ch. 4, pp. 208-209). The dream prophecy in *Laxdæla saga* places Guðrún at the very centre of the narrative. Even when she is not specifically involved in the events which are unfolding, these events are situated within her biography. It is the dreams in chapter 33 that really make *Laxdæla saga* Guðrún's biography, her saga.

The dreams are in fact never referred to again directly, but are referred to subtly in a number of ways. For example each time a new husband is introduced the reader is reminded of the dreams. As one might expect, the descriptions of the husbands bring out many of the points predicted by the dreams. With the introduction of each suitor the details of the dreams become clearer; with each marriage Guðrún's reaction to the dream-symbol becomes more understandable; and with the dissolution of each marriage the reader comes to understand the fate of the dream-symbol. There is also a further scene that draws the reader's attention back to the dream sequence. In the last chapter of the saga Guðrún discusses her four husbands with her son Bolli Bollason. As she lists their good points in turn, she mentions several of the same characteristics prophesied by the dreams. The dreams in chapter 33 are a prelude to Guðrún's biography, indicating what will happen, and her confessional discussion with her son is its epilogue, summing up everything that has occurred. The four dreams are set out as Table 2 below, together with the various introductions for each husband and Guðrún's comments to her son.

**Table 2. Guðrún's dreams and their fulfilment in the saga**

	Dream-symbol	Husband	Description of the husband	Fate of the dream-symbol	Fate of the husband	Guðrún's epitaph ( <i>Laxd</i> 1934, ch. 78, p. 228)
Dream 1	Headdress ( <i>krókfaldr</i> )	Þorvaldr Halldórsson	... auðigr maðr ok engi hetja. ( <i>Laxd</i> 1934, ch. 34, p. 93)	Thrown into stream.	Divorced for transvestism.	Þorvalds get ek at engu.
Dream 2	Silver ring	Þórðr Ingunnarson	Þórðr var vænn maðr ok vaskligr, gorr at sér ok sakamaðr mikill. ( <i>Laxd</i> 1934, ch. 32, p. 87)	Accidentally falls into lake.	Drowned by influence of evil sorcerers.	Þórðr Ingunnarson var maðr þeira vitrastr ok lagamaðr mestr.
Dream 3	Gold ring	Bolli Þorleiksson	... var hann inn vænligsti maðr snimma. ( <i>Laxd</i> 1934, ch. 25, p. 71)	Broken on stone through carelessness.	Killed by the Ólafssons in revenge for killing of Kjartan.	... engi [þeira] var maðr gørviligri en Bolli ok albetr at sér.
Dream 4	Helmet	Þorkell Eyjólfsson	... hann var frægr maðr ok kynstórr. ( <i>Laxd</i> 1934, ch. 57, p. 171)	Topples into Hvammsfjörðr.	Drowned.	Þorkell var maðr ríkastr ok höfðingi mestr ...



In her first dream Guðrún thinks that she is wearing a *krókfaldr*. A *krókfaldr* was a tall headdress, which rose to a peak bent slightly forward (Falk 1919, 99-100). This type of headdress was worn exclusively by women and in particular was considered a wedding garment (Perkins 1986-1989, 279-284). The headdress represents Þorvaldr Halldórsson, her first husband. Guðrún comments that the headdress does not seem to suit her, or perhaps does not fit her, and that she wants to change it. This indicates that Guðrún will be unhappy with her first marriage. The fact that the headdress does not suit Guðrún also relates to an inequality in the marriage. In the previous chapter Guðrún is introduced to the saga (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 32, p. 86): *hon var kvenna vænst, er upp óxu á Íslandi, bæði at ásjánu ok vitsmunum* ('she was the most promising of women, who grew up in Iceland, both in appearance and wisdom'). Like many saga heroines, she is the most beautiful woman in Iceland, but she is also the most accomplished, the wisest and most interesting to talk to. This creates for the reader an expectation that Guðrún should marry the best, most handsome and certainly the bravest man in all Iceland. This is not what happens. Guðrún marries Þorvaldr. When he is introduced he is described as (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 34, p. 93): *auðigr maðr ok engi hetja* ('a wealthy man but not much of a hero'). Therefore, like the headdress, Þorvaldr does not suit her.

In the dream, Guðrún's divorce is represented by her throwing the headdress into a stream. The method by which we have to understand this is explained by Gestr. We have to understand Guðrún's action according to the phrase *kasta á sæ*, literally meaning 'to throw to sea', but metaphorically meaning 'to give something up and get nothing in return'. The phrase *kasta á sæ* or *kasta á glæ* (*glær* also meaning 'sea') is found in both Old Norse and Modern Icelandic (Halldór Halldórsson 1978-1980, I, 189-190). If *Heimskringla* is to be believed, its origin lies in exchanges of weapons in sea-battles, where to shoot one's spears and arrows into the sea rather than at the enemy vessel would clearly mean that no benefit was derived from them (*Hkr* 1945, *Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 48, p. 59). The phrase *kasta á glæ* is also found in *Bjarnar saga* (*BjH* 1938, ch. 29, p. 190). This aspect of Guðrún's first dream is what Wilhelm Henzen (1890, 44-45) refers to as a *Redensarttraum* or 'Set-phrase dream'. Examples of this type of dream can also be found in *Víga-Glúms saga* (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 21, pp. 70-71); *Flóamanna saga* (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 24, p. 293); and *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*

(*PSH* 1950, ch. 4, pp. 309-313).<sup>34</sup> In this type of dream a well-known saying or phrase is literally illustrated in a dream. We are not supposed to believe that Þorvaldr is literally thrown into a stream by Guðrún, rather that he is tossed out to sea, i.e. that he is given up and nothing received in return. It is noticeable that it is not the sea that the headdress is thrown into, but a stream and therefore the dream requires Gestr's interpretation. The meaning of the dream is deliberately disguised by the author. To understand the set-phrase it is necessary to understand the stream in the dream symbolically as the sea, and only once this substitution is made (i.e. changing *kasta á læk* to *kasta á sæ*) can the set-phrase be understood.

In chapter 34 Guðrún divorces Þorvaldr on grounds of transvestism. In fact, Icelandic laws do not specifically state that cross-dressing provides grounds for divorce (Arent Madelung 1972, 210 note). It was, however, considered a serious misdemeanour punishable by lesser outlawry (e.g. *Grg* 1852, II, 47; and 203-4).<sup>35</sup> Concepts of sexual deviancy, transvestism and cowardice are associated with one another in Old Norse. One could impugn a man's bravery by accusing him of sexual deviancy or cross-dressing (Ström 1974). Therefore, a theme seems to run through the very brief depiction of Þorvaldr in *Laxdæla saga*. He is both effeminate and cowardly. The headdress is part of this theme. The *krókfaldr* is the only exclusively female garment among the four dream-symbols. There are several examples of men being ridiculed for wearing headdresses in Old Norse literature. In *Víglundar saga*, Víglundr has to wear a bandage after a particularly violent game of *knattleikr*. His father ridicules this bandage claiming his son is wearing a *faldr*, thereby implying that Víglundr has become effeminate and criticising the fact that Víglundr did not take revenge for the wound he received while playing (*Vígl* 1959, ch. 14, p. 89). Similarly, in *Prymskviða*, Þórr is required to wear headdresses to impersonate Freyja and is therefore ridiculed by Loki (*Prymskviða* stanza 20, *Edda* 1962, 114). In *Laxdæla saga* the depiction of Þorvaldr as a coward and transvestite is also hinted at in the final scene. Guðrún enumerates to her son the good points of all of her husbands, with the exception of Þorvaldr. Of Þorvaldr she says: *Þorvalds get ek at engu* ('Of Þorvaldr I say nothing') (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 78, p.

<sup>34</sup> Set-phrase dreams are discussed by Henzen (1890, 44-45) and Perkins (1974-1977, 212-213) also see the sections IV.vi and VI.iii below.

<sup>35</sup> Lesser outlawry required a payment to be made to a chieftain and banishment of the miscreant from Iceland for three years (*Laws* 1980-2000, I, 250)

228). This silence speaks volumes. Þorvaldr is little better than a dirty joke, one to which everyone already knows the punchline.

Both the second and third husbands are represented by rings. It seems likely that these are arm-rings, rather than finger-rings (which are sometimes referred to by the word *hringr*, but more often *fingrgull*). These are clearly more masculine symbols than the headdress. Rings were given by warriors to their troops as rewards, or between men as gifts denoting friendship and thus both Þórðr Ingunnarson and Bolli Þorleiksson are depicted in a more positive light than Þorvaldr. When Þórðr is introduced into the saga, his description is much more complimentary than Þorvaldr: *Þórðr var vænn maðr ok vaskligr, górr at sér ok sakamaðr mikill* (Þórðr was a promising man and valiant, skilled and a great litigator') (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 32, p. 87). Similarly in her confession scene with her son, Guðrún mentions the same characteristics of Þórðr, saying (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 78, p. 228): *Þórðr Ingunnarson var maðr þeira vitrastr ok lagamaðr mestr* ('Þórðr Ingunnarson was the wisest man among them [i.e. the four husbands] and the greatest litigator').<sup>36</sup>

Guðrún's attitude towards the silver ring in the second dream is also much more positive than her attitude towards the headdress. She describes it as an *allmikil gersemi* ('a very great treasure') and says that she plans to keep it for a long time. In direct contrast to the previous dream, she states that it suits her well. Thus, in Guðrún's eyes at least, Þórðr is a better match, better husband and perhaps also sexually superior to Þorvaldr. The happiness of Guðrún's second marriage is mentioned in chapter 35 (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 35, p. 96): *Samfær þeira Þórðar ok Guðrúnar var góð* ('the marriage of Þórðr and Guðrún was good'). Guðrún also says that in the dream she seems to own (*eiga*) the ring. This ownership presumably relates to the bond of marriage between her and her husband. The verb *eiga* as well as meaning 'to own' also means 'to be married to' or 'to marry'. It is unusual, however, to find the verb used with this meaning where the sentence subject is female. On the verb *eiga* Cleasby (1957, 118) says: "... old writers hardly ever say that the wife *owns* her husband ... owing to the primitive notion of the husband's 'jus possessionis'...". Thus linguistically, men usually took possession of women through marriage and not the other way round. The fact that Guðrún owns the

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<sup>36</sup> A.C. Bouman (1962, 126 note) takes this to be sarcasm given that it is Guðrún who advises Þórðr how to divorce Auðr. This need not be the case as he has already suggested the same plan to her. Furthermore sarcasm would be at odds with the portrayal of Þórðr in the saga as the only husband for whom she seems to have had genuine affection.

ring in her dream, shows that symbolically she is an equal or even dominant party in her marriage and thus in a relatively exceptional position. Furthermore Þórðr is the only one of the four husbands that Guðrún chooses for herself, and in this sense he is also her choice.

Despite her wish to keep the ring for a long time the ring slips from her finger and falls into a lake. Guðrún's second husband is drowned in a storm created by the sorcerer Kotkell and his brothers. In contrast to the previous dream, the loss of the ring in water should be understood on a purely symbolic, rather than, linguistic level. In this case the lake again represents the sea, but that is as far as it goes. Guðrún really does lose Þórðr to the sea rather than metaphorically cast him to it. In this way the saga-writer varies the code by which the dream-symbols are interpreted. The two similar dreams, placed side by side in the text, have to be read in very different ways. It seems the medieval reader had no problem dealing with such difficulties and saw nothing incongruous about having such varied dream traditions placed side by side, both representing equally accurate predictions of the future.

In the dream, Guðrún reacts to the loss of the ring much more than she would have expected from the loss of a mere ring. In this way, Guðrún experiences in her dream the emotional reaction to the real loss of her husband. In this way Guðrún's dreams not only foreshadow events in the saga plot, but also inform us of Guðrún's emotional response to these events. The dreams offer an unusual glimpse into the emotions of a saga character, in an almost Freudian manner.<sup>37</sup> The fundamental difference between Guðrún's dreams and Freud's theories is that her responses are to events which have not yet occurred and thus, according to modern logic, towards which she could have no subconscious feelings.

Guðrún's third dream is of a gold ring, which represents her third husband Bolli Þorleiksson. Bolli is introduced to the saga as a most promising (*vænligstr*) man at an early age (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 25, p. 71). In her confessional scene Guðrún describes him positively: *engi [þeira] var maðr górviligri en Bolli ok albetr at sér* ('none [of them] was a more accomplished man than Bolli, or better in himself') (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 78, p. 228). The similarity between the dream-symbols in Guðrún's second and third dreams

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<sup>37</sup> Freud's most important works on dreams were the two parts of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1953a and 1953b) and *On Dreams* (Freud 1953c). Interestingly, among the material added to the fourth edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (published in 1914) is a paragraph indicating that Freud was familiar with saga dreams, from Henzen's (1890) book (Freud 1953b, 407).

leads the reader to compare the two symbols and by extension compare the two men whom they represent. Accordingly, both men are great, though Bolli is somewhat greater. The use of different metals to represent differences between men is also found in *Rauðúlfs þáttur*, where King Óláfr Haraldsson has a dream of a figure of a crucifix (*Rauð* 1941, 672-680, *Rauð* 1862, 298-301). In the dream, which is based on Nebuchadnezzar's dream in *Daniel* 2:31-45, various parts of the figure are made from different metals, with each different metal contrasting, in the same way that Þórðr and Bolli are contrasted in Guðrún's dreams, to indicate the success and piety of Óláfr descendants. Guðrún's comment that she doesn't think the gold ring all that much better than the silver, shows that she too is comparing the treasures. To give a full account of the complexity of Guðrún's attitude towards her third husband would take more space than might reasonably be devoted to it here. However, the ambivalence and ambiguity about this relationship is summed up in the dream by her comment: *en eigi þótti mér sjá gripr því betr sama, sem gull er dýrra en silfr* ('However, it seemed to me, this treasure didn't become me that much better, not to the extent that gold is better than silver'). This seems to indicate that, although Bolli is considered by society to be the greater man, Guðrún will love him not much more (i.e. probably less) than she loved Þórðr. One can identify the whole tragedy at the centre of the saga within this line. Bolli will be a disappointment to Guðrún and will not fulfil his potential as a man.

Guðrún's third dream is a good example of a dream where the symbols have multiple referents, as Gestr's interpretation of the gold and silver is different from that given above. He states that the gold of the ring in the third dream indicates a change of faith, and the third husband's acceptance of that faith. While in the court of Óláfr Tryggvason Bolli agrees to become Christian along with his foster-brother Kjartan. Óláfr delays Kjartan in his court, along with several other Icelandic hostages, but Bolli returns to Iceland shortly before the conversion of the country to Christianity at the Alþingi. Although the saga says almost nothing of Bolli's role in the conversion and places no great emphasis on his piety, he is nonetheless alongside Gizurr and Hjalti on the side of the Christians at the monumental meeting of the assembly in 999 or 1000, and therefore Gestr's interpretation of the gold ring as a symbol of the conversion is appropriate. Mentioning the conversion at this point in the dream prophecy helps to situate Guðrún's biography, and thus *Laxdæla saga*, at a specific point in history. As already mentioned, the dreams form a structure for the remainder of the saga. Gestr's interpretation of the gold ring as indicative of the Christianisation of Iceland shows the

point at which this hugely important event will occur in the narrative. The foreshadowing of the conversion therefore weaves Guðrún's biography into historical events with which the reader will inevitably already be familiar.

The breaking of the gold ring in Guðrún's dream as she stumbles and strikes it against a stone, indicates the killing of Bolli, by the Ólafssons in revenge for Kjartan. The blood issuing from the two pieces has been seen as an indication that the dream-symbols in Guðrún's dream are still based on concepts of fetches (Kelchner 1935, 61). However blood issuing from inanimate objects such as roofs (e.g. *Stu* 1906-1911, I, 285), weapons (e.g. *Nj* 1954, ch. 72, p. 175) or clothing (e.g. *Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 459) is a relatively common motif and probably merely indicates that Guðrún's third husband will meet a violent end. Bolli Þorleiksson is the only one of the four husbands who dies in direct combat.

In the dream, once the ring has broken Guðrún notices that there had been a crack (*brestr*) in it. This crack seems to represent both the flaws in Bolli's character (Hallberg 1962, 84) and the instability of their marriage. There is a slight pun upon the word *brestr*, which could mean a 'chink' or 'fissure' especially in jewellery, but it could also mean 'loss' or 'want'. In chapter 56 the narrator describes the popular reaction to Bolli's killing (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 56, p. 169): *Þessi tíðendi spyrjask brátt víða ok þóttu mikil. Var Bolli í mesta harmdauði.* ('This news spread far quickly and was thought important. Bolli's death was considered the greatest loss.'). While looking at the broken ring in her dream, Guðrún not only identifies the flaws in Bolli's character and her marriage, but also realises what a great loss the death of the hero will be. The same pun is used more obviously in a dream in *Víga-Glúms saga* (see section VI.iii below).

Despite this crack, Guðrún admits some culpability for the breaking of the ring in the dream, saying: *ok þótti mér þó, sem heill myndi, ef ek hefða betr til gætt* ('Nevertheless, I thought that it might still be whole, if I had taken better care of it'). Bolli's death, although not specifically Guðrún fault, follows directly and inevitably from the death of his foster-brother Kjartan, which could be said to be in part due to Guðrún's actions. In his foreshadowing of Bolli's death, the author admits that Guðrún feels some tacit responsibility regarding the death of her third husband. This idea becomes clearer still if we understand a further level of meaning and understand the dream as a set-phrase dream in addition to its symbolic value. The ring is struck against a stone, which might suggest the metaphor *ljósta einhvern illum steini* literally meaning 'to strike someone with a bad stone', but with the metaphorical meaning 'to harm

someone' (Halldór Halldórsson 1978-1980, II, 177).<sup>38</sup> As it is Guðrún who accidentally knocks the ring against the stone, it is therefore metaphorically she who harms Bolli.

The golden helmet in Guðrún's last dream represents her fourth husband, the chieftain Þorkell Eyjólfsson. The gold and precious stones represent his amassed wealth and success as a chieftain. When Þorkell is introduced we are told: *hann var frægr maðr ok kynstórr* ('he was a famous man and from a great family') (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 57, p. 171) and in Guðrún's summation of her husbands she says: *Þorkell var maðr ríkastr ok hǫfðingi mestr* ('Þorkell was the most powerful man and the greatest chieftain') (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 78, p. 228). In the dream, there seems to be a difference between what Guðrún thinks she ought to feel and what she actually feels. She says that she owned a great treasure, which may represent society's assessment of Þorkell. She, however, actually finds the helmet a bit cumbersome, representing her true feelings and lack of real respect for Þorkell. The helmet is so cumbersome that it falls from her head into Breiðafjörðr. This symbolises Þorkell's death, drowning as he does returning from Hrutafjörðr, having collected the wood he brought from Norway to build a church. Gestr interprets this cumbersomeness as a set-phrase dream. He says: *Sá mun vera mestr hǫfðingi ok mun bera heldr ægishjálms yfir þér* ('That [husband] will be the greatest chieftain and will somewhat overawe you', literally 'hold a helmet of terror over you'). The concept of the helmet of terror seems likely to result from classical influences (Simek 1993, 2). The Greek *aegis* (αἰγίς) probably originally meant storm cloud, but it came to represent an item, often a goatskin, which could be shaken to instil fear in men (Hammond and Scullard 1970, 13; Walters 1916, 21-22). This concept seems to have been adapted into a helmet in Norse literature. In the poetic Edda, the dragon Fáfnir has a helmet of terror, with which he could control men (see *Fáfnismál* stanza 16 and 17 and the prose of *Reginismál* in the *Codex Regius*, *Edda* 1962, 183 and 176). This concept became a set-phrase and can be found in both *Hrafnkels saga* (*Hrafnk* 1950, ch. 4, p. 118) and *Svarfdæla saga* (*Svarfd* 1956, ch. 17, p. 170), meaning 'to control someone with a sense of awe' (Halldór Halldórsson 1978-1980, II, 264). Therefore, according to Gestr's interpretation, Guðrún will be in complete awe of her fourth husband.

This is not, however, what actually happens in the saga. Guðrún agrees to marry Þorkell on the advice of their mutual friend Snorri goði. It is very much Snorri who persuades Guðrún to accept and Þorkell remains silent throughout the scene. Guðrún at

<sup>38</sup> This phrase is discussed in greater detail in section VII.iii below.

once demonstrates her independence, by insisting that the wedding take place at Helgafell, whereas Þorkell had wanted Snorri to host the feast. At the wedding there is a confrontation between the bride and groom over her protection of the killer Gunnarr Þiðrandabani, whom Þorkell has previously sworn to kill. Þorkell is forced to back down in front of the guests and even ends up providing Gunnarr with a ship to help him on his way. We see the dynamic of the marriage again in chapter 70, when Guðrún warns Þorkell that she wants no expense spared in Þorkell's obtaining a good match for her son Bolli, and again in chapter 74, when Þorkell has a dream of a tremendous beard. This is perhaps not a representative selection of their wedded life, but it does give the impression that Guðrún gets the upper hand when she has a strong inclination to do so. Therefore Gestr's interpretation is wrong, or at least an exaggeration. Þorkell is certainly headstrong and this does result in his death, but it is doubtful whether Guðrún is in awe of her last husband. Rather, Guðrún finds Þorkell *þunghærr*; he is difficult to bear, both metaphorically and literally.

#### Kjartan's absence from the dreams

I have already suggested that Guðrún's confessional scene with her son in chapter 78 is a deliberate counterpoint to the dreams in chapter 33. There is a further similarity between the two scenes; that is the striking absence of Kjartan Ólafsson from both lists of husbands. There is no dream predicting Guðrún's relationship with Kjartan. Similarly Kjartan is not mentioned when Guðrún enumerates the characteristics of her husbands to her son. Kjartan's absence is left hanging over the dreams, whereas it is resolved in the confessional scene, when Guðrún says (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 78, p. 228): *Þeim var ek verst, er ek unna mest* ('I was worst, to him who I love the most').<sup>39</sup> Thus the central tragedy of Guðrún's life is portrayed in the dreams; that her greatest love, the man to whom she was worst, is the very man whom she never marries. Kjartan's absence in the dreams is so striking that some scholars have sought to identify some lurking presence of him behind the symbols. Margaret Arent Madelung (1972, 22) interprets the fact that blood emerges from both pieces of the gold ring as an indication that two killings result from Guðrún's third marriage, that of Kjartan as well as Bolli and indeed this may be a further symbolic referent of the ring. Ármann

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<sup>39</sup> Part of the enduring appeal of *Laxdæla saga* is the enigma of these words. I have taken them to refer to Kjartan, the man whose name she is still not willing to speak to her son. It is, however, plausible that they refer to Bolli, which fits well with the guilt hinted at in Guðrún's third dream.



Jakobsson (1999, 79-80) suggests an ingenious interpretation of Kjartan's absence; that, although missing from the dream sequence, Kjartan is in fact symbolised by an item of clothing in the saga, the *motr* ('headgear') given to Kjartan by the King's sister Ingibjörg, for him to give Guðrún (ch. 43). Upon his return to Iceland, and finding Guðrún already married, Kjartan gives the *motr* to Hrefna Ásgeirsdóttir (ch. 44). Kjartan later marries Hrefna, performing in actuality the act he has done symbolically by giving her the item of clothing (ch. 45). The *motr* is an ongoing item of contention in the saga and when it disappears, probably stolen by Guðrún, she comments that it has been taken by its rightful owner (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 46, p. 144). In this way the imagery used in Guðrún's dreams filters into the waking world of the saga, which further reminds the reader of her dreams and centres events around her biography.

### Sources and analogues

All four dreams in chapter 33 use inanimate objects to symbolise people. The use of inanimate objects as dream-symbols is less common in dreams in the *Íslendingasögur* than dreams of animal fetches. In fact there are few comparable examples where a single man-made object is used to symbolise a person (tree-dreams and other botanical symbols are sometimes used to represent a person and their descendants, see section VI.ii below). Only in the instance of Guðrún's third and (to a lesser extent) second dreams is a close analogue to be found in saga literature. In the version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* written by the monk Oddr Snorrason, the death of Tryggvi, Óláfr's father, is told in slightly more detail than in *Heimskringla*. In Oddr's version, messages of friendship are sent by Guðrøðr Bjarnarson to Tryggvi inviting him to join him in a raiding expedition. Tryggvi is eager to go, but his wife Ástríðr foresees Guðrøðr's ill-intentions in a dream (*ÓTOdd* 1932, ch. 1, p. 5):

“Herra,” sagði hon, “ekki vel segir mér hugr um þína ferð. Mik dreymði, at ek hefða mikinn gullhring á hendi ok síðan sá ek hringinn í tvá hluti brotinn ok dreyrði ór hlútunum. Nú hyg ek at þetta beri forynju ok sér þú svikinn.”

“Sire,” she said, “I don't have a good feeling about your journey. I dreamed that I had a large gold ring on my hand and then I saw that the ring broke in two pieces and blood came from the pieces. Now I think it may bode ill and you are deceived.”

Oddr's saga is generally thought to be one of the oldest versions of Óláfr's saga, composed in Latin circa 1190 at Þingeyrar, and considerably older than *Laxdæla saga* (Ólafur Halldórsson 1993, 449). Comparative evidence between the two texts suggests

that it is likely that the author of *Laxdæla saga* knew Oddr's saga (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xlii).<sup>40</sup> Ástriðr's dream corresponds closely with Guðrún's. In both sagas, a woman's dream of a ring represents her marriage to a man, the gold represents the standing or wealth of that man and the breaking of the ring his death. The blood that emerges from the broken pieces is also a striking feature of both dreams. It therefore seems possible that the *Laxdæla saga* writer modelled Guðrún's third dream on that of King Óláfr's mother. The writer then altered some of the motifs found in his source to better fit his intention, specifying the number of pieces the ring shattered into, and introducing the idea of the cross-chinks already present in the ring as flaws in the husband's character. One might even speculate that this dream formed the kernel about which the other three dreams were fashioned.

There are relatively few other saga dreams in which inanimate objects are used to symbolise human life. Some dreams of clothing can be found in Norse literature, most notably Yngvildr's dream of the red kirtle (*Nj* 1954, ch. 134, pp. 351-352), Páll Þórðarson's dream of the ruffled kirtle in *Sturlu saga* (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 106) and the neck-chain in Karkr's dream of King Óláfr Tryggvason in *Heimskringla* (*Hkr* 1941, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 49, p. 297), yet in each of these examples the apparel represents the fate (in each case the death) of the dreamer.

One area that seems to have had a subtle influence on the imagery of Guðrún's dreams is skaldic verse. Vicary (1887, 16-17) suggests that one of the appeals of dreams for their original audience was the similarity between the way they might be decoded, and the way in which the audience has to decode skaldic kennings. Although, there are no verses associated with the dream sequence in chapter 33, the dreams themselves are rich in poetic imagery. The word *faldr* occurs in kennings for women such as: *falds Friðr*, *falda Nanna* and *falda geymi-Bil* (see *Lexicon Poeticum* 120). The same word also occasionally occurs in kennings for helmets, creating an internal cohesion between Guðrún's first and last dreams; indeed *snáks faldr* is a kenning for *ægishjálmr* (*Lexicon-Poeticum* 120). Rings are also commonly found in kennings for women, e.g. *hrings Hlín*, *hrings Hrist* or *hringa Hildr* as well as *bauga Hlökk*, *baugs Hǫrn* or compound kennings such as *orma leiðar Hǫrn* (Meissner 1921, 402-403). Furthermore, gold, necklaces and other wealth are very commonly found in female

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<sup>40</sup> The only factor slightly complicating this is that the manuscript AM 310 4<sup>o</sup> of Oddr's saga may have been expanded using *Laxdæla saga* as a source (Finnur Jónsson 1923, II, 387); however there is no reason to suppose that Ástriðr's dream was not in the original saga.

kennings. Thus, the dream-symbols in Guðrún's dreams fit another sort of code, one which saga audiences would be very familiar deciphering, that of skaldic kennings. Thus on a poetic level, the dream-symbols remind the reader of the dreamer's femininity. If one were to see each dream as a kenning, then Guðrún would be the base-word, she would be Hlín, Hlökk or Hǫrn, to which her husband, the ring or headdress was attached.

The dream-book material also proves surprisingly short of instances where an inanimate object represents a person. The Icelandic version of the *Somniale Danielis* does not contain any headdresses, rings or helmets. There are, however, two consecutive lines of some relevance (Turville-Petre 1968, 32): *Ef þú sé at armar þinir eru dýrlegir þat taknar fagnað. Ef þú sé at armar þinir eru vel búnir, þat taknar vináttu manns* ('If you see that your arms are splendid that symbolises joy. If you see your arms are well dressed, that symbolises the friendship of a man.'). Although this does not mention jewellery specifically, an arm wearing a splendid gold or silver ring could be said to be well dressed. There are two mentions of crowns, which might be seen as similar to the helmet in the third dream. The first states (Turville-Petre 1968, 32): *Ef dreymir at þú takir við kóronu þat taknar ávæxt* ('If you dream that you receive a crown then that denotes gain'). The second (Turville-Petre 1968, 32): *Ef þik dreymir at þú hafir gull kónonu þat er fyrir fé afla* ('If you dream that you have a gold crown, that is for financial gain'). Particularly the latter of these two fits with the gold of the helmet in Guðrún's fourth dream representing Þorkell's wealth. Nonetheless, gold is inevitably a symbol of wealth and need not imply any direct connection between dream-books and the saga. Parallels can be found in Latin dream-books with the rings in Guðrún's second and third dreams. Both Sofus Larsen (1917, 83-84) and Turville-Petre (1968, 28) observe that, in Medieval Latin dream-books, to receive a ring or bracelet represents security, whereas to give away, lose or break such an item indicates grief (see Fischer 1982, 120-122 for further examples). By extension, for a woman, one might suppose that to receive a ring could symbolise the security in marriage and the loss of a ring, the death of a husband. The Latin for both ring and bracelet (*annulus* and *armilla* respectively) puts these topoi at the very beginning of the alphabet and therefore beyond the scope of the Icelandic *Somniale* in the form in which it is preserved. Whether such topoi were known in Medieval Iceland is uncertain. Furthermore there is an intellectual jump from the idea that the breaking of a ring symbolises grief or a well-dressed arm symbolising male friendship, to the idea that the ring itself symbolises a man, and the

fate of the symbol is indicative of the life and death of that man. The Icelandic *Somniale*, like other Medieval dream-books, treated the dreamer as the ego about whose future the dream was revelatory. As the dreamer, that ego was always human. The dreams then reveal to the ego the world around (e.g. storms), their future emotions (e.g. grief, joy, worry), or abstractions (profit, straightened circumstances, danger). There are relatively few topoi, either in the Icelandic *Somniale* or its European relatives, corresponding to animal fetch motifs and even fewer in which an inanimate object is equated to a human life. It seems the influences upon the author of *Laxdæla saga* were manifold. He was undoubtedly familiar with fetch tradition. The 'tree of descent dream' was already flourishing in the north, demonstrating that botanic symbols could be used to symbolise lives. Skaldic verse used a codified system where objects including rings and headdresses could be used to represent people through kennings. Emerging dream-book tradition suggested that all manner of things, including man-made objects, could be used as dream-symbols, symbols that could be used to indicate emotional response as well as physical fate. The author combined all these things, using symbols from dream-books, but in a manner more similar to fetch traditions.

There are a number of parallels to Guðrún's dream-prophecies, which though interesting seem unlikely to have been even partial sources for our saga. Similar to the breaking of the ring in the third dream, is the breaking of a necklace by the baby Hǫrðr, in *Harðar saga*, which foreshadows his turbulent life and eventual violent death (Hansen 2003, 224, see *Harð* 1991, ch. 7, pp. 16-18). The romantic *Vilmundar saga viðutan* contains a birth prophecy concerning the future husbands of twin girls (*Vilm* 1964, ch. 1, pp. 140-141). A *vǫlva* helps the queen of Garðaríki with the delivery. The children are laid on a cloth and one reaches for a piece of fruit, whereas the other reaches for a gold ring. As in Guðrún's dream, these items symbolise the men the two girls will eventually marry; the child reaching for the fruit will marry a commoner, whereas the one reaching for the ring will marry a prince (*Vilm* 1964, ch. 1, p. 141): *því að gull merkir konungatígn* ('because gold symbolises kingly honour'). Perhaps the closest parallel to Guðrún's dreams is Þorsteinn Egilsson's dream in *Gunnlaugs saga* (*Gunnl* 1938, ch. 2, pp. 53-55). In Þorsteinn's dream he sees two eagles fight over a swan. The eagles eventually kill one another, whereupon a falcon approaches the swan. The swan represents Þorsteinn's unborn daughter Helga, and the birds of prey her three suitors. As in *Laxdæla saga*, this dream provides a framework for the saga, but the fact that Guðrún herself dreams her own fate rather than her father, further shows the way in

which the dreams focus attention upon her. Furthermore, in *Gunnlaugs saga*, the swan is largely inactive in the dream, whereas Guðrún is active in all her dreams, her husbands adorning her as ornaments in the dreams and not the other way round (Ármann Jakobsson 1999, 78-79). The headdress and gold ring are lost due to an action taken on her part (albeit an accidental one in the latter case). Even in the fourth dream, the helmet topples from her head because she is unable to prevent it. Both Kelchner (1935, 58-59) and Turville-Petre (1972b, 33) observe a number of examples in Icelandic folktales similar to Guðrún's dreams testifying to the lasting influence of *Laxdæla saga* on Icelandic belief in dreams in general.

### Conclusion

Guðrún's dreams are among the most interesting and complex in Norse literature. The use of man-made objects to symbolise human beings is unusual in Norse literature and does not seem to have its origin purely in either fetch traditions or in dream-book tradition. Instead, the choice of objects seems to a large extent based on the saga-writer's particular artistic intention; his desire to create depth to Guðrún's persona and to use her biography to structure the latter part of the saga. There is possible influence of dream-book tradition on the second and third dreams, but as these topoi are missing from the Icelandic *Somniale* this influence is only assumed. The passage is also influenced by other saga dream traditions, such as the use of set-phrases and puns, and by both skaldic and Eddic verse. The prophecies contained in these dreams form a structure for the remainder of the saga, giving the reader tantalising glimpses of some events, while leaving others shrouded in mystery. The scene shows the great importance attached to dreams in the saga age, and also to the process of dream telling and dream interpretation. Furthermore the saga author engages the reader in this process. Although Gestr's interpretations ensure that no reader is left in the dark, the subtleties of the dreams allow for them to be understood by different readers on different levels. The fulfilment of the dreams both confirms and confounds expectations, reminding even the most astute saga reader that preordained fate is not without its share of surprises.

#### IV.iv Án hrísmagi's dreams

##### Context:

The following two dreams occur either side of the climactic battle where Bolli kills his foster-brother Kjartan. Án hrísmagi (brushwood-belly), or inn svartí as he is known prior to his dreams, first appears in chapter 24 living with Kjartan's father Óláfr at Høskuldsstaðir. He is not mentioned again until chapter 47 when he is Kjartan's only companion on his journey to Þórarinn Þórisson at Hóll, in Sælingsdalstunga. While staying at Hóll, Kjartan inadvertently gives away his travelling plans to Þórhalla in málga ('the talkative') who, true to her name, tells Guðrún at Laugar.

While he is staying at Hóll, Án has the first of the dreams below. The narrator then turns to Laugar where Guðrún wakes Bolli and her brothers and urges them to attack Kjartan. Before he approaches the place where the ambush lies Kjartan dismisses all his companions other than Án and Þórarinn. In the battle that follows Án "falls" (*fell* from *falla*) after putting up a valiant defence while his guts are hanging outside his body. Kjartan throws down his sword and Bolli kills him. The bodies are brought back to Hóll, where Án suddenly sits up and relates his second dream. Án is later killed by Bolli in chapter 55.

##### Án hrísmagi's first dream: Text:

*Laxd* 1889-1891, ch. 48, p. 185

*Laxd* 1934, ch. 48, p. 149.

Um nóttina eptir lét Án illa í svefni, ok var hann vakiðr. Þeir spurðu, hvat hann hefði dreymt. Hann svarar: "Kona kom at mér, óþekkilig, ok kippði mér á stokk fram. Hon hafði í hendi skálm ok trog í annarri; hon setti fyrir brjóst mér skálmína ok reist á mér kviðinn allan ok tók á brott innyflin ok lét koma í staðinn hrís; eptir þat gekk hon út," segir Án. Þeir Kjartan hlógu mjök at drauminum ok kváðu hann heita skyldu Án hrísmaga; þrifu þeir til hans ok kváðusk leita skyldu, hvárt hrís væri í maganum. Þá mælti Auðr: "Eigi þarf at spotta þetta svá mjök; er þat mitt tillag, at Kjartan geri

During the following night Án was restless in his sleep and he was woken up. They asked what he had dreamed. He replied: "A repulsive woman came to me, and pulled me against the bed-rail. She had a blade in her hand and a trough in the other. She placed the blade against my breast and cut my whole abdomen and took away my entrails and replaced them with brushwood. After that she went outside." Kjartan and his companions laughed a lot at the dream and said he should be named Án hrísmagi. They grabbed him and said they should see whether there was any brushwood in his belly. Then Auðr spoke: "There is no need to mock that so much. It is

annathvart, at hann dvelisk hér lengr, en ef hann vill ríða, þá ríði hann með meira lið heðan en hingat." Kjartan mælti: "Vera kann, at yðr þykki Án hrísmagi mjök merkímáll, þá er hann sitr á tali við yðr um dagana, er yðr þykkir allt sem vitran sé, þat er hann dreymir; ok fara mun ek, sem ek hefí áðr ætlat, fyrir þessum draum."

my advice, that Kjartan should do one of these things: that he remain here a bit longer, or if he wants to go, then he should ride from here with a greater force than he came here with." Kjartan spoke: "Perhaps you might think Án hrísmagi is very sage when he sits chatting with you all day, just as you think everything he dreams is a revelation. But I will go, just as I had intended to, before this dream."

### **Án hrísmagi's second dream: Text:**

*Laxd* 1889-1891, ch. 49, p. 193.

*Laxd* 1934, ch. 49, p. 155.

Þat varð til tíðenda í Sælingsdalstungu þá nótt, er vígít hafði orðit um daginn, at Án settisk upp, er allir hugðu, at dauðr væri. Urðu þeir hræddir, er vököu yfir líkunum, ok þótti þetta undr mikít. Þá mælti Án til þeira: "Ek bið yðr í guðs nafni, at þér hræðizk mik eigi, því at ek hefí lifat ok haft vit mitt allt til þeirar stundar, at rann á mik ómeginshöfgi; þá dreymði mik in sama kona ok fyrr, ok þótti mér hon nú taka hrísit ór maganum, en lét koma innyflin í staðinn, ok varð mér gott við þat skipti." Síðan váru bundin sár þau, er Án hafði, ok varð hann heill ok var síðan kallaðr Án hrísmagi.

It happened at Sælingsdalstunga that night after the killing had happened in the day that Án, whom everyone thought was dead, sat up. They, who kept watch on the bodies, became frightened and thought that it was a great wonder. Then Án spoke to them: "I ask in the name of God, that you don't be frightened of me, because I have been alive and have been aware of everything, right up until I lost consciousness. At that time I dreamed the same woman came to me as before and it seemed to me she now took the brushwood from my belly and replaced it with my entrails and with that change, I recovered." Then those wounds, which Án had, were bound and he recovered and afterwards he was called Án hrísmagi.

### **Commentary:**

These interesting dreams seem to contain folktale elements (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, xliv), but like Óláfr pái's dream they have been carefully and usefully incorporated into the narrative of *Laxdæla saga*. Henzen (1890, 48) listed this episode among his examples of word play on names in saga dreams, but it is not really the same as his other examples, as there is no word-play as such. Rather, Án's dreams form an anecdote explaining his unlikely nickname (Whaley 1993, 135). The first dream is a harbinger of the tragic climax of the saga, Bolli's attack on his foster-brother Kjartan.

While pointing towards these tragic events, the scene provides a moment of humour. The second dream explains the recovery of Án from his wounds, a recovery essential in providing a link between the two battle scenes in chapters 49 and 55.

### Án's dream-woman

The fundamental question regarding Án's dreams is the nature of his dream-woman. She seems to embody features of a number of different traditions, but is directly identifiable with none of them. In the first dream she is described in monstrous terms. She is *óþekkilig* ('repulsive') and is immediately aggressive towards Án, dragging him against the bed-rail and cutting him open. In her hands she carries a *skálm* (a bladed weapon) and a *trog* ('trough') (in AM 132 fol. she carries brushwood (*hrís*) rather than the trough). Both these items seem to be linked with either monstrous dream-women or troll-women. In *Þorsteins þátrr uxafóts* (*ÞUxaf* 1991, ch. 10, p. 362), Þorsteinn battles a troll-woman armed with a *skálm* and in *Grettis saga*, Grettir (under the assumed name of Gestr) battles a troll-woman carrying both a *skálm* and *trog* (*Gr* 1936, ch. 65, pp. 212-213). *Heimskringla* contains an example of such a troll-woman in a dream. Before King Haraldr harðráði's invasion of England, a man named Gyrðr has a dream of a troll-woman carrying a *skálm* and *trog*, who recites a foreboding verse and portends the failure of Haraldr's mission (*Hkr* 1951, *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, ch. 80, p. 176; the *skálm* and *trog* are particular to Snorri's version and do not appear in *Fagrskinna* or *Morkinskinna*, see *Fsk* 1985, ch. 62, pp. 277-278 and *Mork* 1932, ch. 34, p. 266). A trough is also carried between the two dream-women in *Víga-Glúms saga*, who scatter blood across the district in advance of the battle at Hrístateigr (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 21, pp. 71-72). A *skálm* seems to have been a long single-handed knife or prong, which, although it could be used as a weapon, is rarely associated with warriors.<sup>41</sup> The role of the troughs in these examples is less clear. Dag Strömbäck (1975b, 78-79) suggests that the word *trog* in a verse in *Hallfreðar saga* might refer to the bowl used to collect blood during pagan sacrifices; therefore the word may have certain ceremonial connotations. The word probably generally had a more mundane meaning associated with food, and particularly meat and butchery. In *Gylfaginning* Loki and Logi compete to see who can eat the most meat contained in *trog* (*SnE* 1988, 40 and 43). *Vatnsdæla*

<sup>41</sup> Cleasby (1957, 542) gives the meanings 'a short sword', 'one part of a cloven thing' and 'a bean pod' (and several examples of names). Zoëga (1910, 370) gives the further meaning 'prong'. Also see Falk 1914, 14; and *Gr* 1936, ch. 12, p. 30 note.



*saga* mentions *slátrtrog*, which seems to be some kind of butcher's trough used to contain meat and offal (*Vatn* 1939, ch. 44, p. 117). One might suppose that in Án's dream the dream-woman uses the trough in the manner of a butcher, placing his intestines and blood in it as she pulls them from his stomach.

The removal of Án's guts in the first dream represents specifically the wounds he receives to his stomach during the battle causing his guts to hang out. This use of a dream to foreshadow a particular wound is similar to the way in which in *Droplaugarsona saga* Helgi Droplaugarson dreams that one of the wolves rears up and tears his face. A further parallel can be drawn between the two episodes in the fact that during the battle Grímr Droplaugarson, Helgi's brother, collapses and is assumed dead, only to recover later in a similar way to Án in *Laxdæla saga*. The use of a dream to indicate the location of a particular wound is relatively common, occurring in several of the wolf dreams (*Nj* 1954, ch. 62, pp. 155-156; *Þórð* 1959, ch. 3, p. 179; and ch. 8, p. 201), but also other sorts of dreams such as Karkr's dream of the gold necklace (representing his beheading) (*Hkr* 1941, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 49, p. 297)<sup>42</sup>, or Gísli's dream of the worse dream-woman wrapping a bloodied bandage around his head (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 33, p. 103).

Nonetheless Án's dream-woman is not necessarily a malevolent spirit, as she returns in the second dream to replace his intestines. The dream-woman therefore seems to have a role both in assigning the wound and healing it. She is, at least in part, a guardian or protecting spirit towards Án. Pagan tradition had a number of female deities who might be associated with such a protecting role. The *dísir* seem to have been tutelary goddesses associated with fertility to whom sacrifices were made at the *dísablót* festival in the autumn.<sup>43</sup> The word *fylgja*, in addition to referring to an animal attendant spirit, was also used to indicate an attendant spirit in female form attached either to an individual or a family.<sup>44</sup> *Dísir* and *fylgjur* were originally quite distinct concepts (the *dísir* were goddesses, rather than protective spirits specifically associated with a family, individual or area). Nonetheless saga writers seem to use these terms

<sup>42</sup> Karkr's dream is slightly different in Oddr Snorrason's version of the story, indicating a slightly different, though no more fortuitous, fate (*ÓTódd* 1932, ch. 21/15, pp. 82-83).

<sup>43</sup> On *dísir* see Turville-Petre (1964, 221-227; and 1966, 346-347); Ström (1954; and 1956-1978a, 3, 101-103); Motz (1980, 175-176; and 181) and Jochens (1996, 38).

<sup>44</sup> On female *fylgjur* see Rieger (1898, 277-290); de Vries (1956-1957, I, §163, 226-227); Ström (1956-1978b, 5, 38-39); Turville-Petre (1964, 227-230); Else Mundal (1974, 72-142; and 1993a, 624-625); and Jochens (1996, 37).

relatively freely and occasionally even interchangeably (for example see *ÞB* 1961, 149). Although essentially protecting spirits, both groups are also associated with death. Warriors accompany *disir* when they die, in a similar concept to valkyries (*valkyrjur*) welcoming dead warriors to Valhöll. In a verse, Björn Hítðælakappi tells of a dream in which *disir* indicate the end of his life and a particular dream-woman invites him home with her (*BjH* 1938, ch. 32, pp. 196-197). The same concept is expressed in *Krákumál* stanza 29 (*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 649; BI, 656). In *Atlamál* Glaumvör dreams that *disir* invite her husband, Gunnarr, to their bench, thereby indicating his death (*Atlamál* stanza 28, *Edda* 1962, 251). In contrast the female *fylgja* seems to move on at the point of a man's death. In *Hallfreðar saga*, Hallfreðr's *fylgjukona* passes to his youngest son shortly before his death (*Hallfr* 1939, ch. 11, p. 198). In chapter 67 of *Laxdæla saga* Þorgils Hølluson passes a woman going the opposite way from him on the way to the Alþingi (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 67, pp. 197-198). Although the word *fylgja* is not used, the woman clearly represents a protective spirit departing from Þorgils shortly before his death. Therefore female goddesses and guardian spirits represented both protection and death. Án's dream-woman embodies both these concepts. Her action of cutting his stomach open predicts his wound, almost as if she were assigning the wound to him. Án's time, however, is not up and the same woman who assigns the wound returns to heal it, thereby saving his life. It is unlikely that the saga writer had a very clear idea exactly what type of spirit Án's dream-woman represented. In addition to the deities mentioned above, one might think of the *nornir* who seem particularly associated with fate (Motz 1980, 174-178; Mundal 1993b, 625-626), or of valkyries, who had important roles in choosing the slain (Page 1990, 61; Jochens 1996, 38-39). What Án's dream does show is the way in which many of these spirits represented something both reassuring and monstrous, both protective and aggressive.

#### The narration of the dream

The first dream is part of the saga-writer's process of setting the stage for Kjartan's death. It builds tension for the battle and adds detail to the previously unremarkable character of Án, Kjartan's companion in that battle. It is typical of the *Laxdæla saga* author that the dream is developed into a short scene peppered with humour, intrigue and sharp exchanges between the sexes. After Án has related his dream, Kjartan and his companions refuse to take the dream seriously, laughing off the bad omen by trying to see whether Án really does have brushwood in his belly. Their

masculine camaraderie is interrupted by the woman of the house, Auðr, who tells them to take the omen seriously and suggests Kjartan either stay longer at Hóll, or take more men on his journey. Kjartan still refuses to take any notice saying: *fara mun ek, sem ek hefði áður ætlat, fyrir þessum draum* ('I will travel, just as I had intended to before this dream'). This is very similar to Helgi Droplaugarson's response to Þorkell's suggestion that he change his plans following his dream in *Droplaugarsona saga*.

In Kjartan's speech the word *vitran* ('revelation'), cognate with the modern English 'vision', is contrasted with the idea of dreaming. Again the author of *Laxdæla saga* implies that untrue dreams were a well known concept in Old Iceland, but once again the dream is actually proved to be an accurate presentation of the future. The disagreement between Kjartan and Auðr fits the motif already noted of a man and woman both offering different interpretations of dreams, but Kjartan's response to Auðr is particularly cutting. He belittles her by referring to her long conversations, a euphemism for sexual intercourse, with Án. Thus Auðr, who is already an object of ridicule, through Þórðr's divorcing her on grounds of transvestism, is not only ignored but her reputation impugned. Furthermore it is not only her sexual reputation that Kjartan calls into question, but also her judgement. He clearly implies that she is somehow being taken in by Án's advances. Whether or not a relationship between Án and Auðr exists, Kjartan's innuendo creates a parallel between this scene and the scene in *Atlamál* in which Kostbera and Glaumvǫr tell their dreams to their respective husbands (*Atlamál* stanzas 10-20 and 21-29, *Edda* 1962, 249-251). Auðr is Glaumvǫr or Kostbera and Án, at least symbolically, is her husband. Thus both Án and Kjartan are heading into a trap, just as Högni and Gunnarr.

Kjartan's offhand disregard for Auðr's counsel shows a slight streak of misogyny in his character. It recalls his flat refusal to consider Guðrún's request to accompany him on his journey abroad in chapter 40. In both scenes he implies that women should not transgress from what he sees to be their gender roles and, in so doing, he draws ever closer to his own demise. It is ironic that Auðr, who has her own reasons for intensely disliking Guðrún, is trying to thwart the plans of the very woman whose counsel was ignored in the earlier scene.

Án's second dream is told more briefly than the first. It is noticeable that the first dream stresses the negative aspects of the dream-woman. She is described as *óþekkilig* ('disagreeable' or 'repulsive'). Whereas, the second dream merely states in *sama kona* ('the same woman') appears to him. Neither the *skálm* or *trog* are

mentioned in the second dream. Thus the monstrous aspects of the woman in the first dream are played down in the second (almost as if, like Gísli's dream-women, this were an entirely different woman). Nevertheless, upon waking Án is keen to declare himself Christian, exclaiming: *Ek bið yðr í guðs nafni, at þér hræðizk mik eigi* ('I ask in God's name, that you are not afraid of me'). Seemingly Án is aware that his experience has little to do with Christianity and is eager to prove to the startled onlookers that he is neither a devil, nor *aptrgangr*, by invoking the Lord's name.

Within the saga Án's second dream explains and justifies his miraculous recovery. The dream is, at least in part, a convenient narrative device. By enabling Án to survive, the author ensures that a person from the battle in chapter 49 is also present at the later battle at which vengeance for Kjartan is exacted (though Án's own part in the later battle is small and ineffectual), thereby creating a greater link between the two events.

## IV.v Þorkell Eyjólfsson's dream of his beard

### Context:

Þorkell Eyjólfsson is Guðrún's fourth husband and, as she later comments to her son, the greatest chieftain among them. Shortly before journeying to Norway, Þorkell has the following dream of an enormous beard. After his dream, Þorkell travels to Norway to obtain timber to build a church. On his return, he lands at Hrútafjörður, on the north coast. He rides the comparatively short distance by land back home to Helgafell, putting the timber in storage for the winter. In the spring he returns to Hrútafjörður to transport the timber back to Breiðafjörður by sea (a journey which requires him to skirt the entire North-West tip of Iceland). He sets out for home once more, despite his kinsman Þorsteinn Kuggason's advice that the weather looks uncertain, and is drowned in Breiðafjörður.

### Text:

*Laxd* 1889-1891, ch. 74, p. 271.

*Laxd* 1934, ch. 74, p. 215.

Þat er sagt eitt sinn, at Þorkell sagði Guðrúnu draum sinn: "Þat dreymði mik," segir hann, "at ek þóttumk eiga skegg svá mikit, at tæki um allan Breiðafjörð." Þorkell bað hana ráða drauminn. Guðrún spurði: "Hvat ætlar þú þenna draum þýða?" "Auðsætt þykki mér þat, at þar mun standa ríki mitt um allan Breiðafjörð." "Vera má, at svá sé," segir Guðrún, "en heldr mynda ek ætla, at þar myndir þú drepa skeggi í Breiðafjörð niðr."

It is said one time, that Þorkell related to Guðrún his dream: "I dreamed this, that I thought that I had a beard large enough to enclose the whole of Breiðafjörður." Þorkell asked her to interpret the dream. Guðrún asked: "What do you think the dream signifies?" "It seems evident to me, that it means my domination will stand around the whole of Breiðafjörður." "It may well be that," Guðrún said "but I rather expect, that it means you will dip your beard down into Breiðafjörður."

### Commentary:

Þorkell's dream of his beard is one of a series of prophecies of his death.<sup>45</sup> As Þorkell and his wife disagree over its meaning, the dream is a further example of a disagreement between a man and woman over dream-interpretation and once again it is the interpretation of the woman which proves correct. The dream acts as a window into

<sup>45</sup> For a list of these prophecies see Arent Madelung 1972, 24-25.

the domestic life of Guðrún's final marriage. It demonstrates her intellectual superiority over her husband, and an increasing acknowledgement that her own dreams have all proved true.

#### The correct interpretation

The correct meaning of the dream is relatively straightforward. The beard spreading across the fjord symbolically represents Þorkell's drowning. Visually this is similar to Páll Þórðarson's dream in *Sturla saga*, in which he sees himself wearing a ruffled tunic (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 106). In Páll's dream these ruffles represent waves that will surround his neck before he drowns. The immense beard in Þorkell's dream visually represents waves surrounding Þorkell's face. Guðrún's interpretation, however, suggests that this meaning was based on not only a symbolic reading, but also on a set-phrase. She places particular emphasis on the phrase: *þar myndir þú drepa skeggi í Breiðafjörð niðr* ('it means you will dip your beard down into Breiðafjörð'). Guðrún clearly means something more by this statement. If Þorkell is to 'dip his beard' then he is likely to dip the rest of himself too and thereby drown. The reader is already aware that Guðrún's fourth husband is likely to drown, from the dreams in chapter 33. Therefore, even though the phrase is not specifically found elsewhere, the reader is likely to understand the phrase 'to dip one's beard' as a euphemism for drowning. Þorkell's dream visually illustrates this euphemism and is therefore another example of a set-phrase dream (Henzen 1890, 45; also Arent Madelung 1972, 23-24; Perkins 1974-1977, 212). As with many such examples, it is the interpretation of the dreamer's companion that makes this connection clear. Þorkell does not say the phrase himself, and indeed interprets the dream in an entirely different manner, but Guðrún provides the phrase thus making the meaning of the dream clear to the reader.

#### Þorkell's incorrect interpretation

In many ways Þorkell's incorrect explanation is more interesting than Guðrún's correct one. Henzen (1890, 43) noted that the beard was a symbol of manliness, after which saga characters are sometimes named (e.g. Þórólfr Mostrarskegg in *Eyrbyggja saga*) and believed that Þorkell was interpreting his dream as such. Both Sofus Larsen (1917, 84) and Gabriel Turville-Petre (1968, 28) note that Þorkell's incorrect interpretation accords with the interpretation given by Medieval dream-books to dreams

of beards.<sup>46</sup> A beard is not among the symbols listed in the Icelandic *Somniale*, nevertheless there is a hypothetical possibility that it existed in the exemplar from which AM 764 4<sup>o</sup> was copied or translated, as 'beard' (Latin *barba*) would appear before 'cow' (Latin *bos*) the first topos mentioned in the *Somniale* as it is preserved. Turville-Petre cites two Latin manuscripts of the *Somniale* (Wien Hofbibliothek 271 fol. and Cambridge, Pembroke College, Nr 103 fol. 75a-77d) in which a dream of a beard means *fortitudo* ('strength') or *potestas* ('power') (also see Larsen 1917, 84). Further examples can be found in other manuscripts, including those with reciprocal entries stating that a long beard indicates positive qualities or fortunes, whereas a dream of a shaved beard indicates misfortune (Fischer 1982, 30-31). Turville-Petre (1966, 351; and 1968, 28-29) suggests that the scene between Þorkell and Guðrún shows two rival methods of dream-interpretation: the imported and the traditional. Argüelles also sees Þorkell's misinterpretation in terms of direct influence from dream-books. Regarding Þorkell's dream and that of Þorkell silfri in *Vatnsdæla saga* chapter 42, he states (Argüelles 1994, 333-334):

These are the only two instances of dream interpretation in the *Íslendinga sögur og þættir* where two different and conflicting interpretations are given.<sup>47</sup> In both instances, the first turns out to be wrong, though it is right according to the various versions of the *Somniale Danielis*. "The second interpretation is the right one and, as it seems, it bears no relation to the *Somniale*. In other words, we find foreign and native systems of dream-interpretation competing against each other" [Turville-Petre 1968, 29] in the sagas, and when this occurs, it is the native dream symbolism that is correct. In fact, these two examples are blatant and perhaps deliberate statements that the saga authors were aware of but did not use continental dream symbolism because they followed a different tradition.

There are a number of problems with the supposition that Þorkell's interpretation is a blatant or deliberate statement regarding dream-books on the part of the saga-writer. Such an argument requires not only that the author is familiar with dream-books, but for dream-book theory to be so wide-spread that a reasonable percentage of the saga readership could be expected to be sufficiently well versed in it as to recognise the

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<sup>46</sup> Turville-Petre (1968, 28) notes that: "According to the *Somniale*, Þorkell should have been right: *barbam prolixam habere fortitudinem* ... But Guðrún knew more about dreams than her husband."

<sup>47</sup> Argüelles' claim that these are the only two instances of multiple interpretations is also questionable. Þorsteinn's assertion that his dream merely indicates the winds could be considered in a similar vein (*Gunnl* 1938, ch. 2, pp. 54-55), and, as stated above, multiple interpretations of Óláfr pái's dream are at least implicit in *Laxdæla saga*.

origin of Þorkell's mistake. Turville-Petre's edition of the Icelandic *Somniale* proves the existence of a dream-book in medieval Iceland, but only in a single manuscript dating to around 1500. Although Guðrún's dreams in chapter 33 show slight similarity to dream-book traditions, there are too few conclusive examples of direct influence of dream-book tradition upon saga literature, to assume that dream-books were widely known during the period of saga writing. Even if he did know something of dream-book tradition himself, I do not believe the writer of *Laxdæla saga* could reasonably have expected his readership to be sufficiently well versed in such traditions to recognise the origin of Þorkell's mistake. Therefore, such a "deliberate statement" (as Argüelles suggests) would be entirely lost on them. Furthermore, such a statement is entirely irrelevant to the plot of the saga. Þorkell himself certainly could not have known much about dream-book tradition – even Turville-Petre's most ambitious dating of the Icelandic *Somniale*, suggests that it may have been brought to Iceland from England only in the twelfth century (Turville-Petre 1968, 27) – and there is no evidence elsewhere to suggest a particular fondness for foreign learning over native tradition on Þorkell's part.

A more likely explanation of the origin of Þorkell's error is that the author has borrowed the interpretation from tree-dream traditions found in *konungasögur* and allowed Þorkell to apply it erroneously to his own dream. In a number of dreams in saga literature a tree or another botanic symbol is used to represent the future success of the dreamer's descendants (see section VII.ii below for a discussion of this motif). In *Hálfðanar saga svarta* in *Heimskringla*, Queen Ragnhildr dreams that she takes a thorn from her shirt, which quickly grows into an enormous tree (*Hkr* 1941, *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, ch. 6, p. 90). In *Bárðar saga*, Bárðr Dumbsson dreams a similar dream in which a tree grows from the hearth of his foster-father Dofri (who is later foster-father to Haraldr Hálfðanarson) (*Bárð* 1991, ch. 1, p. 104). In both these dreams the branches on the tree are said to cover the whole of Norway. Thus the extent of the branches in the dream, represents the extent of the dominion of Haraldr Hálfðanarson and his descendants, in the same way that Þorkell believes the extent of his beard might represent his power. This use of geography in the dream-scape to reflect the extent of dominion can be found in many of the tree-dreams and variants of tree-dreams. For example in *Magnússona saga* sections of both *Morkinskinna* (*Mork* 1932, ch. 63, p. 395) and *Heimskringla* (*Hkr* 1951, *Magnússona saga*, ch. 25, pp. 264-265), King Sigurðr dreams that he sees a tree moving towards Norway from the sea, representing



the arrival of Haraldr gilli, Sigurðr's half-brother. When the tree reaches the coast it shatters and Sigurðr sees pieces of the tree enter every bay in Norway. Similarly in *Sverris saga* (Sv 1920, ch. 2, p. 3), Sverrir dreams that he is an enormous bird whose wings cover the whole of Norway. In *Hálfðanar saga svarta* there is even a variant of the tree-dream, using hair as the dream-symbol. Hálfðan dreams that he has exceptionally long hair (*Hkr* 1941, *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, ch. 7, pp. 90-91). The same dream is also found in *Fagrskinna* (*Fsk* 1985, ch.1, p. 57-58) and in *Hálfðanar þáttur svarta* preserved in *Flateyjarbók* (*HálfðSv* 1860, 563). In Hálfðan's dream the length of the locks vary with the longest touching the ground and the shortest sprouting from his head like small horns. These locks represent the line of kings descended from Hálfðan and their various lengths the auspiciousness of their reign. It seems likely that the *Laxdæla saga* author based Þorkell's interpretation of his dream on a combination of the two dreams in *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, specifically taking the hair motif from Hálfðan's dream, but using the geographical extent of the dream-symbol in a way more similar to the tree in Ragnhildr's dream.

The idea of Þorkell misunderstanding his dream on account of knowing similar dreams of Norwegian Kings, is preferable to the argument put forward by Turville-Petre and Argüelles for a number of reasons. Firstly, while it may be uncertain which texts he knew, it seems likely that the *Laxdæla saga* writer knew a collection of *konungasögur*. Secondly, such a reading does not confound the historical realism of the saga to the same extent. It seems entirely possible, at least within the fictional framework of the saga, that stories of Hálfðan and Ragnhildr's dreams were already circulating in Norway and Iceland by the time of Þorkell's death.<sup>48</sup> Thirdly, and most importantly, Þorkell's misunderstanding is an important indication of his character within the saga. While in Norway Þorkell decides to model his own church on the size and proportions of the church which Óláfr has built. The King suggests he reduce the proportions, but Þorkell refuses. The King responds, criticising Þorkell's arrogance and prophesying that Þorkell is unlikely to build anything with the timber. Although Þorkell's desire to build an enormous church shows great piety, it also demonstrates his arrogant and

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<sup>48</sup> The realist might argue that both Ragnhildr and Hálfðan's dreams also predict the sanctity of Saint Óláfr and therefore probably did not begin to circulate until sometime after the deaths of both Óláfr and Þorkell. Nevertheless, such an objection would not have concerned our saga author who has already firmly committed his text to supporting the veracity and prophetic nature of dreams (and indeed may have even held such an opinion on dreams himself).

overreaching nature. His decision to model the church on Óláfr's, could be seen as a direct affront to the King (and indeed is seen as such by Óláfr, who shows forbearance but is clearly less than pleased by Þorkell's behaviour). In his interpretation of the dream, Þorkell is clearly presenting himself as a sort of King of Breiðafjörðr, and trying to use the dream to suggest that he has an inherent and perhaps even divine right over the region. Yet, as the reader already realises from Guðrún's dreams in chapter 33, the last laugh is on Þorkell.

## IV.vi Herdís Bolladóttir's dream of a sibyl

### Context:

In chapter 56 Guðrún exchanges farms with Snorri goði and moves to Helgafell. After the death of her fourth and final husband Þorkell Eyjólfsson, Guðrún devotes herself to God. The saga tells that she would stay in the church at Helgafell long into the night, with only her granddaughter Herdís (daughter of Bolli Bollason and Þórdís Snorradóttir) as company. One night Herdís has the following dream. The day after the dream Guðrún has the church floor lifted where she kneels in prayer. Beneath the floor they find a sibyl's barrow containing a blackened skeleton, a brooch and wand. Once the bones are moved to an uninhabited area the sibyl causes no further problems.

### Text:

*Laxd* 1889-1891, ch. 76, pp. 283-384.

*Laxd* 1934, ch. 76, pp. 223-224.

Þat er sagt einhverja nótt, at meyna Herdís dreyndi, at kona kæmi at henni; sú var í vefjarskikkju ok faldin hofuðúki; ekki sýndisk henni konan sviplig. Hon tók til orða: “Seg þú þat ömmu þinni, at mér hugnar illa við hana, því at hon bróltir allar nætr á mér ok fellir á mik dropa svá heita, at ek brenn af öll. En því segi ek þér til þessa, at mér líkar til þín nokkuru betr, en þó svífr enn nokkut kynligt yfir þik; en þó mynda ek við þik semja, ef mér þœtti eigi meiri bóta vant, þar sem Guðrún er.” Síðan vaknaði Herdís ok sagði Guðrúnu drauminn. Guðrúnu þótti góðr fyrirburðrinn.

It is said one night, that the maiden Herdís dreamed that a woman came to her. She was in a woven mantle and hooded by a head-kerchief. The woman seemed far from kindly. She began to speak: “Say this to your grandmother, that I am displeased with her, because she tosses about every night on me and drops fall on me, that are so hot that I burn from them all over. I tell you about this because I somewhat prefer you, even though there is something strange about you, but I could deal with you, if things didn't seem so amiss with Guðrún.” Then Herdís woke up and told her dream to Guðrún. Guðrún thought it a good apparition.

### Commentary:

This, the final dream in *Laxdæla saga*, is an example of a dead person appearing in a dream. It seems likely to be a further example of a folk story, which the author has woven into his saga and used to his own artistic ends. The dream, however, also shows considerable similarity to the literary motif in which a saga character dreams of a recently rejected pagan object of faith.

Dreams of the dead

Like Óláfr pái and Án hrísmagi's dreams, Herdís' dream is another example of a visitation dream. Unlike Óláfr and Án, however, Herdís is visited by a real person, albeit one who has been dead for several generations. The heathen dead appear in a number of dreams in Old Norse. These dreams are often connected with graves and treasure. In *Kumlbúa þáttur* Þorsteinn Þorvarðsson finds a cairn containing a skeleton and a sword (*Kumbl* 1991, pp. 453-455). After taking the sword from the grave, Þorsteinn dreams of the cairn dweller who threatens him in a verse. Þorsteinn replies with an equally threatening verse, which seems to pacify the dream-man. Similarly in *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skúta*, Þorkell Geirason dreams of the dead Norwegian Skefill after refusing to put the Norwegian's sword in his mound with him (*Reykð* 1940, ch. 19, pp. 213-214). In *Þorleifs þáttur jarlsskálds* it is not treasure or weapons, but poetic ability that is received from the dead man. A man named Hallbjörn sleeps on the burial mound of the renowned poet Þorleifr and encounters Þorleifr in his dreams, who passes on his ability to the dreamer (*ÞorlJ* 1956, ch. 8, pp. 228-229). In *Þorskfirðinga saga*, Gull-Þórir dreams of his ancestor Agnarr, who leaves him several valuable items (*GullÞ* 1991, ch. 3, pp. 184-185). Dreams of the pagan dead also occur in *Sturlunga saga*, such as Jóreiðr's dreams of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir (*Stu* 1906-1911, II, 243-245), or Egill Halldórsson's dream of Egill Skalla-Grímsson (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 273-274).<sup>49</sup> Thus dreams in which the dead appear in human form (rather than as fetches) are considerably more common than those of the living and sometimes, though not always, were associated with burial mounds and treasure.

Herdís' dream as folktale

This is the earliest example of a common Icelandic folktale, in which a treasure trove is found at the site of a sibyl's grave (for examples see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1931, 189). The story was probably associated with Helgafell at an early date and there may have been some truth in it. Helgafell was originally a place of pagan veneration. Both *Eyrbyggja saga* (*Eb* 1935, ch. 4, pp. 9-10) and *Landnámabók* (*Ldn* 1968, I, 125) describe the settlement by Þórólfr Mostrarskegg, who venerated the hill to such an extent that he would not allow people to defecate or kill livestock on it, and whose kinsmen believed they went into the hill when they died. Following the conversion of

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<sup>49</sup> Kelchner (1935, 66-72) lists further examples of dead people appearing in saga dreams.

Iceland many sites where heathen temples previously stood were converted into churches (Turville-Petre 1953, 71) and it seems probable that either Snorri goði or Guðrún had the church built on such a site.<sup>50</sup> It is therefore possible that bones of a heathen burial were indeed found under the floor of the church at Helgafell.

The contents of the grave, the blackened bones and the *seiðstafr* ('magic-wand'), demonstrate that the occupier is a pagan *vǫlva* or sibyl. (AM 132 fol. has the erroneous reading *seiðstaðr* in place of *seiðstafr*, i.e. beside the bones the excavators found a brooch and a place where magic was conducted.) *Eiríks saga rauða* describes a séance conducted by a sibyl named Þorbjörg lítil-vǫlva, who carries such a staff (*Eir* 1935, ch. 4, p. 206). Þorbjörg's staff, which is described in detail, is topped by a brass knob with stones inlaid beneath it. If the wand found at Helgafell in *Laxdæla saga* was similar to that described in *Eiríks saga*, then it would likely be of some considerable value. Unlike the popular modern concept of the witch as crone wearing black ragged clothes, sibyls in sagas often have considerable wealth (see for example the Hebridean sorceress Þórgunna in *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Eb* 1935, ch. 50-55, pp. 137-151). When Herdís tells her grandmother the dream, Guðrún comments that the dream is a positive one. This is presumably due to the wealth contained in the grave. Although the bones are said to be moved safely away from the church, the staff and the brooch are not mentioned and therefore possibly kept. The sibyl's wealth is also implied by her appearance in the dream. Both the *vefjarskikkja* ('costly mantle') and *hofuðdúkr* ('head-cloth') would have been expensive items, particularly the first, which may have been silk (Cleasby 1957, 688).

#### Dreams of the rejected object of faith

Herdís' dream shows similarities to a number of other saga dreams, in which a dream-spirit appears to either a newly converted Christian or soon to be converted pagan in their dreams. The dream-spirit is an object of worship under the old faith and represents the old order. The object of faith may be a pagan god, but may also be a smaller spirit, perhaps a local guardian deity, such as a *landvættir* ('land guardian-spirit')

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<sup>50</sup> There is a slight discrepancy between *Laxdæla saga*, which claims that Guðrún has the church built at Helgafell (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 65, p. 196) and *Eyrbyggja saga*, which claims that it is Snorri (*Eb* 1935, ch. 49, p. 136). It is not unreasonable that Guðrún had the church either rebuilt or altered, but is also possible that the *Laxdæla saga* author credited the church to Guðrún in order to demonstrate her piety.

or *bjargvættir* ('guardian-spirit').<sup>51</sup> There are no fewer than five instances of such a dream in *Flóamanna saga*, where Þórr appears to the recently converted Þorgils, berating him for his change in faith and for discouraging others from sacrificing (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 20, pp. 274-275; and ch. 21, pp. 278-281). A similar dream is found in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Shortly before Finnur Sveinsson returns home to destroy his pagan temple, his brother Sveinn dreams that Þórr appears to him and asks to be removed from the temple and hidden in the wood (*ÓT* 1961, ch. 226, pp. 112-113). At the end of *Bárðar saga*, Bárðr (who has been venerated by his descendants in the saga) appears to his son Gestr in a dream (*Bárð* 1991, ch. 21, pp. 169-170). Bárðr complains about Gestr's recent conversion to Christianity and causes a wound in the dream, which manifests itself in the waking world resulting in Gestr's death. In *Þiðranda þáttur ok Þórhalls*, Þórhallr dreams that he sees many of the hills and rocks across Iceland opening up and the spirits leaving to make way for Christianity (*ÞÞ* 1961, 150). All these cases demonstrate the lack of room in the Christian order and even in the Icelandic geography, for pagan objects of faith. In the case of *Laxdæla saga* the dream-spirit is actually a human, a *vǫlva* ('sibyl'). While a sibyl does not represent the old religion as obviously as Þórr in *Flóamanna saga*, she does nonetheless represent a figure whose power and position has been undermined by the coming of Christianity.

The closest parallel to Herdís' dream occurs in *Þorvalds þáttur víðfjǫrla*, a short tale describing events prior to the conversion of Iceland, which is preserved in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Among the stories included in the *þáttur* is the account of the visit of Þorvaldr and Bishop Friðrekr to the home of Þorvaldr's father, Koðrán. Although Þorvaldr has become a Christian while abroad, Koðrán is still a pagan and worships a spirit that lives in a stone. This spirit, which he refers to as a *spámaðr* ('soothsayer' or 'prophet'), offers Koðrán and his livestock protection and makes predictions regarding the future so as to allow Koðrán to better plan his life. Both Þorvaldr and the Bishop disapprove of Koðrán's dedication to the *spámaðr* and persuade Koðrán to allow him to be put to the test. Over three consecutive days the Bishop visits the stone in which the *spámaðr* lives and consecrates it with holy water, saying prayers and singing psalms over it. Over three consecutive nights, Koðrán dreams of the *spámaðr* (*ÞorvV* 1958, 286-288). On the first night the *spámaðr* appears to be upset and complains that his children are being hurt by boiling water running from

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<sup>51</sup> I have described this motif in detail in elsewhere, suggesting reasons for its prevalence in conversion narratives (Cochrane 2003).

the ceiling of their bedroom. The *spámaðr* is adamant that the boiling water, which corresponds to the holy water being poured over the stone in the waking world, cannot harm him, though he does criticise Koðrán for inviting the Bishop to stay. In the second dream, the *spámaðr* appears bedraggled and tells Koðrán to make the Bishop and his retinue go away. He admits that the boiling water is causing him some pain, but stoically claims that he will not be moved. By the time the *spámaðr* appears to Koðrán in a third dream he is in a pitiful state. The stone is now broken and the *spámaðr* driven from it. He is deprived of his possessions and his clothes ruined. The *spámaðr* says his relations with Koðrán are over and says he has kept his part of bargain, criticising Koðrán: *Þú kallask maðr réttlátr ok trúlyndr, en þú hefir gmbunat mér illu gott* ('You call yourself a righteous man and faithful, but you have rewarded me with evil in exchange for good') (*Þorv* 1958, 288)

The similarity between Koðrán's and Herdís' dreams is considerable. In both, objects of paganism complain in dreams that they are disturbed by the tremendous piety of a particular person. The cause of the disturbance in *Þorvalds þátr* is the holy water deliberately poured over the stone. In *Laxdæla saga*, the cause is presumably Guðrún's tears caused by her intense religious passion (though this is not made entirely clear by the text and the liquid might be assumed to be sweat). In both texts this liquid has the effect of burning the pagan spirit and eventually driving them from their current position. Both texts also have the pagan spirit confronting someone other than the cause of their discomfort and asking them to intervene. In *Þorvalds þátr*, the *spámaðr* asks Koðrán to make the Bishop and his retinue go away, rather than speaking to the Bishop directly. This motif is made even clearer in *Laxdæla saga*, where the *vǫlva* says that she is asking Herdís because she has greater hope in her taking remedial action than Guðrún, even though Herdís seems to her to possess some of that quality which makes it impossible for her to approach Guðrún; that is Herdís has inherited some of her grandmother's tremendous piety and devotion. The fact that Guðrún disturbs the *vǫlva* both unintentionally and without being aware of what she is doing shows her tremendous piety and demonstrates the superiority of the new religion over the old.

Within the saga, the dream has an important role in the development of Guðrún's character. Firstly, it shows that Herdís is now of an age where she has dreams that are taken seriously by others. Herdís' age is unclear at this point in the saga, but I do not know of any instances of children dreaming in sagas, so one might suppose that Herdís is a similar age to Guðrún when she has her dreams in chapter 33. This ages

Guðrún in the reader's eyes, changing her from the wife and mother into a grandmother and elder stateswoman. It also makes a subtle connection with Unnr in djúpúðga, the grandmother of Óláfr feilan who dominates the early portion of *Laxdæla saga*, creating a circularity whereby the proud, dignified and, on occasion, difficult women dominate the entirety of the saga (Cook 1992, 36-42; Auerbach 1998-2001, 36). Herdis' dream also demonstrates Guðrún's profound piety in her latter years. The fact that Guðrún's tears have the same effect as holy water gives her a saintly quality. Not only does Guðrún outlive her husbands and devote herself to Christianity, she is tremendously successful in this new role (Taylor 1974, 19). Unlike Helga in *Gunnlaugs saga*, who spends her final years in mourning, sitting over Gunnlaugr's cloak, Guðrún outlives her husband and, although maintaining something of an air of melancholy, she channels this into her new-found beliefs.



## IV.vii Conclusion

The dreams of *Laxdæla saga* might therefore be placed in two categories. The first group are based on oral folk narratives. Óláfr' pái's dream, Án's two dream and Herdís' dream all seem to be based on oral tales. These tales are either associated with a particular place (as in Óláfr and Herdís' cases) or with a personal name (as in Án's case). It is interesting to note that these dreams are also all of the visitation type. In all these examples the tale has been carefully woven into the fabric of the saga. The dreams have important roles within the saga, and add to the characterisation of the protagonists or the development of thematic strands. The second group are more literary in origin. Guðrún's four dreams and that of her husband Þorkell owe their origin to dreams in other sagas and European literature. The symbolism used in these dreams is complex and multi-faceted and the author has developed the dream narrations into scenes in which the dreams are related, interpreted and discussed at length. Thus the author presents dreams of very different types alongside one another. The means of interpretation by which each dream must be understood varies from dream to dream and in several cases is multi-layered with dream-symbols referring to several aspects of their fulfilment at once.

## Chapter V: The dreams of *Gísla saga Súrssonar*

### V.i Introduction

No saga is characterised by its dreams to quite the extent of *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Although some sagas may boast more, or longer dreams, nowhere else are dreams quite so important to the experience of the reader. The saga describes the life and death of Gísli Súrsson, a man outlawed for the killing of one brother-in-law in revenge for another. He is then pursued over a number of years and to his eventual death by the brother of his victim Þorkr inn digri and his henchman Eyjólfur inn grái. A total of eleven dreams are narrated in the saga and the text implies that Gísli experiences many further dreams, although these are not related to the reader. The most striking among these dreams are the series of six dreams of the two contrasting dream-women who appear alternately to Gísli. These figures combine pagan and Christian dream-traditions and refer to Gísli's earthly, spiritual and even psychological well-being in a complex manner. The author was also familiar with more typical saga dream-traditions, as the saga also contains fetch dreams and several dreams in which blood represents violent death. All the dreams in the saga function proleptically, pointing forward to events later in the saga. Many of them also have more subtle functions, suggesting the author was influenced by other saga dreams and narrative staging techniques, but was eager to use these things in his own distinct way.

All of the dreams are connected to one or more stanzas. These stanzas are related by Gísli upon waking and do not occur within the dreams themselves. The dating of these stanzas and their relationship to the surrounding prose has been much discussed by scholars.<sup>52</sup> The clear Christian allusions in these verses now almost entirely preclude the possibility that they were composed by Gísli Súrsson himself. There is, however, no definitive agreement on whether the stanzas were composed prior to the saga in which they are now found. What does seem likely is that most of the stanzas are by a single poet. This assumption is based on uniformity of style and a continuity of subject matter and the influence of Eddic poetry on both of these. Gabriel Turville-Petre (1972c, 144-146; and 148-150) maintains that the consistency of style not only pointed to a single poet, but that the most likely candidate for that poet is the saga-

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<sup>52</sup> On this question of the relationship between the verses and prose in *Gísla saga* see Finnur Jónsson 1912, 32-36, Krijn 1935, Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943, v-xii, Foote 1963, 112-123, Turville-Petre 1972c.

writer. In particular Turville-Petre feels that the influence of Eddic verse on both the saga prose and stanzas suggests a common authorship. In the introduction to the Íslenzk fornrit edition Björn K. Þórólfsson (1943, vi; also see Finnur Jónsson 1912, 33-34) suggests a number of old word forms in some of the stanzas such as the use of uncontracted vowels (such as *bráa*, *þáa* and *féi*) indicate a twelfth-century date of composition, i.e. a date after the death of Gísli but prior the composition of the saga<sup>53</sup>. Several scholars support these claims (e.g. Krijn 1935; Gordon 1946-1953; Foote 1963). However Turville-Petre (1972c, 143) doubts the validity of basing the dating on these forms. The internal cohesion between the stanzas is sometimes cited as evidence that some of the stanzas of *Gísla saga* may have originally been part or the whole of longer poems. S.A. Krijn (1935, 77-84) identifies what she sees as three distinct poems, which she believes were written about Gísli by a poet at some point after his death, but prior to their inclusion in the saga. The first of these is represented by stanzas 30, 31, 35, 36, 37 and 38. The second poem contained stanzas 16, 17, 18, and 19 and the third 25, 26, 27 and 29. As the stanzas making up these hypothetical poems are split across several chapters, the identification of such poems suggests that they were written at an earlier date and split up by the saga-writer. Some further evidence that the stanzas predate the prose can be seen in the discrepancies between the saga prose and the stanzas. In places the prose also shows evidence suggesting either the saga-writer or a later redactor has misunderstood stanza words or phrases (I have discussed several of these below). Despite the possibility that the stanzas may predate the saga, they are carefully placed within the saga so that they contribute to the artistic development of the narrative.

It is not the purpose of this study to attempt to answer the question of whether the stanzas predate the saga. My personal view is that the discrepancies are sufficient to make it likely that they do, but to answer such a question would require a more thorough treatment of all the stanzas in the saga, not only those concerning dreams. In my brief treatment of each stanza (both the translation and in the commentary) I have tried to keep an open mind regarding this question and to treat the stanzas as distinct from the saga in which they are contained. In this spirit I have tried to refer to the 'I' of the stanzas as 'the speaker' (even where this results in awkward phrasing) to distinguish this person from Gísli Súrsson.

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<sup>53</sup> These forms, which are demanded by the metre of stanzas, became contracted (to *brá*, *þá* and *fé*) towards the end of the twelfth century (Turville-Petre 1972c, 143 and 149-150). Whether a skaldic poet, however, would have conformed strictly to this is uncertain.

*Gísla saga* is preserved in three versions. The shorter version is preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript AM 556a 4<sup>o</sup> (M). There is also a longer version (S) preserved in two paper manuscripts copied from a lost velum. AM 149 fol<sup>x</sup> was copied by Ásgeir Jónsson and NKS 1181 fol<sup>x</sup> by Jón Jónsson. The stanzas in these manuscripts are thought to have been amended to agree with those of the M manuscript. The stanzas of the original S manuscript were copied down by Árni Magnússon in AM 761b 4<sup>o</sup>. There is also a vellum fragment in AM 445c I 4<sup>o</sup>, comprising only four pages, which seems to preserve a further independent version (this fragment is now thought to have originally been part of the manuscript now referred to as *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*, McKinnell 1970). I will refer to these three redactions as M, S and B respectively, these correspond to the Íslenzk fornrit sigla E, Y and 445. The relationship between these manuscripts has been the subject of contention. Finnur Jónsson (1929, vii) groups B and S together, descending from a version (Y) parallel to M. Jón Helgason (1956, 9) suggests all three versions are independently descended from an original, whereas Guðni Kolbeinsson and Jónas Kristjánsson (1979, 143) group M and B together.

For many years the M version was regarded as superior and has been the basis for most editions of the saga. More recently, however, some scholars have tended to prefer the S redaction, despite a lacuna in the lost velum in the first part of the saga (see for example Guðni Kolbeinsson and Jónas Kristjánsson 1979; Berger 1979; and Meulengracht Sørensen 2001, 40-42). The two versions differ strikingly throughout the early chapters, with S narrating a more satisfactory chain of events. On Gísli's return to Iceland the versions fall together, with most of the differences involving phrasing rather than substantial differences. Certain details found in S, but missing in M, elucidate certain aspects of the story more satisfactorily (such as the detail that the sorcerer Þorgrímr nef was responsible for the storm on the night of Vésteinn's death). S shows a greater tendency to narrate discourse in direct rather than reported speech. The fragment B, contains features of both other versions, but seems to be abridged.

In accordance with my practice with the other saga texts, I have taken the text of the Íslenzk fornrit edition as my main text. The editors of this text have on the whole preferred readings from M to those from S and B. I have therefore tried to write in the commentary on areas in which the texts differ and in some cases suggest readings that may be preferable to those in the main text. Variant readings in the stanzas are taken from *Skjaldedigtning* AI, 101-109. Chapter numbers refer to the Íslenzk fornrit edition (*Gísl* 1943), unless otherwise specified, as do the stanza numbers.

**Editions:**

*Gísl* 1929 = *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. (Prints the M version, with variants from other versions).

*Gísl* 1943 = *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. In *Vestfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson. Íslensk Fornrit 6. (Prints both texts for the first part of the saga, thereafter the M version).

*Gísl* 1956 = *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. In *Håndskriftet AM 445c, I, 4to: Brudstykker af Víga-Glúms saga og Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Ed. Jón Helgason. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 66. (Prints only B).

*Gísl* 1960 = *Gísla saga*. In *Membrana regia deperdita*. Ed. Agnete Loth. Editiones Arnamagnæanæ A5. (Prints the longer, S version of the saga).

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 101-109; BI, 96-104. (Prints the verses, with the A volume giving manuscript variants).

**Manuscript abbreviations:**

B = AM 445c 4<sup>o</sup>

M = AM 556a 4<sup>o</sup>

S = AM 149 fol<sup>x</sup> and NKS 1181 fol<sup>x</sup>

**Translations:**

*Gísl* 1963 = *The Saga of Gisli*. Trans. George Johnston.

*Gísl* 1974 = *Gisli's saga: The verses*. Trans. John Porter.

*Gísl* 1997 = *Gisli Súrsson's Saga*. Trans. Martin S. Regal. In *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* II.

## V.ii Gísli's dreams of the wolf and the viper

### Context:

When Vésteinn Vésteinsson returns from abroad, his friend Gísli Súrsson tries to avoid a confrontation between his brother Þorkell and Vésteinn. However fate conspires to ensure that Gísli's message to Vésteinn not to return to Hóll is received too late. While Vésteinn is staying with Gísli at Hóll, Gísli has the following two dreams, which he chooses not to reveal to anyone. On the night after the dreams the thatched roof is blown off the farmhouse at Hóll causing Gísli and most of the other men to go outside to collect the hay. Vésteinn remains behind and sometime near morning is murdered in his bed. Gísli finally tells his brother Þorkell his dreams of the wolf and the viper at Vésteinn's funeral. Gísli later kills Þorgrímr and is then outlawed. A further act of vengeance is also carried out by Vésteinn's sons when they kill Þorkell.

### Text (of the description of Gísli dreaming):

*Gísl* 1929, ch. 13, p. 18.

*Gísl* 1943, ch. 13, p. 43.

*Gísl* 1960, ch. 18, p. 28.

*Gísl* 1956, 37.

Nú bar þat til nýlundu á Hóli, at Gísli lætr illa í svefni tvær nætr í samt, ok spyrja menn, hvat hann dreymði. Hann vill eigi segja drauma sína.

At this time a strange occurrence happened at Hóll. Gísli was restless in his sleep for two consecutive nights. People asked what he dreamed. He did not want to relate his dreams.

### Text (of Gísli's narration of the dreams):

*Gísl* 1929, ch. 14, p. 20-21.

*Gísl* 1943, ch. 14, p. 46.

*Gísl* 1960, ch. 18, p. 30.

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 101; BI, 96.

"... Draum dreymði mik," segir Gísli, "í fyrri nótt ok svá í nótt, en þó vil ek eigi á kveða, hvern vígit hefir unnit, en á hitt horfir um draumana. Þat dreymði mik ina fyrri nótt, at af einum bæ hrökkðisk hoggormr ok hjöggi Véstein til bana. En ina síðari nótt dreymði mik, at vargr rynni af sama bæ ok

"... I dreamed a dream," said Gísli, "the night before last and again last night. Even though I do not wish to say who carried out the killing, nonetheless that was shown in the dreams. I dreamed the first night, that a viper slithered from a farm and struck Vésteinn to death. The latter night I dreamed that a wolf ran from the

biti Véstein til bana. Ok sagða ek því hvárngan drauminn fyrr en nú, at ek vilda, at hvárrgi réðisk." Ok þá kvað hann vísu:

5. Betr hugðak þá, brigði  
biðkat draums ens þriðja  
slíks af svefni vøkðum  
sárteina, Vésteini,  
þás vér í sal sátum  
Sigrhadds við mjöð gladdir,  
komskat maðr á miðli  
mín né hans, at víni.<sup>54</sup>

same farm and bit Vésteinn to death. I've related this dream to no one before now, because I wanted neither of them to come true." And then he said a stanza:

5. I thought it was better at that time for Vésteinn, when we sat at wine in the room of Sigrhaddr, happy with mead. I do not ask that a third such dream wake the wielder of the wound twigs [the wound twigs, i.e. swords; the wielder of swords, i.e. a warrior]. No man came between him and me. I do not wish to wake from sleep for a third time to such a bad dream.

### Commentary:

The first two dreams in *Gísla saga* are fetch dreams relating to the killing of Vésteinn Vésteinsson. Unlike most prophetic dreams in the sagas, the narration and explanation of these dreams is left until after the events which they supposedly predict. Even when the dreams are told, much is left unsaid and unclear suggesting the author had particular reason for not revealing too much. The description of Gísli dreaming is preserved in all three versions, but Gísli's narration of the dream itself is only in M and S.

### The delayed narration of the dreams

The scene begins as a relatively typical dream sequence with Gísli being restless in his sleep (*illa í svefni* in both M and S; *litt í svefni* in B). As there are already a number of indications that there will be a conflict the reader will guess, even from the scant details in chapter 13, that Gísli's dreams foretell an attack on Vésteinn by the men at Sæból. Therefore, despite not being related until after the event, the dreams do still function as proleptic narrative devices, pointing the reader towards Vésteinn's killing and heightening the tension. Upon waking Gísli is reluctant to tell anyone what he has dreamed. Reluctance to tell dreams occurs occasionally in sagas for a number of different reasons (see for example *Dpl* 1950, ch. 10, p. 161; *Nj* 1954, ch. 133, pp. 346;

<sup>54</sup> Stanza 5: *Betr hugðak þá Vésteini, - biðkat ens þriðja draums slíks brigði sárteina vøkðum af svefni, - þás vér sátum at víni í sal Sigrhadds gladdir við mjöð; komskat maðr á miðli mín né hans.*

and *Gunnl* 1938, ch. 2, p. 53).<sup>55</sup> What is so striking about Gísli's dreams, however, is that he does not relent and reveal his dreams until after the events they predict. Furthermore the reader is not told of the dreams' content by the narrator.

When he finally reveals his dreams, Gísli gives his reason for delaying the narration that *ek vilda* [*gjarna*, S], *at hvárrgi réðisk* ('I wanted [keenly, S], that neither of them came true'). The reflexive form of the verb *ráða* can be used to mean 'to turn out' (e.g. *það réðsk vel*, 'it ended well'), and therefore used in relation to a dream could mean 'to prove true' (Cleasby 1957, 487). Nonetheless, given the fact that *ráða* is often used of dreams as 'to interpret', Gísli's words might also be translated as 'I wanted neither of them to be interpreted' (see Foote 1975, 68-69). Either way Gísli seems to believe that not giving voice to his dreams may avert their prophecy. This belief is not found elsewhere in the *Íslendingasögur*, but Icelandic folklore does preserve a superstition that dreams can turn out in accordance with the sense made of them (Jónas Jónasson 1934, 415). By extension one might suppose that a particularly bad dream should not be interpreted at all. For the writer of *Gísla saga*, such a belief was apocryphal, as Gísli's dreams prove true despite his silence. Nonetheless it fits with a notion sometimes expressed in sagas that to make an unpleasant prophecy is somewhat akin to cursing that person (see for example *Nj* 1954, ch. 1, p. 7; or *Harð* 1991, ch. 7, pp. 17-18; also Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 120-124). Thus Gísli struggles with the knowledge that his friend will die.

#### Gísli's dreams and the identity of Vésteinn's killer

One of the most intriguing aspects of *Gísla saga* is the narrator's reticence about the identity of the killer of Vésteinn Vésteinsson.<sup>56</sup> The two prime suspects are Gísli's brother Þorkell, and their brother-in-law Þorgrímr goði. Despite a chapter heading which reads (*Gísl* 1929, ch. 13, p. 18): *Þorgrímr drap Véstein* ('Þorgrímr killed Vésteinn'), the main text of M avoids naming the killer at all (chapter headings were sometimes added to sagas after the composition of the text itself). The S text does eventually name Þorgrímr as the killer (*Gísl* 1960, ch. 18, p. 32), but throughout the description of the murder itself and the funeral that follows, the killer's identity is deliberately disguised by the narrator, who refers to him merely as *maðrinn* ('the man').

<sup>55</sup> See Henzen (1890, 20) for further examples.

<sup>56</sup> On this question see Holtmark 1951; Andersson 1969; Thompson 1973; Hermann Pálsson, 1975; and Harris 1996.



I believe the two dreams which Gísli has in chapter 13, but does not reveal until the following chapter, are inextricably linked with this deliberate attempt on the part of the author to call the identity of the killer into question.

The two dreams are animal-fetch dreams, in which the wolf and the snake dream-symbols represent Vésteinn's killer or killers. As Gísli does not comment on the shape Vésteinn takes in the dream it seems reasonable to assume that he appears in human form. This is similar to the way in which the dreamer and his companions are often portrayed in wolf-dreams. The wolf symbol is discussed at length in section II.ii, and the example here plays on the notions of evil, destruction and impending chaos associated with the wolf. This wolf, however, is alone (unlike all the other examples of wolf-fetches in the *Íslendingasögur*). We know that several men journey to attack Vésteinn, because Gísli sends his foster-daughter Guðríðr to Sæból shortly after the murder, where she finds all the men still dressed and armed. The narrator, however, chooses to focus his dream on one particular individual, in the same way that Gísli later focuses his vengeance on Þorgrímr and ignores any part his brother Þorkell may have played in the killing. The wolf thus represents Vésteinn's enemy, but whether it represents Þorgrímr or Þorkell is unclear.

Like the wolf, the viper is not native to Iceland, but dreams of snakes are less common in sagas.<sup>57</sup> Like the wolf, the *hoggormr* ('striking-serpent' - i.e. 'a viper') of Gísli's dream has distant pre-Christian relations, the *Miðgarðsormr* and *Níðhoggr*. The viper symbol here, however, owes a great deal to Christian influence. The most obvious source of this influence is the story of the Garden of Eden in Genesis, which confirmed the serpent in the medieval mind as a force of evil, betrayal, temptation and sin. These connotations obviously fit the unprovoked killing of Vésteinn in his bed very well. Yet these connotations might be associated with either Þorkell or Þorgrímr.

Gísli claims that his dreams indicate the identity of the killer. He is adamant that he will not reveal the killer's identity: *en á hitt horfir um draumana* ('although that was revealed in the dreams'). In the S text this reads: *en á sama hæfi ek um draumana* ('but I reach the same conclusion from the dreams'). Identifying the owners of fetches in dreams is not always a straightforward task for dreamers and dream-interpreters. In *Vápnfirðinga saga* Brodd-Helgi interprets a fetch in the form of an ox coloured with red

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<sup>57</sup> See for example *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* (*Hróm* 1944, ch. 9, pp. 284-285). Dreams of snakes sometimes occur as a variant of the dream of the tree of descent (see for example *Guta saga* 1999, ch. 1, p. 2; and *Mírm* 1997, ch. 2, p. 2).

flecks as his son Lýtingr, whereas it transpires to represent his other son Bjarni (*Vápnf* 1950, ch. 13, pp. 48-49). Gísli does give us some clues, such as in the first dream the snake emerges from a farm. In the second he stresses that the wolf emerges from the same farm. The fact that after Vésteinn's death, Gísli immediately sends his servant to Sæból, indicates that he has recognised Þorgrímr's farm in the dream.

In her book on *fylgjemotiva*, Else Mundal (1974, 58-59) suggests that each person could have only one fetch which would always appear as the same animal. Mundal argues that each of the two fetches in Gísli's dreams represents one of the men responsible for Vésteinn's murder, one representing his killer, the other the person involved in assisting him, the *atvistarmaðr*. Foote (1975, 68) suggests a possible emendation to this idea (though in fact he eventually argues against the proposal), that the snake may represent Vésteinn's *ráðbani*, he who urged the killing, in this case presumably Þorkell. Mundal's argument is based on the assumption that the author of *Gísla saga*, both knew of the rule that a person's fetch must always appear as the same animal form and felt the need to adhere to such a rule strictly. I believe only the first part of this assumption likely to be correct. The author's use of dreams and prophecies throughout the rest of the saga exhibits little evidence of adhering to tradition. Rather the author shows a tendency to mix, adapt and rework tradition to his own artistic aims.

A more complex explanation for the two animal dream-symbols is given by Claiborne W. Thompson (1973). Thompson claims that the wolf and serpent symbols provide conclusive evidence that Þorgrímr was the culprit. In mythology the Miðgarðsormr is the bane of Þórr at Ragnarøkkr when the Fenrisúlfr also kills Óðinn (*SnE* 1988, 50). Grímr is another name for Óðinn (*SnE* 1988, 21). Thus Thompson claims that through mythological references to the arch-enemies of two gods, the wolf and serpent describe the two parts of Þorgrímr's name, Þórr + Grímr = Þorgrímr. To support this claim he points to the stanza that Gísli speaks while looking at Þorgrímr's burial mound, where Gísli disguises the first part of Þorgrímr's name as the kenning *tálgrímr vinar fǫlu* ('tricker of the friend of the giantess'; i.e. Þórr) (stanza 11, *Gísl* 1943, ch. 18, p. 58). Thompson sees this stanza as evidence of the author's ability to use mythological references in word-play involving characters' names.

I feel Thompson's view of this dream is somewhat far-fetched. Firstly, Gísli specifically tells us (in both versions of the saga) that he is not going to reveal, even cryptically, who carried out the killing. Secondly, the way in which the dream-symbols supposedly describe Þorgrímr's name, according to Thompson's argument, is somewhat

indistinct. The wolf and serpent are not symbols of Þórr and Óðinn but of their killers (with the added complication that one must remember that Grímr is a pseudonym for Óðinn). Indeed one might even argue that the wolf and serpent should describe Þorgrímr's killer (a reading clearly at odds with Thompson's argument). Although Thompson is right that stanza 11 shows the author, or rather the poet, capable of such word-play, the undisguised element *-grímr* in this verse is left as a clue to the reader as to the real meaning of the stanza. The word sticks out from the stanza and cannot be assigned a meaning, unless the pun on Þorgrímr's name is understood.

My own view on the two fetches is perhaps closest to that of Foote (1975, 69-71), who argues that the two fetches represent two possible killers of Vésteinn, and reveal to Gísli Vésteinn's impending doom, the farm from which that killer will come, but crucially not which one of the two suspects will carry out the deed.<sup>58</sup> As Foote (1975, 69) points out, a saga-writer who allows two dream-women to promise Gísli quite different things after his death (see below) "would hardly find it a problem to let the clear-dreaming Gísli dream alternative killers." The only refinement to Foote's solution that I would like to make is that the two possible killers are not for Gísli's benefit, but for the reader's. The phrase: *en á sama hæfi ek um draumana* in S is obscure but it must mean something like 'but I reach the same conclusion from the dreams', that is that both dreams point towards Vésteinn's death and therefore the same killer. The saga-writer knew of conventional saga dreams in which one man is represented by a single fetch, but he abandoned the convention. Just as the author of *Laxdæla saga* knew that the gold of the ring in Guðrún's third dream could represent both Bolli's character and his religion simultaneously, so the author of *Gísla saga* felt able to represent the same man with dream symbols. It fitted his purpose to show two animals, offering the reader different possibilities, giving subtle, but inevitably unsolvable hints as to the identity of the killer. When presented with the choice of adhering strictly to folk dream tradition or adapting that tradition to better suit the artistic ends of his work, the writer chose the latter, abandoning the one animal to one man rule.

#### The dream stanza (stanza 5)

Following his description of the dreams Gísli speaks a stanza. This stanza mentions Vésteinn by name. I have taken the kenning *brigðir sárteina* ('wielder of the

<sup>58</sup> A roughly similar view is also suggested by Hermann Pálsson (1975, 137)

wound-twig') to mean warrior and to refer to the speaker himself. Therefore in the stanza the speaker says that he does not want to wake from a third bad dream (implying that he has had two bad dreams). The speaker goes on to remember happier times when he and Vésteinn sat drinking in Sigrhaddr's hall, and claims that at that time no-one would come between him and Vésteinn. A man named Sigrhaddr is mentioned briefly in *Gísla saga*, and Gísli and Vésteinn spent a winter in Denmark staying with him where such evenings of drink and mirth may have taken place (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 8, pp. 27-28). Assuming that Gísli is the speaker of the stanza, he complains of his two dreams and reminisces on happier times, when no-one could come between him and Vésteinn. The stanza therefore fits relatively well with its context in *Gísla saga*. I wonder, however, whether the stanza has been moved from a position earlier in the story. In its context it makes little sense for the speaker to express a desire not to wake from a third such dream (as Vésteinn is already dead). I believe the verse was originally spoken by Gísli after his second dream but before the death of his friend, creating irony that he does not wake from a dream, but to an unhappy reality. It seems that the saga-writer took existing material, but altered it, moving the narration of the dreams and the stanza associated with them from before Vésteinn's death, where they must have foreshadowed the killing, to after his death, where they form part of the detective narrative tantalising the reader with clues as to the identity of the killer, while still maintaining the mystery.

### Conclusion

The first two dreams in *Gísla saga* have multiple functions. The initial mention that Gísli has dreamed is enough to foreshadow Vésteinn's killing. The delayed narration of the dreams, however, shows the author's careful manipulation of his narrative. The dreams draw the reader's attention to the question of the identity of the killer without revealing it and they paint a tragic picture of Gísli taunted by the foreknowledge of his friend's death but sensible to his own helplessness to alter the course of events. This delayed narration seems to be associated with the composition of the prose rather than the stanzas on which the prose was based, as the stanza fits better in a position prior to Vésteinn's death.

### V.iii Gísli's dreams of the women and the fires

#### Context:

In revenge for Vésteinn's killing, Gísli secretly kills Þorgrímur goði and is sentenced to outlawry. Gísli remains an outlaw for some thirteen years. Six years into his sentence Gísli begins to have dreams, the first of which is related below. The saga makes it clear that the dream told below is one of many of a similar sort. Following the dream Gísli is pursued by Þorkr inn digri (who has a two-fold reason to pursue him as both brother to the slain man, and new husband to the widow Þórdís) and Eyjólfur inn grái for the remainder of the saga before finally being killed by them.

#### Text:

*Gísl* 1929, ch. 22, pp. 39-41.

*Gísl* 1943, ch. 22, pp. 70-73.

*Gísl* 1956, 57-58.

*Gísl* 1960, ch. 22, pp. 46-48.

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 103-104; and BI, 98-99.

Frá því er sagt eitt haust, at Gísli lét illa í svefni nótt eina, þá er hann var á bæ Auðar, ok er hann vaknar, spurði hon, hvat hann dreymði. Hann svarar: "Ek á draumkonur tvær," sagði hann, "ok er þunur vel við mik, en þunur segir mér þat nokkut jafnan, er mér þykkir verr en áðr, ok spár mér illt eina. En þat dreymði mik nú, at ek þóttumk ganga at húsi einu eða skála, ok inn þóttumk ek ganga í húsit, ok þar kennda ek marga inni frændr mína ok vini. Þeir sátu við elda ok drukku, ok váru sjau eldarnir, sumir váru mjök brunnir, en sumir sem bjartastir. Þá kom inn draumkona mín in betri ok sagði, at þat merkði aldr minn, hvat ek ætta eptir ólifat, ok hon réð mér þat, meðan ek lifða, at láta leiðask forna sið ok nema enga galdra né forneskju ok vera vel við daufan ok haltan ok fátæka ok fáráða. Eigi var draumrinn lengri." Þá kvað Gísli vísur

It is said that one autumn, Gísli was restless in his sleep one night when he was at Auðr's farm and when he woke up she asked what he had dreamed. He answered: "I have two dream-women. One of them is good to me, but the other always says to me something that seems to me to be worse than before and foretells nothing but bad for me. And I dreamed this just now, that I thought I was walking to a house or hall and I thought that I went into the house, and there I recognised many of those inside, my kinsmen and friends. They sat beside fires and drank. There were seven fires, some were almost burnt out, but some burned most brightly. Then my better dream-woman came in and said that this represented my life-time, that which I had not yet lived, and advised me this: that while I lived, I should give up the old faith and learn no charms nor witchcraft and be good to the deaf and lame and poor and helpless. The dream

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| <p>nókkurar:</p> <p>16. Fold, komk inn þars eldar,<br/>unnfúrs, í sal brunnu,<br/>Eir, vörum þar, aura,<br/>einn ok sex, at meini.<br/>Sák bliðliga báðar<br/>bekksagnir mér fagna;<br/>hróðrdeilir það heilan<br/>hvern mann í því ranni.<sup>59</sup></p> <p>17 Huggið at, kvað Egða<br/>andspillí Vör banda,<br/>mildr, hvé margir eldar,<br/>malrunnr, í sal brunnu.<br/>Svá átt, kvað Bil blæju,<br/>bjargs ólifat marga,<br/>veðrs Skjöldunga valdi,<br/>vetr; nú's skammt til betra.<sup>60</sup></p> <p>18. Gerskat næmr, kvað Nauma,<br/>niðleiks ara steikar<br/>órr, nema allgótt heyrir,<br/>Iðja galdrs, at skaldum.<br/>Fátt kveða fleyja brautar<br/>fúrþverrandá verra,<br/>randar logs ens reynda<br/>runnr, an illt at kunna.<sup>61</sup></p> | <p>continued no further.” Then Gísli spoke some stanzas:</p> <p>16. O earth of the wave's fire [the wave's fire, i.e. gold; earth of fire, i.e. woman], I came in to that place where one and six fires burned in a hall; I was in distress there, O Eir of gold [Eir of gold, i.e. woman]. I saw sitters of both benches greet me blithely. The praise dealer [praise dealer, i.e. poet] wished each person health in that large house.</p> <p>17. Mark, gentle sword-tree [sword-tree, i.e. warrior], how many fires burn in the hall,” said the Vör of bands [Vör of bands, i.e. woman], to the one who speaks with men from Agðir [the one who speaks with men from Agðir, i.e. Norseman], “just as many years of salvation have you yet unlive,” said the Bil of linen [Bil of linen, i.e. woman], “O ruler of the wind of the Skjöldungar [the wind of the Skjöldungar, i.e. battle; the ruler of battle, i.e. warrior], now there is not long until the better times.”</p> <p>18. “O messenger of the moonlight of the steak of the eagle [the steak of the eagle, i.e. carrion; the moonlight of carrion, i.e. a sword; the messenger of sword, i.e. warrior], do not make yourself keen to learn, except the good things you hear from poets,” said the Nauma of Iði's song [Iði's song, i.e. gold; Nauma of gold, i.e. woman]. “O tree of the tested flame of the shield [flame of the</p> |
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<sup>59</sup>Stanza 16: *Fold unnfúrs, komk inn þars einn ok sex eldar brunnu í sal; vörum þar at meini, aura Eir. Sák báðar bekksagnir fagna mér bliðliga. Hróðrdeilir það hvern mann heilan í því ranni.*

<sup>60</sup>Stanza 17: *Hyggið at, mildr malrunnr, hvé margir eldar brunnu í sal, kvað banda Vör Egða andspillí. Svá marga bjargs vetr áttu ólifat, kvað blæju Bil Skjöldunga veðrs valdi; nú's skammt til betra.*

<sup>61</sup>Stanza 18: *Órr ara steikar niðleiks, gerskat næmr, nema heyrir allgótt at skaldum, kvað Nauma Iðja galdrs. Runnr ens reynda randar logs, fátt kveða verra fleyja brautar fúrþverrandá, an at kunna illt.*

19. Vald eigi þú vígi,  
ves þú ótyrrinn, fyrri,  
morðs við mæti-Njörðu,  
mér heitið því, sleitu.  
Baugskyndir, hjalp blindum,  
Baldr, hygg at því, skjaldar,  
illt kveða háð ok hǫltum,  
handlausum tý, granda.<sup>62</sup>

shield, i.e. a sword; tree of the sword, i.e. warrior], they say little is worse, for a diminisher of the fire of ship's road [ship's road, i.e. the sea; the fire of the sea, i.e. gold; a sharer of the gold, i.e. warrior], than to know evil."

19. "Do not bring battle any sooner; be untaunting in dealings with the meeting-Nirðir of death [meeting-Nirðir of death, i.e. warriors]; promise me that, O speeder of arm-rings [speeder of arm-rings, i.e. man]. Aid the blind. Think on it, Baldr of the shield [Baldr of the shield, i.e. warrior], men speak ill of mockery and injury upon the lame; assist the armless."

### Commentary:

In chapter 22 we are introduced for the first time to the two dream-women who will appear in Gísli's dreams throughout his later life. Gísli's dreams of these women chart his fluctuating fortunes, his moral and religious state and even his psychological state during his time as an outlaw up until his death. The passage above is preserved in all three redactions of the saga. In the following analysis I will discuss the presentation of these dream-women in the saga in general. Following this, I will identify some of the more specific aspects of the dream and dream stanzas in chapter 22.

### The two dream-women of *Gísla saga Súrssonar*

I have already suggested that dream-women in sagas had roles both as protectors and also agents of fate (see section IV.iv). Dream-women who had the ability to guard and advise, inevitably also had the power to wound and even kill. This is most apparent in the dreams of Án hrísmagi, where the same woman appears first as aggressor, then as saviour. Such depictions of dream-women in the sagas no doubt owed a debt to, but should not be considered identical to, concepts of pagan goddesses such as *dísir*, and guardian spirits such as *fylgjur*. It seems likely that the author of *Gísla saga* was also well aware of pagan beliefs in goddesses and female guardian spirits. The dream-spirits

<sup>62</sup> Stanza 19: *Vald þú eigi vígi fyrri; ves þú ótyrrinn sleitu við morðs mæti-Njörðu; heitið mér því. Baugskyndir, hjalp blindum; hygg at því, skjaldar Baldr, kveða illt háð ok granda hǫltum; tý handlausum.*

that visit Gísli, however, are divided strictly into a positive force and a negative one. It is as if the dream-woman who appeared to Án has been split entirely into her positive and negative aspects and these aspects personified as different beings. In no fewer than six dreams, Gísli has visitations from two dream-women, one of whom is kind; the other promises Gísli misery, covers him with blood and is generally unpleasant. These women are referred to respectively as his *draumkona in betri* ('the better dream-woman') and *draumkona in verri* ('the worse dream-woman'). Each stanza will be dealt with separately below, but it is worth noting that none of the stanzas refer specifically to the better or worse dream-woman and that the dualism associated with the dream-woman may be the product of the saga author's reworking of his poetic source and not the stanzas themselves.

The concept of two guardian spirits, each pulling an individual in a different direction is similar to some medieval beliefs in Christian personal guardian angels. The saint's life *Michaels saga* tells us that every Christian is assigned both a good and bad *nærgöngull engill* ('accompanying angel'), one of whom urges good things, the other urges sin (*Mich* 1877, 683). The words *fylgjuengill* and *varðhaldsengill* express similar concepts. One exemplum preserved in Old Icelandic describes the vision of a man in York named Vilhjálmr (*Æv* 1882, I, 303-305). In Vilhjálmr's vision he sees two spirits, one of whom is god's angel, the other an evil spirit. Vilhjálmr accompanies these two spirits first through three different regions of hell and later to heaven. Guardian angels are also described in an Old Norse homily (*HómNo* 1931, 142):

Varðhaldsengill er sendr hverjum manni til fulltings þá er hann er skírðr. Sá er manninn efli til góðra hluta ok í hlífi við illu. En ef maðrinn víkr eptir teygingum fjándans ok gerir syndir, þá hverfr frá honum varðhaldsengill óglaðr en engill andskotans kemr í stað hans. Sá er manninn fýsir of allt til synda ok til gáleysis. En ef goðs miskunn gefr manninum at iðrask synda af ǫllu hjarta, þá kemr aptr varðhaldsengill til þess manns fagnandi ok rekr braut frá honum andskotaengil þann er hann hafði tældan.

A guardian angel is sent to every man for support, then when he is baptised. That encourages the man to good things, and to refrain from evil. But if the man follows the temptations of the devil and sins, then the guardian angel sadly departs from him and an angel of the devil comes in his place. That one urges the man always to sin and to heedlessness, but if God gives forgiveness to the man for repenting the sins whole-heartedly, then the guardian-angel comes back to that man joyfully and drives away from him that angel of the devil which had entrapped him



This passage is not only evidence for belief in personal good and bad angels in the Old Norse Christian world, but also evidence that these angels worked alternately on their charges. In this passage, the bad angel specifically does not appear until after the good angel has gone, and if the individual is forgiven, the bad angel is driven away once more. In *Gísla saga* the dream-women exert their influence over Gísli alternately, not simultaneously. The two women never appear together. One might therefore at least partially equate the better dream-woman with a good guardian angel and the worse dream-woman with an evil demonic angel and it is she who eventually gets the upper hand and drives away the good.

This connection between Gísli's dream-women and Christian guardian angels was first observed by Wilhelm Henzen (1890, 60). Gabriel Turville-Petre (1966, 345-347) compared the dream-women of *Gísla saga* to the goddesses who appear in *Þiðranda þáttur ok Þórhalls*, suggesting that the women of both stories were similar to guardian angels. In *Þiðranda þáttur*, Þiðrandi, the eldest and most promising son of Síðu-Hallr, leaves the farm at night during the winter-nights festival, despite his father's warning not to. Þiðrandi is slain by nine women in dark clothes riding from the north. Before he dies, however, he sees nine women in shining clothes approaching from the south. In the morning, the prophet Þórhallr interprets these strange events as pertaining to the forthcoming change in faith and the black women representing the old goddesses (the author uses *dísir* and *fylgjur* seemingly interchangeably) taking one final sacrifice before the arrival of the new faith (see *ÞÞ* 1961, 147-149). Although the events of *Þiðranda þáttur* occur in the waking world and not in a dream, one can see similarities to Gísli's dream-women. The women of the *þáttur* seem to be clearly associated with bad and good respectively, just like Gísli's dream-women. They appear on horseback, as does the better dream-woman in chapter 30. The women in black in the *þáttur* are associated with violence and death, as is Gísli's worse dream-woman, and the women in white are associated with salvation (though it comes too late for Þiðrandi), as is Gísli's better dream-woman. In *Þiðranda þáttur* the women in white are specifically associated with Christianity and those in black with the old faith (as made clear by the explanation of the wise sage Þórhallr (*ÞÞ* 1961, 149)). The theological allegiances of Gísli's dream-women are made less specifically, but it is possible to at least partially equate Gísli's better dream-woman with Christianity and the worse dream-woman with paganism.

Not all scholars have agreed with the interpretation of the two women as good and bad guardian angels and relating to Christianity and paganism respectively. Taylor

Culbert (1959, 160-161) saw them as personifications of Gísli's fate. Culbert suggests that the better dream-woman personifies Gísli's hope of returning to live a normal life in society, and the worse dream-woman personifies his knowledge that fate will eventually overpower him. Indeed Culbert (1959, 161 note) claims that: "If the dream-women are regarded as personification of two religions they interrupt for no good reason the progress of the narrative towards its inevitable conclusion by introducing irrelevant religious considerations". Ida Gordon (1946-1953, 190-192) does not doubt the religious nature of the dream-woman, but feels such considerations are "alien elements" within the saga. Gordon's view is that the religious aspects of the dream-women is a product of stanzas which predate the saga, and that the Christian nature of the better dream-woman is "rather an embarrassment" to the saga author, whereas the worse dream-woman, due to her similarity to *fylgjur*, fitted the saga setting more easily. Gordon is right that the Christian elements are more prominent in some of the stanzas than in the prose. However that is not to say that the religious aspect of the two dream-women is entirely incongruous with the saga prose. For example, Gísli begins to dream of the women after the sin of killing his own brother-in-law Þorgrímr. Later in the saga, when the sons of Vésteinn kill Gísli's brother, Þorkell, whom they believe to be Þorgrímr's killer, Gísli does not pursue them. Significantly it is very shortly after this act of restraint that the better dream-woman offers Gísli the vision of heaven in chapter 30.

Peter Hallberg (1962, 87) cautiously suggests that the dreams may have a psychological function in the saga:<sup>63</sup>

The modern reader has a strong impression that the dualism in Gísli's dream directly reflects the struggle within his soul between hope and fear – even though the author of the saga may not consciously have conceived of the matter in this way.

Hallberg is right to be cautious. It is unlikely that the *Gísla saga* author regarded dreams as a window into the subconscious. Nevertheless as the series of dreams progresses, the reader can see Gísli tormented by his dreams as they become increasingly bad. As the dreamer moves towards his fate, his dreams become darker, so he becomes depressed and afraid of the dark, his moods become worse and so the worse

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<sup>63</sup> Other scholars have also interpreted Gísli's dreams to some extent as demonstrative of his inner feelings or emotions (see for example Bredsdorff 1964, 15-21; Harbus, 1995, 100-113; Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 170-173; Lönnroth 2002, 462).

dream-woman gains the upper hand. Separating a psychological function of the dreams from their religious or fate-related meanings is of course impossible. For the medieval reader all these things were connected. Gísli's dream-women embody his earthly and heavenly fates, while also representing the old and new religions, and both of these dichotomies were in turn associated with Gísli's character, his well-being and ultimately his soul. Nowhere else is there such a testimony to the complexity of reference which the medieval imagination could understand from saga dreams.

I see no reason that the dream-women of *Gísla saga* cannot be personifications of Gísli's earthly fate, representatives of the old and new religions and glimpses of his psychological state. They are after all very distinct and specific to *Gísla saga*. It seems likely that the dream-women owe their origin to goddesses and guardian spirits such as *dísir* and *fylgjur*, who probably originally encapsulated both the positive protection of the better dream-woman, but also the sense of fate and doom of the worse dream-woman. The concept of two personal guardian angels, however, divided these two aspects into separate entities who could haunt Gísli's dreams alternately. Given the proximity of Gísli's lifetime with the conversion of Iceland to Christianity, it was inevitable that the better dream-woman should therefore be associated with Christianity and the worse with paganism, thereby creating the dual roles of the two dream-women and their association both with Gísli's earthly fate and his spiritual well-being.

### The alternation of the dreams

I have already mentioned that the dream-women appear alternately (as opposed to simultaneously) in the dreams. The saga indicates that not all Gísli's dreams are told to the reader. This is first made clear in chapter 22, when Gísli tells Auðr (and the reader) that he has two dream-women, but then relates a dream in which only the better dream-woman is described. Similarly chapters 24, 30 and 33 all tell which of the two women features most prominently in his dreams at this time, before describing specific dreams. The order in which the dreams are presented is thus carefully controlled by the author to represent the struggle between the two dream-women over Gísli, the struggle both over his earthly fate and his spiritual development. The scheme below shows the order in which the dreams are related together with the summary given in the saga as to whether Gísli is dreaming predominantly of the better or worse dream-woman.

**TABLE 3. Gísli's dreams of the dream-women**

Chapter	Summary	Specific dreams
Ch. 22	Ek á draumkonur tvær ... ok er qnnur vel við mik, en qnnur segir mér þat nqkkut jafnan, er mér þykkir verr en áðr, ok spár mér illt eina. (‘I have two dream-women. One of them is good to me, but the other always says to me something that seems to me to be worse than before and foretells nothing but bad for me’)	Dream of the better dream-woman and the fires (stanzas 16 to 19)
Ch. 24	...Ok kemr nú á þref um draumana, þegar er lengir nóttina, ok kemr nú in verri draumkonan at honum, ok gerask nú svefnfarar harðar... (‘Now the dreams came again, as soon as the nights drew in, and this time the worse dream-woman came to him and the dreams became harsher...’)	Worse dream-woman foretells Gísli's death (stanza 20) Worse dream-woman washes Gísli in blood (stanzas 21 and 22)
Ch. 30	... ok koma apr draumar hans allir ok harðar svefnfarar, ok kemr nú jafnan at honum draumkonan sú in verri ok þó hin stundum, in betri. (‘... all his dreams and nightmares came back and now that dream-woman always came to him, the worse one, except occasionally the other one, the better one.’)	Dream of better dream-woman and of heaven (stanzas 25 to 27)
Ch. 33	Nú gerðisk svá mikit um drauma Gísla, at hann gerir svá myrkræddan, at hann þorir hvergi einn saman at vera, ok þegar hann leggr sín augu saman, þá sýnisk honum in sama kona. (‘Now the dreams affected Gísli so much that he became so afraid of the dark that he dared never to be alone and as soon as he closed his eyelids that same woman appeared.’)	Dream of the worse dream-woman undoing the better dream-woman's prophecy (stanza 29) Dream of the worse dream-woman binding head in bloody bandage and washing Gísli in blood (stanzas 30 and 31) Two further nightmares.

Initially the dreams alternate between the two women, but they gradually swing in favour of the worse dream-woman. Crucial to the reader's experience is the description in chapter 30. The summary tells us that this swing towards the worse dream-woman continues; yet what is described is the dream of the better dream-woman on a horse and the vision of the splendid hall. Thus, there can be no doubt that the worse dream-woman is gaining the upper hand, although the symmetry of the text is preserved by continuing to switch (more or less) equally between the two dream-women. When two dreams of the worse dream-woman in a row are related in chapter 33, followed by a further two nightmares, it is clear that she has won the battle. This is confirmed in the summary, which says that now only the worse dream-woman comes to him and does not mention the better dream-woman at all.

#### Gísli's dream in chapter 22

The passage above from chapter 22 is the reader's first encounter with the dream-women. This passage represents a major turning point in the structure of the saga. From this point on the story will concentrate on Gísli's attempts to avoid capture, his fluctuating morale and dependence on the assistance of others. To stress the beginning of this new section of the story directly before the passage quoted above, Gísli is re-introduced. When he is first mentioned in chapter 2 Gísli is not described in detail, but his actions in these early chapters - the killing two of his sister's potential husbands - suggest someone young and rash. His reintroduction in chapter 22, describes a more sage-like figure. He is (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 22, p. 70): *vitr maðr ok draumamaðr mikill ok berdreymr* ('a wise man and a man who had a great many dreams and who's dreams were true'). In S the text reads (*Gísl* 1960, ch. 22, p. 46): *ok allra manna berdreymestr* ('... and of all men, the one who had the most true dreams') and in B (*Gísl* 1956, 57): *hann var berdreymr maðr* ('he was a man whose dreams were true'). Despite these slight variations, all three texts stress the importance of Gísli's dreams. The adjective *berdreymr* means having true or 'bare' dreams (*ONP*, II, 226; Foote 1975, 69). It is also found in *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Fbr* 1943, ch. 4, p. 138), *Harðar saga* (*Harð* 1991, ch. 31, p. 77) and *Grænlandinga þáttur* (*Grónl* 1935, ch. 2, p. 278). Gísli's reintroduction thus stresses the importance that dreams will play through the latter half of the text, and quashes any possible doubts the reader may have had as to whether to take them seriously.

The fact that these dreams occur in the autumn appears at this point to be incidental, though it is mentioned in all three versions. It later becomes clear that Gísli dreams more through the winter and autumn than at other times. Dreaming seems to have been particularly associated with the winter months. In *Laxdæla saga* Guðrún specifically tells Gestr that her dreams have occurred in winter (*Laxd* 1934 ch. 33, p. 88). Flosi's dream in *Njáls saga* occurs at some point shortly prior to Christmas (*Nj* 1954, ch. 133, pp. 346-348). Víga-Glúmr's dream of his grandfather's *hamingja* occurs during the winter (see *Glúm* 1956a, ch. 9, 30-31) and further examples can be found in *Sturlunga saga* (see for example *Stu* 1906-11, I, 285, 494 and 518). There also seems to have been an association between dreaming and the winter-nights festival. In *Jómsvíkinga saga*, King Gormr dreams each night of the festival (*Jvs* 1969, ch. 2, pp. 65-66), and Þiðrandi Síðu-Hallsson's encounter with the *dísir* also takes place at this time (*ÞÞ* 1961, 147). The winter-nights (*vetrnætr*) fell during October, marking the beginning of winter and seem to have been particularly associated with the *dísir* (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 6, p. 17; also Turville-Petre 1964, 221).

The prose description of Gísli sleeping describes him as being restless *nótt eina* ('one night') (this varies slightly between the manuscripts), but when he begins to relate his dream it becomes apparent that this is a recurring dream. Thus, although for the reader this is the first encounter with the dream-women, it is clear from Gísli's words to his wife that this is not his first encounter with them. He tells his wife that he has two dream-women who visit him. He describes both of them briefly concentrating on their role as agents of fate - one predicting good, the other bad. At this point it is unclear whether these prophecies apply to his earthly fortunes or prospects for the next life. Gísli then tells of a particular dream in which he enters a house where he sees many of his friends and kinsmen, together with seven fires. The way in which he introduces this dream varies in the different manuscript versions. In contrast to the M version above, S reads: *Ok nú dreymði mik, sú in verri konan. Ek þóttumk ganga at skála miklum* ('And now that one the worse woman, came to me in a dream. I thought that I went to a big hall'). In M, neither of Gísli's dream-women is mentioned as appearing in this particular dream until the arrival of the better dream-woman to explain the seven fires. In S, Gísli seems to have initially been dreaming of the worse dream-woman on the approach to the building, this woman is then replaced (perhaps driven away) by the better dream-woman when Gísli arrives at the hall. As the B manuscript is damaged at this point it cannot give any evidence as to which reading should be preferred.

Although the worse dream-woman has no real function in S at this point (we are not told that she prophesies anything for Gísli on this occasion), a visitation from her fits the way in which the dream-women appear alternately and so the S reading should not be entirely disregarded.

In the dream Gísli enters a large room or hall, in which he sees his friends and kinsmen. This resembles the episode in *Eyrbyggja saga*, where the servant of Þorsteinn Þorskabítr sees his master entering Helgafell (*Eb* 1935, ch. 11, p. 19):

Þat var eitt kveld um haustit, at sauðamaðr Þorsteins fór at fé fyrir norðan Helgafell; hann sá, at fjallit lausk upp norðan; hann sá inn í fjallit elda stóra ok heyrði þangat mikinn glaum ok hornaskvöl; ok er hann hlýddi, ef hann næmi nokkur orðaskil, heyrði hann, at þar var heilsat Þorsteini þorskabít ok forunautum hans ok mælt, at hann skal sitja í qndvegi gegnt feðr sínum.

It happened one evening in the autumn, while Þorsteinn's shepherd tended sheep, north of Helgafell, that he saw that the north side of the mountain opened itself up. Inside he saw large fires and heard there a great deal of merriment and the noise of drinking-horns, and when he listened to whether he might catch some distinct words, he heard Þorsteinn þorskabítr and his crew being welcomed and it was said that Þorsteinn should sit at the high-seat opposite his father.

News soon comes of Þorsteinn's drowning and the reader realises the hall in the mountain is some kind of world of the dead, into which Þorsteinn is being welcomed. This scene is closely paralleled by a scene in *Njáls saga* in which Gunnarr Hámundarson is seen within his own burial mound shortly after his own death speaking a stanza beside four fires (*Nj* 1954, ch. 78, pp. 192-193). In a further parallel, the magician Svanr is seen being welcomed into the mountain Kaldbakshorn after his death (*Nj* 1954, ch. 14, p. 46). Thus Gísli's entrance into the large hall resembles the motif of a newly dead pagan being accepted into an underworld populated by his kinsmen. This world of the dead is characterised by drink, merriment, poetry and particularly fires. In this way, Gísli's dream in chapter 22 is a vision of the afterlife, based on a familiar saga motif (though in all other cases the motif is witnessed by a bystander after the person's death rather than used as a proleptic device predicting that death).

#### The seven fires in the hall

In Gunnarr's grave mound in *Njáls saga*, and Þorsteinn's Helgafell hall in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the fires burning in the halls seem merely to represent the comfort, warmth and sociability of the halls. In *Gísla saga*, however, the fires in Gísli's dream

are given particular significance. The author takes the motif of the pagan hall of the dead and expands on its imagery giving it a further layer of symbolism. The better dream-woman explains that Gísli's lifetime is represented by the fires, with each fire representing one year he has yet to live. The fire(s) which is already partially burned presumably represents the year that is already partially gone.<sup>64</sup> The fires in Gísli's dream have been compared to the motif of the candle in *Norna-Gests þáttr* (Turville-Petre 1972c, 139). At the beginning of his life Gestr is cursed by a *norn*, to the effect that he shall live only as long as it takes for a particular candle to burn. This curse is soon turned into a blessing by another quick-thinking *norn*, who puts out the candle in question and gives it to his mother for safe keeping. After an exceptionally long life, Gestr comes to the court of King Óláfr Tryggvason, accepts baptism and finally lights the candle (see *Norn* 1943, chs. 11-12, pp. 186-187). The *þáttr* is a version of international story type 1187, sometimes called the Meleager type, after the character in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* whose lifespan was dependant on the preservation of an extinguished firebrand (Thompson 1961, 372; also see Bächtold-Stäubli 5, 967-970). While the motif of the lifespan of a fire representing the hero's lifespan is the same in both texts, there is a fundamental difference in the function of the motif in the *þáttr* and its function in *Gísla saga*. In the *þáttr* the prophecy acts in an active way: while Gestr's candle is not burned he cannot die, and therefore his life is unnaturally extended by the prophecy of his death. In contrast the seven fires in *Gísla saga* form an unchangeable prophecy. He cannot in any way extend his lifetime beyond those seven years, and therefore the prophecy functions purely passively, predicting and foreshadowing events through the rest of the saga, but not altering them.

There is one other dream in the *Íslendingasögur* where lifespan is equated to a flame. In the longer, fragmentary version of *Flóamanna saga*, preserved in AM 445b 4<sup>o</sup> and AM 515 4<sup>o</sup>, Þorgils ørrabeinsstjúpr dreams that he has five candles on his knee, with ash on the largest (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 24, p. 294). Richard Perkins (1974-1977, 217) interprets this dream as relating to the lives of Þorgils and his four companions, with the largest representing Þorgils' son Þorfinnr, and the ash indicating that the candle is about to go out. The *Flóamanna saga* dream more closely resembles the *Norna-Gests þáttr* motif, with each lifespan represented by a single candle, than *Gísla saga* where each fire represents a set period of time in a single lifespan. Nevertheless, like *Gísla saga*, the dream in *Flóamanna saga* is an unchangeable prophecy. Furthermore the white ash

<sup>64</sup> The fact that Gísli uses the plural here is confusing this interpretation only slightly.



(*fólski*), which seems about to put out one candle, resembles the partially burnt fire of Gísli's dream.

The equation between the time it takes for a fire to burn and the length of one's life is also made in *Orkneyinga saga*. Rognvaldr and his men are warming themselves by the fire when he comments: *Þá eru vér ok fullgamlir, er þessir eldar eru brunnir* ('We will be fully old, by the time these fires are burnt') (*Orkn* 1965, ch. 29, p. 73). In fact Rognvaldr's comment turns out to be a slip of the tongue and he had meant to say *fullbakaðir* ('fully warm') rather than *fullgamlir*, nevertheless the connection between the length of time it takes for the fire to burn and Rognvaldr becoming fully-old (i.e. the age he will be at the time of his death) has already been made. Rognvaldr takes this slip of the tongue as an omen of his death, remembering that Saint Óláfr had predicted that when Rognvaldr made such a mistake his death would shortly follow. In fact the same story is mentioned in *Óláfs saga ins helga* [*The Legendary Saga of Saint Óláfr*], but here Rognvaldr accidentally says: *Þá höfum vér fulllifat er eldar þessir eru brunnir* ('We will be fully-lived, by the time these fires are burnt'), whereas he had intended to say *fulleldir* ('fully-warm') (*ÓHLeg* 1922, ch. 78, p. 81). The word *fulllifat* meaning 'completely lived' is similar in construction to the word *ólifat* meaning 'not yet lived' which we find in *Gísla saga*. Word-play relating fire to life-span is also found in a dream in *Sverris saga*. Sverrir dreams that he sees his enemy Earl Erlingr roasted on a fire. This is interpreted as Erlingr growing old (*Sv* 1920, ch. 42, pp. 45-46). This pun dream is based on the similarity between the word *eldr* ('fire') and the reflexive verb *eldask* meaning 'to grow old'. There is a hint of a similar pun in Gísli's dream, where the fires (*eldar*) are equated with Gísli's lifetime (*aldr*).

Although in all versions of the saga the fires represent the number of years life remaining for Gísli, they are explained in a slightly different manner. In M Gísli tells his wife that the better dream-woman explains: *þat merkði aldr minn, hvat ek ætta eptir ólifat* ('that represented my life, that which I had not yet lived'). B has a similar reading to M at this point. In S, however, Gísli repeats the dream-woman's words verbatim saying: *Mun ek nú segja þér fyrir, hvé marga vetr þú átt ólifat. Eldar þessir merkja aldr þinn* ('I will now relate to you how many years you have not yet lived. These fires represent your life-time'). The S version matches most closely the phrasing of the corresponding stanza, stanza 17. In all versions the dream-woman goes on to give Gísli advice about how to live his life, but in S the dream-woman returns to the subject of the fires saying: *Ok vætti ek ... ef þú ferr svá með, at þér dugi vel; en svá marga átt þú vetr*

*ólifat sem eldarnir váru óbrunnir* ('And I will grant ... if you behave this way, to assist you well, so that you have as many winters yet to live as there are fires which have not burnt out.') Thus in S, the prophecy is different in two striking ways. Firstly, the seven years have been granted to Gísli by the better dream-woman. She is actively increasing his life-span rather than merely predicting its length. This ties in with the presence of the worse dream-woman earlier in the dream in the S version. Reading between the lines of S, one might suppose that the worse dream-woman has brought Gísli to the end of his life at the beginning of the dream, but he is offered a stay of execution by the better dream-woman. Secondly, in S, the seven remaining years are dependent on Gísli following her advice, whereas neither of the other texts make this explicit.

### Time in the saga

The seven fires and their symbolism for Gísli's seven remaining years have important functions in the narrative. The seven fires set a time-frame for the remainder of the saga. The prophecy is mentioned several times over the subsequent chapters. In chapter 30 we are told (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 30, p. 94): *nú eru eigi meir eptir en tveir vetr þess, er draumkonan sagði hann mundu lifa* ('now there are no more than two winters remaining, of those which the dream-woman said he would live') and again in chapter 33 (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 33, p. 102): *nú eru ... liðnir draumavetr hans gørvallir* ('now all his dream-winters [i.e. those years which of which he had dreamed] are passed entirely'). Where many sagas make prophecies that appear almost forgotten until the time of their fulfilment, casting only the dimmest shadow over the proceedings, Gísli's fate hangs over both himself and the reader constantly. The word *draumavetr* conveys this concept; that Gísli's very life, his years, have become dream-years. The word also reflects the fact that each of these years, these winters, is spent dreaming. Thus the author uses the structure which he sets up in the dream in chapter 22, to describe the passing of time, and as a count-down towards the saga climax. This reminds the reader of Gísli's eventual fate and gradually builds up expectation and anticipation. This use of a dream as a narrative structural device might be compared to Þorsteinn's dream in *Gunnlaugs saga* (*Gunnl* 1938, ch. 2, pp. 53-55), Guðrún's dreams in *Laxdæla saga* (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 33, pp. 88-91), and Flosi's dream in *Njáls saga* (*Nj* 1954, ch. 133, pp. 346-348). Gísli's dream of the fires structures the saga according to time, i.e. the years he has yet to live, rather than events. The structure and the dream which underlies it reflect the success and tragedy inherent in Gísli's life; both the success of evading

capture for so long, and the tragedy that throughout that time he is banished from society and is always aware that he will eventually be caught and killed.

#### The advice of the dream-woman

After explaining the meaning of the fires, the dream-woman then gives Gísli advice on how to live his life. This advice is clearly associated with her role as a good guardian angel, urging her charge towards good and to forgo evil. Gísli has already had some limited contact with Christianity. In chapter 10 we are told he has given up sacrificing at the winter-nights feast, and the S redaction even states that he has had a prime signing ceremony while abroad in Denmark (*Gísl* 1960, ch. 13, p. 20). The prime signing (*prima signatio*) was usually thought of as a pre-baptism, but it also seems to have been used as a ceremony in its own right, requiring the person to give up sacrificing (Jón Jóhannesson 1974, 120-121). Dreams containing religious commandments were a relatively common medieval literary device. Margaret Cormack (1994, 193-194) lists many examples of such dreams and visions in the lives of Icelandic saints. There are also several examples of texts in which dreamers or visionaries are taken to heaven or hell to show the error of their ways (see for example *Dugg* 1983). Such obviously Christian messages are less common in *Íslendingasögur* dreams, although examples can be found, such as King Óláfr Haraldsson advising Hallfreðr in a dream to return to the Christian faith (*Hallfr* 1939, ch. 9, p. 178) or Kolskeggr's dream in *Njáls saga* (*Nj* 1954, ch. 81, p. 197).

The advice given to Gísli by the dream-woman is slightly different in each of the three redactions. In M he is told to give up the old religion, learn no magic and behave well towards the deaf and lame, poor and helpless. In S the better dream-woman's words are once again repeated verbatim by Gísli. The dream-woman tells him to give up the old religion and learn no magic, to which she adds that he should also forgo other forms of sacrifice and he should be kind to the lame and blind and lesser men than he (the deaf, poor and helpless are not specified). B contains a combination of the elements found in the other two versions. Gísli does not repeat the dream-woman's words verbatim and there is no mention of the 'other sacrifices' prohibited in S. However, B contains the same list of people to whom Gísli should be kind as S (lame, blind and lesser men). This passage is clearly associated with stanza 19, where the speaker is told to help the blind, assist the handless and reminded that mockery or injury against the lame is an offence (discussed below). The word *blindum* in line 5 of stanza

is preserved in all extant manuscripts and therefore the reading of S and B should probably be preferred to that of M. On the other hand *fáráðr* ('helpless') in M seems a more straightforward interpretation of *handlauss* (literally 'hand-less') in the stanza, than *þér minni menn* ('lesser men than you') in the other redactions (though to prefer the reading of a single redaction against the combined weight of the other two is questionable). Gísli's final words prior to his stanzas in M: *Eigi var draumrinn lengri* ('this dream continued no further') are found in neither of the other versions. This phrase is almost identical to that spoken by Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir after telling her first and third dreams to Gestr in *Laxdæla saga* (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 33, pp. 88-89) and may be an interpolation.

### Stanzas 16-19

Gísli declaims four stanzas following his dream (stanzas 16-19). In stanza 16 the kenning *fold unnfúrs* ('Earth of the wave's fire'; i.e. Earth of gold) can be taken together as a kenning for woman as can *Eir aura* ('Eir of gold'). Both of these seem to be vocative, indicating that the stanza is addressed to a woman. The latter of these two kennings is of a type used repeatedly throughout the dream stanzas of *Gísla saga*, in which a woman is referred to using the name of a goddess as base-word, followed by a modifier associated with women. In the 22 dream stanzas there are 24 instances of such kennings.<sup>65</sup> In comparison, the stanzas contain only six instances of other types of kenning for woman (i.e. not containing the name of a goddess).<sup>66</sup> The repeated use of kennings involving goddess names is one of the factors strongly suggesting that all the dream stanzas are the work of a single poet (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943, viii). The poet's preference for this type of kenning makes it hard to differentiate between the three women (Auðr, and the better and worse dream-women), which according to the prose one would expect to find in the stanzas. The poet does not use either the goddess name or the modifier to distinguish between the women. In stanza 17 the poet uses the kenning *Bil blæju* ('goddess of linen'), where it seems to refer to the

<sup>65</sup> These are as follows: *Eir aura* (twice), *Vör banda*, *Bil blæju*, *Nauma galdrs lōja*, *Sjöfn sauma*, *ól Nanna*, *Gefn borða*, *saum-Hlökk*, *hneiði-Sól hornflæðar*, *Nauma saums*, *Fulla fallheyjaðar*, *Hildir hringa*, *Þrúðr auðs*, *geymi-Göndul gunnela*, *Sága saums*, *ber-Lofn seima*, *baug-Hlín*, *Vör lauka*, *Syn tvinna*, *Sjöfn silfrbands*, *Gerðr gerðu*, *eld-Njörun öldu*, *hör-Bil*. (This list is obviously dependant on my own grouping of the kennings).

<sup>66</sup> These are: *fold unnfúrs*, *þornreið*, *skorða mágrundar(?)*, *dis elds lægis*, *skorða skapkers*, *band báls slóðar vala*.

better dream-woman. The name Bil, however, also appears in the kenning *hør-Bil* ('linen goddess') in stanza 39 where it seems to refer to Auðr (also see *Sjǫfn sauma*, stanza 20, and *Sjǫfn silfrbands*, stanza 38). Similarly, with the modifiers, the following kennings all represent goddess of 'gold': *Eir aura*, *ber-Lofn seima*, *eld-Njǫrun ǫldu*, *Nauma galdrs Iðja*, *Þrúðr auðs*. According to the positioning of these stanzas within the text, the first three of these kennings should refer to Auðr, the fourth to the better dream-woman and the last to the worse dream-woman. Similar comparisons can be made for kennings involving goddesses of sewing, rings, linen and ale. In this way the diction of the dream-stanzas gives the reader no idea of the appearance or demeanours of the women that they describe. Although the behaviour of the women in the stanzas is very different, were it not for the surrounding prose one might not be able to distinguish between them. This raises questions if one considers the possibility that the stanzas may predate the prose and therefore do not necessarily tell events in quite the same way. Indeed some scholars have considered whether all of the stanzas are associated with the right dream-woman by the prose (see for example Gordon 1946-1953, 191-193; Lönnroth 2002, 461-462). One might even wonder whether the dream-women are quite so clearly presented as opposites in the stanzas as they are in the prose. Undoubtedly in some stanzas a woman is described offering pleasant things, whereas in other stanzas a woman is described behaving horribly, but these women are never clearly said to be separate or in opposition in the stanzas. The two distinct women, and the concept of personal guardian angels, may be a construct of the saga author adding further layers of meaning or clarifying the less distinct presentation of the women in his source material.

In the first *helmingr* of stanza 16, the speaker describes entering a hall and seeing the fires, and comments he was distressed there. As Reinhard Prinz (1935, 62-63) notes, this seems to point forward to the interpretation of the fires relating to the speaker's life-span expressed in stanza 17 and therefore stanza 16 does not stand on its own and can only be interpreted in relation to the following stanza. The idea that the fires distress the speaker is also at odds with the fact that the prose associates the fires with Gísli's better dream-woman. In the second *helmingr* the speaker (referred to by the kenning *hróðrdeilir*, 'dealer of praise' i.e. poet) describes himself exchanging greetings with the occupants of the hall, in a manner similar to the description of Þorsteinn Þorskabítr in *Eyrbyggja saga*.

In the second stanza in the passage I have taken *malmrunnr* ('sword-tree'), *Egða andspillir* ('Friend of person from Agðir', i.e. Norseman) and *Skjǫldunga veðrs valdi*

(‘wielder of the wind of the Skjöldungar’; the Skjöldungar were a legendary race of kings and their storm is a sword or another weapon, and its wielder is a warrior) as kennings for man or warrior. Sigurður Nordal (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 22, p. 71 note) compares *bjargs-veit* in this stanza to the word *bjargsmáðr* (‘one who lives by the means of his hands’). This would suggest that *bjargs* is from *bjarg* a neuter variant of *björg* and relates to the winters that the speaker is being promised. The *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* gives three separate glosses of the word *björg* (ONP 2, 395-396). The first is ‘deliverance’, ‘rescue’, ‘assistance’, ‘help’; the second, (used in the plural) ‘illegal help to an outlawed person often in the form of board and lodging’; and the third, ‘maintenance’, ‘basic necessities’, ‘employment and livelihood’. All three of these might be applied to the meaning of this stanza. The woman in the stanza (*Vör banda*) might be offering the speaker seven years assistance and help, seven years of escaping capture as an outlaw, or perhaps even the basic means of life for the next seven years. In the light of this a tentative interpretation of the verse might be as follows: “Mark, warrior, how many fires burn in the hall” said the woman to the warrior, “just as many years of salvation have you yet un-lived,” said the woman. “O warrior, now there is not long until the better times”.

This final comment: *nú's skammt til betra* (‘Now there is not long until better [life? times?]’) is elusive. It appears to indicate that after the seven years some kind of pleasant afterlife awaits the speaker. In its current position within the saga this is clearly suggestive of the idea of the better dream-woman as a guardian angel, predicting that Gísli may go to heaven. It is unlikely that a strict reading of Church lore would permit the possibility of Gísli's admittance to heaven as even pagan heroes were ultimately destined for hell (see Foote 1984, 86), but the dream-woman's words are sufficiently opaque to leave us uncertain whether she refers to a pagan or Christian afterlife.

Stanza 18 is in some respects the most involved in the passage and is also the stanza that causes most problems in relation to the prose account. I have taken together the kenning *galdr Iðja* (‘the magic song of Iði’) as a kenning for gold. This kenning is similar to that used in *Skáldskaparmál* also meaning gold *glysmál Iðja* (‘Iði's fancy-talk’) (*SnE* 1998, I, 61). Snorri explains that when the giant Ólvaldi died, his sons Þjazi, Iði and Gangr allotted themselves the amount of gold from their inheritance that each could fit in his mouth (*SnE* 1998, I, 3). In the stanza the kenning is part of the larger kenning *Nauma galdrs Iðja* (‘goddess of gold’) for woman. This reading fits the poet's

tendency to refer to women using a goddess' name linked to an item of clothing, jewellery, or in this case gold (see for example *Eir aura* in stanza 16 and 22, or *Þrúðr auðs* in stanza 30). Prinz (1935, 63) notes a parallel to the kenning *Gunnr galdrs Iðja* ('valkyrie of the magic song of Iði') in the stanza, which is heard emanating from the ashes at Bergþórshváll in *Njáls saga* (*Nj* 1954, ch. 130, p. 336).

I have also taken the compound kenning *ǫrr niðleiks steikar ara* ('messenger of the moon-light of the steak of the eagle') to mean warrior. Steak of the eagle is a kenning for carrion; the moon-light of carrion is a sword; and the messenger of the sword is a warrior. In the second *helmingr* I have accepted the reading *fleyja* (genitive plural of *fley* 'a swift ship') from the AM 761b 4<sup>o</sup> manuscript (other manuscripts have *fleina*). Taking *braut fleyja* ('road of ships') together gives a kenning for sea; *fúrr* ('fire') of the sea is gold; and the *þverrandi* ('lessener', or in this case 'distributor') of gold is a warrior. *Runnr ens reynda randar logs* ('tree of the tested fire of the shield') is also a kenning for warrior; the tested fire of the shield being a sword. Reading the stanza in this way we arrive at the translation: "Warrior do not make yourself eager to learn, except the good things you hear from poets," said the woman. "Warrior, they say little is worse for a man that to know evil."

The saga-writer, however, does not seem to have understood the stanza in the manner that I have translated it. In the prose, Gísli is forbidden from learning any magic charms (*galdrar*). It would therefore seem that the saga-writer did not know the story of Iði and his mouthful of gold and took *galdr* in line four with *gerskat næmr*. If this is the case then this could be seen as evidence that this particular stanza was composed earlier than the surrounding prose. A poet is unlikely to confuse his own material. Nevertheless, some modern scholars have maintained that *galdrs* is indeed the object of *gerskat næmr* in line 1, giving "Do not be eager to learn charms ..." (*Skjaldedigting* BI, 99; *Gísl* 1929, 100-101s; Turville-Petre 1972c, 139). This clearly fits the prose account well, though leaves problems in resolving the remaining kennings in the stanza.

In stanza 19 the warrior is instructed not to cause conflict and behave peacefully towards other warriors. He is told to help the blind and the armless and that people speak badly of mockery or offence against the lame. Within the context of the saga, the reader assumes these words to be spoken entirely by the dream-woman and that the narrative frame of Gísli reciting his dream to his wife has momentarily vanished.

Fredrik Paasche (1928, 200-202) noted a striking similarity between the latter half of this stanza and a passage from the second apocryphal book of *Esdras* (*II Esdras* 2.21):

Care for the weak and the helpless, and do not mock at the cripple; watch over the disabled, and bring the blind to the vision of my brightness.

Given the fact none of these instructions have any plot function within *Gísla saga*, it seems likely, as Paasche suggests, that the saga stanza and surrounding prose is inspired by the biblical text. As well as instructing the reader in Christian behaviour, this striking reference adds authority to the commanding voice in the stanza.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore in the four stanzas in this section we find continuity of subject matter. In the first, the speaker addresses a woman, telling her of entering a hall where fires distress him. In the second, he tells of a woman who explains the meaning of the fires and tells him of his future. In the third, the narrative frame has all but disappeared and is only indicated by a single mention that it is a woman speaking. The woman warns about how to behave. In the fourth, there is no evidence of the narrative frame, but the tone and meaning follow logically on from the previous stanza, as if the reader were becoming more and more involved in the dream-world of the stanzas and losing sight of the narrative frame of the man speaking to his wife. This progression adds further weight to the argument that, although they may predate the prose, these stanzas are integral parts of a single work.

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<sup>67</sup> This is also one of the stanzas where such a close reproduction of a Christian text effectively precludes the possibility that the stanzas were composed by the tenth century pagan Gísli Súrsson.



## V.iv Gísli's first dreams of the bad dream-woman

### Context:

Following the dreams in chapter 22 Gísli spends the winter at Vaðill under the protection of a woman called Þorgerðr, before returning to his wife in Geirþjófsfjorðr. As autumn sets in his dreams return.

### Text:

*Gísl* 1929, ch. 24, pp. 43-44.

*Gísl* 1943, ch. 24, pp. 75-77.

*Gísl* 1956, 61-62.

*Gísl* 1960, ch. 22, pp. 50-51.

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 104-105; BI, 99-100.

Ok kemr nú á þref um draumana, þegar er lengir nóttina, ok kemr nú in verri draumkonan at honum, ok gerask nú svefnfarar harðar, ok segir nú eitt sinn Auði, hvat hann dreymði, er hon spurði eptir, ok kvað þá vísu:

20. Villa oss, ef elli  
oddstríðir skal bíða,  
mér gengr Sjöfn í svefna  
sauma, mínir draumar.  
Stendr eigi þat, þeygi,  
þornreið, bragar greiði  
ǫl-Nanna selr annars  
efni, mér fyr svefni.<sup>68</sup>

Ok nú segir Gísli, at konan sú in verri kemr opt at honum ok vill jafnan ríða hann blóði ok roðru ok þvá honum í ok lætr sér illiliga. Þá kvað hann enn vísu:

Now the dreams came again, as soon as the nights drew in, and this time the worse dream-woman came to him and now the dreams became bad. One time he said to Auðr what he had dreamed when she asked about it and then he spoke a stanza:

20. My dreams lie to me if the spear attacker [spear attacker, i.e. warrior] shall reach old age. The Sjöfn of needlework [the Sjöfn of needlework, i.e. woman] appears to me in dreams. Yet the Nanna of ale [Nanna of ale, i.e. woman] gives no other prospects to the reciter of poetry [reciter of poetry, i.e. poet], O broach-pin barer [broach-pin barer, i.e. woman]. It does not prevent me from sleeping.

And now Gísli said that the worse woman came to him often and always wished to smear him in blood and sacrificial gore, and to wash him in it and behave horribly. Then he spoke another stanza:

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<sup>68</sup> Stanza 20: *Draumar mínir villa oss, ef oddstríðir skal bíða elli. Sauma Sjöfn gengr mér í svefna. Þeygi selr ǫl-Nanna bragar greiði annars efni, þornreið. Þat stendr mér eigi fyr svefni.*

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|---|--|
| <p>21. Eigi verðr, en orða<br/>oss lér of þat, borða<br/>Gefn drepr fyr mér glaumi,<br/>gótt ór hverjum draumi.<br/>Kemr, þegars ek skal blunda,<br/>kona við mik til funda,<br/>oss þvær unda flóði,<br/>öll í manna blóði.<sup>69</sup></p> | <p>21. Good does not come from each dream,<br/>yet I am granted words. The Gefn of<br/>tapestry [Gefn of tapestry, i.e. woman] kills<br/>my happiness. As soon as I shall shut my<br/>eyes, the woman comes all covered in the<br/>blood of men, to meet with me and washes<br/>me in the flood of wounds [the flood of<br/>wounds, i.e. blood].</p> |
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Ok enn kvað hann:

And again he said:

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|--|---|
| <p>22. Sagt hefð enn frá órum<br/>oddflaums viðum draumi,<br/>Eir, varðat mér, aura,<br/>orðfátt, es munk láta.<br/>Verr hafa vápna snerru<br/>vekjendr, þeirs mik sekðu,<br/>brynju hatrs ens bitra<br/>beiðendr, ef nú reiðumk.<sup>70</sup></p> | <p>22. I have again said to the trees of spear<br/>rapids [spear rapids, i.e. battle; the trees of<br/>battle, i.e. men], about my dream, of when I<br/>will lose my life. I did not become tongue-<br/>tied, Eir of gold [Eir of gold, i.e. woman].<br/>The rousers of weapons' onslaught<br/>[weapons' onslaught, i.e. battle; the rousers<br/>of battle, i.e. warriors], commanders of the<br/>biting enemy of mail [the enemy of mail, i.e.<br/>a sword; the commanders of swords, i.e.<br/>warriors], they who outlawed me, will have<br/>worse if I now become angry.</p> |
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### Commentary:

The second dream sequence of Gísli's time in the wilderness occurs once again in autumn. The dream is extant in all three versions of the saga. This time it is the worse dream-woman of whom he dreams; as the M text puts it: *ok gerask nú svefnfarar harðar* ('and now all his dreams became bad'). Thus the reader is already aware of the gradual shift towards the worse dream-woman. The exact meaning of the word *svefnfarar* is uncertain. The word *svefn* meaning 'sleep' can also be used for 'dream' (see for example stanza 20) and therefore 'sleep-journeys' would suggest a meaning such as either 'dreams' or 'a dreaming state' (Cleasby 1957, 607; Fritzner 1886-1896, I, 612). In this passage both meanings fit the context; suggesting not only that the dreams

<sup>69</sup> Stanza 21: *Eigi verðr gótt ór hverjum draumi, en oss lér orða of þat; borða Gefn drepr fyr mér glaumi. Þegars ek skal blunda, kemr kona, öll í manna blóði, til funda við mik; (hon) þvær oss unda flóði.*

<sup>70</sup> Stanza 22. *Hefð enn sagt oddflaums viðum frá órum draumi, es munk láta; mér varðat orðfátt, aura Eir. Vekjendr vápna snerru, beiðendr ens bitra brynju hatrs, þeirs sekðu mik, hafa verr, ef ek reiðumk nú.*

themselves are bad, but also that they take their toll on Gísli (Haeckel 1934, 16; Harbus 1995, 104). The word also appears in *Bjarnar saga* where it seems to have a similar meaning (*BjH* 1938, ch. 32, p. 196) and again later in *Gísla saga* (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 30, p. 94). The S and B redactions of *Gísla saga* differ slightly from M at this point in that Auðr specifically asks (in direct speech) about Gísli's dreaming state. Giving Auðr a voice at this point further animates the conversation, which fits the theme of their inseparability mentioned earlier in the paragraph. It also brings Auðr to the fore, creating an interesting juxtaposition between the two women fighting over Gísli in his sleeping life and his wife in his waking life. One might identify a parallel between the two dream-women, and the two significant women in Gísli's life, with Auðr, his wife equating to the better dream-woman and Þórdís, the sister who urges on his pursuers, equating to the worse dream-woman (Harbus 1995, 106).

Gísli's initial response to his wife's enquiry is to declaim stanza 20. After the verse he relates his dreams of the worse dream-woman washing him. The intimacy of this act contrasts with the violence of the battle, in the same way as Sæmundr Ormsson is dried by a woman the night before his beheading (*Stu* 1906-1911, II, 124; see section II.ii). In both cases the act of washing or drying by a woman contrasts with the violence, but also prefigures the wounds that the man will receive. In *Gísla saga*, however, the act of cleansing is subverted by the fact that it is blood with which Gísli is washed. The blood represents the wounds and death he will be dealt in his final battle. The use of blood and gore to symbolise wounds and death in dreams in Old Norse is a common motif and has already been described above with regard to Án hrísmagi's dream in *Laxdæla saga* (see section IV.iv). The ominous use of blood is particularly associated with female dream-spirits. In addition to Án's dream in *Laxdæla saga* (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 48, p. 149) and Glúmr's dream of the two women drizzling blood over the district in *Víga-Glúms saga* (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 21, pp. 71-72; see section VI.iii), there are several examples in *Íslendingasaga*. During the winter after the battle at Víðines a man in Skagafjörður dreams that he enters a large house in which sit two women rocking back and forth speaking a verse as blood pours from the eaves (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 285). This is similar to Dǫrruðr's vision at Caithness in *Njáls saga*, where he sees a house in which women weave at a loom made of human flesh (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 454). In another dream in *Íslendingasaga*, a man named Hafliði Hǫskuldsson's dreams of the woman wielding a bloodied cloth, which she uses as a fatal weapon, pulling over men's heads (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 494). It is possible that the association between blood and female

spirits (*valkyrjur*, *dísir* and *fylgjur*) dates back to pagan times where blood played an important role in heathen sacrifice. The use of the word *roðra* (or *róðra*; 'blood, especially of sacrificial animals') in the M text may be a distant remembrance of such practices (the B text excises this word, and S replaces it with the verb *rjóða*). Thus, in the first dream the reader is actually told that the worse dream-woman predicts Gísli's violent death by washing him in blood. As Thomas Bredsdorff (1964, 17) notes, both Gísli's dream-women predict his death. It is merely the manner in which they predict it, and the nature of what might follow that is different in the dreams.

### Stanzas 20-22

Three stanzas are spoken in the passage; stanza 20 before Gísli's prose explanation of being washed by the dream-woman and then stanzas 21 and 22 separated only by *Ok enn kvað hann* ('than again he said'). In stanza 20 the speaker comments that his dreams lie if the warrior is to live to a great age. This verse is about dream interpretation. It is interesting that within the verse the speaker does not actually say what fate the dream-woman has promised him. He says what the prophecies do not say, rather than what they do say. The speaker is looking at his dreams trying to identify either some area which might offer an alternate prophecy (perhaps in the manner with which Njáll presents two alternate futures to Gunnarr, *Nj* 1954, ch. 74, p. 181), or some scope to claim that the dreams lie (similar to Óláfr pái, *Laxd* 1934, ch. 31, p. 85). Within its context in the saga the stanza plays on the concept of Gísli being *berdreymr*. The reader has already been told that Gísli's dreams represent genuine prophecies and cannot be lying. The use of the word *efni* ('matter', 'theme' but also 'material') is reminiscent of Guðrún's response to Gestr's interpretations of her dreams (*Laxd* 1934, ch. 33, p. 91) and Sigurðr's response to Grípir in stanza 53 of *Grípisspá* (*Edda* 1962, 172). Like both Guðrún and Sigurðr the speaker of the verse would dearly like to make something positive out of the 'material' of the prophecy, but is forced to acknowledge that such an interpretation would be incorrect.

Stanza 21 has end rhyme (*rínhendin*), which suggests a relatively late date of composition (Turville-Petre 1972c, 144 note). This verse is interesting because it shows how the saga-writer has used his source. In the stanza the speaker describes the woman washing him in blood. This is picked up in the prose account that accompanies the stanza. The speaker's comment, however, that the dream-woman comes *þegars ek skal blunda* ('as soon as I close my eyes'), resembles the prose description of Gísli in

chapter 33, which says (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 33, p. 104): *þegar hann leggr sín augu saman, þá sýnisk honum in sama kona* ('as soon as he closed his eyes, that same woman appeared to him'). The saga-writer seems not to have merely retold the stanzas. Rather he has used them as inspiration, taking elements from each individual verse and spreading them across several chapters.

In stanza 22 the imagery is more martial. There are three complex kennings meaning warriors: *odd-flaums viðir* ('trees of spear-rapids'), *vápna snerru vekjendr* ('rousers of the onslaught of weapons'), and *brynju hatrs beiðendr* ('commanders of the hater of the mail-coat'). This gives the overall meaning: 'I have again said to the warriors about my dream of when I will lose my life. I did not become tongue-tied woman. The warriors who outlawed me will have worse if I now become angry.' Some aspects of this fit the stanza's situation in the saga and others remain obscure. The speaker could be understood as Gísli, showing his resilience and refusing to be overcome by his dreams, as he tells them to Auðr, the woman to whom the stanza is presumably addressed. As in the previous verse he refuses to allow the dreams to prevent the composition of his verses. Furthermore the verse describes the anger of the speaker at the men, presumably Borkr and his men, who outlawed him. Only the detail that he has already told his dream to men confounds this interpretation and is at odds with the presentation of the intimate scenes where Gísli tells his dreams to his wife.

## V.v Gísli's dream of the good dream-woman on horseback and the well furnished hall

### Context:

Gísli continues to narrowly evade capture by Þorkr and Eyjólf. Vésteinn's sons, however, take their own vengeance for their father's death by killing Gísli's brother Þorkell. Gísli has the following dream while staying at Geirþjófsfjörðr with his wife.

### Text:

*Gísl* 1929, ch. 30, pp. 58-59.

*Gísl* 1943, ch. 30, pp. 94-96.

*Gísl* 1960, ch. 26, pp. 64-66.

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 106; BI, 100-101.

Ok er á liðr, er Gísli í Geirþjófsfirði, ok koma apr draumar hans allir ok harðar svefnfarar, ok kemr nú jafnan at honum draumkonan sú in verri, ok þó hin stundum, in betri. Einhverja nótt er þat enn, at Gísla dreymir, at konan sú in betri kom at honum. Hon sýndisk honum ríða grám hesti ok býðr honum með sér at fara til síns innis, ok þat þekkisk hann. Þau koma nú at húsi einu, því er nær var sem holl væri, ok leiðir hon hann inn í húsit, ok þóttu honum þar vera hægendi í þollum ok vel um búit. Hon bað þau þar vera ok una sér vel, - "ok skaltu hingat fara, þá er þú andask", sagði hon, "ok njóta hér fjár ok farsælu." Ok nú vaknar hann ok kvað vísur nokkurar, eptir því sem hann dreymði:

25. Heim bauð með sér sínum  
saum-Hlökk gróum blakki,  
þá vas brúðr við beiði

And as time drew on, Gísli was in Geirþjófsfjörðr and all his dreams and nightmares came back and now that dream-woman always came to him, the worse one, except occasionally the other one, the better one. One night it happened again, that Gísli dreamed that that better woman came to him. She seemed to him to be riding a grey horse and invited him to go with her to her home and he agreed to that. They came now to a house, which was almost like a hall, and she led him inside into the house and it seemed to him there were comforts along the platforms and it was well furnished. She said they should stay there and make themselves content - "and you come here when you die, and benefit from the wealth and prosperity here." At that point he woke up and spoke these stanzas about the things of which he had dreamed:

25. The Hlökk of needlework [the Hlökk of needlework, i.e. woman] invited the decker of praise [decker of praise, i.e. poet] to ride

<sup>71</sup>Stanza 25: *Saum-Hlökk bauð lofskreyti ríða heim með sér sínum gróum blakki; þá vas brúðr blið við beiði. Mank orð mágrundar skorðu of þat: Hneigi-Sól hornflæðar kvazk mundu græða mik af heilu.*

blíð, lofskreyti ríða;  
mágrundar, kvazk mundu,  
mank orð of þat skorðu,  
hneigi-Sól af heilu  
hornflæðar mik græða.<sup>71</sup>

home with her, on her grey steed. The bride [bride, i.e. woman] was kind to the bidder of ... [the bidder, i.e. warrior?, see commentary]. I remember the words of the stay of the gull's field [the gull's field, i.e. the sea; the stay of the sea, i.e. woman?] about that. The Sól of the tipping flood of the drinking horn [the flood of the drinking horn, i.e. ale or wine; tipping Sól of ale, i.e. woman] said she would heal me to health.

26. Dýr lét drópu stjóra  
dís til svefns of vísat  
lægis elds, þars lógu,  
litt týnik því, dýnur.  
Ok með sér en svinna  
saums leiddi mik Nauma,  
sákat hól í hvílu,  
hlaut skald sæing blauta.<sup>72</sup>

26. The excellent *dís* of the fire of the sea [the fire of the sea, i.e. gold; the *dís* of gold, i.e. woman] had the ruler of *drápur* [the ruler of *drápur* (poems), i.e. the poet] shown where to sleep, there where feather beds were laid, and I have not forgotten that. And the wise Nauma of needlework [the Nauma of needlework, i.e. woman] led me beside her, I saw no rucks in the bedclothes. The poet got a soft bed.

27. Hingat skalt, kvað hringa  
Hildir at óðar gildi,  
fleina þollr, með Fullu  
fallheyjaðar deyja;  
þá munt, Ullr, ok ǫllu,  
ísungs, féi þvísa,  
þat hagar okkr til auðar  
ormláðs, ok mér ráða.<sup>73</sup>

27. "Pike-tree [pike-tree, i.e. warrior], you shall come hither with the Fulla of death's planner [Fulla of death's-planner (Óðinn), i.e. a valkyrie] when you die, poetry smith [poetry smith, i.e. poet]," said the Hildir of rings [the Hildir of rings i.e. woman]. "Then you and I, Ullr of helmets [Ullr of helmets, i.e. warrior], will command these riches. That makes us two rich in the wealth of the serpent-land [serpent-land, i.e. gold]."

<sup>72</sup>Stanza 26: *Dýr dís lægis elds lét drópu stjóra of vísat til svefns þars dýnur lógu; litt týnik því. Ok en svinna saums Nauma leiddi mik með sér, skald hlaut blauta sæing; sákat hól í hvílu.*

<sup>73</sup>Stanza 27: *Hingat skalt, fleina þollr, deyja með Fullu fallheyjaðar, kvað hringa Hildir at óðar gildi; þá munt, ísungs Ullr, ok ráða ǫllu þvísa féi ok mér, þat hagar okkr til ormláðs auðar.*

### Commentary:

Gísli's second dream of the better dream-woman, seems to concern Gísli's fate, both physical and spiritual. The dream is preserved only in the M and S versions of the saga. The author indicates that this dream is against the general flow of dreams, which are predominantly of the worse dream-woman: *kemr nú jafnan at honum draumkonan sú in verri, ok þó hin stundum, in betri* ('now that dream-woman always came to him, the worse one, except occasionally the other one, the better one'). This is in contrast to the first description of the dreams of the women, where they seem to occur with more or less equal frequency. Thus the author continues to more or less alternate the dreams he actually narrates to create a balance in the text, but it is made apparent that the worse dream-woman is gaining predominance. There is also an indication in the S-redaction that these dreams are once again more common in autumn.

### The grey horse

This time the dream-woman is described as riding a grey horse. A parallel (though not contained in a dream) is in *Þiðrandi þáttr*, where the female spirits who try to save Þiðrandi are riding white horses (*ÞÞ* 1961, 148). The spirits who attack Þiðrandi are also on horseback, although there is no mention of the colour of the horses. From Þórhallr's explanation of events in the *þáttr*, we are told that the women on white horses relate to the new faith coming to Iceland. The saint King Óláfr Haraldsson appears in several dreams riding a white horse (*Flat* 1860-1868, III, 278; and 295) and in *Þórhalls þáttr knapps*, the leper Þórhallr dreams of a brightly dressed man on a white horse heralding the arrival of Christianity and instructing him to dismantle the temple (*Þórh* 2003, II, 156). The dream-woman's horse might relate to the Christian knight who emerges from heaven on a white steed in *Revelation* (19.11), though equally one might think of the image of Death on a pale horse from *Revelation* (6.8). Furthermore, not all dreams of grey horses are specifically associated with Christianity. The symbol of the horse was probably related to cults of the *dísir*, prior to the introduction of Christianity (Skard 1933; Turville-Petre 1964, 226 and references). The invitation to ride a grey horse appears in Icelandic folklore as a symbol of death (*Gísl* 1943, 94 note), and Gísli's acceptance might be interpreted as a sign of his willingness to die (Lönnroth 2002, 460). In *Íslendinga saga* a young woman named Jóreiðr dreams of the legendary pagan Guðrún Gjúkadóttir riding a grey horse (*Stu* 1906-1911, II, 243-245). Therefore, although the white horses of *Þiðrandi þáttr* and the dreams of Óláfr clearly represent



Christianity, this connection is left unclear in *Gísla saga*, particular as the horse in question is grey (*grár*), rather than white (*hvítur*).

### The well-furnished house

The dream-woman takes Gísli to a large building which is well furnished and tells him according to the M redaction: *skaltu hingat fara, þá er þú andask ... ok njóta hér fjár ok farsælu* ('you come here when you die, and benefit from the wealth and prosperity here'). This recalls the comment in stanza 17: *nú's skammt til betra* ('now, there is not long until the better times'). In this way the dream seems to represent a journey to a world of the dead. The dream differs from the earlier dream where Gísli saw his kinsmen in a hall with fires burning. In this second hall there is no mention of kinsmen greeting Gísli. Instead the wealth of the furnishings and platforms is described. There is a suggestion of sexuality throughout the passage. The dream-woman invites Gísli to go home with her. This detail, which relates to stanza 25, is strongly reminiscent of the role pagan female spirits inviting the slain to accompany them. In stanza 29 of *Krákumál*, Ragnarr is invited home by the *dísir* (*Skjaldedigtning* 1912, AI, 649; BI, 656). In *Atlamál* stanza 28, Glaumvǫr dreams that *dísir* call Gunnarr to their bench (*Edda* 1962, 251) (also see Björn Hítðelakappi's final dream stanza *BjH* 1938, ch. 32, pp. 196-197). The woman then says that they should relax together and in the S redaction the dream-woman specifies that Gísli is going to rule over the wealth together with her (*ok njóta hér fjár með mér*). This apparent union between Gísli and his dream-woman is also reminiscent of concepts where valkyries were sometimes portrayed as brides of slain warriors.

Despite such pagan associations and images, Gísli's vision broadly conforms to the tradition of visionary narrative that had become popular in Europe during the Middle Ages. Although the dream-vision as a poetic genre did not flourish in medieval Scandinavia to the same extent as elsewhere in Europe, there are several Old Norse examples. A popular text throughout medieval Europe was the *Visio Tnugdali*. This story of an Irish nobleman who has a three-day swoon during which he is shown heaven and hell by an angel, appears in a thirteenth-century Norse translation as *Duggals leiðsla* (*Dugg* 1983). Like Gísli's earlier dream of the better dream-woman, Duggall's vision has a didactic function for the dreamer, who upon waking gives away his possessions to live a more virtuous life. *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* contains an extensive and quite fantastical dream-vision of heaven (*EVIð* 1944, ch. 4, pp. 452-454). A dream of

heaven is also described in both Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* but not in *Heimskringla*. Óláfr is led up a massive staircase to a place of bright blooms and people in shining white garb, where he speaks to God (ÓT 1958, ch. 76, pp. 152-153; ÓTOdd 1932, ch. 13, pp. 39-41). Such visionary literature undoubtedly influenced the dream of the well furnished hall in chapter 30 of *Gísla saga*, but in contrast to such visions, Gísli's dream of the afterlife is deliberately mundane. Although the hall is well furnished, it feels distinctly earthly. There is none of the bright blossom and white clothes which give Óláfr's dream its explicitly Christian appearance. The building in Gísli's dream is merely a house (*hús*), not even quite as grand as a noble's hall (*høll*). Thus, although the building is large, it pales in comparison to Óláfr's stairway to heaven. Even in a dream-vision, the author maintains the verisimilitude of the saga. It reminds us that although consciously using religious and liturgical motifs, the author has adapted them all to his purpose. Although related to visions of heaven found in texts such as *Duggals leiðsla*, the description is firmly rooted within the *Íslendingasögur* tradition. According to the dream, Gísli is going to be comfortable and wealthy in his afterlife, but the question of his eternal soul is studiously avoided.

### Stanzas 25-27

Unlike the previous three dreams, this dream is narrated in the third person. The reader is told what Gísli dreams, rather than witnessing him tell the dreams to his wife. Upon waking, however, Gísli recites three consecutive stanzas (stanzas 25, 26 and 27). In the S redaction stanzas 25 and 26 are separated by the words *Ok en kvað hann* ('And again he spoke'). The content of these stanzas matches the prose description fairly well. These stanzas, together with stanza 29, form the basis for the second poem that Krijn (1935, 78) identifies as possibly predating the saga as a single work. She justifies her claim largely through the consistency of tone and meaning across these stanzas. She also points to the strong Christian imagery in these stanzas, depicting not the rowdy *Valhøll* of pagan mythology, but a calm Christian afterlife.

Unfortunately stanza 25 is imperfectly preserved. Turville-Petre suggests that *sár-Hlökk* (based on the variant *saur* in AM 761b 4<sup>o</sup>) could mean "a goddess of the Other World, or a *fylgja* calling the hero home" (Turville-Petre 1976, 53). Although this fits well with the context within the saga, the reading *saum-Hlökk* seems more in keeping with the poet's style. *Saum-Hlökk* ('sewing-goddess') and *hneigi-Sól*

*hornflæðar* ('tipping-goddess of the ale-horn') are both kennings for woman. The kenning *mágrundar skorða* ('prop of the sea') also seems to mean 'woman', though one would usually expect a further word meaning 'fire' (fire of the sea, i.e. gold; prop of gold, i.e. woman). The word *beiði* (probably from *beiðir*) in line 3 seems to be the base-word of a kenning referring to the speaker, the determinant of which is lost. Finnur Jónsson (*Skjaldedigtning* BI, 100; *Gísl* 1929, 103) emends the word *heim* in line 1 to *fleins* giving the kenning *fleins beiðir* ('bidder of pikes' i.e. warrior'). Although this completes the kenning, it does so at great expense to the overall intelligibility of the stanza. It seems more probable that the modifier has been lost from the beginning of line 3, where it has been replaced by the functionless *þá* in order to preserve the metre.

Understanding the verse this way one might read it as follows: "The woman invited the poet to ride home with her on her grey dun steed. The woman was kind to the warrior. I remember the woman's words about that. The woman said she would heal me to health." Thus the woman in the stanza resembles a *dís* or *fylgja* and the action of inviting the speaker home is symbolic of calling him to his death. In addition to the stanzas from *Atlamál* and *Krákumál* cited above, the stanza resembles Björn Hítöelakappi's last dream stanza (*BjH* 1938, ch. 32, pp. 196-197). In this stanza Björn describes a dream-woman using a combination of pagan and Christian imagery. This woman invites Björn home, which, as in Gíslí's stanza, seems to correspond with her predicting his death.

In stanza 26 the woman is referred to as *dýr dís lægis elds* (excellent *dís* of fire of the sea, i.e. goddess of gold). Although the two dream-women show similarity to the *dísir*, this reference is probably little more than poetic artistry. *Dís* here is part of a kenning and does not necessarily indicate that the dream-woman is a *dís*. Nevertheless the kenning does show a marked difference from the poet's usual practice of using kennings with the name of a specific goddess as the base-word. The speaker says that the dream-woman has the poet (*drópu stjóri*) shown where to sleep (*lét ... til svefns of visat*), where feather beds are laid (*þars lógu ... dýnur*) and that he has not forgotten this (*lítt týnik því*, literally 'I've lost little of that'). The second *helmingr* causes more problems. *Saums Nauma* ('goddess of sewing') is clearly a kenning referring to the dream-woman. This woman leads the speaker to be beside her (*leiddi mik með sér*), and then he gets a bed (*hlaut skald sæing blauta*). In the M version line 7 reads *lagði heil í hvílu*. Most modern editors have tended to follow the other manuscripts at this point, where the line reads *sákat ek hól í hvílu* ('I saw no rucks in the bed') (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 30,

p. 95; *Skjaldedigtning* BI, 23). Although fitting the context, such detail seems strange and redundant.

In stanza 27 the speaker seems to relate the words of the dream-woman, perhaps the same words that he claimed to remember in stanza 25. Only the words *kvað hringa Hildir at óðar gildi* ('said the goddess of rings to the smith of poetry') are the speaker of the verse telling his dream, the rest of the verse appears to be the dream-woman's words. She tells the warrior (*fleina þollr*) that he will come to this place when he dies with a woman (*Fulla fallheyjaðar*). *Fallheyjaðr* ('death-planner') seems to be a *heiti* for Óðinn and the Fulla of Óðinn is a kenning for a valkyrie (Kock 1923-1941, § 2438), in this case it seems to be the dream-woman referring to herself. This kenning recalls the sense in which fallen warriors were said to marry valkyries in *Valhǫll*, which fits well the claims in the stanza that the speaker will rule over the wealth in the building with her. In the second *helmingr* *Ullr ísungs* ('god of the helm') is a kenning for warrior. The kenning *auðr ormláðs* ('wealth of the serpent-land') means gold (since the snake Fáfñir used the Rhinegold as his bed). Lars Lönnroth (2002, 460) suggests that here it may also be a sexual metaphor, further adding to the latent sexuality running through stanzas 25 to 27. Lönnroth goes on to suggest that *auðr* may be a playful reference to Gísli's wife Auðr. Thus in the *helmingr* the woman says: 'Then you and I, warrior, will command these riches. That will make us rich in gold.'

The three dream-stanzas in chapter 30 closely reflect the events described in the prose, despite some imperfections in preservation. They describe a woman on a grey horse, the comforts in the hall and the wealth over which the speaker will rule after his death. However, where stanzas in chapter 22 contained more apparent Christian references than the prose, those in chapter 30 contain a more obvious suggestion of a sexual relationship between Gísli and a dream-woman in his afterlife.

## V.vi Gísli's further dreams of the bad dream-woman and of the impending battle

### Context:

At the beginning of chapter 33, the narrator tells us that the years the better dream-woman predicted for Gísli to live have now passed. The following series of four dreams relate to Gísli's death. In the following chapters Eyjólfur confronts Gísli with a large force and after a valiant defence he is eventually overpowered.

### Text:

*Gísl* 1929, ch. 33, pp. 63-66.

*Gísl* 1943, ch. 33, pp. 102-109.

*Gísl* 1960, ch. 27, pp. 69-74.

*Skjaldedigtning*, AI, 106-108; BI, 101-103.

Þat berr enn til einhverja nótt um sumarit, at Gísli lætr illa í svefni. En er hann vaknar, spyr Auðr, hvat hann hefði dreymt. Hann segir, at nú kom at honum draumkonan sú in verri ok mælti svá: "Nú skal ek því øllu bregða, er in betri draumkonan mælti við þik, ok skal ek þess ráðandi, at þér skal þess ekki at gagni verða, er hon hefir mælt." Þá kvað Gísli vísu:

29. Skuluða it, kvað skorða  
skapkers, saman verja,  
svá hefr ykk til ekka  
eitr góðmunar leitat.  
Allvaldr hefir aldar  
erlendis þik sendan  
einn ór yðru ranni  
annan heim at kannu.<sup>74</sup>

"Þat dreymði mik enn," sagði Gísli, "at sjá kona kom til mín ok batt á höfuð mér dreyrnga húfu ok þó áðr höfuð mitt í blóði

It happened again one night during the summer that Gísli was restless in his sleep. When he awoke, Auðr asked what he had dreamed. He said that the worse dream-woman came to him and said this: "Now I shall overturn everything that the better dream-woman told you and I shall act in such a way, that you shall come to no advantage from that which she has said." Then Gísli spoke a stanza:

29. "You two shall not live together, such sorrow has the poison of good-love caused you," said the stay of the cask [stay of the cask, i.e. woman]. "The all-ruler of life [the all-ruler of lives, i.e. God] has sent you alone, from your house, to go abroad so that you know the other world."

"I dreamed again," Gísli said, "that this woman came to me and bound on my head a hat of gore and before that washed my head in blood and

<sup>74</sup> Stanza 29: *Skuluða it saman verja, svá hefr eitr góðmunar leitat ykk til ekka, kvað skorða skapkers. Allvaldr aldar hefir sendan þik einn ór yðru ranni erlendis at kannu annan heim.*

ok jós á mik allan, svá at ek varð  
alblóðugr." Gísli kvað vísu:

30. Hugðak þvá mér Þrúði  
þremja hlunns ór brunni  
Óðins elda lauðri  
auðs mína skǫr rauða  
ok hyrkneyfa hreifa  
hǫnd væri því bandi  
báls í benja éli  
blóðrauð vala slóðar.<sup>75</sup>

Ok enn kvað hann:

31. Hugðak geymi-Gǫndul  
gunnela mér falda  
of rakskorinn reikar  
rúf dreyrugri húfu,  
væri hendr á henni  
í hjǫrregni þvegnar.  
Svá vakði mik Sága  
saums ór mínum draumi.<sup>76</sup>

Nú gerðisk svá mikit um drauma Gísli, at hann gerir svá myrkræddan, at hann þorir hvergi einn saman at vera, ok þegar hann leggr sín augu saman, þá sýnisk honum in sama kona. Þat var enn eina nótt, at Gísli lét raunlitt í svefni. Auðr spurði, hvat fyrir hann bæri. "Þat dreymði mik," segir Gísli, "at menn kæmu at oss ok væri Eyjólfir í fǫr ok margt annarra manna ok hittimst vér, ok

sprinkled it all over me so that I became covered in blood." Gísli spoke a stanza:

30. I thought the Þrúðr of wealth [Þrúðr of wealth, i.e. woman] washed me, made my hair red, in the lather of Óðinn's fires [Óðinn's fires, i.e. swords; the lather of swords, i.e. blood] from the spring of the roller of edges [roller of edges, i.e. sword; spring of the sword, i.e. wound] and that god of the fire of the hawk-track [hawk-track, i.e. hand; fire of the hand, i.e. gold; god of gold, i.e. woman] her hand was blood-red in the shower of wounds [the shower of wounds, i.e. blood] from diminishers of the fire of the hand [fire of the hand, i.e. gold; diminishers of gold, i.e. men].

And again he spoke:

31. I thought, the watching-Gǫndul of war-flames [war-flames, i.e. sword; Gǫndul of the sword, i.e. valkyrie] hooded me with a gory hat on the straight-cut of my uncombed parting; her hands were bathed in sword-rain [sword-rain, i.e. blood]. Thus she woke me, the Sága of needlework [Sága of needlework, i.e. woman], from my dream.

Now the dreams affected Gísli so much that he became so afraid of the dark that he never dared to be alone and as soon as he closed his eyelids that same woman appeared. It happened again one night that Gísli was very restless in his sleep. Auðr asked what he had just dreamed. "I dreamed this," said Gísli, "that men came upon us and it was Eyjólfir and many other men in a party and we met each other and I knew that a

<sup>75</sup> Stanza 30: *Hugðak Þrúði auðs þvá mér mína skǫr rauða Óðins elda lauðri ór þremja hlunns brunni ok því bandi vala slóðar báls væri hǫnd blóðrauð í benja éli hreifa hyrkneyfa.*

<sup>76</sup> Stanza 31: *Hugðak geymi-Gǫndul gunnela mér dreyrugri húfu of rakskorinn reikar rúf, væri hendr á henni þvegnar í hjǫrregni. Svá vakði Sága saums mik ór mínum draumi.*

vissi ek, at áburðir urðu með oss. Einn þeira fór fyrstr, grenjandi mjök, ok þóttumk ek hoggva hann sundr í miðju, ok þótti mér vera á honum vargs höfuð. Þá sóttu margir at mér; ek þóttumk hafa skjöldinn í hendi mér ok verjask lengi." Gísli kvað þá visu:

32. Vissak fjandr at fundi,  
fekk innan lið minna,  
ár þótt eigi værak  
andaðr, at mér standa,  
gætím vér, en væri,  
valtafn í mun hrafni,  
friðr í föggru blóði  
faðmr þinn roðinn mínu.<sup>77</sup>

Ok enn kvað hann:

33. Mótut skildi skaldi,  
skjöldr kom mér at haldi,  
gótum hug, við hneiti,  
hjør gellanda bella,  
áðr an mik þeirs mínu  
munu aldragi valda,  
gnýr vas hjørs at heyra  
hór, offliði bóru.<sup>78</sup>

Ok enn kvað hann:

34. Sték of einn, áðr ynni  
árflognis mik sáran,  
hrælækjar gafk hauki,  
huggendr, munins tuggu.  
Sneið at sínu ráði  
sverðs egg í tvau leggi,  
missti menja lestir,

fight broke out between us. One of them went first, howling greatly and I thought that I chopped him in two at the waist, and it seemed to me that he had the head of a wolf. Then many of them attacked me, and I thought that I had a shield in my hand and defended myself a long time." Gísli then spoke a stanza:

32. I knew that enemies attacked in battle, but I was not quickly slain from this. I got less support from inside. We made falcon-prey [falcon-prey, i.e. carrion] to the glee of the raven, but your fair bosom was reddened in my fair blood.

And again he said:

33. They could not destroy the skald's shield with a roaring sword; the shield came to me to support against the blows - I took courage - before they, who will cause my death, attacked me with overwhelming force. A loud sword clash was heard.

And again he said:

34. I stepped over one man, before the gladders of the early flyer [the early flyer, i.e. raven; gladders of the raven, i.e. warriors] gave me wounds. I gave Muninn's mouthful [Muninn's mouthful, i.e. carrion] to the hawk of the carrion-stream [carrion-stream, i.e. blood; hawk of blood, i.e. raven].

<sup>77</sup> Stanza 32: *Vissak fjandr standa at mér at fundi, þótt eigi værak ár andaðr; fekk minna lið innan, vér gætím valtafn í mun hrafni, en friðr faðmr þinn væri roðinn í föggru blóði mínu.*

<sup>78</sup> Stanza 33: *Mótut bella skildi skaldi gellanda hjør; skjöldr kom mér at haldi við hneiti, - gótum hug, - áðr an þeirs munu valda aldragi mínu bóru mik offliði. Hór hjørs gnýr vas at heyra.*

<sup>79</sup> Stanza 34: *Sték of einn, áðr huggendr árflognis ynni mik sáran; gafk hrælækjar hauki munins tuggu. Sverðs egg sneið leggi í tvau at sínu ráði; menja lestir missti fóta; þat vas mannsbót.*

mannsbót vas þat, fóta.<sup>79</sup>

The sword edge cut, just as it wanted, a leg in two; a diminisher of treasures [diminisher of treasures, i.e. warrior] lost his footing; that was compensation.

Nú líðr á haustit, ok minnkar ekki draumana, ok heldr er vaxandi gangr at þeim. Þat var eina nótt, er Gísli lét enn illa í svefni. Auðr spurði þá enn, hvat fyrir hann bæri. Gísli kvað vísu:

Now the autumn came on and the dreams did not lessen, but rather grew more. It happened one night, when Gísli was again restless in his sleep. Then Auðr asked again what had just happened to him. Gísli said a stanza:

35. Hugðak blóð of báðar,  
benvíðis, mér síður,  
þann hofum vér at vinna  
vílsinn, ofan rinna.  
Slíkt dreymir mik, seima,  
sekr emk við her nekkvat,  
bíðum brodda hriðar,  
ber-Lofn, es ek sofna.<sup>80</sup>

35. I thought that blood ran on me down both sides, such a loss of wound-sea [wound-sea, i.e. blood] I had to endure. I dream of this, as soon as I sleep, gold-bearing Lofn [gold-bearing Lofn, i.e. woman]. I am somewhat outlawed by armed forces. I await the storm of spikes [storm of spikes, i.e. battle].

Ok enn kvað hann vísu:

And again he said a stanza:

36. Hugðak blóð of báðar,  
baug-Hlín, gnáar mínar  
herðar hvössu sverði  
hrænets regin setja  
ok valnæra væri,  
Vór, af miklu fári,  
líkn reynum svá, lauka,  
lífs vánir mér gránar.<sup>81</sup>

36. I thought the gods of the carrion-net [carrion-net, i.e. shield; gods of the shield, i.e. warriors] brought blood, with a sharp sword, from both my big shoulders. Arm-ring Hlín [arm-ring Hlín, i.e. woman], my life expectancy was grey because of the great mischief of the falcon-feeders [falcon-feeders, i.e. warriors]. Such is the comfort I will get, Vór of leaks [Vór of leeks, i.e. woman].

Ok enn kvað hann:

And again he said:

37. Hugðak hlífár flagða  
hristendr af mér kvista,  
stór fingum ben, brynju  
báðar hendr með vendi.

37. I thought the shakers of shield-ogresses [shield-ogresses, i.e. axes; shakers of weapons, i.e. warriors] chopped off both my arms with a mail-coat's staff [mail-coat's

<sup>80</sup> Stanza 35: *Hugðak blóð rinna mér ofan of báðar síður, þann vílsinn benvíðis hofum vér at vinna. Slíkt dreymir mik, es ek sofna, seima ber-Lofn, emk nekkvat sekr við her; bíðum brodda hriðar.*

<sup>81</sup> Stanza 36: *Hugðak hrænets regin setja blóð hvössu sverði of báðar gnáar herðar mínar, baug-Hlín, ok lífs vánir væri mér gránar af miklu fári valnæra; líkn reynum svá, lauka Vór.*



Enn fyr mækis munni  
minn hugðak, Syn tvinna,  
oss gein hjørr of hjassa,  
hjalmostofn ofan klofna.<sup>82</sup>

staff, i.e. sword]. I got a terrible wound. I also thought that my helm-stump [helm-stump, i.e. head] was cut from above by a sword's edge; a sword gaped over my crown, Syn of twine [Syn of twine, i.e. woman]

Ok enn kvað hann vísu:

38. Hugðak Sjöfn í svefni  
silfrbands of mér standa,  
Gerðr hafði sú gerðu,  
grátandi, brá váta,  
ok eld-Njörun øldu  
allskyndila byndi,  
hvat hyggr mér, en mæra,  
mín sár, und því váru?<sup>83</sup>

And again he said a stanza:

38. In my sleep I thought that a Sjöfn of silver bands [Sjöfn of silver bands, i.e. woman] stood crying over me - that Gerðr of the waistband [Gerðr (the giant's daughter whom the god Freyr married) of the waistband, i.e. woman] had wet eyelashes - and then the glorious Njörun of wave's fire [wave's fire, i.e. gold; Njörun of gold, i.e. woman] bound my wounds very quickly. What do you think this means for me?

### Commentary:

Nowhere is there a greater testament to the flexibility and fluidity of saga dream-tradition than in the above extract. The dreams are preserved only in the M and S versions of the saga. The passage relates four dreams in all:

1. Gísli's dream of the worse dream-woman overturning the promises of the other dream-woman (stanza 29).
2. Gísli's dream of the worse dream-woman washing him and bandaging him in blood (stanzas 30-31).
3. Gísli's dream of the battle and killing the man with the wolf's head (stanzas 32-34).
4. Gísli's further dream of the battle, torrents of blood and the sorrow of Auðr (stanzas 35-38).

These dreams flow quickly into one another in the text. Nevertheless, according to the prose at least, they are dreamed on separate occasions. Before the second dream Gísli

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<sup>82</sup> Stanza 37: *Hugðak hlifur flagða hristendr kvista af mér báðar hendr með brynju vendi, - fingum stór ben. Enn hugðak hjalmstofn minn klofna ofan fyr mækis munni; oss gein hjørr um hjassa, tvinna Syn.*

<sup>83</sup> Stanza 38: *Hugðak í svefni Sjöfn silfrbands standa grátandi of mér, - sú gerðu Gerðr hafði váta brá, - ok en mæra øldu eld-Njörun byndi sár mín allskyndila. Hvat hyggr mér váru und því?*

tells us *Þat dreymði mik enn* ('I dreamed again') and dreams 3 and 4 are separated by narration telling us that the dreams take place somewhat later than the previous ones. The stanzas will be looked at in detail below, but the distinction between each dream is even less clear in the stanzas. All four of the dreams in some way point towards Gísli's imminent death and the reader is given the impression of an increasingly distraught and desperate man, whose fate is now rushing to meet him.

#### Gísli's last dreams of the worse dream-woman

In the first dream in the passage, the worse dream-woman tells Gísli that she is going to undo (*bregða*) everything that the better dream-woman has told Gísli. In M she goes on to say that he shall come to no advantage from anything the better dream-woman has said. S is more specific (*Gísl* 1960, ch. 26, p. 69): *Ek skal bregða því öllu, er en betri draumkonan mælti við þik, ok skal ek þess vera ráðandi at þér verði ekki at björg né at gagni þat er hon mælti við þik* ('I shall overturn everything which the better dream-woman promised you, and I shall arrange it so that what she promised you will be no salvation or advantage to you'). In this way the S texts picks up on the prediction that the seven fires in the earlier dream represent seven years of protection (particularly as it is expressed in stanza 17). Thus as the seven years draw to a close, the worse dream-woman is able to overturn the temporary stay of execution offered by the better dream-woman. The worse dream-woman may also be overturning the better dream-woman's promises that Gísli will prosper in the afterlife. Thus the worse dream-woman's words indicate the certainty of Gísli's death, but leave the question of his immortal soul unanswered.

The second dream in the sequence has the worse dream-woman washing Gísli's head in blood, sprinkling blood over him and wrapping gore (perhaps intestines) about his head. The act of washing represents the concept of cleansing, both physically and spiritually. Here, however, the concept is clearly inverted, as it is blood in which Gísli is washed. Like the earlier dream in chapter 24, the blood showered over Gísli in the dream is similar to Glúmr Eyjólfsson's dream in *Víga-Glúms saga* of the two women sprinkling blood across the district (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 21, pp. 71-72). In both texts the act of sprinkling the blood (both use the same verb *ausa* 'to sprinkle') suggests an indiscriminateness with which the wounds are given. The word *ausa* also has a ritualistic connotation. It was used to describe the sprinkling of water on a person in a pre-Christian baptism ceremony (in relation to Christian ceremonies the term *skíra*

rather than *ausa* is consistently used; Cleasby 1957, 35). This gross baptism may suggest the worse dream-woman laying claim to Gísli's eternal soul.

If washing with blood represents an inversion of the concept of cleaning, then bandaging Gísli's head with gore, perhaps entrails, represents an inversion of the concept of healing, as these bandages represent the wounds Gísli will receive.<sup>84</sup> Where Án hrismagi's dream-woman had both a role in foretelling, perhaps even allotting, the wounds he receives, but also in healing them, with Gísli's worse dream-woman the concept of healing is purely ironic. Healing is a theme that runs through the dreams of *Gísla saga*. Stanza 25 seems to describe the better dream-woman healing, perhaps even absolving, Gísli. Later Gísli's final dream-stanzas seem to describe his wife's inability to heal him. The act of bandaging Gísli's head is an inversion of this theme. The bandages predict, perhaps even allot, the wounds that Gísli will receive in the impending battle.

#### Gísli's fear of the dark

In the saga prose between stanzas 31 and 32, once again the S version preserves a rather longer text, stressing that his fear of the dark prevents him from leaving the sides of Auðr or foster-daughter Guðríðr. Fear of the dark is a phobia that Gísli shares with another famous Icelandic outlaw Grettir Ásmundarson. Grettir is mentioned in chapter 22 of *Gísla saga*, where the duration of Gísli's time as an outlaw is compared to that of Grettir (*Gísl* 1954, ch. 22, p. 70). In *Grettis saga* the fear seems to result from Grettir's nocturnal battle with Glámr (*Gr* 1936, ch. 35, pp. 118-123), whereas Gísli's results from his tormenting dreams. In *Grettis saga* this fear creates an ironic juxtaposition; that the great and monstrous hero should be afraid of the dark. In *Gísla saga* the motif is more tragic; that the hero who carried out acts of daring in the former part of the saga, including the night-time attack on Þorgrímr, should be afraid of the dark because of the dreams it might bring. Saga heroes are often thought of as meeting their end with bravery and fortitude, but *Gísla saga* explores in greater depth the weight that the knowledge of one's fate brings to bear on the hero. In contrast to the motif of

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<sup>84</sup> The bloody hood (*dreyrug húfa*) formed by the entrails wrapped around Gísli's head is similar to the bloodied cloth (*dreyrugr dúkr*) wielded by the terrifying dream-woman in Hafliði Høskuldsson's dream in *Íslendinga saga* (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 494). This large and frightening dream-woman carries a cloth (*dúkr*), perhaps a shawl, dripping with blood which she throws over men's heads. As each head goes through an opening in the cloth she cuts it off.

dreamers being said to receive the benefit of their dreams (see section III.iii above), in *Gísla saga* the fact that Gísli is *berdreymr* becomes a burden rather than a gift. In his final scene Gísli is the model saga hero, meeting his end without complaint, but resisting to the last (de Lange 1935, 91). In the scenes leading up to it, however, he has become desperate and tormented, afraid to leave the company of his female companions.

#### The man with the wolf's head and the last dream

The third dream of the sequence does not explicitly feature the worse dream-woman. Gísli dreams of being attacked by a group of men including Eyjólfur. In his dream Gísli kills one of these men, who seems to have the head of a wolf. The dream points forward to Gísli's final battle in chapters 34-36, combining direct representation of the battle (i.e. the warriors appear in the dream in human form) with the wolf fetch concept. The *Gísla saga* author was familiar with the wolf dream, as demonstrated by his use of it in Gísli's first dream (though his use of it is far from conventional). Here, however, only one man appears as a wolf and only part wolf at that. The others, we assume, appear naturally. As leader of the force and given his nickname, *inn grái* ('the grey'), one might expect Eyjólfur to be the wolf-man (see Henzen 1890, 36), but, as Gísli kills the wolf-man in the dream this cannot be the case, because Eyjólfur survives the battle. The man whom he kills in the dream most likely represents Njósnar-Helgi. Helgi is instrumental in tracking down Gísli and at his final stand is persuaded by Eyjólfur to climb up the cliff Gísli is defending and attack him (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 34, p. 112). Gísli chops him in two with his axe and Helgi falls back down the cliff. As he tells the dream to his wife Gísli describes the man with the wolf's head as *grenjandi mjök* ('howling greatly'). It is also noticeable that the wolf-man is entirely the invention of the saga author and does not appear in the stanza describing this dream (stanzas 33 and 34). It is possible that the author mistook *gellanda* ('bellowing') from line 4 of stanza 31 as referring to Gísli's attacker rather than the swords that are attacking him and introduced the wolf-man concept from his knowledge of dream-traditions to explain this word.

This dream only covers the opening stage of the battle. The killing of the wolf man is described, followed by an attack by many more men. Gísli ends his narration of his dream to Auðr saying *Þá sóttu margir at mér; ek þóttumk hafa skjöldinn í hendi mér ok verjask lengi* ('Then many of them attacked me; I thought that I had a shield in my

hand and defended myself a long time'). The S version adds at *þeir fengu eigi sótt mik* ('so that they were not able to overcome me'). The use of the shield is mirrored in the actual battle scene (see *Gísl* 1943, ch. 34, p. 112; and ch. 35, p. 113) and recalls Gunnarr's miraculous defence against the wolves in his dream in *Njáls saga*. Thus Gísli's dream stops with him still able to defend himself. The three stanzas that Gísli recites at this point also describe the battle only up to this point. Even in his pre-staging of the battle, the author is building up suspense, predicting the battle bit by bit across several dreams rather than in a single one.

The final dream in the sequence is described only in verse. These stanzas will be dealt with below, but for the purpose of the saga structure it is worth considering them briefly here. The absence of a prose account seems to be a deliberate decision on the part of the author to leave this prophecy slightly obscure. We might compare it to other examples in the *Íslendingasögur* of dreams only narrated in stanza such as Björn Hítðelakappi's final dream-stanza (*BjH* 1938, ch. 32, p. 196-197) and Hrafn Qnundarson's dream-stanza in *Gunnlaugs saga* (*Gunnl* 1938, ch. 11, p. 88). All three cases involve a man relating a dream to his wife which prophesies his death. It is possible that Gísli is trying to protect his wife from the final prophecy, the one that reveals his death, by only telling it in verse. This creates an ironic parallel with the earlier stanza spoken by Gísli in the presence of his sister Þórdís, with the assumption that she would not be able to understand it.

### Stanzas 29 to 38

Stanza 29 is problematic. The verse seems to be almost entirely direct speech, with only *kvað skorða skapkens* ('said the prop of the ale-cask') relating to the speaker telling his dream. The word *verja* seems to have the meaning here 'to live' or 'to dwell' (Kock 1923-1941, §361) (M preserves *vera* in place of *verja*, though Kock objected to this on metrical grounds). Given the phrase *saman verja*, it is reasonable to read *þit* implied in *Skuluða it* as a specifically dual pronoun (rather than using the dual as poetic singular). *Eitr* ('poison') seems to relate to the word *góðmunar* (*góðmunr*, 'good-love') (both M and AM 761b 4<sup>o</sup> possess alternative readings though neither seem plausible), but the exact meaning of 'poison of good-love' is obscure. According to the woman, the poison of love either caused (*leitit til* from *leita til* 'to seek for') sorrow or, according to M, promised (*heitit við* from *heita við* 'to promise') sorrow (*ekki*). The second *helmingr* is also problematic. *Allvaldr aldar* ('all-ruler of life') is clearly a

kenning relating to a specifically Christian God and *annarr heimr* is a euphemism for the afterlife, though whether this is Christian or pagan, heaven or hell, is left unspecified. Thus the woman tells the speaker that God has sent for him to leave his home alone and go to the afterlife. M preserves *mik* rather than *þik* in line 6, indicating that in the second *helmingr* in M the speaker relates the woman's words in reported rather than direct speech. Interestingly, this is in keeping with the more sparing use of direct speech in the prose of M in comparison to S.

Understood this way the verse reads: ““You two shall not live together”, said the woman. “Such sorrow has the poison of good love caused you. God has sent you alone, from your house to go abroad, so that you know the other world””. The dream-woman's words clearly refer to the speaker being separated from someone at his death. In its situation in the saga, the stanza follows the worse dream-woman's statement that she will undo the better dream-woman's promises. Therefore one might understand the verse as Gísli being separated from his better dream-woman, her protection, and her promise that they will govern wealth together after his death. Nonetheless were it not for the surrounding prose, one might rather understand the stanza as indicating the separation of the speaker from an earthly woman (perhaps Auðr) and his departure alone into the next world. One might understand *eitr góðmunar* as ‘blind-passion’, even ‘lust’, which according to the verse leads directly to sorrow and God's punishment. Regarding this stanza Lars Lönnroth (2002, 461) observes: “Here the good and bad dream-women seem to have switched roles, because now the bad dream-woman speaks in Christian terms and appears to represent Christian morality ...”. Ida L. Gordon (1946-1953, 192-193) also picks up this apparent shift, but suggests a more radical reason for it. Gordon observes that phrases such as *allvaldr aldar* and *annarr heimr* are more in keeping with those stanzas associated with the better dream-woman and therefore suggests that the stanza has been associated to the wrong dream-woman by the saga-writer. If this is the case then the stanza might be read as the better dream-woman telling Gísli that he must die, be parted from his wife and move on into the next world. Although she does not specifically say so, Krijn's (1935) interpretation of the stanza supports this, as she places it alongside stanzas 25, 26 and 27 in her hypothetical poem, rather than alongside the other stanzas preserved in chapter 32. Krijn, Gordon and Lönnroth's arguments all expose the fact that the strict dichotomy, so important to the presentation of the dream-women in the prose, is not so apparent and sometimes confused in the stanzas.

Stanzas 30, 31, 35, 36, 37 and 38 all begin with the same construction *Hugðak* (*Hugða ek*, 'I thought' or perhaps here 'I dreamed'). Krijn (1935) sees the *Hugðak* repetition as evidence of the existence of a poem containing those stanzas beginning with this construction. She also tentatively assigns stanzas 20, 30, 31 and 32 to this poem, particularly stanza 30 due to the similarity in sound and meaning of *Vissak* to *Hugðak*. The phrase *hugðak* recalls the stanzas in *Guðrúnarkviða II*, in which Atli tells his wife Guðrún about his dreams (*Guðrúnarkviða II*, stanza 40, *Edda* 1962, 230):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>40. 'Hugða ec hér í túni teina fallna,<br/>þá er ek vildigac vaxna láta,<br/>rifnir með rótom, roðnir í blóði,<br/>bornir á becci, beðit mic at<br/>tyggva.</p> | <p>40. I thought here in the yard, saplings fell,<br/>when I wanted to let them grow. Torn by the<br/>roots, reddened in blood. [They were] brought<br/>to the bench, you told me to eat.</p> |
|--|---|

Two further stanzas follow, beginning *hugða ec* in which Atli tells further dreams. There can be little doubt that both the saga writer and the poet of the *Gísla saga* verses knew and were influenced by the *Völsung* legend and by *Guðrúnarkviða II* in particular.<sup>85</sup> In *Guðrúnarkviða II* after Atli has related his dreams, Guðrún gives each of them an auspicious and incorrect interpretation to disguise her own plan to kill Atli's sons. By contrast, in *Gísla saga* Auðr only asks about each of Gísli's dreams and makes no interpretation. This exhibits the remarkable complexity of reference in *Gísla saga*. Regardless of the date of Gísli's stanzas, in their current position and for the twelfth-century saga readership they relate to a conversation between Gísli and his faithful wife. These stanzas remind the reader of the conversation between another man and his wife, who is vengeful and deceiving. Thus the Eddic reference mirrors the theme in the dreams of two women, one aggressive and the other kind.

Despite the fact they seem to represent a single poem, the six stanzas beginning *hugðak* describe different dreams, and furthermore dreams of different types. In stanza 30 and 31 the speaker describes being washed in blood by the dream-woman and then having a gory hat wrapped around his unkempt hair. It is therefore a visitation dream,

<sup>85</sup> Scholars have explained such influence differently. For example Magnus Olsen (1928) explains the apparent Eddic references in Gísli's verses as the result of Gísli hearing Eddic verses such as *Guðrúnarkviða II* while in Norway, i.e. evidence that Gísli really is the poet. Gabriel Turville-Petre (1972c, 130) reaches the opposite conclusion: that the Eddic references apparent both in the stanzas and prose point to a common authorship.

with symbolic elements such as the blood symbolising Gísli's wounds. Stanza 35 describes blood running down the speaker, which recalls the image in stanza 30 of blood being tipped over him, but in stanza 35 the phrase *benviðis víl* (literally 'wretchedness of wound-sea') seems to mean 'loss of blood'. Therefore in stanza 35 the speaker describes a wound that he has received, rather than the symbolic wounds indicated by the blood poured over him by the dream-woman. This is confirmed by the next stanza, where the speaker is clearly describing a dream in which he sees himself battling his enemies. This dream is one of direct representation in which the dreamer sees events occurring in the dream more or less exactly in the manner that they will happen (rather than symbolically). The *hugðak* stanzas (particularly stanzas 35 to 38) begin to expose the speaker's despondency as he dreams of his own death. Phrases such as *bíðum brodda hríðar* ('[I] await the battle'), *sekr emk við her nekkvat* ('I am somewhat outlawed by armed forces') and *lífs vánir mér gránar* ('my prospects were grey') suggest a man who not only realises the futility of struggling against fate, but who has become exhausted in doing so.

In the latter four verses (35 to 38) the speaker addresses his wife (or so we assume) directly, thus re-establishing the narrative frame of the speaker telling his dreams to his wife. The final verse in the sequence is particularly striking as the speaker seems to describe seeing his own dead body and a woman crying over him. There are three kennings for woman in this verse (*Sjǫfn silfrbands*, *Gerðr gerðu* and *eld-Njǫrun ǫlðu*). The first two of these relate to a woman, standing over the body crying, and the last to a woman trying to bind the wounds. The most obvious interpretation of this is that all three kennings refer to the speaker's wife, crying over her husband's body and vainly attempting to bind his wounds. One might, however, recall the promises of the better dream-woman to heal the speaker in stanza 25, and wonder whether she has returned to fulfil her promises after all. The poet's use of kennings ultimately obscures our understanding and we are left unclear whether the speaker is offered salvation and reward in the afterlife, or is left to die a pagan with his weeping wife standing over him. The speaker acknowledges this uncertainty as he asks his wife for the meaning of the dream.

The *hugðak* verses are interrupted in the saga by three contrasting verses. Stanza 32 is one of the more sentimental stanzas in the saga. The speaker describes the battle in the dream, commenting on his lack of support. He concludes saying the listener's bosom will be reddened by his blood. This image of the speaker laid bleeding



in his wife's arms is reminiscent of Sigurðr's death as described in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* (*Sigurðarkviða in skamma* stanza 24, *Edda* 1962, 211) and also of the dream-stanza spoken by Hrafn Qnundarson in *Gunnlaugs saga* (*Gunnl* 1938, ch. 11, p. 88).<sup>86</sup>

Stanzas 33 and 34 differ considerably from the *Hugðak* stanzas. Both stanzas clearly describe dreams, as the speaker tells of his own death in the past tense and it would be hard to think of another context where this might be possible. Neither stanza, however, has any of the woman kennings using a goddess' name as a base-word which typify many of the other dream-stanzas. Therefore the narrative frame of the speaker addressing a woman has disappeared momentarily, giving the description of the dream battles greater immediacy. In stanza 33 the speaker stresses the positive aspects of his defence as he defends himself with his shield and takes heart (*gótum hug*). Even here, however, his doom is impending as the attackers are described as *þeirs mínu munu aldragi valdr* ('they who will cause my death'), thereby pointing forward to the speaker's ultimate inability to overcome his attackers. Stanza 34 is crowded with gory images, with kennings involving blood, carrion and birds of battle (e.g. *árflognis huggendr*, 'gladdeners of the early flier'; *hrælækjar haukr*, 'hawk of carrion-stream'; *Munins tugga*, 'Muninn's mouthful'). The phrase *missti menja lestir ... fóta* seems to be a grisly pun. AM 149 fol. and M have the genitive singular *fótar*. *Menja lestir* ('distributor of necklaces') is a kenning for warrior. The verb *missa* usually means 'to miss' or 'to feel the want of something', but the phrase *hann missti þá fótum* ('to miss one's feet', sometimes also with *fótr* in the genitive) means to stumble (Cleasby 1957, 431). Both meanings are undoubtedly intended in this stanza as the warrior stumbles on account of the lack of his foot. The speaker's final comment that this action is *mannsbót* ('compensation') points forward to his death. Within the context of the saga, Gísli can be killed without fear of prosecution and therefore in a sense he himself must provide the compensation for his own slaying.

### Conclusion

Chapter 33 contains the highest concentration of dreams in the saga. It also contains the culmination of the conflict between the better and worse dream-women, where the terrible nature of all four dreams suggest that the worse dream-woman has won. On balance the ten stanzas in this chapter appear to pre-date the saga prose. They

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<sup>86</sup> In fact the use of kennings, theme and imagery is so similar between Hrafn's verse and some of Gísli's dream-stanzas one might consider the possibility of direct influence or even common authorship.

have, however, been incorporated skilfully into the text and add to the overall dramatic and artistic effect of the passage.

## V.vii Gísli's final dream of the fighting birds

### Context:

Perhaps sensing that his end is near, Gísli is unable to sleep. He and his two female companions (Auðr and Guðríðr) go to one of his hideouts. As they walk, the women's skirts leave telltale tracks in the frost, and Gísli leaves behind the shavings of a piece of wood he is carving. At the hideout the women keep watch while Gísli sleeps and has his final dream. Following the dream they are attacked by Eyjólfur and his men who have followed the trail from the house. Gísli puts up a heroic defence. He is, however, finally overcome and falls before Eyjólfur's company.

### Text:

*Gísl* 1929 ch. 34, p. 67

*Gísl* 1943, ch. 34, pp. 110-11.

*Gísl* 1960, ch. 27, pp. 74-75.

*Skjaldedigtning*, AI, 108-109; BI, 104.

Rennr á hann svefnhöfgi, ok dreymir hann,  
at fuglar kæmi í húsit, er læmingar<sup>87</sup> heita,  
þeir eru meiri en rjúpkerar ok létu illiliga ok  
höfðu válkazk í roðru ok blóði. Þá spurði  
Auðr, hvat hann hafði dreymt. “Nú váru  
enn eigi svefnfarar góðar.” Gísli kvað vísu:

39. Mér bar hljómi í heimi,  
hǫr-Bil, þás vit skilðumk,  
skekkik dverga drykkju,  
dreyra sals fyr eyru.  
Ok hjǫrraddar hlýddi  
heggr rjúpkerar tveggja,  
koma mun dals á drengi  
dogg, læmingja hoggvi.<sup>88</sup>

Drowsiness came upon him and he dreamed that  
birds came into the house, of the sort called  
*læmingar*, they are bigger than male ptarmigan  
and made a horrendous noise and had wallowed  
in sacrificial gore and blood. Then Auðr asked,  
what he had dreamed. “Now the dreams are not  
good again.” Then Gísli spoke a stanza:

39. In my home of the hall of blood [hall of  
blood, i.e. heart; home of the heart i.e.  
thoughts], I thought a sound came to my  
ears, as soon as we parted Bil of linen [Bil of  
linen, i.e. woman]. I serve the drink of the  
dwarves [drink of the dwarves, i.e. poetry].  
And the tree of sword-noise [sword-noise,  
i.e. battle; tree of battle, i.e. warrior] heard  
the strong blows of two ptarmigan cocks. A  
bow-shower [bow-shower, i.e. battle] will

<sup>87</sup> Both *Gísl* 1929 ch. 34, p. 67 and *Gísl* 1943 ch. 34, p. 110 give *læmingar* (æ rather than œ), however *læmingar* is a somewhat more plausible bird-name (see discussion below).

<sup>88</sup> Stanza 39: *Mér bar hljómi fyr eyru í heimi dreyra sals, þás vit skilðumk, hǫr-Bil; skekkik dverga drykkju. Ok hjǫrraddar heggr hlýddi læmingja hoggvi tveggja rjúpkerar; dals dogg mun koma á drengi.*

come to men [men, i.e. the speaker].

Ok er þetta er tíðinda, heyra þau mannamál,  
ok er Eyjólfur þar kominn við inn fimmtánda  
mann, ok hafa áður komit til húss ok sjá  
dögglóðina sem vísat væri til.

And while that happened, they heard men's  
voices and Eyjólfur had arrived there with  
fourteen men and had previously gone to the  
house and seen the trail in the dew which  
showed the way.

### Commentary:

The last dream in the saga exposes the problems that beset our understanding of the saga. It is preserved only in the M and S versions of the saga. The dream is substantially different in both these versions and both have substantial problems and deficiencies. In both versions the prose writers understand the stanza attributed to Gísli differently and both understandings seem flawed. Furthermore the exact meaning of the stanza itself proves as elusive to the modern reader as it seems to have done to the twelfth-century writers and scribes. Yet despite these problems, Gísli's last dream still fulfils what must have been its intended role in the saga; that is raising the reader's anticipation of the final battle. As the cries of the birds in Gísli's dream die away, they are replaced by the voices of the men who will kill him.

### Differences between the prose versions

In the M version of the text Gísli dreams of birds coming into a house. These birds are red from wallowing in blood and sacrificial gore and make a terrible noise, or perhaps behave badly (*láta* can either mean 'to make a sound' or 'to behave'). There is also some similarity between these birds and the eagle that sprinkles blood about the building in Kostbera's dream in *Atlamál* (stanza 19, *Edda* 1962, 250). In the Eddic poem, it is clear that the eagle is Atli's fetch (*at væri hamr Atla*; 'it was in Atli's shape'), whereas the birds in Gísli's dream in the M version are not identified as such. Although one might compare the dream to wolf dreams, where the dreamer sees himself as human attacked by animal fetches, there is no mention in M of the number of birds in Gísli's dream (which would allow the reader to identify them specifically as the fetches of Gísli's attackers). Rather, the portrayal of the bird splashing in blood is reminiscent of the behaviour of the worse dream-woman in Gísli's earlier dreams. One can compare the description of the birds (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 34, p. 110):

[þeir] létu illiliga ok höfðu vákask í roðru ok blóði	They made a terrible noise / behaved badly and had wallowed in sacrificial gore and blood.
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with that of the dream-woman (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 24, p. 76):

[hon] vill jafnan ríða hann blóði ok roðru ok þvá honum í, ok lætr sér illiliga	‘[she] always wished to smear him in blood and sacrificial gore, and to wash him in it and behave horribly’
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Although he was familiar with the fetch image, the scribe of M used the birds more in the manner he had previously used the dream-woman, to shower Gísli with blood thereby predicting the wounds he will receive in the battle.

The writer of M tells us that these birds are called *læmingar*. Cleasby (1957, 403) defines the word masculine *læmingr*<sup>89</sup>, as ‘a loom’ (bird), but he cites only *Gísla saga* in support of this. J. Fulford Vicary (1887, 22) suggests the birds of Gísli’s dreams are “probably the *Tetrao rupestris*”. Turville-Petre (1976, 54; also 1972c 151-152) also supports the idea that the word means some kind of bird. He suggests that the birds relate to the red-throated diver, Icelandic *lómur*, whose summer colouring, size and eerie call bear some similarity to the description of the birds in the text. However, *læmingr* (or *læmingi*) is preserved nowhere else in Old Norse, nor is any species of bird known by this name in Modern Icelandic. Even if *læmingr* really was a bird species, it was not one with which the readership was very familiar as the writer felt the need to spell out the exact size of the birds (*meiri en rjúpkerar*; ‘larger than male ptarmigan’). Furthermore the ptarmigan seems an unlikely comparator for a red-throated diver (see Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom 1964, 48-49; and 208-209). Fritzner (1886-1896, II, 591) and de Vries (1962, 372) both link the word *læmingr* to *lómundr* meaning ‘lemming’, but this is clearly not the meaning that the scribe of M intended. It seems possible that the writer (either the saga author or scribe) used this bird-name to explain the otherwise obscure phrase *læmingja höggvi* in stanza 39, taking *læmingja* to be the genitive plural of a bird name.

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<sup>89</sup> Cleasby (1957) does not differentiate between æ and œ. On the question of the word *læmingar*, the phrase *í læmingi* and the form *læmingja* from the stanza, see Fritzner (1886-1896, II, 591); Kálund (1909); Nordgård (1924); Lindroth (1925); Stefán Einarsson (1934-1935, 94-96); de Vries (1962, 372); and Turville-Petre (1972c, 151-152; and 1976, 54).

In the S text the birds are described slightly differently. Firstly there are clearly only two of them and, unlike the M text, the two birds battle one another. Therefore the two birds do seem to be fetches of Gísli and the most important member of the attacking party, Eyjólfur inn grái. Bird fetches appear in two other dreams in the *Íslendingasögur*, *Flóamanna saga* (Flóam 1991, ch. 24, pp. 293-294) and *Gunnlaugs saga* (Gunnl 1938, ch. 2, pp. 53-55). Þorsteinn's dream in *Gunnlaugs saga* shows considerable similarity to Gísli's dream as it predicts a future conflict through the image of two birds fighting. I have already mentioned Kostbera's dream of an eagle in stanza 28 of *Atlamál* (also see *Vøls* 1906-1908, ch. 36, pp. 93-94). In stanza 42 of *Guðrúnarkviða II*, Atli dreams of his sons as two hawks (*Edda* 1962, 231). *Vølsunga saga* contains a further bird-dream, not preserved in any extant Eddic poem, where Guðrún imagines her future lover Sigurðr as a hawk with golden feathers (*Vøls* 1906-1908, ch. 26, p. 61). Given the existence of a similar dream in the German version of the Sigurðr legend, it seems likely that this dream also existed in an Eddic poem in the lacuna of the *Codex Regius* (Andersson 1981, 23-24).

The scribe of the S version also seems to have struggled with the word *læmingja* in the last line of the stanza. In this version the prose says that the birds *hjoggusk at í læmingi*. The phrase *í læmingi* seems to be used adverbially, to describe the manner in which strike one another. Cleasby (1957, 403) sees this merely as a metaphorical use of the bird-name *læmingr*; the birds struck one another in the manner of *læmingr* birds, i.e. 'by stealth'. Hjalmar Lindroth (1925, 64 and 66-67) broadly agrees with the meaning 'by stealth' given by Cleasby, but concludes that the word is unrelated to *læmingja hoggvi* of the stanza. Lindroth's argument is supported by Stefán Einarsson (1934-1935, 94-96). Both scholars suggest that the phrase may have been more common in the Vestfirðir than elsewhere in Iceland. Stefán Einarsson (1934-1935, 95) suggests the phrase had rather darker connotations and the word was probably related to the word *lómr* which "... both in Old and Mod. Icelandic must have had the meaning 'treachery', 'traitor', so naturally *læmingr* as a derived word also would mean 'treachery, deceit'".

Despite this confusion, the saga-writer continues to show some considerable skill in his presentation of the dream. After the stanza the writer brings the reader back to the present, to the narrative frame of Gísli telling his dreams to his wife, saying: *Ok er þetta er tíðinda, heyra þau mannamál* ('And when that had happened, they heard men's voices'). These are the voices of Eyjólfur and his companions at last come upon Gísli. Thus, as the screeches of the birds in the final dream die away, they are replaced

by the voices of the warriors. Throughout the latter half of the saga the author has constantly built up towards this final confrontation. He has pointed towards it through dreams, each demonstrating its relative proximity to the point in time that he is describing. It is therefore fitting that after Gísli's final dream the dreaming world and waking world almost merge, the screeching birds resembling the talking men, indicating that the end is at last here.

### Stanza 39

In the final dream-stanza of the saga, the speaker tells the woman (*hǫr-Bil*) that he heard a sound (*mér bar hljóð ... fyr eyru*). The kenning *dreyra salr* ('hall of blood') means 'heart'. Sigurður Nordal (*Gísl* 1943, ch. 34, p. 110) observes that the heart or breast was considered the home of the soul in Old Norse poetry. Therefore the kenning *heimr sals dreyra* seems to refer to the fact that the noise is occurring in the speaker's mind, and might therefore be compared to the phrase *hugðak* in the previous stanzas as indicating the speaker is describing a dream. The phrase *þás vit skilðumk* ('as soon as we parted') also seems to be directed to the woman. It may refer to the time of the battle, i.e. the battle takes place as soon as the speaker is separated from his wife. It may, however, also indicate that the dream occurs as soon as he falls asleep and might be compared with *Slikt dreymir mik ... es ek sofna* of stanza 35. The kenning *dverga drykkja* ('drink of the dwarves') means 'poetry' (see *SnE* 1998 I, 3-4). The form *skekik* seems to come from *skenkja + ek*. Although the form *skekja* is not found elsewhere, the assimilation of nk>kk is not uncommon in Old Norse (Kock 1923-1941, §1940). Thus in the imbedded clause in the first *helmingr* the speaker says that he is serving the drink of the dwarves, that is he is composing poetry.

In the second *helmingr*, *hjǫrrǫdd* ('noise of swords') is a kenning for battle and *heggr* ('tree') of battle for 'warrior'. Thus the speaker hears the blows of two ptarmigan and these seem to be the fetches of the dreamer and his adversary. The interpretation of *læmingja hoggvi* remains as elusive as it did when it apparently confused the scribes whose attempts to understand the stanza have been discussed above. Lindroth (1925, 65-66) understands it as a genitive plural of *læmingi*, and suggests the poet compares the blows of the birds with the bites of rodents. Turville-Petre (1972c, 151-152; 1976, 54) maintains the possibility that the M text was right in assuming *læmingja* to relate to a bird name and thus he reads *rjúpkera tveggja ... læmingja hoggvi* as 'the diver-blows of two cock ptarmigan'. Finnur Jónsson (*Gísl* 1929, 108; also *Lexicon Poeticum* 333)

assumes a form *læmingi* from *lám-*, which he relates to the Norwegian *laama paa* 'to walk heavily or quickly'. This would give a reading of 'the heavy blows of two ptarmigan', which at least fits well with the sense of the stanza. For my own part, I can offer no concrete solution. The sense must be as Finnur suggests, 'hard' or 'aggressive blows'. While I do not doubt the sharpness of the teeth of small mammals, I cannot reconcile 'lemming' or 'rodent' with the tone of the stanza. The speaker was surely not comparing the terrible wounds received in his final battle with the nips and scratches caused by rodents. I am also reluctant to accept Turville-Petre's reading, as this requires one to accept the poet included two different bird-names in his verse, something that could only have confused his listeners.



### V.viii Conclusion

The dreams of *Gísla saga* are probably more complex than any other saga. They go beyond mere narrative device and become part of the story itself. It would not be an overstatement to say that the latter half of *Gísla saga* is actually about dreaming. The author knew various different dream-traditions, both Christian and pre-Christian and was prepared to use these traditions side by side and even to combine them. Gísli's first two dreams and his final dream are of a traditional saga type, the fetch dream predicting a future conflict. Even here, however, the writer adapts the traditions and uses them more subtly than as a straightforward proleptic narrative device. The two dream-women are an interesting mixture of Christian and Pagan elements. The two dream-women clearly represent a dialectic, but the nature of that dialectic shifts throughout the text. At points they represent good and bad guardian angels, with the better dream-woman urging Gísli to behave in a Christian manner and promising him prosperity in an afterlife, the nature of which is always left just out of sight. At other points, they represent Gísli's earthly fortunes, with the better dream-woman seeking to offer Gísli protection and the worse dream-woman seeking to take his life.

While we can read and appreciate the saga in its preserved form, we can only make educated guesses as to the process of its creation. It seems likely that many of the dream-stanzas were composed prior to the surrounding prose. These verses fit together well and may have been part of larger poems, perhaps even introduced by short pieces of prose almost as a proto-saga. There can be little doubt that these stanzas tell the story of an outlaw, not unlike our saga hero, telling his terrible dreams to his wife. Nonetheless the person who took these stanzas and turned them into the saga we now possess, altered the order of the stanzas and reinterpreted them. As the saga-writer recreated each dream he took inspiration from several of the verses at once, separating elements from a single verse into two or more chapters of his story. In so doing he more clearly delineated the women described in the stanzas, creating the dichotomy for which the dreams of *Gísla saga* are justly famous, and adding new and deeper levels of meaning to the text.

## Chapter VI: The dreams of *Víga-Glúms saga*

### VI.i Introduction

*Víga-Glúms saga* tells the story of Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson, a chieftain in Eyjafjörður. After winning renown during a successful Norwegian trip, Glúmr returns to Iceland to find his mother already at odds with Þorkell inn hávi and his son Sigmundur. Glúmr eventually kills Sigmundur, which brings him into conflict with Þórarinn Þórisson and it is the rivalry between Glúmr at Þverá and Þórarinn at Espihóll that is central to the story. The enmity comes to a head with a battle in a field named Hrístateigr, where Þorvaldr krókr (Þórarinn's brother) is slain. Through a series of deceptions Glúmr misleads Þórarinn as to whether or not he is Þorvaldr's killer. Eventually Glúmr is prosecuted for the killing and forced to leave his farm at Þverá.

The saga is preserved complete in only one manuscript: AM 132 fol. (*Möðruvallabók*, written c.1330-1370). Fragments of a slightly different version of *Víga-Glúms saga* are also preserved in AM 445c I 4<sup>o</sup> (c.1390-1425) and in AM 564a 4<sup>o</sup> (c.1390-1425). AM 564a 4<sup>o</sup> was for many years thought to be part of the late fourteenth-century compilation of sagas referred to as *Vatnshyrna* (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956, v; and Turville-Petre 1960, xxii-xxiii). However, it now seems unlikely that *Vatnshyrna* ever contained *Víga-Glúms saga* (McKinnell 1993a, 689). The fragments of *Víga-Glúms saga* in AM 564a 4<sup>o</sup> are probably from the same codex as AM 445c I 4<sup>o</sup> and part of an entirely different compilation of sagas (McKinnell 1970, refers to this compilation as *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna*). The version in AM 132 fol. is shorter than that preserved in the fragments and generally thought to be an abridged version, with the fragmentary version representing the original saga more closely (McKinnell 1993b, 691). Of the fragments, only AM 445c I 4<sup>o</sup> is of relevance to the current study, as it preserves the portion of the saga containing Glúmr's first dream (see section VI.ii below).

The saga has been tentatively dated to around 1230 (McKinnell 1993b, 691) or between 1230 and 1240 (Turville-Petre 1960, xxii), though much of the material was transmitted orally prior to this. There is a possibility that Glúmr's conflict with the Esphælingar may have been told differently in a lost *Esphælinga saga*, which may have been used as a source by the saga author. The saga contains 13 stanzas, 11 of which are attributed to Glúmr himself (including several dream-stanzas). These stanzas contain a number of old word-forms and seem likely to predate the prose (Jónas Kristjánsson 1956, xxiii-xxv). Ursula Dronke (1981, 64) suggests these stanzas may have originally

been interspersed with prose to form an early version of the saga. Two of the stanzas from the saga (8 and 12 in *Glúm* 1956a) are also attributed to Glúmr by Snorri Sturluson (*SnE* 1998, I, 73-74 and 91).

In addition to the following passages there is a further dream-like sequence in chapter 19,<sup>90</sup> where Una Oddkelsdóttir is watching her husband Bárðr Hallason set off to collect some timber. Una turns and looks over her shoulder and then falls unconscious. When she awakes she explains her behaviour (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 19, p. 63): *Ek sá dauða menn ganga á mót honum Bárði, ok mun hann feigr vera, ok munu vit eigi sjást síðan* ('I saw dead men walking towards Bárðr, and he is fated to die and we will not see one another again'). As might be expected this prophecy proves true when Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson kills Bárðr. While obviously related to dream-motifs (for example it is similar to Glaumvǫr's dream of dead women calling to her husband in *Atlamál*, stanza 28, *Edda* 251), this is not specifically a dream. The action of looking over her shoulder allows Una to see through supernatural means what could not otherwise be seen. The vision of her husband being approached by dead spirits is thus a waking vision, appearing before and perhaps causing her collapse into unconsciousness.

#### **Editions:**

*Glúm* 1956a = *Víga-Glúms saga*. In *Eyfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Jónas Kristjánsson. Íslenzk fornrit 9. (Prints the AM 132 text as main text and the fragments as supplementary text).

*Glúm* 1956b = *Håndskriftet AM 445c, I, 4to: Brudstykker af Víga-Glúms saga og Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Ed. Jón Helgason. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 66. (Prints the AM 445c manuscript).

*Glúm* 1960 = *Víga-Glúms saga*. Ed. G. Turville-Petre. Second edition. (Prints the AM 132 text as main-text and the fragments as appendices).

#### **Translations:**

*Glúm* 1997 = *Killer-Glums saga*. Trans. John McKinnell. In *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders II*.

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<sup>90</sup> All chapter references are to the AM 132 version, as printed in the Íslenzk fornrit volume (*Glúm* 1956a).

## VI.ii Glúmr's dream of the huge woman

### Context:

Vigfúss Sigurðarson, Glúmr's maternal grandfather and pre-eminent ancestor, is a *hersir* in Vǫrs in Norway. Chapter 6 of the saga describes Glúmr's expedition to Norway and encounter with Vigfúss. At first Vigfúss is uncertain about Glúmr's claims of kinship, but he realises their veracity when Glúmr refuses to give in to a berserk's bullying. When Glúmr departs from Norway, Vigfúss gives him a valuable cloak, spear and sword and warns Glúmr not to part with these objects. Some years after Glúmr's return to Iceland he has the following dream, which indicates the death of his grandfather.

### Text:

*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 9, pp. 30-31.

*Glúm* 1956b, 30-31

*Glúm* 1960, ch. 9, pp. 15-16.

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 118; BI, 112.

Þat er sagt, at Glúm dreyndi eina nótt: hann þóttisk vera úti staddr á bæ sínum ok sjá út til fjarðarins. Hann þóttisk sjá konu eina ganga útan eptir heraðinu, ok stefndi þangat til Þverár; en hon var svá mikil, at axlarnar tóku út fjöllin tveggja vegna. En hann þóttisk ganga ór garði á mót henni ok bauð henni til sín; ok síðan vaknaði hann. Qllum þótti undarligt, en hann segir svá: "Draumr er mikill ok merkiligr, en svá mun ek hann ráða, at Vigfús, móðurfaðir minn, mun nú vera andaðr, ok myndi kona sjá hans hamingja vera, er fjöllum hæra gekk. Ok var hann um aðra menn fram um flesta hluti at virðingu, ok hans hamingja mun leita sér þangat staðfestu, sem ek em." En um sumarit, er skip kómu út, spurðisk andlát Vigfúss. Þá kvað Glúmr vísu:

It is said that Glúmr dreamed one night. He thought that he was standing outside at his farm and looking out to the fjord. He thought he saw a woman walking from the sea into the district, and she headed that way towards Þverá and she was so large that her shoulders touched the mountains on either side. And he thought that he went out of the yard to meet her and invited her to stay with him, and then he woke up. Everyone thought this strange, but he said this: "It is a great and notable dream and I will interpret it thus: that Vigfúss, my maternal grandfather, must now be dead and that woman, who walked taller than the mountains, must have been his *hamingja*. He was, in most things, honoured above other men and his *hamingja* will be seeking to make her abode, at that place where I am." And during the summer, when ships came out to Iceland, the death of Vigfúss became known. Then Glúmr said this stanza:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>2. Fara sák holms und hjalmi<br/>hauks í miklum auka<br/>Jǫrð at Eyjafirði<br/>ísungs, fira dísi,<br/>þá svát dóms í draumi<br/>dals ótta mér þótti<br/>felli-Guðr með fjöllum,<br/>folkvandar bjóðr, standa.<sup>91</sup></p> | <p>I saw the Jǫrð of the ice of the hawk's island<br/>[hawk's island, i.e. arm or wrist; ice of the<br/>wrist, i.e. silver; Jǫrð of silver, i.e. woman],<br/>the <i>dís</i> of men, travelling in a helm to<br/>Eyjafjörðr; she was of great size - thus it<br/>seemed to me then in a dream - a deciding-<br/>Guðr of the court of the bow-terror [bow-<br/>terror, i.e. sword or weapon; court of the<br/>sword, i.e. battle; deciding-Guðr of the<br/>battle, i.e. that which brings the battle to an<br/>end, a valkyrie] stands alongside mountains,<br/>O commander of the battle-staff [commander<br/>of the battle-staff, i.e. warrior].</p> |
|---|--|

### Commentary:

This is the only dream in *Víga-Glúms saga* preserved in both AM 132 fol. and AM 445c I 4<sup>o</sup>. The text in the fragment is damaged and many words are illegible. From what can be understood the two versions differ only slightly. Glúmr's dream contains what is one of the most interesting depictions of a dream-woman anywhere in Norse literature. The reference to her as Vigfúss' *hamingja* (see below) suggests a link between dream-women and concepts of innate luck as depicted in *konungasögur*. The use of this word, *hamingja*, in Glúmr's dream is also reminiscent of its repeated use in *Vatnsdæla saga*. The dream has important roles in the narrative. For Glúmr himself the dream brings news of events far away. For the reader the dream effectively draws to a conclusion the Norwegian episodes and ends the saga's depiction of Glúmr's youth. The stanza which Glúmr speaks in the passage fits its prose context well, but seems likely to date from earlier than the surrounding prose.

### The concept of *hamingja* as guardian spirit

As with Gísli's dream-women in *Gísla saga* and to some extent Án's dream-woman in *Laxdæla saga*, this woman represents a guardian spirit. In this case the woman is referred to as Vigfúss' *hamingja*. This word means 'luck' or 'fortune' in an abstract sense, but also refers to a person's inherent luck, which might be personified in

<sup>91</sup> Stanza 2. *Sák hauks holms ísungs Jǫrð, fira dísi, fara und hjalmi at Eyjafirði í miklum auka, svát mér þótti þá í draumi dals ótta dóms felli-Guðr standa með fjöllum, folkvandar bjóðr.*

a form similar to that of a guardian spirit.<sup>92</sup> The concept of *hamingja* seems to have been specifically associated with kingship. In *Óláfs saga helga*, from *Heimskringla*, Hjalti Skeggjason says to King Óláfr: *ok þurfum vér nú þess mjök, konungr, at þú leggir hamingju þína á þessa ferð* ('and we need this a lot, Sire, that you send your *hamingja* on this journey') (*Hkr* 1945, *Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 69, p. 88; compare *Laxd* 1934, ch. 21, p. 53; and *PorvT* 1956, 120). Given the earnestness of Hjalti's entreaty to the King, one cannot interpret this as Hjalti wanting the King to wish him well, rather Hjalti is hoping to receive actual benefit from the King's *hamingja* on his journey. It seems that the King's *hamingja* might be detached from him and sent to accompany his emissary to assist in a quest in the King's name. One can find such examples of courtiers benefiting from the King's *hamingja*. In *Fóstbræðra saga* Þormóðr is granted aid in his battle against Falgeirr from the *hamingja* of King Óláfr Haraldsson (*Fbr* 1943, ch. 23, p. 240). In *Njáls saga*, the only detail that the viking Kolr reveals about his dream prior to the attack of Þráinn Sigfússon, is that it somehow involves Hákon which suggests that the Earl may have sent his *hamingja* to assist Þráinn in his pursuit of Kolr and that it is this which affects him in his dream (*Nj* 1954, ch. 82, pp. 199-200). The concept of *hamingja*, however, was not only associated with kings. In *Vatnsdæla saga*, the success of the Ingimundarsons is repeatedly credited to the strength of the *hamingja*, which they have inherited from their father, as he had from his.<sup>93</sup>

The term *hamingja*, however, probably also had some positive moral weight to it. The term is sometimes contrasted with evil magic (e.g. *Hkr* 1945, *Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 9, p. 11; *OStór* 1991, ch. 8, pp. 415-416). Peter Hallberg (1973, 161) notes a particular proliferation of mentions of *hamingja* in the sagas of the Christian kings Óláfr Haraldsson and Óláfr Tryggvason in *Heimskringla*. Although one should not interpret Vigfúss' *hamingja* as Christian, it nevertheless is associated with his positive qualities

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<sup>92</sup> The word *hamingja* comes from *hamr* meaning both 'shape' and 'covering' (de Vries 1962, 207; and 1956-1957, I, §161, pp. 222-223). De Vries compares the form *\*ham-gengja* to *hamhleypa* ('one who can travel in animal form') and suggests that the concept owes its origins to the idea of sending out one's spirit while in a trance state, and to the idea of importance of the afterbirth (i.e. covering) in fetch concepts. The word gradually became used for the abstract concept of luck in addition to the semi-concrete idea of the luck or protection a guardian spirit might bring.

<sup>93</sup> *Hamingja* is mentioned repeatedly throughout *Vatnsdæla saga* always with at least a semi-concrete sense (see for example *Vatn* 1939, ch. 2, pp. 5-6; ch. 3, p. 6; ch. 4, pp. 11-12; ch. 5, p. 15; ch. 7, p. 17; ch. 10, p. 28; ch. 11, p. 32; ch. 13, p. 37; ch. 20, p. 56; ch. 26, p. 70; and ch. 33, p. 89). On the concept of *hamingja* in *Vatnsdæla saga* see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939, xxviii-xxix; and Hallberg 1973, 166-168.

as the size of the woman relates to the extent of Vigfúss' honour (*virðing*). Thus the *hamingja* and the protection which it offers Glúmr contrasts positively with the sacrifices carried out by his enemy Þorkell inn hávi.

#### The transfer of the guardian spirit

The *hamingja* in Glúmr's dream is linked to a specific person, Vigfúss, but upon his death the *hamingja* moves to his descendant. In the dream, Vigfúss' *hamingja* comes to live with Glúmr and, one assumes, adds to his own power and luck. This suggests a cumulative system, whereby every person has dwelling with them the combined spirits of their ancestors. A man might not only inherit wealth and honour (or shame) from his ancestors, he might also inherit their inbuilt good-luck.

In his interpretation of the dream Glúmr comments that the *hamingja* is seeking to lodge with him (*leita sér þangat staðfestu, sem ek em*). This suggests that the transfer of the *hamingja* from one person to another required some kind of agreement on the part of the recipient to receive the *hamingja*. In the dream Glúmr goes out to the yard and invites the *hamingja* home with him, demonstrating his acceptance of her. There is a parallel to this in a waking vision occurring in *Hallfreðar saga*. Hallfreðr spends his final days aboard a ship returning to Iceland with his sons, Þorvaldr and Hallfreðr. As Hallfreðr realises his final moments are upon him, an apparition is seen from the boat (*Hallfr* 1939, ch. 11, p. 198):

Þá sá þeir konu ganga eptir skipinu; hon var mikil ok í brynju; hon gekk á bylgjum sem á landi. Hallfreðr leit til ok sá, at þar var fylgjukona hans. Hallfreðr mælti: "Í sundr segi ek öllu við þik." Hon mælti: "Villtu, Þorvaldr, taka við mér?" Hann kvazk eigi vilja. Þá mælti Hallfreðr ungi: "Ek vil taka við þér." Síðan hvarf hon.

Then they saw a woman walking behind their ship; she was large and in chainmail. She walked on the waves as if on land. Hallfreðr looked and saw that there was his *fylgjukona*. Hallfreðr said: "I announce that I am wholly parted from you." She said: "Þorvaldr, do you want to receive me?" He said that he did not want to. Then Hallfreðr the younger said: "I will receive you." Then she disappeared.

Hallfreðr dies soon afterwards. Although the two sagas use different terms to refer to the women, in both *Hallfreðar saga* and *Víga-Glúms saga* at the point of death a guardian spirit passes from one person to a descendant. In both texts the guardian spirit appears in the form of a woman of tremendous size, wearing armour and walking upon water. In *Hallfreðar saga*, Þorvaldr's refusal to accept the *fylgjukona* may be read either as a reflection of his feelings of inadequacy and inability to live up to the

tremendous reputation of his father or a disavowal of the pagan ways associated with female guardians. The *Hallfreðar saga* scene makes clear that, at the point of transfer, the guardian spirit requires some sort of welcome or agreement on the part of the recipient in order to pass. By extension, one might suppose that had Glúmr not invited the *hamingja* into his house in his dream, his grandfather's guardian spirit may not have transferred to him.

The transferral of a female guardian spirit is also suggested in a series of three dreams in the short text referred to as *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar* (ÞSHDr 1950, 323-325). Each night Þorsteinn dreams of three women who warn him that his slave Gilli is plotting his murder. On the last night the women ask to whom they should go after Þorsteinn's death. Þorsteinn suggests his son Magnús, but the women reply that they will not be able to stay with him long. In this case we find, as in *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Hallfreðar saga*, the idea of female guardian spirits transferring to another family member on a person's death. Þorsteinn's dream-women comment that they will not be able to stay long with his son implying that the son's death will closely follow the father's. Another example occurs in *Laxdæla saga* (Laxd 1934, ch. 67, pp. 197-198). On his journey to the Alþingi, Þorgils Hølluson encounters a large woman travelling in the opposite direction. He comments on the portentousness of the fact that she is leaving the assembly as he arrives. This woman seems likely to be Þorgils' guardian spirit and her departure from him indicative of his impending death.

#### The meaning and function of Glúmr's dream

Within the saga the dream brings news of the death of Vigfúss from Norway to Iceland. I have already mentioned dreams which carry news in regards to Høskuldr's dream in *Njáls saga*. Where Høskuldr's dream merely carried information from one side of the district to the other, Glúmr's dream transports it halfway across the Atlantic. A comparable example can be found in *Gunnlaugs saga* where, shortly after the deaths of Gunnlaugr and Hrafn in Norway, they both appear in dreams to their respective fathers Illugi and Önundr in Iceland to inform them of the battle in verse (*Gunnl* 1938, ch. 13, pp. 104-105). Although these two dreams in *Gunnlaugs saga* are very different in content to Glúmr's, all three dreams transport information more quickly than would be possible in other ways. One might also compare Glúmr's dream to that of Earl Gilli, bringing news of the Battle of Clontarf in *Njáls saga*. Glúmr's dream is specifically said to occur in winter. Although winter seems to have been a particularly prolific time



for portentous dreams (see section V.iii), in this case winter has a further significance. During the winter months Iceland was effectively cut off from the rest of the world. Thus Glúmr could not have known of the death of his grandfather by natural means and the veracity of the dream cannot be confirmed until the following summer. This stresses the supernatural means by which the news has travelled.

Although the meaning of the dream for the characters is to bring news of Vigfúss' death, its function within the text is very different. Vigfúss' being alive or dead has very little bearing on the plot for the remainder of the saga. Rather, the dream functions as a confirmation that Glúmr has reached full maturity. His first encounter with Vigfúss is confrontational, when the older man refuses to accept their kinship. Through episodes demonstrating his bravery and prowess, Glúmr proves himself a worthy descendant and this is confirmed by the transfer of the *hamingja* to him upon Vigfúss' death. The dream also demonstrates the extent which Glúmr's standing and success is dependent on his mother's Norwegian family. In chapter 6, when Glúmr takes leave of his grandfather Vigfúss, the latter gives him three gifts: a cloak, a sword and a spear. The supernatural nature of these gifts is stressed as Vigfúss tells Glúmr (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 6, p. 19): *ok meðan þú átt gripina, vænti ek, at þú týnir eigi virðingu, en þá em ek hræddr um, ef þú lógar þeim* ('and while you possess these treasures, I expect that you will not lose your honour, but I am concerned if you part with them'). It is noticeably his reputation (*virðing*, the same word associated with the size of the *hamingja* in Glúmr's dream) which is protected and not his life. Therefore the three treasures grant an invulnerability to Glúmr's position. The *hamingja* is part of this protection, passed on from his grandfather to watch over Glúmr.

#### Glúmr's dream and *Heimskringla*

The description of the woman striding in from the sea in Glúmr's dream is among the most visually striking descriptions in the dreams of the *Íslendingasögur*. Glúmr's farm Þverá stands just inland from the bottom of the Eyjafjörður in North Iceland. In the dream the woman walks from the fjord south into the district. Assuming that she has walked all the way from Norway, she has walked along the north coast of Iceland then south into the fjord, taking the route that a ship might take. An interesting parallel can be found between Glúmr's dream and the *landvætr* episode in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*. In this episode King Haraldr Gormsson sends a wizard to investigate Iceland. The wizard encounters a series of spirits opposing him. Gabriel

Turville-Petre (*Glúm* 1960, 64 note) observed a similarity between the description of Eyjafjörðr in *Heimskringla* and in Glúmr's dream (*Hkr* 1941, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 33, p. 271):

En hann lagðisk í brot ok vestr fyrir land,  
allt fyrir Eyjafjörð. Fór hann inn eptir þeim  
firði. Þar fór móti honum fugl svá mikill, at  
vængirnir tóku út fjöllin tveggja vegna, ok  
fjöldi annarra fugla, bæði stórir ok smáir.

And he headed away, and went along the coast,  
right to Eyjafjörðr. Then he went in along the  
fjord. There he encountered a bird so big that its  
wings touched the mountains on either side, and  
many other birds both large and small.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1958, 85-86) was also struck by the similarity of the passages, particularly the way the wings of the bird touched the mountains in the same manner as the shoulders of the woman. Einar felt that the authenticity of the stanza spoken by Glúmr upon waking was beyond doubt (see below), and that the stanza provided the model for the writer of the *Íslendingasaga*. He therefore concluded that Snorri had modelled the wizard's encounter with the *landvættir* of Eyjafjörðr on the account in Glúmr's dream.

#### Glúmr's stanza

It is noticeable that (according to the prose) the stanza is not spoken when Glúmr awakes, but when he hears news of Vigfúss' death the following summer. This stanza exhibits a number of complex kennings, and scholars have not always been in complete agreement about how it should be read. In the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition Jónas Kristjánsson understands *ísungr* as "ice" and therefore ice of the hand (*holmr hauks*) as silver and the Jörð of silver as woman (*Glúm* 1956a, 31-32 note). He takes *fira dís* as 'dís of men' (i.e. 'guardian spirit'). This gives the meaning: 'I saw the woman, *dís* of men, of great size, walking beneath a helm to Eyjafjörðr'. Turville-Petre essentially agrees with this meaning but takes *ísungr* to mean headdress and Jörð of the headdress to mean woman (*Glúm* 1960, 64 note). Turville-Petre amends *fira* to *fýra* and takes it with *holmr hauks* to mean 'fire of the hawk's island', i.e. gold and therefore the *dís* of gold being a woman.<sup>94</sup> Finnur Jónsson (*Skjaldedigtning* BI, 118) also emends *fira*, but to *funa*, genitive of *funi* ('flame'), giving the kenning *holms hauks funa dís* ('dís of gold' (the flame of the island of the hawk)). The second *helmingr* causes further debate. Both Jónas Kristjánsson and Turville-Petre agree that manuscript *bioð* (or *bauð* as it is

<sup>94</sup> Turville-Petre offers another explanation in *Scaldic Poetry* (1976, 58), amending *fira* to *firna* (genitive plural of feminine *firnar* or neuter *firn*), giving *firna dís* ('monstrous goddess').

in AM 445c 4<sup>o</sup>) in line 8 should be amended to *bjóðr* ('summoner'). This gives the kenning *folkvandar bjóðr* ('summoner of the battle-staff') meaning warrior. This appears to be vocative, but the prose gives us no indication to whom Glúmr might be speaking when he says the stanza.

Despite these complications the stanza seems to fit the prose quite closely. Assuming that Jörð is accusative, in the first *helmingr* the speaker says that he saw a woman of great size wearing a helm travelling to Eyjafjörðr. The second *helmingr* confirms that this apparition appeared in a dream and again stresses the immense size of the woman by saying she stands alongside the mountains (a detail almost identical to the prose). Line 5 echoes a line in a dream stanza by Þormóðr kolbrúnarskáld: *mér barsk dóms í drauma* (*Fbr* 1943, ch. 11, p. 176). However, as both Þormóðr and Glúmr's stanzas are apparently old it is hard to know in which direction this influence occurred, or indeed if the similarity is simply coincidence. If both stanzas are by the skalds to whom they are attributed (which is plausible in each case), then Þormóðr's stanza would be the borrower.

### Conclusion

The first dream of *Víga-Glúms saga* is essentially a news dream, but has a further function building up Glúmr's character by transferring luck and honour from his own grandfather. Such a reference to a female guardian spirit as a *hamingja* is unusual. Nevertheless it is supported by other descriptions of *hamingja* personified in *konungasögur* or in *Vatnsdæla saga* and by other descriptions of guardian spirits such as *fylgjukonur* and *ættarfylgjur* such as those in *Laxdæla saga*, *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar* and *Hallfreðar saga*.

### VI.iii Glúmr's dreams of the whetstone and women

#### Context:

The conflict between Þórarinn Þórisson and Glúmr is central to the plot of *Víga-Glúms saga*. Þórarinn is on the losing side of the lawsuit against Glúmr, following Glúmr's killing of Sigmundur Þorkelsson. Nonetheless Þórarinn is reluctant to be drawn into further confrontation with Glúmr, until the killing of Glúmr's kinsman Steinólfr Arnórsson by Arngrímur Þorgrímsson. Arngrímur turns to Þórarinn for support, knowing that it will fall to Glúmr to pursue the case against him. During the winter Glúmr becomes increasingly wary and sleeps little. One night his son Már asks how he has slept, and he replies with a verse saying that he will not accept any compensation and then tells of two dreams he has had. The dreams foretell the battle at Hrístateigr where Glúmr kills Þorvaldr krókr, Þórarinn's brother.

#### Text:

*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 21, pp. 70-72.

*Glúm* 1960, ch. 21, pp. 35-36.

*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 118-119; BI, 113.

“Nú skal segja þér draum minn: Ek hugðumk ganga hér ór garði einn saman ok slyppr, en mér þótti Þórarinn ganga at móti mér ok hafa harðstein mikinn í hendi, ok þóttumk ek vanbúinn við fundi okkrum. Ok er ek hugðak at, sá ek annan harðstein hjá mér, ok réðumk ek í mót. Ok er vit fundumsk, þá vildi hvárr ljósta annan; en steinarnir kómu saman, ok varð af brestr hár.” Már spyr: “Hvárt þótti þér heita mega híbýlabrestr?” Glúmr svarar: “Meiri var en svá.” “Þótti þér heita mega heraðsbrestr?” Glúmr svarar: “Vel er því til jafnat, því at ek þóttumk vita, at heyrði um allt heraði. Ok er ek vaknaða, kvað ek vísu:

“Now I will tell you my dream: I thought that I was walking here away from the farm, alone and unarmed, and it seemed to me that Þórarinn was walking to meet me and had a large whetstone in his hands and I thought that I was unprepared for our meeting. But when I thought about it, I saw another whetstone beside me and I went towards him. And when we met each other, then each of us wanted to strike the other and the stones came together and this produced a tremendous crash.” Már asked: “Did it seem to you that that might be called the crashing of a farmstead?” Glúmr answered: “It was more than that.” “Did it seem to you as might be called the crashing of a district?” Glúmr answered: “That is a good estimation, because I thought that I knew it was heard throughout the district. And when I woke up, I spoke a stanza:

5. Harðsteini lét húna  
 harðgeðr lima fjarðar,  
 þat sá, dóms, í draumi,  
 dyn-Njörðr mik of barðan.  
 En ek þrádráttar þóttumk,  
 þjósti keyrðr, of ljósta  
 sævar Hrafns í svefni  
 snarbeinanda steini.<sup>95</sup>
- The hardy Clash-Njörðr of the branches of the court of the bear-cubs of the fjord [bear-cubs of the fjord, i.e. ships; court of ships, i.e. sea-battle; the limbs of battle, i.e. swords(?); Clash-Njörðr of swords, i.e. warrior<sup>96</sup>] gave me battle using a whetstone; it appeared in a dream; I thought that in my sleep I struck a swift-steerer of the Hrafn of the sea [Hrafn (the horse of king Áli) of the sea, i.e. ship; a swift-steerer of a ship, i.e. sea-farer] with an oft-pulled stone [oft-pulled stone, i.e. whetstone], driven by anger.
- Már kvað þat líkligt, at sannask myndi fornkveðit mál, - “at hvárr ykkarr mun ljósta annan illum steini, áðr létti.” Glúmr svarar: “Eigi er óvænt, at slíkt sé; berr nú mart fyrir. Er enn annarr draumr at segja þér. Ek þóttumk úti staddr, ok sá ek konur tvær. Þær hofðu trog í milli sín, ok námu þær staðar á Hrisateigi ok jósu blóði um héraðit allt. Ok vaknaða ek síðan, ok hygg ek fyrir tíðendum vera,” - ok kvað vísu:
- Már said it was likely, that the old saying would prove true - “that each of you will strike the other with an ill stone, before leaving off.” Glúmr answered: “It is not unexpected that it will be this way, many signs point to it. There is another dream to relate to you. I thought that I was stood outside and I saw two women. They had a trough between them and they stopped at Hrisateigr and sprinkled blood about the whole district. And then I awoke, and I think it portends great events.” And he spoke a stanza:
6. Menstiklir sá mikla,  
 mun sverðabrák verða,  
 komin es grára geira,  
 goðreið of tröð, kveðja,  
 þar's ósynjur jósu  
 eggmóts of fjör seggja,  
 vinir fagna því vagna,  
 vígmóðar fram blóði.<sup>97</sup>
- The scatterer of necklaces [scatterer of necklaces, i.e. generous man] saw a great god-ride over the cattle-pen - a sword clash will happen, the greeting of grey spears [greeting of grey spears, i.e. battle] has arrived - there where the battle-eager goddesses of battle [goddesses of battle, i.e. valkyries] sprinkled the life-blood of men over bodies. The friends of chariots(?) [friend(s) of chariots, i.e. Óðinn] welcomed this.

<sup>95</sup> Stanza 5: *Harðgeðr fjarðar húna dóms lima dyn-Njörðr lét mik of barðan harðsteini; þat sá í draumi; en ek þóttumk í svefni of ljósta sævar Hrafns snarbeinanda þrádráttar steini, þjósti keyrðr.*

<sup>96</sup> This kenning is problematic (see commentary).

<sup>97</sup> Stanza 6: *Menstiklir sá mikla goðreið of tröð; - sverðabrák mun verða; komin es kveðja grára geira; - þar's eggmóts ósynjur jósu vígmóðar fram blóði of fjör seggja. Vagna vinir fagna því.*

**Commentary:**

Once again this passage shows the variety and flexibility of dreams, not only within a single saga, but within a chapter. Although these two dreams are narrated consecutively, they are very different. In the first, Glúmr and his enemy both appear in human form, but their conflict is represented by a series of puns. The second dream is a more straightforward prophecy, as two dream-women shower the district with blood, spilled from a kind of trough they carry, representing the wounds and killings at the battle at Hrístateigr. The two dreams are narrated in the first person, as Glúmr tells them to his son Már. The interchanges between Glúmr and Már are skilfully handled. The narrator frames the whole scene as a conversation between the two men, keeping each speech short. The interpretation emerges from the two men exchanging ideas and gradually arriving at a conclusion. Two stanzas occur in the passage (stanzas 5 and 6), which are supposedly spoken by Glúmr to Már as he describes his dreams.

The whetstones

The dream begins with Glúmr stood outside his farm. He sees Þórarinn walking towards him carrying a whetstone (*harðsteinn*). His first thought is that he is unprepared for the meeting. He picks up another whetstone and this seems to suffice. Given the importance of keeping tools and weapons sharp in medieval society, the whetstone was an important symbol, linked to authority and kingship. Stephen Mitchell (1985, 12) describes this relationship in the following way:

The importance of the smith in early Germanic society may in part be accounted for by 1) the significance and awe-inspiring nature of his work, 2) the sparks produced in all phases of metal-working and their association with the sky and thunder, and by extension \**Tiwaz*, the sky god, and 3) the ancient relationship between the concepts of stone and the firmament.

The king as the giver of weapons and commander of troops has a close link to the smith. Although not specifically related to kingship, Glúmr's dream is undoubtedly about authority. The whetstones in the dream symbolise the authority over the district for which he and Þórarinn are contesting (Mitchell 1985, 19).

Mitchell (1985) identifies four instances in Old Norse literature where whetstones have a prominent role in the narrative. The first is Glúmr's dream. The second occurs in *Gautreks saga* (*Gautr* 1944, ch. 9, pp. 33-34). Gautrekr, who has been morose since the death of his wife, habitually sits on her burial mound throwing stones at his hawks. A man named Refr hands him a whetstone (the word *heinarbrýni* is used

rather than *harðsteinn*), in place of a normal stone. The whetstone strikes the bird and Gautrekr is delighted, rewarding Refr richly. The third instance occurs in *Skáldskaparmál* (*SnE* 1998, I, 4). Óðinn encounters nine slaves of the giant Baugi and offers to sharpen their scythes. He removes a whetstone (*brýni*) from his belt and sharpens the scythes. He then offers to sell the whetstone for whatever the buyer thinks is a reasonable price and throws it into the air. In their struggle to catch the whetstone the nine slaves kill each other. The fourth instance, and the closest in similarity to Glúmr's dream, also occurs in *Skáldskaparmál* (*SnE* 1998, I 21-22). In this case Þórr discovers the giant Hrungrnir drinking in Valhøll and challenges him to a duel. At the appointed time Hrungrnir comes carrying a stone shield and an enormous whetstone (*hein*) over his shoulder as a weapon. Þórr throws his hammer at the giant, who casts the whetstone at Þórr. The two weapons collide in mid-air. The hammer continues on its course, hitting and killing the giant. The whetstone breaks in two, half of which hits Þórr, the other half shatters into many further pieces, falling to the ground and forming the whetstones of the world. These four instances all share the following elements: a whetstone being tossed in the air; the stone being used as a weapon (though indirectly in the Óðinn example); and it causing an injury or serious consequence. Thus the unusual dream in *Víga-Glúms saga* is underpinned by a mythological archetype. The battle between Þórr and Hrungrnir is the closest analogue to Glúmr's dream, as the whetstone collides with another missile in mid-air. It seems likely that the *Víga-Glúms saga* author knew the etiological story about the origin of whetstones and decided to re-enact it in Glúmr's dream.

Though undoubtedly using this mythological model and the association between whetstones and authority, the real meaning of the dream actually turns on the linguistic qualities of Glúmr's description and Már's interpretation. Már gives his explanation of the dream: *Már kvað þat líkligt, at sannask myndi fornkveðit mál, - "at hvárr ykkarr mun ljósta annan illum steini, áðr létti."* ('Már said it was likely, that the old saying would prove true - "that each of you will strike the other with an ill stone before leaving off"). The phrase *ljósta einhvern illum steini* ('to strike someone with a ill stone') is likely to have originated from the practice of opposing armies throwing stones at one another, but it seems to have become a metaphorical phrase meaning 'to strike someone a hard blow' (Halldór Halldórsson 1978-1980, II, 177). Therefore, as with Þorkell Eyjólfsson's dream of his enormous beard in *Laxdæla saga*, Glúmr's dream is at least partially a set-phrase dream of the sort described by Wilhelm Henzen (1890, 44-45).

Despite its mythological basis, the image of Glúmr and Þórarinn striking one another with whetstones makes little sense unless it is understood as a literal representation of the phrase *ljósta einhvern illum steini*. The phrase appears in a stanza by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, where it is used metaphorically rather than literally, suggesting that the phrase was relatively well-known at an early date (*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 374; BI, 344; *Hkr* 1951, *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, ch. 73, p. 166). In *Víga-Glúms saga*, the use of the word *harðsteinn* (literally 'hard-stone') to refer to the whetstone, rather than *hein* or *bryni*, hints at the metaphorical meaning of the phrase without revealing it. However, it is noticeable that, although Glúmr's dream illustrates the phrase, the phrase itself is not spoken in Glúmr's narration of the dream, just as is the case in Þorkell's dream in *Laxdæla saga*. The writer maintains the distinction between the form of the dream and its meaning for the dreamer. Only Már's interpretation explicitly makes this link between form and meaning. The fact that the dialogue changes from reported speech to direct speech at this point emphasises the importance of the phrase.

#### The noise of the stones colliding

The symbolism of Glúmr's dream is, however, more complex than this single set-phrase. The crash that the two whetstones make as they collide clearly relates to the forthcoming battle. The link between loud noises and battles is one commonly found in skaldic poetry, where battles are referred to in kennings as great noises of weapons such as swords or spears (Meissner 1921, 186-189). The same association is found in a dream in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. King Gormr has a series of three dreams of oxen while sleeping in his specially designed dream chamber during the winter-nights festival. In the third of these dreams, Gormr sees three black oxen emerging from the sea then returning, whereupon he hears the crash (*brestr*) of a wave which can be heard across all Denmark. His future wife Þyri Haraldsdóttir interprets this in the following way (*Jvs* 1969, ch. 2, pp. 67): *Ok þú heyrðir brest mikinn er særinn féll á land, það mun vera fyrir ófriði stóreflismanna, ok munu þeir hér finnast í Danmörku ok eiga hér bardaga ok orrostur stórar* ('And when you heard a great crash, which resounded when the wave broke against the land, that will symbolise a war between great men and they will meet one another here in Denmark and have a battle here and great confrontations').

In Glúmr's dream, however, there is also a pun turning on the word *brestr*, which can mean both 'a crash' and 'a loss' (Cleasby 1957, 79; Turville-Petre 1972b, 36). Thus when Glúmr says *ok varð af brestr hár*, he means both 'and a loud crash



came from this' and 'and a great loss resulted from this'. Thus, in addition to the set-phrase aspect of the dream, Glúmr's dream is also a word-play or pun dream (*Wortwitztraum*, see Henzen 1890, 44).<sup>98</sup> Such word-play in saga dreams is not uncommon and similar examples can be found in Þórhaddr's series of twelve dreams in *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* (*ÞSH* 1950, ch. 4, pp. 309-313), for example the similarity in sound between the words *tungl* ('moon') and *tunga* ('tongue'), or *bjarg* ('cliff') and *björg* ('aid', genitive *bjargar*). The *Víga-Glúms saga* author seems to have had a particular interest in puns and word-play and one can find a number of such instances in his saga. For example, there is a pun upon the name Hloðu-Kálfr meaning 'barn-calf' (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 14, p. 47), and later upon the similarity between the name *Skúta* and the word *skúti* meaning 'cave' (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 16, p. 54-55). These examples are very similar to the use of names in some word-play dreams (see for example *Stu* 1906-1911, II, 222). Word-play is also found within the very workings of the saga plot, such as the stanza where Glúmr reveals that he is the killer of Þorvaldr (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 23, p. 81) (though our understanding of this stanza is hampered by its poor preservation), or the ambiguous oaths Glúmr swears to avoid conviction (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 25, p. 86). The pun on the word *brestr* in Glúmr's dream is just one instance of the word-play of which the author of *Víga-Glúms saga* author seems to have enjoyed, and is in keeping with a tradition of word-play in saga dreams.

The author's control of his narrative, his careful choice of diction and manipulation of first and third person narration, is demonstrated by his treatment of Glúmr's dream. The framing of the dream within the conversation between Glúmr and his son, with the short exchanges, almost interruptions, between the pair is used to gradually reveal the dream's meaning. Both the set-phrase and word-play aspects of the dream are brought out in this dialogue. Given its context in the dream, the reader is most likely to understand Glúmr's words *ok varð af brestr hár* as 'and this produced a tremendous crash' without a second thought. Már, however, picks up on the word *brestr*, repeating it as he asks *Hvárt þótti þér heita mega híbýlabrestr* ('Did it seem to you that it might be called a *híbýlabrestr*?'). In this context the word *híbýlabrestr* might indeed be interpreted as 'a crashing of a farm'. However the repetition of *brestr*, together with the unfamiliar form, makes this meaning somewhat strained and the

<sup>98</sup> On puns in saga dreams see Henzen 1890, 44-49; Faulkes 1966, 23-29; Turville-Petre 1972b, 34-36; and Perkins 1974-1977, 212-13.

meaning 'a loss affecting a whole farm', i.e. 'a great loss' becomes more likely.<sup>99</sup> Már's third use of the word *brestr*, this time as *heraðsbrestr*, strains the meaning even further. Where 'the crashing of a farmstead' seems plausible, 'the crashing of a district' does not. Thus through this repetition the author draws the reader's attention to the pun. Initially the emphasis is entirely on *brestr* as 'a crashing noise', but this meaning becomes more and more strained, and the meaning 'a great loss' becomes more and more likely. Interestingly, Glúmr does not pick up on the pun as he completes the exchange by saying: *Vel er því til jafnat, því at ek þóttumk vita, at heyrði um allt heraðit* ('That is a good estimation, because I thought that I knew it was heard throughout the district'). Thus Glúmr continues to deal with *brestr* entirely as an aural sound.

### The women with the trough

The second dream in the passage involves two women carrying a trough (*trog*) between them and, once they reach Hrístateigr, sprinkling blood across the district. These two women are quite different from the *hamingja* in Glúmr's earlier dream. They are not guardian spirits relating specifically to him or his ancestors. Thus the saga writer adopted different traditions associated with female dream-spirits within the different dreams in the saga. As discussed above (section IV.iv) the trough they carry between them is probably of the sort associated with meat and butchery (though the word does seem to have occasionally been used to refer to the sacrificial blood bowl used in heathen times (Strömbäck 1975b, 78-80)). The blood which they sprinkle across the district is clearly representative of the blood that will be spilt in the battle at Hrístateigr. Dream-women sprinkling blood is a motif found in a number of saga dreams. The episodes with the greatest similarity to this episode are probably Gísli Súrsson's dreams of the worse dream-woman (see section V.iv and V.vi), Dǫrruðr's vision of the bloody loom in *Njáls saga* (*Nj* 1954, ch. 157, p. 454) and the householder in Skagafjörður in *Íslendinga saga* who dreams that he sees a house in which two women sit rocking back and forth while one recites a stanza as blood pours in through the roof (*Stu* 1906-1911, I, 285) (in this case the dream actually occurs after a battle, though the symbolic association of the women, blood and the battle is the same).

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<sup>99</sup> The word is used with this meaning in the longer version of *Gísla saga* (*Gisl* 1960, ch. 2, p. 5).

Stanzas 5 and 6

According to the prose of *Víga-Glúms saga*, stanza 5 is spoken when Glúmr awakes from his first dream, i.e. it is a dream-stanza in that it describes a dream, but it is not spoken within the dream. To my mind, the stanza is yet to be satisfactorily explained. Dyn-Njörðr is clearly a base-word of a kenning for warrior. This, however, leaves four other elements to be attached to it. In my translation I have tentatively suggested the meaning 'Dyn-Njörðr of the branches of the court of the bear-cubs of the fjord'. Bear-cubs of the fjord is a plausible kenning for ships; and court or judgement of ships is a plausible kenning for 'sea-battle'. However the remaining elements are questionable, and the kenning may be defective with some of elements corrupt or missing. Both Kock (1923-1941, §790) and Turville-Petre (*Glúm* 1960, 36 and 77 note) take Limafjörðr as a single word to mean a place name, though this scarcely solves the problem. In the second *helmingr*, *Hrafn* is the name of the horse of King Áli of Norway (*SnE* 1998 I 58) and therefore *sævar Hrafn* ('Hrafn of the sea') is a kenning for ship and its *snarbeinandi* ('swift-steerer') a kenning for warrior. *Prádráttar steinn* ('oft-dragged stone') is likely to be a reference to the whetstone (i.e. that stone which is often dragged against). Thus the second *helmingr* reads: 'In a dream, driven by anger, I struck the warrior with a whetstone'. One has to wonder whether the word *harðsteinn* was originally an element in a kenning (perhaps a base-word, relieving some of the pressure on the Njörðr kenning). It is possible that the stanza became corrupted, perhaps even before its inclusion in the saga. The saga writer interpreted it as best he could, inventing an ingenious explanation for the dream-stanza, certainly adding further layers of meaning.

Stanza 6 describes the second dream. It is introduced merely by *ok kvað vísu* ('and [he] spoke a stanza'). Therefore, unlike the previous stanza, it is not specifically said to be spoken when Glúmr awakes and is instead merely part of the narration of his dreams to Már. Given the likelihood that the stanzas predate the prose, the setting of each stanza is probably not original. In stanza 6, the speaker says that the warrior (*menstiklir*) saw a great god-ride over the cattle pen (*sá mikla ... goðreið of trøð*). The speaker then explains that the vision indicates that a battle will occur (*mun sverðabrak verða, komin es grára geira ... kveðja*). Cleasby (1957, 208) glosses *goðreið* 'as a ride of gods through the air, a meteor, thought to forebode great events' and refers to this passage of *Víga-Glúms saga* (also see *Lexicon Poeticum* 195). One might compare it with the *gandreið* ('witch-ride') seen by Hildiglúmr Runólfsson in *Njáls saga* (*Nj* 1954,

ch. 125, pp. 320-321). Hildiglúmr's vision involves a tremendous crash, after which he sees a ring of fire and a man riding a grey horse. The two women who sprinkle blood across Hrístateigr in the prose might only be very vaguely described as a 'god-ride'. They are neither gods (though occasionally goddesses are referred as gods in skaldic verse), nor on horseback.

The second *helmingr* fits the prose somewhat better. The speaker says that valkyries (*ósynjur eggmóts*) sprinkle blood over the bodies of men. The kenning *vagna vinir* in the penultimate line of the stanza seems to refer to Óðinn (using poetic plural to refer to the singular). This compares to the kenning *vagna rúni* ('friend of the chariot(?)') in stanza 22 of *Sonatorrek* (Eg 1933, ch. 72, p. 255), and perhaps also *vagna vári* ('defender(?) of the chariot(?)') in *Höfuðlausn* in some manuscripts of *Egils saga* (*Skjaldedigtning* AI, 39; BI, 33), both of which probably refer to Óðinn. Assuming *vagna* is the genitive plural of *vagn* 'chariot' or 'carriage', this is likely to refer to a lost story featuring Óðinn in a chariot. The two *helmingar* of stanza 6 are connected by *þar's* (contracted *þar er*, 'there where'). This suggests to me that the image of the women pouring blood over bodies accompanies another sight indicated by the word *goðreið*, the details of which are now lost. Although there is nothing in the stanza that actually contradicts Glúmr's description of the dream in the prose, I feel the prose may be only a partial summary of what was intended in the verse, which may have more closely resembled Hildiglúmr's vision in *Njáls saga*.

### Conclusion

These two dreams demonstrate the depth of meaning that one finds in saga texts. The first dream unfolds layer after layer of meaning before the reader. The symbolism uses mythological motifs, but adapts and changes their meaning. It illustrates a set-phrase, but then combines this with a play on the meaning of a specific word. At the innermost layer the reader encounters yet further meanings in the verse, meanings which are now all but obscured by its poor preservation. The second dream is apparently more straightforward, but the verses also attach further complexities and problems. The complexity of the passage may indeed be the result of the process by which the saga was composed, with layer upon layer of meaning being added by the retelling of the story and the incorporation and reinterpretation of the stanzas in the prose, but this does not matter. The fact that such complexity of meaning survives more or less intact shows the complexity of meaning understood by the medieval reader.

## VI.iv Glúmr's dream of his ancestors and Freyr

### Context:

Glúmr's final dream recalls an earlier episode in the saga, where Glúmr prosecutes Þorkell inn hávi and secures a ruling that Þorkell must leave the district. Before he leaves, Þorkell sacrifices an ox to Freyr, requesting that Glúmr be forced from the land at Þverá under similar conditions. The ox is struck dead, which Þorkell takes to mean his sacrifice, and the conditions attached, have been accepted (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 9, p. 34). Þorkell plays no further part in the saga, but his sacrifice is remembered in Glúmr's dream prior to the Alþingi.

After the dream, Glúmr is successfully prosecuted by Einarr Eyjólfsson for the killing of Þorvaldr krókr. Although not outlawed, he is required to give half of Þverá to Þorvaldr's son Ketill and sell the other half, thereby fulfilling the expectation set up by Þorkell's sacrifice. Einarr then buys the whole of Þverá, which seems to have been his intention when undertaking the case.

### Text:

*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 26, pp. 87-88.

*Glúm* 1960, ch. 26, pp. 45-46.

En áðr Glúmr riði heiman, dreymsi hann, at margir menn væri komnir þar til Þverár at hitta Frey, ok þóttumk hann sjá mart manna á eyrunum við ána, en Freyr sat á stóli. Hann þóttisk spyrja, hverir þar væri komnir. Þeir svara: "Þetta eru frændr þínir framliðnir, ok biðjum vér nú Frey, at þú sér eigi á brott færðr af Þverárlandi, ok tjóar ekki, ok svarar Freyr stutt ok reiðuliga ok minnisk nú á uxagjöf Þorkels ins háva." Hann vaknaði, ok lézk Glúmr verr vera við Frey alla tíma síðan.

And before Glúmr rode from home he dreamed that many people had come there to Þverá to meet Freyr, and he thought he saw many of the people on the sandbanks beside the river and Freyr sat on a throne. He thought that he asked who had come there. They answered: "These are your dead kinsmen, and we are now entreating Freyr, that you are not removed from Þverárland, but to no avail, and Freyr answers abruptly and angrily and now remembers the sacrificed ox of Þorkell inn hávi." He awoke and Glúmr always had a worse relationship with Freyr after this.

### Commentary:

The final dream of *Víga-Glúms saga* indicates that Glúmr is about to lose his defence at the assembly. The dream represents the conclusion of mythological themes

that have run throughout the saga. This mythological subtext provides a counterpoint for the mundane political confrontation between Glúmr and his enemies, as Glúmr is at once undone by both natural and supernatural causes.

According to *Landnámabók*, Glúmr's grandfather Ingjaldr Helgason built a temple when he inherited Þverá (*Ldn* 1968, II, 268). *Víga-Glúms saga* mentions a temple at Hripkelsstaðir, which is presumably the same temple and specifically states that the temple was dedicated to Freyr (*Glúm* 1956a, ch. 5, p. 16). Such a temple may have contained some carved idol representing Freyr (see Turville-Petre 1964, 244-248 for examples), and there seems to have been a pagan belief that such idols could, under certain circumstances, become animate (Perkins 2001, 60). For example in *Ögmundar þáttur dytts* a man named Gunnarr helmingr encounters a woman in Sweden who claims to be married to an idol of Freyr, which is pulled about on a wagon (*Ögm* 1956, 113-114).<sup>100</sup> Gunnarr wrestles and defeats the idol (which is clearly animate at this point), and then assumes its place receiving tribute from the devotees throughout the winter. The deception only becomes suspected when "Freyr's wife" becomes pregnant. In *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, a man named Sveinn has a dream in which the temple idols become animate (*ÓT* 1961, ch. 226, pp. 112-113). In contrast to Glúmr's dream, it is the god in Sveinn's dream who is in need of assistance. In that dream Þórr comes to him and asks to be removed from the temple before the return of Sveinn's Christian brother. Sveinn refuses and the idols are all later burned in the temple. A further parallel can be seen to Þorgils ørrabeinsstjúpr dreams of Þórr in *Flóamanna saga*. Þorgils has a series of five dreams in which Þórr appears and chastises him for converting to Christianity (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 20, pp. 274-5, and ch. 21, pp. 278-281). The fifth of these (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 21, pp. 280-281) is of particular relevance to Glúmr's dream. Þorgils' dream occurs while his ship is becalmed on route to Greenland. In the dream Þórr, who has finally given up any hope of Þorgils returning to paganism, demands the return of his property. Upon waking Þorgils thinks this 'property' is an ox, which he dedicated to Þórr many years before. Thus, as in *Víga-Glúms saga*, an almost-forgotten gift of an ox to a pagan deity threatens the saga hero at a vital stage in their career. Þorgils is able to overcome the problem by throwing the ox overboard, returning it to Þórr.

<sup>100</sup> A complete version of *Ögmundar þáttur dytts* is preserved in *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol) and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*; however, the opening is also preserved in AM 564a 4<sup>o</sup> where it is interpolated into *Víga-Glúms saga*.

Glúmr's final dream can be seen as the culmination of the dichotomy running through *Víga-Glúms saga* between the cult of Freyr associated with Glúmr's paternal ancestors and that of Óðinn, associated with Glúmr's maternal line. Turville-Petre (1935, 331) suggests that Glúmr's return from Norway and subsequent encounter with Vigfúss' *hamingja* represents Glúmr's change in cult, forsaking the cult of Freyr for that of Óðinn. From this point on Glúmr, despite residing in an area traditionally sacred to Freyr, relies on the protection of Óðinn, whereas his enemies remain loyal to Freyr.<sup>101</sup> Shortly after the transfer of the *hamingja* from Vigfúss to Glúmr, Þorkell makes his sacrifice of the ox. The sudden death of the ox indicates that the sacrifice has been accepted. The god is, however, unable to humiliate Glúmr while he still possesses the gifts given to him by his grandfather. At least two of the three gifts are specifically associated with Óðinn (the cloak and the spear). In chapter 25 Glúmr gives the cloak to Gizurr Teitsson and the spear to Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson. He is now unprotected. Now, some forty years after the initial sacrifice is made (according to the timeline in Jónas Kristjánsson 1956, xlvii), Freyr's debt to Þorkell can be repaid. Glúmr's dream represents a last ditch attempt on the part of his paternal ancestors to prevent this from happening, and to reconcile Glúmr to the deity.

Glúmr's dream of his ancestors and Freyr is a fine example of a saga-writer creating both supernatural and natural causes simultaneously leading to a single inevitable conclusion. The saga's mythological subtext runs parallel to, and provides a contrast with, the more mundane ambitions of Glúmr's enemies, particularly the machiavellian designs of Einarr Eyjólfsson to acquire his land. For the reader, the dream anticipates Glúmr's defeat at the Alþingi, while simultaneously drawing attention back to events at the beginning of the saga. In particular, it links the prophecy and expectation set up by Þorkell's sacrifice to Freyr specifically to its fulfilment and Glúmr's departure from Þverá, giving the saga unity and cohesion. It reminds the reader that, despite the poverty of its preservation and confusion of plot, *Víga-Glúms saga* is nonetheless the work of great story-teller who has woven his source materials into a well structured narrative.

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<sup>101</sup> On this conflict between the two cults in the saga see Turville-Petre (1935, 330-333); *Glúm* 1960, xiii-xv and North (2000, 348-350).

## VI.v Conclusion

*Víga-Glúms saga* contains four dreams of entirely different types. The first dream represents a conclusion to the early Norwegian episodes in the saga and builds up Glúmr's character in the reader's estimation by transferring attributes from his grandfather to Glúmr. Glúmr's second and third dreams both point forward to the central confrontation of the saga. The dream of the whetstones does this through both the illustration of a set-phrase and also a pun on the word *brestr*. The dream and its meaning are multi-layered and multi-faceted and the reader is required to understand it on a number of levels. The dream of the two women pouring blood over the district refers symbolically to the wounds and killings. The dream-women have no apparent relationship to the *hamingja* of Glúmr's first dream and show again that the saga-writer and saga-audience were unconcerned by the use of quite different traditions within a single text. The accompanying stanzas are likely to have been a partial source for the episode, but the saga-writer changed the dreams to create further levels of meaning. The final dream concludes the conflict between the cults of Óðinn and Freyr, and predicts Glúmr's loss of his case at the Alþingi. This dream also creates a circularity in the saga structure to form a direct line of causation between the conflict which initiates the feud between Þverá and Espihóll, and the outcome of the court case which concludes it. All the dreams have been carefully positioned at the turning points in the narrative to punctuate the decisive moments of the hero's career; Glúmr becoming the foremost member of his family, the battle that is the climax of the saga, and the loss of the case that marks the end of Glúmr's pre-eminence and destroys his sphere of influence forever.



## Chapter VII: The dreams of *Harðar saga*

### VII.i Introduction

Like *Grettis saga* and *Gísla saga*, *Harðar saga* is essentially the story of a great man whose potential is not realised. Hǫrðr's career begins with him winning renown abroad, but on his return to Iceland he becomes embroiled in a dispute with his own uncle and is outlawed for the killing of a farmer named Auðr. Hǫrðr escapes to a small island in Hvalfjörðr, where he leads a band of vagrants and outlaws. Hǫrðr turns to stealing livestock in order to survive and is finally slain by an angry band of farmers.

The saga is preserved in a single medieval manuscript AM 556a 4<sup>o</sup> (written c.1475-1500) where it is titled *Hólmverja saga* ('Saga of the Isle-dwellers'). There is a single page preserved in AM 564a 4<sup>o</sup> (written c.1390-1425), part of the saga collection referred to as *Pseudo-Vatnshyrna* (McKinnell 1970, 334). The exact relationship between these versions remains unclear. Most scholars doubt that the longer AM 556a version can date from before the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 1958, 106-107; Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, xiii; Faulkes 1993, 269). Formerly AM 564a was thought to preserve an older, more original version of the saga, which was then expanded in AM 556a (Finnur Jónsson 1923, II, 422). More recent scholarship, however, has supported the view that the text in AM 564a has been shortened and preserves a separate version from that in AM 556a (Lachmann 1932, 7-16; de Lange 1935, 95-96; Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, xiii-xvi).<sup>102</sup> In the final chapter of AM 556a the author tells us that Styrmir prestr inn fróði considered Hǫrðr to be greater than other outlaws (*Harð* 1991, ch. 41, p. 97).<sup>103</sup> This has been seen as evidence that one version of the saga was composed by Styrmir Kárason (d. 1245) (Jón Jóhannesson 1941, 88-89; Guðni Jónsson 1953, XII, xii; Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, xlv-xlviii).

*Harðar saga* has a somewhat complicated relationship with *Landnámabók*. Hǫrðr is mentioned twice in both *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* and at one point there is mention of a *saga Harðar Grímkelssonar ok Geirs* (*Ldn* 1968, I, 76). However scholars have doubted that the saga known to the *Landnámabók* author can be the same as that preserved in AM 556a (Finnur 1923, II, 422).

Although there are three dreams in the saga, to avoid repetition I will discuss them in two sections because the first two dreams are of a similar kind. Given the

<sup>102</sup> De Lange agrees with Lachmann's conclusion that AM 556a and AM 564a preserve separate versions, but disagrees on the suggestion that the AM 564a version has been shortened.

<sup>103</sup> All chapter numbers refer to AM 556a as printed in *Harð* 1991.

major differences between the manuscripts and probability that they preserve independent versions, I have given texts for both manuscripts for the first two dreams (the third is preserved only in AM 556a).

**Editions:**

*Harð* 1960 = *Harðar saga*. Ed. Sture Hast. Editiones Arnamagnæanæ A6.

*Harð* 1991 = *Harðar saga*. Eds Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Íslenszk fornrit 13.

**Manuscript abbreviations:**

AM 556a = AM 556a 4<sup>o</sup>

AM 564a = AM 564a 4<sup>o</sup>

**Translations:**

*Harð* 1997 = *The Saga of Hord and the People of Holm*. Trans. Robert Kellogg. In *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders II*.

## VII.ii Signý's two dreams of trees

### Context:

Signý Valbrandsdóttir is married to Grímkell in a loveless marriage when she has her first tree-dream. The dream predicts the birth of her son Hǫrðr, the saga hero. Hǫrðr's early life is a great success as he wins honour and wealth abroad, marrying Helga the daughter of the Earl of Gotland. However, once he has been outlawed, circumstances force Hǫrðr to carry out greater and greater misdeeds, as he steals from local farmers including his own in-laws.

Signý's second dream occurs about three to five years after the first. Shortly afterwards Signý dies in childbirth while staying with her brother, Torfi. Torfi seems to blame the new-born baby, Þorbjörg, for her mother's death and orders her to be exposed, but the man sent to expose her instead lays her where she will be found and cared for. Throughout the latter half of the saga, Þorbjörg Grímkelsdóttir is one of the central characters. She is torn between loyalty to her husband Indriði and her brother Hǫrðr, proving loyal to her husband when Hǫrðr tries to separate them, but later providing refuge for Hǫrðr's widow and sons and pursuing vengeance for his death.

### Signý's first dream: Text (AM 556a):

*Harð* 1960, ch. 6, pp. 126-127.

*Harð* 1991, ch. 6, p. 15.

Þat er sagt, at Signýju Valbrandsdóttur dreyndi draum einn. Hon þóttisk sjá tré eitt mikit í rekkju þeira Grímkels, fagrt mjök ok svá rótmikit, at í ǫll húsin heima þar á bænum tóku rætr trésins, en ekki þótti henni blómit svá mikit á vera sem hon vildi. Hon sagði drauminn Þórdísi, fóstur sinni, en hon réð svá, at þau Grímkell myndu barn eiga ok myndi þat vera mikit ok virðuligt; kvezk hon hyggja þat svein vera, - "ok mun mǫrgum þykkja mikils um hann vert sakir framkvæmdar sinnar, en ekki kæmi mér þat á óvart, þó at eigi stæði hans hagr með inum mesta blóma, áðr lúki, sakir þess at þér þótti tréit þat it mikla eigi með svá miklum blóma

It is said that Signý Valbrandsdóttir dreamed a certain dream. She thought that she saw a large tree in their bed, hers and Grímkell's, very beautiful and with such large roots, that the tree's roots touched all the buildings, home, there at the farm. However she thought the blossom was not as much as she wanted. She told the dream to Þórdís, her foster-mother, and she interpreted it thus, that Signý and Grímkell would have a child and it would be large and worthy; she said that she thought it would be a boy - "and he will be thought great by many on account of his accomplishments, but it will be no surprise to me, should his affairs not be blossoming before the end, because you didn't

sem þú vildir, ok ekki er víst, at hann hafi mikit ástríki af flestum frændum sínum.”

think the tree had as much blossom as you wished, and it is not certain that he will have much affection from most of his kinsmen.”

**Signý's first dream: Text (AM 564a):**

*Harð* 1960, 126-127.

*Harð* 1991, 15.

Signýju dreymði draum þann, at hon þóttisk sjá tré mikit í hvílu þeira Grímkels ok fagrt mjök ok svá miklar limar á, at henni þótti taka yfir húsin ǫll, en engi á blómin á limunum. Hon sagði Þórdísi, fóstur sinni, drauminn. Hon réð svá, at þau Grímkell myndu barn eiga.

Signý dreamed that dream, that she thought that she saw a large tree in their bed, hers and Grímkell's, very beautiful and such large branches on it, that she thought they touched all the buildings, but there was no blossom on the branches. She told the dream to Þórdís, her foster mother. She interpreted it thus, that they, Signý and Grímkell, would have a child.

**Signý's second dream: Text (AM 556a):**

*Harð* 1960, ch. 7, p. 129

*Harð* 1991, ch. 7, pp. 18-19

Enn dreymði hana draum, at hon sæja tré eitt mikit sem fyrr, í rótum mest, limamargt, ok gerði á blóm mikit. Þann draum réð fóstur hennar enn til barngetnaðar þeira á milli, ok myndi vera dóttir ok lifa eptir ætt stór, er henni sýndisk limamargt tréit, - “en þar er þér þótti þat bera blóma mikinn, mun merkja siðaskipti þat, er koma mun, ok mun hennar afkvæmi hafa þá trú, sem þá er boðin, ok mun sú betri.”

Again she dreamed a dream, that she saw a certain large tree as before, with the greatest roots, many branched and which produced a great bloom. Her foster-mother interpreted that that dream indicated once again a child had been conceived between them and it would be a daughter and a great family would survive her, since it seemed to her the tree was many branched - “and that fact you thought it had a great deal of blossom, will signify that change in faith which will come, and her descendants will have that faith, which will be preached then and that will be a better one.”

**Signý's second dream: Text (AM 564a):***Harð* 1960, 129*Harð* 1991, 18-19

Enn dreyndi Signýju, at hon sæi tré eitt [mikit] ok \*\*\*\*<sup>104</sup> í rótum, en visnaði upp þaðan, ok væri á blómi [mikill]. Þórdís kvað hana eiga myndu meybarn ok sagði m[yndu] koma frá henni mikla ætt.

Again Signý dreamed, that she saw a certain large tree and \*\*\*\* in roots, but withered further up, and there was a large bloom on it. Þórdís said to her, she would have a girl child and said a great family would come from her.

**Commentary:**

Signý's two dreams are clearly intended to function as a pair, predicting the birth and lives of the saga's male and female protagonists. The concept of the dream of the tree of descent has been touched on briefly above (see section IV.v), but I will take this opportunity to discuss the motif in full. I will first discuss the presentation of the dream symbols as they are found in *Harðar saga*. I will, then discuss other examples of this dream in Old Norse. Finally, I will discuss the question of whether the motif is a heterogeneous Norse concept or entirely accountable in terms of foreign influence.

The use of the dream of the tree of descent in *Harðar saga*

Both dreams use the symbol of a tree to signify the birth of a child. In the first dream this is a male child, in the latter it is a female child. The tree in the first dream in the AM 556a manuscript has large roots which cover the entire house. This is interpreted Þórdís to mean that the child will be large and worthy and well thought of, on account of his accomplishments. The tree, however, lacks blossom. According to the foster-mother's interpretation, this indicates that at the end of his life the child's affairs will not be blossoming. The foster-mother also correctly predicts the sex of the child and that he will not have much love from his kinsmen. The tree represents Hǫrðr, and the roots and their spread across the farm represent the extent of his property. The lack of blossom further up the tree in the dream represents Hǫrðr's lack of success in later life, in particular when he is driven into outlawry and forced to survive by stealing. The foster-mother's comment that Hǫrðr will not receive much love from his kinsmen, relates to the fact that both his brothers-in-law and his uncle are involved in the attack in which Hǫrðr is killed. Thus in Signý's first dream in AM 556a, the lower parts of the

<sup>104</sup> Sture Hast estimates 4 or 5 illegible characters at this point (*Harð* 1960, 129 note).

tree are specifically related to the early parts of the child's life and the higher portions to his later life. There is a play on words when the foster-mother comments that his affairs in later life will not be blossoming. This word-play links the tree symbol in the dream linguistically as well as symbolically to its meaning. The reader's attention is drawn to the word-play by the change from reported speech to direct speech shortly before the relevant phrase. This is similar to the use of direct speech in the conversation between Már and Glúmr about the latter's dream in *Víga-Glúms saga*, where it also indicates word-play (see section VI.iii).

There are several differences to the description of the same dream in AM 564a. In AM 564a the tree is beautiful and lacks blossom, but it has large branches which take over the house. Þórdís' interpretation is less detailed. She merely says that Signý and Grímkell will have a child, but gives no indication of the sex of that child. Furthermore, there is no indication of what the lack of blossom symbolises.

The tree in the second dream in AM 556a, is said to have large roots and limbs and a great deal of blossom. Þórdís interprets the dream to indicate that Signý will have a second child, that the child will be a girl and that a great family will descend from her. The blossom is interpreted as indicating the coming change of faith and the piety of Signý's descendants. Although the saga-author clearly intended these two dreams to function as a pair, the code by which they are interpreted is subtly different. In both dreams a tree represents an unborn progeny, but in the first dream the upper portions of the tree represents the child's later life, whereas in the second they represent the child's offspring (i.e. the dreamer's descendants). Furthermore in the first dream, the lack of blossom represents (in AM 556a at least) a lack of prosperity, Hqrðr's position as an outlaw; whereas in the second dream the presence of blossom (again only in AM 556a) indicates piety and Christianity. This shift of symbolism in two such clearly paired dreams shows how saga readers saw no problem in adjusting and adapting their interpretation as directed by the text. Regardless of whether we believe the details of AM 556a to have been expanded (something I will deal with later), the reader of the saga as it is preserved was expected to understand such complex and varied symbolism.

In AM 564a the second dream is even more briefly related and unfortunately the text is damaged. Something is said about the tree's roots, but this is indecipherable. The stem, further up from the roots, is withered (a detail missing in AM 556a). Nevertheless this tree produces a great blossom. The foster-mother says the tree indicates the birth of a female child from whom a great family will descend. It is not

clear in AM 564a whether the blossom relates to the success of Signý's descendants or their piety. There is no indication as to what the withered stem symbolises, but it seems likely to represent Signý's death. In both AM 556a and AM 564a Signý dies during the birth of Þorbjörg. Shortly after this the manuscript AM 564a breaks off.

The symbolism of these two dreams might be summarised in the following way: a tree in the dream of a pregnant woman foretells the birth of a child; the point at which the tree grows, i.e. the bed, is symbolic of the union between the husband and wife; the spread of the tree, either the roots or branches, indicates the extent of the wealth of the child, i.e. the whole farm; the health of the tree is directly linked to the health or success of the person it represents, with the suggestion of word-play on the idea of something blossoming literally and metaphorically; moving further up the tree represents the latter part of the child's life; and in the second dream (at least in AM 556a) the branches indicate the descendants of the child.

#### The spread of the tree of descent in the North

Variations of this dream can be found in a number of places in Old Norse. In *Flóamanna saga*, Þorgils ørrabeinstjúpr has a dream where he thinks he is in Iceland and he sees five *hálmlaukar* growing from his knee. From these stalks many more grow including one which is tremendously large and beautiful (*Flóam* 1991, ch. 24, pp. 294-295). The identification of these *hálmlaukar* or *hjálmlaukar* (as it is preserved in the shorter version) is problematic. They may be leeks or garlic (Cleasby 1957, 266), but may also be angelica (Perkins 1974-1977, 227-232). Regardless of the exact nature of the plants, the dream is similar to that in *Harðar saga*, in that once again progeny are represented by a botanical symbol in a dream. In Þorgils' dream the five plants (or stems of a single plant) represent his five children (his son Þorleifr is excluded perhaps because of his different mother, or because he chooses to remain in Greenland rather than return to Iceland<sup>105</sup>) and the plants that grow from them represent his descendants, just as the branches do in Signý's second dream. As in Signý's dream, the location from which they grow is important. The bed has clear sexual significance in *Harðar saga*, whereas in *Flóamanna saga* the plants grow directly from his body, the knee having particular significance to the concept of lineage (Perkins 1974-1977, 226;

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<sup>105</sup> Perkins (1974-1977, 223 note) tentatively suggests that the left knee may have represented Þorleifr's mother Guðrún. Such an interpretation is pleasing, but raises problems if one bears in mind that Þorgils in fact marries three times (though the author could scarcely portray him in the dream with three legs).

Argüelles 1994, 318 note). In both dreams geographical or topographical details are important. In Signý's first dream, the tree covers (either with its roots or branches) the whole farm and in Þorgils' dream it is specified that the plants grow in Iceland (while he has the dream in Greenland) indicating where his family will live. Once again word-play is used linking the unborn progeny to the symbol. In the case of *Flóamanna saga* this word-play is on the verb *kvísla*, usually used in the reflexive *kvíslask* ('to branch off' of a river or tree) (relating to the noun *kvísl* 'a branch'). In the narration of Þorgils' dream this is used first of the plant itself, and then, in the interpretation, it is used of the family symbolised by the plant. *Flóamanna saga* expands on one element not exploited by *Harðar saga* to the same extent. One particularly beautiful *laukr* is used to represent a descendant of particular note. The beauty of this *laukr* represents the piety of Þorgils' descendant Bishop Þorlákr, in an exaggerated version of the motif of the blossom in Signý's second dream representing the piety of her descendants.

This type of dream is found in one other *Íslendingasaga*. At the beginning of *Bárðar saga*, Bárðr Dumbsson has a dream while he is living with his foster-father, the giant Dofri (*Bárð* 1991, ch. 1, p. 104). In the dream, Bárðr sees a tree growing from the hearth, coiling out through the rock of Dofri's cave and eventually shading the whole of Norway. Bárðr notices that the blossom on one branch is particularly lush and golden. This is the clearest example yet of the genealogical tree being used to symbolise both the individual and their descendants. The tree represents Haraldr hárfagri, who is also later fostered with Dofri. The branches, like the roots (or perhaps branches) in Signý's first dream, represent Haraldr's dominion, which, like the tree, grows from its base in Dofri's cave to eventually cover all Norway. At the same time, however, the branches represent Haraldr's descendants, like the branches in Signý's second dream. The branch of particular note, which represents Saint Óláfr Haraldsson, is similar to the stem in Þorgils' dream overshadowing the others. Bárðr's dream, which is of little relevance to his saga, is exceptional in that the dreamer is not a blood relation of the person represented in the dream. The saga writer mentions a *saga Haralds konungs Dofrafóstra* at this point and it is possible that he took the dream directly from this source.

A similar dream occurs in *Hálfðanar saga svarta* in *Heimskringla*, where it is attributed to Queen Ragnhildr, Haraldr's mother (*Hkr* 1941, *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, ch. 6, p. 90). In Ragnhildr's dream she takes a thorn from her blouse that suddenly grows into a twig, takes root and quickly becomes a massive tree with branches spreading



across Norway. The lowest part of the tree is red, the trunk green and the top white. The interpretation of this dream is not given until the next saga in Snorri's work (*Hkr* 1941, *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, ch. 42, p. 148):

Ok þýða menn þat nú, at vitat hafī um tré þat it mikla, er móður hans sýndisk í draumi fyrir burð hans, er inn nezti hlutr tréssins var rauðr sem blóð, en þá var leggrinn upp frá fagr ok grœnn, at þat jartegndi blóma ríkis hans. En at ofanverðu var hvítt tréit, þar sýndisk þat, at hann myndi fá elli ok hæru. Kvistir ok limar tréssins boðaði afkvæmi hans, er um allt land dreifðisk, ok af hans ætt hafa verit jafnan síðan konungar í Nóregi.

And now men interpret what had been shown by the large tree that appeared to his mother in a dream before his birth. The lowest part of the tree was red as blood, but further up the trunk was fair and green – that signified the blossoming of his kingdom. And above that the tree was white; there it showed that he would get old and hoary. The branches and limbs of the tree symbolised his offspring spreading over the whole land and the kings of Norway have been from his family ever since.

This dream is probably the closest match so far to Signý's first dream in *Harðar saga*. As in Signý's dream, so in Ragnhildr's dream, the further up the tree one moves the further through Haraldr's reign is represented. Red at the bottom of the trunk represents the violence that occurs as Haraldr seeks to unite Norway under his rulership. The green section symbolises the blossoming of his kingdom and the same pun on the metaphorical use of 'bloom' is used in the interpretation of Ragnhildr's dream as in Signý's dream.<sup>106</sup> The white at the top of the tree is said to represent Haraldr's old age and hoariness. The branches once again symbolise both the descendants and also the extent of their dominion as some of the branches trail out of Norway representing the success of Ragnhildr's descendants beyond Norway's borders. Interestingly, the motif of the single branch that out-shines or overshadows all others is missing from Ragnhildr's dream.

Alongside Ragnhildr's dream Snorri relates another similar dream. Unlike his wife, King Hálfðan rarely dreams, until he speaks to a wise man named Þorleifr who advises him to sleep in a pigsty, whereupon he has the following dream (*Hkr* 1941, *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, ch. 7, pp. 90-91) (compare *Fsk* 1985, ch. 1, pp. 57-58; and *HálfðSv* 1860, 563):

<sup>106</sup> The same pun also operates in Óláfr's dream in *Rauðúlfs þáttr* (*Rauð* 1941, 672-680, *Rauð* 1862, 298-301). The floral design on the belly of the figure in Óláfr's dream represents a great flowering or prosperity (*blómi*) during the reign of Óláfr kyrrri (Faulkes 1966, 24). A further example of this same pun is found in a vision in *Jómsvíkinga saga* (*Jvs* 1969, ch. 2, pp. 68-69).

Honum sýndisk sem hann væri allra manna bezt hærðr, ok var hár hans allt í lokkum, sumir síðir til jarðar, sumir í miðjan legg, sumir á kné, sumir í mjöðm eða miðja síðu, sumir eigi lengra en á háls, en sumir ekki meirr en sprotnir upp ór hausi sem knýflar, en á lokkum hans var hvers kyns litr, en einn lokkr sigraði alla með fegrð ok ljósleik ok mikilleik. Þorleifi sagði hann þann draum, en Þorleifr þýddi svá, at mikill afspringr myndi koma af honum ok myndi sá lönðum ráða með miklum veg ok þó eigi allir með jafnmiklum, en einn myndi sá af hans ætt koma, er öllum myndi meiri ok æðri, ok hafa menn þat fyrir satt, at sá lokkr jartegndi inn helga Óláf konung.

It seemed to him as if he had the best hair of all men and his hair was all in locks, some long down to the ground, some the middle of his leg, some to his knees, some to his hip or middle length, and some no further than to his neck and some nothing more than sprouting up from his scull, like horns. And on the locks was every kind of colour. But one lock surpassed all in beauty and brightness and size. He told that dream to Þorleifr and Þorleifr interpreted it this way, that a great line of descendants would come from him and they would rule the land with great honour, nonetheless not to the same extent and that one would come from his family who would be greater and more honourable than the rest. And men reckon it true that that lock symbolised Saint Óláfr the king.

This is not a dream of a tree as such, but it does work in the same way and share many of the same characteristics as tree-dreams. There is a rough similarity between the botanical symbols and the hair of Hálfðan's dream in that both grow and both represent the unborn progeny of the dreamer. The extent of that growth represents the extent of the success of the progeny. The nature or colour of the hair is of symbolic importance, in the same way that the colour of the tree in Ragnhildr's dream and the healthiness of the tree and the extent of its blossom in Signý's dreams is of symbolic importance. Even the language of Hálfðan's dream is similar to the tree-dreams, for example the shortest locks sprout from his head. Unlike Ragnhildr's dream, for which there is no immediate source, Hálfðan's dream appears in two works thought to have been used by Snorri for *Hálfðanar saga svarta*. These are *Fagrskinna* and *Hálfðanar þáttur svarta* (Turville-Petre 1988, 13; see *Fsk* 1985, ch. 1, pp. 57-58; and *HálfðSv* 1860, 563). Snorri changes his sources comparatively little. In *Fagrskinna*, Hálfðan is naked in the dream, otherwise the dream is largely similar and both *Fagrskinna* and *Hálfðanar þáttur* conclude the interpretation of the brightest lock by extolling the virtues of Saint Óláfr (*HálfðSv* 1860, 562): ... *Óláfr Haraldsson er öllum Noregs konungum er meiri með helgi sinni ok hjartari á himni ok á jörðu, svá at allir viti* ('... Óláfr Haraldsson, who of all Kings of Norway, is greater in his piety and brighter in heaven and on earth, as everyone knows'). I have already suggested that Þorkell Eyjólfsson's wishful

interpretation of his dream in *Laxdæla saga* (see section IV.v), is a version of this motif and probably a deliberate imitation of Hálfðan's dream.

There are several further versions of this dream in saga literature, though none with such obvious similarity to Signý's dreams. In *Morkinskinna*, King Sigurðr Jǫrsulafari dreams that he is stood at Jaðarr looking out to sea as a black cloud moves towards the land (*Mork* 1932, ch. 63, p. 395). As the cloud approaches it becomes apparent that it is a tree, standing vertically with its roots in the water and its branches above. When the tree reaches the coast it breaks apart and pieces of all sizes are washed up into every bay in Norway. The same dream is also narrated in the *Magnússona saga* section of *Heimskringla* (*Hkr* 1951, *Magnússona saga* ch. 25, pp. 264-265). Sigurðr's dream foretells the arrival of his half-brother Haraldr Gilli, who comes to share the kingdom with him. The dream does not use the tree symbol in quite the same way as *Harðar saga*, since there is no sense of the tree growing or branching off. However some aspects of the dream are similar. Once again specific geography or topography is used. Rather than the spread of the branches or roots, it is the spread of the broken fragments that indicate the sphere of influence of Haraldr's descendants. Furthermore the size of those pieces indicate their importance, just as the size of the tree in Signý's first dream indicates that her child will be worthy (*virðuligt*). There is even an Eddic parallel to the dream of the tree of descent in the stanza quoted above from *Guðrúnarkviða II* (see section V.vi; *Guðrúnarkviða II*, stanza 40, *Edda* 1962, 230), where Atli dreams of his sons as sprouts (*teinar*) which are torn up and given to him to eat. The fact that these are mere shoots, rather than full-grown plants as in Signý's dreams brings home the fact that Atli's sons will die before they reach maturity. Further examples can be found where, rather than a botanical symbol, animal dream-symbols are used to represent either the extent of authority or unborn progeny, such as a bird (*Sv* 1920, ch. 2, p. 3) or snake (*Guta saga* 1991, ch. 1, p. 2; *Mírm* 1997, ch. 2, p. 2).

### Origins and relationships

The image of the tree is at the very heart of pagan belief, most noticeably in the world ash Yggdrasill whose roots connect the worlds (see *SnE* 1988, 17-18 and *Vǫluspá* stanza 19, *Edda* 1962, 5). The very first humans are said to have their origins in trees as Borr's sons found logs (*tré*) on the shore and breathed life into them (*SnE* 1988, 13 and *Vǫluspá* stanza 17, *Edda* 1962, 4). The first man is named Askr ('Ash') and the first woman Embla ('Elm'). Thus, in the pagan mindset, trees are irrevocably connected to

human life from its very inception. Synonyms for tree (such as *meiðr*, 'tree'; *runnr*, 'bush'; *hlynr*, 'maple') are commonly used as base-words in kennings for 'warrior', often modified by words meaning weapons, helmets or shields (see Meissner 1921, 266-272).<sup>107</sup> Similarly, tree words are also used as base-words in female kennings, usually modified by references to gold, linen or jewellery (see Meissner 1921, 410). This association of human life with trees seems to me quite in keeping with the dream of the genealogical tree and its use in sagas.

Of course a pre-existing link between human life and trees does not preclude foreign influence and indeed, such associations would make it all the more easy for dreams of the genealogical tree to be adapted and adopted into the saga mind-set. Several scholars have tried to suggest origins for the genealogical tree in the North. Larsen (1917, 56) associated Signý's dreams (together with those of Þorgils in *Flóamanna saga* and Ragnhildr in *Heimskringla*) with that of King Astyages, described in book I of Herodotus' *Histories* (Herodotus 2003, 50). Astyages dreams that a large vine grows from the body of his daughter and overshadows all Asia. Larsen suggests that the Old French *Roman de Rou* by Robert Wace may have assisted the spread of this motif throughout Europe. In Wace's work (written circa 1160) the future dominion of William the Conqueror over Normandy is portended by his mother's dream that a tree grows from her body and shades all Normandy (Wace 2002, 166-167). Joan Turville-Petre (1988, 16) compares Signý's dreams to omens foretelling the birth of Emperor Vespasian in Suetonius' *The Twelve Caesars*. Each time Vespasian's mother Vespasia Polla gives birth, an ancient oak-tree sacred to Mars puts out a new shoot (Suetonius 1979, 284). The first shoot withers quickly, representing Vespasian's elder sister, who dies in infancy. The second grows strong and represents his brother Sabinus who becomes City Prefect of Rome. Whereas the third seems 'more like a tree than a branch' and represents Vespasian himself. The withered branch in Suetonius' story resembles the withered stem of the tree in Signý's second dream in AM 564a, which seems to foretell her death.

Both Kelchner (1935, 59-60) and Hilda Ellis Davidson (2001, 36-37) identify parallels between the dream of the genealogical tree and Celtic folklore (see for example Rolleston 1910, 173; and Campbell 1890, II, 153-154). However, the most comprehensive survey of the dream of the genealogical tree in Old Norse has been

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<sup>107</sup> Kelchner (1935, 60), to my mind inexplicably, cites the use of trees in kennings as evidence pointing towards a foreign origin for the genealogical tree.

carried out by Paul Schach (1954 and 1971). In addition to several of the examples already mentioned, Schach refers to further analogues. In the first of two articles, Schach (1954) seeks to identify sources for and borrowings from the dream of Ruodlieb's mother, where she sees a high linden tree at the top of which she thinks she sees Ruodlieb reclining with his army (*Ruodlieb* 1985, 186-187). While undoubtedly part of the same motif, this example has little obvious similarity to Signý's dreams. However among the analogues cited by Schach (1954, 356-357) is the dream of Saint Godehard in Wolferius' *Vita Godehardi episcopi Hildenesheimensis*. Saint Godehard dreams of a tree standing in the courtyard of the monastery with branches spread out to form an arbour (Wolferius 1854, 178-180). In the dream he receives a message that the tree must be sent to the Emperor. As he digs out the tree he notices that the upper part of the tree is withered but the roots remain healthy. Upon waking Godehard misinterprets the dream to portend the dissolution of the monastery. The true interpretation, given somewhat later, is that the withering represents Godehard's weak physical condition due to fasting and over exertion. The withered stem corresponding to Godehard's weakened physical condition resembles the withered trunk in Signý's second dream in AM 564a.

One final possible area of influence on Signý's dreams must also be considered. The book of *Isaiah* contains the following prophecy (*Isaiah* 11:1-3):

Then a shoot shall grow from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall spring from his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and power, a spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

This is in essence a description of a genealogical tree. Jesse is the grandson of Boaz and father of King David, and therefore ancestor of Jesus. These lines came to be represented pictorially in Christian art across Europe. In the motif, often referred to as the tree or root of Jesse, Jesse is usually depicted lying on his back in sleep or in vision as a genealogical tree grows from his loins. Scrolls naming ancestors of Jesus are depicted on its branches. This concept, the earliest examples of which date back to the eleventh century (Watson 1934, 44), proved an important illustration of Christ's ancestry and was used in many manuscripts and religious buildings across medieval Europe including Scandinavia (Lindgren-Fridell 1956-1978, 575-578). Turville-Petre (1988, 20) considers the possibility that Snorri Sturluson knew of the motif at least by reputation, from the stained glass window of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Denis in Paris.

Both Schach and Turville-Petre portray the genealogical tree as a motif that Snorri Sturluson was fundamental in popularising in Iceland. Nevertheless the motif was already established in various forms prior to his compilation of *Heimskringla* (for example *Morkinskinna*<sup>108</sup> and *Guðrúnarkviða II*). Furthermore, ideas associating humans with trees date back to pagan creation myths. These ideas assisted the blossoming of the motif as the growth of literacy in Iceland resulted in foreign texts becoming available. As for Signý's dreams in *Harðar saga*, it is striking that the dreams show some of the hallmarks of dreams contained in foreign texts but not found in other Icelandic texts. Most noticeably the withered tree-trunk in AM 564a, is not found in other Icelandic versions of the dream, but is present in Suetonius and Wolferius. Among the Icelandic analogues, Signý's dreams are most closely related to Ragnhildr's dream in *Heimskringla*. Both dreams share the concept that the upper parts of the tree represent the later stages of the progeny's life and have word-play on the transferred sense of blossoming. As stated above Styrmir Kárason fróði has been suggested as a possible author of *Harðar saga*. *Íslendinga saga* connects Styrmir with Snorri Sturluson (e.g. *Stu* 1906-1911, I, 421 and 540) and it is not unlikely that Styrmir lived for some time with Snorri and was perhaps even his scribe (Þórhallur Vilmundarson 1991, xlv-xlvi). It is possible that Styrmir's life of Saint Óláfr provided a source for Snorri's separate saga of Óláfr, but as only fragments of Styrmir's text remain, this is based more on circumstance than evidence (Whaley 1991, 67-68). If we are to suppose that Styrmir is indeed the author of a version of *Harðar saga*, then it is quite possible to assume that there is a direct relationship between Signý's dreams in *Harðar saga* and Ragnhildr's in *Heimskringla*. This proximity also makes it hard to judge the direction of this influence. Indeed it is even possible that, during his time at Reykjaholt, Styrmir discussed dreams of the genealogical tree with Snorri or that a foreign text at Reykjaholt inspired both writers.

### Conclusion

We must now return to *Harðar saga* to see what light this wealth of parallels can throw upon Signý's dreams. Firstly, if we compare the two manuscripts, then we find that elements unique to both versions seem likely to have been in the original saga.

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<sup>108</sup> We know with relative certainty that Snorri Sturluson used *Morkinskinna* as a source for some of the later portions of *Heimskringla* (Whaley 1991, 71), and, given the similarity between Sigurðr's dream in both versions, it seems likely that Snorri took Sigurðr's dream from there.

This supports the view that the two versions are independently descended from a common original. Regarding the first dream, the text of AM 556a is closer to the original. In AM 556a the roots portray the extent of Hǫrðr's inheritance and the top of the tree the poverty and ignominy of his later life. This feature of moving up the tree to indicate a later time in the progeny's life is also found in the closely related dream of Ragnhildr in *Heimskringla* and seems likely to have been in the original text of *Harðar saga*. In AM 564a this idea is confused. I believe that a scribe or writer mistakenly tried to correct the dream in the version preserved in AM 564a, changing the roots to branches to make the dream more closely resemble those preserved in *konungasögur*, despite the fact this did not agree with the story of Hǫrðr who ended his days an outlaw. In contrast, the second dream is better preserved in AM 564a. The withered trunk, which is only mentioned in the AM 564a fragment, fits well with the idea of the saplings being torn up in *Guðrúnarkviða II* and resembles several of the foreign parallels. The text of AM 564a, however, does show signs of being shortened, most noticeably in the character of Þórdís the foster-mother. Þórdís' interpretations of the dreams in AM 564a have been shortened to the extent that they tell us almost nothing, compared to AM 556a, where they elucidate the more complex aspects of the dreams and give information that could not otherwise be gleaned by the reader.

Despite the problems and questions that the preservation raises, Signý's dreams remain interesting examples of what had become a popular motif in the later period of saga writing. There seems little doubt that this motif owed a great deal to the influence of foreign stories, literature and perhaps even art. However, this motif flourished because it fitted well with pre-existing concepts within the saga mind-set, creating cycles of influence and re-influence.

### VII.iii Þorbjörg's dream of wolves

#### Context:

During his time as an outlaw, Hǫrðr and his company steal from many of the farms surrounding Hvalfjörðr. In chapter 30, Hǫrðr expresses some regret that he has been forced into this position and suggests that they hi-jack a merchant-ship. However, his foster-brother Geirr and his other companions want to burn all the local farmers in their houses. Hǫrðr reluctantly agrees to burning Illugi and Indriði, his brothers-in-law.

The narrator then turns to Indriði's farm where Hǫrðr's sister Þorbjörg has her dream. Following her dream Þorbjörg tells her husband to redirect the stream so that it flows straight through the house. When the attackers arrive, Hǫrðr tries to persuade Þorbjörg to leave her husband, but she refuses. They attack the farm with fire but find that the building will not catch light. Even after they have redirected the stream away from the farm there is still enough water in the building to prevent it burning and, when support for the householders arrives, the attackers go away disappointed and abandon their plans to attack any other farms.

#### Text:

*Harð* 1960, ch. 31, pp. 165

*Harð* 1991, ch. 31, pp. 77

Þá nótt ina sömu, er Hǫrðr fór ór Hólmi, dreyndi Þorbjörgu á Indriðastaðum, at átta tigur varga rynni þar at bænum ok brynni eldar ór munnni þeim ok væri einn í hvítaljörnu, ok þótti hann heldr dapr, ok dvöldusk nokkura stund á bænum ok runnu síðan vestr ór garði á hól nokkurn ok lögðusk þar niðr. En Indriði sagði þat vera hugi Hólmverja til sín. Þorbjörg kvezk ætla, at þeir mundu vera sjálfir ok koma þar brátt.

The same night, when Hǫrðr went from Hólmi, Þorbjörg dreamed at Indriðastaðir that eighty wolves ran there to the farm and fire burned from their mouths and among them was a polar-bear, and he seemed somewhat downcast and they stayed there a little while at the farm and then ran west from the yard to a certain hillock and laid themselves down there. And Indriði said these were the *hugir* of the Hólm-dwellers against him.<sup>109</sup> Þorbjörg said that she thought that they themselves would also be coming there soon.

<sup>109</sup> The last two words of this sentence go with the word *hugir*. Thus one might understand the meaning as either 'feelings towards him', or 'fetches against him'.



**Commentary:**

Þorbjörg's dream is quite unlike the dreams of Signý earlier in the same saga. As the fragment of *Harðar saga* in AM 564a has long since broken off, it is impossible to know whether this dream dates from the same stage in the development of *Harðar saga* as Signý's dreams. Nonetheless, for the readership of AM 556a at least, the dream of wolf fetches sat easily alongside the previous dreams of the genealogical tree. Þorbjörg's dream is similar to that in a number of *Íslendingasögur*, where an impending battle is indicated by a dream of wolves. I have already described this type of dream in detail (see section II.ii). I will therefore try to avoid repeating my arguments, and instead concentrate on details that are peculiar to this instance.

The wolf fetches

As in other wolf dreams these dream-symbols are clearly fetches; the eighty wolves equating directly to the eighty men said to be living on Hólmr (*Harð* 1991, ch. 24, p. 65).<sup>110</sup> Here the word *vargr* ('wolf', but also 'outlaw') associates the dream-symbols with the outlaws who are about to attack. Indriði interprets the wolves as: *hugir Hólmverja til sín* ('*hugir* of the Hólm-dwellers against him'). Þorbjörg follows this by commenting: *at þeir mundu vera sjálfir ok koma þar brátt* ('that they, themselves [i.e. those people represented by the *hugir*] would also be coming there soon'). I have already mentioned that the concept of *hugr* was similar to that of the *fylgja* (see section II.ii). The link between the noun *hugr* and verb *huga* ('to think') suggests that the *hugr* was more closely associated with a person's mind, thoughts and intentions than *fylgjur*, and indeed *hugr* can also mean 'mind' (Cleasby 1957, 290-291). Indriði's words imply this link between fetches and thought. The fetches in the dream are the feelings, or perhaps even aggressive intentions, of the Hólm-dwellers towards him. A similar phrase is used of the fetches in Atli's dream in *Hávarðar saga*, which are said to be *manna hugir* ('*hugir* of men') (*Háv* 1943, ch. 20, pp. 349-350). In *Hávarðar saga* the wolf fetches in Atli's dream may have been caused by the sorcerer Þorgrímur Dýrason's attempts to discover the layout and defence arrangements of Atli's farm before attacking. There is no suggestion of sorcery in *Harðar saga*, but Indriði's

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<sup>110</sup> Argüelles (1994, 242) suggests the number of wolves may have been a scribal error, mistaking *áttján* for *átta tígir*. This would, however, require the number in the exemplum to have been written in words rather than roman numerals. Furthermore the number of men on Geirshólmr has already been stated and eighteen men would be unlikely to pose a serious threat to a fully staffed farm with no shortage of men.

comment and his wife's response fit well with the idea of the *hugr* as something which might be sent out in advance, either voluntarily or accidentally and effectively herald the arrival of the raiding party.<sup>111</sup>

Another striking feature of the wolves in Þorbjörg's dream is that fire emerges from their mouths. This represents the fact that the attackers will try to burn the farm. However it also has a mythological association. In the description of the wolf Fenrir at Ragnarøkkr Snorri Sturluson describes him breathing fire (*SnE* 1988, 50):

En Fenrisúlfr ferr með gapanda munn ok er hinn efri kjöptr við himni en hinn neðri við jörðu. Gapa mundi hann meira ef rúm væri til. Eldar brenna ór augum hans ok nōsum.	And the Fenris-wolf goes with mouth agape and the upper jaw touching the sky and the lower touching the earth. It would gape wider if only there were more room. Fire burns from his eyes and nostrils.
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Though, in Snorri's description, the fire is emerging from the eyes and nostrils rather than the mouth, the wolves in Þorbjörg's dream nevertheless evoke the image of Fenrir that would have been familiar to the saga's original audience. Thus Hǫrðr's attack on his sister represents a social Ragnarøkkr, a breaking down of the social order.

#### The Bear-fetch: An Eddic Reference?

Rather than a wolf, Hǫrðr is represented by a white bear. Bear fetches have already been mentioned with regards to Hǫskuldr's dream of Gunnarr's bear fetch in *Njáls saga* (see section III.ii). By representing Hǫrðr as a bear, rather than a wolf, the author distances Hǫrðr from the negative qualities associated with the wolf fetch. Hǫrðr is not, however, absolved entirely, as his fetch is accompanied by wolves (unlike Gunnarr's which is accompanied by bear-cubs or dogs) showing the extent to which he has fallen into bad company.

The bear-fetch in *Harðar saga* may have a more complex symbolism than in *Njáls saga*, and may be a direct reference to the Eddic story of King Atli's killing of his brothers-in-law Gunnarr and Hǫgni. Such a story would be a suitable parallel for *Harðar saga* as relations between in-laws is a theme throughout. In *Atlamál*, Kostbera has a series of dreams including one in which a bear enters the hall, smashes the benches and behaves aggressively (*Atlamál* stanza 17, *Edda* 1962, 250; also *Vǫls* 1906-

<sup>111</sup> The idea of the *hugr* heralding the arrival of an unexpected visitor persists in modern Scandinavian folklore, often manifesting itself in the form of itching or other physiological feelings (see Strömbäck 1975a, 7-11; Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, 43-45; and Alver 1989, 112-120).

1908, ch. 36, p. 93).<sup>112</sup> This dream represents the killing of Hǫgni and Gunnarr, when they are betrayed by their sister's husband King Atli. In both stories, the attack of a man against two brothers-in-law (the text is quite clear that Hǫrðr is thinking of both Illugi and Indriði when he decides to embark on the raid) is preceded by a dream in which the attacker appears as a bear.<sup>113</sup> The bear fetch thus connects Hǫrðr, the saga hero, with the evil King Atli and his sister Þorbjörg is elevated to the position of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir.

### Þorbjörg's action

Unlike all the male dreamers of wolf dreams, Þorbjörg undertakes a positive action to alter the outcome of the battle following her dream. She tells her husband to redirect the stream through the farm. Through Þorbjörg's forethought, the inhabitants of Indriðastaðir save themselves by dampening the flames from inside the house. Given the clear gender differences in attitudes towards dreaming, I see Þorbjörg's actions in terms of her femininity. Women are repeatedly shown to have a better understanding of dreams than men. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Eddic story which I have suggested is evoked by the bear symbol, where the two husbands repeatedly misinterpret their wives' dreams. Furthermore, Þorbjörg is not governed by the masculine heroic code that prevents so many male dreamers from heeding advice given in dreams. Upon waking from her dream she realises not only its importance but also the means by which they can save the farm and she sets about doing so. Her strategy even avoids direct confrontation between her husband and brother for the time being.

It is, of course, a great irony that Þorbjörg's farm is already destined to be saved. There are relatively few examples in the *Íslendingasögur* of dreamers acting on information obtained in symbolic dreams and even fewer where these actions prove effective.<sup>114</sup> In *Njáls saga*, Gunnarr is unable to prevent his brother dying, despite

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<sup>112</sup> Ursula Dronke (*Edda* 1969, 112-115) has suggested that this dream (along with several others in *Atlamá*) are inspired by the poet's knowledge of topoi from dream-books (for comparable examples see Fischer 1978, 49-50). Steven R. Fischer (1983, 14-15), however, sees such similarities as cultural coincidence.

<sup>113</sup> In the stream which Þorbjörg causes to run through the farmstead one might also see a similarity to Glaumvǫr's dream of a river running through the house in stanza 26 of *Atlamá* (*Edda* 1962, 251; see also *Heið* 1938, ch. 26, p. 290).

<sup>114</sup> This is in contrast to visitation dreams, which often have an instructive message for the dreamer and therefore, by their very nature, one is expected to act upon them.

having seen his death in a dream (see section III.iii). In *Gunnlaugs saga*, Þorsteinn Egilsson is unable to avert the confrontation over his daughter Helga by exposing her at birth (*Gunnl* 1938, chs 2-3, pp. 52-58). Herein lies the difference. Gunnarr has already seen Hjótr's death played out by his fetch. Þorsteinn has already witnessed the battle over Helga. Þorbjörg, on the other hand, does not seek to change the prophecy that she has seen in her dream. Rather the dream already shows that Hjótr's attack will be unsuccessful. She merely uses the information that she has gained to ensure that this occurs.

**VII.iv Conclusion**

*Harðar saga* is not normally considered among the classic *Íslendingasögur*, either in terms of date or content. Despite this, the three dreams told in the saga show considerable skill on the part of the writer. The two dreams of genealogical trees at the beginning, demonstrate a good control on the part of the writer of his material. The symbolism of the two trees is carefully handled, with each image referring to several different referents in the saga plot. These dreams seem to have been part of an early stage of the composition of the saga, as evidenced by the fact that they are present in both the complete saga (AM 556a) and the manuscript fragment (AM 564a), and elements unique to each manuscript appear to have been original. There can be little doubt that the dream of the genealogical tree is the result of influence from European texts. I believe that this influence so quickly took root in a Norse imagination because such images were already present. Furthermore, the influence was not merely the result of learning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but it took place gradually and repeatedly both orally and textually. While some scholars credit Snorri Sturluson with the widespread growth of the genealogical tree in the north, I see no reason why the examples in *Harðar saga* may not date from a similar time. If Styrmir Kárason inn fróði wrote the first version of *Harðar saga*, then Snorri may have known the motif from here. Though the dream of wolves is somewhat less unusual, it is nonetheless part of the saga's emphasis on strong women and draws self-consciously on Eddic parallels to highlight themes within the saga.

## Chapter VIII. Conclusions

There has been considerable interest in dreams in the *Íslendingasögur* over the years, but all scholars dealing with the subject have either approached it from an anthropological standpoint, attempting to understand a viking belief about dreams, or from a literary standpoint, attempting to identify the source for the remarkable array of concepts and symbols found in these dreams. Even where multiple influences have been noted, they have been explained as the conflict between rival dream traditions. It seems to me, however, that, far from one tradition being the rival of another, saga writers delighted in the multiplicity of dream traditions and explanations. Furthermore, while they enjoyed the irony of incorrect interpretations, saga-writers saw no reason to limit, to constrain or even to conclusively explain dreams. Dreams would not be dreams if dream-symbols were forced to match events in the waking world of the saga simply, exactly or consistently.

*Droplaugarsona saga* contains an example of what one might think of as a typical saga dream. The single dream in this saga occurs immediately prior to the climactic episode and heightens the reader's excitement, expectation and suspense for that climax by simultaneously pointing forward to the climax while delaying it. The dream uses what must have been a widespread and well-known tradition in which animal fetches accompanied people, becoming visible only in dreams and supernatural visions. This tradition was often utilised by saga writers to allow the symbols of the dream-world to represent a person in the waking world. Even by the time *Droplaugarsona saga* was written, however, the dream had begun to become not only a literary device, but also an episode of interest whereby the process of dreaming, waking, reciting one's dream and interpretation was narrated in detail. A skilful writer such as the author of *Droplaugarsona saga* ensured that no reader was left unclear of the general meaning of the dream, whereas more complex or detailed connections were left for the reader to understand for himself, thereby engaging his interest in the text.

*Njáls saga*, as a longer text, contains many more examples of dreams. The variety of dreams presented alongside one another in this text demonstrates both the willingness of saga authors to use different types of dreams, and willingness of the saga reader to understand and believe dreams of various types. Both symbolic dreams and dreams in which the dreamer is visited by a dream-spirit are presented as equally good indications of the future. The author seems to use these different types of dream to

portray different historical periods in his text, consigning fetch dreams to the Commonwealth's pre-Christian past while associating visitation dreams with a period closer to that of the contemporary audience and the ensuing confrontation of the Sturlung age. The author also presents more complex dreams which cover a wider time-frame. *Járngrímr's* prophecy in particular is a highly complex dream. This dream is likely to have been influenced by foreign literature, regional folklore and even current events. It contains both symbolic and visitation elements and refers to events in a complex and multifaceted way.

The dreams of *Laxdæla saga*, and most particularly Guðrún's four dreams, represent an even more complex web of meaning and reference. Guðrún's dream-symbols are inanimate objects, suggesting a merging of dream-book theory (with its tendency to use inanimate objects to elicit meaning) together with fetch belief (with its tendency to use a symbol to represent a person). The meaning of these symbols is complicated further by word-play involving set-phrases, puns and skaldic kennings. This complex code is then varied across the dreams, requiring the reader to interpret each in a different way. Furthermore, the symbols refer to different things on different levels. *Laxdæla saga* arguably represents the apex of the use of the dream as a literary device in Old Norse literature. The whole of the latter two thirds of the saga is structured according to the dreams narrated in chapter 33. While the dreams are never referred to directly again in the saga, their prophecy is never far away and is recalled deliberately and carefully in Guðrún's final scene with her son Bolli.

*Gísla saga* more than any other is a saga about dreams. Here the dreams have ceased to be literary devices and become the subject matter of the story. The first two dreams in the saga use the idea of a fetch dream predicting an impending attack. The saga-writer, however, takes this motif and adapts it to his story. Rather than preparing the reader for the attack, the dreams are told after the event and rather than elucidating events, the writer's use of two distinct fetch animals reflects the reader's uncertainty over the identity of the killer. The two dream-women who haunt Gísli's dreams when he is an outlaw are more elusive still. They seem to refer variously to Gísli's earthly fate, to his psychological state, to his eternal fate and to his religion and behaviour. While scholars have sought repeatedly to pin a single meaning on these women, so as to create a blueprint by which we might understand them, the medieval reader does not seem to have required such an understanding. Rather he seems merely to have enjoyed the multiplicity, changeability and difficulty of a text that provides more questions with

every reading. This saga also introduces the question of the development of dreams in a single text during its process of composition. While the dreams seem to have been present in the earliest verses about Gísli, they have been reworked and reinterpreted, with further meanings added with each subsequent telling.

The same is true of both *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Harðar saga*. *Víga-Glúms saga* contains four dreams, again each of a different type. Three of these have verses associated with them. Perhaps most interesting among them is the dream of the whetstones, which contains layer after layer of meaning involving mythology, puns and set-phrases. The recasting of the stanza associated with this dream seems to have added further levels of meaning and has not simplified or explicated the symbols. Signý's tree dreams in *Harðar saga* are perhaps the easiest to identify direct parallels to and perhaps even sources for. Nonetheless the tree symbol is used carefully, cleverly and in a multi-layered manner.

I have maintained throughout these discussions that my approach has not been to make generalised statements about viking dreaming and seek examples to prove my argument, rather to work from the minutiae of single examples. However, even from the above six examples of sagas I have chosen one can begin to notice themes and motifs that must have proved popular with saga readers and writers. The prophetic dream proved a convenient literary device, heightening tension shortly before a climactic episode by foreshadowing the episode, yet simultaneously delaying the episode and holding the reader in suspense. The dream, however, seems to have quickly developed from a literary device to a literary episode in its own right. The dream-scene, in which a dreamer is seen sleeping, and then tells his dream, which is interpreted, occurs in many sagas and was probably a favourite among saga audiences. The question of interpretation is clearly one that interested saga-writers and, as dream scenes became more complex, the interpretation of the dream became a means by which the author could engage the reader's interest. The challenge for saga-writers was to find means by which they could ensure that the dream still performed the function for which it was needed in the text (e.g. foreshadowing, transporting news etc) but could be understood on different levels. Thus dreams took on manifold meanings. This interest in interpretation inevitably became the subject of the episodes themselves as authors differentiated between the sensibility and intelligence of their characters by their interpretations of dreams.



While writers of European literature seem to have sought to divide dreams, not only according to their type but also according to the accuracy with which they might represent events in the waking world, the authors of the *Íslendingasögur* embraced all types of dreams on an equal footing. Thus fetches, object symbolism, direct representation and dream visitations are presented as equally believable and equally good representations of events in the future or present. Various episodes show that saga writers could conceive of a concept of dreams with no meaning; indeed such a belief is probably a pre-requisite for any belief in the veracity of dreams. However, no such dream appears in the six sagas considered in the present study or indeed anywhere in the *Íslendingasögur*. It is hard to imagine what role such a dream could play in a saga.

The question of letting dreams govern one's actions is raised in different ways in the texts. Two views seem to have existed. Firstly, there is the view expressed and epitomised by Skarpheðinn Njálsson that dreams should not govern a man's actions. Secondly, there is the view, often (though not always) associated with women and perhaps symbolised by Njáll himself (though he is never mentioned as dreaming) that dreams can guide and that, while a specific prophecy cannot be changed or altered, they might offer intelligence that cannot otherwise be gained. It would be presumptuous of the saga author to claim which view was superior to the other, and he does not seek to do so.

Saga writers did not seek to offer us any real answers about dreaming. It is quite clear that they took great pleasure in dreams and in particular delighted in the process by which dream-symbols could be associated with the waking world. New stories brought new dreams and new interpretations, and I believe they approached new technologies for interpreting dreams, such as the *Somniale Danielis*, in the same manner. Such new dreams and new interpretations were, however, seen as something to augment rather than replace what they already possessed, adding new and further levels of meaning.

### Appendix I. The Etymology of the Word *Draumr*

The Old Norse word for dream is *draumr* (*draumur* in Modern Icelandic). This is cognate with Faeroese *dreymur*, Norwegian *drøm* (NýNorsk *draum*), Swedish *dröm* and Danish *drøm*. Among the Old West Germanic languages the word is cognate with Old Saxon *drōm* (which was also found with a meaning similar to the Old English *drēam*, see below), the Old Frisian *drām* and Old High German *troum* (*traum* in Modern German) (de Vries 1962, 82).

The origin of Old Norse *draumr* is disputed. It is possibly descended from the form *\*draugma*, meaning ‘deceiving vision’.<sup>115</sup> This seems slightly surprising given the tendency for dreams to have prophetic value in early Germanic literature, or to have actual consequences in the waking world. The other etymology suggested (for example by Ehrensperger 1931), depends on the relationship of the word to the Old English *drēam*. Bosworth (1898, 210) defines *drēam* as: ‘joy’, ‘pleasure’, ‘mirth’, ‘rapture’, ‘ecstasy’ etc and ‘what causes mirth’, ‘an instrument of music’, ‘music’, ‘song’ etc. The word is not preserved in Old English with the meaning ‘dream’, which is usually signified by the word *swefn* or *swefen* (related to Old Norse *svefn*, ‘sleep’) (Bosworth 1898, 946). In Middle English the noun *drēam* is preserved both meaning ‘sound’, ‘music’ as well as ‘dream’, and likewise the verb *drēmen* (Stratmann 1891, 174-175). The change of meaning from the Old English *drēam* (‘joyous song’), to Middle English *drēam* (‘dream’), may have been caused by Scandinavian influence during the viking period (de Vries 1962, 82; Cleasby 1957, 104). It is possible that, like the Old Saxon, both meanings existed in Old English, though the meaning ‘dream’ tended to appear informally and was not recorded in extant literature (Barber 1993, 132; Skeat 1910, 182). Old English *drēam*, however, is derived from Greek *thréomai* ‘to shout’ and *thróos* ‘a noise’. It is therefore possible that the Old English meaning is the more original meaning, which changed to incorporate states of ecstasy or noises made during sleep; this change taking place earlier in mainland Europe than in England.

The verb *dreyma* has similar cognates: Faeroese *droyma*, Norwegian *drømme*, Swedish *drömma* and Danish *drømme*; in West Germanic, Dutch *dromen*, Old High German *troumen*. As with *draumr*, the related verbs in Old English *drēman*, and Old Saxon *drōmian* mean ‘to sing’ and ‘to rejoice’. In Old Norse the verb *dreyma* took an

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<sup>115</sup> On the etymology of *draumr* see Henzen 1890, 1-16; Ehrensperger 1931; Alexander Jóhannesson 1956, 529; de Vries 1962, 82; and Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 125.

accusative subject, i.e. one would say *Mik dreymði draum* ('I dreamed a dream', but literally '(it) dreamed me dreamed a dream').

**Appendix II: The Number and Distribution of Dreams in the *Íslendingasögur***

Henzen (1890, 74) estimates that there are approximately 250 dreams in the sagas. Ehrensperger (1931, 80) mentions 530 dream references in Old Norse literature. Matthías Jónasson (1986, 470) mentions up to 300 dreams narrated in the *Íslendingasögur*, together with *Sturlunga saga*, *Heimskringla* and the *Biskupasögur*. Haeckel (1934, 7) estimates that the *Íslendingasögur* contain an average of three or four dreams per saga. This accords with Hallberg (1962, 81), who gives the same estimate. Argüelles (1994, 232), however, estimates a much smaller number of dreams per saga: “Even if, for some reason, one wished to redistribute the 140 dream references (or 128 dreams) among the 107 individual *sögur* and *þættir* ... there would only be a dream or two per narrative”. Argüelles’ conclusion is largely a result of his decision to treat the sagas and *þættir* as identical (giving him a larger denominator than either of the earlier scholars). Nonetheless Hallberg and Haeckel’s estimate does seem somewhat large. I have included 39 sagas in this study and have found a total of 111 dreams.<sup>116</sup> These references are listed below. This gives a mean average of 2.8 dreams per saga, a figure slightly lower than the average given both by Haeckel and Hallberg. Hallberg gives no account for his estimate, though it seems possible that he took it directly from Haeckel. In Haeckel’s work I cannot find any references to dreams that I do not know about, and therefore I would suggest her larger average is a result of a smaller sample of sagas (in her bibliography she lists only 33 *Íslendingasögur*) and a bias towards sagas containing dreams in that sample. As several of my predecessors have pointed out, the dreams are not distributed evenly across the sagas. Of the 39 sagas, 13 (33%) contain no dream. The maximum number of dreams in a single saga is 15 (*Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*). The median average is 1 and the mode 0. Thus we find many sagas with either one or no dreams at all, and other sagas with many dreams.

In volume II of *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* Vésteinn Ólason (1993b, 42) divides the corpus of *Íslendingasögur* into three groups according to date of composition: *fornlegar sögur* (1200-1280), *sígildar sögur* (1240-1310) and *unglegar sögur* (1300-1450).<sup>117</sup>

<sup>116</sup> In many cases I have made subjective decisions as to exactly what constitutes a dream, and this may lead to some difference in the exact numbers of dreams. As none of the previous scholars have provided a complete list of their dream references it is hard to know exactly where the numbers differ.

<sup>117</sup> The only change I make to these groupings is the addition of *Þorsteins saga hvíta* to the *sígildar sögur* group.

Using this model we find that 31 dreams occur in the *fornlegar sögur*; 36 in the *sígildar sögur*; and 44 in the *unglegar sögur*. *Flóamanna saga* and *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* (containing 13 and 15 dreams respectively) account for over half of the dreams in the last group. Seventy-three percent of the *fornlegar sögur* contain dreams (11 of 15); 67% of the *sígildar sögur* (6 of 9); and 60% of the *unglegar sögur* (9 of 15). From this very crude analysis we can draw two tentative conclusions. Firstly, that dreams were a relatively consistent feature of the *Íslendingasögur*, from those sagas generally believed to be early such as *Heiðarvíga saga* and *Bjarnar saga*, through to post-classical sagas such as *Þórðar saga*. Secondly, dreams were never a requirement of a saga, as each period contains examples of sagas in which no dreams occur. In addition to these conclusions I will tentatively add a third - during the middle and later periods a number of sagas contain scenes in which a series of dreams are narrated consecutively (e.g. *Laxd* 1934, ch. 33, pp. 88-90; *Gísl* 1943, ch. 33, pp. 102-109; *Flóam* 1991, chs. 20-21, pp. 274-281 and ch. 24, pp. 293-295; *ÞSH* 1950, ch. 4, pp. 309-313 and ch. 5, pp. 314-315).

**Table 4. List of sagas**

Saga	Number of dreams	Reference
<i>Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar</i>	15	<i>ÞSH</i> 1950 (ch. 4, p. 309, ch. 4, p. 310; ch. 4, p. 310; ch. 4, p. 310; ch. 4, p. 310-311; ch. 4, p. 311; ch. 4, p. 311; ch. 4, pp. 311-312; ch. 4, p. 312; ch. 4, p. 312; ch. 4, pp. 312-313; ch. 4, p. 313; ch. 5, p. 314; ch. 5, pp. 314-315; ch. 5, p. 316).
<i>Flóamanna saga</i>	13 <sup>118</sup>	<i>Flóam</i> 1991 (ch. 15, p. 260; ch. 16, pp. 261-262; ch. 20, p. 274; ch. 20, pp. 274-275; ch. 21, pp. 278-279; ch. 21, p. 280; ch. 21, pp. 280-281; ch. 23, pp. 286-287; ch. 24, p. 293; ch. 24, pp. 293-294; ch. 24, 294 lower text only; ch. 24, pp. 294-295; ch. 24, p. 295).
<i>Gísla saga</i>	11	<i>Gísl</i> 1943 (ch. 14, p. 46; ch. 14, p. 46; ch. 22, pp. 70-73; ch. 24, pp. 75-76; ch. 24, pp. 76-77; ch. 30, pp. 94-96; ch. 33, p. 102; ch. 33, pp. 103-104; ch. 33, pp. 104-106; ch. 33, pp. 106-109; ch. 34, p. 110).
<i>Laxdæla saga</i>	10	<i>Laxd</i> 1934 (ch. 31, pp. 84-85; ch. 33, pp. 88-90; ch. 33, pp. 88-90; ch. 33, pp. 89-90; ch. 33, pp. 89-91; ch. 48, p. 149; ch. 49, p. 155; ch. 63, p. 186; ch. 74, p. 215; ch. 76, pp. 223-224).
<i>Njáls saga</i>	9	<i>Nj</i> 1954 (ch. 23, p. 64-65; ch. 36, p. 94; ch. 62, pp. 155-156; ch. 81, p. 197; ch. 82, p. 199-200; ch. 112, p. 282; ch. 133, pp. 346-348; ch. 134, pp. 351-352; ch. 157, pp. 459-460).
<i>Fóstbræðra saga</i>	6	<i>Fbr</i> 1943 (ch. 4, p. 138; ch. 11, pp. 174-176; ch. 23, pp. 243-244; ch. 23, pp. 244-245; ch. 24, pp. 252-253; ch. 24, pp. 255-256).
<i>Hallfreðar saga</i>	5	<i>Hallfr</i> 1939 (ch. 6, p. 165; ch. 9, p. 178; ch. 10, pp. 191-192; ch. 11, pp. 194-195; ch. 11, p. 199).
<i>Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa</i>	4	<i>BjH</i> 1938 (ch. 18, p. 158; ch. 25, p. 177; ch. 26, p. 178; ch. 32, p. 196-197).
<i>Gunnlaugs saga</i>	4	<i>Gunnl</i> 1938 (ch. 2, pp. 53-55; ch. 11, p. 88; ch. 13, p. 104; ch. 13, pp. 104-105).
<i>Ljósvetninga saga</i>	4	<i>Ljósv</i> 1940 (ch. 11(21), p. 58; ch. 11(21), pp. 60-61; ch. 11(21), p. 60; ch. 16(26), p. 85).
<i>Víga-Glúms saga</i>	4	<i>Glúm</i> 1956a (ch. 9, pp. 30-31; ch. 21, pp. 70-71; ch. 21, pp. 71-72; ch. 26, pp. 87-88).

<sup>118</sup> This is a conjectural figure. There are 12 dreams in the 'shorter', entire version of the saga, however a further dream is preserved in the fragmentary, 'longer' version. Therefore if the longer version in its complete form originally contained all the dreams now preserved in the shorter version it would have contained 13 dreams.

Saga	Number of dreams	Reference
<i>Borskfirdinga saga</i>	3	<i>Gullþ</i> 1991 (ch. 3, pp. 184-185; ch. 3, p. 185; ch. 18, p. 218).
<i>Bárdar saga</i>	3	<i>Bárd</i> 1991 (ch. 1, p. 104; ch. 3, p. 107; ch. 21, pp. 169-170).
<i>Harðar saga</i>	3	<i>Hárð</i> 1991 (ch. 5, p. 15; ch. 7, pp. 18-19; ch. 30, p. 77).
<i>Þórðar saga</i>	3	<i>Þórð</i> 1959 (ch. 3, p. 179; ch. 8, p. 201; ch. 12, p. 219).
<i>Heiðarvíga saga</i>	2	<i>Heið</i> 1938 (ch. 26, pp. 291-292; ch. 26, pp. 293-294).
<i>Hávarðar saga</i> <sup>119</sup>	2	<i>Háv</i> 1943 (ch. 19-21, pp. 349-350).
<i>Vatnsdæla saga</i> <sup>120</sup>	2	<i>Vatn</i> 1939 (ch. 36, 95; ch. 42, pp. 110-111).
<i>Droplaugarsona saga</i>	1	<i>Dpl</i> 1950 (ch. 10, p. 161).
<i>Fljótsdæla saga</i>	1	<i>Flj</i> 1950 (ch. 5, pp. 224-226).
<i>Grettis saga</i>	1	<i>Gr</i> 1936 (ch. 69, p. 223).
<i>Hrafnkels saga</i>	1	<i>Hrafnk</i> 1950 (ch. 1, p. 97).
<i>Hænsa-Þóris saga</i>	1	<i>Høns</i> 1938 (ch. 9, p. 24).
<i>Kormáks saga</i>	1	<i>Korm</i> 1939 (ch. 19, p. 275).
<i>Reykðæla saga</i>	1	<i>Reykð</i> 1940 (ch. 19, p. 213).
<i>Vápnfirðinga saga</i>	1	<i>Vápnf</i> 1950 (ch. 13, p. 48-49).
<i>Bandamanna saga</i>	0 (in either version)	
<i>Eyrbyggja saga</i> <sup>121</sup>	0	
<i>Egils saga Skallagrímssonar</i>	0	
<i>Eiríks saga rauða</i>	0	
<i>Finnboga saga ramma</i>	0	
<i>Grænlandinga saga</i>	0	
<i>Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfjfls</i>	0	
<i>Karlnessinga saga</i>	0	
<i>Króka-Refs saga</i>	0	
<i>Svarfdæla saga</i>	0	
<i>Valla-Ljóts saga</i>	0	
<i>Víglundar saga</i>	0	
<i>Þorsteins saga hvíta</i>	0	

<sup>119</sup> These two dreams seem to form a single shared experience suffered by both Þorgrímr and Atli simultaneously.

<sup>120</sup> In fact Þorsteinn's dream occurs three times (... *ok svá fór þrjár nætr*, '...and happened this way for three nights'), but as the dream is only narrated once I have only counted it once.

<sup>121</sup> *Eyrbyggja saga* contains a number of waking visions but no actual dreams.

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