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INITIATION BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

STRUCTURE AND SYMBOLISM IN PRE-CHRISTIAN SCANDINAVIAN RELIGION

Translated by Victor Hansen

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to apply theories and perspectives from the Study of Religion, or Comparative Religion as some would prefer, to the study of the pre-Christian culture in the North. The basic idea is that such an application will enlighten our understanding of some myths and other narratives which, from other points of view, may seem obscure and thus give us a glimpse into the world view of the pagan Scandinavians, which, I would maintain, cannot be obtained otherwise. This means that the book deals with problems within the Study of Religion as well as within Scandinavian Studies, and it is, of course, my hope that it can inspire scholars from both fields, even if some chapters may be rather 'technical' and probably more relevant for scholars within one or the other of the fields. As an historian of religion, occupied with Old Norse myth, religion and ideology, the application mentioned seems to be an undertaking that is all the more relevant because much research done from the point of view of so-called modern philology or from the point of view of traditional historical studies argues that our access to this field is severely limited by the situation surrounding the source material. I hope to be able to show that the situation is not all that bad and that studies into the Old Norse world do not have to be critical in only a negative way, but that they may actually reveal important aspects of the world view of that culture, even if we must accept that there will always be important lacunae in our knowledge of pagan Scandinavian religion.

The idea for this book goes back many years. Earlier versions of some chapters have been published as articles during the nineties. The final manuscript was submitted, in a Danish version, in 2003 for the Dr. Phil.–degree at the University of Aarhus and was defended in May 2004. During 2005 and 2006 it was translated into English by Victor Hansen in order to be published as part of the Viking Collection.

This means that many people have had a role to play in the process, and I owe my gratitude to all of them, especially my colleagues at the Department of the Study of Religion at the University of Aarhus and at other universities across the world. Here, I shall mention only a few, who have been particularly important for the final result. Professor

Margaret Clunies Ross, University of Sydney, who has contributed in several ways: by being a member of the committee for the Danish version submitted for the Dr. Phil.–degree and an opponent at the defence, by reading the English manuscript, giving many valuable suggestions for improvement, and by being a member of the editorial board of the Viking Collection, and not least for her great patience with the finishing of the manuscript. I should like to thank also the two other members of the editorial board, Professor Mats Malm, University of Gothenburg, and Professor Matthew Driscoll, University of Copenhagen, for having accepted the manuscript. Additionally I am grateful to the other two opponents at my defence, Professor Britt-Mari Näsström, University of Gothenburg, and Professor Armin W. Geertz, University of Aarhus. My colleagues in Aarhus, Professor Hans Jørgen Lundager Jensen, Professor Per Bilde, and the late Professor Preben Meulengracht Sørensen have all read parts of the Danish manuscript and have contributed with valuable ideas. This also goes for Professor Kurt Schier, University of Munich, who, while I stayed for three months in Munich back in the beginning of the nineties, read some chapters in very early versions. I also want to thank Lecturer Karen Bek-Pedersen, University of Aarhus, for valuable suggestions in the English manuscript, and Henning Kure with whom I have been talking for many, many hours on mythological matters. I want to thank them all for their professional (and often social) contribution.

I should also like to thank the secretaries at the Faculty of Theology in Aarhus, Ingrid Mikkelsen, now retired, who did a great job with the preparation of the Danish manuscript, and Marlene Jessen who has worked just as hard on this English version.

Finally, I must thank the Danish Research Council, 'Forskningsrådet for Kultur og Kommunikation' for financial assistance to cover printing costs, and the Dean at the Faculty of Theology, Carsten Riis, for granting money for the translation into English from 'Aarhus Universitets Forskningsfond'.

As mentioned, many more people who have contributed in some way or other to this book ought to be mentioned here. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them all.

Chapter 1
Introduction

There are several good reasons for being occupied with initiation in pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. One of them is that, while initiation as a phenomenon has attracted the attention of historians of religion, both in connection with most of the individual religions from the past and the present, as well as in cross-cultural perspectives, the phenomenon is a long way from acquiring a central place within research in the history of religion in Scandinavia. There are several reasons for this, but the most important is without a doubt the situation regarding the sources for this field. They give us no possibility of dealing with initiation from those perspectives which in general mark research in other fields, quite simply because we do not have adequate descriptions of rituals.[1]

Another reason for undertaking the present investigation is that, when the point of departure is so problematical as is the case here, we are forced to look more closely at the way in which the phenomenon has been defined in the general history of research. In most cases, the definition has been marred by a lack of rigour and awareness of the terminological and theoretical problems involved in the very concept of initiation. A critical look at the history of research and the way research has defined – or not defined – the phenomenon is, therefore, necessary with a view to marking out relevant criteria for the selection of primary material for study. It is also necessary because there is a need for an independent discussion of research in this field, and an identification of its central elements so as to get an appropriate characterisation of initiation as a phenomenological category.[2]

A third and perhaps the most important reason for analysing Scandinavian myths in relation to the category of initiation is that, in some previous works of mine, I saw that several of these myths 'opened up' when the initiation model was used as an analytical tool (Schjødt 1983, 1994, 1999a, 2000a, 2000b and 2003). The present work, therefore, lays claim to demonstrate that a series of myths, which have not previously been examined in connection with this model, can be shown to form an entire group (or perhaps rather part of an entire group in which other myths possibly also belonging to this group may have been lost or may be so distorted in transmission that it is no longer possible to analyse them as a part of the pre-Christian semantic universe), which have revolved around the semantic adaptation of initiation's *raison d'être*. Thorough analyses of previously examined myths and a number of other myths, together with a complete analysis of the semantic universe to which they each contribute, may be expected to shed new light not only on the myths examined, but on substantial areas of Scandinavian religious history, including important complexes that deal with the relationship between the Æsir and Vanir and myths involving the god Óðinn.

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[1] On the whole, our knowledge about rituals in Scandinavian religion is, for various reasons, very limited (cf. Hultgård 1993, 222-3 and Clunies Ross 2002 and 2003).

[2] In order to prevent any misunderstanding, it must be emphasised that the terms phenomenology and phenomenological are used in the sense of phenomenology of religion and not in the sense the concept has in the history of philosophy.

It is hoped that this investigation will contribute to Scandinavian studies generally as well as to the phenomenology of religion, though my perspective is primarily phenomenological.

A preliminary working definition

As a beginning, I advance the following preliminary working definition, which will be considerably expanded in Chapter 3: initiation is a certain sequential structure – ritualistic or narrative – which makes use of a series of symbols that mark the difference and the transition between the initial and the final phases of the sequence. Central to the unfolding of the sequence is the acquisition of a numinous potential (knowledge or abilities, which are often expressed through various acquired objects) for the acting figure, who can be designated as subject in the sequence, a potentiality without which the subject would not be able to maintain his status in the final situation, which thus designates a 'higher' level and which, in principle, is irreversible. The crucial factor at the present stage is that we are dealing with a sequence structure and thus not necessarily with a ritual structure. This distinction is of considerable importance since it implies that there is no prior explicit or implicit claim in the definition that all the myths, which are to form the main subject of this study, reflect original rituals.[3] The objective of the investigation is, in the first instance, neither the rituals nor their reconstruction, but rather, as mentioned above, an attempt to reveal the semantic universe within which the structure and symbolism of initiation take place. If it is possible in addition to assert that certain individual features in the narrative in fact have had their basis in some aspect of ritual, this must be considered as a by-product of the investigation.

Further, it is important to recognise that the acquisition of a numinous potential may be identified as playing a central part in initiation, because it gives us a possibility of determining the relevant material. It means that passages in the primary data – which will be further defined in Chapter 4 – that include the acquisition of an ability of numinous kind are those which, at least in the first instance, are to be the subject of close analysis. As far as the term numinous is concerned, it was introduced into the study of religion by Rudolf Otto, who argues with some justice that the numinous in the strictest sense is undefinable (Otto 1963: 7). In this investigation, the term will be used in a relatively broad sense which includes that which is not quite precisely definable: the spiritual, the esoteric, the supernatural – in other words, that which in religious consciousness cannot be precisely pinpointed in everyday language, but which nevertheless has to use this language out of necessity. The numinous thus designates the content of a fundamentally *other world*, a world which is categorically different from that in which everyday life takes place (cf. Leach 1976, 72).

It is likewise important with regard to our data that the numinous knowledge which the subject acquires will be of importance for him or her in the final phase, and to this the observation can be added that this knowledge must in itself be the subject's aim and not only be a means of obtaining other things (a bride, wealth or something else). This excludes sequences such as the one in *Vafðr* in which Óðinn is competing in knowledge with Vafþrúðnir. Here it is not a question of an acquisition of knowledge since neither of the parties changes his status with respect to numinous knowledge in the final situation (see Chapter 6.3).

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[3] It is, therefore, not a question of continuing to build on Propp 1983, 470, where he concludes: 'Ces correspondances [between folktales and initiation rituals] nous permettons d'affirmer que le cycle d'initiation est la base la plus archaïque du conte', 'The agreement [between folktales and initiation rituals] allows us to assert that the initiation cycle is the most archaic foundation of the folktale'.

This criterion, however, serves primarily to mark the difference between initiation and, for instance, folktales in which the hero obtains knowledge of how he may be able to find the key to a treasury, which in turn may give him the princess and half of the kingdom. That such folktales *may* have their root in an initiation ideology or perhaps even in initiation rituals can certainly not be rejected, but in that case they are often to be considered as derivations from such an ideology and not as a basis for the world view that was the foundation of the rituals. It is here, among other things, that myths and folktales differ from one another.

That which is required of a certain type of knowledge or abilities in order to qualify as elements in an initiation is that they must be of permanent importance for the subject in the final situation. It is, therefore, not a question of knowledge that solves a pressing problem for the subject but, rather, of numinous qualities which precisely characterise the subject in the final phase. For example, the myth in *Bdr* falls outside the definition for the reason that, although Óðinn indeed obtains knowledge of a numinous nature, it is not knowledge that has a permanent influence on his position.

The analyses will show, among other things, what the numinous entity that is to be acquired consists of, but it can be stated at once that, when the term ‘numinous knowledge’ is used, it is to be understood quite broadly, as it often includes something potential in the form of ‘an object of knowledge’, which gives the one who is in possession of it an increase in his numinous abilities.

It may for instance be a drink consisting of mead or blood, or it may be words in the form of runes or incantations, possibly supplemented by weapons with supernatural powers. The crucial point is whether they provide the subject in the initiation sequence with numinous qualities, signalling that these qualities are connected with an Other World.

The nature of the primary sources

When we say that we do not have sources describing initiation rituals in Scandinavian religion and, when initiation has been understood narrowly as a ritual category in most phenomenological studies,[4] there may seem to be a problem. However, there are new possibilities, not least of a symbolic nature, when we work with a *sequence* structure containing some specific elements. Such a structure may, in addition to being present in rituals, also be found in all kinds of narrative genres which may, therefore, constitute potential primary data. This holds good for myths in the narrow sense, understood as narratives concerning divine beings, but also for folktales, heroic legends and other categories. The mythical, however, occupies a special place in this study, although the term itself must be understood in a broader sense than the one just stated (cf. Chapter 3). Chapter 4 will deal more closely with a series of problems associated with the source material, but here I shall make a single observation about the concept of myth. It is characteristic of the mythical as a category within the phenomenology of religion that it often has a paradigmatic status in a culture, serving as a model for human activity, including the performance of rituals, to use the words of Eliade (e.g. Eliade 1963, 6-8). It is, therefore, meaningful when we want to examine a specific structure and symbolism to search in myth for its most explicit form. Even in religions for which we have copious source material about rituals, we are often obliged to turn to myth in order to obtain an increased understanding of the actions that take place in connection with the performance of ritual.[5]

The material will consist, therefore, predominantly of mythical statements. It is difficult to define myth as a category but, in this study it will be understood as a narrative dealing with circumstances in 'The Other World', or with the interaction which takes place between This World and The Other World. It must, however, be emphasised that the boundaries between myth and adjacent genres are often fluid. There is no doubt that structural parallels exist between myths and popular folktales, as we saw above (without folktales necessarily in all cases being understood as 'derivatives' of myths, see Stitt 1992, 22-3), whereas representational aspects, such as the status of the actors, will normally be different because the protagonists of myth generally belong more closely to The Other World than those who populate the folktale. Concomitantly there will also be a difference in degree of paradigmatic status. With regard to the relationship between myth and ritual it can also be difficult in the field of Scandinavian religion to decide whether a text is mythical or ritual, something that is perhaps most clearly expressed in connection with the stanzas in *Hávm* concerning Óðinn's hanging of himself. Perhaps it is rather a question of the narrative being both/and. It is also possible – perhaps even probable – that some of the poems we know were recited in connection with rituals in pre-Christian Scandinavia, but the exact nature of this oral tradition is unknown (Motz 1996b, 115; Quinn 2000, 37). There is no reason at this stage to carry out a more exact demarcation between myth and ritual, but only to keep in view that the main subject matter of our investigation must be mythical, without rejecting in advance a more or less obscure connection to the ritual sphere.

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[4] It should be stated here that the term 'initiation rituals' in this study covers those categories of rituals that van Gennep called *rites de passage*. The reason for this will emerge in Chapters 2 and 3.

[5] It is not a criticism of that part of the more recent research into rituals which sees the very performance of the ritual as its *raison d'être*. Nevertheless, one can give several examples to show that a ritual, in the participants' understanding, is performed with reference to a myth complex. It is thus not a question of a claim that *all* rituals are attached to myths, or that *all* myths have a paradigmatic status. It is simply a question of ascertaining the trite fact that *some* myths occupy such a position.

Initiation and religion

In order to reach a definition of the phenomenon of initiation, we need to remember that it is a matter of a symbolic structure, which is to be understood within the framework of a *religion*. Where it is meaningful in a sociological context to define initiation as the 'ritualising of a change of status', this is hardly sufficient in the context of the study of religion. When someone who is promoted in a firm is conventionally required to stand a round of drinks for his fellow employees, one may perhaps rightly call this an initiation ritual; it is a more or less institutionalised practice, which marks the person's entering into a new status. There is no reason to reject this usage of the term, which may be meaningful in various disciplines. But when we speak of initiation in the context of the study of religion, it is clear that we must focus on precisely those aspects of the phenomenon that distinguish it as a religious phenomenon, even though rituals can legitimately be argued to exist in both religious and secular contexts. This means that we must see it as part of the religious mode of existence, which has as its prerequisite that the basic ideology of the society is a religious one.

Consequently we cannot avoid touching on the question of what religion actually is. It is not appropriate here to enter into a detailed discussion of the history of research into this subject[6] but, on the other hand it is important to state how the term is understood in the present study. Scholars have tried to define religion throughout the whole history of research on this subject. What is common to the various attempts is that they emerge from the individual researcher's area of interest and professional background and, naturally, from the objectives they had in mind.

With regard to the present project, it is crucial to emphasise the importance of what we call 'The Other World' as it is understood by those people who are the subject of the research. The Other World will often be divided into several worlds, and it only becomes meaningful in contrast to This World, the one in which people's everyday life is played out according to laws and rules, which are generally known by everybody in the culture concerned. The Other World represents first and foremost something *completely different,*[7] and it is very difficult to determine its contents. It varies from culture to culture, admittedly with some common structural characteristics, but its representation is unique in each culture. It contains gods, demons, the dead, fabulous beings, celestial happiness, inhuman tortures, unknown spirits and modes of life and, on the whole, everything that is not of This World. The Other World can be thematised in terms of space or time: it is another place and/or it has existed from the beginning of time or will come into existence at the end of time. And furthermore – seen from the perspective of the study of religion – it cannot be verified, although representations of it and the consequences of these ideas for social and psychological life naturally can. As a universal category, The Other World can thus only be defined structurally as that which is completely different. The way in which it is different will therefore always be related to the empirical world, the form and content of which will be decisive for what resources the individual culture equips its Other World with. Together with otherness it is, therefore, also important to notice that it must have similarities to This World in order to become meaningful – similarities which are, however, often 'distorted' with regard to empirical occurrences. For example, when it is day here, it is night there, or the Other World may be inhabited by anthropomorphic beings who understand the language of animals. We thus operate with the categories of day and night, but they are reversed in comparison with the known world, or the alternation between night and day is suspended so that the Other World experiences an eternal day or an eternal night. People accept that the inhabitants of the Other World are similar to us and communicate with each other but their language is of another kind, or perhaps people are eternally silent. There are many possibilities, but the crucial point is that the Other World is categorically different. We may thus understand it as something that lies outside our world and any direct contact from This World to the Other World is, therefore, not attainable as a matter of course but has to be staged via ritualised actions, which are also actions that are separated from everyday activities though they have an affinity with them.

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[6] Bilde 1991 offers an excellent and brief outline of different attempts at a definition and gives copious references.

[7] The concept has a close affinity with what Rudolf Otto calls *das Ganz Andere*, 'The completely different' (Otto 1963, 31-7) which, however, has an ontological status in contrast to 'The Other World', as the concept is used in this study where it serves exclusively as an analytical concept.

It is the relationship between This World and everything which has to do with the Other World that also forms part of the dichotomy between the profane and the sacred – a dichotomy which, as is known, has rightly played an immense role in research on religion.[8]

The existence of these two worlds in people's religious consciousness is, however, not enough for us to be able to talk of a religion, as in that case we face a purely mental construction or a philosophy. It is thus crucial that a possible communication or exchange between them exists. This will include the possibility that both This World as well as the Other World may be in a position to send messages to one another. Seen from the perspective of the humanistic study of religion, it is only that part of the communication, in which This World is the sender that is empirically observable as a part of such a communication. The communication that passes from the Other World to This World can only be understood as such in the religious person's own interpretation. That a lightning strike is a sign from Jupiter must be said to be a matter of interpretation, whereas the Romans' thanksgiving for this sign may be seen unproblematically as a communicative act. Nevertheless, it can only be interpreted as a meaningful act if the whole complex of ideas about the Other World is involved.[9]

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[8] Brink (2001, 82) takes a sceptical position on whether this dichotomy between the sacred and the profane is applicable to pre-Christian Scandinavian religion with reference to the general sacredness of the landscape, but his argument is based on a misunderstanding. It is not a question of *everything* being sacred *all the time*. Certain places are constantly sacred, whereas other places may be sacred at certain times in connection with rituals. The point of the dichotomy is that people experience something as numinous, which would be impossible if everything was sacred all the time, which would in turn impede ordinary profane tasks. That the world as such is considered sacred does not prevent something at certain times being considered sacred and at other times not. And as long as something is more sacred than something else, it confirms only that the basic religious structure contains a heterogeneous space (cf. Eliade), which consists of a spectrum between the sacred and profane poles.

All this may seem rather trite, but it is nevertheless important to bear in mind since initiation as a phenomenological category will be viewed here primarily as an exchange between the two worlds in which that universe of meaning, which forms the Other World, plays a crucial role. It cannot be denied that initiation should in all likelihood be understood as a ritualised change of status but, in order to qualify this as a phenomenon that is a potential subject for study in research on religion, it is important to give the role that the Other World occupies in a religious society a specific meaning.

A fact that makes analysis difficult is that, in connection with the Scandinavian material – at least in that main part of it comprising the myths – we are already faced with the Other World as the point of departure, because these myths conceptualise a world that is first of all inhabited by gods.[10] Thus, these myths construct another 'Other World' within their own universe which, so to speak, becomes an Other World squared, so that within *that* Other World, which forms the mythical universe, it becomes possible to communicate with a second 'Other World'. We will return to this problem in Chapter 10.

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[9] With this we may also argue that the equipment in The Other World and its communication to This World forms the imaginative part of religion, whereas attempts from This World to communicate with The Other World form the action part of religion and, finally, that those consequences for the sociological and psychological life, which the ideas and the actions have, form the sociological and psychological part of religion. All three parts are important objects for an adequate science of religion and, not least, their relationship to each other. For an amplification of these viewpoints see Schjødt 1990c: 140-3.

[10] The Scandinavian myths include the world of human beings to a far smaller extent than is the case in most other mythologies, and several of the sequences that are dealt with here take place exclusively in the world of the gods, even though in Chapters 7 and 8 I will also examine sequences in which human actors (although with superhuman characteristics) play a part.

The structure of the book

Chapter 2 consists of a selective historical overview of research into the phenomenon of initiation, both from the perspective of the study of religion in general and more specifically from that of the study of Scandinavian religion and myth. Chapter 3, then, concludes, after a discussion of a series of key problems, with a description of the characteristics of the phenomenon of initiation, viewed both from a general and a Scandinavian perspective. Chapter 4 contains an account of the primary sources for the analysis as well as a discussion of problems involved in their interpretation.

Chapters 5 to 8 form the central part of the book and contain close analyses of the mythical sources. Each analysis concludes with the myth in question being measured against the criteria for the identification of initiation established in Chapter 3. There is a difference in the way in which the individual myths are treated as the myths in Chapters 5 and 6 and, to some extent in Chapter 7, require a higher degree of reconstruction than is the case for those in Chapter 8, on account of the nature of their sources. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with myths in which the god Óðinn is the protagonist. Chapter 7 is partly a discussion of whether the god Þórr is involved in myths of initiation, and partly of some myths with semi-divine beings as subjects. Chapter 8 discusses narratives with primarily human actors.

Chapter 9 considers the question of which situations are *a priori* likely, on phenomenological grounds, to involve initiation rituals. Unfortunately, it is only in connection with a few of these that we have any Scandinavian source material at all. In those cases, the scarce source material is compared with the results in Chapters 5-8 with a view to gaining a deeper insight into the structure of the rituals and their symbolism, which is perceptible to only a slight extent in the extant sources.

Chapter 10 is an aggregated analysis of the mythical scenarios analysed individually in the previous chapters with a view to mapping out, or at least putting forward, key elements that constitute the semantic universe formed by the Other World, and which are a prerequisite for working with the concept of initiation. This chapter draws together all the book's findings about the nature of the concepts of the liminal and the Other World and as such it forms a kind of concluding analysis.

Chapter 11 again takes up the question of the relationship between myth and ritual and in addition offers some perspectives for our understanding of Óðinn in Scandinavian religion against the background of the book's analyses.

Chapter 2
Research History

2.1 Initiation in the History of the Study of Religion

The purpose of the following brief account of some significant contributions to the subject of initiation within the general history of religion is partly to give an impression of different angles of approach to the phenomenon, and partly to emphasise relevant views of some of the significant scholars who have been occupied with the subject, with a view to identifying and analysing elements basic to a working definition of initiation. This chapter does not aim to give a full chronological account of research on initiation, which is far too comprehensive for this to be possible. Some drastic selection is therefore unavoidable. The researchers that have been selected for attention have all been of importance, although there are others who have played a part but have been left out – a selection process that can hardly claim to use objective criteria in every respect. Key researchers' work is treated in chronological order, because an historical overview allows us to see the building blocks of a theory of initiation. Most of the scholars whose work is analysed here have had a cross-cultural aim (phenomenological, structuralist or some other approach), but we will also mention researchers and works that deal with individual cultures. These will be examined to the extent to which their results contribute to some general characteristics of initiation.

Arnold van Gennep's analyses of the structure of transitional rituals

The first work of permanent theoretical significance in the field was Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* from 1909.[1] With very few exceptions, all literature concerned with initiation from the viewpoint of the study of religion since 1909, whether the individual researcher's professional background is in anthropology or the history of religion, has had to take van Gennep into consideration.[2] His importance for the understanding of the structure of initiation is indisputable and, apart from a few insignificant corrections, his work is still valid. This applies particularly to his analysis of the structure and 'mechanics' of initiation rituals, whereas his theses about the symbolism and function of the rites are open to criticism and have not continued to play an important role in research.[3]

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[1] Before van Gennep, other scholars had been interested in the phenomenon, and several monographs had already been written (e.g. Schurtz 1902 and Webster 1908). Likewise, such a significant person in the general history of religion as J. G. Frazer had treated the subject in *The Golden Bough* 1907-1915 (VII, 2, 225-78). But none of these have been of permanent theoretical value.

Van Gennep wrote about the purpose of his book:

> … j'ai tenté de grouper toute les séquences cérémonielles qui accompagnent le passage d'une situation à une autre et d'un monde (cosmique ou social) à un autre. Étant donnée l'importance de ces passages, je crois légitime de distinguer une catégorie spéciale de *Rites de Passage*, lesquels se décomposent à l'analyse en *Rites de séparation*, *Rites de marge* et *Rites d'agrégation*. Ces trois catégories secondaires ne sont pas également développées chez une même population ni dans un même ensemble cérémoniel. (1909, 13-14)

> … I have attempted to group all the ceremonial sequences, which follow the transition from one situation to another and from one world (cosmic or social) to another. Given the importance of these transitions, I think it is legitimate to single out as a special category, *Rites of Passage*, which can be analytically subdivided into *Rites of separation*, *Rites of transition* [*lit. Rites of the margin*] and *Rites of aggregation*. Those three secondary categories

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[2] Kimball 1960, indeed argues (X-XI) that the importance of the book, especially for American sociologists, has been limited and gives several reasons for it, including that the interest in religion and rituals was very limited for a time. This is probably correct and explains why it is primarily research in the study of religion that has benefitted from van Gennep's work, even where it had been carried out by social anthropologists. See for instance Glaser and Strauss 1971 as an example of how other disciplines have made use of van Gennep.

[3] For a thorough account of van Gennep's merits, which goes far beyond his work with transitional rituals and includes various methodological considerations, among others the dispersal of folkloristic motifs, see Belmont 1974.

> are neither equally developed in the same population nor in the same ceremonial complex.

That this is the underlying structure of initiation rituals has not subsequently been refuted. The quotation clearly expresses van Gennep's understanding of what a rite of passage in fact is, namely ceremonies which accompany the transition from one situation to another and from one cosmic or social sphere to another. Often it is clear that the rituals are modelled on a territorial transition, and that such a model is also involved in the rituals (1909, 19-33). Apart from the fact that he includes the so-called 'seasonal rites' (1909, 254-63), which constitute a separate problem in connection with initiation, something Chapple and Coon drew attention to (Chapple and Coon 1942, 398 and 507-28), it is striking how difficult it is to find formal criteria to distinguish the various kinds of rites of passage with which the book operates. It is especially problematical to discover what, on the one hand, links the various types of initiation rituals, given that, on the other hand, they should at the same time form a special class of rites of passage different from the other categories. We shall return to this in the next chapter in which we will also examine the problems involved when van Gennep argued for the tripartite phase structure as a genuine characteristic of rites of passage.

Van Gennep has provided an impressive analysis of the structure of initiation rituals, summed up in the quotation above, indicating that they consist of three categories of rites: separation from one mode of being, transition,[4] and entry into of a new mode of being. The importance of the middle phase, transition, becomes clear from the parallel terminology: *rites préliminaires*, *liminaires et postliminaires*, 'preliminary, liminal and post-liminal rites'.

Another important point is that van Gennep draws our attention to the fact that these categories of rites do not always carry the same weight within the various transitional complexes. In certain situations the weight will fall on one or the other category so that, for example, in burial ceremonies separation rites will be most prominent, in wedding ceremonies incorporation rites and in 'initiations' liminal rites. In addition, he draws our attention to the fact that not all the individual rites connected with the transition rituals can be understood unambiguously as having as their exclusive aim the securing of transitions. They may have other purposes in addition, such as the advancement of fertility, apotropaeic aims (e.g. the killing of demons) etc. (1909, 15 and 276-8).

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[4] Van Gennep uses the word *marge* 'margin' which, for the lack of a better word, is translated here as 'transition'.

Since van Gennep's time, scholars have developed this outline further, but its basic components have not been contested in any convincing way. Apart from the merit of seeing a structured entity behind a series of rituals, which might be quite different in their manner of expression, van Gennep made a number of other valuable observations. Two themes, which will be of importance for the question of definition, require discussion here. They are the relationship between the sacred and the profane and the symbolism of death and rebirth, themes that we find in initiation rituals all over the world (1909, 130-1 and 260-2).

The first of these themes deals with the sacred/profane-dichotomy and its place in the tripartite structure of transition rites. The question is what is 'sacred' in the transition rituals. Is it the liminal phase, or is it the condition to which one is admitted? In his discussion of the Eleusinian mysteries (1909, 130), van Gennep states that the person to be initiated is reborn into a sacred world, whereas he argues, in connection with consecrations into secret societies in the Congo, that *de ce passage à travers le monde sacré, il reste à l'initié une qualité spéciale, magico-religiuse*, 'through this journey across the sacred world, there remains with the initiate a special magico-religious quality'(1909, 117). This must imply that the real sacred phase is the liminal one, which is then 'attached to' the initiate in the new existence into which he is initiated. This question may perhaps seem of lesser importance but in fact, it is crucial in order to be able to place the initiation sequence logically in the religious universe and to understand the religious dimension of transition itself – a point which, as we will see below, is emphasised by later scholars like Eliade and Victor Turner.

As far as the second theme is concerned, namely the death-rebirth symbolism, it is a complex that scholars, both before and after van Gennep, have connected indissolubly with the phenomenon of initiation. It thus forms the cornerstone of Eliade's phenomenological research on this subject. Van Gennep saw, as did others before him (e.g. Schurtz 1902, 98 and 105 and Webster 1908, 38), that many of the rituals connected with transition rites make use of this symbolism. It is so well documented from a very large number of cultures that the presence of this symbolism in conjunction with the structure of initiation may be said to be universally distributed, although it cannot be claimed to be present in every initiation, as is argued by Eliade.[5] Van Gennep was not especially interested in the study of symbolism, apart from what could support his theory of the tripartite structure, and it has been left to others to treat the symbolism of death and rebirth more closely in the context of the phenomenology of religion – not least to Eliade.

Van Gennep's great merit was and remains his demonstration of the category of transition rites and their tripartite structure, and it is this discovery that has given him a permanent place in the history of research.[6] The structure consists of the rites of separation, transition and incorporation, which further involves three 'forms of existence': one which the person leaves, one in which he or she remains for a longer or shorter transitional period, and a third to which the person is admitted.

In the following discussion, these will be designated the initial phase, the liminal phase and the final phase, respectively.[7]

Chapple's and Coon's contribution to the classification

In addition to a long series of informative works about initiation and transition rites in various individual cultures, written by ethnographers and historians of religion, there have only been a few substantial contributions that aim to define these categories, at least up to the 1950s. One of those works, which is of value for the classification of transitional rites, is Chapple and Coon's *Principles of Anthropology* (1942). The authors consider the reason for ritualising transitions to be the same as can be seen in van Gennep, namely that the equilibrium of society is disturbed and that the rites are designed to protect it from such disturbances (1942, 486-8). As far as terminology is concerned, Chapple and Coon seem to use the term initiation in connection with puberty rituals, consecration into secret societies and the consecration of shamans. They divide the ritual complex, which van Gennep works with, into two categories, namely *rites of passage*, which deal with individuals moving within society (1942, 484-506), whereas *rites of intensification*, which are normally carried out by periodical changes, involve all the members of the group or the society who are exposed to the changes in their environment (1942, 507-28). The authors sum up their viewpoint thus:

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[5] Eliade 1975, XII: 'The central moment of every initiation is represented by the ceremony symbolizing the death of the novice and his return to the fellowship of the living'.

[6] His importance and the current interest in his work is also emphasised in more recent research (e.g. Segalen 1998, 27-39).

[7] A scholar who ought to be mentioned in this connection is W. E. H. Stanner, whose book *On Aboriginal Religion* (1966) was primarily occupied with Australian Aboriginal religions. Stanner is interesting for several reasons: 1) he demonstrates parallels between initiation on the one hand and sacrifices on the other (p. 15) – a theme we will return to in Chapter 6; 2) he proves that myths and rites can function independently of one another and yet express the same ideological pattern (1966, 80 -106). I agree entirely with his viewpoint, which will be expanded below; 3) he divides the liminal phase into two parts characterised by a destruction and a transformation respectively (1966, 38). One can say of this last idea that, in many ways, it makes good sense and emphasises the significance of the liminal phase, but the relationship between destruction and transformation is not – at least not in Scandinavian myths – especially clear, and for this reason it plays a lesser role in the present study.

> A Rite of Intensification is a ceremony in which equilibrium is restored after a crisis affecting a group, whereas a Rite of Passage restores it after a disturbance which directly affects an individual or class of individuals. The group disturbances which evoke rites of intensification are largely of an environmental character, resulting from an alteration of day and night, the phases of the moon, or the progress of the seasons in their annual cycle. (1942, 528)

What is of greatest interest here in connection with the question of definition is that Chapple and Coon distinguish between two categories of transitions, one of which has the individual or groups of individuals as its object, who seek to be transformed by means of the ritual, whereas the other one has the environment as its object. This means that, following Chapple and Coon, we can eliminate one of the categories that van Gennep included in the *rites de passage*, namely the so-called seasonal rituals. This seems obviously correct and all researchers since have generally followed Chapple's and Coon's demarcation of transitional rites.[8]

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[8] Researchers from the fields of psychology and sociology have also written about the phenomenon of initiation (e.g. Bettelheim 1955, Whiting 1961, Whiting, Kluckhohn and Anthony 1958, Allen 1967 and Young 1965). However, their contributions, irre-

Mircea Eliade's contribution to initiation symbolism

Together with Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner (see below), Mircea Eliade is one of a trio of scholars who have been of the greatest importance in debates about the phenomenon of initiation within the field of studies in religion. Eliade plays a crucial role in the history of this research field,[9] even though his methods are problematical. It has been argued that he is a Jungian (Leach 1966), and there is no doubt that he is strongly inspired by Jung (e.g. Eliade 1969a, 20; 1969b, 22 and 49).[10] On the other hand, it is also clear that he makes a sharp distinction between depth psychology and the history of religion (Eliade 1968, 11-18), for example when he argues that it is not possible to reduce religion to unconscious processes. The most problematical aspect of his work is his use of the concept of archetypes which, at the general theoretical level plays an essential role in almost all his analyses – and also in connection with initiation.[11]

This and other obscurities in Eliade's conceptual world have rightly played a considerable role in the discussion of his scholarship. It is, however, primarily at the general theoretical level that it becomes seri-

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spective of their value in other respects, play no part in semantic analyses of the phenomenon.

[9] The literature about Eliade is enormous, as can be see from Allen and Doing's bibliography (1980). For works with good discussions, see Saliba 1976, who is sharply critical, Dudley 1977, who places question marks against Eliade's scholarship and his ability as an historian, and da Silva 1982, who treats Eliade's phenomenology in a philosophical light and generally has a positive attitude, as does Ricketts 1973. For other critical evaluations see Leach 1966, Berner 1981, Strenski 1993, 15-40 and Pals 1996, 158-97.

[10] Ricketts 1970 gives a good survey of Eliade's 'Jungianism'; concerning his use of 'archetypes', see especially 1970, 216-24.

[11] The concept of archetypes is only one notion among several which are not defined, or which are apparently used differently from one book to another (or from one chapter to another). We do not get any explicit definition of recurring concepts such as symbols, the sacred, nor even of religion. As far as the last-named is concerned, it is considerably easier to say what it is *not* than what it is. It is not the result of political, psychological, sociological or economical factors (1969b, 68). To argue that is reductionism and this, to Eliade, is unambiguously negatively charged. Religious phenomena have an essence (e.g. 1969b, 52), which is apparently universal and cannot be reduced to anything other than that which is religious. It is therefore clear that Eliade's work aims at being an apologia for religion, which is perhaps most clearly expressed in the article 'A New Humanism' from 1961 (Eliade 1969b, 1-11). See also Bianchi 1975, especially 216-20 and his general criticism of Eliade, 184-91.

ously problematical.[12] This becomes important when considering the phenomenon of initiation in relation to when and how the structure and symbolism that Eliade analyses is to be placed in the human consciousness. Yet his analyses themselves seem both informative and inspiring, although debatable. Together with other important scholars, he certainly contributes to an increased general understanding of the phenomenon of initiation,[13] the more general methodological and theoretical problems associated with his work notwithstanding.[14]

Eliade has dealt with the initiation phenomenon in a whole series of articles, but all the essential material is collected in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation.*[15] One of the most important of Eliade's advances in comparison with most earlier research is that he turns attention away from ritual itself and its psychic and social consequences and, instead, takes an interest in the symbolism and structure of the complex of ideas, not only behind initiation rites but also behind initiation myths.[16] Myths are 'often more valuable than rites for our understanding of religious behaviour' (1975, 62). He thus includes, among others things, literary phenomena (pp. 124-8) in which he finds a whole series of symbols comparable to those identified in initiation rituals throughout the world.

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[12] For instance, it is not unjustified when La Fontaine (1985, 22 f.) accuses him of evolutionism, although this is not expressed directly.

[13] It may be relevant in this connection to mention Jean Cazemeuve, who has been occupied with rituals in general and especially with initiation. His viewpoints are so similar to Eliade's, however, that he will not be treated separately in this research outline (see e.g. Cazeneuve 1958, 324-64 and 1971).

[14] A great deal of the criticism of Eliade has been very fierce, some of it justified and some less so. When Strenski, for example, writes that Eliade's 'methodological prescriptions are disastrous for the study of religion' (1993, 16), he undoubtedly exaggerates. It is true that Eliade had a programme which fitted poorly into rational science, but there are probably not a sufficient number of scholars who have taken his methodological considerations so seriously that it can be said that the consequences are 'disastrous' for the study of religion. Most would probably be inspired to test Eliade's results on their own data – results which, in themselves, can seldom be said to be wrong but which are often ascribed a status they cannot sustain.

[15] The book was first published under the title of *Birth and Rebirth* in 1958. It was then published in French under the title *Naissances Mystiques*. In this study, I quote from the 1975 English edition entitled *Rites and Symbols of Initiation.*

[16] Others before Eliade, working in specific cultural areas, have discovered initiation patterns in myths. See Knight 1936, 3-28, who uses a Jungian approach to demonstrate initiation symbolism in Virgil, among others. As far as I know, Eliade is the first to be aware of the extent of these parallels.

Eliade operates with three forms of initiation: 1) puberty rites; 2) mystery consecrations or consecrations into secret societies and 3) consecrations of shamans (1975, 2-3.; see also Eliade 1969b, 112-16), of which the last two have much in common. The first category is characterised by being obligatory. It is here that the initiands are introduced to that which is sacred, to knowledge and to sexuality – they become *human beings*. The two others are specialised. Only a few members of a society take part and the purpose here is to transcend their human situation (pp. 128-32). The classification itself is, however, clearly of secondary importance to Eliade and functions exclusively as the structure for his further work.[17]

His real aim in working with the concept of initiation is, as he says in the first chapter (1975, 1), to:

> … present the most important types of initiation seeking above all to decipher their deeper meaning. The meaning is always religious, for the change of existential status in the novice is produced by a religious experience.

Eliade defines the phenomenon of initiation itself in the following way (1975, x), 'a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated … '.

He works primarily with the symbolic structure in connection with initiation, just as he has done with all the other phenomena that he has examined. He apparently accepts van Gennep's description of the tripartite structure, but he is more interested in the symbolic 'meaning'. Those symbolic entities, to which attention has repeatedly been called, and which give us the possibility of seeing what Eliade understood as the fundamental elements of the phenomenon, are *death, rebirth and the acquisition of knowledge*.

As far as the first two concepts are concerned, the book is an immense collection of examples of a variety of symbols that express them. The two logically belong together and, according to Eliade, form a constant in initiation since they are of crucial importance for the understanding of the change in status that takes place. There is no reason to go into details of Eliade's treatment of the various symbols of death and rebirth, but a couple of them require discussion. For instance, being swallowed up by a monster or entering into a dark hut are said to be symbols of a return to the womb, which again is a symbol partly of death and partly of rebirth (1975, 51-3). The same is the case with the widespread phenomenon in which novices cannot eat by themselves, nor speak in connection with the initiation. This complex, too, can be understood in two ways, namely as death, in which one can do nothing, or as a return to one's earliest childhood, where we are faced with a symbol of rebirth (1975, 15). All in all, one gains the impression that all initiations circle round the theme of death and rebirth, expressed through an endless series of symbols. It has been argued that Eliade understands all the various symbols of initiation as pointing to these two phenomena (e.g. Young 1965, 4 and Weckman 1970, 70), and it is certainly clear that he uses death and rebirth again and again as an explanation for the various ritual events and mythical symbols that appear in his subject matter. On the other hand, he is aware that death and rebirth is one among several sets of symbols that express the same thing. In his introduction to the book about initiation, he makes it clear that the initiation-death 'signifies the end at once of childhood, of ignorance, and of the profane condition' (1975, xii-xiii), and he argues further that death is symbolically equivalent to the return to chaos which takes place, for instance, at New Year rituals, just as rebirth is equivalent to cosmogony. It could, therefore, indicate that Eliade understands the death-rebirth complex as one among several possible symbolic expressions that are found in both myths and rituals.[18]

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[17] Moreover, Eliade sees other transitional rituals, among others those that are connected with death, as initiations (1975, 59 and 1957, 106-8).

We could argue that he has not done much himself to prevent a misunderstanding about the status of this complex – whether it is a *signifiée* 'signified' or a *signifiant* 'signifier', to use terms from semiotics (cf. Schjødt 1999b), as – apart from the introduction – he does not generally include possibly analogous symbolic pairs which could be imagined in this connection.[19] Similarly, he interprets several symbolic expressions that we come across in initiation as precise expressions for death and rebirth. In other words, it remains an open question whether Eliade understands the terms death and rebirth as the exact 'meaning' of initiation, or whether he just considers them one among several expressions for the beginning and the conclusion. There are examples of both kinds of understanding in the book.

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[18] This implies that part of the criticism which Young, among others, has levelled at Eliade, namely that death and rebirth are not present in a great deal of the material that he himself has worked with, is of less importance, as other symbolic expressions could connote a conclusion and a new beginning just as well. For example, the imitation of animals could be a symbol of a return to an original condition in which there was no division between animals and human beings.

At least in some passages, Eliade understands death and rebirth together as a symbol of a beginning which is absolute and consistent. This implies that the individual who is created by this rebirth is something different from what he had been before, because he is 'created' in the same manner as the cosmos itself which is the work of the gods (1975, 59-60). We are here faced with one of those views that runs through the whole of Eliade's work, that human beings strive to imitate the conditions and the events *in illo tempore*, at the time when the gods institutionalised everything that is present today. Initiations thus become a recapitulation of the history of the tribe and of the world (1975, 129). That, however, which makes the crucial difference between the life that the individual lived before initiation and the one which follows is the knowledge itself which the initiand becomes acquainted with during initiation. This knowledge, which is both secret and sacred, consists, according to Eliade, in learning about everything that happened in connection with the creation – *in illo tempore* – and therefore (1975, 29):

> Initiation … is equivalent to a revelation of the sacred, of death, of sexuality, and of the struggle for food. Only after having acquired these dimensions of human existence does one become truly a man.

Through initiation, the initiands become open to spiritual values. During the ritual they receive an answer to the great questions of life and, not only this, they also become like gods or their ancestors and receive admission to everlasting life (1975, 101, 131, 136). The knowledge they receive indicates that rebirth, as the opposite to natural birth, acquires a pronouncedly spiritual character, and it is to the spiritual element that real value is attributed (1975, 60). Furthermore, the experiences gained might give the initiands a psychological boost in facing the fear of death (1975, 131-2).

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[19] Here, we may note that Eliade argues in many places that the death and rebirth symbolism is present in *all* initiations (e.g. 1975, 15 and 131) which they are certainly not.

There is no doubt that, in several places in his interpretations, Eliade generalises beyond what is acceptable, something all his critics have pointed out. Nevertheless, he has drawn attention to a series of features that are typical of initiations all over the world. For example, the acquisition of knowledge is a crucial feature in all initiations (cf. La Fontaine 1985, 15), although it does not always answer the great existential questions. Generalising becomes problematical when Eliade tries to make uniform that which characterises *homo religiosus*. It is incontrovertible that there are initiation scenarios in which the liminal phase is imagined as a kind of return to the original condition, but it is just as incontrovertible that this is not the case in every initiation. The similarities are at another level than the one which, according to Eliade, forms the consciousness of *homo religiosus*.

The last element to be discussed here is the dichotomy sacred-profane, which is a fundamental element in Eliade's view – not only of initiation but of all religious phenomena. He argues that there is a universal need for people to wish to approach the sacred,[20] to become like gods, and that through initiation people acquire the possibility of approaching that which is trans-human (1975, 132).

If we look more closely at the key concepts of death and rebirth in relation to the sacred and the profane, we note that Eliade argues that death and rebirth symbolise the destruction of the profane and the new beginning of a condition characterised by sacredness. With this it becomes clear that we have here, on the one hand, a binary opposition consisting of the poles sacred and profane or, with another pair of concepts taken from Eliade's vocabulary, spiritual and natural, or knowing or not knowing, and, on the other hand, a tripartite process operating with an existence that is concluded, a transitional phase and the beginning of a new life. The sacred and profane is dispersed in the three phases in the following way, as we also saw it in van Gennep: the primary phase is profane and is followed by dying to the liminal phase, during which sacred knowledge is acquired. This is why the rebirth in the post-liminal phase becomes a rebirth to a sacred world. As far as structure is concerned, Eliade is thus clearly dependent on van Gennep, especially when it has to do with the sequence which, in Eliade, is not only ritual but also narrative.

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[20] Eliade's understanding of sacred things is discussed in most of the above-mentioned works. In addition, an excellent sketch of what is sacred in Eliade's view is found in Paus 1989. One problem in Eliade's use of the term is that it clearly has an ontological status, as with Rudolf Otto (cf. Prades and Benoît 1990), whereas in humanistic scholarship it is obviously more fruitful to let it designate an 'empty' category into which the individual culture can fill all sorts of things. The only constant in it is that the contents are defined as an inversion of the profane. I will elaborate on this in Chapter 3.

The greatest value of Eliade's work in relation to the present study of initiation is without a doubt that he treats myths and ideas of both a religious and non-religious kind on an equal footing with the rituals, just as it is of importance that, on the empirical front, he also includes Christianity and the mystery religions. He develops the structure itself but on the whole does not deviate from other scholars since van Gennep, except in his terminology. On the other hand, because of his great collection of examples, he is able to show that there is a series of other equivalent oppositions, for example spirituality-naturalness, totality-division (1975, 26), connected with the contrasting relationship between sacred and profane. In discussing Victor Turner's work, the deeper importance of such oppositional pairs will emerge which will play an essential role in the analyses in Chapters 5-10.

Victor Turner and the liminal

Besides van Gennep and Eliade, Victor Turner has played a crucial role in studies of the rituals of initiation and transition. He is important in several ways but, theoretically, it is his treatment of the liminal phase of ritual that is of the greatest importance here.[21] In contrast to most scholars who have acknowledged the importance of this phase, he is relatively clear in his definition of it. He writes (1977, 37):

> A limen is a threshold, but at least in the case of protracted initiation rites or major seasonal festivals, it is a very long threshold, a

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[21] Ronald Grimes argues quite correctly in the 1995 edition of his *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* that, at the time of writing, Turner was the most recent ritual scholar who was able to obtain a broad consensus for his theories (Grimes 1995, xvii), and this is probably still true.

> corridor almost, or a tunnel which may, indeed, become a pilgrim's road or passing from dynamics to statics, may cease to be a mere transition and become a set way of life, a state, that of the anchorite, or monk. Let us refer to the state and process of mid-transition as 'liminality' and consider a few of its very odd properties. Those undergoing it – call them 'liminaries' – are betwixt-and-between established states of politico-jural structure. They evade ordinary cognitive classification, too, for they are neither-this-nor-that, here-nor-there, one-thing-nor-the-other. Out of their mundane structural context, they are in a sense 'dead' to the world, and liminality has many symbols of death – novices may be classed with spirits or ancestors or painted black.

> … the most characteristic midliminal symbolism is that of paradox, or being both this and that. Novices are portrayed and act as androgynous, or as both living and dead, at once ghost and babes, both cultural and natural creatures, human and animal.

Turner has also expressed the idea of liminality in a more summary fashion (1967, 106): 'Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence'. The concept of liminality has certainly been influenced by aspects of earlier research on initiation, but Turner is to a far greater degree able to pinpoint what it actually is. He acknowledges his dependence on van Gennep's tripartite schema and finds it confirmed, partly through his own investigations in Zambia, and partly through his observations of present-day examples of transitions, but at the same time his analyses reach far deeper into the recognition of the importance of transitions than van Gennep had ever done or had ambitions of doing. It is also important that Turner sees the liminal phase in many different types of rituals and not only in those that van Gennep classified as *rites de passage.* [22]

Before looking at Turner's contribution to the understanding of initiation, there are a couple of points to be discussed about his terminology which seems more complicated than necessary. Turner calls the condition of the initiand during the central phase of the tripartite sequence liminality, but the terms *communitas* and *antistructure* are also used as distinctive features. The former term is primarily directed at the ritual situation and characterises a fellowship which is contrary to the one people normally have in a society and which can be characterised as hierarchically differentiated (1969a, 131; cf. also 96-7.): '... communitas is a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals'. Communitas can be divided into three sub-types, existential, normative and ideological, the first of which may be seen as the 'actual' communitas, whereas the other two are derivatives from it.[23] As far as the analysis in which mythical material is also included is concerned, it is not appropriate to characterise the liminal as a special social situation, so we will keep to the term liminality because it is not in the same way burdened with associations of definite ritual situations. As far as the term antistructure is concerned, it must be emphasised that Turner does not speak of a structure in the sense that the structuralists, and especially Lévi-Strauss, have attached to the term (Turner 1969a, 131 and 167). 'Structure' rather designates the social system with all that entails of fixed and hierarchical relationships.[24]

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[22] A good critical introduction to Turner's general importance for research on rituals is Doty 1986, 81-95.

In Turner's overarching view of ritual, the three terms enter into a relationship with each other in the following manner (1973, 216):

> Liminality, the optimal setting of communitas relations, and communitas, a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes, together constitute what one might call 'antistructure'.

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[23] Whitehouse has some valuable points of criticism in connection with the use of Turner's communitas and its tripartite division and demonstrates, among other things, that it cannot be a question of the lack of ambiguity in the psychological sense, for which Turner argues in connection with the existential communitas. The question is, therefore, whether all kinds of communitas do not contain an aspect of ideology or, as Whitehouse himself expresses it 'a doctrinal mode of religiosity' (Whitehouse 2000, 180-2).

[24] '... the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets and status-sequences consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society and closely bound up with legal and political norms and sanctions.' (Turner 1973, 216).

Turner's understanding of the liminal ought to be evaluated in relation to a series of his theoretical and methodological views. In his introduction to *Forms of Symbolic Action* (1969b) he has a detailed exposition of what a symbol consists of and how it works (1969b, 8-19). The symbol is the basic element in 'ritual behaviour', 'ritual behaviour' being understood broadly to include mythical narratives. Symbols may be divided into 'multivocal' and 'univocal' types, and he writes about the former (1969b, 8):

> A multivocal symbol, in so far as it is a symbol, is a thing (object, event, person, relationship, activity, place, period of time, etc.) regarded (as the concise Oxford Dictionary puts it) by general consent (and as anthropologists would say, by persons of the same culture) as 'naturally typifying or representing something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought'.

Symbols that only have one meaning (are 'univocal') often originate from a disintegration of 'multi-vocal' symbols. Those meanings, denotations and connotations the ritual symbols contain can – Turner argues – be separated into two groups, namely those that are attached to physiological objects and processes, and those associated with cognitive, moral and ideological factors (1969b, 9). Furthermore, the symbols have three dimensions of meaning (1969b, 11-12), the exegetical, the operational and the positional. The exegetical dimension is that or those meanings which are directly understood by worshippers in the culture concerned and which they often explain by means of myths concerning changes that have happened in the cosmos, or by means of rituals or direct explanations, but which they are fully aware of in all circumstances.[25] The operational dimension of a symbol's meaning can be understood by examining how it is used and what affective values it entails in addition to what consequences its use has for the various participants in the ritual. Turner does not here speak of whether the worshippers consciously understand this meaning. In the positional dimension, the meaning of the symbol appears in relation to other symbols, that is, from the structural position. In connection with a criticism of Lévi-Strauss, whom Turner accuses of only wishing to find ‘meaning’ in the structure and the mutual position of the elements, he writes (1969b, 13):

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[25] Cf. Sperber's criticism (Sperber 1975, 12-16) of Turner's understanding of symbols. We will below (Chapter 3) return to Sperber's own understanding of symbols.

> My own view is that where one has information about the ‘exegetical’ or ‘operational’ meanings of a given symbol, one can see very well that even though only a single designation of that symbol is situationally manifest, the ‘penumbra’ of latent senses (to be manifest in other ‘positional’ combinations) is nevertheless ‘present’. Latent senses of symbol A may be ‘projected’ upon symbol B, C, and D, which are present in the same ‘symbolic field’. Thus a symbol must always be regarded as ‘dense with meaning’, even when only a portion of this richness is situationally emphasized or ‘visible’ through the symbol’s ‘structural’ relations with another symbol or other symbols.

There is no doubt that Turner’s understanding of symbolic meaning is valuable. It is important, not least in relation to the Scandinavian sources to be analysed below, to pay attention to the fact that the individual symbolic elements ‘carry a meaning with them’ from one myth to another (cf. below Chapter 10.3). But in most religions, and this is no less valid for those in which the source material is less copious, it is a problem to gain knowledge about the entire meaning-complex of which the individual symbol forms a part. Nevertheless, we must have an eye for this quality in the symbols. One consequence is that the ‘meaning’ of the individual symbol becomes especially fluid, and that it will be more to the purpose to speak about ‘semantic fields’ in those cases where the individual symbols form a part of the field without an exact ‘meaning’ being capable of extraction. We will return to this issue in the next chapter. It is thus of crucial importance that the symbols are polyvalent and that their meaning can be displaced in relation to their position in the context.

Given that Turner is aware of positional importance it is also obvious that he must be occupied with the structuring of binary opposites, a subject he discusses in several of his works, among others *The Ritual Process*. It is important for the problematisation of initiation to examine those pairs which in one way or another relate to the two poles, ‘the social system' or 'structure' on the one hand, and liminality or 'antistructure' on the other. Turner mentions here a whole series of oppositions, partly in connection with the Ndembu Isoma-ritual – and partly in connection with a whole series of liminal situations (1969a, 39 and 106). From the material he includes, he mentions 26 examples (a list which could be expanded considerably).[26] They are:

- Transition/state
- Totality/partiality
- Homogeneity/heterogeneity
- Communitas/structure
- Equality/inequality
- Anonymity/systems of nomenclature
- Absence of property/property
- Absence of status/status
- Nakedness or uniform clothing/distinctions of clothing
- Sexual continence/sexuality
- Minimization of sex distinctions/maximization of sex distinctions
- Absence of rank/distinctions of rank
- Humility/just pride of position
- Disregard for personal appearance/care for personal appearance
- No distinctions of wealth/distinctions of wealth
- Unselfishness/selfishness
- Total obedience/obedience only to superior rank
- Sacredness/secularity
- Sacred instructions/technical knowledge
- Silence/speech
- Suspension of kinship rights and obligations/kinship rights and obligations
- Continuous reference to powers/intermittent reference to mystical powers

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[26] See also Droogers 1980b, 119: 'Cultures make an economical use of the means by which they express marginality. As life itself offers the raw material for cultural expression, the stock of symbolic means is not limited'.

- Foolishness/sagacity
- Simplicity/complexity
- Acceptance of pain and suffering/avoidance of pain and suffering
- Heteronomy/degrees of autonomy

Although individual pairs are culture-specific so that they do not have the character of universals that can be applied as a matter of course to Scandinavian religion, for example, they give a clear idea of what is at stake in these dichotomies. Turner is aware that the terms in opposition do not in themselves need to have a fixed meaning content. This is obtained through their positional placing in the structure, partly in relation to the particular myth or ritual, and partly in relation to the total semantic structure of the general ideological universe of the culture concerned. How far it is possible to analyse this meaning content will depend on the material, not only of the traditional sources of the history of religion, but by and large on our knowledge of the entire social and material construction of this particular culture. This means, among other things, that Turner does not let himself be seduced by the interpretations of Jungian depth psychology which he criticises strongly in several places (1967, 98 and 1969a, 163).[27]

What is crucial for Turner about liminality in relation to transition rituals is that it forms a kind of 'no-man's-land' which one has to pass through when moving from one status to another, and it contrasts, therefore, with the status which the initiand has both in the initial and final phases – an oppositional relationship that is often expressed symbolically, as we saw in the list above. Turner, who sees human life as a dialectic process consisting of changing liminal and non-liminal phases, argues that when phenomena in the social system have certain sacred characteristics, this is because they have been attained through transitional rituals and because the 'sacredness' of the liminal phase has 'influenced' the post-liminal phase. Turner's insight here provides a solution to the difficulties that Eliade experienced on this point.

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[27] In spite of this approach to symbols, in which one must generally agree with him, Turner has also in some connections accepted 'the meaning' of certain symbols as universal (without this being a question of any form for Jungianism). This, for instance, is the case with the colour-trio in "Color Classification in Ndembu Ritual: A Problem in Primitive Classification" (1966, 79-83) in which, as he is arguing against Durkheim's centring around society as the actual point of departure in all human classification, he argues that the human organism is *fons et origo* in all classifications, and that the colours red, white and black are universally attributed with definite symbolic values. Whether the criticism of Durkheim is reasonable or not, it seems that Turner here goes further than is necessary which several other researchers also have observed, among others, Mary Douglas who writes: 'There is no reason to assume any primacy for the individual's attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than for his cultural and social experience' (Douglas 1966, 121). Although the criticism is solid, it only plays a subordinate role to Turner's relevance to the problem of initiation.

It is characteristic of the liminal phase that those who pass through it are provided with a kind of knowledge which is reserved especially for them.[28] Turner states that the kernel of the liminal phase consists in the communication of *sacra* (1967, 102), which generally consist of three forms of communication. Jane Harrison (1961, 150-161) had already demonstrated three fundamental characteristics of liminality in connection with Greek mystery consecrations, identifying: 1) that which is shown; 2) that which is done, and 3) that which is said. The purpose of these *sacra* is to instruct the initiand in the essential factors of the culture concerned, such as the structure of society, the cosmos and life-producing elements. The communication of *sacra* and other esoteric instruction involves the following three parallel processes (1967, 106):

> The first is the reduction of culture into recognized components or factors; the second is their recombination in fantastic or monstrous patterns and shapes; and the third is their recombination in ways that make sense with regard to their new state and status that the neophytes will enter.

This treatment of known components and factors is parallel to the tripartite phase structure with its separation from known life, its 'reversal' and its formation of a 'new' existence. The reason that liminality gives the initiand the possibility of acquiring knowledge is that the neophyte in this phase – partly on account of the physical tests he is exposed to –

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[28] It is often the case that others are also in possession of at least some of this knowledge, although it is theoretically reserved for the initiated (e.g. Droogers 1980a, 349).

becomes a *tabula rasa* on which one can inscribe the knowledge that is essential for the group to communicate.[29]

Turner treats the knowledge that is communicated in the liminal phase of ritual far more adequately (and realistically) than was the case in Eliade's work. Transitional rituals and initiation rituals are very different both from culture to culture and within the same culture and can be more or less spectacular. And also the knowledge that is communicated may be of a different nature, depending on various factors. It may acquire a quite dominant place in initiation (as in some of the Hellenistic mystery religions) or it may just be hinted at (as in the baptism ritual of the Danish National Evangelical Lutheran Church) in a more or less symbolic form in which it will be impossible to see a process relating to *sacra*, as Turner mentions in the quotation above. This does not mean that it is not there but only that we must understand Turner's description as a model that may be apparent in certain rituals, while in others it may be perceptible only as symbolic hints (for example, the acquisition of certain magical resources). We will return to this complex of problems in Chapter 3.3.

In addition to the knowledge that is communicated, the liminal phase is marked by everything that is opposite to the social norms and cultural ideas that are characteristic of the social system. Turner gives copious examples of such oppositions, especially in the ritual context in which one *does* things that in other circumstances would have been out of the question. Granted, this oppositeness is not of the same kind in all cases. As Turner emphasises, it is often a question of known elements being put together in a new way (for example, 'silence' is not reserved for the liminal phase, but it acquires another meaning in such situations), whereas in other cases it may be a question of elements that are markedly absent in the social system (for example, 'absence of status'). Recapitulating, we see that the liminal symbols acquire their liminal meaning through their oppositeness in relation to the social system. The meaning content of liminality cannot, therefore, be studied or understood outside the classification pattern and complete ideology of non-liminality.

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[29] The *tabula rasa* is obviously to be understood as ideological rather than psychological, even though Turner and many other scholars understand it as a concrete psychological phenomenon.

To sum up: among the elements of Turner's work that are relevant to this investigation is his acceptance on the whole of van Gennep's tripartite structure and his occupation with the liminal phase, which he understands as an anti-structure in relation to the 'normal' social structure. In addition to being without a structure, it is characterised by being everything that is opposite to or reversed in relation to the non-liminal periods. Of special importance are the symbols that are communicated during the liminal phase which in nearly all cases are considered sacred (1969a, 128). In this phase, the persons to be initiated are structurally 'dead', they are 'no more' in society and they are 'not yet' in society. In other words, they are 'empty' and, in the transference of *sacra*, may attain a completely new mode of existence. For the perspective of classification, Turner is less important because the terms of his distinction between 'life crisis rites' and 'calendrical rites', which are defined almost in the same way as the two categories we saw by Chapple and Coon, seem to be irrelevant to a more exact characterisation of the relationship between the various rituals.

Research after Turner: classification and structure

A scholar whose work is relevant to the study of initiation is Terence S. Turner. His article 'Transformation, Hierarchy and Transcendence: A Reformulation of van Gennep's Model of Structures in Rites de passage' (1977) is an attempt at a theoretical formulation of the tripartite structure. Terence Turner attempts to advance a model for the general structural features of transitional rituals which is interesting on several grounds. The crucial point for our purpose is that he adds an essential aspect to van Gennep's basic structure of the rituals. These, Turner says, mediate between the structures of social relationships (1977, 57), while the structures of rituals reflect the transition between these relationships. But, he claims, the structure of rituals has a vertical dimension which van Gennep overlooked. This is because we are not only faced with a tripartite sequence, but with a 'model' with two axes that cross one another and in which the horizontal marks the contrast between the position of the initiand in the pre-liminal phase and his position in the post-liminal phase, whereas the vertical marks the contrast between these two forms of existence on the one hand and the phase (the liminal phase) which regulates the transition between them on the other (1977, 68). The content of the liminal phase is, therefore, defined as a culturally dependent variable, as it will be dependent on the content of the two non-liminal phases. This two-dimensional perspective is necessary to an adequate understanding of the structure and *raison d'être* of initiation and, for that matter, of all other rituals when they are understood as religious phenomena, and for this reason it occupies an essential place in any description of the phenomenon.

The most recent monograph – although more than twenty years old - about initiation as a general phenomenon to be mentioned here is *Initiation. Ritual drama and secret knowledge across the world* (1985) by Jean La Fontaine. This book does not contain actual new perspectives but is distinguished by a running discussion of other researchers' findings, with interesting analyses of many different rituals, together with an emphasis on a series of elements that are of importance for a deeper understanding of the initiation phenomenon. The material included is, as the title indicates, gathered from all over the world and includes for instance a treatment of freemasonry (1985, 49-56). In her theoretical perspective, La Fontaine is in agreement with van Gennep whose tripartite phases of the sequence structure she finds confirmation for everywhere. It is further of methodological interest that she distinguishes between the effect the ritual has from the viewpoint of the participants and the one which is perceptible to the observer (1985, 185). The former alters the individual who experiences initiation, the latter is often of a psychological or sociological character. What makes La Fontaine's treatment something more than a trivial repetition of the facts is that she pays more attention to how solidarity among those who are initiated into the same group is established, namely in that 'shared secrets create a bond' (1985,186). By this means, the knowledge that is obtained during the ritual becomes of crucial importance, not because of its content but simply because those who are not initiated do not know it. Just as in Eliade – to whom La Fontaine adopts a very critical attitude (1985, 22-3) – this knowledge is, therefore, seen as quite central. La Fontaine, in contrast to Eliade, does not consider the actual content as crucial, however, because it may comprise all kinds of trivialities and need not in any way be something that brings a human being closer to the gods or to prehistoric times or makes him a more 'authentic' human being, although it is often 'eternal values' such as birth, death and mythical powers that are involved (1985, 17). 'Knowledge' is regarded by La Fontaine as a sociological factor which separates those who are initiated from those who are not. This is obviously a correct observation seen from the level of the outside observer. On the other hand, one can hardly ignore content altogether when it has to do with the participants' understanding. This is not the case either in the book, although the author seems very reluctant to speak about its possible religious dimension. She writes (1985, 187):

> The experience of initiation is usually identified by the participants as conferring on the initiate knowledge or rights which underline and justify an increase in his or her status, whether this is publicly acknowledged by a community or recognized only in the closed circle of the group.

Seen from the outside, it is possible that it is enough only to know *something*, but the way in which this knowledge appears must necessarily bring to the initiands an understanding of something that is not trivial and which, therefore, has the character of something numinous. Whether this quality lies in the content itself or the manner in which the knowledge is transferred is perhaps not important, as long as the 'message' appears to the initiands as numinous. La Fontaine also makes an interesting observation about death/rebirth symbolism. After having established that symbols associated with sexuality and birth play a considerable role in a whole series of rituals – even when it is not a question of initiation – she poses the question (1985, 189):

> … are they just 'natural symbols', material available? In many of the rites discussed here, there are other symbols – fire, water or beer – which are linked with sexuality. They are usually interpreted as metaphors for it, in a way that assumes that the primary meaning is sexuality. If we approach rituals as actions designed to achieve a purpose, and consider the objects and acts which appear in rituals not only as designating meaning but containing qualities which are used, then a different explanation is possible. These are substances and processes which are generative, they create change. Fire, yeast, water, all change the substances they come in contact with; they are potent. The processes are not metaphors for procreation but parallel to it, used as much for

their own powers as for representation of the power of reproduction.

Although the present study is more occupied with myths than rituals, this observation seems important here. There is no doubt that sexual metaphors play a part in the Scandinavian material and that they do not occur alone. The decisive factor is that they are powerful, that they can create something new, and that all the various metaphors and symbolic relationships enter into a common semantic universe.

A contribution that is primarily of interest in connection with the classification of rituals will be included here, although it does not have initiation as its main subject.[30] It is an article by the Finnish historian of religion and folklorist Lauri Honko, originally presented at a conference of historians of religion in Helsinki in 1973. In 1975, part of Honko's contribution was published in the article 'Zur Klassifikation der Riten', but the publication of the complete paper did not occur until 1979.

Like Chapple and Coon and several others, Honko is aware that there are unfortunate consequences connected with the fact that the term *rites de passage* covers the whole spectrum of rituals that van Gennep discusses in *Les Rites de Passage*. Honko classifies the rituals as 'rites of passage', 'calendrical rites' and 'crisis rites' and defines the three categories as follows: 'Rites of passage are traditional rituals organized by society whereby the individual is moved from one status to another' (1979, 374).[31] 'Calendrical rites' are '… cyclical rites, organized by the community, and placed at the turning points of the socio-economic seasons, often at their beginning or end' (1979, 375), while 'crisis rites' are '… occasional rituals in unexpected situations of crisis' (1979, 377). Honko uses three criteria in making these distinctions: 1) whether the rites are orientated towards an individual or a group; 2) whether they are recurring, and 3) whether they are predictable. When these three criteria are applied to the three categories, the following table can be produced (1975, 75):

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[30] George Weckman in his article 'Understanding initiation' (1970) has tried to classify various types of initiation rituals, but his criteria are only of limited importance for this study and will not be discussed further.

[31] Honko is also aware of the importance that knowledge has in transitional rituals (cf. Honko 1975, 69).

Table 2.1

Rite category	Social orientation	Recurring	Predictable
Rite of passage	Individual	÷	+
Calendrical rite	Group	+	+
Crisis rite	Individual/group	÷	÷

This classification seems useful in connection with a definition of the category of initiation, although we may place a question mark against some of the criteria (e.g. whether it is appropriate to make *rites de passage* centre exclusively on the individual, as this category in its social orientation also seems to vary from birth, which is completely centred on the individual, to the puberty rituals, which, at least to a certain degree, are just as collectively oriented as some of the seasonal rituals). An important observation by Honko consists in distinguishing between a 'category' and a 'model', of which the categories form a practical taxonomy and which makes the classification of the material easier, whereas the procedural model of a rite is used to shed light on special problems and their solutions (1979, 372). This distinction is of importance because, among other things, it justifies the perception that a model (e.g. van Gennep's) fits into several categories (1979, 380).[32]

The question of the classification of rituals has produced a great deal of debate in the study of religion generally, but it plays only a subordinate role in the study of initiation. Honko's work has been included in this survey because it is useful in deciding which general category initiation rituals may be placed in. It is anticipated that they will be placed within the transition rituals, for which the present study will substitute the term 'initiation rituals' (see below Chapter 3.3). As far as Honko's criteria are concerned, these need to be supplemented with some structural criteria, such as the relation between the initial and the final phases of the ritual. For instance it is characteristic that, in the seasonal rituals, it is a matter of society moving between two phases which may be characterised as neutral, since the final phase that is aimed at must merely be at the same level as the level society is moving out of. In the crisis rituals it is in the nature of things a question of an initial phase which is negative; and for this reason the ritual must recreate the normal condition. In the transitional ritual it is the aim, on the other hand, to let the individual move from one 'normal condition' on to another condition, which is 'higher' and therefore may be characterised as a positive condition. We can, therefore, by operating with the categories ÷, 0 and +, carry out a clear distinction between the three types of rituals based on a couple of structural characteristics.[33]

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[32] See also Leach 1976, 78 (cf. Pentikäinen 1979, 156) for a schematic representation of the model of *rites de passage*.

Concluding remarks

In this section we have examined a series of more or less significant works, which have shed light on the phenomenon of initiation or *rites de passage*, between which most researchers have not fully distinguished. In the next chapter, it will be necessary to return to a series of elements, which are important as a characterisation of initiation rather than an actual definition of the phenomenon. In addition, some of the scholars whose works have been reviewed here have also made valuable *methodological* contributions to the study of initiation. Among these is Victor Turner's understanding of symbolic meaning, which can be applied to the Scandinavian material.

As a provisional summary, it is clear that all the scholars discussed have fixed on the fact that initiation marks a transition from one status to another, which in some sense or other is 'higher' than that left behind, through a specific sequence of rites. There has been widespread agreement that the acquisition of 'knowledge' or 'numinous power' plays a role in this transition. Further, several scholars have seen that a specific transitional symbolism that circles around the phenomena of death and rebirth is very often present. With Victor Turner's analyses of 'the liminal' we have seen, besides, that not only the initiation rituals or the transitional rituals contain a liminal phase, but that rituals in general are constructed as a movement between non-liminal and liminal phases, which are semantic opposites with relation to the dichotomy sacred/profane. On the other hand, we have only noticed to a slight degree that the same structure, which we find in the rituals, may also be present in various narrative genres. Finally, it has been suggested that there are problems with the classification of initiation as a ritual category, both with regard to the sub-categories and the general category of *rites de passage,* and the criteria by which this category can be classified in relation to other categories. We will return to these issues in the next chapter.

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[33] I have thoroughly discussed this issue in a couple of earlier articles (Schjødt 1986b and 1992a) and in addition, I can refer to the improvement of my own graphical model in Rydving 1993. See also Chapter 3 below.

2.2 Initiation within Research on Scandinavian Religion

Research into the history of religion in Scandinavia has only to a limited extent been occupied specifically with initiation. This is largely due to the fact that only a few sources describe sequences of events which we may reasonably designate as initiation rituals. The main part of the scholarly literature dealing with the topic only touches on a few elements in the texts and a few aspects of the initiation complex, and these will be discussed in connection with the relevant passages in the analyses in Chapters 5 to 9. No attempt has ever been made to lay down precise criteria for identifying patterns of initiation in Scandinavian sources.[34] The main purpose of most of the contributions appears to have been to show that certain apparently incomprehensible myths and mythical statements may be explained with reference to the fact that they have roots in initiation rituals, which Vladimir Propp, too, attempted to demonstrate systematically in connection with Russian wondertales (Propp 1983, 21-3). This is, naturally, quite legitimate, but the lack of theoretical considerations of the relationship between myth and ritual seems all the more conspicuous.

Works that specifically discuss initiation in Scandinavian religion

Lily Weiser carried out the first systematic attempt at a scientific investigation of 'ob und inwieweit die über die ganze Erde verbreiteten

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[34] Both Phillpotts (1920) and Gunnell (1995) touch on initiation sporadically in their endeavours to prove that the poems of the Elder Edda were staged dramatically, but neither of them considers more closely what this implies, and it is clear that both of them assume that the seasonal rituals (see below Chapter 3) were the basis for the poems.

Jünglingsweihen und Männerbünde den Germanen bekannt waren', 'if and to what extent the consecration of young men and male societies, that were spread over the whole earth, were known to the Germanic peoples' (1927, 7). In her book *Altgermanische Jünglingsweihen und Männerbünde*, she formulates the problem thus: 'gibt es in altgermanischer Überlieferung Spuren der Initiation, wie sind sie beschaffen, darf man sie als Grundlage der neueren deutschen und nordischen Volkssitten ansehen?' (1927, 11) 'are there traces of initiation in the old Germanic traditions, and can more recent German and Scandinavian customs be seen as being constructed on the basis of them?' Weiser is familiar with van Gennep and uses this knowledge in several places. She relates positively to it without managing to transfer the essential part of his contribution to the Germanic material, however. One of the reasons for this is probably that she is mainly interested in the *development* that the object of her examination has undergone (1927, 12), so the crucial new ideas in van Gennep's investigation – the tripartite phased structure as the analytical model – do not manage to acquire a significant place in her work. Thus, only relatively few of Weiser's observations will be mentioned here. One of these is that, as far back as is known, it appears that both north and south Germanic peoples had male secret societies of a kind also known from other parts of the world. As far as initiation itself is concerned, the material is scarcer, but Weiser refers to some literary examples, such as *Vǫlsunga saga*'s description of Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli (see Chapter 8.3), and she finds both here and in other sagas clear traces of initiation rituals. Another example she adduces is *Gylf*'s account of the god Þórr's journey to Útgarðaloki (Faulkes 2005, 37-43). It is the test of endurance and tests of abilities that attract her attention (1927, 70-82) rather than the symbolic and structural characteristics. We will return to Weiser in Chapter 8.3.

A work of more far-reaching importance for our understanding of cult societies in the Germanic area is Otto Höfler's *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* (1934). Höfler, too, was to some extent influenced by evolutionary development models (1934, e.g. 67), which, however, play a subordinate role in connection with initiation. The point of departure for Höfler was – just as for Weiser – to prove the existence of male secret societies. His methodology is, however, more subtle, and this is one of the reasons that his ideas are still of value to research and that his book has acquired the status of a classic within the history of Germanic religion. Höfler's material, like Weiser's, is predominantly folkloristic, but he also uses both Old Norse and other old sources extensively, demonstrating by this means that many of the ideas in the poetry of the Elder Edda, among other texts, show a continuity both with ancient material like Tacitus and more recent folklore.[35]

The general value of Höfler's work is high. To summarise his most important insights, he, as well as Weiser, has demonstrated that the phenomenon of male secret societies existed in Germanic territories and that these had been especially attached to the god Óðinn who, above all else, was god of the male bands,[36] both in this life and in the next one. Just as he has shown that the prerequisite for becoming a member of these societies was a consecration which included elements that can be observed on a global basis in initiations, he also drew attention to a symbolism which included death, rebirth and the acquisition of numinous knowledge. Höfler has not made much of these elements – probably because his work is before Eliade, Turner and others discussed earlier in this chapter. But he did nevertheless recognise the symbolism, and for this alone he is important in relation to initiation. The present study has been inspired to some extent by Höfler's work, but attempts to show in far greater detail to what extent the various elements formed fundamental factors in determining the way in which the Scandinavian people organised their world view in relation to the phenomenon of initiation – and not only in relation to initiation into warrior bands.

Lily Weiser and Otto Höfler are the two scholars who have had the greatest importance for the understanding of initiation in the Scandinavian areas and both have increased our knowledge of male secret societies considerably, especially in connection with the existence of berserks. Although initiation was not the actual goal of research for either of them, it is nevertheless also those two, together with Danielli, who have devoted themselves most systematically to the topic.[37]

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[35] One of Höfler's methodological premises that is not unproblematic is that we must take the point of departure in the concrete (the rite), not in the abstract (the myth) (1934, 284-286). It is largely for this reason that his primary text material consists of descriptions of young men, equipped with masks, who terrorise their surroundings.

[36] Höfler draws attention to the parallel to the Indian Rudra (1934, 261) with reference to H. Arbmann (1922) and Otto (1932), who are especially relevant in a Indo-European perspective (see also Kershaw 2000 for a more modern perspective).

In 1945 Mary Danielli made initiation the direct research topic of a short article. Her point of departure is epic sequences, primarily taken from Icelandic sagas, which she thinks contain several elements that reflect elements from actual initiation rituals. It is problematic that Danielli had apparently not found it important to explain how the saga material and rituals relate to one another. In the course of the article, the literary features that are analysed are described as 'ceremonial' (1945, 240), and their purpose was, she claims, to tell about a form of 'initiation of the sons of noble settlers in Iceland into their social responsibilities…' (1945, 232). Although not all the conclusions in the article are convincing there are many significant analytical observations, and it is regrettable that the article has never played a greater role in accounts of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion,[38] which is probably due to the fact that Danielli was on the fringe of the philological mainstream.

In places the article is unsystematic. On the one hand it emphasises the parallel between the sequence structure in the literary passages and in initiation while, on the other, Danielli fixes on a series of different elements, such as tests, dressing up in masks, travels and the presence of bears or berserkers, who all, it is argued, direct our thoughts towards initiation ritual.[39] It is, however, problematic when Danielli bases initiation rituals in individual symbolic elements which are used as the frame of reference for literary passages.[40]

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[37] On the other hand, within Indo-European research on religion, a series of outstanding contributions have been made, including Widengren 1938, 311-25 and 1954-55,I, 65-9 in the Iranian area; Rees and Rees 1961, 246-58 in the Celtic; Gonda 1965, 315-36, in the Indian. In addition to this there are some works on Greek and Roman religion in which traces of initiation in myths have been found and which are methodologically interesting; see Knight 1936, Jeanmaire 1939, Vidal-Naquet 1968 and 1973 and Clark 1979. Common to all these contributions is that they have been written to solve problems within individual cultural contexts, and their value for the Scandinavian material is, therefore, limited, apart from the fact that they show that there exist certain striking parallels between the various cultures' initiations. A book that ought to be mentioned is Stig Wikander's *Der arische Männerbund* (1938), which, although it has not had any direct influence on the Scandinavian condition, is of great importance as it was directly inspired by Höfler's work. Finally, a more recent work, which contains many interesting observations on male societies both in Scandinavia and in the whole of the Indo-European area, is Kris Kershaw's *The One-eyed God* (2000); as the title indicates, it deals mainly with Óðinn and this god's attachment to male groups.

[38] It is conspicuous that it does not appear in the bibliographies of the greater collected accounts of Scandinavian and Germanic religion (thus, neither in de Vries 1956-57, Turville-Petre 1964, Å. V. Ström 1975, Clunies Ross 1994, nor in Steinsland 2005).

There is no doubt that Danielli's contribution is both original and in certain places convincing. As mentioned, she takes her point of departure from a series of sequences in the sagas and a passage in *Beowulf,*[41] in which she points out that the hero experiences a sequence which corresponds to that of the initiand, with a series of tests, expulsion and a new status, which is higher than the one he had in the initial phase. She demonstrates that a series of elements recurs in the passages analysed, among others that the killing of a ghost or monster takes place at Yule time, and from this she concludes that they must have a common foundation in initiation which has the purpose of joining the hero to the fellowship of the community.

Danielli's investigation is interesting because it draws a parallel between structure in literary material and one we know from initiation rituals, which is also the primary aim of this book. But, as mentioned, it is also problematic. The general problem is that elements which have a clear literary function or are based in actual historical conditions are interpreted as ritual. This, for instance, holds good when Vigfús in *Víga-Glúms saga* Chapter VI (Kristjánsson 1956, 17-19) asks his men not to provoke the berserk Bjǫrn, and Glúmr, as the only one can put him in his place, or when sons of noblemen travel abroad in their youth. In the first case, we have to do with a literary topos which shows what the heroes are made of (c.f. also Liberman 2005), and in the second one, we are faced with a kind of educational travel which in fact often took place. In other words, we are dealing with topoi which may have a function in contexts that have nothing to do with initiations. It does not exclude the possibility that there may be ideological elements in these descriptions, even those of initiation, but it demands stronger arguments than Danielli puts forth and argues with. On the other hand, her emphasis on the Hǫttr-episode in *Hrólfs saga kraka* is of a completely different nature, as the narrative abounds with features that do not have any literary function and which could only have been drawn from reality, if one assumes the existence of certain rituals.

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[39] There is no doubt that these elements can form part of initiation, the problem is that in order to argue that convincingly a more extensive placing of them in the structural complex that the initiation constitutes is required – a complex which Danielli never analyses.

[40] She states, for instance, that the state of outlawry represents ritual death (1945, 243). The general term for both the state of outlawry and ritual death is a separated or liminal condition, but neither the one nor the other of the manifested terms can be said to take precedence over the other.

[41] Arent (1969) heads in the same direction as Danielli, and she even uses the same material. But Arent also includes pictorial material from helmets and suggests that a series of motifs circle around initiation, which is possible but can hardly be said to be probable. Besides, one can criticise Arent on the same points that hold good for Danielli.

An article which must also be mentioned in this connection is Riti Kroesen's 'The Christianization of two Initiatory Patterns in Ǫrvar-Odds Saga' (1985). The topic is naturally more limited, but Kroesen deals especially with Óðinn's role in initiations in which he takes care of 'the hero'. Again, however, we lack a systematic definition of the phenomenon, and Óðinn's own experiences of initiation are only sporadically included. On the other hand, Kroesen realises (1985, 649-51) that an initiation pattern can be found both in Saxo's account of Hadingus and in the saga of Hrólfr kraki – two accounts we will examine more closely below.

The phenomenon of initiation in some larger collected descriptions of Scandinavian religion

It is conspicuous that several of the larger works which claim to give an overview of Scandinavian or Germanic religion and mythology do not touch at all on the subject of initiation (e.g. F. Ström 1961, Davidson 1964 and 1967 and Holtsmark 1970). As Jan de Vries in *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* has collected all that has been considered to concern initiation up to the 1950s, the present survey will not go further back. One of the examples that he draws upon is Óðinn's self-hanging, which he describes, apparently without any further thought, as both a sacrifice and as an initiation (de Vries 1956-57, I, 499-502 and II, 49-50). He follows Weiser's and Höfler's views of male secret societies on the whole without adding anything of importance, just as he follows Dumézil's interpretation of the Hrungnir-myth (I, 492-4 and II, 135-8). He acknowledges also, however, that, strictly speaking, we are not in a position to know whether an initiation had taken place in connection with admission to these groups (II, 98). Besides the two above-mentioned myths, together with the berserk complex and the *einherjar* complex, he also connects the myth in *Grí* with initiation which is somewhat problematic (cf. Schjødt 1988c), and the motif with Hǫttr, which, as indicated above, is sensible (II, 135), although he by no means exhausts this topic. It is interesting that the motif of the establishment of blood-brotherhood in *Gísla saga* is regarded as an initiation, with all the symbolism such as we know it from other cultures, including death, rebirth and the obtaining of a new status (cf. de Vries 1929). The example is interesting, not least because it is the only West Scandinavian source to give a distinct description of a ritual in which the symbolism is relatively clear, and which is, therefore, the closest we come to an initiation ritual in the sources (see below Chapter 9.4). Nevertheless, it has not been considered as an initiation in the remainder of the works surveying this field.

In E. O. G. Turville-Petre's *Myth and Religion of the North,* there is a marked lack of discussion of initiation and the only myth in connection with which he mentions the possibility is Óðinn's self-hanging. But even here, he does not attribute any greater importance to the phenomenon, as he obviously prefers the terminology of sacrifice in his treatment (1964, 42-50). He comments (p. 50):

> Initiation is regarded largely as a symbolic death, often followed by the rebirth of the initiate under another name. It is well possible that such ceremonial practices were known to the Norsemen in very early times, but the library sources give scant evidence of them. (1964, 50)

This viewpoint is largely representative of other contemporary research in this field: the existence of initiation is not completely rejected, but the consensus is that we cannot find clear traces of it in the source material. This is quite correct when we are talking exclusively about *ceremonial practices*, but if we include the mythical material, the case is different, as we will see.

In the series 'Die Religionen der Menscheit' (1975), Å. V. Ström mentions initiation in connection with myths about Óðinn. Ström also follows Dumézil in his interpretation of some of the Þórr myths as literary adaptations of initiation rituals to the warrior function (Å. V. Ström 1975, 139) without in any way expanding on this. He also accepts the existence of male secret societies without discussing initiation in that connection (1975, 262). There is, however, one thing which is worth noticing, namely that he indicates that there is a connection between the acquisition of knowledge and initiation. Following Höfler, he draws our attention to the fact that the acquisition of knowledge is associated with admission into male secret societies and, in this connection, he also touches on the myth of the acquisition of the mead of poetry (1975, 117). Ström does not make anything further of this connection which is regrettable as the association is quite central to it, as we shall see: myths in which the acquisition of knowledge or the acquisition of objects with numinous qualities form a part ought to be examined with a view to their possible character as 'initiation myths'.

Margaret Clunies Ross, too, in *Prolonged Echoes* I (1994) touches on initiation, primarily in connection with Óðinn's self-hanging, in a more analytical and thoughtful way than in the rest of the accounts. As her book will be discussed in various connections below, and since it is not an exhaustive treatment of the phenomenon in relation to those myths that are being discussed, it will not be commented on more closely at this point.

Two more popular works are Jean Renaud's *Les dieux des Vikings* (1996) and Britt-Mari Näsström's *Fornskandinavisk religion. En Grundbok* (2001). In these too, we do not find an explicit discussion of initiation. Óðinn's self-hanging is characterised as an initiation (Renaud 1996, 47 and Näsström 2001a, 62), and a few transitional rituals are described (Renaud 1996, 178-80 and Näsström 2001a, 230-2). In Renaud, there is no attempt at the kind of analysis that would give us a glimpse of their structure and symbolism, whereas Näsström touches on the theme when she includes some of those sources that will also be analysed below; but here, too, there is no attempt at any form of in-depth analysis.[42]

The most recent general treatments of Nordic/Germanic religion are Rudolf Simek's *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen* from 2003 and Gro Steinsland's *Norrøn religion. Myter, riter, samfunn* from 2005. Whereas Simek hardly touches on the subject of initiation, Steinsland has a small chapter on rituals connected with biological passages or life crises (2005, 328-344) in which initiation is mentioned a couple of times. The aim, however, is to describe what is related in the sources with only a few discussions of the problems involved.

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[42] The same author is a little more detailed in 2001b, 115-19 and in 2002, where various initiation scenarios are discussed. These will be mentioned several times later on..

In summing up research on initiation within the Scandinavian field, there are very few contributions that have had initiation as their main focus. Weiser and Höfler were primarily interested in the male secret societies, which leaves us with Danielli as the only one who has attempted to say something general about initiation. Indeed, a number of articles and books have been published that deal with the topic of initiation in relation to various myths and other accounts, and we will return to these in connection with the individual analyses below, but attempts have not been made to plan full-scale studies of the phenomenon in Scandinavian religion. There has been a tendency among scholars to think that the myths could have retained reminiscences from earlier rituals without further consideration, however, of the relationship between myth and ritual. In addition, they have as a rule focused on individual elements in these myths (and rituals), of which the most prominent have been death/rebirth symbolism and the physical tests together with the change of status that takes place between the initial and final situations. The question of what lies between these two phases and how the various elements have become part of an entity has been almost completely neglected. Some scholars have also been aware that a kind of secret knowledge has played a part, and Höfler, in particular, has noticed that initiation has involved a relationship with death, but none of them have noticed the connection between knowledge, death and initiation as a link in a vast semantic complex.

Chapter 3
Towards a Definition of the Category of Initiation and Criteria for the Choice of Material

In Chapter 1, we made a provisional attempt at a definition of initiation which it will be necessary to expand on here. We will examine more closely the question of what it is that characterises the structure that identifies initiation. This will entail an attempt at classification of the various categories of rituals, since initiation has been identified in the history of research as a ritual category. Our first question must, therefore, be: Do initiation rituals form a special category and, if that is the case, on what criteria, or are they a sub-category of *rites de passage*, as van Gennep argued? And then: Is it correct to assume, with van Gennep, a special sequential structure for transitional rituals, or is that structure which he analyses so general that it holds good in principle for all rituals? Section 1 of this chapter thus deals with the general classification of rituals. After that, we will examine more closely the relationship between ritual and myth, a relationship which is of great importance in relation to the objective of this study (Section 2). Finally, we will single out and comment on those elements that comprise criteria for establishing whether or not a source can be considered initiatory. In that connection, it will be necessary to enter more closely into some of the problems concerning symbolism and structure (Section 3).

3.1 The Classification of Rituals

In two earlier articles, I have discussed problems that arise in connection with an appropriate classification of rituals, primarily with regard to van Gennep's model (Schjødt 1986b and 1992a), and I will, therefore, only summarise these views here. What is of interest for the present investigation is how we can define the category we call initiation.[1]

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[1] A classification of the rituals is naturally present in every introduction to the phenomenology of religion, but it is remarkable how, not only the classification itself but also (often implicitly) the criteria, vary (e.g. Heiler 1961, 176-266, Widengren 1969, 216-57 and Dhavamony 1973, 167).

There are two particular problems in van Gennep which claim our interest. Firstly, he works with the term *rites de passage* as a special ritual category, and *rites d'initiation* is understood as a sub-category of this. This appears reasonable enough as a point of departure, since the chapter about initiation is placed between the chapter dealing with birth and the one on marriage. It looks as if van Gennep has simply proceeded in accordance with the order of the 'biological' transitions in human life and that we are therefore dealing with puberty ritual here. This is confirmed by the introductory remarks to the chapter which focus on puberty rites. The problem is that very soon we learn that the consecrations of kings, priests and magicians are also included among what is designated as initiation ritual (van Gennep 1909, 94). When, in addition, it is argued that a wedding could form an initiation (1909, 202), it becomes very difficult to see what it is that separates initiations from the rest of the transitional rituals. Van Gennep himself does not tell us on what criteria he determines the classification.

Secondly, it is noticeable in the arrangement of the book that the criterion that is used for separating *les rites de passage* from the other categories of rituals is of a structural kind, namely the combination of the three types of rites into a definite sequence. This, however, is also far from unproblematic as the rituals, which follow this structure, are more general than van Gennep thought, and perhaps even so general that the criteria cannot be used to effect a classification. We saw that Chapple and Coon already separated out what they called *rites of intensification*, without affecting the validity of van Gennep's structure, which indicates that this structural characteristic is too broad to be of use for the purpose of classification. This is also supported by the investigation of Hubert and Mauss into the structure of sacrifice, which demonstrates that sacrifices and transitional rituals have to make use of a comparable structure, although with a wide variation in content.[2]

We are, therefore, dealing with two problems of a classificatory kind. The sequence with three types of rites seems to be general, even for rituals which do not primarily deal with an individual's change of status, and the sequence can, therefore, not be used as a criterion for classification.[3] Next, the reason for van Gennep's sub-division is quite unfathomable. If the criteria for it are the two forms of status between which the rituals form a transition, then it is impossible to see what it is that connects the sub-categories of initiation but at the same time separates them from the rest of the *rites de passage*.

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[2] Strangely enough, van Gennep was aware of the analyses of Hubert and Mauss (1909, 263), but apparently they did not influence him in any way.

The solution to these problems must be that researchers cannot use the sequence as a classificatory criterion (cf. also van Baal and van Beek 1985, 131; Chapple and Coon 1942, 484). All religious rituals must be understood as an attempt to communicate with The Other World – a communication which may be direct or indirect.[4] It is, thus, necessary to have a separation from This World, a stay in a symbolic space, which represents The Other World (or in a symbolic space which makes it possible to make contact with it), and a return to This World. This naturally includes rites that separate, rites that are liminal and rites of reintegration. These various categories will not always be present in a specific ritual, but should be considered as ingredients in a model. By virtue of the fact that a ritual will always include a transition between the two worlds, we may argue polemically that all rituals are transitional rituals. Now, it was naturally not this that van Gennep meant by 'a transition' as, for him, it had to be a question of a transition between two stages in an individual's life (or of the transition from the old year to the new). Nevertheless, it is relevant enough to ask the question of whether it must not always be an issue of a transition from a ritual's initial phase to its final phase. The ritual is carried out with the purpose of renewing contact with the actors in The Other World and thereby improving the present situation. It will, therefore, always be a question of a transition between two different phases, which are characterised respectively by an actual or a potential crisis and a negating of this crisis.

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[3] The fact that the sequence that van Gennep established is very general may also have contributed to the fact that the same material has caused two apparently different paradigms to emerge within research on rituals in the twentieth century. One paradigm deals with the dying and reborn god in connection with New Year ritual, and the other deals with initiation (cf. Versnel 1990, especially 64-7).

[4] The designations 'direct' and 'indirect' communication refer respectively to that communication in which the subject moves to a symbolic space, which represents The Other World, and the one to which a mediating factor is added, such as a sacrificial animal or a sacred object (see also Schjødt 1992a, 15-17 and A. W. Geertz 1990).

Therefore the term *rites de passage* – irrespective of how much honour it has gained within research on religion – is unfortunate with regard to classification. Naturally, it cannot be chased away from the scholarly vocabulary, but for two reasons it will consistently be substituted by the term initiation in this book. The first reason is that there are no arguments in favour of working with van Gennep's sub-categories of *rites de passage* when the sub-category of initiation is just as heterogeneous as all the other groups in relation to the general classification. The second reason is that the term initiation indicates that, for the individual, it is a matter of a new beginning – sometimes he quite simply becomes a new person in one or more respects, and it is exactly this that is the issue in all the categories which van Gennep was working with as transitional rituals, aside from the seasonal rituals.

As far as the general classification is concerned, an essential point about the terminology suggested here is that it has eliminated the problem van Gennep had with the relationship between, on the one hand, the various categories of the *rites de passage*, and, on the other hand, the various forms of initiation. The difference between an individual experiencing a ritualised transition from the state of being unmarried to that of being married, on the one hand, and a corresponding ritualised transition from being a child to being an adult, on the other, is not more striking than the difference between a transition from not being a king to becoming one, and a transition from not being a member of a warrior band to being one. We can naturally adduce criteria like the degree of exclusivity in discerning, but this will go contrary to van Gennep's general and sub-classifications and does not tell us anything about how some of these transitions were supposed to be sub-categories of *rites de passage*, whereas others are further sub-categories of initiation.

What we have is not a general category out of which we can separate initiation rituals, which can then be further subdivided. With the designation initiation as the general category, there is, indeed, a series of sub-categories separated from it, but these must be seen as sub-categories at the same level ('Puberty rituals', for example, would not be a subcategory under 'Initiation rituals', but would be at the same level as e.g. 'Funerary rituals') according to both sequential and structural criteria (the relationship between the initial phase and the final phase). By this means we get a series of transitions at birth, puberty, marriage, when taking up one's official duties, as well as for admission to certain religiously based associations, and at death, all of which have the characteristics that make them into initiations. This will be further explained later in this chapter. As a matter of form, it must be emphasised in this connection that not all transitions are ritualised in all cultures, nor are they ritualised to the same extent. The purpose for which we can use such an enumeration is to advance a hypothesis: it is in connection with these 'biological' and 'culturally determined' transitions that we may expect in advance that rituals of the initiation type may be used. And it is, therefore, in sources that shed light on them that we must take our point of departure when we are searching for a description of initiation rituals in Chapter 9.

It is obvious, for instance, that Eliade's three categories are exclusively based on the various social categories which are in turn based on the final situation. Something similar holds good for Weckman who suggests that various types of criteria may be included in his hierarchically constructed classification (1970, 76-8). There is no reason to contest that, and it seems most purposeful to classify with regard to the ritual subject's position in the final situation – not with a point of departure from the structure of the ritual, which would hardly be possible, but precisely in relation to those categories into which the individuals are initiated (e.g. shaman initiations and initiations of leaders). With regard to the present investigation, the sub-division of the various categories of initiation rituals does not play a crucial role, although we will return to this problem several times in passing. The investigation deals primarily with the general structure and symbolism – elements which cannot be distinguished consistently in relation to the various subcategories.

3.2 Myth and Ritual

So far we have considered transitional *rituals* and initiation *rituals* almost exclusively. However, in preparation for the following investigation it is of crucial importance to discuss the relationship between myth and ritual. The literature on this topic is enormous, and it is far beyond the scope of this book to enter into a closer discussion of it.[5] Since

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[5] Light is not only shed on the problem in works that deal directly with the relationship between myth and ritual, but also in many publications, which work primarily with

Robertson Smith (1972) [1889] and Frazer (1906, e.g. 169), many scholars have looked for a close connection between ritual and myth and argued either that ritual is derived from myth or vice versa. Through most of the twentieth century, researchers inclined to think that rituals were the fixed basis and that myths were derived from them in order to 'explain' the events that happened in the culture (e.g. Hooke 1933, 3, Hyman 1955, 462-72 and Wallace 1966, 243-4.), a point of view that is already found in Robertson Smith (1972, 18) [1889]. Others, such as Kluckhohn (1958)[6] and Leach (1954, 13-4) have neglected to evaluate what is derived from what, but continually emphasise the close connection between the two categories, because the myth is understood by and large as what is spoken, that which puts into words what ritual 'enacts' – and that they relate to one another as *legomenon* to *dromenon* (cf. Harrison 1912, 328 and Gaster 1954, 187).[7] Others again see the relationship as more complicated and reject an unequivocal relationship between myth and ritual, which is true of Lévi-Strauss (1958, 232) and Kirk (1970, 28-31). Some scholars, especially from the second half of the twentieth century, emphasise that myths exist that are unattached to any ritual (e.g. Stanner 1966, 81-106), and that such an affiliation, therefore, cannot be the basis for whether a particular narrative can be classified as a myth. Discussions of this kind are often rather pointless as it may be legitimate, although not always to the pur-

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either myth or ritual. Often, we also discover important theoretical reflections in investigations of myths and rituals in specific cultures. Works with numerous and good references to various aspects of research on rituals are Grimes 1984 and Bell 1992; for research on myths Cohen 1969 and Honko 1970. For an excellent discussion of the myth/ritual complex in general – although with a point of departure in the Greek material – see Versnel 1990 with many references. Other general works surveying the topic are de Vries 1967, 209-15; de Waal Malefijt 1968, 172-95; Kirk 1970, 8-31; Doty 1986, 72-106; Ackerman 1991; Bell 1997, 3-22; Segal 1998, 1-13 and not least Fontenrose 1966.

[6] Kluckhohn's understanding has played an important role in the history of research. He thinks that both categories have a common psychological basis: 'Ritual is an obsessive repetitive activity – often a symbolic dramatization of the fundamental "needs" of the society … Mythology is the rationalization of these same needs whether they are all expressed in overt ceremonial or not' (1958, 151).

[7] Gaster, about whom it has been said that he is 'perhaps the last true Frazerian' (Versnel 1990, 74), argues that whereas the ritual expresses the immediate aspect of a situation, myth expresses the transcendal and ideal aspect – a viewpoint expressed in various forms by the myth/ritual school.

pose, to reserve a term for exactly this or that usage (cf. Strenski 1987, 1-12). However, to use the term 'myth' exclusively to designate narratives that accompany or have accompanied a performance of a ritual (e.g. Widengren 1969, 150) will exclude a considerable number of narratives, including those that contain such internal criteria as content and structure, which indicate their mythic nature, and whose narratives deal with subjects generally accepted as mythical, like stories of the gods. If such exclusions were followed, almost all Scandinavian 'myth-material' would not consist of myths (in the same way as a great part of the Greek and Indian narrative traditions), because in only a very few cases is there proof of any ritual association.[8]

One must accept that myths and rituals (as we will use the concepts in the following discussion and expand on below) may be seen as links in a single complex, but it must be emphasised at the same time that the relationship is considerably more complicated than many have been inclined to think, at least when it has to do with the relationship between actual rituals and actual myths, in which there are especially great possibilities for variation – an acknowledgement which has been taken up within Scandinavian religion by Catharina Raudvere, among others (2002, 40).

It is necessary to explain how the terms myth and ritual will be used in the present study. I have previously argued that definitions must keep to the scholarly field within which they are to be used, and the present discussion therefore lays claim to be useful exclusively in connection with the phenomenon of religion, as we have characterised it in Chapter 1. As a pragmatic working definition, we may advance the view that myth is a phenomenon which of necessity must be characterised by means of both internal and external criteria, that is partly by criteria which are characteristic of the myth's own internal organisation, and partly by criteria which characterise the attitude the myth encounters in the culture in which it functions. To start with the latter, it should be emphasised that the often-used 'truth-criterion' – which means that the individual myth must be understood as being true by the people in the culture concerned – cannot be a crucial factor. Whether people ‘believe’ in the content of the myth in all its details and whether all attribute to it the same meaning are matters of less importance than whether they are influenced by its message in their world view – whether those signals, which the narrative sends out, together with other narratives linked with it in a mythological corpus, form a part of their way of understanding and their way of handling the surrounding world. The crucial external criterion is, therefore, whether the narrative has an influence on individuals’ ways of understanding and arranging their experiences of themselves and their environment (cf. Lawson and McCauley 1990, 155), and whether different variants[9] of it have influenced their society as a whole.[10] In that sense there is no difference between religious and non-religious myths. The Western-‘myth’ is an example of how a nation’s world view may be influenced by a certain meta-narrative.

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[8] The attempts made by such scholars as Phillpotts (1920) and Gunnell (1995) to relate the Elder Edda poems to rituals may have a certain power of persuasion, but must still be considered as uncertain (with regard to the history of research in this area see Gunnell 1995, 1-10).

As far as internal criteria are concerned, we must first be dealing with a *narrative*[11] and, secondly, this narrative must contain some kind of reference to The Other World. The main actors may be gods or other supernatural beings whose existence in the consciousness of the specified culture is beyond any doubt. But they may also be human beings who interact with The Other World. The myth is, therefore, a narrative, or a sequence of functions in Propp’s sense, that is, minimal units each of which constitutes an action by the hero or some of the other *dramatis personae,* and which are combined in a certain order (1968, 25-65). It is a narrative which deals with events in The Other World only, or events that are played out in the field between This World and The Other World, and which are important for the way in which society's world view is organised.[12] We may thus argue, with Eliade, that myth has a paradigmatic status or, to put it another way, it belongs to that phenomenological category we may call conditional phenomena (Schjødt 1990c, 141-3): it is the content of the myth which constitutes the conditions for how human beings react socially and religiously and not least with regard to rituals. This, of course, is seen from the perspective of the religious person. It is problematic to give a more exact definition than the one given here, if at the same time it is to be used in specific analyses. Among other things, the relationship to other related narrative genres (folk tales, legends and other traditional stories) is not clarified and, although it will be discussed in passing, it must be admitted that it is not possible to construct watertight barriers between myths and these other genres, nor will it be useful to do so (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1964, 12-14).

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[9] Variation is rather the rule than the exception. The ‘message’ of the myth may be expressed in many ways, and for this reason it will not surprise us that the liminal appears in many different forms within specific religious groups. As is argued in Chapter 10, a semantic space is created which may contain many different representations, but not *any* kind of representation. Representations must all be able to relate to the semantic core, which is the actual foundation for this space.

[10] We cannot be sure whether this is the case for the Scandinavian narratives included in Chapters 5-8. It will, therefore, be established only that a broad societal effect is a characteristic of myth as a general category. That this, however, has been the case in Scandinavia, too, is indicated by various recent researchers, among others Clunies Ross (e.g. 2000, 123).

[11] Again, there are some limitations in the Scandinavian material, as is the case with the Mímir complex (Chapter 5.1) among others. We have here a series of hints at and actual fragments of a mythical sequence, but we do not possess an actual connected narrative containing all these fragments. Nevertheless, the sources we do have allow us to reconstruct the essential features of such a narrative.

The content of the myth or the mythical universe is both taken from and helps maintain the fund of representations which together form the ideology that a culture lives by and through which it understands itself.[13] And myth is probably the most important manifestation or expression of this ideology in religious societies.[14] Some myths contain great and existentially important parts (semantic fields) of the ideology, and these produce the so-called 'great narratives', whereas others are quite simple in their pretensions (e.g. how various animals have come to look the way they are or, with an example from Scandinavia, how the net was invented [Faulkes 2005, 48]). The religious myth therefore acquires its contents from religious ideology, is an element in religious discourse, and in this respect always refers to a greater or lesser degree to The Other World.

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[12] This characteristic is not unlike the one that is suggested by Maranda (1972, 12-13): 'Myths display the structured, predominantly culture specific, and shared, semantic systems which enable the members of a culture area to understand each other and to cope with the unknown'. The terminology is different and emphasises the structural and the culture-specific together with the fact that it is semantic systems that we are dealing with. In this connection I must emphasise that I am completely in agreement with Dan Sperber when he rejects the notion that symbolic representations have a 'meaning' which is not in itself symbolic (Sperber 1975, 12-16). Yet it is reasonable to talk of semantic systems since myth creates associations between symbolic representations – associations which, indeed, do not create exact meanings in individual symbolic expressions, but which stake out the boundaries for meaning, i.e. a space within which a certain actual or belief-based phenomenon's meaning may be characterised and adapted with relation to other phenomena (cf. also Lawson and McCauley's discussion in 1990, 148-157, in which they, among other things, say: '... larger cognitive constructs rather than individual concepts ... are the most obvious bearers of meaning' (1990, 154)).

[13] It is here a question of the same two aspects of myth which C. Geertz touches on when he talks of cultural patterns which are both models *of* the world and models *for* the world (Geertz 1966, 8).

The function of myth is partly legitimating: it must give reasons for and legitimate a whole series of social institutions and norms. But it must also be able to give an answer to a great many questions concerning the surrounding world. In this it has both a legitimating and an explanatory function (cf. Bolle 1983, 298). For this purpose, it may use various scenarios taken from the society and its surroundings, and through the narrative sequence expose them to manipulations of all kinds. In the final phase, there will in all cases have to be a kind of justification or explanation, and so we may argue that all myths contain an aetiological aspect. But this may be indirect, and that which is justified will not be apparent until the individual myths are placed in a relationship with other myths within the semantic universe to which they belong. That which the individual myth explains may thus be other myths.[15] The value of the explanation may, therefore, be both external, as it can turn towards society and its surroundings and justify certain natural phenomena, rituals or everyday events, or it may be internal and turn inwards towards other narratives. An example is the myth about the Norse god Loki's binding and punishment as it is told in *Gylfaginning* (Faulkes 2005, 48-9). Externally, it gives an explanation of earthquakes which are said to be caused by the bound god trying to get free. Internally, it points towards a series of other myths with Loki as protagonist and thereby motivates the Ragnarǫk-myth which is represented as a consequence of his escape from bondage (cf. Schjødt 1981a). In the last instance, the explanation-value of the myth is related to the way in which people create order in their world.

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[14] Ideology, or rather religious ideology, is here very close to that which de Waal Malefijt calls 'dogma' (1968, 145). She says: 'The word dogma will be used in this discussion to indicate a set of propositions or cognitions about the universe which include the supernatural. The beliefs in any such body of cognitions are validated by myth … Dogma as the term is defined here, centers on three major topics: the nature of the supernatural, the nature of the physical world and the nature of man and his society'. This corresponds to what Clunies Ross calls 'the shared cultural knowledge' (1994, 25).

[15] By this is meant that the individual myth primarily refers to other myths and only 'uses' elements in the surrounding world because they may be 'good to think with'. In the last instance, it is perhaps reasonable to assume with Lévi-Strauss that the myth refers to the human spirit (Lévi-Strauss 1964, 346).

It is therefore not, or at least not only, a question of some form or other of a primitive explanation of the course of nature or the trouble in human life. Myths are explanatory on many levels, and they therefore form a link in a construction of The Other World, and thus also of This World (cf. Berger 1969) through its status as a model.[16] It should be emphasised that myths fulfil their function by virtue of being known. It is not the concrete situation of recitation which creates their meaning, but rather the contribution that knowledge of them imparts to ideology,[17] and thus to society's construction of the world.

Ritual is a part of the human construction of the world and belongs to another category of religious phenomena than myth, namely that group we may call communication phenomena. Rituals serve primarily communicative purposes as tools to enter into contact with The Other World.[18] With regard to the religious world view, we may, therefore, argue that myth and the semantic universe that it contributes to and is a part of, are prerequisites for ritual. We cannot, on the other hand, argue that myth has preceded ritual in a purely historical sense. Actually, it is likely that ritual in that sense precedes myth.

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[16] Cf. Eliade 1974, 416-7: 'The myth, whatever its nature, is always a precedent and an example, not only for man's actions (sacred or profane), but also as regards the condition in which his nature places him…'

[17] With regard to what has already been said, it is obvious that myth in an actual situation of recitation may form a link in a ritual context, beyond the aspects mentioned here. The recitation of myth (but not myth 'itself') may thus be a rite (Bianchi 1975, 112), but whether it *is* a rite does not primarily rest on its content, but on the scenario of the situation of the recitation.

[18] Naturally, myth is also in a certain sense a communicative phenomenon, since the members of a society communicate with each other via the myth, as is the case in all human forms of expression. It is, however, not this, something we might call a horizontal communication that is at stake here. This sort of communication is also found in ritual but, for both myth and ritual, we are dealing with another level than when the ritual is understood as a vertical communication between This World and The Other World. In the latter case, it is a conscious and purposeful communication – the rituals communicate, so to speak, more than the myths do (cf. Rappaport 1999, 135). Horizontal communication, which is an important aspect in both myths and rituals, is a latent function in the recitation of myth or in the performance of ritual, a factor of which the purpose is to confirm the ideology and with this either to maintain the *status quo*, or adapt the ideology to new conditions in the world. Besides, it must be emphasised here that rituals, in addition to their communicative purpose, have many other functions both

The communication which ritual seeks to establish always includes an attempt to manipulate actors from The Other World. Humans need the intercession of these beings in order to obtain something; the ritual is 'purposeful activity' (La Fontaine 1985, 184).[19] That which one wishes to obtain may be anything from fine weather to victory in battle, and it may be knowledge of The Other World, or extended possibilities for manipulating it.

Whereas myth, as a part of ideology, is active even when it is not spoken, it goes without saying that ritual is only active, commensurate with its manifest function, if it is performed. Myth's function is to 'explain', ritual's to 'obtain'. In order, however, to obtain the sought-after objective, it is crucial that rituals are carried out correctly and that contact is established with The Other World. This contact can only be established by symbolically representing a condition, and thereby a space, in which human beings and gods can meet. This condition and this space are what constitutes the 'liminal'. So, in order for the ritual to succeed, it must out of necessity draw on the semantic universe, which we know through myths (but not necessarily through one single myth).

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of a psychological and sociological kind, functions which ought to be included if we want an adequate picture of rituals as such. The present study, however, focuses on the communicative aspect in order to gain insight into religious and ideological logic.

[19] Cf. Podemann Sørensen 1992, 83-6 and 1993, 18. As far as the purpose of ritual is concerned, I am completely in agreement with Podemann Sørensen, and this also holds good, to a certain extent, for his definitions of rituals, which is that rituals are 'representative acts, designed to change or maintain their object' (1993, 19-20). On the other hand, it must be considered problematical when he argues that ritual is *not* 'designed to inform or persuade any extra-ritual agency. It is designed to work, to act directly on whatever object it has' (ibid.). Podemann Sørensen is definitely not after a discussion of the relationship between religion and magic, although the quotation might point in the opposite direction. It is obvious that rituals must have effect by virtue of the fact that they are carried out, but the prerequisite for their 'efficacy' is a world which operates with actors from The Other World. It is, of course, true that the assumption of the existence of such actors belongs to matters of faith (ibid.), but the ritual subject's consciousness of them is a fact; and after all it is also this subject who must judge their efficacy. In the consciousness of the subject it is thus crucial that there exists an authority to which one can turn – an Other World – which is the prerequisite of the ritual.

For this reason, both myths and rituals must make use of symbols and structures that characterise this universe, and which are subjected to those principles that the ideology marks out.

The consequences of the inclusion and use of the concept of ideology is that we will not be able to derive a specific ritual from a specific myth. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, we cannot, as Propp thought (1983, 470), argue that the myth (or folktale) has initiation *rituals* as its basis.[20] Rituals and myths are manifestations of that ideology through which a society understands itself and the world around it, and which contains both the features of that culture and universal features. There will, therefore, be parallels between the two categories, and it may also be reasonable to argue at this level that they express 'the same thing' in various ways. At another level, however, they relate to each other as manipulation to ascertainment. With regard to initiation, it is the function of ritual to transform a subject through communication with The Other World, whereas the function of myths is to establish and ascertain the possibility of this transformation.

When we speak of initiation in what follows, we are not necessarily talking of a definite ritual pattern of events, but of a definite sequence structure with certain characteristics which we will examine more closely in the next section. This sequence structure may be expressed both in a ritual and in a narrative context, where the narrative is not least important since it will often serve as the model for the ritual structure, which must be present in order that the execution of the ritual has meaning for those who perform it. This does not imply that every action in the ritual is considered by the participants as having a fixed meaning, but only that they must have considered the performance meaningful and probably had some idea of what it was about, even if only vaguely and at the general level. In other words: one could not do whatever one liked in the performance of specific rituals.

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[20] In this connection, it may be of interest to note a remark by Eliade on Propp's understanding (Eliade 1963, 196): 'Propp sees in folk tales the memory of totemic initiation rites. The initiatory structure of folk tales is obvious … But the whole problem is to determine whether the tale describes a system of rites belonging to a particular stage of culture, or if its initiatory scenario is "imaginary", in the sense that it is not bound up with an historic-cultural context but instead expresses an ahistorical, archetypical behavior pattern of the psyche'. This wording is interesting because it emphasises two completely different attitudes to the 'similarities'. What Propp can see only as developments, Eliade is ready to see as 'ahistorical' and as 'archetypes'. We have touched on the problems in Eliade in Chapter 2.1, and they will not occupy us here, but it ought to be pointed out that he, too, in a certain sense remains 'historical' in that the rituals (and the myths) are assumed to precede the folktales or, in other words, that the 'serious' expression has preceded the non-committal one that we find in the folktales (Eliade 1963, 201-2). On the other hand, it is also obvious that Propp must eventually have to accept the existence of 'one or another' ahistoric entity, because it may be possible to maintain that folktales go back, in the first instance, to myths (initiation myths) and then to rituals; but to explain from *where* they originate must involve something 'ahistorical', whether it has its basis in the psychological or the sociological. Neither Eliade nor Propp can accept the possibility that we are simply faced with a structure, which has always been able to manifest itself in various forms of expression, both narrative and ritual, the basis of which lies beyond the possibility of any historical research.

Two problems, to which we will return later, will be touched on here at the conclusion of the discussion of the myth/ritual relationship. These problems crop up on account of the special character of the Scandinavian material. First of all, the nature of the sources is such that it is not possible in all cases to single out a sequence unambiguously as either a myth or a ritual. An example of a myth that is at the same time a description of a ritual can be found in Snorri Sturluson's account of the funeral of Baldr (Faulkes 2005, 46-7). On the one hand, it is clear that we are dealing with a mythical scenario, but it is just as clear that a ritual is taking place at this cremation. Whether it is more correct to treat such a text in connection with rituals or with myths must to a certain degree depend on what seems most appropriate with regard to the overall representation. In the course of the present study, there will be several cases in which it is debatable whether the texts to be included shed light on a myth that contains ritual features or rituals that are placed in a mythical frame. It is not crucially important with regard to the semantic universe whether we decide to accept the one or the other of these suggestions since the distinction is functional rather than dependent on structure and content. If, for example, some of the eddic poems were in fact ritual texts, as Gunnell (1995) understands it, it is relevant to ask whether these are ritual or mythical texts, but the answer would have no consequences for their analysis, since the definitional criteria that will be advanced here do not exclude either performance or mythical narrative sequences. On the other hand, the distinction is, of course, important with regard to one's evaluation of the extent to which initiation rituals did in fact take place in pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. We could perhaps even argue that the ambiguity in the sequences actually strengthens the arguments for not keeping the two levels – mythical and ritual – sharply separated in the analysis.

Secondly, it may seem to be a paradox to speak of an exchange between This World and The Other World when the mythical source material, at least in Scandinavia, almost exclusively uses protagonists who are representatives of The Other World. As will appear in Chapter 10.1, however, it is possible within the myth's own universe to separate The Other World into several worlds in which an interaction becomes possible, which may perhaps form a model for the human ritual sphere.

3.3 Criteria for a Definition

In this section, we will return to the working definition of initiation advanced in Chapater 1 and consider the characteristics which will be tested against the results of the analyses of Chapters 5 to 9. We will also consider more closely some of the methodological problems that will be of importance for elements in the analyses.

a) Irreversibility

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We may begin by stating that an initiation involves a transition for one or more individuals. It is not only a question of a transition between the two worlds, This and The Other, but rather of a transition from one social and/or religious status in the initial situation to another in the final situation. We have seen that such transitions are also characteristic of crisis rituals but, beside the various levels in question, there is also another important difference from these. Whereas a crisis ritual is carried out in connection with the appearance of a crisis, which in principle may take place at any time and may happen again and again, the status that the individual obtains in the final situation of initiation is *irreversible*. This is a basic feature of every initiation ritual, and it is also important with regard to its differentiation from related phenomena. What separates a typical shaman séance, for instance, from an initiation, is precisely the fact that the shaman, after having gone through the ritual sequence, returns to the status that he had before the unfolding of the ritual. As is the case with the subject in all rituals, he has benefited from the performance of the ritual (obtained knowledge of things, which otherwise were hidden; brought forth a lost soul and so on), but he has not reached a permanent new status. During his stay in the liminal space, he has achieved a change of status for a moment, but he has not obtained 'something' which has caused a religious and/or social transformation once and for all.[21] By contrast, that *has* happened to the initiate as he has acquired something which has changed him forever and separates him from what he was in the initial phase. When we extend this criterion from rituals to various narrative genres, it will be difficult to separate myths from folk tales, in which the main actor, after having experienced a certain sequence, ends up as a king or a prince, which might normally be considered an irreversible position. We will return to the differences that are actually involved here in part d) of this section, which deals with the nature of the numinous object.

Another point that requires emphasis in connection with the definition of initiation is that the object that is transformed in the unfolding of the initiation sequence is identical with the subject, who is the main actor. It is thus not the natural environment that is manipulated, or society as such that primarily benefits from the event. In this respect, initiation is similar to the individual crisis ritual (cf. Honko's classification), but the latter does not result in an irreversible change of status.

b) The tripartite sequence

At the level of a model, ritual will always follow the sequence that van Gennep advanced in *Les rites de passage*. In the following discussion, we will thus operate with a horizontal structure (the sequence), containing three categories of events, each of which may be characterised individually in van Gennep's designation as separation, transition and incorporation. Such a structure presupposes an initial situation prior to the separation, just as incorporation must be followed by a final situation. The mutual relationship between these phases is, as we have seen, of importance to the fundamental idea of initiation, namely that the final phase is 'higher' for the subject, who moves through the sequence, than the initial phase, whereas the three ritual phases themselves as a general model can be found in all rituals. In actual fact, we have thus to reckon with five phases (which are of importance with regard to the next fundamental element in our working definition: the binary opposites): 1) an initial phase; 2) a separation phase; 3) a transitional phase or, as it will be called here, a liminal phase; 4) an incorporation phase or, as it will be called here, a reintegration phase and 5) a final phase.

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[21] In the religious universe, the two terms often form two sides of the same case. In practice, religious and social status cannot be separated (see James 1933; Goode 1951, 221-2; Widengren 1969, 594-7). Examples from the phenomenology of religion are sacral kings and cult societies.

This said, we have to pay attention to the fact that the actual sequences, not least in ritual connections, may often possess a considerable complexity by virtue of the fact that sequences, which from an analytical point of view ought to be held separate, are woven together so that it becomes difficult to identify the individual rite. A good example of this problem is analysed in Chapter 9.2, in Ibn Fadlan's description of the rites that are carried out on account of the death of a chieftain. The transition of the chieftain to the kingdom of the dead, the change of status of the slave girl and, finally, the new chieftain's change of status appear in the description as a single sequence, but it is actually a case of three different rituals being enacted, all of which were caused by the same precipitating event; the death of the chieftain.

c) Oppositional pairs that are analogues to the liminal vs. the non-liminal

We saw in Chapter 2.1 that Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process* (1969a, 106-7) put forward a series of examples of oppositional pairs, which correspond to the basic opposition called liminal versus non-liminal, or, as he says, liminality in contrast to the *status system* – a term, which has marked sociological connotations and which we will therefore not use here. Turner's oppositional pairs are found on various levels. Some are general, such as sacredness versus secularity and continual references to mythical powers versus periodic references to mythical powers, whereas others are more limited to certain cultural situations, such as silence versus speech and sexual abstinence versus sexuality. The deciding factor is, however, that in most rituals we encounter a series of oppositional pairs, which are found on the emic level and which may be analysed as analogues to the etic category liminal versus non-liminal.[22] The actual content will be culturally determined, although there are some general tendencies, but the construction itself is general, as Turner himself has demonstrated. This binary structure is not limited to the initiation sequence, but will in principle be discoverable in all categories of rituals; and, it may be added, in all kinds of myths and other narrative genres in which the transition is thematised spatially. In many cases, it is clear that the opposites are sequentially organised in the same way as in initiations, as it is a matter of a movement from the non-liminal to the liminal and back again, the sequence being expressed in contrasting symbolic relations. When the criterion of the binary opposites is nevertheless included here as an important characteristic, even though it extends far beyond the phenomenon of initiation, it is due to the fact that it is precisely the actual content of these symbolic pairs that may give us some knowledge of how The Other World was actually construed. We may, therefore, also use these symbolic pairs together with the other criteria in our delimitation of the corpus.

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[22] A brief discussion of the emic-etic categories can be read in Jensen, J. S. 2003, 109-11.

Two further observations should be made about this symbolism of opposites. From a general theoretical viewpoint there is an asymmetry between the two poles of the opposites. If, for example, we take Turner's *Absence of status/status* (1969a, 106), we see that the liminal absence of status is the marked pole in that it is the status pole which may be defined as neutral in relation to the known world. Its opposite is characterised only by an inversion of the connotations attached to 'status'. The point of departure is thus the non-liminal pole, which is the known one, characteristic of the 'here and now' situation. The asymmetry is clear in this example, in so far as the liminal term only exists *qua* the construction of an inverted content. This does not hold good in all cases, however. In another of Turner's examples – *Foolishness/sagacity* – there are two terms that each have their own independent existence in every society. Nevertheless, the 'here and now' situation is characterised by a cleverness or 'know-how' without which a society would not be able to maintain itself, and an inversion possibility would, therefore, be 'foolishness'; but it could also be a question of *another* kind of know-how, for instance numinous know-how as opposed to technical know-how. The deciding factor is that the liminal terms have a marker, which in one way or another (in relation to the norms or to the 'nature' of things) makes them into inversions of the characteristics at the non-liminal pole. It is therefore an inversion of the understanding of the 'normal', 'the proper, the correct', which is applied symbolically to the liminal phase in the tripartite sequence (cf. Leach 1976, 72). It is also for this reason that the liminal is often expressed in monstrous forms, as monstrosity is one aspect of the liminal which may be drawn in, in places where the connection demands it, such as is often the case in initiation rituals.

Liminality is, therefore, characterised by being the opposite of everything that is non-liminal. It is the constant factor in initiation and also in other rituals and narrative sequences. The content is variable, however, partly because the terms, which are selected from the non-liminal world to symbolise it – in an inverted form – differ from culture to culture and from ritual to ritual, and partly because there will often be several possible ways in which one may choose to invert, depending on what code one selects to thematise within (the opposite to 'cow' is 'bull' or 'calf' or 'horse' or 'human being' or something completely different, depending on the code which is made the theme of the actual sequence).[23] But certain non-liminal characteristics are universal and for this reason, certain liminal symbols will also have a tendency to be universal – not in the sense that they are necessarily found in all cultures, but in the sense that they may emerge everywhere. This holds good for status versus no status, life versus death, restrictions with regard to certain things versus absence of restriction with regard to certain things, or profane versus sacred. Others, however, have an extremely limited distribution, as for instance a certain sexual or nutritional behaviour which is 'inverted' in relation to the society's sexual or nutritional norms. It is well known that such norms vary from society to society, and the liminal symbols will, therefore, vary correspondingly. The analyses of the sources will be accompanied by a list of the liminal terms involved. Here, we will only comment on one widely dispersed oppositional pair which is also found in the Scandinavian material, namely that which has to do with life versus death.

First of all, it is important to consider death/rebirth symbolism in relation to the life/death-opposition, which is the more fundamental one, because it is an opposition relating to fundamentally different conditions. The death/rebirth-pair, on the other hand, has to do with a process and can, therefore, only be viewed as a result of the life/death dichotomy in cases where this is symbolically applied to initiation. In this light, death can be seen in the dichotomy as a semantic inversion of life, which is the condition that characterises the non-liminal.[24] In relation to this, the symbolic pair death/rebirth is an expression in turn of the transition from the initial phase to the liminal phase and from the liminal phase to the final phase. 'Death' in the pair death/rebirth ought, therefore, more correctly be replaced by 'dying', because it is a question of a transition to death as a condition. In relation to the sequence with the five phases that were mentioned above, we may argue, with regard to the life/death-dichotomy (when it is present), that the initial phase = life, the separation phase = dying, the liminal phase = death, the reintegration phase = rebirth, and the final phase = life.

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[23] Liminal symbols may also change in the course of time, as Turner demonstrated. In a religious ideology, liminal symbols are often inversions of theological and cosmological terms, for instance the elimination of the distance to the gods, the moving back *in illo tempore*, etc., whereas in an areligious ideology one would often be obliged to make use of inversions of secular entities. In other words, liminal symbols will also change in tune with the changes of the society, although they are often seen as eternal by the religious person.

Secondly, we will briefly examine the status of this symbolic pair. Eliade argues that the condition of forgetting one's language and learning it again symbolises death (dying) and rebirth (Eliade 1975, 31), which implies that we are justified in searching in rituals and myths for elements that have this symbolic value. On the other hand, it is also obvious that Eliade and others understand death as the most logical expression for the state of becoming a *tabula rasa* and rebirth as the most logical expression for the beginning of a new existence. We are thus faced with symbols on various levels, as some expressions refer to death and rebirth, referring in their turn to something 'else' (end and beginning). Thus we have here an example of Sperber's argument that the 'meaning' of symbols is only other symbols. When the death/rebirth-complex is a 'strong' symbol-complex, this is because the two terms express transitions to and from the liminal phase, making use of 'death', which in every way is an opposition to the connotations of This World, and probably the strongest term for 'otherness' that one can imagine. It is, therefore, not surprising that the complex is extremely widespread since the 'otherness' or 'that which is different' are the closest we can come to a general characteristic of the liminal. Conversely, we cannot argue that this symbolic pair is fundamental in order to identify a rite as an initiation: only in those cases – and there are, indeed, many – in which the term 'death' is seen as an essential characteristic of liminality, would the death/rebirth-complex be relevant. But even when this is the case, it does not inevitably follow that dying and rebirth is included as a marked symbolism. If death is essentially understood in spatial terms (e.g. as a journey from one place to another which has connotations of death as a semantic category), a metaphor of travel could become a part instead of rebirth, as representing the reintegration phase. This applies to Scandinavia where there is, however, also a sexual symbolism in the liminal phase, which suggests a semantic field in which rebirth, too, may be present, at least in latent form.

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[24] It is conspicuous that Turner does not include this opposition in his list. On the other hand Eliade gives numerous examples that death is seen as a prerequisite for the 'real' life, i.e. the life which characterises the final phase.

d) The Object that is acquired in the liminal phase always consists of a form of numinous knowledge

As the fourth and last criterion to be included here as an element in our model, we have the kind of object that is acquired in initiation. In the previous chapter, we noticed that all researchers have paid attention to the knowledge or the numinous power which is granted to the initiands. It is this knowledge that, from the perspective of the religious, constitutes the difference between the initial and final phases. It is that which is the very reason for the ritual and which, in myth, makes the subject able to function as a model. Basic to this knowledge on the social level is that it is supposed to be fundamentally secret or unknown to those who are not initiated (e.g. Allen 1967, 6; Muhlmann 1955, 29; Haekel 1954, 171; Munn 1969, 191; Piddingtonn 1932-33, 46; La Fontaine 1985, 15; and especially Peuckert 1951, 198). That is what makes it numinous.

We may search in vain for a constant content to this knowledge, because there are great differences from one instance of initiation to another. Both Stanner and Eliade connect the knowledge aspect with knowledge of ancient times – knowledge of how institutions and things in general have come to be the way they are. This may occur when the novices are taken back to a pre-cosmic stage and various things, which we will call *sacra*, are revealed to them. Although this particular content is often present, there are copious examples to show that this is not always the case (e.g. Droogers 1980a, 265-8) and, very often, the knowledge in question emerges as empirically trivial or without any actual content (cf. P. Boyer 1990, 95). Initiation is thus not constituted by some definite knowledge content. As Eliade's collection of examples demonstrates (1975), there seems to be a tendency for acquired knowledge to be associated in part with ancient times, including how customs were formed and became rules and norms of the social group. Another frequent kind of acquired knowledge is of magic formulae and techniques, together with the possibilities of learning these.[25] In addition, it may also be a question of the acquisition of a certain know-how or certain abilities, which are provided with numinous qualities and offer a direct possibility for the subject to be able to act according to the rules in the final phase.

'Numinous knowledge' or 'numinous power' is thus to be understood in a broad sense and may be determined in advance as knowledge or powers, which the subject is *not* in possession of in the initial phase, but *is* in possession of in the final phase – at least in his understanding of himself and his surroundings. As mentioned, it may be a matter of verbally transferred knowledge of cosmic events or instruction in magic techniques; it may also be resources or knowledge of resources (magic objects) for carrying out such techniques, or it may be equipment that has certain 'supernatural' (or liminal) qualities, but which is used in 'everyday' situations, such as weapons and battle-equipment, if, for instance, the ritual is one of warrior-initiation[26] (e.g. Eliade 1975, 90 and 99). 'Knowledge' may thus present itself as 'words' (magic formulae or incantations) or as some object or other with numinous qualities. If the numious content of initiation as a phenomenological category is variable, there are a couple of aspects that are constant, namely that it is knowledge or know-how which is considered to be 'of (and often about) The Other World' – often expressed in spatial terms (La Fontaine 1985, 90 and 96) – and thus only known by special individuals in the community who, directly or indirectly, frequented this other world in the liminal phase of initiation.

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[25] Droogers (1980a, 266-7) draws our attention to the fact that among the Wagenia an actual acquisition of knowledge did not take place during initiation, but it is still a question of various secrets *in principle* separating the initiated person from the non-initiated.

[26] Whether it is a question of knowledge about magic or 'merely' supernatural know-how with regard to battle, for instance, will often depend on whether the rite is a so-called shaman consecration, on the one hand, or whether it is a consecration to a warrior band or a puberty rite on the other. The crucial fact is whether the object that is acquired is considered to possess powers which can only be attained through contact with the numinous in the liminal phase. There are differences between the kinds of power which the initiands obtain in the various categories of initiations: intending shamans receive helping spirits, warriors obtain fighting qualities, children at puberty receive general rules for life in society and possibly its history, etc. This creates 'competence' in the final phase in the persons concerned, at least in their own opinion. P. Boyer has argued strongly that: 'the rituals which are supposed to convey this knowledge turn out to be vacuous, the secrets are empty' (1990, 100). This may be correct, at least in a whole series of cases, and at least on a discursive level, but it hardly touches on the fact that the very existence of transmitted knowledge gives the initiand the 'natu-

The numinous potential must, therefore, usually be obtained in the liminal space, and the main acquisition of knowledge itself will thus take place in the liminal phase. This does not mean that knowledge cannot also be obtained in the separation phase or in the reintegration phase, as it is also here a question of 'approaching' the liminal. But the knowledge which the initiation aims to procure is primarily localised in the liminal space and/or by the initiand being in a liminal condition.[27] In this connection it must be made clear that the crucial part in the logic of the sequence is *not* that the subject – the person who is in possession of the knowledge in the final phase – moves to a symbolically constructed Other World in order to acquire numinous knowledge, although this is obviously the most common way and probably occurs consistently in ritual connections. The crucial part is that numinous qualities have been added at some time or other to the knowledge or the knowledge-object by having been in or in contact with The Other World. In order to 'explain' what it is that makes the numinous object numinous, the myth may, therefore, let it be the knowledge-object which experiences the sequence in a journey to The Other World and

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ralised' position (ibid. p. 106), which makes him or her 'competent' with regard to the rest of the members of society. Rappaport (1999, 383 and 388-90) argues in the opposite direction to Boyer and says that ritual 'instruction' is fundamental because it contains both discursive and non-discursive elements, and that both the conscious and the unconscious are affected so that 'That which is learned in ritual may thus override, displace or radically transform understandings, habits and even elements of personality and character laid down in early childhood' (1999, 390).

[27] The function of numinous knowledge varies considerably. At the symbolic level, the know-how or the objects being acquired will be necessary for the subject's role in the final phase: a warrior acquires weapons or courage, a shaman techniques, enabling him to make contact with beings that cause diseases, a king the knowledge that is needed in order to be able to maintain contact between the community and the gods, and so forth.

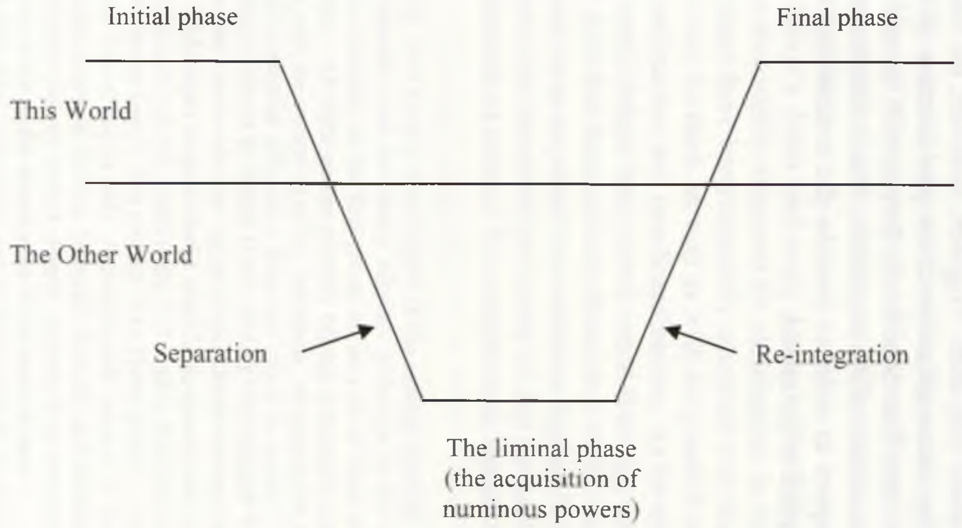
back again in order to become a helper for the actual subject. In that case, the object is given the status of subject in phases 2-4, but it remains different from the subject, who benefits in the final phase. We will see in the analyses of Scandinavian myths that this is the case in the Mímir complex and partly in the Kvasir complex (see below Chapter 5).

The last item to be mentioned in connection with the acquisition of knowledge is the actual status this numinous knowledge or numinous knowledge-object has. We have seen above that initiations and various narrative genres such as folk tales share structurally parallel sequences. Another similarity is that objects of knowledge are often acquired in folk tales. These are frequently magical objects, which give the owner abilities that he did not have previously, and with that the possibility of obtaining the coveted object in the final phase (the princess, the kingdom, the treasure). There is, however, a crucial difference, namely that the acquisition of knowledge in initiation is the reason why the events take place and creates, so to speak, the subject in the final phase, whereas in the folk tales it is only a means to win the sought-after object, and after this its importance disappears. The knowledge at stake in folk tales is also of a somewhat more limited nature in that it is narrowly directed towards its aim. In initiation, on the other hand, it is a kind of knowledge which in itself creates the higher status of the subject, and which actually causes the initiate's change of status to be irreversible, forever binding him to the numinous. Having said this, it must be agreed that there are 'grey' areas in which the initiation myth and the folk tale may be difficult to separate from one another, and we must also accept that there exists a structural kinship without one genre necessarily having been generated from the other (cf. Kroesen 1985, 651).

Conclusion

There are four elements that are crucial in determining whether we can talk of initiation: 1) irreversibility with regard to the final phase; 2) a defined sequence, in which the actual event is played out in agreement with van Gennep's model, together with an initial phase and a final phase; 3) a series of oppositional pairs, which characterises the relation between the non-liminal and the liminal, and which often, but not always, is thematised in spatial terms; and 4) the criterion which qualitatively separates the initial phase from the final phase is the acquisition of numinous power, which takes place in the liminal phase. It is these four criteria, which form the basis for the theoretical model, against which we must test our material, and which can be set out graphically in the figure below, illustrating the mutual relationship of the relevant elements.

Table 3.2


Initial phase
Final phase
This World
The Other World
Separation
Re-integration
The liminal phase
(the acquisition of
numinous powers)

As we have seen, each individual element does not form a distinctive criterion on its own. Each one may be found by itself in sequences that cannot be designated initiations. Individually they are common features in all other rituals, and there are clear parallels to various narrative genres, especially popular folk tales. Together, however, the four criteria form an appropriate characterisation of the phenomenon of initiation, and the placing of these four criteria side by side will be crucial for the evaluation and discussion of the sequences, which will be analysed in the following chapters in order to describe the content that the pagan Scandinavians applied to the model.

Chapter 4
The Sources

The primary material to be examined in the present study comprises the Poetic Edda and other poetry in eddic verse-forms[1] and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* together with other texts, which relate to this material in style and/or content.

Both Snorri's *Edda* and every poem in the Elder Edda collection have been thoroughly discussed by philologists. In the case of Snorri's *Edda*, scholars have been especially occupied with his motives for writing in the way he does, as well as with his possible sources of inspiration – Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian. As far as the eddic poems are concerned, debate has centred round their age and mutual connection, and there has been a lively discussion of the motifs the unknown authors may have acquired from southern regions. It is not my purpose here to enter into details of the history of this research, as it can be read in several excellent works.[2] This chapter will, therefore, be brief.

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[1] Harris 1985, 68-9 gives a brief outline of the relation between 'eddic poems proper, the eddic appendix, and the *eddica minora*'. Although, in his overview of research, Harris keeps primarily to the first group, he sees all of them as possessing common characteristics : 'All three groups properly belong, it seems to me, to the same field of study since, with the exception of the "accidents" of manuscript preservation, there are no important consistent differences from one group to another' (1985, 68). A similar understanding is offered by Schier (1985, 357-8): 'Der Begriff "Lieder-Edda" kann … nicht nur auf die Lieder des Cod. regius eingeschränkt werden. Eine erhebliche Anzahl von anord. Dichtungen zeigt so starke inhaltliche, sprachliche, formale und metrische Übereinstimmungen mit den Liedern des Cod. regius, dass man sie von diesen Werken nicht scharf trennen kann', 'The concept "The Poetic Edda" … cannot be limited to the poems of the Codex Regius only. A considerable number of Old Norse poems show such strong agreement in content, language, formally and metrically with the poems in the Codex Regius that we cannot sharply separate them from this work'. This understanding is also basic to the demarcation of the material here.

[2] For the slightly older view points, see de Vries 1964-67, Hollander 1963 and Fidjestøl 1992. Harris 1985 has a splendid discussion of essential later viewpoints. A discussion of later contributions to the history of research can also be found in Clunies Ross 1994, 20-33; in Clunies Ross 2005, 6-13 a short overview (especially concerning the way Snorri used the poems) can be read, and many important elements that have played a considerable role in the research history are discussed in Meulengracht Sørensen 2006, 62-99. As far as Snorri is concerned, a great many pertinent contributions, which help

In an investigation based in the history of religion, a number of discussions that deal with literary motifs and 'borrowings', as well as questions of style, language and metrics will not be of overriding importance, since it is far more important for us to determine whether a *representation*, as we find it expressed in the sources, is likely to be pagan, inspired by Christian thought processes, or perhaps based on the individual author's imagination. And exactly this question about the character of the representations and the possibility of being able to reach an understanding of these representations through the surviving texts have been discussed in a series of more recent contributions, some of which we will examine in this study.

4.1 The Corpus

As will be seen from the analyses below, especially in Chapters 8 and 9, other material besides the texts mentioned above will be included. However, it seems appropriate to take our point of departure primarily from the poetry about gods in the Poetic *Edda* and Snorri's *Edda* because there is no doubt that these texts are mythological and thus provide the type of material most suitable for discussion of the ideological complex behind the symbolic universe of initiation. As mentioned above in Chapter 3.2, myth often has a paradigmatic status. Whereas, as a rule, it will be impossible to perceive a precise ritual symbolism without any accompanying explanation, the myth gives us exactly this possibility because it deals directly with The Other World, and because, as a paradigm it is obliged, so to speak, to give 'meaning'. It is, therefore, a far more direct expression of the ideology from which both the myth and the ritual obtain their symbolism. In addition to this, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is the central target of this investigation to shed light on a series of *myths*, whose connection with initiation have not been recognised, or, if they have been, only to a limited extent.

Eddic poems and Snorri's *Edda*, however, are not the only texts that contain mythical information. Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* and Old Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* also relate myths in which the actors

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to shed light on Snorri's way of working, have appeared in the last three decades (e.g. Clunies Ross 1978, 1983, 1987, and 1992a; Clunies Ross and Martin 1986; Schier 1981; Dronke and Dronke 1977; Ciklamini 1975; Frank 1981; Faulkes 1983; Weber 1985 and 1986; Steinsland 1995).

are representatives of The Other World.[3] In addition, we find many sequences both in Saxo and in the *fornaldarsögur*, which are not presented as myths in a strict sense, as they are placed in a 'This-World scenario' where the more or less human actors play roles which probably would have been played by gods or semi-mythical heroes in pagan times.[4] With regard to such texts, this study does not in any way pretend to exhaust the topic in the sense that all passages containing elements, which could *possibly* be seen in connection with initiations, have been included. If elements are present in a text that may shed light on the problem in such a way as to supplement our knowledge about initiation in relation to the frankly mythological texts, they will naturally be included.

The same is true of sources that shed light on rituals. These will be discussed in Chapter 9. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, no texts or other sources are in themselves able to shed light on the symbolism or structure of initiation rituals, which is probably to be explained by the quite banal reason that the rituals had been forgotten to a large extent when the sources were written down, as, in contrast to myths, they could not be mediated without continued pagan practice (Clunies Ross 2002, 18). On the other hand, it is possible, with the analysis of the mythical texts in mind, to understand features of various descriptions of rituals as giving meaning in connection with the initiation model we constructed in the previous chapter – features which otherwise appear quite incomprehensible. But none of these descriptions can, as mentioned, increase the knowledge we have from the myths about the semantic dimension of initiation.[5] To assist in shedding light on rituals, I include passages from sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) and, not least, Ibn Fadlan's description of the burial of a chieftain among the Rus people together with a few other sources.

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[3] As Tulinius (2002, 66) has quite correctly pointed out, there is a tendency in especially the Icelandic material to emphasize the pagan elements as a part of the reconstruction of the past (cf. 2002, 114).

[4] This is the case, for example, in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* chapters 6-10 (*FSN* IV, 331-340), in which the hero Þorsteinn has travelled to Geirrøðr, in what is clearly an adaptation of the myth, as we know it from *Þórsdrápa* and from Snorri's *Edda* where Þórr is the hero. There is a similar adaptation by Saxo in *Gesta Danorum* (VIII, xiv, 1) (Olrik and Ræder 1931, 238-43) where the hero is named Thorkillus (cf. McKinnell 1994, 59-86, 2005, 118-25; Malm 1992, 169-74 and Mitchell 1991, 64-66). The 'disguise' may be difficult to penetrate, as in Saxo's account of Hadingus, where the protagonist has been shown to be a 'humanised' version of Njǫrðr (Dumézil 1970).

[5] See the remarks above in Chapter 3.2 about the difficulties involved in deciding whether a text ought to be classified as myth or ritual.

Images and archaeological material will be included in this study to a very limited extent. This is not for want of theories placing such material in the context of initiation. Gotland picture stones, for example, have been seen as 'doors' to The Other World, and their motifs, therefore, have been considered important in connection with rituals for the dead (Andrén 1989, 292; 1991, 30); and *guldgubber*[6] have been connected with the coronation of kings (Steinsland 1990; cf. Kolstrup 1995, 35-41), just as pictures on helmets have been understood as illustrations of warrior consecrations (Arent 1969, 133-45). Such theories will certainly not be rejected, yet they are so uncertain that it will be untenable to let them form a part of the argument for a specific semantic content of initiation rituals. With this kind of material, it is generally the case that it cannot shed light on initiations, whereas the opposite is conceivable if, by applying the initiation model, we might be able to shed light on the source material. Something like this will occasionally be indicated, but it is not crucial for the aim and the results of the study. A group of sources, which traditionally plays an essential role in the study of Scandinavian religion, is skaldic poetry. I do not think that there is any direct information of importance in this poetry connected with the problem of initiation, although individual passages will be included from time to time in order to shed light on various myth complexes.[7]

Below we will return to those sources to be included in the investigation and discuss some of the problems we must come to a decision about if they are to be used to shed light on pre-Christian circumstances. In conclusion, then, the material that contains crucial information about the structure and symbolism of initiation is in eddic poetry and Snorri's *Edda*, supplemented by passages from the *fornaldarsögur* and Saxo, when these sources contain new information which goes beyond what the first group contributes.

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[6] The term *guldgubbe* (pl. *guldgubber*), literally 'old man made of gold', is an almost untranlaterable reference to various types of very small gold foil images of men, men and women or other figures that have been found in many parts of Scandinavia in connection with human habitations of the prehistorice period and early Viking Age.

[7] See Marold 1992 for an evaluation of the importance of skaldic poetry in the general Scandinavian history of religion, in which it is, among other things, argued that the poetry in most cases is 'secondary', as it includes neither cultic nor mythological texts (1992, 689; cf. McKinnell 2005, 39-40; Meulengracht Sørensen 2006, 100-23, and Clunies Ross 2005, 13-18). This viewpoint is, however, debatable, but, as mentioned, it does not look as if there is any information that sheds direct light on the semantic side of initiation. For a good recent overview of some of the problems concerned with the reception of the skaldic poems, we can refer to Würth 2007.

4.2 Eddic Poetry

It may seem fundamentally inconsistent to make use of a text corpus, which includes works of such a different nature as is the case with eddic poetry and Snorri's *Edda*. Even within the corpus of poetry in the Codex Regius of the Elder *Edda*, there are considerable differences in form, content and age, which become more problematic when we include poems that are extant in other manuscripts of more recent date, like the so-called *Eddica Minora*, which are taken from manuscripts of the *fornaldarsögur*. In the form in which they have been transmitted, they may be quite recent, not only in relation to pagan times, but also in relation to the Codex Regius, which is usually dated to c. 1270 (Harris 1985, 68).

Although it will be argued below that the postulated date of a specific eddic poem cannot be a deciding factor in whether we can use its subject matter to shed light on a pagan idea-complex, we will briefly evaluate existing possibilities for dating eddic poems. The most striking assessment of whether the mythical poems of the Elder Edda can be dated is perhaps Gabriel Turville-Petre's: 'In general, it must be admitted that critics fall back on subjective arguments in dating the mythological lays' (1964, 13). There are, in fact, very few objective criteria for dating them. In most cases, it is possible to give a *terminus ante quem* since the poems are found in a small number of manuscripts which may be dated with some certainty, or they are quoted in Snorri's *Edda*, which is usually dated to c.1220-5. But such criteria do not give us a basis for deciding whether a poem was composed in pagan or Christian times. It is not of any special interest, seen from the viewpoint of the history of religion, whether the poems are from the twelfth or thirteenth centuries or later. The introduction of Christianity marks the important divide. And even in cases where it is probable that a poem originates, for example, from the beginning of the tenth century, we cannot for that reason be sure that it has not been influenced by Christian ideas, conscious or unconscious. This again supports the argument, which has been advanced with great force by Meulengracht Sørensen (1991a), that we must concentrate on concepts rather than on a specific poem.

At the other end of the spectrum, some scholars have thought that it ought to be possible to set an earlier chronological boundary for dating by referring to the linguistic changes that took place in the period up to the Viking Age, but even this criterion has been doubted as definitive proof (Harris 1985, 93). However, convincing arguments have not been mounted to show that the poems, as we know them, could be dated back to before 800.[8]

Beyond quite palpable arguments, which generally, however, cannot show anything but when a poem *may* have existed, there has been considerable discussion about the age of the poems with reference to their content, form, chronological interrelatedness and their 'tone'. Most of these arguments are what Turville-Petre referred to as 'subjective'. When one can claim about a poem such as *Lokasenna* that it has to be relatively recent because of its coarse tone, thereby placing the gods in a ridiculous position, and because it contains some passages that are also found in other eddic poems (de Vries 1964-67, II, 123), both arguments have failed (cf. Harris 1985, 97-100). As far as the second is concerned, there will be formulaic passages in orally-transmitted traditional poetry [9] that may be repeated in various places, but this does not tie certain poems together in a state of reciprocal dependency.[10] With regard to the former, the type of humour in *Lokasenna* is known from several religions, so that argument tells us more about the researcher's relationship to one of the Biblical religions. That conditions were different in pagan Scandinavia, however, as they were in most other places, is confirmed through several investigations (e.g. Gurevich 1976, 130-4; Clunies Ross 1989a 8-10; North 2000b, 394 and Maier 2003, 44-47). Similar counter-arguments may be advanced against a great many attempts at dating eddic poetry, and there are very few compelling arguments on a scientific basis for a definite dating of whole poems. It will not be denied that certain stanzas, on the other hand, can be argued with great probability to be from the Christian period, although here, too, other explanations can often be found for apparently Christian thought processes.[11]

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[8] Birger Nerman is especially known in this connection, as he has attempted to prove a very early date for some passages in the poems and for whole poems, using archaeological evidence in support (e.g. 1931, 1969, 1971). The arguments are, however, not convincing in any other sense than as demonstrating that the composers of the poems knew about and operated with objects, belonging to an earlier period. It is in no way a question of providing definitive proofs.

[9] Acker 1998, 85-108 gives a good survey of the use of 'oral-formulaic' theories applicable to eddic poetry.

[10] Lönnroth (1981) discusses the formula *Iǫrð/upphiminn*. His wide-ranging conclusion holds good for this and many other formulas. He argues that 'dependence-theories' …'should be avoided … because they tend to conceal the basic fact that all the texts are dependent on *oral tradition*, not on literary imitation' (1981, 323). He is speaking about 'thought-patterns', since the formula he investigated is found in certain meaning-contexts, irrespective of the actual text in which it is found. Longer phrases may possi-

A question which researchers have seldom tried to answer is why Christian poets would be motivated to compose poems about pagan gods. We may talk as much as we like about a 'Renaissance' in the twelfth century, but it is one thing to collect old material together, something different to compose new poems, and in the twelfth and, for that matter, also in the thirteenth century, paganism was still relatively close, probably so close that it would have been difficult to compose whole poems about pagan gods.[12] I do not claim that this argument may not also be held to be 'subjective', but it does seem relevant. A subject

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bly be used in several different texts in which the merging of meanings-contexts is open for discussion (cf. Schier 1985, 382). Lindow 1987 and McKinnell 1987, too, have problematised the relation between similarities of motifs on the one hand and mutual influences between motifs on the other.

[11] An example is found in *Vǫluspá* 65, which, as is well known, is only found in *Hauksbók*, and which nearly all researchers attribute to a Christian poet or at least to a poet who was conversant with the central ideas in Christianity. Nevertheless, Åke V. Ström (1967, 196-200) has attempted to prove that even the motif of the mighty one who comes from heaven is Indo-European. To me, however, his arguments seem unconvincing, primarily because there is no merging of functions or, rather, aspects: Ahura Mazda must be a transformation of the first function's 'aspect of a magician', whereas Týr (and Baldr, too, who has been seen as *inn ríki*, cf. Naumann 1934, 30-1) must represent the 'aspect of law'. A more convincing reasoning, which, however, is not unproblematic as far as the pagan affiliation is concerned, is found in Steinsland 1991b, 340-5, where *inn ríki* is understood to refer to Heimdallr.

[12] Quinn (2000, 38) has suggested that a purposeful stamping out of paganism may be inferred from the fact that no eddic stanzas (or, rather, almost none) relate to pagan rituals; for a contrary view, see Gunnell 1995.

that is far more important than whether an individual poem in the form in which it has been transmitted to us has been composed at one time or another is that of the poems' underlying ideas.

Both Kurt Schier (1985, 378-85) and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1991a, 217-18) give explicit grounds for distinguishing between the poems and the ideas that are articulated in them. Meulengracht Sørensen expresses this in the following way (1991a, 218):

> Den kildemæssige benyttelse forudsætter … ikke nødvendigvis, at digtet i den form, der er bevaret, kan henføres til førkristen tid. Det er tilstrækkeligt at tage stilling til, om det i henseende til de dele, der benyttes, bygger på en troværdig tradition.
>
> The use of the sources … does not necessarily presume that the poem may be traced back to pre-Christian times in the form that is preserved. It is sufficient to take a position on whether it builds on a reliable tradition with regard to the parts that are used.

And further (1991a, 222):

> Når det gælder indholdet, er digtene i den bevarede form og denne forms datering imidlertid kun af sekundær interesse, nemlig som et hjælpemiddel til at forstå indholdet.
>
> When it has to do with the content, the poems in their preserved form and the dating of this form are only of secondary importance, namely as an aid to understanding the content.

I agree with these points of view. Meulengracht Sørensen gives us two arguments for assuming that the poems have preserved a genuine world of ideas (1991a, 225), firstly, that there are no references to anything that may be attached to Christianity, and secondly, that nothing indicates that the writer considered them as anything other than pagan. He is aware that these arguments cannot be understood as 'proof' that the poems carry pagan material, and he says directly that, if we wish to relate the poems in their preserved form to people's thoughts and history, we have to interpret them and, in doing so, 'give up objectivity in the traditional sense' (*opgive objektiviteten i traditionel forstand*, 1991a, 226).[13] It is difficult to disagree with this, but there are, however, a couple of further arguments which are of importance for the degree of probability governing the poems' usefulness as sources for a pre-Christian mythical universe.

One of these is that in only very few cases are we able to understand all the details in the myths that are mentioned.[14] Ursula Dronke has observed (1992, 657) that eddic poetry is:

> very frequently allusive or cryptic in its religious references, since it is intended for a heathen audience with a practised ear, well versed in old traditions and in the many poetic variants of them. (1992, 657)

The poems in the form we know them presuppose knowledge on the part of the audience (cf. also Clunies Ross 2005, 96-102), which modern researchers have only incomplete access to through other sources, first and foremost through Snorri's *Edda*. This knowledge must have its roots in the pagan world of ideas and, irrespective of how far into the Christian era it has extended (possibly for a long time, which Snorri seems to be a proof of), it cannot have been created from Christian ideas. In other words: the degree of incomprehensibility alone points to a pagan origin.

Finally, there is an argument, which is not unproblematic, but nevertheless appears inevitable, namely that, in many passages, we are dealing with elements and religious structures that are so well known from the phenomenology of religion that they simply have to be considered as the Scandinavian variant of certain very widespread phenomena (e.g. Yggdrasill as the *axis mundi;* Ymir as the original being that furnishes the 'building material' for the cosmos). In certain cases, it is also possible to find some of these elements in Christianity, but that does not give us the right to speak about 'borrowings' solely because of certain similarities that are present, as has often been done (cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1991a, 225). In many cases, the similarities are of such a character that we must regard them as different variants of more or less universal ideas. This does not imply that we may not reckon with changes and interpolations of a Christian character when we are dealing with those manuscripts that we now have, because there seems not to be any doubt that interpolation took place in some passages. But – and that is the crucial point in this context – unless there are content-elements that seem to be incompatible with the pagan understanding of the world, which we are generally presented with, it is artificial to accept a connection with the Christian concept of the world only because we can demonstrate a (often not especially convincing) parallel from Christian scriptures, which *might* have been known in Iceland or in other parts of Scandinavia in the twelfth, thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Exactly on this point, the comparative history of religion seems to be able to contribute constructively to finding new perspectives from which we can observe the Scandinavian mythical sources.

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[13] Cf. also Clunies Ross 1994, 19: 'Literary interpretation and the understanding of myth that can be gained through predominantly literary texts, as the Old Norse sources are, is by no means an exact science'.

[14] Meulengracht Sørensen makes this observation (1991a, 223): Eddadigtet forudsætter myten bekendt, og gengiver ofte kun en del af den og tit i specielle sammenhænge 'The Edda poem presupposes that the myth is known, and often relates only a part of it and frequently in special contexts'. Strangely enough, he does not use this explicitly as an argument for the ideas being deeply rooted in paganism.

A question, which has been discussed a good deal, is how far the poems have been handed down orally.[15] Most modern scholars have considered that some form of oral transmission can be taken for granted, at least as far as some of the poems are concerned (e.g. Harris 1983; Lönnroth 1981; Clunies Ross 1994; Schier 1985; Kellogg 1990 and 1991; Gísli Sigurðsson 1990; Johansson 2000a and b; Meulengracht Sørensen 2000, 2006 and Gade 2000),[16] and I can only agree with them in this. Another question concerns how consistently ideas that are expressed in eddic poetry can be paralleled in other media throughout the Scandinavian area. Irrespective of where we want to place 'the origin' of the individual poems (cf. Harris 1985, 94 and

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[15] See Harris 1985, 111-126 for a survey with many pertinent references, and, for a more general discussion, Foley 1991.

[16] These are all strongly inspired by Parry's and Lord's investigations (cf. Lord 1960) of Serbo-Croatian popular poetry, which is rejected by Jónas Kristjánsson 1990 who, however, accepts the existence of oral transmission and roots going back into the pagan era. A good introduction to the Parry-Lord-tradition is Foley 1985; for the history of research with regard to the eddic poems, see Acker 1998, 85-108. A poem such as *Vǫluspá* which, at least aesthetically, occupies a special position among the eddic poems, will, irrespective of whether we accept an author of genius as its originator therefore also depend on mythical competence on the part of both the poet and the audience.

Schier 1985, 383-5), both the runic finds at Bryggen in Bergen and Saxo's Latin versions of poems in the *Gesta Danorum* (cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1991a, 219-20) demonstrate that poems comparable to those of the Elder *Edda* collection had been used and probably composed in other places besides Iceland. In addition, it is likely that images on stones, especially those in Gotland (Buisson 1976, especially 116 and Andrén 1989, 297-302, with references), show myths that are known from Old Norse written texts. The inclusion of these, together with other sources from East Scandinavia, and also to a lesser degree material from the southern part of the Germanic area, makes it possible for us to assume the probability that at least some of the Edda myths were known far beyond Iceland (cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 2006, 68). Whether this also holds good for those myths for which there are no parallels, must to a certain extent be a matter of faith. There is no reason on the basis of ethnographic parallels to reject the notion that concepts varied from area to area (cf. Schjødt 2007d and Brink 2007). But to argue that the Scandinavian people, who, as far as we know, had more or less the same gods, more or less the same language and more or less the same culture, and where considerable inter-communication stretched far back into prehistory, had completely different religious understandings from one region to another, seems unworthy of credence, although variants naturally did exist, both with regard to rituals and myths. In all circumstances, the burden of proof seems to be with those who want to make such a claim.

Before concluding this discussion of the Edda poems, we should briefly address a question that has often been discussed, but to which a satisfactory solution has never been found. It has to do with the function of the Edda poetry, their *Sitz im Leben*. There is no reason to assume that a definite answer, for which there might be a consensus, *can* be given, nor is the aim of this study to attempt it. One problem area has, however, special interest for the topic of this study, namely the relationship of the texts to the ritual sphere – a relationship that is clearly connected with the discussion of the texts' written or oral transmission.

There is no reason to pursue further the presumption that the content of the texts, primarily in the poems about gods, is mythical by nature, as we have already discussed the concept of myth and have reached the conclusion that the definition often used, that myth is a narrative which has accompanied rituals, is too narrow. Instead, we must understand myth as a narrative which, by virtue of its inclusion of the phenomenon 'The Other World', says something with an important significance for that culture in which it functioned. However, the argument has in fact been advanced that several of the Edda poems had originally been cult texts. Magnus Olsen (1909) suggested that *Skírnismál* (*Skí*) was a poem attached to the cultic performance of *hieros gamos*. A more comprehensive attempt to connect the Edda poems with rituals was advanced by Bertha Phillpotts (1920), but this point of view has not gained much popularity (cf. Schier 1985, 376). However, it has more recently emerged in various connections from time to time (e.g. Martin 1972; Haugen 1983) and is best argued for in Gunnell 1995. Without rejecting the idea that these poems (or some of them) were originally ritual texts, it should be conceded that there are neither absolute nor positive reasons for their actual fulfilment of this role (cf. e.g. Baetke 1939, 202-5).[17] It is, however, important that we distinguish between cult poetry, understood as texts that were in fact recited in connection with rituals, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, poems, the content of which formed a frame for the understanding for the performance of specific rituals in a vaguer sense. Without being able to prove a connection with certainty, the present investigation will indicate that we must operate with the assumption that there was a semantic and structural connection between poems and rituals. That means that it will be possible to state something about the notions that were behind the rituals by examining the myths, but we can hardly hope for a detailed reconstruction of the rituals themselves.

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[17] A considerable part of the problematic, namely the dialogues which have the character of a verbal battle, has been discussed by Ellis Davidson 1983. Here it is argued that there is no direct connection to pagan rituals, and that the texts, as we have them, cannot be understood as originally ritual texts. Haugen is more positive about the relationship to rituals, stating directly: 'I am convinced that these texts as we have them are very close to the cultic rituals which were enacted among them as among most other archaic peoples. In emphasizing their literary quality most students have overlooked their religious values' (1983, 21). Haugen is not especially precise in his understanding of the way in which the poems are supposed to have been used, but, as it will emerge, there is hardly any doubt that a relationship between the structures in the poems and those in the rituals did exist, only it is probably considerably more indirect than Haugen hints at when he claims for the dialogues (e.g. *Hárb* and *Lok*) that: 'It is this high degree of performance-oriented quality about the poems that has convinced me that we are very close to having something like a text for cultic occasions in the poems of the *Elder Edda* (1983, 5). A similar understanding is expressed by Gunnell (1995, 350): 'Some form of ritual drama certainly existed in pagan Scandinavia, and there is good reason for believing that some of the Eddic poems in *Ljóðaháttr* must have evolved within such a tradition'. The first part of the statement is *a priori* probable, whereas the second part must remain open for discussion (cf. also Lönnroth 1990).

In concluding our discussion of the use of eddic poems as sources for pre-Christian Scandinavian religion, we can, therefore, state that, although it may be difficult to provide positive proof that they could have been composed in pagan times in the form in which they have been transmitted to us, the crucial question we must ask ourselves is whether the conceptions that are mediated are pre-Christian. Important criteria, which have to be included in our considerations, are therefore whether there are direct or indirect references to Christian ideas, or if, on the other hand, it is at all possible to understand the content outside a pagan frame of reference. As will emerge from the analyses below, there are several features which can only be understood if they are seen as Scandinavian variants of general religio-phenomenological categories. By arguing in this way, we are not saying that the poems *could* not have been composed by Christians in a Christian age, even though no irrefutable arguments for such a position have been advanced, as Einar Haugen briefly and concisely states: ‘It is ... unconvincing when some scholars have attributed some or all the Eddic poems to Christian poets’ (Haugen 1983, 3, cf. Mundal 1992b, 190 concerning *Vǫluspá*). The probability speaks for the notion that the fixing of the poems in a written form only constituted a small part of the mythical universe, which in pagan times was orally transmitted, sometimes in a narrative form, at other times only by way of suggestion.

4.3 Snorri’s *Edda*

Turning to Snorri’s work, the situation is completely different. We know when he lived, approximately when he wrote his works, and we know that Iceland had then been Christian for a couple of hundred years. We have no reason to assume that Snorri would not have been a good Christian, who had a good knowledge of European Christian literature. Secondary literature about Snorri’s works is just as voluminous as is the case with the eddic poems. And the problems involved in a religio-historical use of both his *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga* (*Yng*) in

Heimskringla (which, as far as the first ten chapters are concerned, is not very different in style from *Gylfaginning* [*Gylf*]) with regard to the pagan period are at least as great. As far as the Edda poems are concerned, we may argue that they *could* have been produced in pagan times, whereas this is of course not possible with regard to Snorri.

Although Snorri's works as sources are of a completely different character from the Edda poems, the problems attached to using his writings in this investigation are not essentially different from those we have outlined above. Here, it also became clear that, in spite of the fact that it is *a priori* most likely that many of them must have originated in the pagan era, this cannot be the deciding factor in assessing whether they are useful sources for this investigation. The crucial criterion is whether the transmitted *ideas* and notions may be considered pagan, and precisely the same is the case with Snorri's work.

Within recent decades, a wealth of research has been published on the subjects of Snorri's working methods, his attitude to the pagan world that he described and the sources of inspiration that were available to him. Assessments of the value of his sources have varied considerably, especially with regard to how consciously he adapted the myths to the Christian tradition to which he himself belonged. Disregarding their considerable individual differences, there has been a tendency among most scholars to consider this adaptation as fairly extensive (e.g. Holtsmark 1964; Gurevich 1971; Schier 1981; Lönnroth 1986; Weber 1985 and 1986; Clunies Ross 1987a and 1992c, Janson 2005).[18] We cannot enter into a more detailed discussion of these aspects, but only state that all researchers probably agree that we can find in Snorri's works both an influence from the cultural situation in which he lived in Iceland in the 1200s as well as from the tradition which, at least partly, leads back to pagan times, and which he had available from both oral and written sources (cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 2004, 5-17). Disagreement does not appear until we begin to decide how much of his works, is due to the one or the other.

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[18] A strong opposition to Snorri's 'Christian' transformation of the myths is put up by von See 1988, whose thesis, however, in no way supports any greater historical reliability for Snorri's works. See Beck 1993 for a discussion of some of the more recent positions in Snorri research, and, especially with regard to his euhemerism, Beck 2000.

The tendency in research – in spite of, or perhaps rather because of, what has been done to map out the manner in which Snorri worked, including his use of medieval Christian prototypes – leads, as was also the case with the poems, in the direction of a more positive evaluation of Snorri's *Edda* as a source of pagan religion. This tendency is connected with several factors.

Firstly, researchers have acknowledged that it is not possible to state very much about pagan religion, and especially about the mythology, if we refuse to include Snorri and use only material whose provenance is pagan (Meulengracht Sørensen 1990 and 1991b). This cannot in itself be an argument for including Snorri, but it intensifies the need to find such arguments if possible. Secondly, comparative research on Indo-European myths has played an essential role in the evaluation of myths that Snorri has recorded.[19] Thirdly, it appears that many elements in Snorri's narratives can be supported from older sources such as eddic and skaldic poems (e.g. Schier 1981, 420) and stone images (e.g. Weber 1985, 410). Fourthly and finally, it is possible by means of ethnographic parallels to find support for the idea that we are often dealing with myths which are well-known from the phenomenology and which, although they may appear incomprehensible, acquire meaning when these parallels are included as types of *models* for interpretation. We will return to this last point below (4.3).

The publication that perhaps best illustrates the view of Snorri in contemporary research is Gerd W. Weber's article on Snorri's *Edda* in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, even though it is more than 20 years old. Here, having maintained that Snorri was very greatly influenced by contemporary Christian modes of interpreting the pagan, Weber insists that the basic structures in Snorri's myths are expressions of pagan ideas (1985,409-10):

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[19] Weber (1985, 408) expresses it as follows: 'Neuerer Forsch. zeigt sich Snorri's E. als mythenkonservierend und verlässlich, und Dumézils Urteil, dass "Snorri's Zeugnis nicht verdächtig, sondern im Gegenteil immer der Beachtung und ernstlichen Diskussion wert ist," besitzt als Maxime Gültigkeit', 'Recent research demonstrates that Snorri's *Edda* is a preserver of myths and is reliable, and Dumézil's judgement that 'Snorri's testimony is not suspicious, but on the contrary always worthy of consideration and serious discussion' has validity as a maxim'. North (1991, 11) is, therefore, incorrect in stating that Snorri's works are 'attributed now more than ever not to an ancient Germanic past, but to imaginative reconstructions'. The whole issue is more complicated than that.

> Erst im Ernstnehmen des Eingebettetseins der E. in die herrschenden theol.-geschichtsphilosophischen Traditionen wie z.B. den Neuplatonismus wird Snorri's eigentliches Erkenntnisziel und 'Interesse' an seinem Gegenstand als Deutungssystem offenbar, das es ihm möglich machte, den Stoff selber weitgehend unangetastet zu überliefern und, statt ihm zu zerbrechen lediglich zu perspektivieren ….

> Not until it is taken seriously that the *Edda* is embedded in the ruling theological and philosophical historical tradition such as, for example, the Neoplatonic, will Snorri's actual aim of recognition and 'interest' in his subject as a system of interpretation be revealed, which made it possible for him to pass on the material untouched to a great extent and, instead of destroying it, put it in perspective …

Weber goes on to enumerate the various ways in which Snorri related to his material, and the conclusion is, as mentioned, unambiguously positive, *if* we are conscious of the manner in which Snorri worked (cf. also Clunies Ross 1992a, 655). Therefore, with the necessary reservations, there appears today to be no controversy in using Snorri's work to shed light on pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. The question is only *how* it should be done, and to what extent we are aware of how Christian features, conscious or unconscious on Snorri's part, are implicit in his account.

All things considered, a great deal of the information Snorri has recorded will be used and discussed in this study. The basic assumption will be that information, for which no convincing parallels can be found in the Christian world, proves meaningful when seen in connection with the structure of initiation, as it has been described in Chapter 3, and for this reason alone must be considered a reflection of pagan ideas.

4.4 Other Sources

The guiding principle in deciding which other sources to include in this study must remain whether the ideas that are expressed in them may be assumed to be of pre-Christian origin, and not whether the works themselves are. Relevant material such as the sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendin-*

gasögur) and the *fornaldarsögur*, or mythical-heroic sagas, are obviously late, just as Snorri's works are, and the same is the case with Saxo's *Gesta Danorum.* Ibn Fadlan's value as a source will be discussed in Chapter 9.2. Whereas the *fornaldarsögur* and the *Gesta Danorum* are primarily interesting in relation to initiation because of their mythical or 'half-mythical' testimony, the sagas of Icelanders contain some descriptions of rituals which may be associated with actual initiation rituals (cf. Schjødt 2000a and 2007a). As only a few passages from these sources are of interest in connection with this study, they will not form the subject of a long research-historical account here, but a couple of important questions connected with their use will be mentioned briefly.

I have discussed elsewhere (Schjødt 2007a) the relationship between sagas as sources and sagas as literature, and this will not occupy us more closely here. It must, however, be emphasised again that there are clear tendencies in modern research, which have demonstrated that traditional elements play a part both in the sagas of Icelanders[20] and in the *fornaldarsögur*[21]. Stephen Mitchell identifies two kinds of paganism to be found in the *fornaldarsögur*, namely direct references to pagan gods and forms of practice, on the one hand,[22] and on the other the less transparent remnants of the mythological tradition (Mitchell 1991, 60; cf. also Clunies Ross 2000, 120-3). This is undoubtedly a fruitful distinction, but we could add a third category, namely the unconscious use of elements that may be traced with high probability to pagan ritual sequences. Examples of this are the events that make Hǫttr into Hjalti in *Hrólfs saga kraka* Chapters 35-6 (*FSN* I, 66-9) and Sigmundr's and Sinfjǫtli's experiences in the forest prior to the killing of Siggeirr in *Vǫlsunga saga* (*Vǫls*) Chapter 8 (*FSN* I, 123-128) – passages which we will look at more closely below.

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[20] See in particular Meulengracht Sørensen 1992, where a series of statements that may relate to the god Freyr are investigated. The conclusion (1992, 735) is that 'Die engen Parallelen zwischen den Abstammungsgeschichten der Sippen in den Isländersagas und zwischen den Isländersagas und der *Landnámabók* sind Ausdruck für eine starke Konzentration bestimmter mythischer Züge und religiöser Vorstellungen. Ein dahinter liegendes Bedeutungsmuster oder Teile davon haben Spuren in diesen Erzählungen hinterlassen. Oder mit einem Bild gesagt: Der Mythos liegt immer noch wie ein magnetisches Feld unter dem Text, und er hat bestimmte Erzählelemente angezogen, und andere abgestoßen, so dass wir sein Muster hinter der historischen Erzählung sehen können' 'The close parallels between the narratives concerning descent in the sagas of Icelanders and between the sagas of Icelanders and *Landnámabók* signify a strong concentration of certain mythical traits and religious conceptions. A pattern of meaning or part of it lies behind these narratives. Or, figuratively speaking, we can say that the myth lies always as a magnetic field beneath the text, and has drawn in certain narrative elements and pushed away others, so that we can see its pattern behind the historical narrative'. The reasoning and analyses here seem convincing, and this procedure has since been taken up by, among others, van Wezel (2000, 544-52), but precisely because it is a question of a mythical feature, it will not be possible to use the same method on the descriptions of rituals analysed below. Clunies Ross (1998) has discussed a whole series of passages from sagas of Icelanders from the same premises, being much broader in its scope, however. It is noteworthy that we are not dealing with a definite narrative transmission in these works, but with 'vaguer' traditional *complexes*. Further analyses that continue these perspectives are Haraldur Ólafsson 1995, 130-4 on *Landnámabók* and Hermann Pálsson (2000, 97-118) on *Gísla saga*. For a recent and thor-

These various ways in which pagan material is included in the *fornaldarsögur* must also be viewed differentially. As Mitchell points out (1991, 61-63), the pagan gods are demonised in several passages and viewed in a markedly negative light, whereas in other connections, and sometimes even in the same sagas, we get an image which is apparently close to the understanding that may have belonged to the pagan world (cf. also Mitchell 1985b, 777-86). Whether this is due to a tradition in one form or another from pagan times, or whether it is only a question of antiquarian interest, is in many cases difficult to decide. There is a great probability (but no certainty) that we are dealing with authentic features from pre-Christian religion, in connection with the unconscious use of pagan myth and ritual features. Mitchell mentions, for example, the relationship between *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* and Þórr's journeys to Geirrøðr and Útgarðaloki (1991, 64-66), as we know these accounts from *Þórsdrápa* and particularly from Snorri's *Edda*. On the

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ough presentation of the problems concerned with these sagas cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 2004.

[21] Mitchell is representative when he says (1991, 179): 'It has been possible to see how the texts in their current forms draw on traditional themes, inherited poetry, and learned works, but it is equally important to bear in mind that they were also shaped by individual writers who created poetry and interpolated episodes'(cf. Schjødt 2007a). Mitchell concedes that oral transmission plays an important role particularly at the structural level (p. 47). Tulinius argues (2002, 54) that oral accounts may have existed prior to the written version but, all things considered, such accounts would have been essentially different from the extant texts.

[22] Examples of such references, including to the god Óðinn, can be found in Boyer 1998, 222-9 and Lassen 2003b.

other hand, there are no parallels in the rest of the Scandinavian material with the examples from *Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Vǫls*, and for this reason we are obliged to authenticate them by means of comparisons based on the phenomenology of religion (see below Chapter 4.5).

All in all, we must conclude that it is not possible to give definitive proof of whether this or that episode in these sagas ought to be considered as pagan material. Provisionally, we must be content with stating that, in agreement with research of recent decades (cf. Mundal 2003, 31-2), we must at least reckon with the *possibility* that we are dealing with an inheritance from pagan times.

What has been argued for the *fornaldarsögur* also holds true to a great extent for Saxo, as his *Gesta Danorum* will be used in this study. Scholars have acknowledged for a long time that Saxo must have obtained much of the material for his first nine books from existing and lost accounts of the same kind of material as we find in the *fornaldarsögur* (Olrik 1894, cf. Schier 1970, 79-80 and Skovgaard-Petersen 1987, 40-2). There is no doubt either that he knew heroic poems which have now been lost (de Vries 1964-67, II, 275). However, it is incontrovertible that Saxo changed a series of narratives which he knew, and his critical attitude to everything that appears explicitly pagan is well known. To what extent he himself adapted material about pagan times or how much he had come to know in an already adapted form, we cannot know for sure[23] and it is not important in the present analysis. The crucial factor is whether we may credit Saxo's narratives which have a bearing on pre-Christian religion, and that certainly seems to be the case, although the narratives are often transformed in various ways (Dumézil 1970).

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[23] Apart from his generally negative way of mentioning the pagan gods, investigations of various narrative sequences point to the fact that Saxo, at least in some points, was very conscious of the way in which he used material obviously connected with paganism. This is true of the account in Book VIII (Olrik and Ræder 1931, 214-49) of Thorkillus' journey to Geirrøðr and Útgarðaloki (Malm 1992) and probably also parts of the Starkatherus saga (Skovgaard-Petersen 1985).

4.5 Some Methodological Considerations in the Use of Sources

With the backing of recent research, we have presented a series of arguments supporting the use of *certain types* of information from the sources that will be used in the following analyses to shed light on the circumstances of paganism, but in all cases we must reckon with possible influences from Christian ideas in these sources. We are, therefore, left with a crucial problem, which is whether it is defensible to make use of precisely that information which is relevant to the problem of initiation.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, we can hardly claim objectivity in the traditional sense. What we may hope for is an acceptable degree of probability, which has always been the situation in discussions of the sources of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. It is clear that the strongest argument for a pre-Christian origin for certain mythical and ritual elements is mounted with reference to parallels which undoubtedly existed in pre-Christian times. Such parallels are, however, very few and seldom unambiguously convincing. As an example, we may mention Tacitus' well-known description of the Nerthus cult (Warmington 1970, 196), which seems to form a proof of the Vanir's connection with fertility. But it is only in a few cases that something like that is possible, and there is very little that would remain of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion if we were forced to rely on such parallels alone.

Another possibility is Indo-European parallels. Here, the potential comparative material is far greater, but it is still only a limited part of the Scandinavian material that we can find parallels for. With regard to the problem of initiation, there is so to speak no help from that direction because, among other things, the parallels in the information that we have about initiation from other Indo-European religions seem to be of such a general kind that we cannot argue for a genetic relation. This brings us to a third kind of parallels to be taken into consideration.

These are parallel structures in the Scandinavian material on the one hand, and general phenomenological categories on the other (cf. Steinsland 2000, 17-18). There is no doubt that this is a dangerous road to follow. A wealth of investigations has included ethnographical and phenomenological parallels in order to discover meaning in the Scandinavian material, sometimes successfully, though more often the results that follow seem so uncertain that they can hardly be described as anything but suggestions, which have no more validity than all other possible suggestions. The sparser the material is, the more uncertain such results will be. It is not surprising that some research, for example that which relies on archaeological material only, without any support in written sources, may give the reader a feeling of sheer arbitrariness about the conclusions drawn. The crucial question must be for *what* purpose one is using such parallels and *how* one uses them. Much could be said about these things, but here it is only a matter of how parallel material of this type may be included in discussions of how far the information in the sources is of pre-Christian origin.

The obvious answer must be that phenomena, like initiation, which are so widespread in the general history of religion that they can be designated universals as far as form and structure are concerned, can also be presumed to have occurred in Scandinavia, though with a specifically Scandinavian character. When, therefore, the structure of initiation, as it was described in the previous chapter, can be discovered in the sources, it is difficult to argue in favour of it having arrived at a late date. Certainly, there may be features in the myths and rituals we are dealing with that could be Christian 'borrowings' or expressions of an author's imagination. But if the semantic universe that emerges does not have specific parallels in the corresponding Christian phenomena but may only be 'explained' as a special variant of the universal basic structure, then there seems to be only one place from which they may have been taken, namely the pre-Christian Scandinavian religion itself.

In order to analyse these parallels and the ideas behind the texts, the sources must be interpreted; and interpretations will, as is well known, always have elements of subjectivity about them and thus some degree of uncertainty.[24] The degree of certainty increases, however, proportionally to the number of statements in the sources that support the interpretation. That means that in cases where reservations can be expressed about the interpretation of an individual source-statement, the greater the number of statements, which seem to be saying 'the same thing', the greater support for the justification of that individual interpretation. This is of importance for some of the analyses to be carried out below, since there must be a certain degree of reconstruction. Because of the kind of material we are dealing with, it is unavoidable that reconstructions of parts of rituals and myths with uncertain elements must take place. When we can only get a glimpse of the tip of the iceberg of our subject, we have to make an assessment of the significance of the whole of which we can only see part, and from which we today are cut off both with regard to the details in the individual sequence and obviously from whole sequences. The individual analyses, on the one hand, make it possible for us to construct an entity out of a series of details and, on the other hand, that entity will also be able to help us in a rough way to fill in some of the lacunae containing individual details in the sequence. The risk of circular argument is obviously present, but it seems possible to find a balance, as part of the material is in itself adequate enough for us to be able to form a clear idea of its basic structure and symbolism.

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[24] With regard to the relationship between subjectivity and that which is 'scientific', de Vries more than forty years ago made a statement which is not a great theory, but which nevertheless quite precisely characterises the practice that we are faced with when we want to say anything about Scandinavian and Germanic religion. After stating that subjectivity is unavoidable, he writes (1964, 2): 'Bedeutet das also, dass einer durchaus subjektiven Deutung der Vergangenheit Tür und Tor geöffnet werden soll? Natürlich nicht; wir sind dem Geiste echter Wissenschaft verpflichtet, nicht an die Statt der Wirklichkeit unsere Wunschträume zu stellen. Nüchternheit, Zuverlässigkeit, peinliche Ehrlichkeit werden immer die höchste Zierde wissenschaftlicher Forschung sein; aber

Thus it may be possible to enter into the universe of ideas that constituted part of the basis for the texts as they have been transmitted to us. We will obviously never reach complete knowledge of the ideas that were associated with initiation in pre-Christian Scandinavia. Many details and symbolic relations, which we do not understand, will remain. Some of them have obviously not even been understood by those

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wir sind uns dessen bewusst, dass sie allein nicht ausreichen zu seiner wahrhaft schöpferisch-gestaltenden Wissenschaft. Zu ihr gehören auch die zusammenschauende Phantasie und die bis ins Mark der Dinge dringende Intuition. Wir fordern deshalb das Recht, unsere Ansicht über die Vergangenheit auszusprechen, obgleich wir wissen, wie zeitbedingt und persönlich bestimmt das Urteil sein wird.' 'Does this mean, then, that a door will be opened to a completely subjective interpretation of the past? Of course not. We are responsible to the spirit of real science not to put our wishful dreams in place of reality. Sobriety, reliability, scrupulous honesty will always be the greatest ornament to scientific research; but we are aware that it alone cannot reach to a truly creating-shaping science. To this belong also the all-embracing fantasy and that necessary core, intuition. We claim, therefore, the right to speak our opinion about the past, although we know the judgement will depend on time specific and personal circumstances'.

people who related the myths or carried out the rituals (cf. Chapter 3.3), but they nevertheless contributed to the creation of meaning in their lives, perhaps precisely because the myths or rituals evoked only vague associations. They may have been difficult to understand or perhaps completely incomprehensible. But they were symbols of The Other – precisely that which could not be understood with the rationality of This World. It may, therefore, be difficult to decide whether the lack of precision in the universe of ideas to be analysed is due to the problematical state of the sources or is an inherent obscurity in this universe itself. We cannot do anything other than interpret the connection between the elements that can be analysed and their logical relations which makes that connection possible and 'natural', as far as we can; but we cannot expect to be dealing exclusively with logic, at least not a logic that we have a chance to immerse ourselves in.

As a sort of conclusion to this chapter, we will cite a quotation by Margaret Clunies Ross, which compares research on Scandinavian religion to the work of anthropologists (1994, 26), and with which I entirely agree:

> … the only feasible course of action is to transform one's outsider status into that of a partial insider through a process of willing immersion in the alien culture, or, in our case, as students of Norse myth, in the whole corpus of the texts and other fragments Old Norse culture has left to us. This will certainly not give us access to complete, objective categories of knowledge or "the whole picture"; our knowledge will remain partial and incomplete because of the nature of the evidence itself, and because of our limited powers to understand the ancient culture's ways of constructing meanings in narrative as in other processes.

Chapter 5

Óðinn Myths 1: Mímir and Kvasir

5.1 Mímir

Mímir is a mythic being whom scholars have always had trouble placing within Scandinavian mythology. In the first instance, there are only a few hints about his character dispersed through the sources. Snorri Sturluson has a relatively consistent portrayal of Mímir's death in *Yng* 4 and, in addition, has some confusing and, apparently, contradictory information about him in *Gylf.* There are no relevant mythical sequences whatsoever in poetry. Secondly, the being goes under three different, closely related names. Although the names are similar, they may conceal two or three different characters (cf. von der Leyen 1909, 150; de Vries 1956-57, I, 246). These names are *Mímir*, *Mímr* and *Mími.*[1] Before beginning to discuss this problem it is necessary to list the sources in which Mímir appears.

The sources

The most important of the poetic texts are *Vsp* 28 and 46:

28 Alone she sat outside, when the old man came,
the Terrible One of the Æsir and he looked in her eyes:
'Why do you question me? Why do you test me?
I know everything, Odin, where you hid your eye
in the famous well of Mimir.'
Mimir drinks mead every morning
from Father of the Slain's wager – do you understand
yet, or what more?[2]

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[1] The term *Mími* is not found in the nominative case in the source material, but is implicit in the term *Mímameiðr* in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 20 and 24 (SG I, 204-5). As a starting point, we will consider all three names as a designation for the same mythical person and refer to him as 'Mímir'.

[2] Ein sat hon úti,

46 The sons of Mim are at play and fate catches fire
at the ancient Giallar-horn;
Heimdall blows loudly, his horn is in the air.
Odin speaks with Mim's head.[3] (Larrington 1996, 7, 10)

Another important poetic source is *Sigdr* 13-14:

13 'Mind-runes you must know if you want to be
wiser in spirit than every other man;
Hropt interpreted them,
cut them, thought them out,
from that liquid which had leaked
from the skull of Heiddraupnir

þá er inn aldni kom
Yggiungr ása,
oc í augo leit:
Hvers fregnit mic,
hvi freistið mín?
alt veit ec, Óðinn,
hvar þú auga falt:
í inom mæra
Mímis brunni.
Dreccr miǫð Mímir
morgin hverian
af veði Valfǫðrs -
vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?
(NK 1962, 7)

[3] Leica Míms synir,
enn miǫtuðr kyndiz
at ino gamla
Giallarhorni;
hátt blæss Heimdallr,
horn er á lopti,
mælir Óðinn
við Míms hǫfuð.
(NK 1962, 11)

and from Hoddrofnir's horn.

14 'On the cliff he stood with Brimir's sword,
a helmet he had on his head;
then Mim's head spoke
wisely the first word
and told the true letters[4]. (Larrington 1996, 168-9)

The name *Mímameiðr* occurs in *Fj* 20 and 24. The context indicates clearly that the tree (*meiðr*) referred to is the World Tree, better known as Yggdrasill. *Vafðr* 45 (NK 1962, 53) mentions *Hoddmímis holt* 'Treasure-Mímir's wood', which is the name for a place where Líf and Lífþrasir have survived a mighty winter (*fimbulvetr*). In *Grí* 50 we encounter the name *Socmímir* or *Soccmímir*,[5] which designates a being that Óðinn visited. It should also be mentioned that a kenning for Óðinn in some passages in skaldic poetry is *Míms vinr* 'Mímr's friend' (e.g. Egill Skallagrímsson's *Sonatorrek* 23 (Finnur Jónsson 1908-15 B 1, 37)). In a *þula* (Faulkes 1998, I, 110) and in *Yt* 2 (Finnur Jónsson 1908-15 B 1, 7), Mímir appears to be the name of a giant.[6]

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[4] Hugrúnar scaltu kunna,
ef þú vilt hveriom vera
geðsvinnari guma;
þær of réð,
þær of reist,
þær um hugði Hroptr,
af þeim legi,
er lekið hafði
ór hausi Heiddraupnis
oc ór horni Hoddrofnis.

Á biargi stóð
með Brimis eggiar,
hafði sér á hǫfði hiálm.
þá mælti Míms hǫfuð
fróðlict iþ fyrsta orð,
oc sagði sanna stafi.
(NK 1962, 192).

[5] Gering prefers the first name, which he interprets as 'the aggressive giant', whereas Neckel has Sǫccmímir 'Mímir in the deep' in his edition.

[6] For other combinations with Mímir, see references by Faulkes 1998, II, 492.

Snorri gives considerably more detailed information about Mímir.

Gylf 15:

> But under that root that reaches towards the frost-giants, there is where Mimir's well is, which has wisdom and intelligence contained in it, and the master of the well is called Mimir. He is full of learning because he drinks of the well from the horn Giallarhorn. All-father went there and asked for a single drink from the well, but he did not get one until he placed his eye as a pledge. Thus it says in *Voluspa*: (then follows *Vsp* 28/7-14). (Faulkes 1987, 17) [7]

Gylf 51:

> Then Odin will ride to Mimir's well and consult with Mímir on his own and his people's behalf.[8] (Faulkes 1987, 54)

Yng 4:

> Óthin made war on the Vanir, but they resisted stoutly and defended their land; now one, now the other was victorious, and both devastated the land of their opponents, doing each other damage. But when both wearied of that, they agreed on a peace meeting and concluded a peace, giving each other hostages. The Vanir gave their most outstanding men, Njorth the Wealthy and his son Frey, but the Æsir, in their turn, furnished one whose name was Hœnir, declaring him to be well fitted to be a chieftain. He was a large man and exceedingly handsome. Together with him the Æsir sent one called Mímir, a very wise man; and the Vanir in return sent the one who was the cleverest among them.

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[7] En undir þeiri rót er til hrímþursa horfir, þar er Mímis brunnr, er spekð ok manvit er í fólgit, ok heitir sá Mímir er á brunninn. Hann er fullr af vísindum firir því at hann drekr ór brunninum af horninu Gjallarhorni. Þar kom Alfǫðr ok beiddisk eins dryckiar af brunninum, en hann feck eigi fyrr en hann lagði auga sitt at veði. Svá segir i Vǫluspá. (Faulkes 2005, 17)

[8] Þá ríðr Óðinn til Mímis brunns ok tekr ráð af Mími fyrir sér ok sínu liði. (Faulkes 2005, 50)

> His name was Kvasir. Now when Hœnir arrived in Vanaheim he was at once made a chieftain. Mímir advised him in all things. But when Hœnir was present at meetings or assemblies without having Mímir at his side and was asked for his opinion on a difficult matter, he would always answer in the same way, saying, "Let others decide." Then the Vanir suspected that the Æsir had defrauded them in the exchange of hostages. Then they seized Mímir and beheaded him and sent the head to the Æsir. Óthin took it and embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms over it, giving it magic power so that it would answer him and tell him many occult things.[9] (Hollander 1992, 7-8)

Yng 7:

> Óthin had with him Mímir's head, which told him many tidings from other worlds.[10] (Hollander 1992, 11)

As is evident, Mímir appears in a series of different forms whose connections may be difficult to perceive immediately. If, however, we hope to obtain a greater understanding of the function and meaning that this character or these characters have in the mythological universe, we must necessarily examine all aspects with a view to either confirming or disproving such connections, even if the nature of the sources prevents us from drawing definite conclusions.

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[9] Óðinn fór með her á hendur Vǫnum, en þeir urðu vel við ok vǫrðu land sitt, ok hǫfðu ýmsir sigr. Herjuðu hvárir land annarra ok gerðu skaða. En er þat leiddisk hvárumtveggjum, lǫgðu þeir milli sín sættarstefnu ok gerðu frið og seldusk gíslar. Fengu Vanir sína ina ágæztu menn, Njǫrð inn auðga ok son hans Frey, en Æsir þar í mót þann, er Hœnir hét, ok kǫlluðu hann allvel til hǫfðingja fallinn. Hann var mikill maðr ok inn vænsti. Með honnum sendu Æsir þann, er Mímir hét, inn vitrasti maðr, en Vanir fengu þar í mót þann, er spakastr var í þeira flokki. Sá hét Kvasir. En er Hœnir kom í Vanaheim, þá var hann þegar hǫfðingi gǫrr; Mímir kendi honum ráð ǫll. En ef Hœnir var staddr á þingum eða stefnum, svá at Mímir var eigi nær, ok kœmi nǫkkur vandamál fyrir hann, þá svaraði hann æ inu sama: 'ráði aðrir' kvað hann. Þá grunaði Vani, at Æsir myndi hafa falsat þá í mannaskiptinu. Þá tóku þeir Mími ok hálshjoggu ok sendu hǫfuðit Ásum; Óðinn tók hǫfuðit ok smurði urtum þeim, er eigi mátti fúna, ok kvað þar yfir galdra ok magnaði svá, at þat mælti við hann ok sagði honum marga leynda hluti. (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, 12-13)

[10] Óðinn hafði með sér hǫfuð Mímis, ok sagði þat honum tíðendi ór ǫðrum heimum, … (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, 18)

The etymology of the name is uncertain[11] (see *AEW*, 387) but, most probably, as Müllenhoff indicated (1883, 105-6), we are dealing with a meaning that lies within the semantic field of 'spiritual ability', cognate with the Latin *memor* '[to be] mindful'. In spite of the elements of uncertainty associated with this etymology, the proposed meaning accords well with the role that Mímir has in the mythology (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 214), and which we will now examine more closely.

Analysis

In *Vsp* 28 we hear of a well or a spring called *Mímis brunnr* in which Óðinn has placed or hidden his eye,[12] and that every morning Mímir drinks mead from Valfǫðr's (Óðinn's) pledge (*af veði Valfǫðrs*).[13] The whole stanza is exceedingly problematic, not only in relation to the Mímir character, but also in relation to Óðinn and not least his pledge. The latter is traditionally understood as meaning that Mímir drinks from Óðinn's eye, which, therefore, is to be identified as *veð*

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[11] Even words for which we can lay down certain etymologies only have a limited value as a rule when we are dealing with the meaning of a mythic character, because they cannot be a corrective to the results that emerge from functional and structural analyses. On the other hand, they can at times support these results. The shifts in the meaning of mythological figures that historically take place over time cannot be captured by a study of etymology. For example, to focus on Þórr's connection with thunder because of the etymology of his name would be to foreground a secondary feature over a primary one, viz. his role as a giant killer and thus the guardian of the cosmos.

[12] With regard to the sense of the verb *fela* 'to hide', I must declare myself in agreement with the traditional view of its meaning and thus at variance with Höckert 1926, 44-8, who argues that it refers to a magical act. For a more detailed discussion, see Wessén 1927, 74-5. Höckert's general view of sts 21-29, that Mímir is identical with the world-tree and even the sky (1926, 83), cannot, as we will see in the following analyses, be correct, as Mímir's chthonic character is quite clear. Höckert's general approach is based on pan-Babylonism and that school's understanding of the world-tree and the heavens, something which one cannot today use as a point of departure for an analysis of, for example, symbols in Scandinavian religion.

[13] It has been suggested by Åke Ohlmarks (1937, 366) among others, that *af veði Valfǫðrs* is the result of a scribal error, influenced by the wording of stanza 27. He argues that 28/13 should actually have read *af horni Heimdallar* 'from the horn of Heimdallr'. Such a suggestion can be neither confirmed nor denied in the absence of any supporting textual evidence.

Valfǫðrs.[14] This is never made explicit in the texts, however, and Snorri understood it differently in his interpretation of *Gylf* 8, where he maintains that it is the Gjallarhorn that Mímir drinks from.

This nexus may be connected with the fact that stanza 27 of *Vsp* mentions *Heimdalar hlióð* (27/1-2), a phrase in which the word *hlióð* may mean a horn, silence or the sense of hearing. The last is almost certainly the original meaning (Sigurður Nordal 1927, 64), whereas the first is likely to be a poetic circumlocution. The last four lines of stanza 27: *á sér hon ausaz/ aurgom forsi/ af veði Valfǫðrs –/ vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?* do not help us, as *veð Valfǫðrs* here is just as obscure as in the following stanza. If, however, *hlióð* is understood to mean horn, *veð Valfǫðrs* may be identical to Gjallarhorn in the way that Fleck has suggested (1968, 119; cf. Meletinskij 1973, II, 71). But in that case we are dealing with a mythical theme which the texts do not otherwise mention, for, in the passages in which the name Gjallarhorn occurs, we find it associated specifically with Heimdallr (Höckert 1926, 44). Fleck is, however, later less categorical and is aware that the problem can also be solved by understanding *veð Valfǫðr* as the mead itself (Fleck 1971, 399). However, in both cases the depositing of Óðinn's eye has nothing to do with Mímir's daily drink.[15] We will look more closely at these problems below in connection with a discussion of the information in *Gylf* 8, but we can already establish that the lack of any final solution must point to the probability that Snorri did not have any clear understanding himself of the ideas that formed the basis for his account.[16] In connection with *Vsp* 28, we will, therefore, content ourselves here with concluding, firstly, that Mímir in this source is thought to be alive; secondly, that he is thought to drink mead, and thirdly, that he has a close connection with a well or a spring in which Óðinn has placed his eye.

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[14] Sigurður Nordal (1926, 66) says of this interpretation: 'Boer taler om "die sinnlose Behauptung, dass Mimir aus dem Auge trinkt". Dog er dette *hans* fejlagtige opfattelse, ikke digterens. *Drekka af* betyder ganske vist ofte det samme som *drekka úr* (drikke af f.ex. bæger, kande; og således har Snorri forstået udtrykket her, fordi han tænkte på Gjallarhornet), men det kan også betyde *drekka ofan af* = drikke af en væske, hvori noget ligger (urter el. lign., som giver væsken kraft). … Odins øje giver alt vand fra brønden ny kraft.' 'Boer talks about "die sinnlose Behauptung, dass Mimir aus dem Auge trinkt" ["the absurd assertion that Mimir drinks *from* the eye"]. Yet, this is *his* wrong perception, not the poet's. *Drekka af* means, indeed, often the same as *drekka úr* (drink from, e.g. a beaker, a jug; and it is thus that Snorri has understood the expression here because he was thinking of the Gjallarhorn), but it can also mean *drekka ofan af* = drink of a liquid in which something is floating (herbs, or the like, that gives the liquid its power) … Odin's eye gives all the water from the well new power.'

[15] Fleck's viewpoints and theories are especially interesting and will be discussed in more detail in what follows. However, I am not in agreement with him on all details, nor with his overall interpretation of the myth of Óðinn's self-hanging, but he has been the first to present a clear perception of the connection between the most important myths that have to do with the acquisition of numinous knowledge. As far as Óðinn's pledge is concerned, it is reasonable, as already mentioned, to presume that we are dealing with the mead itself, although it is difficult to understand the pledge both as the eye and the mead, as van Hamel (1925, 299) has argued: 'The pledge of Óðinn is his

In *Vsp* 46, we hear partly about *Míms synir* 'the sons of Mímr' and partly about Óðinn, who speaks with *Míms hǫfuð* 'Mímr's head'. We know nothing about Mímr's sons, as they are mentioned in no other source. Various suggestions have been made that they are metaphorical expressions for giants or streams (SG III, 60; Finnur Jónsson 1932, 15), but it will become clear below that making Mímir the father of such beings does not lie within the semantic sphere in which he operates. Fleck proposed that *synir* ought to be read as *sýnir* 'sights, visions'[17] (Fleck 1968, 120; 1971, 397). There are neither palaeographical nor metrical reasons to contradict this proposal, although *sýn* in the sense of spiritual vision is only attested in late prose sources. How *leika*, normally meaning 'to play, move, swing', is to be understood in Fleck's interpretation is uncertain, as unambiguous parallels are not found (*LP*: 3. *leika*), but one assumes that the meaning is that Mímir's visions have full liberty in and through the great things that are about to happen. The question cannot be decided with certainty but, in consideration of our relative ignorance about any sons that Mímir may have had, and of the fact that he is not such a prominent giant character (see below) that his name seems obvious in a kenning for giants, Fleck's suggestion is tempting. Furthermore, Mímir's role in the mythology is exclusively as

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eye, which the god was forced to deposit in the well of wisdom, and thus the expression could easily be used to indicate the well itself'. This position appears rather far-fetched.

[16] Carey (1983, 214-18) endeavours to bring order into the relationship between the mead of wisdom and Mímir's well by means of Irish parallels, and suggests, without having any direct parallel, that 'In the Vǫluspá, where Mímir drinks "from Valfödr's pledge (af vedi Valfǫdrs)", the lost eye has itself become the well' (1983, 217).

[17] From *sýn*, f. 'sight, sense of sight'. The indication of vowel length is in any case inconsistently used in the manuscript (Lindblad 1954, 61-2). This, then, neither contradicts, nor supports Fleck's proposal.

the transmitter of knowledge from other worlds, which also supports this suggestion.

In stanza 46/7-8, we learn that Óðinn speaks with *Míms hǫfuð* 'Mímr's head'. It happens immediately before Ragnarǫk, and the wording indicates that we are here dealing with a head that is separated from the body. On the other hand, in this passage there is no reference to the well, unless the mention of Gjallarhorn can be understood as such. In that case the clause *horn er á lopti* 'the horn is in the air' might indicate that it had been taken up from the well in which it had been hidden since the events that are mentioned in stanza 27. In consideration of the disconnected images in this part of *Vsp*, there still does not seem to be a compelling connection between Heimdallr, the horn, Óðinn and Mímir's head, and we must therefore take up the problem again after having examined the individual sources.

In *Sigdr* 13-14, the content of which is especially obscure and difficult to understand, Mímir's role is very uncertain.[18] The first question is whether the content of stanza 13 actually refers to Mímir at all. We cannot be sure of this from the internal evidence of the poem, but a certain possibility appears when other elements of the Mímir-complex are considered. If the stanza says anything about Mímir, it must be because it is he who is hidden behind the names Heiddraupnir and Hoddrofnir, which do not appear elsewhere in the mythology. These names mean, respectively, 'he who drips clearly' and 'he who opens treasures' or 'treasure-breaker' and can be connected with what we otherwise know about Mímir, as one who drips from the liquid in the well and one who gives wisdom (Simpson 1962, 51-2).[19] Viewed realistically, it is clear, however, that, had it not been for the following stanza, one would hardly think of Mímir in connection with the two names. In this context it is possible, but it remains only a possibility, that the stanza improves on the knowledge we have about Mímir from other sources. It is therefore important that there seems to be a certain connection between the *hugrúnar* 'mind-runes' of *Sigdr* 13/1 and the liquid from Mímir's well together with Óðinn's acquisition of runic wisdom. The attachment to, respectively, a skull and a horn poses a difficulty, as we again have problems with the exact connection. Nevertheless, we do know the two phenomena in connection with Mímir from other sources, among others, as we saw above, in *Vsp* 27, the placing of which indicates a connection between *hlióð Heimdalar* and Mímir's well in the following stanza and also in *Vsp* 46, in which both Heimdallr's horn and Mímir's head are mentioned.

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[18] Stanza 13, 7-8 together with all of 14 are only found in the Codex Regius (R), but not in *Vǫls* (NKS 1824 b 4).

[19] De Vries 1956-57, I, 245; Fleck 1968, 118; Höckert 1926, 53-4 and Renauld-Krantz 1972, 94-7 (see further Doht 1974, 292) also assume an identity between these two characters and Mímir.

Thus it seems acceptable to let the possibility be left open of placing all these referents within a semantic field with Mímir at its centre. There is also the possibility that we are simply dealing here with a drinking horn from which one drinks the liquid that is mentioned. In that case, the meaning must be that Óðinn (Hroptr) has become master of 'mind-runes', which he has obtained from a liquid that has dripped from Mímir's skull (Mímir's head) and from Mímir's horn, which, if we follow Snorri, is identical with Gjallarhorn. Whether Óðinn in fact must have drunk from the liquid, as Palmér thinks (1928, 249), we cannot know for sure, but it is not evident from the poem itself, and there is thus no direct support for Snorri's claim that Óðinn wished to drink of the liquid from Mímir's well.[20]

It is not remarkable that knowledge should be at the centre of a wisdom-poem, but we must pay careful attention to how all four links in the transmission of this knowledge are presented. Firstly, there is Sigurðr to whom knowledge is transmitted from Sigrdrífa, who, therefore, must possess it, though we do not learn how she has acquired it. But before her, Óðinn, at least, must have been in possession of it, and he in turn has interpreted the runic wisdom from the liquid that dripped from Mímir's head and his horn. From this text, we cannot know for sure exactly what the liquid is, but with the parallels that exist with other myths about the acquisition of knowledge, and which we will examine shortly, there cannot be any doubt that it was not a question of ordinary water, but a drink that gives special abilities to the one who consumes it (Palmér 1928, 250).[21] This supposition is strengthened by stanza 18, which speaks about various magical runes that have been carved in different places, and which are now scraped off into the mead in order to be sent out into the whole world (cf. Dörner 1993, 50-2). We are thus dealing with a metonymical connection between mead and runes that is essential for the understanding of the acquisition of numinous knowledge in general.

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[20] Palmér (1928) is probably the scholar who has discussed stanza 13 in greatest detail. He construes *réð*, *reist* and *hugði* as descriptively laying the foundation for the same process, viz. the execution of magical runes. His reasoning seems sensible; his interpretation of the last two lines in relation to this execution of runic magic corresponds perfectly to whatever else we know about Mímir. It is interesting that Palmér (1928, 250) finds an exact parallel between *Sigdr* 13-14 and *Hávm* 139-40 – a parallel which unfortunately is not followed up but, as we will see below, is of great importance for the establishment of the whole semantic universe to which the acquisition of knowledge is central.

Sigdr 14 is not without problems either, but here the problems do not have the same importance for our understanding of Mímir's role as is the case with stanza 13. It is most difficult to determine the identity of the person who stands on the mountain with *Brimis eggiar* 'Brimir's sword' [*lit.* 'edges, blades'], but most take him to be Óðinn, and that is also the solution that best fits the context, as the stanza then becomes an expansion of Óðinn's acquisition of knowledge from Mímir. The difficulty rests primarily in the fact that we are dealing with a sword and not a spear, which is Óðinn's characteristic weapon. This point is not, however, a decisive objection to understanding the person as Óðinn.

The more important issue for us is that in the last three lines of stanza 14 we get some essential information about Mímir (or Mímr). Here, we are dealing with his head, as in *Vsp* 46; we are also informed that he speaks wisely (*fróðlict*), and that he *sagði sanna stafi* 'told the true letters'. The latter is an interesting expression, as it can be translated literally to say that Mímir spoke 'true staves'. Naturally, it is the runes that are the topic of discussion and, as we will later see, they play an essential role in the whole of the wisdom-complex. But at the same time they can also be mere 'letters' or 'words', and we can, therefore, see here an indication that the runes in the wisdom-complex, beyond denoting 'letters', can also be understood in a more general sense as

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[21] This differentiation is not unproblematic when it concerns the language of myth in which elements from everyday life often acquire a specific 'mythic' meaning, i. e. a meaning that involves qualities and characteristics that are fundamentally different with relation to those that we know from This World. The whole problem about this liquid is treated in Doht 1974, especially 152-156 (see also Schjødt 1983). Generally, it would be wrong to draw too sharp a line between water and an alcoholic drink, as elements of both enter into the knowledge-complex (see also Bauschatz 1982, xix).

'words with a secret content' (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 214 and Chapter 6.1 below).

To summarise the information in *Sigdr*, we can say that, although it contains elements of great uncertainty, these elements do not introduce any discordance element into the picture of Mímir that we get from *Vsp* and the rest of the source material. We come across a figure that appears only as a head, characterised by great wisdom and knowledge with regard to runes and secret things in general. Besides this, a liquid and a horn, which is probably to be regarded as a drinking horn in the context of the liquid, apparently play an important role.

In *Fj* 20 and 24, we hear about *Mímameiðr*, which, as previously mentioned, is likely to be a synonym for Yggdrasill. Part of the evidence for this interpretation comes from 20/2-3 *en þat mangi veit/ af hverjum rótum renn* 'and no one knows from which roots it comes', which has an almost exact parallel in *Hávm* 138/8-9 where there can hardly be any doubt that it is the World Tree which is referred to. In addition, the tree's supernatural resistance to fire and iron, as well as the fact that it falls before that which nobody expects, must refer to Yggdrasill's function as the measurer of time (Steinsland 1979; Schjødt 1992b), as its destruction is synonymous with Ragnarǫk.

Stanza 24 is considerably more difficult but, in spite of all the difficulties, it is clear that we are confronted with a tree that has special significance. Even though the information that is given is not otherwise known in connection with the World Tree, the fact that the cock Viðófnir is present among the branches of the tree is one indicator that we are dealing with Yggdrasill, upon which many animals are present (*Grí* 32-4), as is the mention of Surtr whose eschatological function is testified to in *Vafðr* 51 and elsewhere.

It is of some interest that the length of the vowel in *Míma-* is uncertain,[22] but that in itself cannot be decisive in the identification of Mími and Mímir. As it will emerge, the placing of Mímir near Yggdrasill is incontrovertible, and the name *Mímameiðr* for the World Tree is, therefore, in agreement with our mythological knowledge.

Vafðr 45 refers to *Hoddmímis holt* 'Treasure-Mímir's wood'. The expression reminds us partly of Hodddrofnir in *Sigdr* and partly of *Mímameiðr* in *Fj*. The reference to Mímir's wealth is probably to be understood in connection with his intellect, and the very expression is, as most scholars agree, a circumlocution for Yggdrasill.[23] We do not know from any other sources that a couple named Líf and Lífþrasir survive the mighty winter (*fimbulvetr*).[24] Snorri, who paraphrased this stanza, argues that it is the burning of the world they avoid in Treasure-Mímir's wood, probably in order to maintain the logic of his own version of Ragnarǫk. The deciding factor seems to be that the human couple survive in the centre of the world, a place which in all horizontally oriented cosmologies (cf. Schjødt 1990a) is in possession of a special 'holiness' (Eliade 1969a, 51), and which, in connection with Mímir, is named after him.

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[22] So SG III, 1, 412.

The last poetic source to be discussed in connection with Mímir is *Grí* 50. It is one of the most difficult, as the reading of the text is uncertain and the myth it refers to is otherwise unknown. It has to do with the fact that Óðinn has visited a giant by the name of Sǫkkmímir (also Sekmímir in *þulur*, although with variations in the manuscripts, and *Yt* 2), whom he apparently killed.[25] Now, it is uncertain if Mímir is to be understood as a giant at all, and the myth thus cannot be taken as a clear indication that it is about the same character that is known from other sources. Nor does the name itself provide a compelling argument, as it may have two very different meanings depending on the form of its first element. If we read Sǫkmímir, the first element may mean 'battle', a possible meaning of the feminine noun *sǫk*, normally 'charge, lawsuit, legal action.'[26] The Codex Regius manuscript seems, however, in Wimmer's and Jónsson's photo-technical edition (Wimmer and Jónsson 1891, 20) to indicate that a double consonant is more likely (*sǫcc-*) and in that case we get Sǫkkmímir – Mímir in the abyss (cf. LP: *sǫkk* n.). Such a descriptive name could be in agreement with the information we have elsewhere about Mímir, but the name remains uncertain and there is nothing in the other sources that lets us suppose that Óðinn killed Mímir.[27] Snorri gives a completely different version of Mímir's killing. Both here and in *Yt* 2 (in which the name also appears with a single consonant) and in *þulur* Sǫkk/SǫkMímir is associated with giants who, judging by the other sources do not seem to have anything to do with Mímir. The suggestion of wisdom that is connoted by the very name *Mímir* can be explained by association with the great age of the giants and, as a consequence, the knowledge that is attributed to many of them.

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[23] There is one problem in that *holt* does not mean a single tree but a wood or forest (Martin 1972, 126 with references). However, the usage here is probably an example of a metonymical connection between the concept of wood/forest and tree.

[24] Olrik 1902, 167-75 argued that the 'Fimbul Winter' in certain areas of Scandinavia referred to the very destruction of the human race or Ragnarǫk itself (1902, 169) and not, as Snorri argues, only a prelude to it. It is not impossible, but Olrik's argument seems too rationalistic: 'Menneskeparret i Hoddmimes skov er i læ for vinteren; men for en verdensbrand eller en verdensdrukning vil skoven jo være til liden nytte' 'The human couple in Hoddmímir's forest is sheltered from the winter; but against a global fire or a drowning of the world, the forest would, after all, be of little benefit'. True, there is logic in myths, but their logic is on another level, and in the face of certain problems, e.g. how a whole world can be destroyed and at the same time individual beings (both gods and humans) can survive, even the myths have to give up, and this holds good not only for Scandinavia.

[25] It is not certain whether *Sǫccmímir* is identical with Miðviðnir's son who is mentioned later in the same stanza and, if that is so, whether it is him that Óðinn has killed.

In Snorri's writings, we get various pieces of information about Mímir, some of which are based on the poems examined above. Moreover, Snorri gives us some very interesting pieces of information about him that we do not know from other sources, and he also gives us an insight into some connections that are obscure in the poems. *Gylf* 15 establishes a connection between Mímir's well and the World Tree, which supports the interpretation of *Fj*'s statement about *Mímameiðr* as an alternative name for Yggdrasill. Furthermore, we learn that there is wisdom in the well, that Mímir himself is filled with wisdom, and that the well is placed under the root that leads to the frost giants.

According to Snorri, Mímir's wisdom results from his drinking from the well out of Gjallarhorn, which, as already mentioned, seems illogical in consideration of the fact that *Vsp* 28 is paraphrased and quoted immediately afterwards, and of the general interpretation of this passage being that Valfǫðr's pledge is Óðinn's eye. But Snorri obviously had problems with the myth, demonstrated by his mention of Mímir's drinking from the Gjallarhorn as well as his quotation of the stanza in which it is stated that he drinks from Valfǫðr's pledge. In his own voice, Snorri adds the information that identifies this pledge with Oðinn's eye. *A priori*, it seems most likely that a liquid is drunk from a horn, and it is, therefore, understandable that some scholars have placed a question mark against the traditional interpretation of *Vsp* 28 and thought that there could be something in Snorri's assertion about Gjallarhorn, not least because a horn appears in several places in the poetical sources alongside the mention of Mímir (Simpson 1962, 52-3).

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[26] So Gering (SG III, 1, 195). For other meanings of this word, see *LP*: *sǫk*.

[27] In this regard I must declare myself in complete disagreement with Drobin 1991, 102 and 127, who claims that *Sigdr* 14 gives the impression that it is Óðinn who has cut off Mímir's head (cf. Dörner 1993, 48).

Fleck (1971, 399), as mentioned earlier, is of this opinion and canvassed two possibilities: that *veð Valfǫðrs* might be either the horn or the mead itself. However, he did not comment on 28/7-10 *alt veit ec, Óðinn,/ hvar þu auga falt:/ í inom mæra Mímis brunni* 'I know everything, Odin, where you hid your eye, in the famous well of Mimir.' His failure to comment here is problematical as the meaning of the lines can hardly be other than that Óðinn has placed his eye in the well, an action for which we are not given any support elsewhere. Naturally, we can assume that there were two myths in existence or two variants of a single myth, one in which Óðinn has given some pledge or other from which Mímir is able to drink (the mead or the horn), and another in which he, for some unknown reason, has put his eye in the well. Such a reconstruction must remain completely hypothetical. Sigurður Nordal's understanding (cf. above note 14) ought also to be considered here. It avoids the problem that results from the idea that Mímir drinks from the eye, because it represents him as drinking from the liquid in which the eye lies. However, if Sigurður is correct that the eye gives strength to the liquid, which is possible, then it seems illogical that Snorri should argue that Óðinn wished to drink, but first had to give his eye as a pledge: what could Óðinn's motive be, to wish to drink when the liquid does not acquire power until the eye is in it? In that case it must be Mímir who benefits from the transaction.[28] Moreover, it seems most likely that the liquid in itself possesses a knowledge potential (cf. the skaldic mead and the mead of knowledge) from which Mímir, who drinks every morning, becomes wise (cf. *Vsp* 28). Even so, we cannot completely rule out Sigurður's proposition, but Snorri's interpretation, nevertheless, seems to show traces of a misunderstanding of *Vsp*.

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[28] Kure (2006) has elaborated on Sigurður's idea. He says (p. 537): 'As a pledge (as opposed to a payment or a sacrifice) the eye is still his and works to his benefit….'. This theory must certainly also be taken into consideration.

The most likely hypothesis is to suppose that Óðinn hides his eye in the well (which, among others things, explains why he has only one eye) in order to gain something, but this something can hardly be the mead itself, an interpretation for which there is no support in other places than in Snorri, but rather the words that Mímir's head becomes capable of uttering after it has drunk from the liquid. A further problem is the connection between the liquid in Mímir's well and the mead of knowledge, which we will examine below. If the mead were to be Óðinn's pledge, as was suggested by Fleck, he already had it, and it would therefore not be necessary to pay with his eye in order to get permission to drink it.

It does not seem possible to reconstruct a narrative sequence that both has support in the texts and at the same time explains all the different elements in this myth-complex.[29] Moreover, there are simply too many elements of uncertainty. Their coherence remains obscure, and the only thing that seems to be certain is that there is an exchange of knowledge in which Óðinn's eye[30] and especially the liquid in Mímir's well play a part. But even this affirmation of salient details is important because it shows that Óðinn on the one hand has transferred an object to Mímir and on the other has obtained a benefit from it, which consists in knowledge. It is also of great importance that Mímir, who is stated in *Gylf* 8 to be *fullr af visindum* 'full of learning', obtains his knowledge from a well from which he drinks.

We are also informed in *Gylf* 15 that Mímir's well is located under that one of Yggdrasill's three roots which leads to the frost giants. The information is given in Snorri's own narrative, whereas the three roots are testified to in *Grí* 31. Several scholars have thought that Snorri's three wells are the product of systematisation, which the learned Icelander introduced himself (eg. Turville-Petre 1964, 279; Holtsmark 1964, 47), and it is true that we do not know elsewhere about three wells that are each connected to a separate world. If this assumption is correct, we have to ask why Snorri associates Mímir with the root that reached to the frost giants or the giants in general. The answer may be that Snorri here builds upon such sources as *Grí* 50, *þulur* and *Yt* 2, as the *Sǫkkmímir* mentioned there is the only 'Mímir' that can be understood to be a giant. Although most scholars, as a matter of course, have accepted Mímir's status as a giant, there is only a very small amount of evidence that points in that direction apart from *Gylf* 15 and, in any case, he is first and foremost characterised as living with the Æsir, as we are told in *Yng* 4 (cf. Haudry 2001, 304). That he descends from a giant family is not impossible, as we shall see in connection with the analysis of Óðinn's self-hanging about which it has been suggested that Óðinn's maternal uncle perhaps should be identified with Mímir (cf. Drobin 1991, 110). But in that case he appears fundamentally different from normal giants, whose wisdom is connected specifically with memory. In spite of the etymology of his name, it emerges clearly that Mímir is able to do other things than simply tell about the past.

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[29] Cf. also Drobin 1991, 105: 'De myter som ligger bakom pantsättningen av Odins öga och bakom Heimdalls hlióð har gått förlorande. Ett synes emellertid stå fast: Mjödet participierar i den mytiska kosmografin och Odin och Heimdall participierar i mjödet; den som dricker därav blir vis genom att bli delaktig i det gudomliga vetandet' 'The myths that form the basis for the pledge of Odin's eye and Heimdall's *hlióð* have been lost. One thing seems, however, to be certain: the mead participates in the mythical cosmosgraphy and Odin and Heimdall participate in the mead; the one who drinks from it becomes wise by participating in the divine knowledge'. Drobin has several interesting observations in this article, but interprets a series of details quite differently from my own interpretation.

[30] It must be considered likely that the eye has something to do with 'inner sight' – the function of Óðinn in the mythology taken into consideration (cf. Lassen 2003a, 88-92).

In *Gylf* 51, we learn that Óðinn rides to Mímir's well and gets advice from him. The whole passage concerning Ragnarǫk (Faulkes 2005, 49-53) is almost a paraphrase with certain additions of the Ragnarǫk account in *Vsp*, which is also quoted. In that connection it is worth noticing that *Míms hǫfuð* 'Mímr's head' is not mentioned explicitly in Snorri's prose interpretation. We hear here, on the other hand, about *Mímis brunnr* 'Mímir's well', which is not mentioned in *Vsp* 46, and Snorri must, therefore, have seen a connection between the head and the well – a connection that cannot have been decided from knowledge he had from other known sources.

There is hardly any doubt that, behind all the fragmentary statements we have examined up to now, there lies a narrative sequence or a myth, which told how Óðinn's eye, Mímir's well, which probably contained runic wisdom, and Mímir's head were closely connected with each other. We get part of the explanation in *Yng* 4.

The myth that Snorri relates in *Yng* 4 is the only one that forms a complete narrative sequence with Mímir at its centre, and it gives some conclusive information about him, although it does not fill all the lacunae. He was sent to the Vanir as a hostage, and specifically as a kind of guarantor of peace. His direct opposite in the exchange is Kvasir, who is the most clever (*spakastr*) among the Vanir, but on the other hand not Njǫrðr and Freyr, who, according to Snorri's description, are exchanged with Hœnir (*en Æsir þar í mót þann, er Hœnir hét,* Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, 12). It is not until after this exchange that, almost as an addendum, one gets to know that Mímir, who is especially clever (*inn vitrasti maðr*) is also sent to the Vanir and is exchanged with Kvasir. It is evident that the Æsir got most out of this hostage-exchange, as Hœnir was apparently unable to fulfil any positive function, yet for unexplained reasons Mímir had to pay for Hœnir's irresoluteness by being beheaded. In addition, he was of benefit to Óðinn alone and not to the Vanir, as the latter sent the severed head back to the Æsir. Conversely, Njǫrðr's and Freyr's positive qualities were obviously useful to the Æsir and likewise those of Kvasir, to which we will return. When Óðinn received the severed head, he rubbed it with herbs in order to preserve it and sang incantations over it so that it could converse with him and tell him secret things from other worlds (*Yng* 7).

Thus Mímir had originally belonged to the circle of the Æsir, after which he stayed for a time with the Vanir where he was killed. His head was sent to the Æsir, and Óðinn, through his magic know-how, saw to it that it became capable of speech, telling him secret things. In this way, it came to acquire a role as a kind of instructor for Óðinn (Dumézil 1948, 164). In this text we have no less than three statements that have to do with Mímir's wisdom: a) he is called *inn vitrasti maðr* 'the wisest man'; b) he advises Hœnir: *Mímir kendi honum ráð ǫll* 'Mímir advised him in all things'; and c) his head *sagði honum* [Óðinn] *marga leynda hluti* 'his head told him [Óðinn] many occult things'. The adjective *vitr* means 'wise' (*Fritzner: vitr*) and seems, as far as meaning is concerned, to correspond closely to the word that is used to characterise Kvasir, *spakr*, although *spakr* usually signifies wisdom that derives from prophetic vision (Dumézil 1986, 222; cf. *AEW*: 531). Finally, we have in *Yng* 7 (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, 18) a statement that Óðinn possesses Mímir's head, which gives him information from other worlds, and in the same connection we learn that Óðinn restored the dead to life and sat down under the hanged (to learn their secrets). The only new information added is that the occult or secret things which are also mentioned in chapter 4 of the saga, more exactly is described as *tiðendi ór ǫðrum heimum* ‘tidings from other worlds’.

If we summarise the information gleaned from the heterogeneous source material surveyed so far, we arrive at the following précis: Mímir has a mythic history, which we hear of in *Ynglinga saga*, where we learn that he originally stayed with the Æsir in order to be sent to the Vanir as a hostage, forming an element in the conclusion of a pact. There he is beheaded because of what the Vanir consider a deception on the part of the Æsir. After this, his head is sent back to the Æsir where it is ‘quickened’ with the help of Óðinn’s magic. *Yng* does not tell us what happened to the head after this, except to say that it gives Óðinn knowledge. By connecting the statements in *Gylf* 51 and *Vsp* 28 and 46 it appears, however, that it is thought that the head resides in or near a well from which it drinks mead; on the other hand, it is only in *Gylf* 15 that we hear that it is thought that Óðinn also drinks from it. The well must be located in the immediate proximity of the World Tree (*Gylf* 15; *Vsp* 27 and 28), which is also called *Mímameiðr* (*Fj* 20 and 24). Whether Snorri’s understanding is correct is, as mentioned, doubtful, as *Vsp* 28 certainly support the idea that the eye has been placed in the well, but not that it constitutes a pledge. However, *Valfǫðrs veð* is, as we have seen, so problematical a concept, both with regard to the motivation for paying it and what it in fact consists of, that we cannot reach even an approximately certain interpretation of the motif, and we are not able to make a general reconstruction of a ‘Mímir myth’ on that basis.

The mythical landscape we encounter consists of a well and a tree, which should in all probability be understood as Yggdrasill. The idea that it is reasonable to see a connection between Mímir’s well and Mímir’s tree is not only supported by an *a priori* understanding of the two figures as identical. That identity is also based on a knowledge that the well and the tree, in both a mythic and a cultic sense, formed a complete representational complex. We know from Adam of Bremen (IV, 26 schol. 138; Trillmich 1973, 471), that the temple itself, the well and the tree had been placed in close proximity to one another at the sacred place in Uppsala.[31] *Vsp* 27 likewise strengthens the supposition about a 'landscape' consisting of a tree and a well, in which *Valfǫðrs veð* is also found (Fleck 1971, 385-94). It will thus be obvious that Mímir's head, which rules over or is found in or near the well,[32] has given the well and the tree the designations *Mímis brunnr* and *Mímameiðr*.

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[31] For me there is no reason to assume either that Adam’s description was taken from mythology or vice versa (cf. Gräslund 1999, 59 and Hultgård 1997, 24-7). Both sugges-

We have seen that knowledge is of absolutely central importance in connection with Mímir's role in the mythology, irrespective of how we interpret the details. In the texts considered so far, knowledge is expressed in three different ways: a) in the form of a fluid from the well (*Gylf* 15 and *Vsp* 28); b) in the form of speech (*Yng* 4 and 7; *Sigdr* 14; *Vsp* 46 and *Gylf* 38); and c) in the form of runes (*Sigdr* 13 and 14). Items b) and c) can be summarised as 'words' with a numinous content in written or oral form (Flowers 1986, 145-53). Both the head and the well thus have a clear affiliation with knowledge. The last item a) can either be identified with or seen as a parallel to *Urðarbrunnr* 'the well of Urðr', Urðr, one of the Norns, being a personification of fate, also placed in close proximity to the World Tree (*Vsp* 10). Its connection with knowledge is clear, as the Norns are characterised precisely as *margs vitandi* 'knowing much'(*Vsp* 20). The tree, whose role is, among other things, to function as an *axis mundi*, a role to be explained further later on, constitutes a direct connection between the different strata of the cosmos and is therefore the tree upon which Óðinn hangs himself and obtains knowledge (*Hávm* 138-41). Wisdom thus constitutes a kind of common denominator for head, tree and well, and for this reason any doubt as to the identity of Mímir, Mímr and Mími as one and the same being seems to be unfounded. Besides, 'knowledge' is the concept that best describes the relationship between Óðinn and Mímir, as the subject of the transmission of knowledge from Mímir to Óðinn is a constant theme, irrespective of the interpretation of the details in the Mímir-complex.

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tions seem hypercritical, and the parallelism between cult and myth must in a religio-phenomenological perspective *a priori* be considered probable.

[32] It seems to have been firmly established from Celtic parallels that the combination head and well represents a fixed complex (Ross 1962, 41; Simpson 1962, 49-50) in both Celtic and Germanic religion. For a discuşsion of the relationship between the well and the tree, see Bauschatz 1982, 19-29, although his treatment is primarily about Urðr's well.

Sequence analysis

We will now consider how the different elements that are contained in the only narrative sequence that we have about Mímir are related to one another and to some of the elements in the rest of the Mímir-complex. Let us once more sketch the myth: Mímir is sent to the Vanir alive in connection with a peace agreement and, although he is wise, the Vanir do not think that they get anything out of his wisdom. He is therefore killed by being beheaded, as the Vanir consider the hostage-exchange a deception on the Æsir's part. His head, which is now separated from the body, is sent to the Æsir and here it becomes Óðinn's special property; from then on it functions excellently as his advisor. If we pause for a moment, we will see how the narrative's unfolding of this story separates out some oppositional pairs, and how these are organised in relation to the initial phase with the Æsir and the following phase with the Vanir: peace agreement versus killing, life versus death, body/whole versus head/part. Furthermore, it appears that the Vanir, whose most important function in myth and religion is wealth and fertility (Schjødt 1991a), cannot exploit Mímir's potential capacities and therefore send his head back to Óðinn, who, in his role as magician,[33] activates it and makes very good use of the capacities Mímir possesses.

At one level, we can read the myth as an explanation of how Óðinn became the deity to receive the knowledge that Mímir represents. The living Mímir belongs in the myth's initial phase to a collective of Æsir and afterwards becomes a part of a collective of Vanir. It is in this phase that the decisive transformation takes place as he is killed in order then to be 'divested' of his body and to function as a pure fund of knowledge or pure intellect, to be sent back to the Æsir and made eternal (or in any case to be given good keeping qualities) by Óðinn, who is apparently the only one who has access to this well of knowledge. In this sense, we can talk of an aetiology since, to use Dumézil's terminology, we get an argument for why the first function represents this aspect of the intellectual (cf. R. Boyer 1986, 132-41) and not the third function, although the Vanir are also mentioned as wise (*Vsp* 24) and have a kind of connection with wisdom. We will come back to this subject in Chapter 10.

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[33] Examples of descriptions and mythic relations that associate Óðinn with magic are legion, and his function as the god of magic *par excellence*, will be further supported in what follows. Boyer (1986, 135) characterises Óðinn as 'l'archétype … du magicien dans le Nord' 'the archetype … of the magician in Scandinavia'.

There is, however, a deeper level in the Mímir-complex, because we are establishing a connection between three key concepts in this investigation: knowledge, death and fertility. Mímir is sent to the Vanir, who control fertility and who, like most fertility gods, have a chthonic aspect (Schjødt 1991a, 305-7; cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 215 and Chapter 10). This means that Mímir is sent to the underworld, which is the Vanir's residence in the vertical cosmological model,[34] and dies there. Back in the upper world with the Æsir, his head denotes pure intellect, which also remains the sphere in which he functions in the rest of the mythic narrative; but at the same time he is in a state between life and death,[35] as he has been transformed from an entity consisting of a body *and* a head, of instincts[36] *and* intellect to one consisting only of the last-named. Nevertheless, in spite of his physical death, he is intellectually more alive than ever before, and the myth indicates by this that, although the connection is not expressed explicitly, there exists a relationship between physical death and intellectual life. In any case, it is clear that the realisation of this knowledge first occurs as a consequence of a stay in the underworld, a death, and a return back to the upper world in a new form.

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[34] The problematic nature of the cosmology in Scandinavian religion has been taken up in various papers. Several scholars realise that we must operate with two cosmic models, viz. a horizontal one and a vertical one (cf. Meletinskij 1973, Gurevich 1969, Hastrup 1981 and Schjødt 1990a).

[35] Cf. Simpson 1962, 50: '…he belongs neither to the world of the living, nor wholly to that of the dead; there is thus no real contradiction between passages where he seems living and active, drinking the waters of his own well, and those where he seems merely to respond to Óðinn's necromantic arts.' This statement is entirely correct, and it may be added that in both connections it is presumably the head that communicates with Óðinn and not the entire person who, because of his journey to the underword, has become 'pure intellect', expressed through the physical metaphor of a head without a body.

[36] It is not made explicit in this context that the body connotes the instincts, as the main point of the myth is the creation of pure intellect, but there is no doubt that the under-emphasised, but structurally secure role of the body in relation to the head is to be the dwelling-place of the non-intellectual part of the person. In addition, we can also see that it is precisely the Vanir who are characterised by bodily attributes that clearly serve to promote sexuality (Freyr is phallic, whereas Freyja is so beautiful that she is desired sexually by both gods and giants).

When we work with the opposition life versus death, it is important to pay attention to the fact that there are two kinds of life, namely on the one hand a life which takes place before death, and is characterised both by physical and intellectual activity, the last of which, however, cannot be manifested ,and on the other hand a 'life' that cannot be lived until after physical death, an intellectual life that flourishes and manifests itself in that world where Óðinn is the divine king.

As we have seen, wisdom acquires concrete expression in words and drink. Mímir, we are told, drinks daily mead from Valfǫðr's pledge. Irrespective of its connection with this pledge, we are dealing with a knowledge-drink, and thereby a strong semantic affinity, if not an identity, is established between the content of Mímir's mead-well and the mead that Óðinn steals from Suttungr, which we will consider in the next section. At this point we seem to encounter a paradox: Óðinn is dependent upon the mead, but he is also dependent on the wisdom that comes from Mímir's head. It cannot be denied that we have here a double expression of the means of obtaining knowledge. Óðinn *has* after all had the mead himself, he *has* received Mímir's head, he could merely drink of the mead *himself*. This may be considered to imply that either Mímir or the mead is superfluous. We are dealing here with a redundancy that is characteristic of almost all myths and which is in no way superfluous, but on the contrary gives the myth special dimensions by tying several different narrative sequences into the construction of the semantic universe which it is their task to establish. The liquid as well as Mímir are necessary in order to legitimise and explain that reality in which the Scandinavian people lived and which finds expression in the notion that numinous power could be obtained through the consumption of mead that, among other things, had a sacral character, and through the communication of words; it is precisely the Mímir-complex that shows that the two forms of obtaining knowledge are inseparable: Mímir drinks and utters wise words which Óðinn receives.

The mead is located in a well or a spring.[37] Whichever of these two words we choose as a translation of *brunnr* is of little significance because an important characteristic is present in both of them: the visible part is located in the upper world, but the source comes from the underworld. As we know that the spring is literally a source of knowledge, it becomes clear that it is this knowledge that flows forth from the underworld in order to be used in the upper world. With this we get yet another indication that the tree and the well are located within the same semantic field, as both are vertically oriented and therefore contribute to creating a possibility for communication between the upper world and the underworld.[38] The roots of the tree are also in the underworld, whereas its visible manifestations are in the upper world.

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[37] Bauschatz 1982, 16-19 has a detailed discussion of the possible meanings of *brunnr*.

This quality of the well establishes two further oppositional pairs, high versus low and manifest versus latent. As hinted at above, and as I shall argue in Chapter 10, it is probable that the Vanir have a chthonic association, and this is made more likely through the high/low dichotomy, which is consituted at the cosmic level but can be found also at an anthropological level, because the head/body-dichotomy,[39] irrespective of what other connotations it may have, also involves a high/low dichotomy. A further characteristic of all the oppositional pairs mentioned so far is that the one pole constitutes a manifestation of the latent content that lies in the other. The value of the tree and the well as metaphors in this regard is, as we have seen, exemplary; but the same can also be said for the anthropological opposition, because Mímir was wise before the hostage exchange and while he lived with the Vanir, but the latter were not able to use this wisdom, even to the point where they felt that they had been deceived by the Æsir. It is not until *after* the head has been sent back to the Æsir that Mímir's knowledge becomes manifest. In other words, there is something that could indicate that the underworld in the universe of the myth cannot manifest the knowledge that is undoubtedly present in latent form. And the very object of knowledge – Mímir's head and the mead itself – will not be able to be activated or manifested in the upper world until it has been around this mythical entity.

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[38] There has, presumably, also been an association between the *aurr* that showers Yggdrasill (*Vsp* 19) and the liquid in the well (cf. Dörner 1993, 46 and Chapter 10 below), just as the well, when it is thematised as Urðr's, plays a part in the creation of mankind (Johansson 2000b, 53).

[39] It is impossible to differentiate in this connection between head versus body on the one hand and head versus whole on the other. In the Mímir-complex, the body is not connoted as positive, but only as a negation of the head, and as such 'wholeness' in the unfolding of the myth is to be seen as parallel to 'body'. It is not until the severed head is introduced that we meet the positively connoting pole in the oppositional pair.

The high/low dichotomy also contains a couple of ‘sociological’ connotations, because the group that is ‘low’ participates in the third function, whereas the other one participates in the first and second functions (Dumézil 1959, 3-39). In addition, the Vanir, aside from the hostages, are an apparently undifferentiated collective, not only here but throughout the entire mythology, whereas the Æsir group is extremely individualised and, in connection with Mímir, it is exclusively Óðinn we hear about. This is undoubtedly connected with the etiological aspect mentioned above, and accentuates Óðinn’s paramount importance in representations of numinous knowledge and its procurement.

The final point to be made about the Mímir-complex in the context of the acquisition of numinous knowledge is that it inverts the traditional structure of the Vanir as fertility gods and Óðinn as god of the dead, for Mímir is with the Vanir when he is killed, whereas Óðinn makes him intellectually active, though he does not restore him to life. This inversion reveals the ambiguity of the underworld as the domain of both death and fertility, something we know from most other archaic religions, too.

In summarising the results of this preliminary analysis, we are able to establish the following fundamental elements: the narrative structure of the myth-sequence, which we only find explicitly in *Yng*, gives us an explanation of and a reason why exactly it is Óðinn who is in possession of numinous knowledge, the nature of which we cannot yet be specific about, except to state that it can be effected partly as words and partly as a drink. We have also seen that there is a quite definite relationship between death and knowledge. When he is alive, Mímir is passive and unable to function, whereas after his physical death he is made active so that his intellect can manifest itself as the giver of wisdom to Óðinn. With this it becomes clear that death is understood as a relative condition, and it is more than hinted at that death is the prerequisite for the active use of knowledge.

Furthermore, we have seen that the myth is composed of a series of semantic oppositions: peace agreement versus killing, Æsir versus Vanir, physical life versus physical death, intellectual life versus physical death,[40] manifest versus latent and high versus low (on both a cosmological and an anthropological axis). Apart from the first of these oppositions, which exists exclusively in the narrative sequence and which is only elaborated here and in the Kvasir-complex,[41] we will see that a mediating factor is added to the remaining pairs, namely Mímir himself, who moves between the Æsir and the Vanir, is both alive and dead, whose knowledge is both latent and manifest, and who resides in a physical state in the underworld and as intellect alone in the upper world. Besides, both the tree and the well also have the character of mediators in the high/low dichotomy, as this appears in connection with the knowledge-complex; and it is primarily in this that the unity of the Mímir-complex, doubted by some, resides: all elements contribute to the establishment of certain definite semantic oppositions.

Finally, we will briefly consider how the elements identified in Chapter 3 as determining the structure of initiation are implicated in the Mímir-complex. The situation is complicated by the fact that we are apparently dealing with two subjects, the one that moves to the underworld – Mímir, and the one that benefits in the final phase – Óðinn. This evident problem will be discussed later. For the time being, we must be content to conclude that both Mímir and Óðinn have reached an irreversibly higher status with regard to knowledge. Next, the myth operates with a tripartite horizontal sequence, namely Mímir's movement from the Æsir's world to that of the Vanir, which, as we will see in Chapter 10, is an 'Other World'. Here he is killed, but, after his return to the Æsir's world, he is made intellectually 'alive' by Óðinn. The majority of the oppositional pairs we have analysed so far are in a relationship describable as between 'This World' and 'The Other World' which, in turn, can be characterised as non-liminal versus liminal. Finally, we have seen that knowledge is absolutely central in relation to the object obtained, which is Mímir's head, and that this object plays a role for Óðinn right up to Ragnarǫk and thus has significance in the final phase of the mythic sequence.

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[40] In Chapter 10, we shall discuss in detail the death-life complex in relation to the terms physical and intellectual, where they will be related to the three phases, pre-chthonic, chthonic and post-chthonic.

[41] This contrast is only of limited importance for the initiation-complex and will, therefore, not be elaborated on further. Seen in the light of Dumézil's comparative investigation of this theme, we can glimpse the outline of a myth that contributes to the creation of the society of the gods, which coincides with a killing that could perhaps be interpreted as a sacrifice. In the same way as Ymir is 'sacrified' in the cosmogony, Mímir and Kvasir are 'sacrificed' in the sociogony (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 152-9 and 197-8).

5.2 Kvasir

Inextricably bound up with the Mímir-complex is the mythical sequence that deals with Kvasir and the theft of the mead of knowledge. One could in fact speak of two different myths, but we will discover that there are good reasons to accept the close connection which Snorri expresses in his version of the story in *Skm* (Faulkes 1998, I, 3-5). In contrast to the Mímir-complex, it seems that the main points connected with both Kvasir and the theft are fairly fixed, which is due to the fact that the two main sources both have the character of a narrative. The various references to the complex that are dispersed in the sources are reasonably easy to arrange in relation to the narrative sequence, although certain interpretations are not compelling in themselves.

The sources

The two most important sources are *Hávm* 104-10 and *Skm* 57-8.
Hávm 104-10 reads:

104 I visited the old giant, now I've come back,
didn't get much there from being silent;
with many words I spoke to my advantage
in Suttung's hall.

105 Gunnlod gave me from her golden throne
a drink of the precious mead;
a poor reward I let her have in return,
for her open-heartedness,
for her heavy spirit.

106 With the mouth of the auger I made space for myself

and gnawed through the stone;
over me and under me went the paths of the giants,
thus I risked my head.

107 The cheaply bought beauty I made good use of,
the wise lack for little;
for Odrerir has now come up
to the rim of the sanctuaries of men.

108 I am in doubt as to whether I would have come
back from the courts of the giants,
if I had not made use of Gunnlod, that good woman,
and put my arms about her.

109 The next day the frost-giant went
to ask of the High One's advice, in the High One's hall;
they asked about Bolverk: whether he was amongst the gods,
or whether Sutting had slaughtered him.

110 I thought Odin had sworn a sacred ring-oath,
how can his word be trusted!
He left Suttung betrayed at the feast
and made Gunnlod weep. [42] (Larrington 1996, 28-9)

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[42]

104 Inn aldna iǫtun ec sótta,
nú em ec aptr kominn,
fát gat ec þegiandi þar;
mǫrgom orðom
mælta ec í minn frama
í Suttungrs sǫlom.

105 Gunnlǫð mér um gaf
gullnom stóli á
drycc ins dýra miaðar;

ill iðgiǫld
lét ec hana eptir hafa
síns ins heila hugar,
síns ins svára sefa.

106 Rata munn
létomc rúms um fá
oc um griót gnaga;
yfir oc undir
stóðomc iǫtna vegir,
svá hætta ec hǫfði til.

107 Vel keyptz litar
hefi ec vel notið,
fás ec fróðom vant;
þvíat Óðrerir
er nú upp kominn
á elda vés iaðar.

108 Ifi er mér á,
at ec væra enn kominn
iǫtna gǫrðom ór,
ef ec Gunnlaðar né nytac,
innar góðo kono,
þeirar er lǫgðomc arm yfir.

109 Ins hindra dags
gengo Hrímþursar,
Háva ráðs at fregna,
Háva hǫllo í;
at Bǫlverki þeir spurðo,
ef hann væri með bǫndom kominn
eða hefði hánom Suttungr of sóit.

110 Baugeið Óðinn
hygg ec at unnit hafi,
hvat scal hans trygðom trúa?
Suttungr svikinn
hann lét sumbli frá
oc grœtta Gunnlǫðo.
(NK 1962, 33-4)

Skm 57-8:

> 'How did this craft that you call poetry originate?' Bragi replied: 'The origin of it was that the gods had a dispute with the people called Vanir, and they appointed a peace-conference and made a truce by this procedure, that both sides went up to a vat and spat their spittle into it. But when they dispersed, the gods kept this symbol of truce and decided not to let it be wasted, and out of it made a man. His name was Kvasir, he was so wise that no one could ask him any questions to which he did not know the answer. He travelled widely through the world teaching people knowledge, and when he arrived as a guest to some dwarfs, Fialar and Galar, they called him to a private discussion with them and killed him. They poured his blood into two vats and a pot, and the latter was called Odrerir, but the vats were called Son and Bodn. They mixed honey with the blood and it turned into the mead whoever drinks from which becomes a poet or a scholar. The dwarfs told the Æsir that Kvasir had suffocated in intelligence because there was no one there educated enough to be able to ask him questions.
>
> 'Then these dwarfs invited to stay with them a giant called Gilling and his wife. Then the dwarfs invited Gilling to go out to sea in a boat with them. But as they went along the coast the dwarfs rowed on to a shoal and the boat capsized. Gilling could not swim and was drowned, but the dwarfs righted their boat and rowed to land. They told his wife what had happened and she was greatly distressed and wept loudly. Then Fialar asked her if it would be some consolation for her if she looked out to the sea where he had drowned, and she agreed. Then he told his brother Galar that he was to go up above the doorway she was going out of and drop a millstone on her head, and declared he was weary of her howling; and Galar did so. When Gilling's son Suttung found out about this, he went there and seized the dwarfs and took them out to the sea and put them on a skerry below high-water level. They begged Suttung for quarter and offered him as atonement in compensation for his father the precious mead, and they were reconciled on these terms. Suttung took the mead

home with him and put it for safe keeping in a place called Hnitbiorg, setting his daughter Gunnlod in charge of it. That is why we call poetry Kvasir's blood or the dwarfs' drink or the contents or some term for liquid of Odrerir or Bodn or Son, or dwarfs' transportation, because this mead brought them deliverance from the skerry, or Suttung's mead or Hnitbiorg.'

Then spoke Ægir: 'I think it is an obscure way to talk to call poetry by these names, but how did the Æsir get hold of Suttung's mead?'

Bragi replied: 'There is this story about it that Odin set out from home and came to where nine slaves were mowing hay. He asked if they would like him to hone their scythes. They said yes. Then he took a whetstone from his belt and honed, and they thought the scythes were cutting very much better and asked if they could buy the whetstone. The price he set on it was that he who wished to buy must give what was reasonable for it, and they all said they wanted to and bade him sell it to them, but he threw the whetstone up in the air, and when all tried to catch it they dealt with each other in a way that they all cut each other's throats with the scythes. Odin sought lodging for the night with a giant called Baugi, Suttung's brother. Baugi reckoned his economic affairs were going badly, and said his nine slaves had killed each other, and declared he did not know where he was going to get workmen from. Odin told him his name was Bolverk; he offered to take over the work of nine men for Baugi, and stipulated as his payment one drink of Suttung's mead. Baugi said he had no say in the disposal of the mead, said that Suttung wanted to have it all to himself, but he said he would go with Bolverk and try whether they could get the mead. Bolverk did the work of nine men for Baugi during the summer, and when winter came he asked Baugi for his hire. Then they both set off. Baugi told his brother Suttung of his agreement with Bolverk, but Suttung flatly refused a single drop of the mead. Then Bolverk told Baugi that they would have to try with some stratagem to see if they could get hold of the mead, and Baugi said that was a good idea. Then Bolverk got out an auger called Rati and instructed Baugi to bore a hole in the mountain, if the auger would cut. He did so. Then Baugi said that the mountain was bored through, but Bolverk blew into the auger-hole and the bits flew back up at him. Then he realized that Baugi was trying to cheat him, and told him to bore through the mountain. Baugi bored again. And when Bolverk blew a second time, the bits flew inwards. Then Bolverk turned himself into the form of a snake and crawled into the auger-hole, and Baugi stabbed after him with the auger and missed him. Bolverk went to where Gunnlod was and lay with her for three nights and then she let him drink three draughts of the mead. In the first draught he drank everything out of Odrerir, and in the second out of Bodn, and in the third out of Son, and then he had all the mead. Then he turned himself into the form of an eagle and flew as hard as he could. And when Suttung saw the eagle's flight he got his own eagle shape and flew after him. And when the Æsir saw Odin flying they put their containers out in the courtyard, and when Odin came in over Asgard he spat out the mead into the containers, but it was such a close thing for him that Suttung might have caught him that he sent some of the mead out backwards, and this was disregarded. Anyone took it that wanted it, and it is what we call the rhymester's share. But Odin gave Suttung's mead to the Æsir and to those people who are skilled at composing poetry. Thus we call poetry Odin's booty and find, and his drink and his gift and the Æsir's drink.[43] (Faulkes 1987, 61-4)

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[43] 'Hvaðan af hefir hafizk sú íþrótt, er þér kallið skálskap?' Bragi svarar: 'Þat vóro upphǫf til þess, at guðin hǫfðu ósætt við þat fólk, er Vanir heita, en þeir lǫgðu með sér friðstefnu ok settu grið á þá lund at þeir gengu hvárirtveggju til eins kers ok spýttu í hráka sínum. En at skilnaði þá tóku goðin ok vildu eigi láta týnask þat griðamark ok skǫpuðu þar ór mann. Sá heitir Kvasir. Hann er svá vitr at engi spyrr hann þeira hluta er eigi kann hann órlausn. Hann fór víða um heim at kenna mǫnnum frœði, ok þá er hann kom at heimboði til dverga nokkvorra, Fjalars ok Galars, þá kǫlluðu þeir hann með sér á einmæli ok drápu hann, létu renna blóð hans í tvau ker ok einn ketil ok heitir sá Óðreyrir, en kerin heita Són ok Boðn. Þeir blendu hunangi við blóðit, ok varð þar af miǫðr sá er hverr er af drekkr, verðr skáld eða frœðamaðr. Dvergarnir sǫgðu ásum at Kvasir hefði kafnat í manviti firir því at engi var þar svá fróðr at spyrja kynni hann fróðleiks.

Þá buðu þessir dvergar til sín jǫtni þeim er Gillingr heitir ok konu hans. Þá buðu dvergarnir Gillingi at róa á sæ með sér. En er þeir fóru firir land fram, røru dvergarnir á boða, ok hvelfði skipinu. Gillingr var ósyndr ok týndisk hann, en dvergarnir réttu sitt skip ok reru til landz. Þeir sǫgðu konu hans þenna atburð, en hon kunni illa ok grét hátt. Þá spurði Fjalarr hana ef henni myndi hugléttara ef hon sæi út á sæinn þar er hann hafði týnzk, en hon vildi þat. Þá mælti hann við Galar, bróður sinn, at hann skal fara upp yfir dyrrnar er hon gengi út ok láta kvernstein falla í hǫfuð henni ok talði sér leiðask óp hennar, ok svá gerði hann. Þá er þetta spurði Suttungr, bróðurson [W and U have son] Gillings, ferr han til ok tók dvergana ok flytr á sæ út ok setr þá í flœðarsker. Þeir biðja Suttungr sér lífsgriða ok bjóða honum til sættar í fǫðurgiǫld mjǫðinn dýra, ok þat verðr at sætt með þeim. Flytr Suttungr mjǫðinn heim ok hirðir þar sem heita Hnitbjǫrg, setr þar til gæzlu dóttur sína Gunnlǫðu. Af þessu kǫllum vér skáldskap Kvasis blóð eða dverga drekku eða fylli eða nakkvars konar lǫg Óðreris eða Boðnar eða Sónar eða farskost dverga, fyrir því at sá miǫðr flutti þeim fiǫrlausn ór skerinu, eða Suttunga miǫð eða Hnitbiarga lǫgr.'

Þá mælti Ægir: 'Myrkt þykki mér þat mælt at kalla skáldskap með þessum heitum. En hvernig kómu þeir æsir at Suttunga miði?'

Bragi svarar: 'Sjá saga er til þess at Óðinn fór heiman ok kom þar er þrælar níu slógu hey. Hann spyrr ef þeir vili at hann brýni ljá þeira. Þeir iáta því; þá tekr hann hein af belti sér ok brýndi, en þeim þótti bíta ljárnir myklu betr ok fǫluðu heinina. En hann mat svá at sá er kaupa vildi skyldi gefa við hóf, en allir kváðusk vilia ok báðu hann sér selja, en hann kastaði heininni í lopt upp. En er allir vildu henda, þá skiptusk þeir svá við at hverr brá ljánum á háls ǫðrum.

Óðinn sótti til náttstaðar til jǫtuns þess er Baugi hét, bróðir Suttungs. Baugi kallaði ilt fjárhald sitt ok sagði at þrælar hans níu hǫfðu drepizk, en taldiz eigi vita sér ván verkmanna. En Óðinn nefndisk fyrir honum Bǫlverkr. Hann bauð at taka upp níu manna verk fyrir Bauga, en mælir sér til kaups einn drykk af Suttunga miði. Baugi kvazk enskis ráð eiga af miðinum, sagði at Suttungr vildi einn hafa, en fara kvezk hann mundu með Bǫlverki of freista af þeir fengi mjǫðinn. Bǫlverkr vann um sumarit níu mannsverk fyrir Bauga, en at vetrí beiddisk hann Bauga leigu sinnar. Þá fara þeir báðir til Suttungs. Baugi segir Suttungi bróður sínum kaup þeira Bǫlverks, en Suttungr synjar þverlega hvers dropa af miðinum. Þá mælir Bǫlverkr til Bauga at þeir skyldu freista véla nokkvorra ef þeir megi ná miðinum, en Baugi lætr þat vel vera. Þá dregr Bǫlverkr fra nafar þann er Rati heitir ok mælir at Baugi skal bora bjargit ef nafarinn bítr. Hann gerir svá. Þá segir Baugi at gǫgnum er borat bjargit, en Bǫlverkr blæss í nafars raufina, ok hrjóta spœnirnir upp í móti honum. Þá fann hann at Baugi vildi svíkja hann ok bað bora gǫgnum bjargit. Baugi boraði enn. En er Bǫlverkr blés annat sinn, Þá fuku inn spœninir. Þá brásk Bǫlverkr í orms liki ok skreið í nafars raufina, en Baugi stakk eptir honum nafrinum ok misti hans. Fór Bǫlverkr þar til sem Gunnlǫð var ok lá hjá henni þrjár nætr, ok þá lofaði hon honum at drekka af miǫðinum þrjá drykki. Í inum fyrsta drykk drakk han allt ór Óðreri, en í ǫðrum ór Boðn, í inum þriðia ór Són ok hafði hann þá allan mjǫðinn. Þá brásk hann í arnaham ok flaug sem ákafast. En er Suttungr sá flug arnarins, tók hann sér arnaham ok flaug eptir honum. En er Æsir sá hvar Óðinn flaug þá settu þeir út í garðinn ker sín, en er Óðinn kom inn of Ásgarð, þá spýtti hann upp miðinum í kerin, en honum var þá svá nær komit at Suttungr mundi ná honum at hann sendi aptr

We hear about Kvasir again in *Gylf* 50 where he is one of the Æsir who come to Loki's house in order to catch Baldr's *ráðbani* 'contriver of death':

> And when the Æsir came to the house, the first one, who was the cleverest of all the Æsir, and whose name was Kvasir, went in. And when he saw the burned remnants of the net on the fire, he figured out that it might well be used to catch fish with, and he told the Æsir this.[44] (Faulkes 1987, 51)

In Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* 1 (Finnur Jónsson 1908-15 B 1, 177), Kvasir's name is the determinant in a kenning for poetry, *Kvasis dreyri* 'Kvasir's blood'.

There are other possible allusions to the myth about the mead, the most important of which is *Hávm* 13-14:

13 The heron of forgetfulness hovers over the ale-drinking;
he steals men's wit;
with the feathers of this bird I was fettered
in the court of Gunnlod.

14 Drunk I was, I was more than drunk
at wise Fialar's,
that's the best sort of ale-drinking when afterwards
every man gets his mind back again[45]. (Larrington 1996, 16)

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suman mjǫðinn, ok var þess ekki gætt. Hafði þat hverr er vildi, ok kǫllum vér þat skáldfífla hlut. En Suttunga mjǫð gaf Óðinn Ásunum ok þeim mǫnnum er yrkja kunnu. Því kǫllum vér skáldskapinn feng Óðins ok fund ok drykk hans ok gjǫf hans ok drykk Ásanna. (Faulkes 1998, I, 3-5)

[44] En er æsir kómu til hússins, þá gekk sá fyrst inn er allra var vitrastr, er Kvasir heitir. Ok er hann sá á eldinum fǫlskann er netit hafði brunnit þá skilði hann at þat mundi væl vera til at take fiska, ok sagði Ásunum. (Faulkes 2005, 48)

[45]

13 Óminnis hegri heitir,
sá er yfir ǫlðrom þrumir,
hann stelr geði guma;
þess fugls fiǫðrom

Finally, Kvasir appears also, as we saw in the previous section, in *Yng* 4.

As with the discussion of Mímir, we will also briefly examine the name Kvasir. One among several possibilities is the etymology that belongs to the same semantic field as modern Danish *kvase* 'to crush, squash, squelch' (*AEW*: 336), which can refer to pressing or crushing, as in the preparation of intoxicating drink, and in accordance with the myths, one can see Kvasir as a personification of intoxicating drink. This understanding is supported by the comparisons that Dumézil has made with Indian material, in which we find a figure, 'Mada', who is the personification of drunkenness and just like Kvasir is an important element in the peace agreement between the representatives of the first and second functions on the one hand and representatives of the third function on the other (Dumézil 1959, 32-7).[46] The etymological argument is not assured, so it will not play any further part in the following analysis and discussion.

Some viewpoints from the history of research

The myth-complex about Kvasir and the mead of knowledge has an important place in the history of research, which will only be dealt with

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ec fiǫtraðr varc
í garði Gunnlaðar.

14 Ǫlr ec varð,
varð ofrǫlvi
at ins fróða Fialars;
þvi er ǫlðr baztr,
at aptr uf heimtir
hverr sitt geð gumi.
(NK 1962, 19)

[46] It is difficult to determine whether the word can be connected to the Russian *kvas*, which means *säurliches Getränk* 'sour drink' (Vasmer 1950-8) and could thus be in semantic accord with Kvasir, as a personification of the mead, although *kvas* is not a very potent intoxicant. However, it is an open question whether or not the Russian and Scandinavian words are Indo-European cognates or whether the Russian word is a loan from Norse; if the latter, it could not have taken place before the Viking era (cf. Stender-Petersen 1927, 83-4).

summarily here.[47] Three contributions from the 1970s, which have been concerned with this myth-complex to a greater or lesser extent, will be briefly mentioned, because each of them contains observations of value for this investigation. These are an article by E. M. Meletinskij, a dissertation by R. Doht inspired by Otto Höfler and, finally, a book by the French Scandinavianist P. Renauld-Krantz.

Meletinskij's article 'Scandinavian Mythology as a System' from 1973 is one of the earliest contributions to research on Scandinavian mythology to be influenced by structuralism, and as such it is interesting, but at the same time it is especially difficult to work with, partly because of the almost complete lack of references and partly because it lacks precision and includes much incorrect information about the content of the sources. Meletinskij's understanding of the myth about Kvasir and the theft of the mead of wisdom (which only occupies a limited part of the article) is that the myth, as told by Snorri, actually contains three different 'plots', which

> … become one by virtue of the fact that the mead from the spittle of the gods is treated only as the spirit of the mead which has yet to be killed and transformed into food (although the very name Kvasir undoubtedly points to the fact that originally what was meant was a drink, which then was anthropomorphized, similar to Hindu soma), which the dwarfs do in fact carry out. Dwarfs in Scandinavian mythology are usually shown as demiurges, as wondrous master-craftmen (they make various 'treasures of the Aesir'). (1973, II, 67)

Meletinskij tries to place the myth of the theft of the mead in a larger mythological context and brings in, among other things, the myths about Óðinn's self-hanging and Mímir because, he says (1973, II, 72):

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[47] There has been a tendency to 'dissect' the myth to completely incoherent parts in order to trace its presumed historical development. Examples are Schneider 1936, Olrik 1925, and later researchers such as Doht (1974 231-4). Some, for example Mogk 1923 and Frank 1981, go even further and attribute to Snorri a considerable part in the creation of the individual elements. Some of these suggestions will be considered below in the interpretation of the myth.

> In this way, the sacred mead creates a vast semantic field, in which the mead on one level appears as a drink, revivifying one's forces and arousing inspiration, while on the other level it is a symbol of wisdom and poetry. Wisdom itself appears sometimes as a personal trait, at others as a kind of reserve of sacral information including mythological secret knowledge proper and magic incantations. It is for this reason that wisdom is symbolized by the mead drink and source or by a wise and living human being (Kvasir) or by the lifeless head of a wise man (Mímir). Correspondingly what is distinguished in the plots is the acquisition of wisdom, magic runes, sacred mead as a personal attribute or as a certain range of sacred information. The origin of the sacred mead is also distinguished – its acquisition by the commune of the Aesir, the shaman's receiving it for himself as a result of his elect status and painful consecration (in a series of variants), and the receiving of the mead after the completion of what is in principle a repetition of the ritual, generally the ritual drinking of the mead or beer at the feast.

There is no doubt that Meletinskij is here speaking about something essential in connection with the acquisition of knowledge in general in Scandinavian mythology, and that he gives us a superficial glimpse of the larger connection in which some of the myths in which Óðinn obtains knowledge are involved. Unfortunately, it is limited to the unelaborated hint that the mead in the myth may have two functions, each on its own level, to be a source of wisdom on the one hand and a life-giving force on the other, although, as Meletinskij observes immediately afterwards, the immortality-function in the mythology is taken care of by Iðunn's apples (1973, II, 75-7). He succeeds, however, in arguing convincingly for a connection between the myths about the theft of the mead and the theft of Iðunn's apples and the structural similarities between the two complexes, whereas he does not succeed in explaining an 'immortality-function' in the Kvasir myth itself. In addition, Meletinskij observes that the myth is etiological in the sense that it explains why it is Óðinn who is the owner of the mead, precisely because he occupies the role as a culture hero.

While I concur with the main thrust of Meletinskij's interpretation of the myth, it is important to be aware that his interpretation does not include all the essential elements either of the myth itself about Kvasir and the mead of wisdom, or of other relevant myth-complexes. Besides, his article is to some degree influenced by a traditional 'developmental' way of thinking in which one tries to account for 'original' versions, which is a quite different perspective from the one that is the basis for this book, although in fairness it must be said that these attempts only play a subordinate role in a structuralist-inspired comprehensive view (cf. Meletinskij 1976, 98-101).

A more detailed analysis is produced by Renauld-Krantz in his *Structures de la Mythologie Nordique* from 1972, which in several respects has points in common with Meletinskij and consequently also with the viewpoints in the present study. Renauld-Krantz is inspired by Dumézil, but also by scholars such as Eliade and the psychologist Bachelard (1972, 8-10) who have influenced his interpretation, including his use of the concept of 'archetype', evidently related to Jung's use of the term, although this is not said directly (eg. 1972, 8), and other terms taken from depth psychology. The phenomenology of religion likewise plays a considerable part, and Renauld-Krantz follows Eliade in his – often too uncritical – use of the term and of the concept of shamanism (e.g. 1972, 83, cf. Schjødt 2001). But in spite of these differences between his and my approach, there are also important points of contact. The most important of these appear in the chapters that deal with Óðinn as a magician (1972, 66-101). Renauld-Krantz shows how the two most important versions of the myth (in *Skm* and *Hávm*) can be seen without difficulty as mutually confirmatory and complementary (1972, 72-6), and that only the Baugi-episode should be considered 'spurious' (1972, 70). He further sees a connection between the liquid elements and femininity: 'Le liquide est d'essence feminine' 'liquid is the essence of the feminine' (1972, 74), and alcoholic drinks are especially closely connected to women's erotic powers. He states directly that Óðinn's acquisition of the intoxicating drink is equivalent to the act of lovemaking without, however, this being analytically clarified further; but that the two acts are interdependent will become evident below.

It is furthermore significant that Renauld-Krantz invokes the phenomenon of initiation with its widespread use of the symbolism of death and rebirth in connection with this myth. He observes that the water of life is a symbol of spiritual regeneration (1972, 75 and 82) that is taken from Mother Earth and brought to the surface. That it is precisely a question of *spiritual* regeneration is important, because the myth has also been interpreted as a reminiscence of an actual fertility ritual, for which, as we will see below, there is little evidence. Finally, Renauld-Krantz emphasises that the functions of the liquid as water of life and as a drink of knowledge cannot be separated.

A very carefully worked out exposition of the myth of Kvasir and the theft of the mead as well as of the complex surrounding intoxicating drinks in general in Scandinavian and Germanic mythology is Renate Doht's dissertation of 1974, *Der Rauschtrank im germanischen Mythos*. Doht's main conclusion has to do with the relationship between the different kinds of liquid and the functions they may have had. And especially in that connection lies the basis for criticism of her often exaggerated and apparently quite unreflecting use of the phenomenology of religion as an answer-book. She pursues two different motifs in connection with the liquid. On the one hand, she sees it as conclusive that the drink is connected with magic, intoxication and ecstasy, elements belonging to the semantic field that we can call 'knowledge' or intellectuality or numinous power. On the other hand, she makes much of showing that the 'liquid' element, which she claims to be a universal fertility symbol, played a considerable role in fertility cult and therefore belongs to the semantic field of physical fertility (1974, 34-5).[48] It is presumably correct that both of these aspects of the liquid are present in the complex, but whereas the two aspects are understood as fundamental in this book, Doht places them in originally different complexes which were blended together only in a later phase,[49] a view also found in Meletinskij. In conclusion she says (1974, 231):

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[48] Moreover, it is quite strange that Doht (1974, 227) sees the quality 'moist' in connection with symbolism about rain and *semen virile* (cf. also Fleck 1971, II, 403-11) in contrast to Renauld-Krantz, who links the element to the feminine, a detail that indicates how insecure it is to attempt to interpret the symbolic content of individual elements in a myth.

[49] The closest that Doht comes to a semantic connection is on p. 150 where we read (as a general phenomenological 'statement'): 'Das Lebenswasser, wie das Wasser überhaupt, teilt höheres Wissen mit, weil es mit dem Lebens- und Erkenntnisbaum verbunden ist, oder weil es von den Göttern stammt, aber auch, weil es aus der Unterwelt hervorsprudelt und die Toten nicht nur ewiges Leben, sondern auch Erkenntniss und Weisheit besitzen'. 'The water of life, like water in general, imparts a higher knowledge since it is connected to the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, or since it originates

> Zusammenfassend möchte ich sagen: mir scheint die Geschichte vom Raub des Dichtermets, so wie sie die Germanen aufgezeichnet haben, aus der Kombination zweier verschiedener Mythen entstanden: a) dem altererbten indogermanischen Mythos vom Raub des Göttentrankes durch ein Raubvogel, b) einem Mythos von der gefahrvollen Henseitsreise zu einer göttlichen Frau, die den ambivalenten Lebens- und Todestrank hütet und die sich mit der Initianden – als solchen müsste man dann den Eindringling wohl auffassen – in einer Heiligen Hochzeit verbindet un ihm von dem heiligen Trank darbietet.

> In summing up, I can say: it seems to me that the story of the theft of the poetic mead, such as the Germanic peoples have recorded it, originated from the combination of two distinct myths: a) the ancient inherited Indo-Germanic myth of the theft of the gods' drink by a bird of prey, b) a myth about the dangerous journey to the other world to a divine woman who guarded the ambivalent drink of life and death, and who unites herself with the initiand – as such one could probably construe the intruder – in a sacred wedding and offers him the holy drink.

Doht also touches in several other places on the role of intoxicating drink in initiation, but the closest she comes to a definition of this relationship is in the following quotation, which she borrowed in part from Güntert (1974, 100):

> Der Trank is durchaus ambivalent zu verstehen: 'Der Held muss als Mensch sterben, wenn er als "Unsterblicher" leben will: der Eingang zur ewigen Jugend führt nur durch die Pforten des irdischen Todes' (Güntert 1919: 163) – das Geheimnis jeder Initiation.

> The drink is to be understood as thoroughly ambivalent: 'The hero must die as a human being, if he wants to live as "immor-

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from the gods, but also because it springs from the underworld and endows the dead, not only with everlasting life, but also possesses knowledge and wisdom'. Doht does not make anything else out of this connection and does not acknowledge an original unity in the mead-complex in the Germanic tradition.

tal": the entrance to eternal youth leads only through the gates of earthly death' (Güntert 1919, 163) – the secret of every initiation.

These are big words – probably too big; but the drink is here seen both as a drink of life and a drink of death in connection with the initiation complex (1974, 228).[50] This life function, it is argued, is not the crux of the matter in the Germanic domain as it is in India and the Orient, rather the knowledge-function is seen as of greater importance (1974, 156 and 233). I disagree with several of Doht's arguments, but her work encompasses a wealth of functions that 'the sacred liquid' has in many cultures. The most serious criticism of it is that it does not manage to place the myth in a wider context within Scandinavian religion.[51]

Analysis

The *Hávm* stanzas contain a couple of problems of a textual kind that are important from the perspective of the study of the history of religions and for the connection to Snorri's version. It is evident that there are differences between the two versions, primarily because each text contains themes that are not found in the other, which may partly be due to a generic difference between them.[52] Snorri narrates the whole of

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[50] Initiation is mentioned in several places, for example pp. 18, 100, 122, 129 and 142.

[51] A later contribution focussing on the problematic status of the mead of knowledge is Drobin 1991 which we have touched upon earlier. There are certainly many valuable observations here, but only a few that are of value for the present study. This is due partly to the fact that the goal that is pursued is the matter of the role of the mead in the symbolism of sacrifice, but not its role as an object of knowledge, and partly that the article, in order to reach the desired result, makes use of interpretations for which there are hardly any supporting examples, such as the claim about Óðinn's identification with the mead itself (1991, 116-17).

[52] Cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1991a, 223 on the *Hávm* version: 'Myten kan ikke forstås alene på grundlag af disse strofer. De forudsætter altså, at den på forhånd er bekendt. Det synes heller ikke at være *Hávamál*-passagens vigtigste formål at fortælle myten. Stroferne står som en del af et større afsnit, der handler om livets usikkerhed og især om kvinder og mænds falskhed i erotiske forhold. Den fragmentarisk fortalte skjaldemjødsmyte tjener som illustration til det sidstnævnte. Denne slags relation mellem et bevaret gudedigt og bagvedliggende myte er ikke sjælden. Den må snarest siges at være reglen. Eddadigtet forudsætter myten bekendt, og gengiver ofte kun en del af den og tit i specielle sammenhænge.' 'The myth cannot be undersood on the basis of these stanzas alone. They presuppose that it [the myth] is known beforehand. Nor is it the main purpose of these passages in *Hávamál* to tell the myth. The stanzas are a part of a larger

Kvasir's prior history, whereas this is not mentioned at all in *Hávm*, a point to which we will return. In addition, there is a great difference in the 'tone' that is used in the two texts as Gunnlǫð in *Hávm* appears as far more active than she does in *Skm* and plays a part in Óðinn's escape, a role that is not mentioned by Snorri. In the poem, we hear that Óðinn has uttered many words in Suttungr's hall, which may indicate that he had direct contact with Suttungr, whereas Snorri only mentions his intrusion upon Gunnlǫð. Furthermore, there is the information about the frost giants in stanza 109, which Snorri has not included (or known). Conversely, *Hávm* does not mention the three mead-vats, Óðinn's transformation into a snake and an eagle and the whole Baugi-episode.[53] All these variations can be relatively easily explained by the two completely different contexts in which the two narratives occur. The only point on which the two versions seem directly to contradict one another are that Óðinn in *Hávm* apparently uses Rati as a means of getting away from the giants, whereas in *Skm* it is clearly stated that he uses the auger to get into the mountain. The possibility that these are two genuine variants may be supported by the fact that, whereas Snorri 's version indicates that Óðinn comes to Gunnlǫð in secret and is not discovered until he flies away as an eagle, it is clearly stated in the passage in *Hávm* that Óðinn resided in Suttungr's hall (104). Whether there was direct contact between Óðinn and Suttungr is not mentioned explicitly, but it is strongly hinted at that Óðinn and Gunnlǫð were not alone during the whole of his stay, and that perhaps a wedding had taken place, which we will come back to below in the discussion of Snorri's version.

Some have thought that the sequence of stanzas 105 and 106 in Codex Regius is wrong and that a change in their order would solve the problem concerning the use of Rati (SG III, 1, 127-8; Doht 1974, 42). This is naturally a possibility, although it will always be problematic to

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passage that deals with the uncertainties in life, and especially about women's and men's deception in erotic relationships. The fragmentarily narrated myth about the skaldic mead serves as an illustration of the latter. This kind of relationship between an extant poem about gods and the underlying myths is not uncommon. It can rather be said to be the rule. The Edda-poem presupposes that the myth is known, and it often only reproduces part of it and often in a specific connection.'

[53] In Doht 1974, 42-3 there is a summary of all the similarities and differences between the two accounts.

argue from a supposed 'error' in manuscripts in order to get various statements in texts to fit together. Besides, this procedure would not solve the problem of Óðinn's visit being characterised differently in the two sources. Van Hamel (1934, 78-80) has suggested another solution to the problem. Drawing on Greek and Irish parallels, he argues that Snorri had endeavoured to synthesise two different variants of the same myth in which Baugi and Suttungr, respectively, were the antagonists. Following this argument, he reaches the point that Rati must have been used to escape from the giant and that, at the conclusion of variant A Baugi is the antagonist, whereas Snorri uses the motif as an introduction to variant B which has Suttungr as the antagonist. If this explanation is accepted, *Hávm* is to be preferred, as Óðinn's escape in the form of a snake has to be associated the dangers that are linked to the escape. De Vries (1956-7, II, 70) concurs with this viewpoint. But this possibility also seems methodologically problematical, as we are again making a correction to a source text (in this case Snorri's). That authors and copyists made errors is obvious, but it is preferable to look first for other explanations of apparent inconsistencies – explanations that may better be able to bring out the meaning and importance of the myth. One possible solution is the one proposed by Finnur Jónsson (1924, 107), that *létomc* in *Hávm* 106/2 should be understood in the pluperfect tense 'I had made [space] for myself'. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the escape is again mentioned in stanza 108 so that stanzas 106-9 could be argued to form a sequence: Óðinn does not come to Gunnlǫð until 106, then mentions the benefit of his journey in 107, and describes its dangers in 109. Whichever solution is the most plausible cannot be decided until the different levels of meaning in the myth have been compared.

As has already been mentioned, the greatest difference between the two versions is that Snorri's narrative includes a number of episodes before Óðinn's meeting with Gunnlǫð. The absence of this material in *Hávm* is understandable in the context of the poem's character (see note 52 and Meulengracht Sørensen's observation there). Traditionally, the stanzas concerned have been called 'the second Óðinn-exemplum' (Müllenhoff 1883, 264) and are an exemplum of treachery in relationships between the sexes. Stanza 103 is a claim or a piece of advice, the truth of which is illustrated in the following exemplum. *Hávm* has rightly been considered by most scholars as a compilation of several originally independent poems (e.g. de Vries 1964-67, I, 48-51; von See 1972a, 4-11; Klingenberg 1972), each of which could have appeared in a different form than the one we find in the Codex Regius. As to the composition, 'the second Óðinn-exemplum' appears as an inversion of the 'first Óðinn-exemplum', which deals with an unfortunate experience that Óðinn had with Billingr's daughter (stanzas 96-102, cf. Lindow 2000). The two exempla result in a demonstration of the woman's deception in the first case, and his own in the second, and the Gunnlǫð narrative serves this second purpose. In Snorri's text, however, it only functions as a necessary means of obtaining the mead and therefore does not play any great role. It is therefore likely that the mythical content in 'the second Óðinn-exemplum' may once have formed part of a mythic complex that is different from the one we find in *Hávm*, and may have had a prior history that corresponds more closely to Snorri's narrative (von See 1972a, 58).[54]

Óðinn's role in this episode is clear enough. He tells of how he visited the old giant, and that he has now returned. In order to advance his case, he uttered many words (stanza 104). From Gunnlǫð he received a drink of the precious mead, after which the events are forestalled as he relates how she only got ingratitude for her service (stanza 105). In stanza 106, we learn that he reached the giants by using Rati (see above), which can be translated as 'path-finder' (*LP*: *Rati*) and here signifies the auger that Óðinn used for clearing his way, and that this way was far from free of dangers. We do not learn how Óðinn managed to slip away, apart from the fact that Gunnlǫð helped him (stanza 108). Stanza 107 is the most difficult as far as translation is concerned,[55] but only the last line (107/6) is significant for our analysis. In the Codex Regius this line reads *á alda vés iarðar*, which, however, must be wrong on both grammatical and metrical grounds (Evans 1986, 121), and most editors emend the last word to *iaðar*, from the noun *jaðarr* 'edge, border, lord, protection' (the last two senses only in poetry). Finnur Jónsson (1924, 110) emended the whole line to *á alda vé jaðars*, which he construed as 'on the protector of mankind's [Óðinn's] sacred place'. This sacred place may be Valhǫll, as Finnur suggested, but in principle could be any sacred place in the world of the gods, named in *Gylf* 15 as *helgistaðrinn goðanna*, which primarily consists of Yggdrasill and its surroundings in which, secondarily, Valhǫll is also included. Other interpretations take *jaðarr* in the sense 'edge, border' rather than 'lord, protector', and suggest that it is the fence around mankind's sacred place (*alda vé*) that is focused on. Both interpretations are, however, in agreement with Snorri's version in which Óðinn fetches the mead for the Æsir and mankind. If the latter reading of 107/6 is correct, it indicates that we are dealing with the notion that the mead is to be consumed in connection with the cult of the sacred place, and that we are thus dealing with a variant that contains features that are more archaic than Snorri's.

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[54] Klingenberg 1972, 119-44 tries to place the two episodes in a larger mythic framework, whose content is the changing phases of the moon. This construct is unconvincing, as it seems to build on a view of myth as nature-allegory which is not supported by the text.

[55] The difficulties are enumerated by Evans 1986, 121-2; see also Finnur Jónsson 1924, 108-10 and SG III, 128.

There is also a problem in stanza 107/4 when it is compared with Snorri's version, because the name *Óðrerir* could be a designation of the mead itself in *Hávm*, whereas in Snorri it designates one of the vats into which it is poured. The meaning is 'that which sets the mind in motion' a sense that best fits the mead itself.[56] It is hard to avoid thinking that there are two different versions of this element, though the difference is not significant for this analysis. If Óðrerir in *Hávm* is in fact the name of a vessel, then Óðinn has obviously not swallowed its contents, as we hear of him doing in Snorri (and this feature is fundamental to the myth), or, if it is the mead, then Snorri or his source has misunderstood the name.[57] The conclusive factor in stanza 107 is, however, that Óðinn has brought the mead from the giants to the sacred place of the gods or of mankind. In stanza 108 we are told that Óðinn would not have escaped if Gunnlǫð had not helped him (in what way, must remain uncertain). Stanza 109 deals with an epilogue to the theft, not otherwise mentioned, that makes the stanza difficult to interpret. It is certain, however, that some frost giants the following day come to Óðinn's hall in order to ask whether Bǫlverkr had got home, or whether he had been killed by Suttungr. Several scholars are of the opinion that these giants had been sent by Gunnlǫð (SG III, 130; Ohlmarks 1964, 86), but this is only a possibility, and the stanza's connection with the mead of knowledge remains completely obscure. A single detail will be mentioned, because line 1, *ins hindra dags*, can be interpreted as 'the day after the wedding' (SG III, 1, 130; Finnur Jónsson 1924, 111; Drobin 1991, 115 and Evans 1986, 123), which must obviously indicate that a wedding had taken place before the acquisition of the mead. Weddings in myths are often models for a cultic *hieros gamos*, and this possibility will be examined more closely below. The last stanza (110) sheds little light on the theft of the mead, but we do learn that Óðinn has broken an oath in order to get to the drink. The oath is described as a *baugeiðr*, an oath sworn on a ring, which may well be a wedding-oath which he has perhaps sworn to Gunnlǫð.

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[56] See also de Vries 1956-57, I, 172. Whether the name designates the drink or the vessel cannot be decided from *Hávm* 140 where the construction *ausinn Óðreri* is uncertain (Evans 1986, 135). Frank (1981, 162) gives several reasons for thinking that the designation covers the mead itself. Dronke's arguments for the opposite (1992, 662) seems rather far-fetched.

[57] That *Óðrerir* was in fact the mead itself seems also to find support in Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* stanza 5 (Finnur Jónsson 1908-15 B 1, 117), cf. Frank 1981, 161-3.; but this reference is not quite certain either.

In *Hávm* 13-14, there is a reference to something that could be a different version of the mead-myth. Stanza 12 has warned against too much drinking, and the two following stanzas give an example of Oðinn's own experience with strong drink. *Óminis hegri* 'the heron of forgetfulness' is an expression without any parallels and is impossible to explain precisely. The point, however, must be that Óðinn has got himself into difficulties because he was drunk; perhaps the situation refers to the above mentioned *baugeiðr.*[58] Apart from the name Gunnlǫð, there is nothing that connects the stanzas with the theft of the mead as we know it from stanzas 104-10 or from Snorri. The mention of Fjalarr in stanza 14 can only be connected with the myth with great difficulty, as that name in Snorri designates one of the dwarfs from whom Suttungr gets the mead, and not, as most researchers have understood it here, Gunnlǫð's father. It is worth asking whether the two stanzas refer to the same myth at all, or whether it is merely the compiler or modern readers (e.g. Finnur Jónsson 1924, 27; SG III, 87 and Ohlmarks 1964, 75) who understand them in this way on a very slender basis. There may be no connection except that both examples concern drunkenness.

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[58] See the survey of various (not very convincing) attempts at a solution in Evans 1986, 80.

There is, in any case, no basis for assuming with Turville-Petre (1964, 37), Evans (1986, 81) and Doht (1974, 44) that the poet of these stanzas knew a third and different version of the myth. The arguments, taken from Sijmons and Gering (SG III, 87), seem weak. They consist of the fact that nothing is said in either *Skm* or in 'the second Óðinn-exemplum' about Óðinn being very intoxicated, and that the name of Gunnlǫð's father is Fjalarr. This argument, however, rests on an *a priori* assumption that the two stanzas deal with the same myth which we have seen is questionable. Furthermore, *Skm* and 'the second Óðinn-exemplum' are not primarily about intoxication. If the relationship between Óðinn and Gunnlǫð is as described in *Hávm* 104-10, in which a kind of wedding-feast may have taken place, Óðinn might well have been intoxicated without the relevant stanzas dwelling on it, as their aim is something completely different. The tremendous intoxication that is mentioned in stanza 14, however, does not seem to be connected with the mead-complex but refers, rather, to a completely different, and to us unknown, myth. Whether Fjalarr is the dwarf who is known from Snorri's version, or whether it is a question of a giant of the same name who is mentioned in a *þula,*[59] or whether it refers to a completely different being cannot be decided. Stanza 13 seems to refer to Óðinn's intoxication in Gunnlǫð's hall, which fits in with the theory about an actual wedding-feast, during which Óðinn swears oaths, which he does not afterwards keep (stanzas 105 and 110), whereas stanza 14 presumably refers to a completely different myth. In all circumstances, *Hávm* 13 and 14 are so obscure in relation to the two other versions that it will be unreasonable to involve them in a semantic analysis of the complex.

We get another indication of Óðinn's consumption of the drink of knowledge in *Hávm* 140, yet without this reference adding any new information about the myth. It will, however, be discussed thoroughly in Chapter 6 in connection with Óðinn's self-hanging in stanzas 138-41 of this poem.

In Snorri's text, by contrast, we have a copious variant of the myth, which gives us the whole prehistory of the theft of the mead, for which *Skm* is the only source. This has made some scholars think that Snorri himself was the originator of the main part of the story and, among other things, has ‘deified’ Kvasir (e.g. Frank 1981, 160 and 169-70).[60] But the text in its entirety contains a series of features, which, as we will see, must be age-old mythological material, and the same can be said for the main features in the composition, although these have often been attributed to Snorri himself (e.g. Renauld-Krantz 1972, 69; van Hamel 1934, 78-80).

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[59] The name appears also in *Hábl* 26, where it is most likely a different name for Skrýmir, but in actual fact we cannot decide whether the figure behind the name is a giant or a dwarf.

As we have seen, there are no serious divergencies between the various versions, although Snorri goes into more detail than the other sources. It will, therefore, be natural to start from the variant that appears in *Skm*. In *Hávm* 103-10, it is only of importance – beyond what Snorri narrates – that a wedding is hinted at and along with this a feast in Suttungr’s hall. This, indeed, is contrary to the information about Óðinn’s mode of entry that Snorri gives, as he indicates that Óðinn reaches Gunnlǫð without Suttungr discovering it at all. Óðinn, however, is disguised and calls himself Bǫlverkr (the one who causes wickedness), and it is, therefore, possible that Suttungr did not discover his real identity until late in the festivities, presumably after he has swallowed the mead. The reason why he assumes the shape of a snake is not given, but it is hardly a conclusive piece of circumstantial evidence to suggest that we are dealing with two materially different versions. The situation is that Snorri, as already mentioned, focuses on the theft of the mead itself, whereas *Hávm* is focused on the relationship with Gunnlǫð to whom Óðinn has perjured himself. We must, therefore, imagine a myth that lets Óðinn come in and celebrate a wedding with Gunnlǫð (perhaps in the form of a snake), after which his real errand is revealed when he steals the mead and is then pursued by Suttungr. The difference between the two texts can thus be explained relatively easily, as the difference in the context makes them both acceptable and understandable. In all circumstances, it is the sexuality – whether it is a question of a wedding or merely of coitus – that is the centre of it, and that is what is important in the following discussion.

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[60] Frank is a good example of a modern version of the hypercritical understanding of Snorri. Her introductory question (which is not actually mentioned) seems to be: How can we show that Snorri himself *could have* constructed the information we get in his *Edda*? The point of departure is that most of Snorri’s material cannot be taken as an expression of pagan conceptions, and that we, therefore, only have to show *how* Snorri may have invented it. In this way of approaching the subject, we see a straight line to such earlier scholars as Baetke and Holtsmark. The far more productive procedure – from a religio-historical viewpoint – would be to consider, at least as a point of departure, whether Snorri’s narratives are meaningful in relation to a non-Christian world-picture, but this is apparently not taken into consideration at all (cf. Schjødt 1988a, 135-8 and 1988b, 105), although work such as Dumézil’s would support it.

In answer to the question of how the art of poetry arose, Bragi explains that its origin goes back to the peace agreement between the Æsir and the Vanir. As part of the peace agreement, both parties had to perform the action of spitting into a vat, and from the liquid thus collected, the Æsir formed a man named Kvasir, who plays the main part in the first half of the myth. Kvasir is characterised by being so wise that nobody can ask him a question that he cannot answer. This is the only thing that we learn about him while he is alive. It is not until after his death that he acquires a role as a purveyor of knowledge and the skaldic art, which is apparently the only reason for his existence.

Sequence analysis

Although it is difficult to formulate a narrative sequence based on the *Hávm*-version, Snorri's version progresses relatively logically and so is clear in this respect. The following elements form the foundation of the narrative sequence:

> The Æsir and Vanir conclude peace by producing a liquid from their mingled spittle.
> The gods transform the liquid into a man, Kvasir.
> Kvasir comes to some dwarfs.
> The dwarfs kill Kvasir and he is transformed into a liquid (blood + honey = the mead of knowledge or of poetry).
> The liquid is handed over to the giant Suttungr, and his daughter Gunnlǫð is appointed its guardian.
> Óðinn makes contact with Suttungr's brother Baugi.
> After having experienced tests and been in danger, Óðinn arrives at Gunnlǫð's place in the form of a snake (and according to *Hávm* may celebrate his marriage to her).
> Óðinn sleeps with Gunnlǫð for three nights.
> Óðinn flies away from Gunnlǫð in the shape of an eagle.
> Óðinn spits out the mead for the Æsir and mankind.

The recurrent element in the whole sequence is thus the liquid in its different manifestations and the agents who change or steal it.

When the liquid is introduced for the first time, it is in the form of spittle and is associated with the peace agreement between the Æsir and the Vanir. The relationship between these two groups of gods will be discussed below in Chapter 10, but on the whole most recent researchers agree on viewing the peace agreement as the mythic expression of the establishment of society. The first ingredient in the drink was thus created in exactly that situation in which society is formed as a product of the totality of the culture's functions. That it is precisely spittle which is used to form the basic element of the drink of knowledge, is important within the myth's internal logic, because we can thus establish a parallel with the mead that is spat out by Óðinn in the final episode.[61]

In order for the liquid not to be wasted, they make a man out of it – Kvasir. We saw already in the previous section that there is another variant that explains Kvasir's origin, namely that he is a figure sent from the Vanir to the Æsir in connection with a hostage-exchange. The passage in *Yng* 4 presupposes that Kvasir was not created at the peace agreement, but had existed prior to it since he is present as a hostage to be exchanged with Mímir. The Kvasir that we are introduced to in *Yng* disappears out of the mythology just as suddenly as he was introduced. On the other hand, the Kvasir of *Skm* is created, lives, dies and is transformed into mead and thus has a completed mythological existence. Common to the two variants is the fact that the main character is in possession of great knowledge, that he appears on the mythological scene at the peace agreement between the two groups of gods, and, of course, that he has the same name. As far as the differences are concerned, they are of various kinds. On the one hand, there is Kvasir's existence after he has become a member of Æsir society or has been created by the Æsir. *Yng* is silent about what happens after this and cannot, therefore, contradict *Skm*'s description of it. On the other hand, we have contradictory information about Kvasir's origin. *Skm* states that he was created by the gods after they had spat into a vat, whereas

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[61] In many parts of the world, spittle is a common fermenting agent in brewing alcoholic drinks (Dumézil 1959, 31-2; Mogk 1923, 19-20), and it can also symbolise friendship (Stübe 1924, 504-6).

Yng indicates that he had resided with the Vanir and later, at the peace agreement,j was sent as a hostage to the Æsir. While this contradiction exists, it does not affect the fundamental 'message' of the myth. The decisive factor is that these are two different expressions for the same thing, because in both cases Kvasir relates as well to the Æsir as to the Vanir, that is, he fulfils an instrumental or mediating function. This is thematised in *Skm* through his origin in that, as a liquid, he contains elements from both groups and in *Yng* through a spatial transformation: Kvasir moves from the Vanir to the Æsir. In both cases, we are dealing with variants within the same semantic field. The version in *Yng* focuses on Mímir and hardly touches on Kvasir, whereas *Skm* is exceedingly dense semantically with regard to Kvasir. *Yng* is thus content to hint at Kvasir's role in the acquisition of the numinous, which in both myths is a result of the exchange of hostages. In that sense the myths are transformations of one another, as they say the same thing in different ways in order that each one can bring new semantic relationships into play, as we will see below in Chapter 10. We cannot know the reason for the specific difference between the representations in the two sources. It is most likely that Snorri knew two different variants of the myth, but it is important to notice that he is (most likely) the intermediary of both versions and apparently had not considered the divergences of any consequence, as long as he could preserve the basic structure in both.

The most peculiar thing about Kvasir is his creation and his transformation into mead as he, while he is alive barely has a function. The only thing he does, according to *Skm*, is to travel all over the world and share out his knowledge, although we hear no details about his activity, and it is not until after his death that the knowledge he is in possession of acquires any mythological meaning. Besides, his death is only the first step in the development that the knowledge he represents traverses. At one point on his journey around in the world, Kvasir reaches the two dwarfs named Fjalarr and Galarr. The meaning of the former name is uncertain (Simek 1984, 96), whereas Galarr means 'the one who cries out, screams'. We cannot decide whether these names had been attached to the dwarfs before Snorri's time, but the most significant fact is that they are dwarfs. In this connection, we notice two significant characteristics about dwarfs in Scandinavian mythology: that they are clever as artisans and that they are chthonic.[62] In that sense they fit perfectly into the myth, as it is they who give the mead its final form by killing Kvasir – a killing that, therefore, must take place in a chthonic sphere, like the killing of Mímir. The reason why the dwarfs have been chosen here out of the various chthonic groups is obviously because of their skill as artisans,[63] because they not only kill Kvasir but also mix his blood with honey and with this they create the mead which makes all those who drink from it *skáld eða frœða maðr*'a poet or scholar'. The two elements, blood and honey, have a precise importance in this connection. The former is the seat of life and of those qualities that characterise the being, whose blood is at stake.[64] Honey is less evident in Scandinavian mythology, but it was a basic ingredient of mead, as is signalled by its etymology (*AEW*: 390), and as a product it has some qualities that make it useful as a symbolising agent. It is a natural product in the sense that it is produced independently of human beings, but at the same time is linked to culture by being processed (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1968, 253). As such, honey is an ideal mediator between nature and culture and is, therefore, a very suitable agent to include in a myth that deals with the origin of the (gods') society or the cultural setting.[65]

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[62] *Gylf* 14: *....dvergar hǫfðu kviknat í moldunni ok niðri i iǫrðunni* ... (Faulkes 2005, 15)'....the dwarfs had been generated ....in the soil and down in the earth....'(Faulkes 1987, 16) See also Motz 1983, 98-115.

[63] Cf. here Krappe 1928, 69-70 and Mogk 1923, 25-27 where it is demonstrated how the dwarfs, throughout the whole of the Scandinavian mythology provide the gods with their most important magical objects. Motz 1973-74, 102-19 also gives an excellent account of the dwarfs' field of activity. Motz's conclusion, however, in which she argues that dwarfs and elves were originally identical groups, is hardly correct, although both have obvious chthonic aspects.

[64] Blood is a 'powerful' symbolic expression, as it plays a part in all cultures, but naturally in very different ways and with very different symbolic content. This is even true within a single culture, witness the Scandinavian material where blood plays a part in several magic and ritual connections (e.g. de Vries 1956-57, I, 286). Below, we will examine more closely the role of blood as symbolising 'family ties' (blood brotherhood), and as a magic drink (e.g. *Fáfn* prose before stanza 32: *Enn er hiartblóð Fáfnis kom a tungo hánom, oc scildi hann fuglssrodd* 'And when the heartblood of Fafnir came on his tongue, he understood the speech of birds' (Larrington 1996, 162). Its role in connection with sacrifices, we will, however, not discuss further. In all these connections, blood has different symbolic values, possibly, however, with a defined symbolic nucleus (see also Ranke 1978, 78-80).

[65] The connection of honey with the making of poetry has its roots in Indo-European traditions in which it frequently figures as 'eloquent speech' (e.g. Durante 1968, 264-5).

After the killing – which happens completely without motive and which the dwarfs themselves deny by stating that Kvasir had simply choked on his own knowledge because nobody was clever enough for him to gain an outlet for it – the dwarfs pour the blood into a cauldron and two vats called, respectively, Óðrerir, Són and Boðn. Óðrerir has been discussed above, and we saw that it is probable that Snorri misunderstood the name, which is likely to have described the mead itself. Boðn means 'vessel' and may have been attached to this myth at a late point in time (Lindroth 1915, 174-6; Frank 1981, 162), perhaps by Snorri himself, and the same holds good for Són. It is interesting that this word is identical with Old High German *suona*, which means reconciliation or conclusion of peace. This may indicate that the word actually refers to the reconciliation between the dwarfs and Suttungr (Uhland 1868, 213) or perhaps the conclusion of peace between the Æsir and the Vanir (Lindroth 1915, 175). But the elements of uncertainty are considerable, and the three names cannot therefore take on a determining role in the analysis of the myth as this appears in Snorri's version.[66] As for the episode with the dwarfs, we are, thus, able to show that Kvasir is killed in a chthonic space and becomes the basic ingredient in the mead of knowledge.

It is difficult to see how important the episode with Gillingr is. In the narrative, it functions as the basis for the transfer of the mead to Suttungr and consequently is the prerequisite for Óðinn's theft of it later; but whether we can go further in our interpretation is open to question. The passage may well have had a mythical significance that is hidden from us today. Although it is apparently without meaning in the context of Snorri's narrative, it is adorned with so many picturesque details that it can hardly be a product of his own otherwise rational thinking.[67]

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[66] Dumézil's comparison with the Indian myth of the battle between Indra and the two Nasatyas, which is settled through the creation of the giant Mada, who after his death is divided into *four* parts (Dumézil 1959, 31-33), is thought-provoking. The parallel seems so convincing that the dividing of the 'peace-character' must be old material in spite of the obvious differences. The tripartition in Snorri is, however, without importance in the further sequence with which he presents us.

[67] Gillingr means 'the one who makes noise', a sense that does not seem to have any specific connection to this myth.

The figure of Kvasir is involved in a transformation, at first from a liquid to a solid form and then back again to a liquid one; thus the mead of wisdom is created. It stlii functions, however, just as passively as was apparently the case when Kvasir was alive, and this does not improve when the giants acquire it from the dwarfs. Suttungr places his daughter Gunnlǫð as its guardian inside the mountain, and here it remains until Óðinn fetches it.[68] No development in the myth occurs until Óðinn is brought into it. Before he reaches Gunnlǫð, he engages in an interlude with Suttungr's brother Baugi. Again, we encounter a motif with elements of such great uncertainty that they are difficult to interpret and cannot be included as basic elements in the analysis. Krappe (1928, 70-77) tried to prove, by means of comparisons with Greek material, that the nine haymakers who kill each other is a theme that stems from old agrarian rites.[69] This cannot be rejected outright, but, if accepted, the theme must have been transformed as, here, it becomes part of a myth that does not deal with physical fertility at all. The similarity of the motif with Greek myths, which de Vries partly accepts (1956-57, II, 69-73), can be thought of as parallel expressions that emphasise differences at least as much as similarities. It is therefore possible to accept the parallel that Krappe adduced, while at the same time conceding that it was no longer (or perhaps never had been) a part of the same total complex in Scandinavia as we seem able to glimpse in connection with the Greek material, which decidedly points in the direction of an original agrarian ritual.[70]

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[68] The name Suttungr is of uncertain etymology. Attempts have been made to explain it in several ways (see de Vries 1956-57, II, 71) but, apart from a possible connection with the name Surtr, there are no suggestions that help us to a better understanding of Suttungr's role in this myth.

[69] Krappe's interpretation of the myth in its entirety is not convincing enough because, although several of the details in the analysis seem quite believable, it is not possible to see Óðinn's relationship to Gunnlǫð as merely a *hieros gamos*, which it becomes as the result of Krappe's theories which, in their turn, are partly based on Mannhardt's.

[70] Stephen Mitchell (1985a) has an interesting discussion of the meaning of the whetstone. After having demonstrated how it forms part of the insignia of royal authority, he comments: 'As is the case with *óðr*, incitement in ON has two manifestations: in its "positive" capacity, it results in poetry; in its "negative", in violence and destruction. In the myth of the Poetic Mead, it is significant that the "negative" aspect of incitement is exploited in procuring the liquor through which men and gods gain access to the other sort of *óðr*, that of poetic inspiration. Thus, the whetstone plays a particularly appropriate role in this myth in which both aspects of *óðr* are portrayed' (1985a, 20). If Mitchell

The narrative function of the motif in Snorri's text seems to be clear enough, since it brings Óðinn a step closer to the mead, whose acquisition is the myth's central focus. The episode helps him to make contact with Baugi, whose role is also unclear.[71] As mentioned, van Hamel suggested that Baugi and Suttungr are simply alternative names for the same agent in different versions of the myth (van Hamel 1934, 78-82), which Snorri has endeavoured to fuse together without much success. This theory can explain some of those details which otherwise appear difficult to understand, but one must nevertheless query the relationship of this episode to the final acquisition of the mead. Both the motif with the nine slaves as well as Baugi's actions, together with the name of the mountain in which Gunnlǫð is guarding the mead, can give us a clue to the answer to that question. All these things are obstacles that Óðinn faces[72] – obstacles that according to Snorri must be overcome in order to acquire the mead. Óðinn has first to establish a connection with Baugi, which he succeeds in doing by means of the intermezzo with the slaves; next he has to work hard in order to get Baugi to help him persuade Suttungr to give him some of the mead. Finally, when Suttungr has firmly refused to give him any, he is exposed to great dangers when he moves in through Hnitbjǫrg ('clashing rocks'), as Baugi thrusts the

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is right, the myth of the harvesters must be important in connection with the theft of the mead. This result is intriguing but, on the other hand, explains only a small part of the motif of the harvesters; for example, it does not explain why the episode leads to the meeting with Baugi and not with Suttungr.

[71] The name Baugi must be a derivative of *baugr* 'ring', and Simek suggests that it means 'the bent one' (Simek 1984, 43).

[72] When Doht (1974, 38) writes: 'Óðinns Dienst bei Baugi stammt vielleicht aus dem alten Märchenmotiv vom jungen Helten, der zur Erlangung eines gewünschten Gutes eine bestimmte Zeitspanne im Jenseits oder in der Anderen Welt Dienst tun muss' 'Óðinn's service with Baugi stems perhaps from the old folktale motif of the young hero, who, in order to obtain a wished-for benefit, must serve for a certain time in the Beyond or in The Other World'. Although she does not develop this thought further, she is perhaps more right than she is apparently herself aware of, because she is speaking about tests which 'the hero' must experience in order to obtain a 'wished-for benefit'. This pattern appears in various folktales, but it has at least just as marked a presence in another place: in initiation rituals (cf. Propp's demonstration of the structural similarity, especially 1983, 470).

auger at him.[73] This threefold test can hardly be a chance interconnection of the motifs and, if we take the text at its word, must serve as a prerequisite for the acquisition of the mead. It is, however, possible that the name Baugi is an invention by Snorri himself (cf. the *baugeið* of *Hávm* 110), but there can be hardly any doubt that the myth included difficulties that had to be overcome, which also appears from *Hávm* 106. Another element that supports this understanding is Baugi's actual conduct. To put it mildly, it is illogical, and for that very reason there is little likelihood that Snorri would have invented it for the occasion. Baugi's behaviour seems 'psychologically' impossible: initially, he helps Óðinn just as he has promised, and in that he conforms to the narrative's internal logic, but afterwards he tries to deceive him, and in the last instance to kill him. Snorri does not give any information that can justify such an antagonistic quality in Baugi, which may suggest that he was including the information because it was already present in some form in the version of the myth he knew. The antagonism could be explained according to van Hamel's theory that Baugi is a variant of Suttungr, but as we will see, there is a striking parallel between the structure of this myth and that characteristic of initiation, and the trials can, therefore, be placed far more naturally in the transition from the initial phase to the liminal phase, as Snorri has done, and not in the transition to the final phase, as van Hamel's suggestion implies. In summarising the episode with the nine slaves and Baugi, we can say that, although it contains many features that are difficult to understand, and whose meaning we can only guess at, it serves the purpose in the narrative structure of allowing Óðinn to experience a series of trials. These are of a different character (his cunning in the whetstone episode, which causes him to work for Baugi; then hard work throughout the summer; finally the life-threatening dangers connected with the passage through Hnitbjǫrg),[74] but they all serve the same purpose: to bring him into a position in which he can obtain the mead.

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[73] We find parallels with Hnitbjǫrg in various cultures all over the world (Olrik 1925, 237-9), and the representation of rocks that are dangerous to pass is not uncommon among other Indo-European peoples.

[74] With a little good will (but also with the danger of over-interpretation), one could see here a trial involving the three functions as the whetstone, as suggested by Mitchell 1985a, 13, could be a symbol of rulership (and is used as such here), and therefore associated with Dumézil's first function. In that case the labour carried out for Baugi

Óðinn then comes in to Gunnlǫð in the shape of a snake and has sexual intercourse with her (*Skm*) or celebrates his wedding with her (*Hávm*). The snake shape is of importance on account of its strong chthonic connotations,[75] which are further strengthened by the contrasting eagle-form he takes when he flees.[76] The scenario we find ourselves in is, therefore, still chthonic, and this also applies to the placing of Gunnlǫð who sits *inside* the mountain. It is striking that Snorri, who does not even hint that a wedding is to take place, in fact mentions an agreement which has the character of a contract and which, therefore, leads one to think more of a wedding than of 'casual' intercourse, which his narrative suggests in other respects: *he* is her lover for three nights, and *she* gives him in return the mead in three vats. After this 'bargain', Óðinn flies from giantland to Ásgarðr in the shape of an eagle pursued by Suttungr, whom he evidently escapes by excreting some of the mead in his direction. The remaining mead he spits out and gives to *ásunum ok þeim mǫnnum er yrkia kunnu* 'to the Æsir and to those men who are able to compose poetry'.

The concluding sequence of this myth is loaded with meaning. We have discussed the meaning of the snake/eagle-dichotomy, indicating a low/high-opposition, which we saw was also present in the Mímir-complex. The spatial opposite is also emphasised by the placing of Gunnlǫð inside the mountain. Seen in connection with the snake/eagle-dichotomy in this myth, this functions as an *axis mundi*, a function that

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must represent the third function, while the deadly dangers experienced during the passage through Hnitbjǫrg are connected with the second function. One problem is, however, that the *sequence of* the functions is 'wrong', so the connections might merely be accidental.

[75] Besides the chthonic symbolism that is implied by the snake's form, the snake may also function as a phallic symbol (Neumann 1956, 144).

[76] There are numerous examples both in Scandinavian mythology and in the phenomenology of religion that the snake and the eagle are representatives of the chthonic and the celestial spheres respectively (cf. Drobin 1991, 113). It probably apears most clearly in Snorri's writings in *Gylf* 16 where the eagle sits at the top of the World Tree, and the snake lies at its root. Clearly, the empirical observation of these two creatures makes them especially useful as bearers of symbolic opposition. In addition, support for the understanding of the snake and the eagle as very old symbols in connection with Óðinn has come from an unexpected quarter: Karl Hauck's studies of bracteates (e.g. Hauck 1972, 65).

is normally performed by Yggdrasill.[77] A basic feature of an *axis mundi* is that it creates a connection between the various levels of the cosmos, and it appears that this feature is also present in this myth. After arriving at Gunnlǫð's as a typical chthonic being, Óðinn flies from there towards Ásgarðr as an equally typical celestial being. By means of this dichotomy, an opposition appears between the underworld and the upper world, two symbolic entities that are meaningful in the establishment of the semantic universe within which initiation is deployed.

Gunnlǫð's role in the myth considered as a whole is striking. In the first place, what is the meaning of her presence in it? Is it not Suttungr who got the mead in compensation for his parents? Is it not he who pursues Óðinn when the latter has stolen (or received) it? Could Óðinn not have conquered Suttungr in a direct physical confrontation, as Þórr undoubtedly would have done,[78] or – perhaps as more suited to his special powers – have conquered him in a wisdom-contest? The answer must in all cases be affirmative, which makes it so much the more pressing to look at Gunnlǫð's role, accepting that the combination of her and the mead is not late or secondary, as has been suggested by McKinnell (2005, 171).

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[77] Meletinskij 1973, II, 69 has also interpreted it as an *axis mundi*. Apart from the similarity of shape in the vertical orientation that exists between the mountain and the tree, they also seem to be functionally similar in connection with the acquisition of knowledge when the Mímir- and the Kvasir-complexes are compared. Finally, the snake/eagle-symbolism is attached both to the mountain and the tree (see previous note).

[78] In an interesting article, Schröder (1955a) pointed out some strong parallels on the one hand between the myth in *Hym* and several Indian myths, and on the other hand between the *Hym*-myth and the theft of the mead of knowledge (cf. Clunies Ross 1989b). He says directly (p. 26): 'wir sehen in der alten Fabel von Hymir und Thor nicht mehr und nicht weniger als eine Variante von Óðinn's Raub des Dichtermets...' 'we see in the old fable of Hymir and Thor nothing more and nothing less than a variant of Óðinn's theft of the mead of poetry...' However, Schröder interprets the parallel in an historical perspective, arguing that it was originally Þórr who fetched the mead, but after he had been displaced by Óðinn as the chief god, he was only associated with the obtaining of the cauldron, as *Hym* states directly (1955a, 27). It cannot be disputed that there are parallels, but they can hardly be explained from an historical perspective alone, but rather serve the redundancy principle, in which basically the same information can be passed on in various ways, and yet add something new. In this case it is striking that the ways in which the two gods obtain objects from the giants are so different: Þórr kills, whereas Óðinn has sexual intercourse, and here too the similarities serve perhaps to emphasise the differences. It is a mere trifle that historical developments took place after the separation of the Indo-European peoples, so Schröder may be right, but new forms often involve new meanings, and it is those that are to be examined here.

Firstly, with her a feminine element is introduced into the universe of the myth, which is of decisive importance as the myth then uses sexuality as an essential factor in the transmission of the mead. It is the sexual intercourse that clears the way for the final situation in the myth: Óðinn's possession of the mead. As previously mentioned, some researchers have thought to see here reminiscences of the cult of an originally performed *hieros gamos* with connections to agrarian rituals (e.g. Krappe 1928). An essential factor is, however, lacking, if the myth deals with an agrarian ritual, namely the fruit of the intercourse, which would have been the reawakening of nature or vegetation, possibly in the form of a corn-demon or a son of a god. Nothing of that kind is present here, however, as the sole outcome of the intercourse is that Óðinn gets possession of the mead. Gunnlǫð is, therefore, not a 'Mother Earth' who brings forth physical life in one form or another. She only clears the way in order that Óðinn can bring 'intellectual life', constituted by the mead, to the Æsir and mankind. But although Gunnlǫð does not give birth, Óðinn's manner of voiding the mead can be seen as an inverted birth: he spits the mead from his mouth. Instead of bringing forth physical life, he brings forth spiritual or psychic life; and instead of giving birth as women do – from the abdomen – he 'gives birth' from his mouth.[79] That we are to understand the spitting out of the mead as an inverse birth is strengthened by the fact that it presupposes a sexual act. And it is as a partner in this that Gunnlǫð is necessary to the message of the myth. But there is another important and related reason why Gunnlǫð and not Suttungr is the one that is emphasised as the guardian of the mead. This myth, as we have seen, operates within the vertical cosmos-model (cf. the mountain as the *axis mundi*) and so can hardly include the giants, whose mythical deployment clearly belongs to the horizontal cosmos (Schjødt 1990a, 48). On the other hand, giant *women* – not primarily as giants, but as exponents of the feminine as a semantic category – are classified in relation to the vertical model (cf. Hastrup 1981, 66 and Schjødt 1983, 94-5).

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[79] In addition to the general feature in many myths in which life, in one way or another, is brought forth by masculine beings, a specific characteristic of such myths is that birth comes from the head (eg. Zeus 'giving birth' to Athena).

Before we proceed to a comprehensive analysis of the information obtained from the sources, we need to consider briefly the episode in *Gylf* 50, in which Kvasir is mentioned as the one who finds out what the net that Loki has made is to be used for. That Kvasir simply cannot be alive at this point in mythic history is a conclusive indication that Snorri's information here must be a subsequent rationalisation. It is evident that the murder of Baldr and its consequences relate to eschatology, whereas Kvasir's whole career relates to the founding myth about the peace agreement between the Æsir and Vanir, which follows *fólcvíg fyrst í heimi* 'the first war in the world'(*Vsp* 24). It is therefore a myth of sociogony with regard to the gods' society. There are two possible explanations for Kvasir's appearance in this passage of *Gylf.* Either Snorri quite simply was in need of an especially clever character and had 'forgotten' that Kvasir had already died, or else - and that seems more probable - the myth of the net does not belong here, something its etiological character alone supports, and has not previously been placed at this point in cosmic history. The only sense in which this statement sheds light on the rest of our material about Kvasir is in the way that he once more appears in a situation in which his knowledge is central, but it must still be the *Skm* version that forms the basis for the analysis.

From the spittle of the gods to Óðinn's spittle, wisdom has experienced several modes of existence and been the subject of different relations of ownership. The final situation, as in the Mímir complex, is that Óðinn alone is in possession of the knowledge that the mead represents, whereas the initial situation is characterised by the basic component, the spittle which becomes Kvasir, being owned by a commune of Æsir and Vanir. We will return below to the parallel with the Mímir-complex, but first examine the narrative sequence more closely from the initial to the final situation. The mead is, so to speak, created in three tempi. First, society's principal functions help to create a drink by means of spittle. Next, the dwarfs create the mead itself by mixing Kvasir's blood with honey and, finally, Óðinn steals it so that it can play that role which is its real purpose in the mythic present, as he 'gives birth' to it again. From being a common possession of all the gods, it first belongs to the dwarfs, next to the giants, until Óðinn brings it back to the gods and mankind as his property.

During this unfolding, a series of oppositional pairs emerges. If we look at the first part of the myth, we find an opposition between the peace agreement and the killing. Kvasir is created through the peace agreement and finishes his life by means of a killing that takes place among the dwarfs, who are chthonic. This involves also the opposition life versus death and, analogous with this, are the opposites solid form versus liquid form: Kvasir passes over at his death to function as a fluid form. Finally, the killing, as mentioned, takes place in the underworld so that we get an opposition high versus low on the cosmic axis.

Kvasir is actually wise before he dies, but his wisdom apparently has no function. The dwarfs are perhaps not completely wrong when they argue that he could not dispose of his knowledge. In any case, we do not hear of anybody who has any benefit from it. The precondition for this to happen is for him to be transformed into mead. But even after this ‘second’ creation, the degree of activity of this knowledge is limited, as the dwarfs themselves do not use it, and Suttungr places it passively inside the mountain. It is not until the final phase of the myth that the mead acquires its real role. The second part, in which Óðinn is the main protagonist, is structured differently. Analogues to high versus low in this sequence are the oppositional pairs eagle versus snake and, furthermore, active versus passive: as long as Gunnlǫð is in control of the mead, it is passive, whereas it becomes active with Óðinn’s transformation into an eagle. Finally, in this last part of the myth, we are also introduced to a new opposition, masculine versus feminine. It is the masculine god from the upper world who through intercourse with the feminine giant’s daughter from the underworld changes the mead from a passive to an active condition.

In relation to the Mímir-myth, it is clear that there is a series of distinctive common features. Above all, there is Óðinn’s role which, in both places, is characterised by the fact that he is not mentioned in the initial phase, yet in the final phase is left as the one who controls the object of knowledge (in connection with Kvasir, the mead; in connection with Mímir, the head). Thus the etiological aspect that we touched on in connection with Mímir is also present here.[80] Óðinn is the possessor of wisdom because he alone has control over Mímir's head and the mead. The oppositional pairs that we saw in connection with the Mímir-complex are for the most part also present here, with some additions, but the core is identical. Mímir's and Kvasir's fates are largely parallel: they appear on the scene at society's beginning, at the peace agreement between the two groups of gods. Their knowledge is passive until they are killed, and that happens for both of them in the underworld, after which they return to the upper world and function actively. The consequence of the killing is in both cases a transformation of their physical state: Mímir becomes pure intellect, and intellect-giving in the form of the severed head, and Kvasir becomes intellect-giving as he becomes the mead which makes both the gods and mankind wise when they drink it. In summary, we see that in both myths the final product, the wisdom object, which Óðinn is in possession of, is the consequence of a stay in the underworld, a death and a return to life and the upper world in a new form.

At a certain point in the myths the parallelism stops, however, because in *Vsp* 28 we hear that Mímir drinks mead every morning. The mead that is mentioned here undoubtedly has a strong semantic affinity with the drink of knowledge, that is, the transformed Kvasir, who thus now enters into a new relationship with Mímir in which the parallelism is substituted with a possessor-object relationship. Kvasir *is* the drink, and Mímir *owns* the drink, some of which he consumes every morning. There is, therefore, a clear correspondence between the opposition head versus body and the opposition liquid form versus solid form, in which the first link in both oppositions connotes the active object of knowledge which Óðinn can make use of in the mythical present time. Although it is a matter of a redundancy, the meaning of this distinction, which the texts here create themselves, ought to be examined. We saw that numinous knowledge is expressed in three forms in the Mímir complex: speech, runes and drink, and that the spring or the well in which the mead is, constitutes a mediating element between the upper world and the underworld. In the same manner, Kvasir constitutes a mediating factor in this regard, as he is fetched in the form of mead from the underworld and led up into the upper world in which he can be identified with or have strong semantic affinity with the mead in Mímir's well. Mímir gets knowledge among other things by drinking from the well, Óðinn by speaking to the head, which tells 'true staves' (*Sigdr* 14). We also find this combination of speech and drink as intermediaries in connection with Kvasir, because the mead as a liquid is consumed through the mouth, from which speech also emerges. It has been argued that poetry was understood as something that simply had to be ingested in order to come out again (Stephens 1972, 265),[81] just as the mead is first ingested by Óðinn in order to be spat out later. In other words: the mead is, as the skalds were aware, a metaphor for speech,[82] the wise and poetical speech, which in the myth is symbolised by Mímir's head. And these two quantities – mead and head – appear as the exponents of wisdom in general, through which the parallelism between the Mímir and the Kvasir complexes is retained on the paradigmatic level of the myth, whereas in the narrative sequence it is a matter of convergence on the syntagmatic level: the head drinks the mead.

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[80] It is not, as with Mímir, a movement from the Vanir to Óðinn that is in play, but on the contrary a movement from the gods gathered together (Vanir and Æsir) to Óðinn. It seems, however, not to be a question of any difference in the meaning, apart from the fact that the social-ideological distinction between the first and third functions cannot easily be analysed.

It also becomes clear in connection with Kvasir that one of the problems which is thematised is the relationship between physical and intellectual life. There is on the contrary nothing that indicates that the phenomenon of 'everlasting' life was thematised, as Doht touched on, at least not in the sense that she and Güntert assumed.[83] The myth argues that a physical death must precede an intellectual life, as Óðinn could not just take over the spittle directly after the peace agreement, but had to let it undergo the development narrated by the myth, which includes Kvasir's death in the underworld and the passivity of the mead while it is with Gunnlǫð. A pattern has thus emerged in which the realisation of the numinous knowledge, of which both Mímir's head and the mead of skaldic art are expressions, presupposes a physical death and/or a journey to the underworld, which is here connected with sexuality. We will return to this in Chapter 10, but we can already establish that the underworld and the kingdom of the dead can, in certain respects be considered as parallel entities and together with some others constitute different expressions for the phenomenon that we call 'The Other World'. The myth thuspostulates that there exist two worlds, two forms of existence, between which mediation must take place in order to realise the numinous potential.

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[81] Edwards 1986 gives a series of examples from sagas and *Beowulf* of how the relationship between alcohol and poetry is perceived as closely connected.

[82] Cf. Kurke 1989, 113 where, among other things, it is maintained that various Indo-European traditions 'use the image of liquid in some form for speech or song'. Kurke shows that the recitation of prayers is often encompassed by the same terminology that is used in connection with libations.

[83] This linking of the two forms of life may thus be considered fundamental, and the difference between the liquid as a drink of life and an intoxicating drink is not to be seen as a 'chance' linking of phenomena, but rather as a point in the main theme of the myth. The likelihood is that the combination of the two main areas of the functions of the drink – life and knowledge – cannot be an expression for an historical development in which various ideas have gradually merged into a single myth, as has generally been assumed (by among others Olrik and Doht). Rather, it is fundamental to the whole complex. This does not mean that there have been no developments, but that one cannot

In summarising the Kvasir-complex, the following can be established: the myth of the theft of the skaldic mead contains an etiological dimension, but in addition constitutes a semantic universe – as with the Mímir-complex – that has made it possible, by means of a series of oppositional pairs, to classify important categories such as life and death, the upper world and the underworld, masculine and feminine. In both myth-complexes, we likewise see that these oppositional pairs are organised in a certain way in relation to the narrative sequence, so that Mímir and Kvasir are in the upper world in the initial phase, then come to the underworld and return to the upper world in a transformed shape. We thus have a tripartite sequence characterised by the fact that the relation between, on the one hand, the initial phase and the final phase

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explain the meaning of the theme-combination as part of such a development. What we have to do is to look at the structure, which 'explains' the relationship between the various components and functions of the myth. It will not be denied that the intoxicating drink in this myth contains elements from what is called the water-of-life-complex (water, seed) and from the actual intoxicating drink (ecstasy and spiritual growth) in the phenomenology of religion, just as it is correct that these two complexes are separated in many cultures. My reasoning here only claims to show that people in pre-Christian Scandinavia juggled with these two meanings, creating a fundamental analogy between physical and intellectual life. It serves no purpose to declare one factor more 'original' than the other. They depend on one another in the mythological complex under discussion. These relationships will be considered further below in Chapter 10.

and, on the other hand, the central phase, is expressed through a series of oppositional pairs, whereas the decisive difference between the initial phase and the final phase is that the object of knowledge is transformed and can only function in accordance with its purpose in the final phase. In the same way that Mímir takes on the role of mediating factor, as we have already seen, Kvasir does, too, as he also moves between the upper world and the underworld, is both dead and alive and his knowledge is both latent and manifest.

We will again conclude the analysis by referring the results to our characterisation of initiation. Here, too, we are dealing with two individuals: Kvasir and Óðinn, of which the former, just like Mímir, also constitutes the actual object of knowledge. Óðinn, who ingests the object of knowledge in the form of mead, attains an irreversibly higher status in the final phase with regard to knowledge, as he is now in possession of it and can use it for the rest of mythical time. The mead passes through a three-phased sequence with a movement from 'This World' to 'The Other World' in which first a killing takes place and then a sexual act, after which the object of knowledge is brought to the upper world. The myth is constructed around a series of oppositional pairs that are analogues to the opposition 'This World' versus 'The Other World'. Both Kvasir and the mead are characterised by a numinous potential, and the mead is an essential factor in Óðinn's position as the god of skalds in the mythic present. All four criteria that are essential to the characterisation of initiation are thus present in this myth-complex.

Chapter 6
Óðinn Myths 2: Hanging, *seiðr* and *vǫlur*

6.1 Óðinn's Self-Hanging

The source

The only source for Óðinn's self-hanging is *Hávm* 138-41:

138 I know that I hung on a windy tree
nine long nights,
wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,
myself to myself,
on the tree of which no man knows,
from where its roots run.

139 No bread did they give me nor a drink from a horn,
downwards I peered;
I took up the runes, screaming I took them,
then I fell back from there.

140 Nine mighty spells I learnt from the famous son
of Bolthorn,[1] Bestla's father,
and I got a drink of the precious mead,
poured from Odrerir.

141 Then I began to quicken and be wise,
and to grow and to prosper;
one word found another word for me,
one deed found another deed for me. [2] (Larrington 1996, 34)

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[1] The form Bǫlþorn is from Snorri's *Edda* (*Gylf* 5); *Hávm* has Bǫlþorr.

From a religio-historical viewpoint, these stanzas are among the most interesting in the entire corpus of eddic poetry, and the secondary literature about them is correspondingly large. We will begin here with a detailed discussion of the elements that are of importance for the acquisition of knowledge and initiation. Although the stanzas are not especially complicated linguistically, they contain a series of statements whose meaning is uncertain and difficult to understand.

One such question of central importance is how we are to understand the connection between these four stanzas and those that surround it. On the whole, most scholars today agree that the *Hávm* text in the Codex Regius does not constitute an original unit. This means that,

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[2] 138 Veit ec, at ec hecc
vindgameiði á
nætr allar nío
geiri undaðr
oc gefinn Óðni,
siálfr siálfom mér
á þeim meiði,
er mangi veit,
hvers hann af rótom renn.

139 Við hleifi mic sældo
né við hornigi
nýsta ec niðr
nam ec upp rúnar
œpandi nam,
fell ec aptr þaðan.

140 Fimbullióð nío
nam ec af inom frægia syni
Bǫlþors, Bestlo fǫður,
oc ec drycc of gat
ins dýra miaðar,
ausinn Óðreri

141 Þá nam ec frœvaz
oc fróðr vera
oc vaxa oc vel hafaz
orð mér af orði
orðz leitaði,
verc mér af verki
vercs leitaði.
(NK 1962, 40)

even if we should succeed in determining with precision the date of the poem as it is found in the Codex Regius, we cannot necessarily assume thatwe can tell the date of the individual stanza-sequences and motifs – and this also applies to the sequence of Óðinn's self-hanging.[3] As far as the context with the surrounding stanzas is concerned, the problem is most pronounced with regard to the stanzas after 141, as the division between the *Loddfáfnismál* and *Rúnatal* sections is marked in the Codex Regius and is clearly expressed in the content.[4]

Stanzas 142-5 which, in the poem's present form, serve as a transition to the so-called *Ljóðatal* 'List of Songs' section, are thematically loosely attached to the self-hanging stanzas because their subject-matter is the runes and their usage. But stylistically there seems to be a break as the first-person subject apparently changes from being Óðinn to an unknown *ec* 'I' (143/5), for here Óðinn is mentioned in the third person in 143/1 and 145/6 (under the name of *Þundr*).[5] The stanzas following 142 must be characterised as a set of magical instructions rather than as actual myth material (perhaps with the exception of 145/6-9), which 138-141 unquestionably are. Whatever the connection between 141 and 142 following might be, and irrespective of when it was adopted, it seems appropriate in the first instance to discuss stanzas 138-41 as a separate mythic unit.[6]

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[3] A large part of the literature about *Hávm* and its part-motifs is, seen from a religio-historical point of view, either out of date or primarily philologically oriented in the way the problems are presented. An example of the former is Lindquist 1956, who tries to reconstruct a 'Proto-*Hávamál*' by a method that can best be characterised as 'intuitive', with the author consistently building on his own assumptions of how the old Scandinavian people ought to have thought – even though he himself calls his method 'synthetic' (1956, 91). Attempts of this type are almost doomed to fail. A scholar who has a strongly marked philological way of presenting the problem is Klaus von See, who in several of his expositions has shown that *Hávm*, as a compilation, is a very late product (von See 1972a, 1972b and 1975). Klingenberg 1972, who makes an interesting attempt at a deeper understanding of *Hávm* in its entirety, is, however, not unproblematic. For further references, see Harris 1985, 147-8.

[4] The reference to runic magic in the latter part of stanza 137 must, as von See has noticed (1972a, 60), be understood as the editor's endeavour to create a transition to the following stanzas, and an originally closer connection between the two parts seems highly unlikely.

[5] Grønvik's understanding (2000, 128) that the subject in 138 is *not* Óðinn, does not seem convincing. The very concept *unio mystica* 'mystic union', which Grønvik argues is involved here, seems foreign to pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. Besides, there is no reason to presume a subject other than Óðinn himself.

The matter of the actual content of these stanzas is, as mentioned above, of great importance for our understanding of central phenomena in Scandinavian religion. The problem we must first consider is whether we are in the presence of genuinely pagan material, or whether the four stanzas could possibly have been influenced by the Christian idea of Christ hanging on the cross. The latter, which has been particularly associated with Sophus Bugge (Bugge 1881-89, I, 291-7), has been taken up in various ways by a long series of scholars (e.g. E. H. Meyer 1891, 250-1.; Golther 1895, 280-2; Ohrt 1930, 273-86; Reichardt 1957, 26-8; Clunies Ross 1994, 222 and Näsström 2001b, 166-8), and it must also be conceded that certain features in the account of Óðinn's self-hanging can be imagined in a Christian context.[7] Since Reichardt, the tendency has, however, been to emphasise the pagan aspects of the stanzas, thus continuing to follow the track of that group of commentators which includes Pipping (1928, 1-13), van Hamel (1932, 260-88), Höfler (1934, 231-46), de Vries (1934a, 392-5) and Hunke (1952, 68-71). A series of representatives of the more recent tendencies will be included in the following discussion. It will then be argued that the myth of Óðinn's self-hanging must be unambiguously understood as the expression of a pagan thought complex. We will, therefore, not touch more closely on the various 'Christian' interpretations, about which it can be said in general that they derive from a lack of reflection about the structure and symbolism of initiation, together with a lack of will to see that the elements to which attention is called as being inspired by Christianity have a solid foundation dispersed in the Scandinavian material. This, for example, is the case with hanging (which is not a crucifixion), the tree (which is not a cross), the spear, the number nine and so forth.

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[6] Both von See 1972a, 60, Evans 1986, 29 and many others support the supposition that the four stanzas are an independent unit.

[7] An interesting discussion of the respective merits of a 'pagan' or a 'Christian' interpretation of the stanzas is Reichardt 1957, 21-3. He observes here, among other things, in contradiction to Höfler, one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the 'pagan' theory, that 'Die germanischen Quellen enthalten unendlich wenig, das ohne Zwang mit Initiationsriten zusammengebracht werden kann' 'The Germanic sources contain extremely little that can be connected with initiation rites without being forced', and Reichardt, therefore, also prefers the 'Christian' interpretation. But this statement seems not to have taken full cognisance of the work on initiation among the Germanic peoples carried out by Höfler himself and Lily Weiser. The discussion is important, however, since it shows that there are two elements in play, one being the similarities with Christian representations, and the other the contention that initiation as a phenomenon is only weakly, or not at all, represented in the material. The methodological question one must ask is whether the first argument is not weakened if it is shown that the second is untenable. If it proves to be the case that great parts of the Óðinn-mythology, and for that matter other parts of the Scandinavian religion, are permeated by initiation-symbolism, is that not in itself an indication that the four stanzas in *Hávm* can be understood as a description of initiation and that similarities with Christian concepts must be more or less incidental, unless they are considerably stronger than is the case in this connection? See Evans 1986, 29-34 for further discussion, in which Reichardt is included.

We need to discuss more closely the question of whether we are faced with a sacrifice or an initiation, as this has played an important role in the history of research. For that purpose, it will be necessary to include various phenomenological considerations. But first we will look more closely at what the stanzas are actually saying.

Analysis

In stanza 138, it becomes clear that Óðinn is the one who is speaking (*Veit ek … gefinn Óðni, siálfr siálfom mér* … 'I know … given to Óðinn, myself to myself'). He has hung for nine nights on a wind-swept tree, wounded with a spear.[8] The tree is described in line 2 as *vindgameiðr* 'a wind-swept tree' and in lines 8-9 it is further characterised as the tree *er mangi veit, hvers hann af rótom renn* 'of which no man knows, from where its roots run'. As mentioned previously, *Fj* 20/2-3 has a parallel wording to the stanza's last two lines where the tree is called *Mímameiðr* 'Mímir's tree'. This has caused several commentators to think that the wording in *Hávm* has been borrowed from *Fj*, but it is just as likely that we are dealing with a formula that one could use to characterise that tree which must be the subject in both instances:[9] the World Tree (Sauvé 1970, 181). Even if one assumes that the last three lines of the stanza were interpolated,[10] there can be no doubt that it is the World Tree that is mentioned here, since, as we saw in Chapter 5, the acquisition of knowledge takes place in the mythical landscape where both the well and the tree are found. The majority of interpreters agree that the tree mentioned in *Hávm* is the World Tree. Yggdrasill functions as an *axis mundi* (Eliade 1951, 342-8) and is thereby the creator of the transition between the upper world and the underworld.[11] The place from which the roots come, and which nobody knows, must therefore be the underworld, in which the kingdom of the dead and the powers of fertility are located.

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[8] The relationship between sacrifice and punishment in connection with hanging will not be discussed here. There can be hardly any doubt that both have played a part, nor that many of the examples from literature, which have been included in the discussion, must be considered as literary *topoi* (cf. Gade 1985).

[9] With regard to the whole question of the use of formulas in poetry, see Lönnroth 1981 (cf. above Chapter 3).

The descriptive compound noun *vindgameiðr* indicates that the self-hanging involves trials for Óðinn similar to the hunger and thirst that are mentioned in the following stanza. Both in the Scandinavian and Irish fields there are parallels that indicate that such trials were thought to further 'magical' abilities (van Hamel 1932, 275-83).[12] There is a considerable plausibility in van Hamel's argument in his famous article about the stanzas (1932, 267), that the manner in which Óðinn is exposed to the weather, as well as the fast, the stabbing by the spear and the hanging itself are links in a ritual, the purpose of which is to obtain such magical powers, in this case the runes. On the other hand, we know from Adam of Bremen (IV, 27) that the sacrificial victims in

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[10] Most researchers since Müllenhof have considered these lines a late addition on metrical and stylistic grounds. Finnur Jónsson (1924, 146), on the other hand argues against their authenticity on account of their supposed lack of logic. This is unconvincing, because there is a valid reason in this place to emphasise the mythical and unknown qualities of the tree on which Óðinn receives his secret knowledge. Whether the lines have been interpolated or not, they form a natural context, as far as the content is concerned.

[11] Most scholars understand Yggdrasill to mean 'Yggr's [Óðinn's] horse' (for other suggestions, see Schröder 1941, 9-15 and Sauvé 1970, 188). Eiríkr Magnússon (1895, 59) thought the term originally did not refer to the World Tree at all but only to Óðinn's horse so that the real name was *Yggdrasill askr* 'the ash Yggdrasill' (Sauvé has a similar point, but from a different angle). The suggestion cannot be excluded, but has no effect on the present investigation and will, therefore, not be discussed further.

[12] Van Hamel gives two examples, taken from Saxo's story of Starkaðr (VI, vii, 7) and *Ketils saga hœngs* chapter 5 (*FSN* II, 175). Both examples deal, however, with an increase of one's abilities in connection with battles and do not aim at an actual acquisition of wisdom, as is the case in *Hávm*. Nevertheless, there is physical pain in various forms that is universally so common in connection with the acquisition of knowledge that that interpretation also seems probable here.

Uppsala were hanged in a grove and that they rotted there. It is primarily this parallel from *Gesta Hammaburgensis* that has provoked the discussion about whether we are dealing with sacrifice in *Hávm*, or with 'martyrdom', as van Hamel expresses it somewhat obscurely.[13]

The spear Óðinn is wounded with is his special weapon which, among other things, can be used to 'consecrate' enemy armies. In Old Norse texts there are several examples of this (e.g. in *Þáttr Styrbjarnar Svíakappa* [G. Vigfússon and C. R. Unger 1860-8 II, 72] and in *Eyrbyggja saga* chapter 44), in which the underlying idea is that by dedicating the enemy to Óðinn he must die in order to be able to go to Óðinn in Valhǫll. This is put in perspective in *Yng* chapter 9 in which Óðinn himself, and after him Njǫrðr, have themselves 'marked' for Óðinn.[14] Together these texts indicate that a symbolic stabbing has played a decisive role in initiations to Óðinn, which in itself makes it likely that the god himself – Óðinn – as a mythic prototype carried out this rite in connection with the symbolic death that is narrated in *Hávm* 138-9.

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[13] Van Hamel's distinction between 'martyrdom' and 'sacrifice' is expressed most strongly in the following quotation: '... in martyrdom one offers something of oneself, whereas we may sacrifice anything we like, in the majority of cases something that is not part and parcel of ourselves. This is only a consequence of a deeper difference. He, who suffers martyrdom in order to obtain a certain object, extorts it from the actual possessor, whose magical power is overcome by the greater magical power of his opponent. Through martyrdom one actualizes his own magical power and, if one is only able to sustain the torture long enough, the possessor of the desired object will be compelled to surrender. But in case of sacrifice the possessor can only be removed to grant the demand from his free will. Martyrdom is practised against blind powers, such as the elements or magic, whereas a sacrifice is offered to a god who takes an interest in mankind generally or in a particular favourite. In appearance, however, the two will often have much in common and easily get mixed up' (1932, 266). It is not clear which phenomenological category van Hamel is actually referring to with his 'martyrdom', but it is obvious that he writes from within a tradition that assumes a radical distinction between religion and magic, a distinction that is based on the criterion of personal gods or impersonal forces ('pre-theistic' is the term used on p. 265). This differentiation is hardly sustainable any longer, mainly because it is not operational (see Schjødt 1991b). The question is, however, whether it is not defensible to place van Hamel's 'martyrdom' alongside certain forms of initiation, as he apparently agrees with Sijmons and Gering when they argue that *gefinn Óðni* ought to be translated as *dem Óðinn geweiht* 'consecrated to Óðinn' (SG III, 1, 149; van Hamel 1932 264). What van Hamel means by 'martyrdom' is quite simply a consecration to a higher level 'without the aid of a god' (1932, 265). For a criticism of van Hamel's viewpoints, in many ways justified, see Sauvé 1970, 179-81. Below, we will return to the discussion of whether sacrifice or initiation are the most suitable terms for this phenomenon that we come across in *Hávm* 138-41.

[14] When Reichardt writes: 'Der Bericht Snorri's, dass Óðinn sich vor seinem Tode in Schweden mit einer Speerspitze habe 'merken' lassen ist in euhemeristischem Geist

The words *ok gefinn Óðni/ siálfr siálfom mér* 'and given to Óðinn, myself to myself' are absolutely essential for the interpretation of the stanzas and will be thoroughly commented on below.

Stanza 138 is a representation of Óðinn in a situation that includes physical torments lasting for nine nights. The number nine indicates a form of totality or accomplishment wherever it is found (Schjødt 1988c, 38-9), and in this respect it has the status of a 'holy' number for the Scandinavians.[15]

In stanza 139, we hear that Óðinn had had neither food nor drink, and this suggests that he endures a kind of fast. We do not know the symbolic content of this fast for certain, but there are several possibilities. It may have been, as van Hamel argues, a technique used in order to gain power over the god's own *ásmegin*. It can, however, also have been an element in a cleansing process that is common in rituals all over the world, not least in rituals of initiation. If the fast was associated with a symbolic death, it may have been an expression for the condition of being dead, in which food and drink are not necessary. Finally, it may have been a combination of these elements, as actual physical

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geschrieben worden und verliert schon dadurch Gewicht, dass Snorri dasselbe über den Gott Njörðr berichtet.' 'Snorri's account that Óðinn before his death in Sweden had had himself marked by the point of a spear has been written in the spirit of euhemerism and loses its strength in that Snorri is narrating the same about the god Njörðr'(1957, 22-3), the argument is flawed. Snorri's euhemeristic viewpoint has, first of all, no influence on the evaluation of such an obviously pagan practice as the marking with a spear – a practice which otherwise agrees well with what we know about Óðinn and his attachment to the spear, and was not just 'invented' by Snorri for the occasion (cf. Víkarr's murder). Secondly, the repetition in connection with Njǫrðr is, in contrast to what Reichardt argues, rather an indication that it is, in fact, a question of a tradition that has developed according to a mythic prototype.

[15] The nine nights have been interpreted in various ways, as for example a pendant to the nine hours that Christ hung on the cross (Reichardt 1957, 28), as a period in the lunar calendar (Klingenberg 1972, 135) or as the nine months of pregnancy (Hunke 1952, 70). None of these suggestions seem compelling or probable. The number nine in Scandinavia is simply the number used when the subject has to do with holy things. Whatever else is included in it besides this cannot be decided, and is not relevant either in this connection.

effects that have psychological outcomes are often symbolically based in accordance with the religious world view (Renauld-Krantz 1972, 81).

It is just as important, however, that Óðinn looks down, picks up the runes screaming and then falls off the tree. This is a climax, and that holds good irrespective of whether one understands runes figuratively, in the way that the god learns about them (including their secrets and their use), or literally in the way that he actually picks something up from the ground. [16] The question is of some importance and we will return to the meaning of *nema upp* below. [17]

Finnur Jónsson claimed that stanza 140 'has strayed into this context', because 'it is not the runes that are mentioned here, but songs (of incantation) and the skaldic drink' (1924, 148). Whether the sequence of these stanzas is the original one cannot be determined conclusively, but Finnur's argument must be rejected. During our discussion of Mímir, we established a close connection between the two ways in which knowledge manifests itself: as speech and as a fluid, and we also saw that speech can be expressed in runes (*Sigdr* 14). [18] When such a combination exists in one mythic complex, one cannot reject it outright in another. Stanza 140 thus fits naturally in a place where we have just heard that Óðinn has acquired the runes and now also learns that he will get *fimbullióð níu* 'nine mighty songs' from Bǫlþorn's son, who is probably his mother's brother (perhaps identical with Mímir; see below), together with a drink of the mead *ausinn Óðreri* 'poured from Óðrerir'.

How the specific chronological connection is to be understood is certainly unclear, but it can hardly have been the case that, after the acquisition of the runes, yet before the process that is described in stanza 141, Óðinn had experienced the actions of two myths, the latter of which can with certainty be identified with the acquisition of the mead of wisdom.[19] The situation described in stanza 141, where Óðinn states how powerful he has become in the possession of knowledge, had probably arisen already at the time he acquired the runes, so the *þá* 'then' which introduces this stanza presumably refers back to that point in time. The two mythical events that are indicated in stanza 140 cannot, however, be completely excluded from belonging to the self-hanging sequence, but, if so, the verbs *nam* (140/2) and *gat* (140/4) have to be understood as pluperfects so that the objects in question are picked up before the release described in 139/6. This would also rule out allusion to both the Mímir- and Kvasir-complexes and would mean that Óðrerir should be understood simply as a general designation of the mead. Finally, this interpretation seems to contradict 139/2 in which the lack of drink is emphasised.

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[16] I will not touch on Ohrt's (1930) interpretation of the stanzas, as an expression for the collection of herbs instead of runes (p. 285), as the runes are always an important element in the whole Óðinn-mythology.

[17] Concerning the interpretation of the verb *sœldo,* see Grønvik 1999, 47 -8.

[18] Egill Skallagrímsson, who is undoubtedly an Óðinn-hero, also possesses the combination of runic and poetic abilities, which suggests the basic nature of this combination (Finlay 2000, 94).

With regard to the internal chronology implied by these stanzas, it seems more probable that stanza 140 is an insertion (and as such may be thought to have come after 141), but not necessarily of later date than the other stanzas. The poet has wanted to mark two decisive events which the acquisition of the runes had brought about. The two events thus become a part of that which is mentioned in 141, namely the words and actions that continually seek and, it must be supposed, find, new words and actions. In this regard, the *þá* of 141/1 relates to the conclusion of 139 and not to 140, and refers, therefore, to that point in time when Óðinn falls off the tree. *After this*, the positive development (including acquisition of magic songs and the mead of wisdom) that is described in stanza 141 begins. The sequence we have in the Codex Regius is thus completely acceptable, but it is still possible that 140 and 141 have been reversed. In both cases, the acquisition of incantations and of the mead of knowledge becomes an expression for the increasing wisdom that the self-hanging has brought about.

Without further proof, it is not possible to determine who Óðinn's mother's brother is, and it is hardly of vital importance (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 227). Viktor Rydberg (1886-89, I, 259) and others have suggested that he is Mímir, which is a possibility considering the latter's role as purveyor of knowledge in other connections (see also SG III, 151), although such a kinship tie between Mímir and Óðinn has not otherwise been recorded.[20] In the phrase *ausinn Óðreri*, the name Óðrerir may either designate the mead itself or the vessel in which the mead is stored. The phrase itself is not unambiguous (Evans 1986, 135) and can, among other things, mean 'sprayed with mead', perhaps pointing to an association with the idiom *ausa barn vatni* 'to sprinkle a child with water' in pre-Christian name-giving rituals (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 227).

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[19] So Boer (II, 47). But the mythical chronology in Óðinn's acquisition of knowledge is in no way clear, and it seems, therefore, not compelling to argue for a sequence that reads: 1) self-hanging, 2) contact with Bǫlþorn's son and 3) the acquisition of the mead of knowledge and *then* the growth of knowledge (141).

The last stanza, 141, does not cause any problems with regard to sense, except for the difficulties in its location which we have already discussed. We learn that Óðinn matures (*frævaz* 'to become fertile') and becomes *fróðr* 'clever, wise, full of knowledge'. He grows and things go well for him, words seek new words, actions new actions. There can hardly be any doubt that the elements that are included in the stanza all deal with the acquisition of wisdom, and, therefore, concern the intellectual aspect (*BE* II, 47), although the physical one cannot be consistently separated from it.[21]

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[20] Klingenberg's viewpoint on this uncle (1973, 170) as initiator is tempting, but we face problems in connection with the chronology, because we must maintain as most probable that both the nine *fimbullióð* and the mead from *Óðrerir* were not given to Óðinn until he had fallen off the tree. For this reason, I cannot agree with Clunies Ross (1994, 227) when she understands Bǫlþorn's son as initiator in connection with the myth of the hanging. It is possible that he did function as an initiator, but in that case the nine songs are given to Óðinn in another context, and perhaps, if we accept the identification with Mímir, in connection with the head that speaks to Óðinn.

[21] It is of importance to point out the ambiguity in several of the words that are used. Thus both *frævaz* and *vaxa* are taken from the physical sphere, but are to be understood as the consequences of the self-hanging and have, therefore, affinity with intellectual wellbeing (see also Dörner 1989, 108-13). This ambiguity is fundamental to the understanding of the numinous knowledge, which we already discussed in connection with the sexual connotations in the Kvasir-complex. Furthermore, it appears in the entire magic-complex, both in- and outside Scandinavia, when a person with intellectual abilities is able to manipulate his physical surroundings, which, for example, appears from *Hávm* itself, viz. stanzas 146-163. Naturally, this also holds good in an area such as fertility with the sexual connotations that are attached to it. The most interesting word is perhaps the adjective *fróðr*, which means clever, but which in the form *inn fróði* means fertile (cf. *AEW* 143-4). The two meanings of the same word must force us to look at the connection between them, which there certainly will be plenty of opportunity to do in this investigation. See also Renauld-Krantz 1972, 82 and Näsström 2001b, 171-3, who clearly express this opinion.

Sacrifice or initiation – myth or ritual?

As mentioned above, there is one question that has played a considerable role in research and is of crucial importance to consider in connection with this myth. This is whether we are, in fact, faced with an initiation, or whether we are dealing with the mythic archetype of an Óðinn-sacrifice. In contrast to the other myth-complexes we have already discussed, it has been common to speak of an initiation in connection with the self-hanging. It has even been argued that this is a genuine cult-myth, and that ritual initiations must have taken place according to the same 'schema' (Klingenberg 1972, 134 and 1973, 169-75; Grønvik 2000a). The crux is the meaning of the words *ok gefinn Óðni/ siálfr siálfom mér* 'and given to Óðinn, myself to myself', depending on whether *gefinn* bears the meaning 'consecrated' or 'sacrificed'. The first sense is supported by, among others, SG III, 149; van Hamel 1932, 264; Pipping 1928, 9; F. Ström 1947, 61; Hunke 1952, 69; Näsström 2001b, 172, and perhaps most noticeably by Höfler 1934, 232-46. The second sense is preferred by, among others, Turville-Petre 1964, 50; I. Beck 1967, 134-5,[22] and Sauvé 1970, 180 and probably also implicitly by Talley 1974, 163-8.[23] Van Hamel's elucidation of the problems in the stanzas has been considered by many to have uncovered the central elements in the hanging scene. He argues that the myth deals with the evocation of magical power, and that magic is to be understood here as an attempt to approach the dead, or to communicate with them. This is attained, according to van Hamel, through the martyrdom endured through the nine nights that the rite lasts (van Hamel 1932, 288). Jere Fleck avoids taking a position on whether we are dealing with a sacrifice or a consecration as he uses both designations and, without any kind of theoretical discussion, argues for both the one and the other

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[22] It is obvious that Beck throughout her outstanding chapter about hanging and stabbing by means of a spear understands it as a sacrifice. She is, however, aware of the initiation posibility (1967, 175), but does not pursue it.

[23] Talley's article seems unclear on this point as she draws clear parallels with the Indian human sacrifice *purushamedha* and strongly emphasises the fertility symbolism at the expense of the acquisition of knowledge. In addition, the article endeavours to prove the role of the mandrake almost as an alternative to the runes, and this is also seen in connection with a fertility ritual (1974, 166-8). Several of the views expressed here are reminiscent of Ohrt 1930 and Fleck 1971 (with respect to the sexual symbolism).

(Fleck 1968, 101-126 and 1971).[24] As we will see, there may be some sense in this position, although it does not emerge in Fleck's publications.[25]

Van Hamel's interpretation has been sharply criticised by some scholars who argue that 'sacrifice' is the only reasonable designation to attach to the event that is described in *Hávm* 138-41. In addition, the phenomena behind the two designations sacrifice and initiation/'martyrdom' have often been understood as mutually exclusive.[26]

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[24] The closest Fleck gets to making up his mind on this issue is in 1971, 398: 'Óðinn's ritual inversion contains not only the standard elements of the initiation, but also incorporates features of a ritual sacrifice'. But what elements belong to which complex, and how the two complexes relate to one another is not explained or even discussed.

[25] Fleck has, however, as we will see, several original ideas as well as a certain eye for a connection between the self-hanging on the one hand and the Mímir and Kvasir complexes on the other: 'Óðinn's Selbstopfer am Baum ist also in der Funktion mit der Tötung von Kvasir und Mímir identisch' 'Óðinn's self-sacrifice on the tree is therefore in its function identical with the killing of Kvasir and Mímir' (Fleck 1968, 121). The result is in all cases a transition to a new form of life in which the individual subject is even more closely connected to numinous knowledge than before. One can only agree with that, so it is regrettable that Fleck did not make more of the common features that the three myths show in connection with the initiation complex. On the whole, he leaves out any interpretation of the structure itself and, strangely enough, he does not mention van Gennep, which may contribute to the fact that he does not commit himself to the three phases in the initiation or to the relationship between the aspects of knowledge and fertility, although he acknowledges the existence of both. Nor does he endeavour to get behind the death and rebirth symbolism, but only notes its presence. On the other hand, he has many exciting (though also disputable) thoughts about a possible identity between blood, mead and sperm and between the World Tree, the phallus and Heimdallr. His understanding of the relationship between initiation, the acquisition of knowledge and ruler-worthiness (1968, 127 and 140-52) is both original and convincing when, for example, he argues that the role of the *þulr* in initiation has been to convey the cultic 'Belehrung, die bei einer typischen Initiation nicht fehlen dürfte' 'teaching, which must not be lacking in a typical initiation' (1968, 147).

[26] Ström 1947, 61, for example, argues that the fast cannot be part of the sacrifice as the value of the sacrifice is not increased by it – a viewpoint that is, however, softened a little later (p. 73), as he says that both self-hanging and sacrifices to Óðinn have a common denominator in divination: 'De sakrale och de magiska linjerne sammanstråla i en offerritual, vars huvudsyfte har varit att med det döende offret som medium tyda de tecken, som forma fremtidens händelsemönster' 'The sacral and the magical lines merge into a sacrificial ritual, the main purpose of which had been to interpret, with the dying sacrificial victim as the medium, the signs that form the future pattern of events'. The latter observation is possibly correct, whereas the perception of the sacrificial victim and the fast seems to be influenced by a logic that focuses solely on the sacrifi-

One exception to this is Ulf Drobin (1991, 109-10), who argues that the multivalence that is attached to the Óðinn-character can allow many different phenomena to be in play at one and the same time; he argues, however, that the symbolism of sacrifice is the most important. Margaret Clunies Ross (1994, 222-6) also considers the four stanzas to contain elements from both sacrifice and initiation and, as the only scholar who has worked with the self-hanging, she is explicit about how the two phenomena are connected. She argues that from the point of view of the initiand, initiation *is* a form of sacrifice (1994, 226), but she, too, considers sacrifice as central to the stanzas. We will now examine the relationship between the two categories more closely.[27]

Sauvé and Talley, who are both strongly influenced by Dumézil and who include comparative material in support of their theories, compare Óðinn's self-hanging to the descriptions we find in Adam of Bremen of the Uppsala-sacrifices, which include the hanging of human beings, and further with the Indian human sacrificial rite of *purushamedha*. Using such analogies, they interpret the self-hanging as either a victory over death (Sauvé 1970, 190) or as a fertility rite (Talley 1974, 167). The two interpretations can be made to harmonise with one another, but in spite of the common inspiration from Dumézil, there are great differences in the two scholars' viewpoints. Where Sauvé tries to find the meaning of the myth as it appears in *Hávm*, Talley endeavours to reconstruct its development in a way that is not completely unproblematic. We will look a little closer at Sauvé's reasoning, because he has been critical of van Hamel's interpretation of the stanzas in more detail than most, particularly of the Dutch researcher's 'primitivist' viewpoints and the evolutionist tendencies that characterise his article. He writes (1970, 180):

> The assertion that Óðinn is martyred, not sacrificed, pays no attention to the obvious and hardly inconsequential fact that he suffers precisely the same ritual death as might befall one of his

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cial victim as a 'commodity'. As we saw in the overview of research history in Chapter 2, it is only Stanner who deals explicitly with the relationship between sacrifice and consecration, but others, as for example Evans-Prichard (1956, 197-230) is also aware of the close connection there can be between initiation and sacrifice.

[27] I have taken up the problem myself in two articles (Schjødt 1993 and 1995), and to a certain extent they overlap with the following.

> human sacrificial victims. Óðinn does indeed die a ritual death by means of which he appropriates the power of death, symbolized in the runic magic that raises the dead to momentary eloquence.

Sauvé argues that Adam of Bremen's description of the sacrifices at Uppsala (Trillmich 1961, 470-72) is like Óðinn's behaviour on the tree. However, there are both similarities and differences between Adam's account and the stanzas in *Hávm*. If we first look at the similarities, we notice that the number nine appears in both sources: Óðinn's trials last for nine nights; the feasts at Uppsala are celebrated every ninth year; of the various male creatures, nine specimens are sacrificed; and the sacrifices last nine days (schol. 141). The hanging itself is also common to both sources, as both Óðinn and the sacrificial victims mentioned by Adam hang in trees.[28] The detail that both parties are wounded as well as hanged may also provide a parallel. Óðinn is wounded with a spear, and the sacrificial victims at Uppsala were apparently not hung up in the trees until after the blood had been used as a gift to the gods. For this reason, the victims must have been wounded or perhaps killed before they were hung up.[29] Finally, the trees in both sources are sacred.[30]

But there are also differences between the two sources. The similarity provided by the trees proves, on closer inspection, not to be a similarity at all, as it seems to emerge from Adam's description that the trees we are dealing with in the grove at Uppsala cannot be regarded as cultic parallels to Yggdrasill. In schol. 138, we hear about another tree, which judging by its size, the extent of its branches and the fact that it is evergreen must form the cultic counterpart to the World Tree of the myths (cf. the description in *Gylf* 15 and *Vsp* 19). This tree stands near a well, just as the World Tree can be localised to a place near Mímir's or Urðr's well (*Vsp* 19), and it is apparently not identical to any other tree in the grove we hear about in chapter 27, the sacredness of which is primarily due to the death and decay of the sacrificial victims. As far as the latter is concerned, it must be emphasised, of course, that Adam's description ought to be viewed with reservation, not least in connection with the ideas that lie behind what he describes.

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[28] Hultgård (1997, 138), among others, has cast doubt on whether human sacrifices were still taking place in Uppland in the eleventh century.

[29] The connection between hanging and stabbing is found in several passages in the Scandinavian material (cf. the episode with king Víkarr below and *Hálfssaga ok Hálfsrekka* chapter 8 (*FSN* II, 104-5), where there is no mention of sacrifice, but where king Hreiðarr is stabbed and hanged, and in which it is suggested that his assistant Asa is drowned. See also Ward 1970, where hanging, stabbing and drowning are understood as fundamental in the tri-functional sacrifice i.e. a sacrifice being performed for all three of the Dumézilian functions, together with Näsström's critique of and further work on this concept (1997).

[30] It is, however, not explicitly expressed in *Hávm*, but, as mentioned, here it must be a question of the most sacred of all threes, viz. Yggdrasill.

There are even more marked differences between the two sources, because the substance of *Hávm* 139-41 does not have any real counterpart in Adam. This means that, if it is accepted that the four stanzas (138-41) are connected, which cannot be doubted, the parallel to Adam's description only has to do with a very specific part of the *Hávm*-sequence. The parallels that do appear are of a relatively subordinate nature and are found at the level of detail, whereas the essential characteristics in *Hávm* which are the connection between ritual death, the acquisition of knowledge and the return to life, do not correspond at all to Adam's text,[31] where we are not even told that the sacrifices concern Óðinn. This seems to be the greatest problem in drawing a parallel between Adam of Bremen and the myth of self-hanging. On the other hand, there are still points of similarity between the sacrificial victims at Uppsala and Óðinn, and one cannot reject some kind of semantic affinity between them. Naturally, certain fixed ritualistic and symbolic expressions (e.g. hanging and stabbing) are included in many rituals without these necessarily needing to belong to the same phenomenological category. But it must be emphasised that the description *does not* offer sure possibilities for evaluating the kind of similarities that exixt at a semantic level between Óðinn's self-hanging and the sacrifices that were carried out at Uppsala.

Aside from Adam, there is another source that apparently treats similar phenomena. This is the murder of king Víkarr which is described in two places: in *Gautreks saga* chapter 7 (*FSN* IV, 29-30) and in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* VI, v 7 (Olrik and Ræder 1931, 153). In spite of considerable differences between the sources in the description of Starkaðr, there are no material discrepancies between them with regard to the actual killing of Víkarr. For us, the important context is that Óðinn wanted a human sacrificial victim in return for giving a fair wind to Víkarr and his crew. By casting lots, it was determined that the king himself was to be the sacrificial victim, and for this reason they wanted it to be only a sham-sacrifice. However, Starkaðr, who was to perform the sacrifice, had promised to send Víkarr to Óðinn, and the outcome was that the innocent osier that was put round the king's neck became tight and strong and caused strangulation; at the same time Starkaðr pricked him with a straw that was suddenly transformed into a spear (*Gautreks saga*), or he simply killed him with a sword (Saxo). In both cases, the outcome is that Víkarr dies.

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[31] Beck 1967, 173 tabulates all the similarities point by point, but completely avoids mentioning the differences.

There seems no doubt here that we are dealing with an Óðinn-sacrifice, and there is no doubt either that the manner of killing corresponds to a large extent to the description in the self-hanging myth in *Hávm.* Again, we see, however, that there is no close parallel to 139-41 in the elements that form the basis for the sacrifice of Víkarr. If one must attach a religio-historical term to those phenomena that we are dealing with here in Adam and in connection with Víkarr, it must be a *do-ut-des*-sacrifice – 'I give in order that you shall give [me]' – thus emphasising the contractual aspect in the relation. This emerges especially clearly in the Víkarr-account. Here it seems that Starkaðr and Óðinn have almost concluded a contract, so to speak, in which Starkaðr (according to Saxo) obtains a lifespan three times longer than normal in exchange for which he is expected to send Víkarr to Óðinn. Besides, the sacrifice is carried out explicitly with the objective of obtaining a fair wind. It is worth noticing in *Gautreks saga* that when Starkaðr touches the king with the straw he says: *nú gef ek þik Óðni* 'now I give you to Óðinn'. Here we have, then, the verb *gefa* in connection with a *do-ut-des* sacrifice.[32]

Comparisons between the myth of Oðinn's self-hanging and the rituals associated with the Uppsala-sacrifices and Víkarr's murder are certainly not unproblematic. Still, it cannot be denied that there is a series of similarities on the plane of expression: the number nine, the combination of stabbing with a spear and hanging, the assignment of the object to Óðinn (which is uncertain in Adam). In this context, Sauvé's arguments about the meaning of self-hanging are worth considering (1970, 190):

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[32] Beck (1967, 106), in connection with her description of bloody animal sacrifices, argues that the verb *gefa* is not used as a consecration formula. On the other hand, she gives several examples of the use of precisely this verb in connection with her explanation of human sacrifices (96 -110).

> Óðinn achieved a mighty victory over death when he dangled from the world tree for nine nights, and secured possession of the powerful runes, effective over the dead.

He is undoubtedly quite correct in this understanding, but the question is whether it is really different from van Hamel's idea that Óðinn through his martyrdom attempts to communicate with the dead and the underworld. Van Hamel also touched on the possibility that the manifestations of 'martyrdom' and 'sacrifice' could be difficult to separate from one another, although the underlying representations were considered completely different (van Hamel 1932, 272). This last idea, however, requires further proof; if we ignore van Hamel's definitions, which were influenced by the evolutionist research-tradition (e.g. 1932, 266), we cannot avoid noticing that there are several things, in both symbolism, meaning and function, that run parallel when we look at *do-ut-des*-sacrifice and initiation. Renauld-Krantz expresses it in this way (1972, 80-1):

> Dans la souffrance le monde lui devient interieur et ses secrets se révèlent á lui. Tel est á mon avis le sens psychologique et mystique du martyre volontaire d'Óðinn. La souffrance qu'il ressent a donc une valeur initiatique et doit être rapprochée de celle qui est toujours infligée dans les ceremonies d'initiation.
>
> In suffering, the world becomes interior to him and its secrets reveal themselves to him. In my opinion, this is the psychological and mystical meaning of Óðinn's voluntary martyrdom. The suffering that he feels thus has an initiatory value and must be compared to that which is always inflicted in initiation ceremonies.

and further(1972, 82): 'Or ce qu'obtient Óðinn par le martyre qu'il s'inflige, c'est *le savoir magique* symbolisé par les runes.' 'Now that which Óðinn obtains through the martyrdom that he inflicts on himself, is *magical knowledge* symbolised by the runes.'

When this is compared with the quotation from Sauvé above, we see that in both cases the runes are viewed as the real objective of the ritual, whether this is understood as a sacrifice or as an initiation. The runes are thus of great importance and function as the object of reciprocation that is sought after by means of the action.

We have, then, four essential elements in the *do-ut-des*-sacrifice as well as in initiation, namely a sender (S), an object (O), a receiver (R) and also an object of reciprocation (RO). A normal *do-ut-des*-sacrifice will thus assume the following form: S sends O to R, who in turn sends RO to S. So far as it goes, there is nothing new in this (cf. Hubert and Mauss 1964, 100-3), and the reason that the self-hanging cannot be recognised as a sacrifice of this type without further proof is quite simply due to the fact that we here have a merging of three elements that are nearly always separated in a cult situation,[33] as S is always one or more human beings, O a living or dead object, and R one or more beings with an affinity to The Other World. RO can be anything: fine weather, health, food, fertility and so forth; *and*, if Sauvé is correct, which in all probability is the case here, it can also be *the runes* that provide the possibility of 'controlling' the world of both the dead and the living. In *Hávm*, we also have these four elements, but here S, O and R are not separated because it is Óðinn who gives himself to himself, whereas RO, as mentioned, is the runes (and, in a longer view, incantations and mead). We have therefore a *structure* which can be paralleled with the *do-ut-des* sacrifice. But van Hamel drew our attention to the fact that certain elements could not belong to such a sacrifice. These include exposure to the elements and to fasting (1932, 267), which were used as part of the proof that we are in the presence of a martyrdom. It is difficult to decide whether these two elements cannot actually be part of a sacrifice (see also F. Ström 1947, 61), as we have to be content with *argumenta ex silentio*, which – considering the nature of the material – cannot easily be used in the Scandinavian domain. It is also important to notice that Óðinn is *both* sender and object; and since it is generally known in the phenomenology of religion that the sacrifice-sender has to observe certain rules before performing the sacrifice, it is possible to view these elements of suffering as belonging, not primarily to Óðinn as object, but to Óðinn as sender.

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[33] The degree of separation is debatable, as several researchers have indicated that the sacrificial gift is always made 'sacred' in the sense that it possesses some of the giver's power and therefore is part of the giver (see for example Widengren 1969, 285).

We must now investigate what the position of the initiation-structure is in relation to both the structure in *Hávm* and the *do-ut-des*-structure. In an initiation, one 'gives' oneself to something, which is normally a social group that is separated from those individuals in the society who have *not* been initiated into the group. Often this group has a god as its patron,[34] whose 'property' one therefore becomes, and for this reason it seems expedient to regard this god as the receiver of those initiated persons. In return, one receives those rights and duties that accompany the membership of this group, together with knowledge of these rights and duties. It is often necessary that the individual, in order to be able to attend to these new functions, is also supplied with knowledge of a magical kind; this applies perhaps especially to so-called shaman-initiations (cf. Eliade 1969b, 115-16). That means that the elements S, O, R and RO are also present in initiations, but here it is in contrast to the *do-ut-des*, so that usually S and O are identical. In initiation, it is S who gives himself (O) to R, which may be a social group that in the religious context has a special affinity to one or more gods or beings from The Other World. In return, R gives knowledge – a knowledge that is partly directed towards the functions one has to attend to in the new life, and can consist partly of all kinds of religious exotica and magical abilities and equipment. Just as this structure fits snugly into the self-hanging, we can also see that it is almost identical with the sacrifice-structure, yet with the difference that the normal ritual of sacrifice includes a distinction between S and O, whereas the opposite is the case in initiation. But at the very moment we begin to talk about 'self-sacrifice' we have a problem of separating the two categories from one another, at least with reference to the sequence-structure.

As a provisional conclusion we must establish that the structure of the self-hanging myth – with a sender, who is lacking something which he desires to obtain, and therefore gives 'something' to 'somebody', who then in return remedies the initial want – is present both in *do-ut-des*-sacrifices as well as in initiations. It is understandable that researchers have thought that they have found support in both ritual-categories because the self-hanging is an exact parallel to both of them.

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[34] Most religions have groups attached to specific gods and, as far as Scandinavia is concerned, we have seen that Höfler 1934 (cf. Kershaw 2000, 69-90) has demonstrated the existence of *Männerbünde* attached to Óðinn.

But there are other elements besides structure that can form the basis of categorisation. Van Baal in his critique of Stanner fastened upon the point that the object in the sacrifice is destroyed, whereas it profits from the ritual in the initiation. The two phenomena are thus in an inverse relationship to one another (van Baal and van Beek 1985, 221).[35] We must therefore ask whether Óðinn in his capacity of object was destroyed? Was he killed, or are we only presented with a sham-sacrifice, as Otto Höfler among others, has argued (Höfler 1934, 236-40)? On the one hand, Höfler emphasises the importance of seeing the self-hanging as a sham death, and on the other hand he remarks: 'Scheintötungen aber, die als Scheinopfer aufgebaut waren, kennen wir besonders in einer Kategorie zur Genüge: bei den Initiationsriten' 'But we know sham killings which were set up as sham sacrifices especially from one category: in initiation rites' (Höfler 1934, 237). Höfler succeeds, therefore, in linking sacrifice and initiation, as he correctly draws attention to the symbolic death that is so often present in initiation. Transferred to Óðinn's situation in *Hávm*, it means that the four elements, hanging, stabbing with a spear, hunger and exposure to the elements, each one individually and all together connote death, or in other words: the maltreatment that Óðinn exposes himself to by his self-hanging, and which initiands all over the world expose themselves to, can be regarded as equivalent to the destruction of the sacrificial object. For just as the sacrificial object by means of its destruction is transformed to a condition in which it can reach the gods, so it issimilarly necessary for the initiands to attain a different form of existence (the liminal condition) that can bring them into contact with The Other World. This is often brought about by maltreatment that symbolises, or has affinity with, the process of dying (Eliade 1975, 24). At the symbolic level there seems, therefore, not to be a great difference between the two rite-categories with respect to the destruction of the object since, in certain respects, we can understand initiation as a symbolic sacrifice with accompanying symbolic destruction. It is, therefore, problematical when Höfler emphasises the importance in the *Hávm* stanzas of distinguishing between an actual death and a sham death (Höfler 1934, 232 and 236), because, when we encounter a mythical context, we must consider this distinction abolished: an 'actual' death and a sham death is, in the world of myths and from a semantic point of view, the same thing.[36]

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[35] Again, we must emphasise that it is analytically expedient to differentiate between S and O, and again we must ask whether in initiation it is the initiand in his capacity as S or O that benefits from the ritual. We will briefly return to the problem below.

The crucial element in *Hávm* is that during the act of self-hanging Óðinn is *transformed.* Whether at the same time he is *destroyed* is in this connection less important; but if the act of dying itself is regarded as a destruction, then it must be so considered, just as it is the case in all initiation rituals that make use of death-rebirth symbolism. In that case, the criterion that van Baal used to differentiate between 'sacrifice' and 'anointment' loses its value, because the statement that: 'in the latter the action is to the benefit of the object, in the former the object is made a victim' does not hold good. The object is always a 'victim' on the symbolic level, whereas the sender 'benefits'. This is also true of Óðinn in connection with the acquisition of knowledge. The complication in this myth is that Óðinn is both sender and object: he receives the benefits as S, but is at the same time destroyed as O. For the sake of the analysis, we have found it expedient here to differentiate between S and O, but, as we have seen, they are identical both in *Hávm* and in initiation rituals in general. It is interesting now that even in the *do-ut-des*-sacrifices one cannot argue without further proof that the object is completely separated from the sender, because even if this is the case when the two entities are considered in their physical form, one must observe that the function and meaning for S is to obtain something – RO – by help of that which one gives. In addition, that which one gives is understood as symbolic, that is, as a part of the giver himself, which is the hallmark of the institution of the gift in most archaic cultures.[37]

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[36] In the rituals, it is naturally otherwise as it can be decisive for the categorisation of the rituals whether the 'victim' is killed or only suffers a sham death (not to mention the difference in the social and psychological implication that occur). With regard to the distinction between sacrifice and initiation, this is also of importance, as a 'real' hanging must be regarded as an element in a sacrificial ritual, whereas a sham sacrifice is more or less typical of the initiation category, just as Höfler formulated. It must, however, be maintained that a 'real death' in the mythic world need not be different from a sham death in the ritual one, because a return to life is not necessarily a big problem in the world of myth as the actors are gods or human beings that are exposed to robust divine intervention.

The act of giving includes a manifestation of friendship – it establishes a tie between the giver and the receiver[38] and obliges the latter to reciprocate (e. g. *Hávm* 42 and 145; van Baal 1976, 163-72). In a sacrificial context the gift functions, therefore, as a mediator between human beings and the 'supernatural' (Hubert and Mauss 1964, 11),[39] so we can regard sacrifice as an indirect communication with The Other World, whereas initiation means that the initiand himself is being placed in The Other World in the form of a symbolic space, and the communication should, therefore, be regarded as direct (Schjødt 1992a, 16-17). The distinction between sacrifice on the one hand and initiation on the other can still be maintained in that, in the former, there is no physical identity between S and O but, rather, a *pars pro toto*-relationship, whereas physical identity is present in initiation. Yet on a symbolic and structural level there are considerable points of similarity. As we demonstrated in Chapter 3.1, initiation and sacrifice are found on different levels in the hierarchy of classification. Thus a sacrificial rite can be included in an initiation ritual, as Clunies Ross has observed (1994, 225): 'Here [in *Hávm*] we find the characteristic use of the idiom of sacrifice within a context reminiscent of male initiation ritual'. But we can perhaps go further and say that it not only reminds us of initiation, but that the *context* in the *Hávm*-stanzas constitutes a mythic initiation by virtue of the fact that the initiand returns, bringing with him an object of knowledge (the runes), whereas the killing itself, isolated from the context, can probably be called a sacrifice insofar as every initiatory death can be understood as such (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 226).

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[37] See van Baal 1975, 26-30 and 52-8 and, quite explicitly (as a propitiatory sacrifice), van Baal 1976, 174: 'Up to an extent the sacrificer is identical with the victim'. The most famous, and perhaps also the best, analysis of the institution of the gift is still Marcel Mauss's essay of 1925 [1974]. Mauss, too, emphasises that something of the giver is in the gift (1974, 8-10), and uses examples from the Germanic area (1974, 59-62).

[38] That this was also the case in Scandinavia can clearly be seen from many examples (references can be found in Hamre's article in *KLNM* 5, columns 653-61 and Vestergaard 1991, 98-104) and, in particular, Grønbech 1955, II, 49-69.

[39] Cf. ON *senda* 'to send, despatch', the verb designating the handing over of the sacrificial object to the gods (Näsström 1999, 161-3).

To sum up, we have established that the only semantic difference between a *do-ut-des*-sacrifice and an initiation is that in the former S and O are not physically identical, whereas they are in the latter. In addition to that – and connected with it – there is the structural distinction that the subject in initiation returns to This World from its liminal position, but in a transformed shape, whereas the sacrificial object is integrated into The Other World from the liminal position. All other possible distinctions are invalid when fundamentals are compared. Van Baal mixes subject and object together when, in connection with *do-ut-des*-sacrifices, he speaks of the object which becomes 'a victim', whereas he speaks about the subject which benefits in connection with initiation. But in both cases there is a subject that benefits and an object that is destroyed (actually or symbolically). The difference is only that in initiation there is a consistent merging of subject and object. From this it follows further that the term 'self-sacrifice' is unfortunate. For this reason, Sauvé's 'attack' on the 'initiation theory' must also be rejected, as the self-hanging with its merging of S and O is actually closer to initiation than to the category that we normally understand as sacrifice. On the other hand, we can willingly concede to Sauvé, Beck and the other defenders of the sacrifice-theory that the symbolic context of both the hanging-sacrifices and the self-hanging is Odinic, so it is possible, even probable, that a semantic merging has occurred, especially as the borderline between the categories, as analysed above, is not as well-defined as has generally been assumed. In all circumstances, it is important to maintain that initiation, as well as sacrifice, can involve destruction (torture and symbolic death), and that, just as in sacrifice, a reciprocated object is obtained (numinous wisdom or know-how), which makes the destruction itself meaningful for the subject.

It remains, however, to explain the significance of the identity – not only between S and O, but also between S/O and R. In traditional sacrifices, R consists normally of one or more supernatural beings, and this is the same in initiations, although their identity may be concealed, as it often is in puberty-initiations and in others of those categories where it is a matter of 'biologically conditioned' consecrations: marriages, births etc., in which the initiand often enters into a relationship with The Other World in general, rather than with definite gods. On the other hand, we see clearly in consecration associated with shamans, mysteries and secret societies, R's identity as a supernatural being.[40] In the self-hanging myth, there is no doubt that both the giver and the receiver is Óðinn. This provides several possibilities for interpreting the myth and, at the same time, it has the effect of imparting a 'mystical' colouring to the whole event.[41]

First of all, it is of importance here that we are dealing with a myth, that is, with a model for and an explanation of the human condition, presumably including certain rituals. These latter ones appear to have attracted the most attention in the literature to date. A mythical model operates under fixed conditions, of which the most important in this connection is that it is both similar to and yet different from the rituals that it can generate. One must be able to imitate it, but it must at the same time be provided with an aura of something 'superhuman', which can explain its paradigmatic status and make it worthy of imitation.

There is another text in which Óðinn plays a central role and where we hear explicitly that he carries out an act that becomes an example to be imitated. It has to do with the previously mentioned description by Snorri of Óðinn's and Njǫrðr's deaths in *Yng* 9, which has hardly been noticed in the literature about the self-hanging. Óðinn's death is described by Snorri in this way: 'Óthinn died in his bed in Sweden. But when he felt death approaching, he had himself marked with the point of a spear, and he declared as his own all men who fell in battle. He said he was about to depart to the abode of the gods and would there welcome his friends.'(Hollander 1964, 13).[42] About Njǫrðr he says: 'He had himself marked for Óthinn before he died' (Hollander 1964, 13).[43] The point here is that Óðinn is the god who receives the men who died by weapons: it is he who receives fallen warriors and those who are 'marked' for him. To be marked consists in a symbolic stabbing with the point of the spear, as a sign that one belongs to him, and it can thus be taken as a synonym for being 'consecrated' or 'dedicated'.[44] Those who were consecrated to Óðinn included those who were actually killed in a battle (and can, therefore, be seen as Óðinn-sacrifices), as well as those warriors who were members of warrior bands, as has been demonstrated by Höfler who concludes (1934, 250) that: 'Die Initiation in der Männerbund bedeutete also nichts anderes als die Aufnahme in die Gemeinschaft der Ahnengeister' 'Initiation into male warrior bands therefore means nothing other than admission into the society of the spirits of the ancestors'. Although this statement is not without problems, it indicates that Óðinn in his capacity as god of the dead must be understood as the ruler of the kingdom of the dead, where an initiation of one form or another must necessarily precede residence there. Whether this initiation takes place in connection with admission into a warrior band, immediately before dying in one's bed (Njǫrðr), in connection with a hanging-sacrifice (Víkarr) or simply by being 'consecrated' to Óðinn on the battlefield through the fact that the enemy is throwing his spear, or one in fact dies a warrior-death, cannot be decided. It is probably unlikely that any strict rules governed the determination of what constituted initiation, so the different 'consecration-methods' were able to appear together or separately depending of the specific situation and local traditions. In any case, it is a question of a symbolic consecration to Óðinn and with that an 'admission card' to Valhǫll (cf. Schjødt 2007c).

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[40] As mentioned above, all initiations aim, naturally, to make the initiand fit for some function or other in society with all that that entails, but, as these functions in most archaic societies were thought to be under the protection of a certain god, or group of gods (see also Haekel 1954, 168), it will do to speak of consecration to certain gods.

[41] The myth can thus evoke associations of the experience of unity, which plays so great a part in mysticism (Schjødt 1990c, 145-7; cf. also Grønvik 2000a and the criticism of his views above). There is, however, a conclusive difference in that we are faced with a myth and the one actor is a god. Therefore it makes no sense to speak of a 'unity' – of whom? It certainly takes two characters to 'unite'.

[42] Óðinn varð sóttdauðr í Svíþjóð, ok er han var at kominn dauða, lét hann marka sik geirsoddi ok eignaði sér alla vápndauða menn, sagði hann sik mundu fara í Goðheim ok fagna þar vinum sínum. (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, 22)

[43] *lét hann ok marka sik Óðni, aðr hann dó.* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, 23)

Óðinn is, therefore, the figure to whom one is consecrated. But at the same time he has, as we heard in Snorri, himself instituted the rite that consists in letting oneself be 'marked', and thus he becomes both sender, object and receiver. We have here a close parallel to the structure that is present in the self-hanging myth. It is therefore also natural to see the self-hanging as the mythical establishment of a more comprehensive ritual that not only secures an existence with Óðinn in the hereafter by means of the spear-stabbing, but in addition secures knowledge of hidden things just as Óðinn obtained this via *his* self-hanging. In both cases, we are dealing with an Óðinn-consecration but, whereas in Snorri it is focused on his role as a god of the dead or a god of warriors, in *Hávm* it is his position as the possessor of knowledge that is the focus.[45] With regard to Eliade's categories, one can also argue that whereas Snorri's description is an element in a kind of consecration into a warrior league, the *Hávm*-description is a 'shaman-consecration' (Eliade 1975, 2).

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[44] It is probably this 'marking' that is involved in connection with Víkarr. It was claimed above that this involved an Óðinn-sacrifice, but that certainly does not exclude the sacrificial victim being 'consecrated' to the god in advance.

Óðinn in his role as object is, therefore, the mythical *example* of someone consecrated to Óðinn, whether as a sacrifice (cf. Víkarr) or as an initiand, whereas in his role as receiver he takes on this role that nobody but he can fulfill, as the god of secret knowledge which is exemplified primarily by the runes.

Now, there is no source explicitly dealing with initiation-rituals that includes hanging and stabbing with a spear, whereas in connection with punishment and sacrifice we have several descriptions of hanging alone or hanging and stabbing with a spear together[46] (Turville-Petre 1964, 46-50; Fleck 1968, 103-4 and above all Beck 1967, 134-77). That such a ritual existed in connection with numinous knowledge seems likely, although we are unable to form any impression of the details of the concepts held by the participants.

There is one problem in particular that has caused a great deal of trouble in cases where we are no longer dealing with a god, but with human beings who have to undergo a rite of this type; this has to do with the expression *nema upp*. The problem has been investigated particularly by Fleck (1968, 101-3 and 1971, 121), who fails to examine the relationship between myths and rites more closely and is primarily concerned with the expression *nema upp* as it is found in *Hávm* 139/4. The uncertainty concerns whether we must understand *nema upp* literally in the sense 'to take up', so that we may imagine Óðinn picking the runes up from off the ground, or whether the expression can be understood figuratively, with the meaning 'to understand' or 'learn'.[47] Both the suggested solutions encounter difficulties, however, the former because of the completely banal observation that it must be regarded as exceedingly difficult for a hanged person to reach the ground and thus pick up anything from below, and the latter for philological reasons, because we do not have examples of *nema* with the preposition *upp* meaning 'to acquire knowledge' (*Fritzner: nema*).

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[45] This statement does not imply that a symbolic self-hanging was included in the admission rites of warrior bands. What belonged to them will be discussed below in Chapter 9. Here, the point is the parallel with Óðinn as the mythical example. That both stabbing with the spear and perhaps other elements may be present in warrior initiations as well as in acquisitions of the secrets of the runes is due solely to the fact that Óðinn is the mythical focus of both the warrior death and numinous knowledge.

[46] As mentioned above we can not here deal with questions of the connection between punishment and sacrifice or with the possible sacral origin of punishment in Germanic societies. For a short introduction with references, see Folke Ström's article in *KLNM* 17, (F. Ström 1956-78, cols. 275-280, and the excellent discussion by Gade (1985) of the relationship between the legal material and statements about hanging as punishment in literature.

An interesting and surprising attempt to solve the problem was put forward by Fleck himself in his commentary on the *Hávm* stanzas (1968, 101-15). Here, he argued that Óðinn hangs with his head downward or in other words hangs upside down. That everything in connection with the underworld is imagined to be reversed in relation to the upper world is not unusual as a phenomenon in the history of religions, and Fleck himself adduces impressive material from Germanic and non-Germanic areas that shows how common 'reverse hanging' was in connection with the acquisition of wisdom. Whether one can accept his 'proof' is partly a matter of temperament, but one cannot reject the suggestion out right; this would imply that Óðinn, or the initiand, quite literally picks up the runes from the ground, which would be possible in that position. On the other hand, the philological objection that could be raised against understanding the expression figuratively is hardly compelling in a connection where wisdom in the mythical universe is understood as literal and abstract at the same time. This can be seen in relation with the Kvasir-motif, with the mixing of blood and honey very simply *being* knowledge and poetic ability, which clearly emerges, not least from a long series of kennings for poetry (Turville-Petre 1964, 38).

If *nema upp* can be interpreted as 'to learn', 'to acquire knowledge', we have to look at what the object of learning is. The word is *rúnar* (f. pl.) which has been understood by most researchers to mean letters or characters.[48] However, the plural form of the noun *rún* can also mean secret lore, and this was probably the ‘original’ meaning[49] from which a secondary meaning designating magical signs derives. It has been supposed that the *Hávm*-context supports the theory that Óðinn actually learns the meaning of these characters or gathers them up while he is hanging on the tree, seeing that the section of *Hávm* beginning with stanza 142 deals with various instructions about the carving and interpreting of runes (e.g. Turville-Petre 1964, 48). As mentioned earlier, the connection between 141 and the subsequent stanzas is problematical, so we cannot conclude that the substance of stanza 139 actually deals with the runic characters.[50] Neither can such an argument be advanced for the opposite viewpoint, although we will see below that certain elements in the whole complex with regard to the acquisition of knowledge point towards the word being understood more broadly than merely knowledge of the runic characters, however great a power these might have given in themselves. They are rather symbols of the knowledge that the initiand receives (Quinn 2000, 53). In addition, we already saw in *Sigdr* 14 that Mímir speaks *sannir stafir*, where the *stafir* clearly belong in the semantic sphere that operates with runes as characters, but which can still be spoken. Something similar also appears in *Vafðr* 1 where Óðinn wants to debate *fornom stǫfom* 'in ancient staves' with the giant. In both examples, the two meanings of *rúnar* seem to have merged, probably because the characters have been understood as containing secret knowledge, whereas secrets have been expressed in words, spoken or written. Finally, *Sigdr* 13 and 18, in which the runes are found in the sacred mead, are also relevant to this discussion. Here, the runes are inextricably mixed in the triad comprising magic drink, magic words and magic runes. In connection with this problem, we can content ourselves with concluding that what Óðinn obtains through his self-hanging comes within the semantic space that has as its principal designation *numinous knowledge*.

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[47] Fleck records several suggestions for a solution, and we will only here add that Müllenhof's suggestion that the verb means 'to invent' (German *erfinden*) seems arbitrary and is without example.

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[48] Support for this sense can be found in Tacitus’ *Germania* chapter 10, where he writes in connection with a description of the way the Germanic people used omens: ‘Auspicia sortesque ut qui maxime observant: sortium consuetudo simplex. virgam frugiferae arbori decisam in surculos amputant eosque notis quibusdam discretos super candidam vestem temere ac fortuito spargunt. mox, si public consultetur sacerdos civitatis, sin privatim, ipse pater familiae precatus deos caelumque supiciens ter singulos tollit, sublatos secundum impressam ante notam interpretatur’ ‘To divination and the casting of lots they pay as much attention as anyone: the method of drawing up lots is uniform. A branch is cut from a nut-bearing tree and divided into slips: these are distinguished by certain marks and spread casually and at random over a white cloth: afterwards, should the inquiry be for the people the priest of the state, if private the father of the family in person, after prayers to the gods and with eyes turned to heaven, takes up one slip at a time till he had done this on three separate occasions, and after taking the three interpret them according to the marks which have been already stamped on each’ (Warmington 1970, 144-7). The *notae* mentioned here could possibly be interpreted as runes, because the *Germania*, as is well known, was written not long before the time to which we can refer to the oldest known runic inscriptions. How such a prediction-system with runes would have functioned is completely obscure due to the fact that we do not know anything about the systematisation of the runic alphabet, but one cannot ignore the possibility that runic names as well as the three rows of runes (see Düwel 1968, 7-11 and 96-101) could have played a significant role in divination in Tacitus’ time. An argument against interpreting Tacitus’s *notae* as runes is that, if he were thinking of some kind of letters, he would probably have used the word *litterae*. Against this, however, one could argue that there is the possibility that they used some form or other of ‘secret runes’ that correspond to those that we have in the more recent runic alphabet (Düwel 1968, 98), and which do not direct our thoughts to letters in a general sense. The interpretation of that passage in Tacitus remains uncertain.

[49] Düwel 1968, 1; Flowers 1986, 148 and Helm 1953, 124. The etymology of the word is uncertain, but most likely it is connected to the Greek *έρευνάω* – ‘to explore’ (see *AEW*, 453). Moltke 1976, 65 argues against the meaning ‘secrets’ being the original one. The question of the original function of the runes – whether they have been considered as magical or only as ‘common letters’ – is unlikely to be solved definitively. Régis Boyer’s position (1986, 166 with references), in which he says that the runes were a means of communication between people and that it was possible with runes to cover the whole spectrum of communication, including the magical, seems reasonable. See further Flowers 1986, 48-67 and Raudvere 2002, 46-52.

Sequential analysis

Let us look once more at the sequence that we encounter in *Hávm* 138-41, especially with regard to the Mímir- and Kvasir-complexes. As previously, we can work on two planes, the horizontal and the vertical. When laid out horizontally, the myth shows us the well-known picture of Óðinn, acquiring wisdom by coming into contact with death. In this case, it is not a question of an explicit journey to the underworld, as we saw in connection with Mímir and Kvasir and with Óðinn himself in his encounter with Gunnlǫð. But that this theme is, nevertheless, present is revealed by two factors. The first is that death in itself is closely connected with the images of the underworld, a connection established in the two previous complexes in which death and the journey to the underworld merged, and the second is that Óðinn picks up the runes from *below*. Although we do not expressly learn that they are coming from the underworld, it must be this which is meant by the movement from below and upwards (Clunies Ross 1994, 226). The lines *nýsta ek niðr;/ nam ek upp rúnar* 'I looked down, I took up the runes' must, therefore, be taken as an indication that we are in the presence of a high/low dichotomy. Folke Ström wrote in this connection (1947, 65): 'Ned mot underjordens förborgade våld riktar guden sit spejande blick (*nýsta ek niðr*), dess hemligheter är det som blottas för hans syn' 'The god directs his searching gaze down towards the underworld's hidden realm (*nýsta ek niðr*), whose secrets are unveiled before his gaze'. Ström uses stanzas 42 and 43 from *Vafðr* in support of his argument, which seems to be correct as the basis for being able to know (stanza 43) *iǫtna rúnom oc allra goða* '[Of] the secrets of the giants and of all the gods' (Larrington 1996, 47),(irrespective of whether the runes are now understood in their narrow or broad meaning) is that Vafþrúðnir has been in all the worlds. After this, it says that *nio kom ec heima fyr Nifhel neðan, hinig deyia ór helio halir* 'nine worlds I have travelled through to Mist-hell, there men die down out of hell' (Larrington 1996, 47). But the tree, too, whose mythic origin is emphasised in the last lines of stanza 138, and which connects the upper world with the underworld, shows that contact has been established with the underworld. It is therefore plausible to accept a connection between the runes, the kingdom of the dead and the underworld: one knows the runes because one has had contact with the underworld or the kingdom of the dead.

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[50] F. Ström (1947, 65-69) supports the meaning 'secrets' in stanza 139, but his reasoning seems unconvincing, primarily because he apparently underestimates the meaning of what mastering written characters entailed as he writes 'såväl den religiösa som den konstnärliga logiken fordrar en rimlig proportion mellan vinst och insats' 'both religious as well as artistic logic demands a reasonable proportion between gain and effort' (p. 68).

Compared with the Mímir- and Kvasir-complexes, there are both similarities and differences. The similarities are, as we have mentioned, expressed in the narrative sequence in which the initial situation is a lack of knowledge (in comparison to the final situation's abundance), followed by a journey to the dead with the elimination of the lack of knowledge as a consequence, which is valid for all three complexes. Similarly, we see in all three places the etiological aspect that explains that Óðinn is the possessor of knowledge in the mythic present, because, after wisdom has been present in a latent form in the underworld, he is now master of it in the upper world where it is realised and activated.

The number of binary oppositional pairs that are directly thematised are fewer here than in the myths discussed earlier in Chapter 5, but they are just as important. Only the pairs life-death and high-low operate here and these have also been seen to have been fundamental in the two previous complexes.

Exactly because all three complexes occur within the same semantic space, it is important to examine differences in the analysis at both the horizontal and the vertical levels, since we may expect that they form semantic transformations that gradually lead to a model according to which the numinous understanding of the world can be organised, as will be supported in Chapter 10. Before the analytical differences are described, we should emphasise that purely textual differences between this motif and the previous ones can be of some importance to our understanding of the three complexes. *Hávm* 138-41 is in a concise and brief style, and is the only passage that deals with the self-hanging, whereas the fate of both Mímir and Kvasir is mentioned in several sources and in Snorri is laid out in considerable detail. This obviously contributes to the fact that the 'mystical' and 'visionary' impression one gets from reading the stanzas in *Hávm* is substituted in these myths with an apparently far more 'primitive' or purely 'mythical' way of thinking. This is really a superficial impression, though, as the topics that are at the centre of the narrative about Mímir and Kvasir are not especially primitive (at least not in the sense of being 'uncomplicated') and, conversely, the self-hanging is in its way no more complicated or less 'mythical' than the ideas that are the basis for initiation myths or initiation rites or *do-ut-des*-sacrifices in general.

An important analytical difference appears when we examine the objects of the three myth-complexes. It is clear here (if we keep to the first part of the Kvasir-complex) that, whereas in the self-hanging myth it is the subject itself that benefits from contact with the underworld, that is to say Óðinn, neither Mímir nor Kvasir benefit at all from their journey to the underworld. Again, it is Óðinn who does so. We will also return to this in Chapter 10, as, while the self-hanging myth can be understood as a definite initiation myth with a thoroughly traditional initiation structure, the Mímir- and Kvasir-complexes aim more at a mythical explanation of the scenario that we come across in the central phase of the initiation, namely the liminal space and with that the associated necessity for the triadic sequence. They also explain the very appearance of some of the essential knowledge-objects, provoking the question: how does an object qualify as numinous? In addition, there is a marked difference in the kinds of transformation that happen to the three objects. Óðinn is enriched intellectually, but his physical appearance apparently does not change. Mímir and Kvasir, on the other hand, are transformed to, respectively, a head without a body and a liquid, and both function solely as tools of knowledge for Óðinn. Thus after the self-hanging Óðinn manages to play an active, mythical role. This, in a way, also holds good for Mímir and Kvasir, but whereas they are 'locked into' the particular role in which the myth has placed them, namely as tools for Óðinn, the self-hanging has the result for Óðinn, as it says in 141, that *mér af orði orðz leitaði, verc mér af verki vercs leitaði* 'one word found another word for me, one deed found another deed for me'. This also means that the three myths do not have the same status. They all refer to Óðinn as it is he who ultimately becomes more knowledgeable, but at one level the self-hanging is a prerequisite for the other two myths, because this is what explains exactly how Óðinn can utilise the transformed objects: he can do this because he has acquired, once and for all, a basic knowledge or a basic tool with which to seek new knowledge. But this new knowledge is in fact merely a tool for attaining even more knowledge, as it is characteristic of Óðinn throughout the whole mythology that he constantly seeks knowledge. Irrespective of how many tools of knowledge he is in possession of, he must all the time acquire new knowledge by contacting the *vǫlva* (*Bdr* and *Vsp*) and the dead (*Yng*). But the two most crucial tools of knowledge or knowledge objects that Óðinn is in possession of are precisely Mímir's head, which gives him true words, and the mead, which makes him the master of wisdom. It seems, therefore, also in agreement with the internal logic of the myths if, in the nine *fimbullióð* and the mead, one accepts that we have references to precisely these two myths,[51] although it is far from compellingly necessary. At another level, however, one can also assert that these two myths are more fundamental than the self-hanging myth, because it is they that serve as a model to explain the emergence of the numinous as numinous: the knowledge objects have been through a total transformation.

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[51] With this, Mímir's status as a giant is also accepted, but as a giant who, through his kinship with Óðinn, must be presumed always to have resided among the Æsir and, as

In summing up the self-hanging myth with respect to the definitional criteria, we can conclude that Óðinn has obtained an irreversibly higher status with regard to knowledge, just as the sequence of death, the acquisition of new knowledge and a return are present. The Other World scenario is only developed a little, but still clearly, as death explicitly and the underworld implicitly (in the high/low-dichotomy) are present and operate within the field already encountered in the complexes that we have dealt with previously. What we have is thus an acquisition of knowledge that is played out in a narrative sequence which establishes a contact between the poles in some oppositional pairs. As a mediating factor, we have here Óðinn himself together with the World Tree Yggdrasill with its roots in the underworld.[52]

Thus, there seems to be no doubt that the myth of Óðinn's self-hanging is connected with the two previous myth-complexes.

6.2 Loki's and Óðinn's Mixing of Blood

The three previous myth-complexes have – irrespective of one's interpretation – clearly 'something to do with knowledge' for which reason they naturally present themselves as potential material for analysis as initiatory myths. The motif that is now to be discussed has, on the other hand, never been connected with the acquisition of numinous knowledge. One cannot say either that it is copiously represented in the sources, as there are only four stanzas in *Lok* that deal with the theme, and in order for them to be seen as connected they must be interpreted in an untraditional manner. The stanzas in question are 9, 23, 24 and 25, the last of which is of importance only because it gives a kind of chro-

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we have touched on previously, one who in many ways is a completely atypical giant – in fact just like Loki.

[52] It is significant here that the traditional interpretation of the designation as 'Óðinn's horse' indicates the exact character of the tree as a means of transport between the two worlds in the vertical model in the same way as Sleipnir (perhaps primarily in the horizontal model) is the only horse that can ride to the kingdom of the dead.

nology for what is referred to in the two previous stanzas. For this reason, it must necessarily be a question of a considerable degree of reconstruction, as was also the case with Mímir. But it is a reconstruction which is firstly of considerable value in explaining many obscure points in the myths about Loki, and secondly is rendered probable by the parallels to the rest of the initiation scenarios that are analysed in this study.

The source

Lokasenna 9, 23-5

9 'Do you remember, Odin, when in bygone days
we mixed blood together?
You said you would never drink ale
unless it were brought to both of us.'

23 'You know, if I gave what I shouldn't have given,
victory, to the faint-hearted,
yet eight winters you were beneath the earth,
a woman milking cows,[53]
and there you bore children,
and that I thought the hallmark of a pervert.'

24 'But you once practised *seid* on Samsey,
and you beat on the drum as witches do,[54]

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[53] *Kýr mólcandi* 'milking cows' is problematical, as it cannot be decided whether *mólcandi* is to be understood as transitive or intransitive (cf. the discussion in von See *et al.* 1997, 427-9). Considering all of Loki's strange abilities, including his ability to transform himself into a female animal (e.g. *Gylf* 42, Faulkes 2005, 34-6)), it seems most likely that he in fact appeared as a cow in the underworld. The question is not a crucial factor, however, in this connection, as all cases involve a sex-change (cf. Bonnetain 2000, 80). We do not know the basis for this myth, but it seems unlikely that Óðinn's accusation aims only at the low status attached to having been a milkmaid (McKinnell 1987-9, 244).

[54] The translation of *draptu á vétt* might preferably be given more neutrally as 'you practised magic' in relation to the comprehensive discussion that has taken place about

in the likeness of a wizard you journeyed among mankind,
and that I though the hallmark of a pervert.'

25 'Your actions ought never to be
spoken of in front of people,
what you two Æsir did in past times;
always keep ancient matters concealed'.[55] (Larrington 1996, 86, 88-9)

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this line (see von See *et al*. 1997, 431-5). Whether it is in fact a question of beating on the lid of a chest or merely a more general exercise of magic is not important in the present analysis.

[55] 9. Mantu þat, Óðinn,
er við í árdaga
blendom blóði saman;
ǫlvi bergia
létzu eigi mundo,
nema ocr væri báðom borit.

Veitztu, ef ec gaf,
þeim er ec gefa né scylda,
inom slævorom sigr:
átta vetr
vartu fyr iǫrð neðan
kýr mǫlcandi oc kona
oc hefir þú þar born borit,
oc hugða ec þat args aðal.

Enn þic síða kóðo
Sámseyo í,
oc draptu á vétt sem vǫlor;
vitca liki
fórtu verþióð yfir
oc hugða ec þat args aðal.

Ørlogom ycrom
scylit aldregi
segia seggiom frá,
hvat iþ æsir tveir
drýgðot í árdaga;
firrize æ forn rǫc firar.
(NK 1962, 98 and 101)

Analysis

It can be established immediately that there is not much in these stanzas that suggests initiation; so for our purpose it is necessary to include all of the underlying mythology that has to do with Óðinn and Loki. We learn that a mixing of blood has taken place – a phenomenon that we will also examine in a ritual connection, and which may be thought of as having been followed by a ritual of the initiation type, seeing that the blood brothers obtain a new status in comparison to their previous life. We may, therefore, ask in what mythical/religious context this mixing of blood has taken place as well as what the reasons for it and the consequences of it have been.

The question of what it means that two gods,[56] who confront one another at Ragnarǫk as chief adversaries, have blended their blood at the beginning of time, has been discussed by many scholars without a consensus emerging withn regard to the answer.[57] An important problem in this connection is whether the mixing of blood can be interpreted as an allusion to an original identity of the two characters in an earlier period of Scandinavian religious history (Philippson 1953, 49-51 and F. Ström 1956, 67-95). In an earlier article (Schjødt 1981a),[58] I rejected this possibility, partly because it does not give an explanation of Loki's further mythical career, and partly because it operates with the myth as a narrative that only reflects actual historical conditions. Naturally, it cannot be denied that myths may contain features that reflect earlier religio-historical conditions but, in addition to this they will, during the time when they were in use, nevertheless, have had a function within the collective mythical universe in which they are embedded, and it is that function which forms the focus here.

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[56] I will not enter further into whether it is reasonable to classify Loki as a god. True, he is of the giant family, but he lives all his mythical life among the gods and, although he is atypical in many ways, it seems most to the purpose to consider him one of these. The most recent comprehensive discussion, which is neutral with regard to the research debate, is Hultgård 2001a.

[57] I cannot agree with Klingenberg (1983, 146) who sees the allusion to Loki as a prefiguration of the moral decline in the period leading up to Ragnarǫk. As it will appear, it has on the contrary the character of a foundation myth.

[58] Söderberg (1987, 79-80) has seriously objected to my use of *Lok* as a source for reconstructing a pre-Christian myth. Söderberg, however, Söderberg misunderstands completely the use I make of the comparative perspective. I expressly draw attention to the fact that the use of Dumézil's results is only a point of departure in order to examine the possibility of whether Loki can be seen as a demon of time (1981a, 50). Next, as far as the source material is concerned, I draw attention to the fact that I will 'at least as a working hypothesis assume that a certain order exists in it' (1981a, 51). The analysis then concludes with the statement that it is, in fact, possible to understand the Loki-character as the Scandinavian answer to the Indo-European demon of time, and that all the information in the sources can indeed be seen as dealing with Loki in this role. I do not say anything about *Lok* as a poem. That I can no more than Söderberg prove anything with certainty is obvious. Söderberg writes that it is possible that I am right, but she thinks it is more probably 'att anta att det återspeglar en medeltida lek med Loki-

As far as the mixing of blood is concerned, it is obvious, although we cannot speak of an actual identity, that it is an expression for an especially close relationship between the two blood brothers involved. This is bound up with the general role blood has, as we already have seen in the Kvasir myth where blood functions as the carrier of attributes, something we also see clearly in the story of Hǫttr (*Hrólfs saga kraka* 25 [*FSN* I, 66-67] and *Gesta Danorum* II, vi, 11 [Olrik and Ræder 1931, 51]), who drinks blood and gains strength (see Chapter 8.4 below), and in the story of Sigurðr, who acquires abilities that he had not previously had by drinking blood (see below Chapter 8.2). The transfer of blood is thus synonymous with the transfer of abilities (cf. de Vries 1929, 116), and a certain measure of identity will, therefore, be present as a result of the mixing of blood. Because of this it becomes necessary to examine more closely what such an approach of two gods to one another might actually have meant for the old Scandinavians. Before we endeavour to answer this question, it is expedient to examine

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motivet' 'to assume that it reflects a medieval play with the Loki motif' (1987, 80). I do not agree, and in any case the viewpoint does not shed light on the Loki-character as a significant phenomenon in the mythological context (for a conclusive criticism of Söderberg's attempt at dating it, see also Meulengracht Sørensen 1988, 257-8). With regard to my overall view of Loki and my understanding of the individual myths, I will moreover refer to my 1981a article. The critique that has been raised by Liberman (1992, 122) is completely unreasoned and is, besides, based only on the completely traditional understanding that the Loki-character, as it is found in the sources, is a hotchpotch of people's conceptions at different periods. My arguments are not taken into consideration at all. An implied critique of my understanding of Loki is also present in McKinnell (1994, 29-55), where he differentiates between three different views of Loki which he claims to find in the sources. To this, I can only say that there are not only three but many other views of this peculiar character. McKinnell, however, does not seem to take the trouble to see whether the different viewpoints *can* have contributed to an overarching understanding of the Loki character. What I argue is that this is, in fact, possible.

a little more closely what we otherwise know about the blending of blood in ritual contexts, although a thorough discussion of this topic will be reserved for Chapter 9.4.

In both *Gísla saga Súrssonar* chapter 6 and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* chapter 21, we are given a description of how such a blending of blood took place. Both texts contain several interesting elements, but the only thing to be emphasised here is that they both connect the mixing of blood with a rite: the so-called *jarðarmen* (literally 'necklace of earth') rite. This consists in the cutting of a long piece of turf in such a way that it is possible for the participants in the ritual to 'go underground' beneath it. It has long been acknowledged that the *jarðarmen* ritual can be seen as a symbolic birth (Pappenheim 1919, 78-85; Hellmuth 1975, 192-6). This element is known from initiations the whole world over. With regard to the myth complexes that we have already examined, it is also clear that a journey to the underworld combined with entry into a new condition (perhaps a symbolic birth?) is known in Scandinavian religion in connection with the acquisition of numinous knowledge and numinous objects. As for Loki and Oðinn, we do not hear about any journey to the underworld in connection with the mixing of their blood – not immediately at any rate.

The wording of Loki's utterance in stanza 9/2 is quite striking in that the blood mixing is said to have taken place at the beginning of time – *í árdaga*. We are not exactly pampered with statements of time in Scandinavian mythology, not even when they are as imprecise as this one. Furthermore, when we come across it yet once more in the same poem, namely in stanza 25/5, put in the mouth of Frigg, we are compelled to examine whether the two events that are mentioned in the two passages might have some mutual connection. Frigg's utterance in stanza 25 refers to those deeds which the two gods were said to have performed at the beginning of time, namely those already mentioned in stanzas 23 and 24. A large part of *Lok* comprises Loki's accusations of despicable behaviour on the part of various gods and their counter-accusations of him. In the present case, stanza 9 is spoken by Loki, 23 by Óðinn, 24 by Loki again, and 25 by Frigg. All the accusations are of a very serious nature.

In stanza 23, Óðinn alleges that Loki had been eight winters in the underworld, had given birth to children and carried out women's work as a milkmaid or, quite simply, that he had been a cow. Considering his activities in the mythology as a whole, this is not in itself surprising (Schjødt 1981a, 51-5), because he often changes sex or changes shape, and his activities generally take place within the sexual sphere.[59] But it is still worth noticing the connection between a journey to the underworld on the one hand and the assumption of a feminine identity on the other.

In stanza 24, Loki accuses Óðinn of performing sorcery (*seiðr*) on the island of Sámsey to the accompaniment of gross *ergi* (sexual depravity). The final lines of both 23 and 24 comprise the same verbal formula *oc hugða ec þat args aðal* 'and that I thought the hallmark of a pervert', which indicates that the allegations were thought to involve more or less identical forms of behaviour. In any case, we know that the *seiðr*-complex has strong connotations of the feminine, and for this reason it is stated (*Yng* 7) that men could not allow themselves to be occupied with it.

It is not stated directly that Loki has performed *seiðr* but, considering his change of sex and the feminine activities connected with it, it seems reasonable to presume that Óðinn's behaviour and Loki's journey to the underworld are both played out within that meaning-complex which also has *seiðr* as one of its elements.[60] Loki is, therefore, to be understood as a practitioner of *seiðr*, which is in agreement with his activities in a long series of myths. But Óðinn, as we know from *Yng* 7, is also a practitioner of *seiðr*, and we are therefore faced with a correspondence that is so conspicuous that it demands an attempt at an explanation. It does not seem probable to attribute this solely to a development in Scandinavian religion in which one god developed over time into two, and under no circumstances would that give a sufficient explanation, anyway. On the other hand, it seems reasonable to assume a connection between the two gods' common abilities and the mixing of blood which they carried out at the beginning of time – therefore before their later mythical activities.

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[59] It is characteristic that Loki throughout *Lok* almost constantly returns to the ideas of the sexual behaviour in his accusations of the gods. Likewise, the scene in *Skm* 3, in which he makes Skaði laugh, is typical of Loki's not quite normal attitude to sex. Lindow's hypothesis that Snorri himself has inserted the motif (1992, 138) cannot indeed be rejected, but if he did so it would be surprisingly in agreement with everything else we know about Loki (cf. Clunies Ross 1989a).

[60] Strömbäck 1935 mentions both the change of sex and the change of shape as fundamental to *seiðr* (1935, 160-73 and 195). Strömbäck is not always quite clear in his differentiation between *seiðr* and shamanism (which, when all is said and done, he thinks is more or less the same thing), which can make (and does make) for certain problems in his explanation; but fundamentally, there can be little doubt that Strömbäck's description of the fundamental elements of the *seiðr*-complex is correct. For a recent overview of the complex, see Raudvere 2001 and 2003, 91-134, and Price 2002, 63-90.

As far as Óðinn is concerned, we do not know from where he got his abilities to perform *seiðr*. It is true that *Yng* 4 states that the Æsir first learned *seiðr* from Freyja, and that this practice was common among the Vanir. About the Vanir, we know that they, as a group, were chthonic figures (see Schjødt 1991a and Chapter 10.1 below), and this supports the theory that *seiðr*, as a special category of abilities and techniques, must be considered as chthonic. In addition, Freyja's control of it indicates that it can also be classified as an especially feminine attribute, in complete agreement with what was said above about the attitude to male practitioners of *seiðr*. Thus Snorri's remark in *Yng* must be interpreted as meaning that Freyja taught the Æsir *goddesses seiðr*; and since Óðinn and Loki are the only male gods that directly practise *seiðr* (Óðinn), or activities that can hardly be distinguished from *seiðr* (Loki), it is to these two that we must look for the prototype of the male practitioner of *seiðr*.

There is nothing to prevent us from supposing that Óðinn *learnt seiðr* directly from Freyja. It would still agree well with the model that we have discovered in the previous myth-complexes in which knowledge is brought to Óðinn from the underworld, either by his having been there himself, or through a medium who has resided there for a longer or shorter time. But there is also another possibility, namely that Loki played the role of mediator, as is so often the case in the myths in which he appears (see Schjødt 1981a, 82-4). As mentioned, we do not know the myths that are the basis for Loki's journey to the underworld and the mixing of blood, but a possible reconstruction that is in agreement with everything we know about Loki, about *seiðr* and about the role of blood as a vector of abilities, would consist in the scenario that Loki had obtained abilities in the underworld that made it possible for him to practise *seiðr*, probably in connection with a sex-change and a sexual act, since he also becomes a 'mother'. After this, he mixes blood with Óðinn, thereby transferring these abilities, which Óðinn is able to use in the mythical present just as he uses the mead of knowledge, Mímir's head and the runes. Whether the mixing of blood takes place in the upper world or in the underworld we cannot know, and it is probably not a deciding factor either in the interpretation of the myth as one of initiation. Probability, however, speaks for the latter, due to the fact that the accompanying rite, which we discussed above, includes a symbolic journey to the underworld (*jarðarmen*). As far as Freyja's role in acting as an intermediary is concerned, the information in *Yng* 4, as mentioned, may refer to the fact that she taught the goddesses sorcery, but it is also possible that she played a part in connection with Loki's journey to the underworld. There is no evidence, however, in the sources for this last hypothesis.

If this reconstruction is correct, it explains several things about Loki in the myths which are otherwise completely obscure. Firstly, it gives a logical explanation for why Óðinn and Loki mixed their blood at the beginning of time. In this way, abilities are transferred from one participant in the act of mixing blood to the other and, as Óðinn constantly acquires abilities that can increase his numinous knowledge and magic know-how, his motive for this mixing of blood becomes quite obvious. Secondly, the hypothesis explains why Loki, in spite of all the problems he causes the Æsir, is allowed to remain with them. Thirdly, the *seiðr*-complex can give an explanation for the many common features that have caused some scholars to understand Loki and Óðinn as a splitting of an originally single figure. In all essential respects in which the two gods 'look like' each other, the pivotal points are the elements that are absolutely fundamental to *seiðr*, namely shape-shifting, feminine behaviour and magical capacity.

Sequence analysis and the relationship to the mead-complex

An actual mythical sequence cannot be constructed directly from the sources and, all in all, the information is so scarce that a reconstruction acquires a somewhat 'puritanical' stamp, almost bare of details; on the other hand it is quite close to the text. This is the nature of the sequence in this 'clean-cut' edition: Loki moves to the underworld where he changes sex. After this, he mixes blood with Óðinn so that the latter is now in possession of abilities which Loki obtained during his experiences in the underworld.

Provided this interpretation is acceptable in general terms, we have to understand the mixing of blood and its prerequisites as an acquisition of abilities for both Óðinn and Loki. Both are in possession of these abilities in the mythical present, but they have obtained them in different ways: Loki via his journey to the underworld and his performance there, Óðinn via the mixing of blood. As far as the latter is concerned, we will later return to the symbolism associated with it (Chapter 9.4) but, as already indicated, it includes some rites that accord with the structure of initiation, as it is defined here, and among these is a symbolic journey to the underworld. As mentioned, we do not have any details at all with regard to how the mixing of blood between Óðinn and Loki was carried out, so we will concentrate on examining the symbolism and the structure of the journey to the underworld that Loki experiences, which also gives us a few pieces of information that are important for the topic. But we must also be aware that we are still dealing with an 'Óðinn-myth' in the sense that it is Óðinn who is in possession of numinous knowledge – the ability to practise *seiðr* – in the mythical present time.

The myth has certain elements in common with the complex associated with the mead of knowledge. Here, too, we have a mediator in the form of Kvasir, and it is he who in the first instance comes to the underworld from which, transformed to blood (and honey), he comes into Óðinn's possession. In both cases, then, blood functions as a carrier of the knowledge that Óðinn obtains. In the one case, it is Kvasir's blood that is mixed with honey and which in the last instance has its origin in the gods themselves; in the other, it is Loki's blood, the Loki who is of giant kin and who is the cause of Baldr's murder and consequently of Ragnarǫk. The parallelism thus emphasises the difference, namely that we deal with two kinds of blood.

Thus we meet a mediator who moves to the underworld where a transformation takes place (in the one case from life to death, in the other from a masculine to a feminine being). After this, there is a journey to the underworld on Óðinn's part, in consequence of which he obtains the blood that contains numinous abilities which are afterwards used in the upper world. It is easy to demonstrate that there are also differences. Kvasir dies in the underworld and does not play any further part in the mythology. Loki, on the other hand, returns to the upper world and acquires a central position right up to Ragnarǫk.[61] The sexuality in the mead-complex is 'normal', as Óðinn has intercourse with Gunnlǫð, whereas the sexual element in Loki's journey to the underworld is perverted and includes a sex-change. The object of knowledge is different, too, as the mead has exclusively positive connotations, whereas Loki's blood contains the owner's problematic characteristics. Although the narrative structure shows a close parallelism, the content is very different and points forward to the different functions that possession of the mead on the one hand and the practice of *seiðr* on the other have in the further course of myth. But in both cases we have Óðinn as the one who benefits from the object of knowledge, which is a consequence of a journey to the underworld.[62]

We will later (Chapter 10) return to these similarities in connection with a larger mythical nexus, but we will now turn to those basic features of the myth about the mixing of blood and its prerequisites that are related to initiation.

Firstly, Óðinn, and Loki too, has obtained an increase in status through the practice of *seiðr*, which must be considered as irreversible since the knowledge they acquire is used diligently by both parties in the mythical time up to Ragnarǫk. Secondly, we have a triadic sequence that consists of a journey to the underworld, a transformation in the form of a change of sex, including giving birth to children and sexual activity, followed by an (implicit) return to the upper world where the *seiðr* can be used. Thirdly, there are some binary oppositional pairs in connection with which we might wonder why life versus death is not present, as we have seen it in the previous examples. This might, among other reasons, be due to the fact that Loki had an important role to play in the further mythology, so a killing would have been excluded. But the reason could also be that it is not knowledge from the kingdom of the dead that is at stake here, but on the contrary abilities from the fringes of the world of sexuality and thus from another kind of liminality. On the other hand, we clearly have two oppositional pairs: upper world versus underworld, and masculinity versus femininity. The oppositions active versus passive and manifest versus latent appear only weakly and implicitly in the sequence, as Loki's appearance in the underworld does not have any meaning either for himself or Óðinn until he has returned to the upper world. The fourth point is that we can see that the object Óðinn acquires is the blood that contains the ability to practise *seiðr*. This has clear importance for the final situation and at the same time has the character of numinous knowledge – knowledge from an Other World.

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[61] This and the remaining differences are obviously connected to Loki's major function in the mythology (Schjødt 1981a), which is a fundamentally different one from Kvasir's.

[62] Apart from *Yng* 7, we do not hear much about Óðinn's use of *seiðr*. But that it has played a part is confirmed since he makes use of it to procure an avenger for Baldr (*Gesta Danorum* III, iv, 1-7, cf. Kormakr's *Sigurðardrápa* 3: *seið* Yggr *til Rindar* [Finnur Jónsson 1908-15 1 B, 69]).

The myth about the mixing of blood and its assumptions, as it has been reconstructed above, seems to fulfil all the criteria for being considered an initiation structure, so it must be included in the further discussion of the ideology that forms the basis of initiation symbolism. It is indisputable that it is in several ways atypical, but the kind of numinous knowledge that stems from it is so, too, and there is every probability that a connection can be found in it. In any case, the myth constitutes yet another variant of Óðinn's acquisition of knowledge – a variant which in its basic structure is both parallel to and an inversion of that which we have examined previously.

6.3 *Vǫluspá* and *Baldrs Draumar*

We will now examine two eddic poems, *Vsp* and *Bdr*, in which Óðinn acquires numinous knowledge,[63] and in which several features of those myths that have been examined above are present. Still, as will become clear, it is not a question of an initiation structure properly speaking, as one determining element is not present. For this reason, but also because there are no great problems involved in understanding the texts' essential elements, they will only be examined briefly here. The reason that they are included at all is because it gives us the opportunity to further develop our knowledge of 'Other World' scenarios, and to emphasise the importance of the fact that all four fundamental elements must be present – implicitly or explicitly – in order for us to be able to identify an initiation-structure with certainty.[64]

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[63] Kure's suggestion (2006, 539-40) that it is actually the *vǫlva* who acquires wisdom should not be dismissed, since we know from other sources (cf. Chapter 8) that Óðinn is actually very active in transmitting his knowledge to humans. On the other hand, I cannot agree with Kure as he maintains that the traditional reading of stanzas 28-9 would imply that Óðinn was portrayed as a failure and a loser. Since one of the semantic features about the feminine is as possessor of knowledge in a latent form, it does not diminish Óðinn's masculinity to go and request knowledge from those who have it. In the following paragraph, we will thus stick to the traditional reading.

Vǫluspá

Turning to *Vsp*, we will concentrate on the frame story. Here Óðinn comes to the *vǫlva* or seeress and wants her to recite her prophecy, something we learn already in the first stanza. But it is not until stanzas 28 and 29 that their actual meeting is further described.[65] The first of these was quoted above in Chapter 5.1 in connection with Mímir, and the second one reads:

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[64] Someone might wonder why a poem such as *Grí* will not be examined independently here, as it has often been viewed as an example of initiation (e.g. Schröder 1958, 371-7, where Óðinn is seen as the initiand, and Klingenberg 1983, 155-6, where Geirrøðr is understood as the person to be initiated; cf. also Steinsland 2002, 98). I have previously rejected this viewpoint with copious arguments, of which the most important is that Óðinn *does not* acquire any kind of numinous knowledge, but also that it is not a question of a liminal space (Schjødt 1988c). On the face of it, *Vafðr* could also be considered a poem in which Óðinn acquires numinous knowledge. Again, we must reject this. Óðinn is not asking Vafþrúðnir any questions that he himself may not be presumed to know the answers to beforehand (that is the very point of a 'wisdom contest'); therefore, he does not acquire any new knowledge, and for this reason there is nothing that separates the initial situation from the final situation. The 'space' that Óðinn is staying in with Vafþrúðnir does not have any of the liminal characteristics, either, which we have come across elsewhere and in which we have seen that giant-*women* alone, rather than giants, constitute liminal persons. Nor do the oppositional pairs that we have previously identified play any part, and finally, we are not dealing with a place in the underworld, as the giants in relation to the gods are placed on a horizontal axis (Schjødt 1990a). Although from a superficial viewpoint the two poems can look as if they deal with the acquisition of numinous knowledge, they have in fact nothing to do with it, and thus they will not be examined further here.

[65] Here, I essientially follow Sigurður Nordal's understanding of the poem's general structure, which seem in accordance with the basic structures of Old Norse mythology (Sigurður Nordal 1927, 14-21; cf. Steinsland and Meulengracht Sørensen 1999, 91-5, but also note 63 above). This means that the version in Codex Regius is used as the basis for the understanding, whereas the H-version has a completely different perspective on a series of points (cf. Quinn 1990 and Johansson 2000a). See also Schach (1983, 86-113) who disagrees with Sigurður on many details but mainly follows his understanding of the general structure.

29 Father of the host chose for her
rings and necklaces,
he got wise speech
and a rod of divination;[66]
she saw widely, widely
into all the worlds.[67] (Larrington 1996, 8)

In this passage in the poem, which forms the transition from mythical past time to mythical present time,[68] we learn that the *vǫlva* is sitting outside alone, and thus she is in a situation that can be designated as liminal as a matter of course.[69] When to this is added that she must be presumed to be dead and therefore is in a condition which is immensely widespread in liminal symbolism,[70] there is no reason to doubt that this is a liminal scenario. From the fact that she is dead, we may also assume that she has an affinity with the underworld, which is strengthened by the word *sǫkkvaz* in the last line of the poem. After she has proved her great knowledge to Óðinn, the *vǫlva* receives rings and jewels, and her 'vision' can begin.

The situation is, then, that Óðinn comes to the *vǫlva* in a liminal space in which knowledge that can clearly be represented as numinous is procured.[71] The parallelism to the scenarios analysed above seems clear: the object is numinous knowledge; we are dealing with a series of oppositional pairs (masculine versus feminine, life versus death, the upper world versus the underworld), which we have come across previously. The triadic horizontal sequence is not expressed explicitly, but its presence can nevertheless be glimpsed implicitly: Óðinn is moving into the liminal space where he can meet the *vǫlva*, and he functions, therefore, as mediator. The knowledge, the acquisition of which is the reason for his meeting with her, is then recited, and finally we can implicitly reckon with a return in which the acquired knowledge can be used by the subject of the sequence, Óðinn. The object of knowledge here is, as we have encountered it previously, merely 'discourse'.

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[66] The meaning of the word *spágandr* (29/4) is uncertain, but probably refers to the staves which fortune-tellers made use of (cf. *vǫlr*).

[67] 29 Valdi henni Herfǫðr
hringa oc men,
feec spiǫll spacklig
oc spáganda;
sá hon vítt oc um vítt
of verǫld hveria.
(NK 1962, 7)

[68] R. Boyer (1983, 124) speaks directly about stanzas 27-30 as the poem's 'mathematical centre'.

[69] *Sitja úti* 'to sit outside' is, as known, a *terminus technicus* for a special way of coming into contact with beings from The Other World, and for this reason any further justification for the status of this technique as liminal is superfluous.

[70] Elsewhere I have given reasons why the *vǫlva* must be assumed to be dead (Schjødt 1981b, 94-5), both from internal arguments in the text and from parallels in other Edda poems.

[71] Bessason (1992, 72) argues that the *vǫlva* gives Óðinn knowledge that he has lost, because his immoral behaviour had caused 'the collapse of his sovereignty'. This seems

What separates the situation in *Vsp* from the other myths we have examined is that Óðinn has apparently not attained any irreversibly higher status in the final situation. This is probably due to the fact that Óðinn in *Vsp* does not acquire the tools of knowledge or objects of knowledge; it is not the mead of knowledge, Mímir's head, the runes or Loki's blood with all that these entail that Óðinn is able to take with him from his meeting with the *vǫlva*. On the contrary, it is specific knowledge that gives the answer to a relatively specific, although immensely important, question, namely what had happened in the past and what will happen in the future. It is, therefore, not a question of a means by which he can acquire further knowledge or a specific piece of knowledge, which in the very acquisition has created a new status for the subject. Óðinn's status consists in his being the master of those techniques that are necessary in order to acquire new knowledge. It is analogous to the situation of a shaman, who, once he has attained shaman status, is continuously able to obtain numinous knowledge. It is this know-how that characterises both the shaman and Óðinn (though Óðinn cannot be identified as a shaman merely because of this; cf. Schjødt 2001, and below Chapter 11. 2).

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to be quite an arbitrary interpretation and reminds us more of Wagner's universe than of that of the pagan Scandinavians. Óðinn seeks knowledge across the whole mythology, and gets it. To wonder that he does not know everything is to put a contemporary, and therefore an anachronistic, rationality over the myths. Óðinn's main role in the mythology is to seek knowledge and to become wise. Obviously, it has never been imagined that he was omniscient: he knows a lot, but there is always more knowledge to be had. It is the very process of acquiring knowledge rather than its result that is Óðinn's *raison d'être*.

As we mentioned in Chapter 3.3, it is not every acquisition of knowledge that forms part of initiation, although every initiation includes the acquisition of knowledge or the acquisition of numinous power. The knowledge acquired during initiation is always considered as fundamental in determining the initated person's status in the final situation. As far as Óðinn is concerned, it is clear that, in the mythical complexes analysed in this and the last chapter, he has obtained 'abilities' (techniques, tools) which he can use himself or give to others. But the conclusive factor is that, after he has acquired them, he *keeps* them and is in possession of them for the rest of mythical time. In *Vsp*, on the other hand, Óðinn only *uses* these abilities and in this way gains knowledge of something he evidently did not know beforehand. And this is not the only time that Óðinn goes out and gathers knowledge to answer specific questions about the course of the world. Óðinn's role in *Vsp* relates, therefore, to the previous Óðinn-myths, as the journey of the shaman relates to the shaman's original consecration.

But even if the frame story in *Vsp* is not an initiation in the true sense of the word, it nevertheless contributes to our knowledge about the liminal scenario. We saw above that those elements that the subject meets in the liminal phase are connected with the feminine, with death and the underworld, all elements we have encountered previously. However, the sexuality that played a considerable part in both the Kvasir-complex and the Loki-complex, and which we will come across again several times below, is absent – a fact which is quite understandable in this particular myth as the *vǫlva* attributes a special meaning to her great age. We will return to this element in Chapter 10.

In that chapter, we will also examine more closely how it comes about that we are dealing with a liminal scenario which 'looks like an initiation' without it being a question of an actual initiation. A possible explanation could be that the structure and symbolism found in an actual initiation sequence merge with that which we can generally call the 'acquisition of knowledge' scenario. It is not surprising that the two scenarios cannot be separated, as both cases must be based on a 'Other World scenario', the main function of which is to procure numinous know-how. The distinction between the initiation sequence and that which is 'only' an acquisition of knowledge primarily turns on the factor of reversibility or irreversibility, as has been hinted at above.

In summing up, we can therefore state that, with regard to *Vsp* there is confirmation on the one hand of some of those results that we have seen above concerning the liminal scenario, without there being any new element, apart from the old, non-sexual woman, whom we have not previously encountered.

Baldrs draumar

We come across the *vǫlva*-type again in *Bdr*, although we do not learn anything specific about her age. But it is certainly not sexuality that forms the focus of this poem. It is said explicitly here that the *vǫlva* is dead, and in stanza 5 she says she has been dead for a long time (*dauð var ec lengi*). The situation in *Bdr* is very reminiscent of the one in *Vsp*, and this parallelism confirms our understanding that in both cases the speaking subjects are dead women. The place in which Óðinn here forces the *vǫlva* to speak is certainly the kingdom of the dead and is, therefore, the underworld. As we have seen in connection with both Kvasir and Mímir, the two entities, death and the underworld, are an instance of redundancy in relation to 'the acquisition of knowledge scenario'. The liminal character of the setting emerges even more clearly in *Vsp*, in which we learn that the *vǫlva* 'sat outside', although at the same time, in all likelihood, she must be understood as dead. Thus, Óðinn has gone to the underworld and it is there that he receives the knowledge he wants. This knowledge, as we saw also in *Vsp*, concerns something specific, namely Baldr's fate, and the direct cause of Óðinn's visit to the kingdom of the dead is Baldr's bad dreams. Óðinn wakes the *vǫlva* by reciting *valgaldr,*[72] which agrees with what we know about him from *Yng* 7, where his ability to raise the dead is emphasised. After this, he receives various pieces of information about Baldr's killing. The poem ends when Óðinn is asked to ride home, that is, to the upper world. In relation to the sequence accompanying the acquisition of knowledge, there are no major problems, although there are several obscure elements in the last stanzas (12-14) of the poem (cf. Lindow 1997, 45-8 and Malm 2000, 281-8)[73].

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[72] *Bdr* 4/6. The word is a *hapax legomenon*, but probably means incantations that will arouse the dead (but probably not those who have died on the battlefield!).

[73] Firstly, it is not clear who the maidens that appear in stanza 12 are. Fleck 1968, 93-8 gives several suggestions, and he himself thinks that they refer to those women who are

The oppositional pairs here are the same as those in *Vsp*: masculine versus feminine, life versus death and the upper world versus the underworld. These oppositional pairs are further characterised, as we have seen previously, by one pole expressing a latent content which is manifested in the other one (the *vǫlva*'s knowledge is 'dead', as she herself is, until Óðinn receives it). Here, too, sexuality is absent and here, too, the knowledge that Óðinn is in possession of in the final situation is a knowledge of something quite specific. But we do have here an Other World-scenario that has features in common with those encountered in the myths and myth-complexes discussed previously. Óðinn plays the role of mediator and the knowledge-object is, as in *Vsp*, solely discourse.

With regard to initiation in the narrow sense, *Bdr,* too, is parallel to *Vsp*: in both cases Óðinn, as the subject, makes use of know-how and resources that he has earlier acquired in order to get the knowledge which he lacks in the two poems' initial phases – thus providing a parallel to the relationship between shaman-initiation and shaman-séance.

The frame stories of the two poems *Vsp* and *Bdr* have confirmed several features that we have identified in the analyses of the previous myth-complexes. Nevertheless they must in a certain sense, be considered as secondary because, while they involve the acquisition of knowledge, they do not provide the subject with a permanent increase in status. An additional gain from viewing the two poems in this light is that, irrespective of the time period to which one might assign them, it can be seen that they are both variants of a structure and an imaginative

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to accompany Baldr on the funeral pyre. This may be correct, but it involves such great uncertainty that the suggestion is mere guesswork. Secondly, it is not clear how the *vǫlva* and Óðinn recognise each other's identities (stanza 13): The *vǫlva* reveals Vegtamr to be Óðinn (which the audience naturally knew beforehand), and Óðinn says that the *vǫlva* is not a wise woman but the mother of three giants (*þriggia þursa móðir*). It is apparently a question about the maidens in stanza 12 that puts the *vǫlva* on the track, without the connection being explicit (a thorough discussion of the problem is found in von See *et al.* 2000, 449-61 and Frog 2006). It is also possible, as some interpreters think, that something has been lost in the poem between stanzas 12 and 13, or that there is some compositional fault (Fleck 1968, 99-100). No suggestion for a solution will be advanced here, but it is likely that the question belongs to the type of Óðinn-question that cannot be answered by anybody but Óðinn himself (Malm 2000, 281).

world that have deep roots in pagan thought processes,[74] in a way of thinking that is fundamentally foreign to Christianity, with its relationship between the living and the dead, with its emphasis on the feminine as a source of knowledge and its insistence upon Óðinn himself needing to acquire knowledge from these dead women.

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[74] McKinnell (2003, 126-8) also supports such a view. He finds a relatively stable structure in a series of episodes from both eddic poems and sagas in which a *vǫlva* is involved. This does not mean that the poems cannot contain Christian elements, or cannot have been composed in a Christian era, which most researchers think must be the case as far, at least, as *Bdr* is concerned (for a brief discussion see de Vries 1964-67, I, 101-4).

Chapter 7
Other Mythical Figures

7.1 Þórr

After having examined Óðinn's role in several myths in which the structure of initiation and its symbolism is relatively easy to observe, we will now turn to Þórr, not least because he is associated strongly with the concept of consecration, expressed by the verb *vígja*. Furthermore, aside from Óðinn, Þórr is the only one of the great gods who plays a role in myths which *can* be associated with initiation at all. In this connection, we must examine material both within the corpus of eddic poetry and outside of it in order to investigate the figure of Þórr more generally. The myths about Þórr's encounters with the giants Hrungnir and Geirrøðr in particular have been associated with initiation by some scholars, as has the episode transmitted to us in *Þry* about Þórr's 'wedding' to the giant Þrymr, together with his role in Baldr's cremation and his ability to bring his goats back to life with the help of his hammer. In addition, we shall briefly discuss the fact that Þórr is mentioned in several runic inscriptions in connection with the act of consecration.[1]

vígja

We will examine the runic inscriptions first and, in doing so, we must go further into the semantic sense of the word *vígja* together with Þórr's association with the action that the verb represents. In his groundbreaking book *Das Heilige im Germanischen*, Walter Baetke worked through the various sources in which Þórr is connected with *vígja* and endeavoured to determine the meaning of the word (Baetke 1942, 106-122). In spite of the fact that he seems hypercritical in some places, which he is in other connections also (see Chapter 9.5 below)[2], his investigation is exceedingly useful. It is most important in our context that he has been able to prove that *vígja* meant 'to consecrate' in the sense 'to give numinous power' (*numinos machen*) but apparently not in the meaning of *dedicare* 'to consecrate to someone'.[3] This means that when Þórr is said in sundry runic inscriptions to 'consecrate' the runes *(runaR)* or a memorial to the dead *(kuml)*, he infuses power into the object, probably in such a way that some kind of protection was thrown up around it.[4]

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[1] E.g. the Glavendrup and Virring stones, both from the tenth century. See also Ljungberg 1947, 121-4 and M. Olsen 1921, 225-8.

[2] Among other things, Baetke does not accept the statement in *Þry* in which the bride is to be married with the hammer, because this feature is neither found in the laws nor in the sagas (1942, 108-11). However, Þórr's connection to fertility is so well attested that

In connection with *vígja*, we must also mention the Nordendorf buckle with its brief but much discussed inscription *logaþore wodan wigiþonar awaleubwinie.* It is naturally *wigiþonar* which is of interest here. Whereas the second syllable without doubt designates the god Donar, who becomes the Scandinavian Þórr (see e.g. de Vries 1956-57, I, 311; Ljungberg 1947, 36-37 and for the etymology *AEW*, 618), there are several possibilities with regard to the first syllable. Already in 1889 Rudolf Henning suggested reading *wigi* as the singular imperative of *wíhian* or *wígian* (Henning 1889, 92), giving *wigi Thonar* 'Thonar consecrate' (it is uncertain what it is that will be consecrated, but Hen-

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the *Þry*-statement must be considered as more than poetic licence (see among others Davidson 1965, 11; Schröder 1965, 12-13 and Renauld-Krantz 1972, 115-17).

[3] Baetke 1942, 120-2. One should perhaps not say that Baetke has definitively proved this, but one cannot find any support for the meaning *dedicare* in the older sources. In connection with the self-hanging, we also saw that the Old Norse equivalent of the Latin verb *dedicare* was *gefa.*

[4] A point Baetke makes is that Þórr was only associated with the act of consecration relatively late (1942, 117-18), when his image was already being used as the symbolic counterpart to Christ in the period just before the adoption of Christianity in Scandinavia. In earlier times, however, Þórr seems not to have had anything to do with the runes (cf. Marold 1974, 220-5). This may possibly be correct (Þórr is, however, mentioned as early as on the Rök-stone, usually dated to the ninth century. The interpretation of Rök has varied so much and seems so uncertain [see the brief outline of interpretations in Nielsen 1969] that it will not be discussed further here). But the argument above does not take into consideration that to consecrate runes or a memorial stone does not in itself imply that Þórr has had a special affinity to the runes. It is rather to be seen as an invocation of Þórr as a helper against threatening powers, as the conqueror of chaos *par excellence* in Scandinavian religion. It is important to focus, not on the object (the runes), but rather on the function which Þórr has: as the protector of everything that has to do with the human cosmos. It is, therefore, also reasonable to assume with Hultgård that 'Allem Anschein nach haben wir es bei der "Thor weihe" – Formel mit einer genuin altskandinavischen Kultformel zu tun …' 'Apparently, we are dealing with a genuine old Scandinavian cult-formula in the "may Þórr consecrate" formula…' (Hultgård 1998, 730).

ning thought it was marriage, referring to *Þry*). Krause, however, argued that *wigi* is the first element in a compound name Wigi-Thonar (Krause 1927), that is, 'Thonar who consecrates'. This interpretation would not imply a special function of consecration in connection with the inscription on the buckle (which Henning considered a piece of magic to promote marriage), but rather a more general function of the god. It is unlikely that any definitive conclusion about the meaning of the inscription *wigiþonar* can be reached,[5] but it indicates, nevertheless, that a connection between the act of 'consecration' and the god Donar-Þórr already existed in the seventh century. On the other hand, there is nothing that suggests that we are dealing with an initiation-element but, rather, with protection against the forces of chaos, which is one of Þórr's primary roles. There seems, thus, to be an apotropeic element in the word as it is used in connection with the runes.

Besides these brief inscriptions, there are also a couple of myths narrated in *Gylf* where we hear that Þórr consecrates various objects. In chapter 44 we learn that he consecrates the bones of his goats. After the goats have been killed for the evening meal, we are told: 'Thor stayed the night there, and in the small hours before dawn he got up and dressed, took the hammer Miollnir and raised it and blessed the goat-skins. Then the goats got up …' (Faulkes 1987, 38).[6] No direct parallel to this consecration occurs in the source material, and it is difficult to extract a great deal from the statement. Whether the passage represents a 'real' religious or magical phenomenon has been much discussed, and one's view on this is inevitably connected with one's general view of Snorri's work as a source for pagan conceptions. Even if we assume for the moment that the underlying concept is pagan, it is still difficult to find its precise meaning. Þórr is a god who consecrates (gives numinous power) and, in this case, he gives the goats power to live again, using his hammer Mjǫllnir for this purpose.[7] A form of rebirth symbolism is, therefore, present, but it is still not enough for us to speak of either initiation or initiation-like phenomena. On the other hand, the passage might provide the basis for an investigation into whether this characteristic in Þórr and his hammer are used in other connections, where a greater number of features might indicate the presence of an initiation structure.

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[5] A completely different reading as *wiguþonar* has been suggested by Krogmann (1937, 62-4) and Ljungberg (1947, 209-11) among others, seeing it as an older form of Vingþórr, the deeper meaning of which is not clear, either, so that no better understanding of the compound is reached.

[6] Þórr dvalðisk þar of nóttina, en í óttu firir dag stóð hann upp ok klæddi sik, tók hamarinn Miǫllni ok brá upp ok vígði hafrstǫkurnar. Stóðu þá upp hafrarnir...... (Faulkes 2005, 37)

The other passage in *Gylf* in which we hear that Þórr consecrates something is in connection with Baldr's cremation. We learn that Hyrrokkin has pushed the funeral ship into the water: 'Then Baldr's body was carried out on to the ship, and when his wife Nanna, Nep's daughter, saw this she collapsed with grief and died. She was carried on to the pyre and it was set fire to. Thor then stood by and consecrated the pyre with Miollnir' (Faulkes 1987, 49).[8]

We shall return to Baldr's cremation in Chapter 9 and will limit ourselves here to touching on Þórr's role as the consecrator at cremations. A funeral is in itself a transitional situation, and it can be thought of from the outset as having initiatory features. Here, too, we have neither mythical nor ritual parallels to guide us, but we see once more that the hammer is *the* instrument which consecrates. As far as the purpose of the action is concerned, it is reasonable to accept Ljungberg's view: '… att aktivisera eller bevara livet, torde ligge bakom vigningen vid dödsögenblicket, såsom när Tor vigde Balderbålet med hammaren' '… to activate or preserve life ought to be behind the consecration at the moment of death, such as when Þórr consecrated Baldr's funeral pyre with his hammer' (Ljungberg 1947, 123). Such an assessment allows us to see that this myth shows a conceptual similarity to the episode of the goats. But in the Baldr-myth the purpose of the consecration cannot be fulfilled because of the myth's whole character and function – of which the essential point is precisely that Baldr is killed and remains dead (see, however, Dumézil 1959, 78-105 and – from another theory – de Vries 1955b, 52-6; also Lindow 1997, 31). Thus, it does not weaken Ljungberg's understanding of the hammer as a potentially life-giving tool.[9]

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[7] The etymology is disputed (see *AEW*, 390, Turville-Petre 1964, 81 and Mikkola 1903, 331). Mjǫllnir has without a doubt been understood primarily as Þórr's weapon, but has probably also been connected with thunder and in general with the atmospheric disturbances that cause precipitation (Davidson 1965, 5-6). This indicates a fertility aspect – but, as we shall see below, one of a special character – which Þórr, too, is in possession of and which is perhaps most forcefully shown in Adam of Bremen.

[8] Þá var borit út á skipit lík Baldrs, ok er þat sá kona hans, Nanna Nepsdóttir, þá sprakk hon af harmi ok dó. Var hon borin á bálit ok slegit í eldi. Þá stóð Þórr at ok vígði bálit með Mjǫllni. (Faulkes 2005, 46)

The desire to give the pyre numinous power and with that the possibility for Baldr to have an existence in the kingdom of the dead might imply the presence of an element of an initiation ritual. But this is uncertain. In the first place, we do not know of any parallels, and here it is not just a question of lacking sources, as we do in fact have a detailed description of the cremation of a chieftain (Ibn Fadlan), which, if a rite of this kind had taken place, would probably have included references to such an element. Secondly, we must ask in more detail about the meaning of the rite. If it is to have any meaning, it must be to consecrate Baldr to Valhǫll, Óðinn's kingdom of the dead, which is characterised as a place with a sort of 'everlasting life'. The fact that the attempt to do so is unsuccessful is, as already mentioned, quite in agreement with the whole logic of the myth. We know, however, that other and different rites were required in order to enter into Valhǫll, namely stabbing with a spear, which cannot be interpreted otherwise than as a consecration to Óðinn. Now, one could understand the mistletoe which kills Baldr in the same way as the reed that kills Víkarr, but the outcome for Baldr is the opposite of what it is for Víkarr, because he does not come to Óðinn in Valhǫll but, on the contrary, goes to Hel in the underworld. It cannot be decided, thus, whether Snorri's description can be trusted at this point. If it can be, it would be logical to interpret Þórr's consecration as aimed at life in The Other World, as Ljungberg argued, if necessary via an apotropeic function, and thus would be in agreement with his role as the opposer of life-threatening disorder as we know it so well from other Þórr-myths. We will return to this point below. That Þórr and his hammer could have played a role in connection with initiation seems likely enough, but it is a role that relates only indirectly to initiation. Rather, it is aimed primarily at warding off the intrusion of the demonic. This vague wording is probably the closest we can come to a determination of Þórr's role in Baldr's cremation.

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[9] If it is correct that the hammer is to be understood as a life-giving tool, it is at the same time important to take note of its role as the killer of giants. The two functions appear at first to be contradictory but are in reality an expression for the same thought: Þórr with his hammer is the one who promotes the wellbeing of the cosmos, which unavoidably includes, however, the killing of powers of chaos in the form of giants (see also Lindow 1994, concerning the different functions of the hammer).

In *Þry* 30, the hammer may perform a similar function[10] when Þrymr, immediately before his wedding with the supposed Freyja, gives this order: 'Bring in the hammer to sanctify the bride, lay Miollnir on the girl's lap, consecrate us together by the hand of Var!' (Larrington 1996, 101).[11] The hammer may here be understood directly as a phallic symbol, as has been suggested by several scholars (von der Leyen 1938, 45; Schröder 1965, 14; Renauld-Krantz 1972, 131-2) and, in any case, it is impossible to overlook the fertility-giving function. In connection with a wedding, too, one obviously thinks of initiatory elements, but the passage does not give us much to work with. One can imagine that the bride is to be given numinous power with a view to her fertility, and one can also imagine that she herself symbolically had to undergo a ritual death and rebirth but, as there is no evidence for such rituals in connection with weddings in early Scandinavia (see Chapter 9), these surmises must remain purely hypothetical.

In spite of these problems, we are able to establish a couple of common features in all three situations involving Þórr. Firstly, Mjǫllnir plays a central role in all three. Secondly, all three myths contain in a certain sense a transitional phenomenon in which a subject (the goats, Baldr and the bride) is to enter into a situation, in which new life forms an important element. The goats are quite literally to be brought back to life so as to fulfil their function as draught animals. In an apparently similar fashion the gods endeavour to bring Baldr back to life – if not in This World then in The Other World. Finally, the consecration of the bride must naturally be understood as a rite undertaken with a view to promoting fertility in her future life. It is in this connection important to take into account the apotropeic aspect, because it generally cannot be separated from that which is life-promoting, which is characterised by the absence of demonic forces. There is, therefore, no reason to assume that Þórr here has any other function than the one we know from other myths. By virtue of the fact that 'disorder' is warded off, correct order is promoted, that is, life and fertility.[12] There is thus a difference between whether fertility is promoted in actual fact, as, for example, through actual or symbolic sexual intercourse and by gods with characteristic fertility attributes like over-determined sexual organs, or whether that which acts against fertility is marginalised by gods with fighting attributes, which in themselves have nothing to do with fertility in the narrow sense. That it is the latter that is involved in these myths seems confirmed from the use of Mjǫllnir – that attribute of Þórr, which, more than any other, stresses that his role as a life-promoting force is based primarily on his ability to kill those who oppose the life-promoting process.

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[10] The supposedly late origin of the poem is not in itself an argument against it containing pagan elements. The episode with the hammer, in which the bride is to be 'consecrated', seems to be old material, which it is difficult to imagine having found its way into the poem if it had not been possible to draw on pagan traditions.

[11] Berið inn hamar,
brúði at vígia,
leggit Miǫllni
í meyiar kné,
vígit ocr saman
Várar hendi.
(NK 1962, 115)

In connection with these texts, one can perhaps view the runic inscriptions as magical inscriptions whose purpose is to protect the dead person on several levels: to ensure that the memorial or the runes remain in place, and perhaps also to ensure that the dead person 'lives' in the world beyond. In this sense it is also correct, as Baetke mentioned, that the formula could act as a curse against desecrators of the grave and others who threatened the memorial, because they would then commit a crime against the dead person's reputation. Thus, in all cases in which Þórr and Þórr's hammer is involved in 'consecrations', we find an association with life-creating power – but via the conquest of the opponents of what is life-creating – which can certainly also be of importance in connection with initiation.

When all is said and done, we must admit that our knowledge of the symbolism and structure of initiation is not increased by analysing these *vígja*-situations. Their precise meaning in the individual contexts is uncertain. We lack elements such as numinous knowledge, we lack any hint of a triadic sequence, and we lack liminal symbols. The only thing we can argue for in a rather guarded way is that Þórr could have played a part in certain initiatory situations as the one who gives numinous power (that is fighting destructive powers), just as he was also able to do in other situations. This is a function which fits the impression that our sources give of Þórr, namely as the one who has power, as the one who can protect against threats of chaos.

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[12] The main issue in the discussion of Þórr's function has been whether he was a god of fertility or a god of war. He was definitely not a war god in the usual sense of the word, since he was apparently not venerated in connection with warfare. Nevertheless, he was no doubt a fighting god, namely against the giants (cf. Kroesen 2001, 108 and Schjødt 2004).

Tests of warriors

If we turn to another category of Þórr-myths, the situation is different, although it may not necessarily be any better suited to an increased understanding of initiation. It has to do with myths in which Þórr occupies his traditional role as giant-killer. Some scholars have been inclined to see in these a manhood test, which is thought to have taken place in connection with initiations.[13]

In this connection, a problem we have previously touched upon will be briefly considered, namely the relationship between tests in descriptions of heroes in general and specific initiation tests. It can be difficult to distinguish between these in a mythical context. Such tests do not in themselves form any characterising structure of initiation, but on the other hand various elements may be suitable components of the liminal phase of initiations. If we consider the comparative history of religion, one can find gods who fight monsters of one kind or another in nearly all religions,. If one wished in each individual case to see reflexions of initiatory manhood tests, certain mythological and epic traditions would consist of almost nothing else. The element of fighting or aggression, the purpose of which often is to emphasise a certain god's or hero's proficiency, may appear in many contexts, of which initiation may be one. Initiation and the heroic epic make use of some identical elements which, among other things, include physical confrontations associated with those tests which all proper heroes must endure if their story is to be told, and which initiands must also often experience in more or less symbolic forms. Several scholars have paid attention to exactly this part of initiation in connection with the Þórr-myths and on this basis have interpreted some of them as reflexions of initiations. However, it is necessary to insist that, unless other factors point in the same direction, the basis for the interpretation is too uncertain for us to be able to speak about initiation in these cases.

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[13] Dumézil and several others with him have placed Þórr's role in the Hrungnir-myth in an initiatory context and, although Wais (1952, 229) calls Dumézil's viewpoint an initiation idiosyncrasy, we must examine this myth together with the Geirrǫðr-myth, which has also been interpreted as an initiation (e.g. Clunies Ross 1981).

Þórr appears in many myths as a giant-killer and chaos-conqueror with all the risks that these roles entail – risks that are necessary in order to show prowess in battle. In a couple of these myths there are some features that are very difficult to explain because they are apparently superfluous with regard to the narrative sequence in general. They have, therefore, been connected with some ritual strata that may have existed behind the narratives. In itself, this is not a bad method to adopt towards seemingly intractable elements in a myth, rather than to consider them as redundant additions by later authors, as was often done by scholars in previous generations. We must therefore consider more closely the two myths which have been most seriously discussed in connection with initiation, namely Þórr's fights with the giants Hrungnir and Geirrøðr.

Hrungnir

In the Hrungnir-myth, it is mainly the clay-giant Mǫkkurkálfi who has been associated with initiation, but here we must examine the myth in its entirety in order to assess the validity of the theory. This necessitates giving a rather detailed account of it. In its entirety, the myth is found in two sources, *Skm* 17 (Faulkes 1998, 20-2) and stanzas 14-20 of the skaldic poem *Haustlǫng* by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir (usually dated c. 900), while references to it are found dispersed in both eddic and skaldic poetry as well as in other places.[14] In contrast to many of Snorri's other narratives, scholars agree in this instance that this is an old myth, although certain features have been considered to be relatively late poetic additions.[15] *Haustlǫng* is, as is often the case with skaldic poetry, fairly brief in its narrative style and, in addition, sometimes difficult to understand (cf. Holtsmark 1949; Kiil 1959). Because it belongs to the genre of picture-poems, that is, a poem descriptive of images on a painted shield or on other items, it is very 'plastic' in its expressions and pays more attention to the description of individual scenes than to the general narrative. Stanzas 14-16/4 describe the effect of Þórr's travel through the air, stanzas 16/5-17 the battle itself,[16] stanzas 18-19 the situation after the battle with both the opponents lying on the field and, finally, stanza 20 describes a certain ǫl-Gefjon (perhaps the same person as Gróa in *Skm* 17; Kiil 1959, 102-3), who attempts to charm a piece of Hrungnir's whetstone out of Þórr's head. Snorri's much fuller and more detailed prose narrative acknowledges Þjóðólfr's version as a source and the two versions are consistent on a number of essential points.[17] As we have seen before, especially in connection with the skaldic mead, Snorri enlarges on the myth and brings in details which he must have known from other (probably oral) sources. It seems, therefore, to the purpose to draw on both versions, using Snorri, however, where his version is more elaborated than *Haustlǫng*. Snorri's version includes a number of 'peculiar' features that cannot have been placed there with a view to increasing the myth's epic value but which, on the contrary, confuse the reader and therefore can be seen as features that were present in the tradition that Snorri knew, which existed alongside *Haustlǫng*.

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[14] M. Olsen (1921) argues that there are references to the myth on the Rök-stone inscription, where there are references to Þórr's son Magni. See further Renauld-Krantz 1972, 150-1 for references in the sources.

[15] Bertell 2003, 227-39 argues that in some older version the myth could be compared to Saami material and should be read as a narrative relating to the lightning of fire. This element may be at stake, but it is certainly not decisive for the myth as we read it in the extant sources.

Snorri relates that once, when Þórr was away from Ásgarðr, Óðinn had ridden to Jǫtunheimr where he met Hrungnir. They argued and bet on whose horse was the best – Sleipnir or Gullfaxi. This episode ended with Hrungnir pursuing Óðinn all the way home to Ásgarðr where he is invited to a drinking feast, and then in a drunken stupor begins to offend and threaten the gods (nothing more is heard of the bet). All the gods are afraid, but then they mention Þórr's name and immediately he is present and is exceedingly displeased that Hrungnir has entered Ásgarðr. Hrungnir becomes uneasy at the situation and says that Þórr will get little honour by killing him, as he is unarmed, and suggests a duel on the border of Grjótunagarðar ('stone farms enclosures') instead. Þórr does not refuse as it is the first duel to which he has ever been challenged.

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[16] Mǫkkurkálfi is not mentioned directly in *Haustlǫng*, yet it is possible that he may be alluded to in stanza 17, as is argued by Kiil (1959, 92-4).

[17] The objections that Schneider 1952 and Wais 1952 pointed out against regarding a series of features as 'original' is more due to these scholars' own hypotheses than to the statements in the texts.

After Hrungnir has returned home, his journey and the approaching duel is much discussed, and the giants think that it is extremely important who is going to win because Hrungnir is the strongest of them and they would, therefore, be at a disadvantage if he were killed. For this reason, they make an enormous man of clay who was nine *rastir* tall and three broad under the arms. However, they have difficulties in finding a heart that is suitable to these dimensions and end up taking one from a mare, although it does not sit too firmly when Þórr arrives in all his might.[18] In this connection, we learn that Hrungnir himself has a heart of stone with three points just like the engraved figure (*ristubragð*) that is named *Hrungnis hjarta* 'Hrungnir's heart'. His head and his shield are made of stone, too, and he has a whetstone as a weapon. With his shield in front of him he now waits for Þórr with the clay giant Mǫkkurkálfi at his side. The latter was, however, so afraid that he wet himself when he saw Þórr. Þjálfi, who is acting as Þórr's second in the duel, arrives first on the battleground on the pretence of warning Hrungnir, saying that Þórr will attack him from below. Hrungnir therefore places his shield under his feet but at the same time sees Þórr come rushing through the air in a divine fury. They throw their weapons simultaneously: Þórr his hammer and Hrungnir his whetstone and, when they collide in the air, the whetstone breaks apart. Part of it falls on the ground, and from it originate those mountains from which whetstones can be quarried, but another part hits Þórr in the head so that he falls to the ground. Mjǫllnir hits Hrungnir in the skull and shatters it so that the giant falls forwards with one leg lying over Þórr's neck. Mǫkkurkálfi falls with little honour in his battle with Þjálfi, who then tries in vain to lift Hrungnir's leg away from Þórr. The other Æsir do not succeed in this task either, apart from Magni, Þórr's own son with the giantess Jarnsaxa. Magni is only three years old (or three nights old according to W and U manuscripts), yet he throws the leg off his father and even maintains that he would be able to fell giants with his bare hands. Þórr gets up and gives him the horse Gullfaxi as a reward.

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[18] This entire preliminary tale is not mentioned in Þjóðólfr, who begins his tale with a description of Þórr's journey to the battle.

Þórr now returns home to Þrúðvangar, but he still has the whetstone lodged in his head. Then a *vǫlva* named Gróa arrives and tries to get the stone out by means of magic spells. When she seems to succeed, Þórr wants to make her happy and tells her that he had recently passed over Élivágar, carrying Aurvandill – Gróa's husband – in a basket. Proof of this, Þórr says, is that he broke off Aurvandill's frozen toe, which had stuck out of the basket, and threw it up into the sky where it is now the star called Aurvandill's toe. Þórr predicts that it will not be long before Aurvandill returns home. Gróa becomes so happy at this news that she forgets the rest of her incantations, and the whetstone remains lodged in Þórr's head. For this reason, Snorri adds, one must never throw a whetstone on the floor, because the piece in Þórr's head then moves.

All scholars agree that the main content of the myth, the duel between Þórr and Hrungnir, has roots going far back in time. On the other hand, there are some features in Snorri's version which are found in neither *Haustlǫng* nor in the other sources, and they have often been understood as later additions. We will not go into details about these features here, as their importance to the debate about whether this is an initiation myth or not are only marginal. The additional features are the whole of the story that brings Hrungnir to Ásgarðr, including Óðinn's visit to the world of the giants and the drinking bout in Ásgarðr, together with Þjálfi's role as the one who lures Hrungnir to push his shield under his feet.

As far as the first addition is concerned, it is impossible to judge whether it is the 'original'[19] preliminary narrative we are presented with in Snorri's version, and our conjectures must, therefore, be more or less subjective. Óðinn's appearance in Giantland may perhaps seem somewhat atypical (Schneider 1952, 201), but for that reason need not necessarily be a recent feature.[20] On the contrary, Hrungnir's appearance in Ásgarðr seems to be an excellent reason for the later duel, not least in view of the fact that Þórr's main task throughout the whole of Old

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[19] The term 'original' in this connection means that the underlying concept is likely to be genuinely pagan. In the history of research, the term has often had the additional meaning of 'the *only one* and the *first one*' – a construction which with regard to myths and many other religious phenomena is probably a pure fiction, as variants must be presumed to have always existed.

[20] The scenario is not essentially different from the one we encounter in *Vafðr*, although the Hrungnir-myth does not include a wisdom-contest.

Norse myth is to defend Valhǫll and Miðgarðr against the giants' attacks. Hrungnir's threats in Ásgarðr seem completely understandable in relation to Þórr's later role in the myth.[21] Besides, it is important that we learn specifically that Þórr has been challenged to a duel for the first time.

Whether Þjálfi's role is in harmony with the pagan tradition cannot be answered unequivocally either. Renauld-Krantz thinks this is not the case (1972, 152) and refers among other things to Wais's comparison with a Hurrian narrative about Teshub and Ullikummi (Wais 1952, 215-20) in which the stone warrior Ullikummi was overcome by an attack from below, because he was vulnerable on the undersides of his feet. Renauld-Krantz's view is that the warning to Hrungnir originally reflected a real danger. There is certainly a very strong and repeated connection in the myth between Hrungnir and stones: his head, his heart and his weapons are made of stone. But stone can symbolise many things and in this context it most probably symbolises hardness. Þórr and Mjǫllnir are able to destroy and conquer something even as hard as stone.[22] The connection between giants and stone was also something of a cultural given, witness the frequent use by poets of giant-kennings incorporating references to rocks or stones which symbolise the inhospitable and uncivilised world of the giants (e. g. *grjótǫld*, *grjót-Níðaðr*). Given such a world view, it would be natural to assume that Hrungnir, who is the strongest of all the giants, is simply *made of stone*. However, there is no empirical evidence that Hrungnir was especially vulnerable beneath his feet, so one must resign oneself to the fact that no better explanation for why Hrungnir stands on his shield than the one Snorri gives can be produced on the basis of our knowledge of Norse mythology, even though we must concede that Þjálfi's role is only described by Snorri, and that his cunning may seem unmotivated in consideration of Þórr's strength.

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[21] The kenning *blað ilja þjófs Þrúðar* 'leaf of the footsoles of the thief of Þrúðr' for a shield in *Ragnarsdrápa* stanza 1 (Finnur Jónsson 1908-15. B 1,1) has led some researchers to think that the real reason for Þórr's battle against Hrungnir is that the giant abducted Þórr's daughter Þrúðr (e.g. Schneider 1936, 25-6). Although this is possible, one need not exclude Snorri's version. Firstly, one might imagine that the two versions could have existed as parts of a complete whole in which the giant has both offended the gods and stolen Þrúðr (one of his threats is, after all, that he will steal, not Þórr's daughter, but his wife Sif). Secondly, the two reasons may have existed side by side as variants, as the deciding factor in the myth is apparently not the reason for the conflict, but the outcome of the duel. In connection with the myth's potential meaning in an initiation-complex, this uncertainty, however, plays no part.

[22] Clearly, it is also of importance that iron and stone face one another in the confrontation between the two weapons. The myth operates with an opposition between stone and iron, which is analogous to uncivilised and civilised, chaos and cosmos and perhaps also nature and culture. We will not pursue this further here as these oppositions cannot be connected with an initiation structure, but it is clear that the contrast between Þórr and Hrungnir (and also between Mǫkkurkálfi and Hrungnir, as between clay and stone) is significant for an understanding of important aspects of the Scandinavian world view.

Dumézil and several other scholars have considered this narrative to be an initiation-myth (Dumézil 1939, 99-106; 1942, 29 and 1959, 109-13; de Vries 1956-57, II, 135-6; Renauld-Krantz 1972, 153-7). As mentioned above, the reason is primarily the presence of the clay giant Mǫkkurkálfi whose function in the story is difficult to perceive because, when the battle starts, he proves to be completely useless. Dumézil draws a parallel with the episode with Hǫttr in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, chapters 35-6 (*FSN* I, 66-9; Dumézil 1959, 111), in which there also appears an apparently formidable but in reality quite harmless enemy. We will return to this passage in Chapter 8.4 and state here only that the episode with Hǫttr clearly indicates that the 'harmless' enemy could be connected with an initiation scenario. But, this aside, it is difficult to enter further into a discussion about initiation because, in the Hrungnir myth, there is nothing beyond the clay figure that points to such a scenario, even though Renauld-Krantz argues otherwise. Dumézil himself is also suitably tentative with regard to his hypothesis in his 1959 book (compare the far more assertive statements in the 1939 edition, 102-6); he says:

> [The use of a *manlíkon*] … apparaît avec des circonstances qui en rendent l'interprétation difficile: est-ce un simple enjolivement, pris aux rituels d'initation, mais dépoullé de sa valeur originelle? est-ce une partie du récit, qui serait alors, comme j'ai pensé en 1939, un vrai 'mythe d'initiation', soit de *Th*jálfi (mais ce valet, ni avant ni après l'exploit, n'a rien d'un guerrier), soit de *Th*ôrr lui-meme – et, dans ce cas, non d'une initiation 'première', puisque *Th*ôrr est déjà d'avance un redoutable guerrier, mais d'une initiation de degré supérieur? Peut-être, puisque le texte parle d'un début, d'une sorte de progrès dans l'expérience

> combattante du dieu: 'C'était la première fois, dit Snorri, qu'il lui était donné de se rendre à un duel régulier' (1959, 112-3).

> [The use of a *manlíkon*] ... appears in circumstances which makes it difficult to interpret: is it a simple embellishment, taken from initiation rituals, but stripped of its original value? Is it a part of the narrative, which would then be, as I thought in 1939, a true 'initiation myth', be it of Þjálfi (but that man-servant, neither before nor after the exploit, has anything of a warrior about him), be it Þórr himself – and in that case it is not a 'first' initiation since Þórr is already a renowned warrior, but an initiation of higher degree? Perhaps, since the text speaks of a beginning, of a sort of progress in the god's battle experiences: 'It was the first time, Snorri says, that he had involved himself in a regular duel'.

After this, Dumézil adds that the whetstone in Þórr's forehead also points in the same direction, since it can be understood as a mark of initiation. He argues further that Hrungnir's heart with its three points makes one think of the Indo-European theme of the god of war fighting against a monster which is characterised by 'threeness'. This cannot be contested, while the whetstone as a mark of initiation is just a possibility, though an exclusively hypothetical one; and in any case it is not possible to pursue the hypothesis further within the Scandinavian material. Most important in the quotation from Dumézil is the doubt he expresses.

Of the two possibilities he mentions with regard to initiation, we must definitely prefer the former, if there really is any connection with initiation. It cannot be a question of a true *mythe d'initiation* as conclusive defining elements are lacking. The most telling factor is that neither Þórr nor Þjálfi acquires a new form of life after their confrontation with Hrungnir, and neither of them apparently receives any knowledge or an object that provides them with new abilities. The triadic sequence is certainly present, expressed in spatial terms, because they travel from Ásgarðr to the boundary with Útgarðr, where the battle takes place, after which they return home. But this sequence is, as we saw above, not enough in itself, although initiation also makes use of it. As far as oppositional pairs are concerned, they are of a somewhat different nature from the ones we have seen earlier. This is true of the oppositional pair cosmos versus chaos, which can perhaps be connected with life versus death by virtue of the fact that the killing takes place in a locality symbolising chaos or on its border. In addition to this, a code is clearly thematised, which includes the physical materials involved in the action (iron, stone and clay, cf. footnote 22). Both the triadic sequence and the binary structure are, however, so common in a long series of narrative genres that we cannot speak of a sequence that is parallel to that of initiation, as we have come across it in the Óðinn-myths, from this material alone.[23] The liminal space that is mentioned here is different from that of initiation, which is probably due to the fact that whereas mythical initiation and the acquisition of knowledge take place on the vertical axis of the cosmos, the Þórr-myths take place on the horizontal axis (cf. Schjødt 1990a and 2004).

In connection with the Hrungnir-myth, we have, as a further problem, no less than three possible subjects. One is Þjálfi who must be the initiand if a parallel to the Hǫttr-episode is involved, as it is he who kills the mannikin. But, as Dumézil himself points out, Þjálfi is no warrior, although in the Geirrøðr-episode in *Þórsdrápa* he is described as courageous. Thus Dumézil prefers to understand Þórr as the one who is initiated, but into a higher degree. There is no doubt that there can be several degrees in an initiation sequence, but our knowledge of the Scandinavian material is so defective that this surmise must remain hypothetical. If, however, Þórr is the initiand, Mǫkkurkálfi's function becomes even more enigmatic and his role can only be explained if Dumézil's first hypothesis is the correct one, namely that detached elements of an initiation ritual have found their way into the Hrungnir myth, but quite separate from their original function, and – we may add – from their position in the initiation structure. Finally, we could see Magni as a possible subject because the test, which he passes, seems no smaller than the other tests; in any case, none of the Æsir can do what he can do by throwing Hrungnir's leg aside.

Renauld-Krantz (1972, 154), who follows Dumézil's interpretation as expressed in the 1939 *Mythes et Dieux des Germains*, endeavours to solve the problem of the various subjects by regarding Snorri's version of the myth as containing both a 'Þórr-initiation' and a human imitation in the form of Þjálfi's battle with Mǫkkurkálfi. He emphasises the whetstone as an initiation symbol, but does not produce arguments to support this understanding which, in any case, cannot be anything other than hypothetical. As far as I know, this symbol is not found elsewhere in the source material, neither in connection with warriors, berserkers, or others, nor in connection with 'initiation-like' scenarios.[24] This same reservation holds good for the postulation that it is Þórr's wound in this battle which forever makes him proof against wounds (Renaud-Krantz 1972, 156). Among the elements that Renauld-Krantz identifies as certain indicators of initiation are: 1) that it is the first time Þórr engages in a single combat; 2) that it is the only single combat of his career; 3) that his opponent is the strongest of the giants and 4) that both the gods and the giants are collectively involved in the outcome of the battle. Unfortunately, it is difficult to perceive as much as a hint of initiation in any of them. The importance of the battle is obvious, considering Hrungnir's threats, while the fact that it is the first (and only) time that Þórr enters a single combat is probably based on the notion, as Snorri says, that nobody had dared to challenge him before, and *that*, in any case, does not indicate that he had not previously been involved in an initiation – quite the contrary.

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[23] On the other hand, it reminds us somewhat of the scenario we will come across in 8.3 and 8.4 but here it is unambiguously a question of subjects with a human status whereas in connection with Hrungnir we are dealing with mythical subjects (that Þjálfi originally was a human being does not make him less mythical: he is first and foremost Þórr's servant).

The problems discussed above rule out each of the three possible subjects who might have played the role of initiand in the Hrungnir myth. Therefore, it must be maintained that nothing indicates that this myth, as it has been handed down to us, forms a sequence that can be designated as either descriptive of an initiation ritual or as an initiation myth. This does not mean that there cannot be features in the narrative that may have had their roots in initiation rituals, as Dumézil indicated, and this is especially true of the character of Mǫkkurkálfi. But beyond the very hypothetical character of such a suggestion, these features do not help us to increase our understanding of either the symbolism or the structure of the ideology of initiation as it existed in Scandinavia.

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[24] Simpson (1979) and Mitchell (1985a, cf. Chapter 5 above) have argued that the whetstone is a symbol of a ruler, and Mitchell includes in this connection Hrungnir's whetstone, understanding it as a symbol of his status among the giants, among whom he was the strongest. Nevertheless, the motif that pieces of a whetstone in the forehead are a sign of a warrior- or, for that matter, a royal initiation (and Þórr is quite definitely *not* a king) cannot be found.

Geirrøðr

Another myth, which has also been connected with initiation and which, besides, has several points in common with the Hrungnir story, is the account of Þórr's fight against the giant Geirrøðr, mentioned in several places in the source material (Clunies Ross 1981, 371; McKinnell 1994, 59-60 and further 2005, 118-25).[25] In connection with this myth, too, it is primarily the tests undergone by the heroes[26] that have caused some scholars to want to see an initiation myth in it. Here, too, it is Snorri's version (*Skm* 18; Faulkes 1998, 24-5) that is the basis for the reference since, on the whole it apparently follows *Þdr*, which is quoted as the source. This poem by the skald Eilífr Goðrúnarson, usually dated c. 1000, is so complicated that the meaning in many passages is quite uncertain; at the same time, we may suppose that Snorri had other sources at his disposal that might have caused him to deviate from *Þdr* (e.g. that Þjálfi has been substituted with Loki as a travelling companion), but we must also reckon with the possibility that he has misunderstood something or other in the poem.

Snorri begins with a prelude that explains how Loki gets into a situation in which he is forced to lure Þórr to Geirrøðr's dwelling without his hammer and his belt of strength. This prelude is of no interest in the present analysis in which the important point is that Þórr sets out unarmed, but *Þdr* seems to confirm Loki's role. Paradoxically, the first thing that happens on the expedition is that Þórr meets a giantess by the name of Gríðr, who gives him a belt of strength and iron gloves together with a staff named Gríðarvǫlr. After this, he comes to the torrential river Vimur, crossing it with great difficulty with the help of the staff, and Loki (but in *Þdr* 9 Þjálfi) has to hang onto him. The reason is that a giantess's urine or menstrual blood (Kiil 1956, 106) makes the river flood when Þórr and his companion go to cross it. Snorri identifies the giantess as Gjálp, one of Geirrøðr's daughters, but this is problematical since she also appears later, even though she must be supposed to have been killed after Þórr throws a stone at her in order to stop the stream.[27] By holding onto a rowan tree on the bank, they succeed in getting across safely. When they arrive at Geirrøðr's house, Þórr sits down in a chair, which is raised up by the daughters Gjálp and Greip who are crouching underneath it; but Þórr pushes his staff against the ceiling and in this way breaks the backs of the two giantesses.[28] InsideGeirrøðr's hall, the giant himself attempts to kill Þórr by throwing a red-hot iron bar at him, but Þórr catches it in his iron gloves and throws it back so that it passes through the iron column behind which Geirrøðr is hidden, through Geirrøðr himself, through the wall and down into the ground outside. Snorri's account finishes here, but Eilífr's adds in stanza 19 that Þórr kills the rest of the giants with his hammer, which, according to Snorri, he is said not to have brought along. This has caused Kiil (1956, 158-60) to understand *Þdr* 19/2 *gramr med dreyrgum hamri* as 'the chieftain with the bloody hammer', as he draws attention to the fact that such an attributive use has several parallels in Old Norse poetry. This would imply that Þórr does not actually carry his hammer but is characterised as the one who normally uses it. The use of the hammer after the killing of Geirrøðr, however, is fundamental to Clunies Ross's interpretation (1981, 388), which we will return to below.

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[25] McKinnell's treatment of this myth-complex is quite problematical as he accepts, without further proof, that both *Hym* and Snorri's and Saxo's accounts of Útgarðaloki are variants of the Geirrøðr-myth. It is obvious that there are similarities, but these are likely to derive from the fact that all these narratives involve conflicts between Þórr and giants. As such, they may on one level be seen as variants, but this holds good for all Þórr's controversies with giants. There is nothing that indicates that the three accounts mentioned have a special connection to the Geirrøðr-complex. Hymir and Útgarðaloki are not Geirrøðr and Þórr's way of treating them is different.

[26] Þórr and Þjálfi are the heroes in *Þdr*, and Þórr and Loki in Snorri (if one can call Loki a 'hero' in this connection since it is he who has enticed Þórr to undertake the dangerous journey, as is the case in both *Þdr* and *Skm*). In the versions of *Gesta Danorum* and *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, a considerable retinue accompanies both Thorkillus and Þorsteinn on their journey to Geirrøðr or Geruthus.

First, however, we will examine Renauld-Krantz' interpretation. As with his reading of the Hrungnir myth, he sees the Geirrøðr myth also as a myth of initiation. He argues that the three tests Þórr undergoes have to do with the three elements water, earth and fire, and that these are on an increasing scale of difficulty: first one woman, then two and finally Geirrøðr himself (Renauld-Krantz 1972, 146-7). This order 'évoque un scenario d'initiation, initiation de type *héroïque* caracterisée par la descente du héros *vivant*, non metamorphose, dans le sein de la Terre pour y livrer un *combat* ...' 'evokes a scenario of initiation, an initiation of the *heroic* type, which is characterised by the descent of the *living* hero, not metamorphosed, into the bosom of the Earth in order there to join a *battle*'. The battle is the culmination of the initiation, and what is obtained is 'the powers necessary to his function'. All things considered, there is not much that points in that direction. Perhaps it is correct that the tests involve a battle against the three elements. But the idea that Þórr obtains that power which is necessary for his future career by this means is simply a supposition which has no foundation in the sources. Likewise, it does not appear to be in agreement with the sources to understand his journey as a journey to the underworld or a journey to the dead. Although several scholars suppose this to be the case (Clunies Ross 1981, 373 and 377, who speaks of 'giant chthonic beings'; Turville-Petre 1964, 80; McKinnell 1994, 64-5; Mogk 1924, 384), there are no substantial indications that Þórr's (or Þorsteinn's or Thorkillus's) journey to Geirrøðr is simultaneously a journey to the underworld or a journey to the kingdom of the dead,[29] although Saxo's version in particular, seen in isolation, *could* be viewed as a journey to the underworld. But in consideration of the fact that the giants otherwise do not appear as chthonic and that their world is placed in the horizontal cosmological model, not in the vertical one (Schjødt 1990a, 47-9), such an interpretation is not convincing and, in any case, not inevitable. It cannot be substantiated, then, that Þórr made a journey to the underworld on this occasion. In all likelihood this journey, like all other journeys against giant adversaries, is a journey to the world of the giants in the east, which are indeed characterised by symbols that can also be interpreted as chthonic (e.g. stone, as in the Hrungnir-myth), but which just as well – and there is no doubt that that is the case here – can be an expression for the uncivilised, for the chaotic, the raw and that which has not been wrought by human beings and which, as a rule, characterises the giant world.

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[27] Perhaps Saxo is more correct when he mentions three daughters (VIII, xiv, 15), one for the river episode and two who sit under the chair, as Mogk suggested (Mogk 1924, 383).

[28] In Saxo's version, the backs of the two women are broken by a thunderbolt (*fulmen*) which we are probably to understand as Þórr's hammer, which may indicate a different version from the one Snorri gives where Þórr arrives without the hammer. This would explain the role of the hammer in *Þdr* 19.

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[29] In *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, Þorstein indeed comes to Guðmundr's kingdom Glæsisvellir, which is undoubtedly an area connected with the dead (cf. the not quite clear relationship to Ódáinsakr [de Vries 1956-7, II, 284-6]) but a kingdom of the dead, which definitely cannot be compared to the dreary place in which Geirrøðr lives (most striking in Saxo). Besides, the dangerous but passable river forms the boundary between *Glæsisvellir* and *Jǫtunheimr*, which is Geirrøðr's country, and for this reason these two entities ought under no circumstances to be identified as one and the same.

Before we test the myth against our four criteria, we will examine an interpretation by Margaret Clunies Ross who links it closely to initiation. Her chief conclusion is that the myth is about an initiation with Þórr as the subject who leaves the sphere of the mother and moves over into the adult world, which includes marriage and the acquisition of weapons. The details in the arguments are debatable,[30] but the major problem seems to be that the prerequisite for a conclusion is that every detail must be interpreted in the manner suggested by Clunies Ross, and there are far too many elements of uncertainty to allow this to happen. If we are to accept the result, it is thus necessary to accept that the rowan tree, which Snorri mentions, and by which Þórr rescues himself in the river, can be identified as Sif, which requires a detour through Lappish material (1981, 378-9), that the giant's daughters can be identified with Þórr's own mother Jǫrð (cf. above with regard to the problems connected with the chthonic aspects of the giants[31]), and – the most problematic of all – that Geirrøðr is Þórr's father (1981, 387-8). If all these part-interpretations hold good, then the myth has to do with how Þórr separates himself from his maternal origin who, nevertheless, resists violently; and how he then moves into the adult warriors' world where he gets married, and how he steals the hammer from his father, who does not surrender it voluntarily. It cannot be denied that Clunies

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[30] It is, for example, hardly possible to understand Geirrøðr as a smith who in fact has created the hammer (Clunies Ross 1981, 388-9). In Scandinavian mythology, smiths are dwarfs or humans, but not giants, and the supposition, which is based on comparative material and is important in drawing the conclusion about Þórr's acquisition of the hammer, thus seems unlikely.

[31] It is certainly correct that *Þdr* 14 indicates that Geirrøðr's house is located in a mountain cave, but this is still not in itself enough to ensure that we are dealing with a chthonic scenario. However, when it appears in connection with other features, it can be an indication of such a scenario (cf. 8.2 about Sigurðr). We must, therefore, first examine whether such features are present. The giants are, as is known, dwellers in the wild mountain regions and are, therefore, often described as *bergbúi* or *bergrisi* without this indicating an aspect of the underworld.

Ross has given a possible solution to the problem that Þórr apparently has the hammer in the last stanzas of *Þdr* (he has quite simply taken it over after the killing of Geirrøðr; cf. also Guðmundur Ingi Markússon 2005, 170-2). But here, too, we have certain problems as *Skm* 35 gives a quite different version of how the hammer becomes Þórr's property, and this seems both genuine and, in the light of initiation, impossible to view as a transformation of the version of the myth proposed by Clunies Ross.[32] Perhaps it could have been stolen just as in *Þry*, but then the initiation interpretation falls flat. Finally, *Þdr* does not indicate that Þórr was in fact without his hammer on the journey to Geirrøðr, so Eilífr may here have drawn on a different tradition from Snorri, a tradition in which Þórr travels as usual to the land of the giants, bringing with him his favourite weapon. The Clunies Ross interpretation cannot be disproved, but there seem to be too many elements of uncertainty, all of which are supposed to merge into a higher entity in order for it all to fit together. To make one or the other interpretation probable, we must by necessity include the larger complex of which initiation is a part. We must, therefore, examine more closely how the myth fits into our structure.

There are already problems with regard to the criterion of irreversibility: Þórr is, at least as the myth appears in our sources, already extremely powerful in the initial situation,[33] and nowhere does it state that his status after the killing of Geirrøðr has changed, apart from the fame which every giant-killing brings with it. If the hammer, therefore, was acquired during this journey, our sources are conspicuously silent about it. Just as in the Hrungnir-myth, the triadic horizontal structure is not developed in any significant way: Þórr leaves home, arrives after sundry tests (and the acquisition of certain magic objects which, however, are only of importance in respect of the coming tasks) at the dwelling of Geirrøðr, whom he kills, and of course he returns (but, as mentioned, without any marked elevation of his status having taken place). This, however, is no conclusive objection to seeing the myth as an initiation sequence as, in other cases in which the likelihood that we are dealing with an initiation is great, we also have merely the subject's movement with regard to space. What is more conclusive is how the stay in the liminal space is characterised. The oppositional pairs that this myth operates with seem, as in the Hrungnir-myth, not to indicate a binary structure between the non-liminal and the liminal space, such as we have encountered in the Óðinn-myths: it does not involve the underworld or the kingdom of the dead, it is not a question of something latent against something manifest, and it is not a question of a space characterised by feminine connotations (even though the giant's daughters play a part, it is Geirrøðr who is the centre of the episode). Finally, we do not hear anything about Þórr acquiring an object of knowledge, which is of importance in the final situation. If Clunies Ross is correct that the hammer is acquired in connection with the killing of Geirrøðr, we could indeed see this as an expression of the acquisition of numinous power or numinous abilities (which then would also indicate a 'higher' status in the final situation), but her interpretation, as mentioned, seems to presuppose the correctness of too many uncertain premises. It is most significant that we have no indication that Geirrøðr at any point in time would have been in possession of the hammer, let alone made it, or that Þórr would not have had it before the battle against Geirrøðr. Snorri on the contrary explicitly argues that he had it.

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[32] An interesting analysis which actually suggests that the two myths are transformations of each other is suggested by Guðmundur Ingi Markússon (2005). This, however, can hardly support the two myths as being initiation myths.

[33] The kennings that are used in *Þdr* seem to indicate clearly that the god who travels to Geirrøðr is in no way in need of *becoming* powerful.

Having said all this, we must once more emphasise that we cannot reject the possibility with this myth, as with the Hrungnir-narrative, that various features may have been drawn in from an initiation scenario, since, as we have mentioned before, myths refer to one another and naturally 'borrow' from one another. This is particularly plausible of the episode with Gríðr, whose equipment is certainly only used in the events described but which might previously have had another role. It is perhaps the very acquisition of the belt of strength and the iron gloves (we know nothing of the staff from other episodes with Þórr) that underlies this episode.[34] This point will not be argued further, however, as we would have to dig into a mythical stratum that is earlier than the period for which the transmitted myths are an expression. In any case, we have in the Gríðr-episode the female mediator of numinous objects, yet placed in a context which is like the one we know from popular fairytales in which the magic objects are to be used in a quite specific connection.

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[34] Cf. chapter 2 of *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* where we are told of a journey that Þorsteinn makes to the underworld. Prior to this, however, the transference of a staff and some gloves from a woman from the underworld has taken place. Although this episode is not directly connected with Þorsteinn's visit to Geirrøðr, it can hardly be by chance that it has been placed here, and it is not difficult to see a parallel with the Geirrøðr-episode. In connection with Þorsteinn, an episode follows in which a dwarf gives

There is, therefore, no reason to reject the idea, as advanced by Renauld-Krantz and Clunies Ross, that this myth contains elements of initiation, but an initiation myth in the sense that we have outlined it in Chapter 3.3 is not involved in any of the variants that have been transmitted to us. What we have are individual features which do not form a whole either structurally or symbolically.

Summing up on Þórr and initiation

We will briefly return to the relationship between passing tests or undergoing tests on the one hand, and the acquisition of knowledge or numinous abilities on the other. As we have seen, scholars have focused almost exclusively on the tests in Þórr myths as conclusive indications that these myths include initiations or initiation-like scenarios. And as mentioned, it is also correct that such tests are involved in initiation rituals the whole world over. The thing that characterises initiation in the world view of the believers is that the initiands *after* the rituals are in possession of numinous powers, which, at least symbolically, make them able to carry out some definite religious or social functions in their new mode of life. And it is in that connection that we must view initiatory tests: they are to ensure that the initiated person will be able to manage his new existence. But it is not the actual passing of the test that is decisive (there are many initiations in which we cannot see any trace of tests) as this is only a manifestation or a sign of the essential thing, namely that one has obtained or made oneself accessible to the necessary abilities or the necessary knowledge, acquired through the sequence. In connection with our Norse myths, this means that if those

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him certain magical tools which are used in connection with the journey to Geirrøðr. The descriptions of the introductions to the meetings with both the woman and the dwarf are very similar: in both cases he comes *í eitt rjóðr* 'into a clearing', in the one case a hill appears and in the other a stone, and in both places he meets beings from the underworld from whom he obtains magic objects.

tests, of which the material is so full, do not have a prior or subsequent acquisition of knowledge attached to them or do not bring about an irreversibly higher status, there is no sense in talking about an initiation. It is a fact that the status of the sources concerning the Scandinavian area is of such a kind that many details have been lost, and that is why one has to be cautious in rejecting the possibility of initiatory scenarios in, for example, the Þórr myths. But we are able to establish that we do not have in a single myth or myth variant, which has Þórr as the main actor, a complete scenario which makes it possible to see a parallel to what we must work with as initiation on the basis of the phenomenology of religion. It is also striking that what forms the liminal space in the Þórr myths has no connection with the kind of liminal space we found in the Óðinn myths. This also holds good in cases which do not directly deal with initiations as far as the criterion of irreversibility is concerned, as in *Bdr* and *Vsp* which in every respect correspond to the liminal space of initiation. In the myths about battles with giants, the liminal space is neither characterised by a connection with the underworld nor by latent numinous knowledge.

Now, as far as the Þórr myths are concerned, it might be a question of a *different* liminal scenario from the one we come across in the Óðinn myths. In that case, in agreement with Dumézil's schema of the three functions, it might be natural to assume that, whereas the Óðinn myths form a kind of 'shaman initiation', the Þórr myths could form 'warrior initiations'. Even if this solution cannot be rejected, it is, however, not so simple, since Óðinn also plays an essential role in warrior-initiations of earthly heroes, as we shall see later, whereas Þórr is completely absent in this connection. Although Þórr often travels to an 'other' world where he kills giants, which in itself *could* be part of an initiation, there is nothing in the overarching structure of these myths that indicates that this is, in fact, the case. The scenario that is formed by the giants' world and the killings which take place there does not indicate that we are dealing with liminal situations that we can relate to initiation without forcing them when we view it in the context of the mythology as a whole, but rather, perhaps, to liminal scenarios that have their roots in cyclic rituals.

This takes us to a short summary of Þórr's possible role in the initiation complex. As has been shown, there are many elements of uncertainty. The connections in which he 'consecrates' things or persons –

gives them numinous power – *may* be liminal situations in which Mjǫllnir has played a part as an apotropeic (demon-killing) force and, therefore, as a life-giving element. This, however, is uncertain, and it does not have any value as an explanation with regard to the symbolism and structure of the initiation. The same is true of those myths in which Þórr kills giants after enduring many hardships. In none of them do we find a complete initiation scenario but, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that some elements are present in these myths which may be either originally attached to the initiation context or were simply taken from the semantic universe in which initiation also has its roots.

It is thus difficult to see any conclusive arguments for supposing that Þórr played any role in initiation. On the one hand, the context in which he 'consecrates' something could indeed – but not very probably – suggest that he had a role as initiator which, as mentioned, has also been suggested with regard to his function in the Hrungnir myth with reference to Þjálfi. On the other hand, in the Geirrøðr myth, if that can in fact be considered an initiation, he can unambiguously be seen as the initiand, which may also be the case in the Hrungnir myth. Although we cannot reach any certainty on this issue, there are some strong arguments against understanding Þórr as closely tied to the phenomenon of initiation. In the first place, it seems that the 'consecration'-situations are all tied to Þórr's well-known function as the conqueror of chaos: he conquers demonic powers which could be imagined as preventing the objectives of a ritual or a runic inscription. Although this can also apply to transitional situations, including initiation rituals, it does not give Þórr a special role in relation to them but should rather be regarded as a general function of the god in the ritual sphere. Secondly, it is conspicuous that, if Þórr is understood as an initiator, he does not play any role at all either with regard to consecrations of earthly or half-mythical warriors[35] or in other connections in which an initiation structure clearly emerges. The third point is, and this is an important argument against understanding Þórr himself as the initiand, that he apparently always has possessed his great strength. While time after time we find the theme of Óðinn seeking knowledge, as far as Þórr is concerned we do not encounter him searching for strength, dexterity in the use of weapons or knowledge as a theme. To put it another way: as a result of his battles against giants, Þórr never takes home either objects of knowledge or any other tools which he does not already have.

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[35] A more wide-ranging discussion of Óðinn's and Þórr's relationships to war and warriors is undertaken in Schjødt 1999a.

We must, therefore, conclude that the Þórr myths do not give us any insight into an initiation sequence but, at the most, concern some elements which may enter into initiations in other connections.

7.2 Óttarr

Hyndl is an eddic poem which deals with the acquisition of knowledge. It is not found in the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda and is known only from *Flateyjarbók*. Most researchers have agreed that, in the form in which it has been transmitted to us, we are dealing with a late product, put together from various originally separate poems (e.g. de Vries 1964-67, II, 109-10; Klingenberg 1974, 9; Finnur Jónsson 1894-1902, I, 204; Boer 1922, II, 347), but in recent years a strong question mark has been put against this understanding by Gro Steinsland (1991a, 248-51) and implicitly by Britt-Mari Näsström (1995, 151-8). Steinsland argues for a unity of the poem and a deeply rooted pagan ideology centring round *kongens død og kongens genealogiske forbindelse med jotunættene* 'the death of the king and his genealogical connection with the families of giants' (Steinsland 1991a, 248).[36] Although there are points in her reasoning that I cannot agree with,[37] the most essential part, the frame-story in which Freyja persuades Hyndla to let her knowledge be of benefit to Freyja's own protégé Óttarr, and Hyndla's pronouncement of this knowledge, fits solidly together and seems to be convincing in the context of the present analysis. The same holds good for the argument that the so-called *Vǫluspá hin scamma* (stanzas 29-44) ought to be understood as an integrated part of *Hyndl*. Näsström also understands it as an entire poem and, in addition, interprets the whole of Hyndla's speech as initiatory instruction (Näsström 1995, 174).

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[36] In addition, see Steinsland 1991a, 243-8, von See *et al.* 2000, 669-74 and Zernack 2000, 305-8 with regard to the research history of the poem and for additional references to the evaluation of the poem.

[37] One point, which is fundamental to Steinsland's argument (1991a, 287-91), is that stanza 44 expresses a future ruler-ideal. I think it is doubtful. The arguments used here and in connection with *Vsp* 65 (pp. 293-303) will only hold good, in my view, if popular Christian ideas really cannot be involved in these two stanzas. It seems not to have been proven that there could not be images present that were influenced to a greater or lesser degree by Christianity.

The sequence in the frame story

The situation in the poem is that Freyja wakes up the giant woman Hyndla, who lives in a cave, in order to get her to ride to Valhǫll and to the holy place (*til vés heilags*) with her. This happens during the night (1/5) and Freyja entices her with the promise that Óðinn is generous with gold, and also that Þórr perhaps can be persuaded to leave Hyndla in peace forever, even though she is a giantess. But Hyndla works out Freyja's real plan (stanza 6), which is to ensure that Óttarr, who has apparently taken on the form of the boar Freyja is riding (stanza 45), obtains knowledge, and she objects to saying anything. But in the end Hyndla consents, even though she learns that her knowledge will help Óttarr in his fight against Angantýr. From stanza 12 the pronouncement begins, but it is difficult to say for certain where this takes place. One could imagine that it happens while they are travelling to Valhǫll, as most scholars have thought (e.g. Klingenberg 1974, 25; Steinsland 1991a, 243; Näsström 1995, 162). However, it may be more probable that it takes place in the cave in which Hyndla lives (cf. stanza 46: *Snúðu burt heðan! sofa lyster mic* [NK 1962, 295] – 'Go away from here! I wish to sleep' [Larrington 1996, 259]; see also Ohlmarks 1936, 280, Quinn 1994, 144 and von See *et al.* 2000, 694). In that case, Freyja's invitation to ride with her to Valhǫll is only a means to lure Hyndla to pronounce her knowledge. As she sees through Freyja's plan all the same and shows that she knows that the boar is identical with Óttarr, the actual journey loses its meaning. It is therefore hardly the case, as Näsström has argued, that 'The two antagonists, the goddess and the giantess, seem to pass the border between the Land of the Living and the Land of the Dead together with Óttarr's person or something symbolising him' (1995, 162). It is Hyndla alone who is the representative of The Other World in the poem, a point that also brings *Hyndl* far more in agreement with the other myths we have investigated.

With stanza 45, we are back in the frame story, irrespective of whether one accepts the whole of *Hyndl* as a unit or works with the 'two-source-hypothesis', and Freyja asks Hyndla for a memorial drink (*minnisǫl*), so that Óttarr will be able to remember everything when facing Angantýr. Apparently he gets it when Freyja threatens Hyndla, although it is accompanied with oaths and curses and the usual accusations of lewdness against Freyja; and, without saying so directly, we may suppose that Hyndla was finally left to sleep in peace.

Analysis

We will not here discuss the kind of knowledge that is imparted. The important thing in our context is that it is a question of an acquisition of knowledge and that this seems to be characterised in the same way as several of the other examples that we have examined, but with a couple of further important features added.

It is of some importance to determine what the knowledge Óttarr is to receive is to be used for. Several researchers have thought that it was a royal consecration which Óttarr was to prepare himself for (Bergmann 1876; Fleck 1970; Steinsland 1991a; Gurevich 1973 opposes this viewpoint). In that case, we are dealing with a kind of initiatory knowledge where the context would reveal it as the initiation of a king. The poem itself only states (stanza 9) that Óttarr needs the knowledge Hyndla can give him in order to obtain his ancestral inheritance (*fǫðurleifð hafi eptir frœndr sína*). The poem is silent about what this inheritance consists of but, in the light of both Fleck's and Steinsland's investigations, in which parallels of various kinds are drawn into the discussion, in both cases associated with the ideology of kings, it seems appropriate to regard the ancestral inheritance as a kingdom.[38] Both Klingenberg (1974, 25-30) and Näsström (1995, 162-6) also view Ottarr's acquisition of knowledge as an element of initiation, but both are of the opinion that it is a warrior initiation. Klingenberg fastens primarily on the detail that Óttarr is to look into Valhǫll and see the *einherjar* so that he, so to speak, prepares the way for his own acceptance among their flock (1974, 30). Näsström, on the other hand, argues that, although this is a warrior-initiation, it is the initiation of a different kind of warrior from, for example, the berserkers, which, as Höfler has pointed out (see Chapter 9.3 below), may be the earthly counterparts to the *einherjar* (Näsström 1995, 166). The poem itself does not provide us with the possibility of a certain decision, and the essential thing in the context of this study is, therefore, whether it is probable that the poem represents an initiation scenario.

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[38] Gurevich's arguments (1973, 74-5) against Bergmann cannot in any way touch either Fleck or Steinsland, and how he can think that Fleck's article is demolished by these (Gurevich 1973, 84) is completely incomprehensible.

An argument against this being probable appears to be stanza 9, where it is stated that a bet between Óttarr and Angantýr is the reason for Óttarr's wanting to be given the genealogical and mythical knowledge which Hyndla's pronouncement contains (*þeira hafa veðiat valamálmi, Óttarr iungi oc Angantýr* (NK 1962, 289) – 'They have wagered foreign gold, young Ottar and Angantyr' (Larrington 1996, 254). Näsström (1995, 152) considers the bet superfluous and leans towards the view that the text has been corrupted. Another possibility, which ties the two elements of the ancestral inheritance and the bet together, and so places the bet in the context of an initiation, has been suggested by Fleck (1970), who sees Óttarr and Angantýr as brothers who have to compete for the throne by demonstrating their genealogical and mythological knowledge. In consideration of the numinous character of this knowledge, and from the fact that it is given by means of Freyja's intervention, it seems most likely that it plays a part that goes well beyond a 'common' bet in which the participants merely return to their old roles after the winner has been decided.[39] There appears to be more at stake here, and Fleck's arguments in this connection seem convincing. If so, then there is no contradiction in the notion that Óttarr will use his knowledge both in a bet and to acquire his ancestral inheritance. If this is the kingdom, as Fleck has argued convincingly (cf. von See *et al.* 2000, 679-80), the genealogical knowledge, which is implicitly numinous, will have been of crucial importance.

There are therefore good reasons to understand *Hyndl* as dealing with a future king's acquisition of numinous knowledge in the context of an initiation, and the view that we are dealing with a warrior initiation consequently becomes weaker.[40]

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[39] One cannot compare the bet between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir in *Vafðr* in which Óðinn must be assumed to know all the answers beforehand. In *Hyndl* Óttarr, who is a human being, gets his knowledge from a being from The Other World, which in itself indicates that we are dealing with knowledge that leads up to a final condition, essentially different from his condition in the initial phase.

[40] Näsström (1995, 163-6) produces several good arguments in support of her thesis that on the symbolic level there is an affinity with war. In itself, however, this is not an argument against understanding Óttarr's situation as an initiation of a king: as far back

There are many problems in Hyndla's pronouncement, among other things regarding the mythology itself as we know it from other sources (see Steinsland 1991a, 252-7). For our purpose, however, it is enough to demonstrate that the poem refers to numinous knowledge, and we must therefore also examine more closely how *Hyndl* stands with regard to the structure of initiation.

The expected triadic sequence of initiation does not emerge clearly as only the central phase is made explicit. However, it is obvious that Freyja and Óttarr have gone to the cave in which Hyndla lives, so it is most likely that it is here that they obtain the knowledge that Hyndla supplies. There is no direct indication of a return, although one may be taken for granted as Óttarr must use his knowledge against Angantýr, and this must be thought to take place back in This World. The horizontal sequence is thus implicitly but not explicitly present in the narrative. As far as the place where Óttarr acquires knowledge is concerned, we are told that Hyndla lives *í helli* 'in a cave'. In certain circumstances we can regard a cave as an underworld locality and, even if such an interpretation is not in itself compelling, it seems – considering the parallels we have touched upon in earlier analyses – most natural here to focus on this aspect of the cave, which is a rock cave (*AEW*: 221), and thus *in* the ground or under the ground.[41] This underworld location is confirmed by the probability that Hyndla must be considered dead, as the verb *vekja* 'to waken' is also used in other contexts about raising the dead who are to procure numinous knowledge (e.g. *Gróg* 1). Besides, parallels to other *Totenerweckungen* 'raisings of the dead' appear to be

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as our sources reach, Scandinavian kings had functions with regard to war and battle, and examples of fighting qualifications playing a part in the evaluation of a king's worth are legion. Consequently, a king no less than other warriors can be supposed to be taken into the circle of the *einherjar* in Valhǫll.

[41] Another aspect of the cave we could focus on is its character as a primitive dwelling (cf. sundry kennings for giants, which contain the word [*LP*: *hellir*]), and this connotation may also be present here, as Hyndla's giant nature is not in doubt (cf. stanza 50 *brúdr iǫtuns*), though it is her role as provider of knowledge that is stressed in *Hyndl.* The significance of the cave here does not contradict what was stated earlier about the cave in the Geirrøðr myth. Depending on the context in which it is a part, the cave *can* be seen as a locality that is characterised as *the* other world from which one fetches numinous knowledge and, consequently, it can be used in the initiation scenario. But taken in isolation, it can naturally also be characterised as a mere primitive giant dwelling in Útgarðr or in any other uncivilised place.

so strong that her condition as a dead person cannot reasonably be doubted (Ohlmarks 1936, 277-80).[42] It is not in any way unusual that a giantess should be involved in such an exchange, although giants as a group are normally placed on the horizontal world axis. We have already seen several examples of giant *women* being located in the underworld (*Vsp*, *Bdr*, Gunnlǫð).

This means that the liminal scenario here is characterised in the same way as we have seen above, via a series of oppositional pairs in which the poles relate to each other as non-liminal to liminal. The oppositional pairs that are present are upper world versus underworld, life versus death and masculine versus feminine.[43] To the last-named, one must add that the real subject of the sequence is Óttarr. True enough, it is Freyja who brokers the contact between Óttarr and Hyndla and thus plays the role of mediator, but Óttarr himself is present in the liminal phase (in the shape of the boar), and it is he who profits from the acquisition of knowledge in the final phase, although we hear nothing about that. The object of knowledge is here partly the genealogical elucidation and partly the memory-drink, which provides associations with the mead, granted that it is here referred to as beer (*minnisǫl*, stanza 45). So far, there is nothing new in the scenario we encounter here.

This is also true of the very nature of the knowledge in question. It is evident in relation to the mythological part of Hyndla's pronouncements, which clearly have numinous value. But it is true in no lesser degree for the genealogical knowledge. This is not a question of a general examination of sundry ancestors over a specific number of generations but, on the contrary, about a pronouncement which connects Óttarr both to 'historical' persons and dynasties from legendary history. It is obvious that this whole enumeration of names of people who were said to be Óttarr's ancestors was not to be taken literally. Nobody would be able to establish kinship between all the people Hyndla names.[44] Something other than physical or biological kinship must have been at stake. When Hyndla constantly repeats *alt er þat ætt þin* – 'all these are your kin', this must be connected with another kind of kinship, a kinship of a kind that supposes that human beings are thought to be descended from the gods, or at least that some families are (Höfler 1959, 673 and 695-6; Schjødt 1990b, 57-8). In other words, it is a question of an ideological basis for many of the royal families in Scandinavia (Steinsland 1991a, 256). It is not only the 'good' qualities of this descent that are mentioned but, on the contrary, the whole potential that is to be contained in one person, namely the king. There is thus a further argument for considering Óttarr a royal candidate, because if that were not the case the whole genealogical section of the poem would be meaningless. On the other hand, it is extremely meaningful in the context of the ideology of kingship, in which the king is the *representative* of the whole people, to emphasise the all-inclusive context in which the future leader should be able to function. We will return to this subject in Chapter 9. 5. Here, we will only establish that the actual content of the knowledge, which Óttarr is given, allows us to presume that the final state in which it is imagined to function indicates irreversibility, something which does not otherwise appear clearly.

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[42] Besides there are, as far as I know, no examples in the old Scandinavian material of a sleeping person being woken up in order for them to give forth numinous knowledge.

[43] The fact that Óttarr is in the form of an animal also strengthens one's understanding that he is in a liminal condition.

[44] Klingenberg argues (1974, 30) that it is a matter of a spiritual relationship with the heroes who live as *einherjar* in Valhǫll, and who become Óttarr's 'spiritual' kinsmen via his initiation as a warrior. If this is correct, such a kinship would be just as relevant

Thus we have all the elements that make it possible for us to talk about a myth which in one way or another has something to do with initiation. This vague wording is due to the fact that insufficient contextual information makes it impossible for us to evaluate whether we are dealing with a myth which had been attached to a ritual, just as the absence of the final phase makes it difficult to evaluate precisely how the frame-story of the poem in particular had been used in relation to the ideology of rulership. But both the structure and the symbolism, which are in agreement with our criteria for the recognition of initiation, are implicitly or explicitly present. The subject from the upper world travels into the liminal phase, which here, as in other cases, is marked as the underworld, femininity and death, from which he acquires numinous knowledge that is able to secure for him an irreversibly higher status in the final phase of the sequence.

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if *Hyndl* was dealing with the consecration of a king, as the kings also were united with Óðinn with special bonds (see Schjødt 2007c and Chapter 9.5 below).

Freyja – the divine helper

As was mentioned earlier, there are a couple of elements in this myth which we have not previously discussed but which are of importance for our understanding of the semantic universe within which the initiation takes place. It concerns the role Freyja takes on in this poem. Fleck (1970, 44) and Näsström (1995, 173) raise the question of why Freyja herself does not supply Óttarr with the knowledge he needs, why Óttarr has to travel about in the underworld and to Hyndla when Freyja, after all, is a goddess and kindly disposed towards him? Fleck answers the question for himself by referring to Freyja's lack of chastity (see also Fleck 1968, 90-3; 1969, 19-24) which could be incompatible with prophetic abilities and so with the possession of numinous knowledge. This, however, seems unlikely, as neither Frigg nor Gefjon, to whom Fleck refers as having knowledge, are especially chaste. Näsström firstly emphasises that such mythological questions cannot be treated in a logical fashion and adds that, although Freyja belongs to the supernatural sphere, her actions in the myth are 'a reflection of the world of man and of the human pursuit of unearthly wisdom'. Secondly, she argues that Hyndla acts as a *vǫlva* similar to those whom we come across in *Bdr* and *Vsp*. Both these points are certainly important, and the former especially must be taken into consideration if we are to explain Freyja's role.

But there is more to be said about the question of why both Freyja and Hyndla are necessary actors and why Freyja has a place in the myth at all, which, as mentioned above, could seem superfluous. The first point is that Freyja here plays the role of mediator between the upper world and the underworld, something we will discuss further in Chapter 10.1. She is neither completely chthonic, although this feature generally characterises the Vanir, nor completely of This World, even though she lives in the upper world with the Æsir (it is for this reason that she can invite Hyndla to Valhǫll, an invitation that appears to be rejected). As a hostage, she is *both* a representative of This World and The Other World (Schjødt 1991a). This does not mean that she does not have knowledge of a numinous nature (cf. her role in connection with *seiðr* in *Yng* 4) but, in the same way as Óðinn, as a hostage she is so much a part of the upper world that she needs to fetch or supplement her knowledge by contacting the underworld (cf. Näsström 1995, 173-4).[45] But, in addition to this, there is something significant in her role as a helper to Óttarr. Several scholars have claimed (Phillpotts 1920, 140-1; Steinsland 1991a, 251-2; Höfler 1952b, 139) that *Hyndl* articulates a semantic sphere to which the *hieros gamos* element belongs. This is acceptable for several reasons if we define the concept sufficiently broadly to include every sexual relationship in which a deity or some other supernatural being plays the role of one of the parties.[46] The main argument for there having been a sexual relationship between Freyja and Óttarr is Hyndla's statement (stanza 6) that Óttarr is Freyja's *verr* – her husband or lover (cf. von See *et al.* 2000, 711). Furthermore, Óttarr is portrayed in the poem as a boar, and the boar is normally Freyr's special animal which functions as an attribute (de Vries 1956-57, II, 178). It is well known that the Vanir practised incest and that Freyr and Freyja had an incestuous relationship (*Lok* 32). This could indicate that Óttarr has had a special relationship to Freyr, the Yngling family's eponymous ancestor, and that it is perhaps in the light of this that we ought to see his attempt to become king.[47] That sexuality plays a part here points partly back to the Gunnlǫð myth and partly forward to the myths, dealing with Sigurðr, Hadingus and Sigmundr that will be discussed below.

We do not have any other examples in eddic poetry or *Snorra Edda* of Freyja playing the role of a supernatural aide to a pretender to a throne, but we do have one clear structural parallel, namely the relationship between Sigrdrífa and Sigurðr in *Sigdr*, which will be discussed below. Just as Freyja is known for her connection to war (*Grí* 14), so Sigrdrífa, as a valkyrie, is connected to war, and both of them must thus choose the slain on the battlefield together with Óðinn. And in the same manner in which Sigrdrífa and Sigurðr meet in the liminal space, probably in connection with royal initiation ideology, one can obviously see Óttarr's and Freyja's connection within the same ideological configuration.[48] We find in Saxo (I, vi, 4-5) a parallel of a slightly different nature. If Dumézil's understanding of Hadingus as a heroicised Njǫrðr is accepted (Dumézil 1970 especially 67-79), we can see that Harthgrepa who, according to the interpretation, must naturally be one of the Vanir, follows Hadingus to a corpse, which she forces to impart its knowledge about the future. There are marked differences in the details, but the main substance, that a Vanir goddess accompanies a human protégé with affinity to the male Vanir gods to a dead person, who then imparts some knowledge, is also present here. In any case, it is certain that Hadingus is Harthgrepa's protégé and that they have sexual intercourse (cf. below Chapter 8. 1).

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[45] It does not serve any purpose to draw a line between what Freyja and Óðinn know themselves and what they have to contact the underworld to obtain knowledge about, as the myths themselves do not operate with such a distinction. It holds good for both of them that the boundary is fluid and that the numinous knowledge, whether they already have it or have to acquire it, has to be attained through contact with The Other World.

[46] Näsström (1995, 166-9) rejects the idea that it has to do with an actual *hieros gamos* but accepts the sexual relationship, which she sees as parallel with several examples of relationships between earthly heroes and supernatural women. The definition of *hieros gamos* is not simple, but it seems as if Näsström's at least is too narrow when she refrains from using the expression in connection with Óttarr and Freyja because it does not give an exact parallel to the Mesopotamian material that she and, before her, Phillpotts emphasise. But the expression *hieros gamos* is not conclusive in this connection: whether Óttarr is a pretender to the throne or not, there is good reason to suppose that we are dealing here with a sexual relationship between a goddess and her protégé.

[47] A similar point, but more substantial, is made by Höfler 1952b, 139.

Whereas we saw in *Sigdr* that a supernatural feminine being appears both as the helper and as the one who is in possession of numinous knowledge, in the Hadingus episode and in *Hyndl* we find two actors who divide the roles between them. Below, we will come back to the Hadingus episode and here only attempt to elucidate the relationship between Hyndla and Freyja. Above, we have discussed Freyja's position, which is explicable through her role as a mediator who is in possession of abilities from both the Æsir's celestial and the Vanir's chthonic worlds. For her part, Hyndla is parallel to the *vǫlva* figures in *Bdr* and *Vsp*. But in these two poems there is no helper who is parallel to Freyja. The natural explanation is of course that Óðinn is Óðinn – a god, in contrast to the other myths' human subjects. As will become clear later, one of the characteristics of myths dealing with human subjects is that a female sexual figure and/or a male helper appears (perhaps so distributed in royal initiations and warrior initiations respectively cf. Chapter 10 below). But part of the explanation for the division into two actors is on a different level and seems to have to do with the fact that the initiation complex's liminality, as we come across it in the myths, operates with relatively few semantic elements. These can be put together in various ways so that each individual myth contributes to the meaning-potential that the complex as a whole contains, and which ties it to other mythic complexes (e. g. the female helper who contributes to the hero's success in war often assumes the form of a valkyrie, as in the Helgi-poems). We have earlier examined both the young erotic woman (Gunnlǫð) and the dead *vǫlva* (*Vsp*, *Bdr*), and we have found that both sexuality and death are important semantic ingredients in the complex. These two elements can, however, appear on their own or as more or less connected units, and the way in which the actors are organised has to fit in according to the meaning that individual myths express. *Hyndl* has an earthly hero who has an erotic alliance with a female protector and at the same time undertakes a journey to the world of the dead where numinous knowledge is present in a latent form: death and sexuality are, as we saw in the Kvasir complex, ingredients in the liminal. For this reason both the erotic goddess and the dead giantess are necessary. Each connects the myth in a special way to other myths, and together they form a semantic universe.

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[48] The supernatural female helper is also found in *Hhund I*, *HHv* and *Hhund II*, where Helgi has a special erotic relationship with a valkyrie. The help consists, in these cases, of aid in battle alone, and there is no question of journeys to another world with a view to obtaining knowledge. It is possible that these poems involve a reworking of the initiation structure (Näsström 1995, 173-4), although this cannot be demonstrated.

7.3 Svipdagr

The myth we are presented with in *Grǿg* and *Fj* is not mentioned in any other eddic poem or in the older literature at all, but only in post-medieval popular ballads (de Vries 1964-67, II, 524-7). The poems have only been transmitted in late paper manuscripts, and most researchers agree that we are faced with a very recent shoot from the tree of eddic poetry.[49]

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[49] 'Dass man nach 1300 sogar noch ein Eddalied gedichtet hat, dafür dürfte das seit Sophus Bugge als Svipdagsmál bekannte Gedicht ein Zeugnis sein' 'The poem, known since Sophus Bugge's time as *Svipdagsmál*, may well be a testimony to the composition of eddic poetry even after 1300' (de Vries 1964-67, II, 524). De Vries nevertheless agrees that it is likely that the poem is a collation of material from various ages (*ibid*, 526). Höfler 1952a, 37-41 and Schröder 1938, 83-4 have come to the same conclusion from completely different angles (see also SG III, 1, 399-401 and Boer 1922, II, 376-7).

The mythical sequence

The plot in *Grógr* has to do with a son who raises his mother from the dead in order to ask for her help in a journey he is setting out on to a certain Menglǫð – a journey that involves great dangers. The mother teaches him nine spells that will be able to help him on his journey and bring him good luck. In *Fj* Svipdagr has reached the mountain in which Menglǫð lives and which is encircled by flames. He is stopped by a guard, Fjǫlsviðr ('the very knowledgeable one'), who says that he will never let Svipdagr, who goes by the name of Vindkaldr, enter the castle. Then Svipdagr challenges Fjǫlsviðr with a series of questions partly about the locality he finds himself in and partly of a mythological nature. Finally, Fjǫlsviðr tells him that the only man whose bride Menglǫð will become is Svipdagr. The latter now reveals his true identity, and when he finally meets Menglǫð there is great mutual happiness.

It has been debated whether the two poems belong together at all. Most researchers, however, agree that they do and refer, among other things, to the more recent popular ballads for support. In their present state, there is only one thing which ties the poems together, namely the name Menglǫð (*Grógr* 3), and even this is the result of a conjecture by Bugge, *because* he assumed that the poems belong together (see SG III, 1, 402). On the other hand, it is conspicuous that those spells that Svipdagr (if it is he) acquires in *Grógr* are not used at all in *Fj* This may, of course, be due to the fact that the journey to Lyfjaberg, where Menglǫð lives, during which the spells were to be used (*Grógr* 4 and 5), is not itself mentioned. But it must be presumed to have taken place in a passage that may have fallen out of the two poems. This means that if the two poems belong together they must have been dealing with a longer motif sequence than the two that appear in our poems, which makes an analysis of the narrative sequence difficult.

Some scholars are of the opinion that *Svipdagsmál* is to be considered as a parallel to *Sigdr* and *Skí* (e.g. Schröder 1966, 114), but the similarities seem to be of such a general nature (a man is looking for a woman, whom he gets after some difficulties, possibly involving a 'servant', as in *Skí* and *Fj* but not in *Sigdr*) that they are not very useful. One exception is perhaps the fire, which encircles the mountain. It is found both in *Fj* and in *Sigdr* and indicates that behind the flames we are dealing, in both poems. with a world, which is separated from the one from which the hero comes. But even this element is found in other contexts that have nothing to do with initiation. There are, on the other hand, some striking differences, first and foremost with *Skí*: Menglǫð wants to marry Svipdagr once she learns who he is; Sigrdrífa wants to marry Sigurðr as soon as she wakes up: Gerðr does not at all want to marry Freyr, but is forced to do it. Svipdagr and Sigurðr approach the woman in person, whereas Freyr sends Skírnir. Sigrdrífa is a valkyrie; Gerðr and possibly also Menglǫð are giantesses.

One could continue in this way, but in the following analysis the superficial similarities between the texts will not be emphasised. It is possible that we are dealing with a transformation-group in the Lévi-Straussian sense, but not with parallels that indicate an original identity. Besides, *Skí* is under no circumstances an expression of an initiation structure or an acquisition of knowledge, which makes any further comparison irrelevant. Nevertheless, there are features in the myth[50] as it is described in the two poems which could indicate that at least elements of an initiation-structure can be found there. Certainly the motif of the acquisition of knowledge is present in *Gróg*, where the knowledge that is transferred has a numinous content.

Although scholars in general agree that the poems are late, they also think that they have found traces of genuine pagan myths in them. *Svipdagr blindi* 'Svipdagr the blind' is one of Óðinn's names (*Yng* 34), and Svipdagr is probably connected with the god Dagr. In an extensive discussion, Höfler (1952a) suggested that the name ought to be interpreted as 'Dagr of the Swabians' and that we are dealing with a god of fertility, as Gróa, because of the etymology of her name, is understood to be a fertility goddess.[51] Groá is, however, Svipdagr's mother, and there is nothing that indicates that any other relationships lie behind it. It cannot be decided whether there are, in fact, reminiscences of an old fertility myth in *Grǫ́g* and *Fj* but, on the other hand, there are no arguments advanced either that make this much more likely.

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[50] The designation 'myth' in this connection is problematic as long as we are not really dealing with divine beings - or supposedly not, a point we will come back to later. But neither are the protagonists ordinary human beings either, so it is just as problematic to call the texts folktales or heroic poems. As mentioned in the introduction, a demarcation of genre does not play any important role in this investigation, so for the time being we will work with the two poems under the designation 'myth'.

[51] It is striking that in *Gesta Danorum* (I, iv, 2-18) we have an account that involves both a woman by the name of Gro and a (Norwegian) king by the name of Suibdagerus. The context here is, however, completely different from the one we come across in *Gróg*, as Gro is rescued from a marriage to a giant by Gram, who is killed in a battle against Suibdagerus. There is, however, no relationship between this man and Gro.

In contrast to the majority of the complexes that have been discussed here in connection with the myths, this myth has in fact been analysed as an element in an initiation. The originator of this theory was Lotte Motz (1975, 134):

> Wishing to ascertain the closeness of the poem to myth I have followed the view, now widely held, that myth serves in recreation of a paradigmatic event, since there was the belief that beneficial action can only be achieved because such action had at one time taken place among the gods.

And further (1975, 135):

> The fated entrance of the hero into a land of terror where afflictions not sent by men are accepted without struggle resembles a ritual experience endured throughout the world in certain cultures: in primitive and archaic forms of society the passage from one class to another is accomplished by rites which always symbolize the same events: the death and rebirth of the individual. These (initiatory) rites almost invariably remove the individual from the normal forms of his life, produce a sudden break with his former existence, so that in the wilderness of bush or forest, frequently suffering ordeals, he may enter the land of his dead ancestors. And this submergence into non-human regions brings him the vision and the wisdom through which his new form is created.

And the conclusion of the analysis reads (1975, 148-9):

> We may summarize that we have found, in the story of Svipdag, the elements of an initiatory sequence leading to admission into the secret house of a goddess. This course of events, containing echoes of the rites of puberty initiation, parallels also that of the rites of some mystery religions in which the chosen re-enact

> through their agony and their final union the drama of the resurrection of the god, the son or lover of the great goddess whose cult or priesthood they are about to enter.

It is clear that several of these statements are relevant to the present investigation. But it is also clear that there are elements that are problematic. For example, it is not evident that the poems were intended to express a 'paradigmatic event', since, as has been mentioned, when looked at more closely they are not dealing with gods; and even if they were, these myths do not need to create such an 'event', but can arrange some elements in the semantic universe within which the ideology and the rituals as well can take place. One of the other problematic elements that may be mentioned is that, in spite of the fact that Motz gives excellent reasons for Menglǫð's dwelling being inside the mountain rather than *on* it (1975, 144-5), the final phase of the sequence should consist in Svipdagr coming in to her. This is not likely in the case of an initiation, if we compare the results of the analysis that have been carried out above, where the journey to the underworld is characteristic of the liminal phase and not the final phase. It seems as if Motz was not quite clear about what the sequence of an initiation actually involves, not to mention her argument (1975, 143) that the initiation here must have to do with a 'priest-magician' or 'non-warrior king'. In her examination of the spells (1975, 136-9), she includes elements from the initiations of warriors as a confirmation that we are in fact dealing with initiation. In general, her analyses are too loose both here and in other places (see also Whitaker 1977, 152), and it is especially difficult for her to see what van Gennep (who is referred to on page 135) can actually be used for. The use Motz makes of him, or, rather, of comparisons in general, is as an answer-book in which elements from initiation rituals from all over the world can be dragged in as a solution to otherwise inexplicable elements in the Scandinavian material.[52]

The crucial problem for Motz is, as it will be for anyone who discovers an initiation sequence in the two poems, that the final phase, which includes a return to This World, is not present.[53] Motz has obvious problems with the sequence when she writes (1975, 147):

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[52] This characteristic is far more prevalent in Motz 1973 where she discusses the figure of Grettir. This article is pertinently criticised by Whitaker 1977, and Motz's response (1978) does little to improve the evident weaknesses of her comparative analyses.

> Returning to the scenario of initiation we may remember that the removal of the mask or disguise signifies the end of the ceremonies and the return of the individual to the profane condition. It would, however, be difficult to understand Svipdag's entry into a flame-ringed sanctuary as a return to normal life. For an analogy to the sequence we may have to turn to a 'complex' initiation in which a set of preliminary rites prepares one or several chosen beings for the 'higher mysteries', the entrance into the sacred chamber of a godhead.

This wording apparently tries to cover over the fact that the initiation structure, which the investigation is ostensibly aimed at proving, is simply not present because there is nothing that indicates that the meeting with Menglǫð constituted a 'preliminary' rite. With regard to the triadic sequence, the liminal space may possibly be present, as certain characteristics here recur in other liminal scenarios. It could also be a question of a post-liminal phase, as *Gróg* could then be seen as dealing with the preceding liminal phase, and the marriage to Menglǫð would form the final phase, although in that case it is a final phase that does not take place in This World. But it cannot be a question of a preliminal 'rite' or a structural analogy to it – even if van Gennep himself quite correctly accepted the existence of complex rituals. There is, as Motz saw, no possibility of viewing Svipdagr's meeting with Menglǫð as a return to This World. If one wants to insist on an initiation structure (included a return to This World) in the two poems, one is, therefore, forced to assume a final phase, possibly in a third poem, now lost. This is unsatisfactory for methodological reasons, because the arguments for considering these poems as part of an initiation structure are weak. The last two lines of *Fj* also seem to suggest that it *is* the final phase we have in this poem. But the final phase seems to take place in a liminal space whether it must be understood as a locality in the underworld, as Motz suggested, or not. In any case, the fire around the mountain indicates that the mountain is isolated from the world from which the subject comes. Besides, as we have mentioned, Menglǫð has certain features in common with Sigrdrífa and perhaps moreover with Gunnlǫð (the giantess in the mountain, who has or will have sexual relations with the subject, who has had difficulties approaching her). But in contrast to the two women mentioned, she does not provide Svipdagr with any form of numinous knowledge. The two poems apparently form one long liminal phase, so it cannot be argued under any circumstances that *Gróg* and *Fj*, in the form in which they have been transmitted to us, constitute a parallel to the initiation structure in its entirety, either as we know it in Scandinavia or as it has been described by van Gennep. But could there possibly be *elements* of an initiation structure present in the two poems?

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[53] This is indeed also the case in *Hyndl*, but in this we saw that strong arguments can be advanced for Óttarr in fact being a pretender to the throne, and that a return is secured with this. The myth in *Hyndl* quite simply becomes meaningless if one considers the sequence finished with the last stanza of the poem. In this myth, the opposite is rather the case: with the revelation of Svipdagr's identity there is no occasion for further changes, neither with regard to space nor in any other way.

While the horizontal structure with the triadic phase is not present, if we consider the two poems together, we have a series of binary oppositional pairs, which remind us strongly of those we have seen in sequences previously analysed. We have *Gróg* 1, in which Svipdagr raises his dead mother from the grave, which reminds us of the situation, among others, in *Bdr*: the living, masculine subject from the upper world who travels to the dead and the feminine possessor of knowledge in the underworld. She, Gróa,[54] in contrast to the situation in *Bdr*, willingly gives of her numinous knowledge, which we will not examine more closely here, but it comprises spells and, therefore, formulae, which can in themselves influence the physical world[55] and which, in this case, are of importance during the journey. These therefore form a knowledge object. *Gróg* must, therefore, be understood as an acquisition of numinous knowledge in connection with a difficult task or test, which the hero faces.[56]

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[54] This name is also known in connection with a woman skilled in magic in *Vatnsdœla saga* chapter 36 and with a *vǫlva* (a kind one) in *Skm* 18 (there is no reason to assume with Schneider 1952, 208 that Gróa in *Gróg* has developed from Gróa in the Hrungnir myth, whereas it seems likely, as Ohlmarks 1936, 273 assumes, that the dead Gróa is a *vǫlva*, taking into consideration the parallel in *Bdr)*. The name is apparently linked to the concept of numinous knowledge and means 'to grow' or 'to thrive' (*AEW*: 190). The application to the three Gróas indicates that it is the intellectual thriving that is of primary concern here; cf. also *Hávm* 141.

[55] Motz 1975, 136-9 analyses these spells one by one, and again I must declare myself very sceptical. There seems to me very little to indicate that all these spells would prepare Svipdagr specifically for his meeting with the dead as an element of an initiation ritual. Motz is here a victim of her own powers of association. The spells refer

The situation in *Fj* is different. This poem is a dialogue comprising questions and answers, which in itself gives much interesting information about mythology, and from a compositional perspective is built upon a partly circular argument, since the prerequisites for coming into contact with Menglǫð are found inside the castle. The mythological information itself has only peripheral interest in this study, although the actual content of the dialogue indicates that we are dealing with a liminal scenario. The final situation consists, as mentioned, in a marriage between Svipdagr and Menglǫð (cf. stanza 50/4-6: *nú er þat sátt, er vit slíta skulum œvi ok aldr saman* – 'Now it is true that we shall spend our life and years together'). If we accept the connection between the two poems, there seems only to be one realistic possibility for interpreting the *Fj*-episode in the narrative sequence. As is the case with Sigurðr and Sigrdrífa, to be discussed in the next chapter, we can imagine that we are in the underworld, and so inside Lyfjaberg, and the road, which we have not heard about but which had to do with Gróa's spells, is a road in the underworld. In that case, Svipdagr comes to a locality in the underworld in which he apparently has to remain. One could imagine in part a parallel to the Sigurðr/Sigrdrífa-episode and partly to the Óðinn/Gunnlǫð-episode, but it is characteristic of both of these that the

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rather to situations, which can be encountered on any kind of journey. This could include journeys in the underworld, but they are not specifically directed at underworld journeys. The ninth spell, about Svipdagr's eloquence, may refer directly to the exchange of words with Fjǫlsviðr, but its formulation is nevertheless quite common.

[56] The only element that requires additional comments in *Gróg* is stanza 15/4-6: *á jarðfǫstum steini stóð ek innan dura, meðan ek þér galdra gól* 'I stood inside the doorway on an earth-fast stone, while I chanted magic songs over you'. The statement is interesting because it seems to provide a parallel to the half-buried stone in Saxo (I, ii, 1), but there in connection with the consecration of a king (see also SG III, 1, 407 for further examples). This could indicate that the rite of standing on such a stone, fixed in the earth, (if we disregard Saxo's reasons) may have been a part of initiation ritual and probably in that case must be understood as a connecting link to the underworld. The appearance of two such stones could indicate that communication with the underworld was crucial in both situations. If so, we may have an example of one and the same rite being included in two different rituals (cf. below Chapter 9. 4 on the *jarðarmen*-rite), namely the crowning of a king and the recitation of incantations.

masculine party leaves again and *has obtained a new position via one or more objects of knowledge*. That feature is completely absent in *Fj*, and the final stanza indicates with great certainty that it was never there. If that is the case, we are not dealing with a parallel structure to that of initiation, as we normally come across it, but – if we wish to find ritual parallels – rather with a seasonal ritual in which Svipdagr must be considered as chosen to be a marriage-partner (possibly as a sacrificial victim) for a fertility goddess (Menglǫð = 'necklace-beautiful', a designation which would suit Freyia extremely well; cf. *Sǫrla þáttr* and Näsström 1995, 79-82).[57] This could be a symbolic representation of a sacrifice and we know from the Nerthus-episode (Tacitus, *Germania* Chapter 40) that such sacrifices did take place on Germanic soil. It is probably not unimaginable that in connection with a sacrifice of this type it would be a matter of the symbolic performance of a sexual relationship. All this is quite hypothetical and is only proposed in order to emphasise the fact that the structure of *Fj* is not that of initiation.

If initiation is still to be considered in *Fj*, it could only be a question of an initiation to a quite definite position, namely as a dead person, because rituals associated with death and burial must also be considered as initiations, as we have mentioned earlier. But it is evident that, in these particular rituals, the border between the liminal phase and the final phase will be fluid (see Chapter 9.2 below). In that case, Svipdagr must be understood as the dead prince who, through an actual liminal phase (*Grόg*), reaches the final phase, which is characterised by a sexual relationship with Menglǫð (*Fj*). Gro Steinsland has proved in several publications that death could be understood as an 'erotic pleasure-trip' (Steinsland 1992, 1994 and 1997, 102-3). It is a possibility which certainly cannot be excluded in *Fj*, but which probably cannot be proved convincingly either.

Conclusion

We must therefore conclude that, while *Grόg* shows clear parallels to the liminal scenario which we have come across in *Bdr* and *Vsp*, and thus could constitute an acquisition of knowledge and, with this, perhaps part of (the liminal phase) in an initiation sequence, there is very little in *Fj* that, seen in isolation, directs one's thoughts towards initiation. The sequence has few similarities with those that we have considered earlier, and if *Fj* is not seen in connection with *Gróg*, the frame story is considerably closer to popular folktales than to religious ritual. If the two poems, on the other hand, form part of a whole unit, which is probably likely, the wedding to Menglǫð must be seen as the goal obtained in the final phase of the myth, but a final phase which, as mentioned, is characterised by remaining in a liminal scenario, because a permanent stay in Lyfjaberg with Menglǫð, as Motz also observed, can hardly be designated as a return to a This World-scenario. Seen in this way, we have a combination of the dead woman and the sexual woman, as was also the case in *Hyndl*, as ingredients of the liminal scenario. There is no mediator in the form of a knowledge object in the two poems. The only mediator between This World and The Other World is Svipdagr himself, and he remains in the liminal space.

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[57] Such a solution has been suggested by Schröder (1966, 116) who, however, in continuation of Höfler (1952a, 38), sees Svipdagr as a divine character.

With regard to our four criteria, we are able to establish that the subject perhaps has reached a (presumably) irreversibly higher status. But the triadic sequence is difficult to analyse since, firstly, we do not have any explicit initial situation which could give us a context, and secondly, there is a final situation which precludes a return to This World. We can find some of the well-known oppositional pairs in *Gróg*, and partly also in *Fj*, since it is possible in combination with *Gróg* to see Menglǫð as the female party in a sexual act with the masculine subject. Numinous knowledge plays a part in both poems, although we cannot form a reasoned theory of the importance it has in the final situation.

Even though the possibility that these poems may have had something to do with initiation in some way or other cannot be excluded, it is not really possible to give positive reasons in support of this idea either. On the other hand, as in *Vsp* and *Bdr*, we get information about those concepts which make up the liminal space and thereby give the possibility for an acquisition of knowledge. This is apparently, and for good reason, identical with the liminal space that initiation makes use of. On this basis, but also with the necessary reservations, the poems *Gróg* and *Fj* will be included in the analysis of the liminal scenario in Chapter 10.2 and 3.

Chapter 8

The Human Heroes

8.1 Hadingus

Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* describes many journeys to various forms of Other-World localities, and in several passages there may be reminiscences of an initiation structure. But, using our four criteria as the point of departure, there are only two passages that are so developed that they can contribute to a semantic analysis and therefore require a closer examination.[1] These are both found in the first book and both have Hadingus as their subject. We have discussed the sources in Chapter 4 and ascertained that there is nothing that precludes our use of passages from the *Gesta Danorum* to elucidate pagan religious structures. Dumézil has demonstrated that the course of Hadingus's life can be seen as running parallel to a great extent with that of the god Njǫrðr. This is certainly important and has a specific significance for the themes to be analysed in the following section.[2]

The two passages of concern here are the meeting with the old man, who appears in a couple of passages which will be discussed together (vi 7 and 8 and viii 16)[3] and whom we can no doubt identify as Óðinn, and the meeting with a woman who takes Hadingus to the underworld (viii 14).[4]

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[1] We have previously touched on the journeys that Thorkillus made to Geruthus and Utgarthilocus where, in both cases, we have Other-World scenarios without their having any relationship to the initiation complex in the form in which Saxo recounts them.

[2] Dumézil discusses among other things the old question about the relationship between Hadingus and the two Haddingjar (1970, 107-20), whom he thinks can be identified with that of Njǫrðr and Freyr. This relationship is not relevant to the present discussion and will, therefore, not be taken further. The question is discussed by Kroesen 1987, who in general discusses Dumézil's views on the identity of Hadingus with Njǫrðr. On the whole, the understanding of Hadingus as a heroic version of Njǫrðr is rejected and, instead, she suggests a secondary parallelism. It is possible, as Kroesen maintains, that Dumézil's arguments, taken individually, can be explained differently, but taken in its entirety his theory still seems more plausible than, for example, Kroesen's which to a great extent consists of reconstructed myths and mythical relationships which we do no know from any source.

[3] As we will see in Chapter 8.2, I viii 16 provides an exact parallel to the passage in *Reg* in which Sigurðr takes Óðinn on board his ship.

Hadingus and Óðinn

In the first episode it, is related that Hadingus, after already once having met the old one-eyed man,[5] meets him again and is taken on his horse to his house (*ad penates suos*), where he accepts a very sweet drink (*suavissima potio*). He learns that he will acquire great strength, after which Óðinn makes a series of predictions in verse, which also have the character of advice. Among other things, Hadingus learns that he must kill a lion and drink its blood. After this, he is again placed on the horse, and it dawns on him that they are flying across the sea. With this he is back in his own world.[6]

Hadingus has further dealings with the old man (viii 16), because he takes him on board his ship and receives advice about the disposition of the army, after which the old man helps the hero in his battle against the Biarmians. Before the old man leaves Hadingus, he gives him several pieces of advice (with regard to those against whom he ought to wage war) and he predicts that Hadingus will not fall at the hands of his enemies but will die a voluntary death. As is well known, this later comes to pass when Hadingus hangs himself in full view of his people.

There is no doubt that these two meetings with Óðinn must be considered in connection with one another, and, as Dumézil has shown, they, together with the rest of the Hadingus saga, ought to be regarded as a link in a long initiation sequence. In the second episode it is not a matter of Hadingus leaving his own world, but there is no doubt that this is the case in the first. Here he is flown to Óðinn's world. This, as we will see in Chapter 10.1, is from the human perspective an Other World, just as the underworld is an Other World from the perspective of the Æsir. Hadingus is thus brought to The Other World where he receives a drink, which can probably be understood as mead and which, in the light of the previous analyses, must clearly be connected with knowledge. It is even natural to assume that it may be associated with the mead that Óðinn has acquired from Gunnlǫð and which he is able to give to gods and humans. In addition, he receives knowledge about the future and advice about what he ought to do. Here we learn, among other things, that he will be taken prisoner, but will escape and conquer a lion in order to obtain gigantic strength. There is no doubt that Dumézil is correct when he says about the prophecy (1970, 50):

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[4] Dumézil has also had an eye for the possibility that the meeting with Óðinn has the character of an initiation (1970, 49-56) and draws the reader's attention to other scenarios with a similar content, which will also be discussed here (*Yng* 34 where Ingjaldr eats the heart of a wolf and becomes ill-tempered from it will not be subject to further analysis as this only contains detached features, which *may* have had their roots in an initiation scenario). It is, however, not a question of a structural analysis in relation to initiation as a general phenomenon. On the other hand, several interesting features of initiation are stressed, and we will return to these below.

[5] Saxo obviously did not understand the old one-eyed man as Othinus, as the digressions in the Hadingus-saga demonstrate. Given that Hadingus is a hero in Saxo's opinion, the old man is also valued positively. In the digressions, on the other hand, Othinus is a ridiculous figure.

[6] As is the case with Sleipnir in the Baldr myth and Grani in the account of Sigurðr, we here encounter the horse as a means of transport between This World and The Other World.

> … *il faut* que Hadingus, loin d'y être soustrait, traverse jusqu'au bout cet enchainement de périls, qu'il tue la bête fauve particulièrement redoutable et qu'il boive son sang; c'est là le service nécessaire, préalable, que le protecteur divin ou humain d'un candidat héros doit rendre à son protègé. Simplement, avant de le remettre devant l'épreuve terrible, Óðinn donne à Hadingus la provision occasionelle de force et de savoir qui lui est nécessaire pour l'affronter avec succès.

> … Hadingus *must*, far from being shielded, pass through until the end that series of dangers; he must kill the especially formidable beast and drink its blood; that is the necessary, preliminary service that the divine or human protector of a heroic candidate must render his protegé. Quite simply, before placing him before the terrifying test, Óðinn gives Hadingus strength and knowledge for the occasion which are necessary for him to be able to confront it with success.

It is thus a matter of a killing of a lion, a task which the subject must carry out during the process, and it is just as important that he must ingest its blood. This motif is thus parallel to Sigurðr's meeting with Fáfnir, as we will examine in 8.2 below, and Hǫttr's meeting with the monster, which we will discuss in 8.4. We have thus in the episode two kinds of drink, namely mead and blood.

Immediately after Hadingus has returned to his own world, he is captured by a king by the name of Lokerus and sees that the old man had prophesied truly, because everything happens as he had foretold. Hadingus does in fact experience the events that have been mentioned in the prophecy. From then on he has great success, obtains great victories and is able to return to Denmark and become king there.

What Hadingus obtained from Óðinn was the equipment that is necessary for everyone to have in order to become king, and, as is evident from his second meeting with the old man, to also have the possibility of communicating with his 'protector' and by this means sustain his kingdom.[7] Thus, at his first meeting, Hadingus achieved an irreversibly higher status. This was obviously obtained through the knowledge and the equipment he acquired; and a prerequisite for this was the journey to The Other World which, as mentioned, is characterised as Óðinn's home, the world of the gods. It is on the other hand not characterised, as we have seen in previous analyses, as the underworld with a feminine bias.[8] The initiatory sequence itself is present insofar as Hadingus's journey, especially his return to his own world, is thematised and characterised as terrifying (*terribilis*). The horse that rushes across the sky must be Sleipnir, the horse which is characterised by being able to cross the boundary between This World and The Other World. We have, therefore, a sequence in which a subject from This World travels to The Other World, obtains knowledge and returns, by means of which he has obtained a higher status. The binary oppositional pairs are only weakly present in the sequence. Life versus death is indicated, but otherwise nothing is emphasised that can be analogous to the contrast between This World and The Other World and thus help to characterise this Other World.

Thus, there is nothing that separates this sequence structurally from the greater part of those we have examined previously. But it is striking that The Other World has not in the least respect the character of the underworld and is not connected with anything feminine. Both of these features are, on the other hand, represented in other episodes of Hadingus's life to which we will now turn.

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[7] Óðinn appears as an advisor in other places in Saxo, e.g. to Harald Wartooth (VII x 6). Here, too, one could imagine that other meetings preceded it, without this having been stated explicitly.

[8] There is no reason to assume with Kroesen (1987, 418) and many others that Valhǫll was originally a locality in the underworld.

Hadingus and the woman from the underworld

If we now turn to the episode in which a woman leads Hadingus to the underworld, we have here another sequence which, on the one hand, is embedded in the larger course of Hadingus's life and, on the other hand, is also in itself a counterpart to the structure of initiation.

Once, while Hadingus was eating, a woman stuck her head out of the ground (*humus*). She was holding a bunch of hemlock and asked if anybody knew where grass so fresh grew during winter. Hadingus wanted to find that out, and she led him down under the ground (*sub terras abduxit*) to a place which Saxo identifies with the kingdom of the dead ('… I think the gods of the underworld had decided it thus in order that he should be led alive to those places where people go after death' [I viii 14]).[9] After having passed through a dense fog, they met distinguished men (*proceres*) and came to sunlit places in which the green grass that the woman was carrying grew. Then they came to a river in which various kinds of weapons floated and across which there was a bridge. When they had passed it, they saw two phalanxes (*acies*) fighting and, upon Hadingus's asking, the woman told him that they were people who had fallen in battle and who were imitating what they did when they were alive. Then they came to a wall which was difficult to scale, but the woman pulled the head off a cock and threw it over the wall; it crowed straight away as proof that it had been restored to life. Without any transition we learn that, when Hadingus returned, he escaped from some pirates in a miraculous manner. It is shortly after this episode that we hear about Hadingus's second meeting with the old man. Hadingus's life comes to an end when he commits suicide by hanging, a manner of death that directs one's thoughts to sacrifices to Óðinn and to Óðinn's own self-hanging. Both in life and in death, Hadingus thus stands in a special relationship to Óðinn.

One problem is how exactly we are to understand this journey to the underworld. There is no doubt that Hadingus obtains numinous knowledge. He is led to the underworld, where he sees the life that awaits him after he dies. There seems to be no doubt, either, that this existence is the life in Valhǫll with the eternal battles of the *einherjar* to which Hadingus, through his attachment to Óðinn, must be considered dedicated (cf. the description in *Gylf* 38-41). It may seem strange that the location is situated in the underworld, since Valhǫll is characterised as an upper-world residence in relation to Hel, which must incontrovertibly be located in the underworld (see Chapter 10.1 below). It may seem sheer redundancy that Hadingus in this episode is again to visit Valhǫll, which he has already done once before when Óðinn took him to his house, but, as we will see, there is another possible explanation.

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[9] … credo diis infernalibus ita destinantibus, ut in ea loca vivus adduceretur, quæ morienti petenda fuerant. (Olrik and Ræder 1931, 30)

But, besides this spatial dichotomy, we also find the well-known opposition between masculine and feminine here: the masculine subject from the upper world is led by a woman to the underworld. And in this way she imparts numinous knowledge to him. The woman does not directly impart the knowledge (she is not, like Gunnlǫð, the one who gives him the object of knowledge, or, like the *vǫlva* figures in *Vsp* and *Bdr*, the one who pronounces numinous information), and she may rather be regarded as a mediator as she has a position which is parallel to Freyja's in *Hyndl*. Life versus death is also quite explicitly present here: they visit the kingdom of the dead. Furthermore, the grass, which is green during the winter, and the episode with the rooster indicate also the possible thematisation of the idea that life can arise from death (cf. Ibn Fadlan's description of the chieftain's cremation which is analysed below in Chapter 9.2).[10]

It does not emerge, however, that this visit would give Hadingus an irreversibly higher status. He is already a king and remains such right up to his death.

As far as the triadic sequence is concerned, it is present – at least implicitly – by virtue of the fact that Hadingus moves from one world to another and returns. We hear only about the journey out, but that, on the other hand, is clearly characterised by transitional metaphors: through the fog and across a bridge over a river full of weapons (cf. *Vsp* 36).

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[10] Cf. Davidson and Fisher 1980, 35: 'The emphasis is on life rather than death, since herbs grow in the Other World in wintertime and a dead bird is restored to life'.

We will now look a little more closely at the woman who accompanies Hadingus to the underworld. As mentioned, there is a parallel between Freyja's connection with Óttarr and the unknown woman's with Hadingus. Dumézil (1970, 74-9) has pointed out another parallel to Freyja's role in *Hyndl*, namely in connection with Harthgrepa[11] whose relationship to Hadingus he claims is parallel to Óttarr's relationship to Freyja. This seems very plausible in the light of his overall analysis, so we must investigate how these parallels relate to one another. What is the connection between Harthgrepa and the unknown woman in the context of their relationship with Hadingus? Strangely enough, Dumézil has not discussed this episode in his book on Hadingus, perhaps because it does not in itself lend any support to his arguments for an identity of Hadingus with Njǫrðr.[12] As Dumézil has demonstrated, however, (1970, 64-6), Harthgrepa must be understood to belong to the Vanir, so we must ask whether there is something that indicates that the unknown woman has at least an affinity to this group of gods. At the very least, Harthgrepa and the woman from the underworld have a series of features in common. The first is that they both have a special ability with regard to the dead.[13] Harthgrepa raises a dead person (I vi 4), while the woman leads Hadingus to the kingdom of the dead; and she, too, masters the art of restoration to life, as the episode with the cock shows. Secondly, both women have an affinity with the underworld as the one woman comes up from below, while Harthgrepa, if Dumézil is right, as one of the Vanir, is attached to the underworld, which is the Vanir's locality (see Chapter 10.1). Both women are, therefore, chthonic. The third similarity between them is that both appear as helpers of the subject, Harthgrepa partly by protecting him from a gigantic hand (vi 6), partly by getting a dead person to pronounce a (positive) prophecy for him (vi 5), and the woman from the underworld by showing him the world of the dead, which he wanted to know about, and by restoring a cock to life there, a feature that can perhaps be understood as a positive 'prophecy'. The fourth similarity is that both women are mistresses of the art of changing shape or at least changing size (vi 3 and viii 14).

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[11] We probably meet her under the name of Harðgreip in *þulur* (Faulkes 1998, 112).

[12] One of 'the problems' here might be supposed to be that in the Hadingus narrative's internal chronology the unknown woman appears at the 'wrong' point in time since Hadingus has long before passed over into the Odinic phase of his life. However, this in itself ought not to prevent us from seeing the woman as a member of the Vanir group or as having an affinity with the Vanir. As actors in the underworld the Vanir are useful at any given time when we are dealing with the acquisition of knowledge from the underworld, which is, after all, also demonstrated by the fact that the two precious objects of knowledge, the mead and Mímir's head, were created with the help of the Vanir.

[13] Kroesen 1985, 650 understands the woman as a goddess of the dead, a view that is probably too definite; but one must grant that it is a question of an affinity with death in the same way as with Freyia. The parallel drawn by Kroesen with Ǫrvar-Oddr is interesting but seems to lack analytical cogency.

Another noteworthy point about Harthgrepa is that she has a sexual relationship with Hadingus. That is not said about the woman from the underworld but, by comparing it to the passage referred to in Ibn Fadlan, it seems likely: the female slave who is lifted up over the doorframe (or in Amin Razi's version, which is perhaps closer at this point to the rite actually carried out, up on the ship itself) throws a hen (!) into the ship. There is no doubt that both the doorframe, or the ship's gunwale in Ibn Fadlan, and the wall in Saxo separate two worlds. It is clear in Ibn Fadlan that these are obviously the worlds of the living and the dead, whereas the status of two worlds in Saxo is more opaque,[14] yet the parallel is too striking to be fortuitous. In both passages, a woman separates the head from the body of a fowl immediately in front of the boundary to be crossed between two worlds, one of which is the world of the dead, and in both passages one part of the hen/cock is thrown over the dividing-line. This parallel forces us to examine the possibility of further common features. Among other things, there is no doubt that the female slave in Ibn Fadlan must be seen as a kind of 'substitute wife' for the deceased chieftain, and the sexual excesses she is subjected to (perhaps only those which take place on board the ship immediately before the killing) have, therefore, the character of ritual intercourse between the female slave and the deceased chieftain. It is, therefore, a case of a sexual relationship between the male subject, who is in the liminal phase, and the woman who is to follow him. If the parallel between the two events, which includes the transference of the cock/hen to The Other World, is at the same time a parallel on the structural level, then it seems likely that Hadingus and the unknown woman have a sexual relationship. In this respect, the similarity between Harthgrepa and the woman is clearly strengthened. Finally, we cannot exclude the possibility that they are actually identical. Harthgrepa dies and, one must assume, moves to the underworld from which the woman emerges.

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[14] Even though the whole episode apparently happens in the underworld, and even though there seems to be 'life' on both sides of the wall, the wall must be presumed to be around the kingdom of the dead, and its function must be to mark the boundary between This World and The Other World. The event with the cock perhaps indicates also, in contrast to Ibn Fadlan's account, that it is the world of the living – This World, which is on the other side. As we will see in Chapter 9.2, there is a straight inversion between the two texts.

It cannot be decided whether the two figures are actually identical, but both have a relationship to Hadingus which has similarities to the one Freyja has to Óttarr: they help the hero to survive and to obtain knowledge. The fact that Saxo does not mention a possible sexual relationship and obviously does not understand Harthgrepa and the woman as identical cannot be a fundamental objection to seeing at least a semantic affinity between the two figures, and for this reason it would definitely be appropriate to reckon with a parallel between Freyja's role in *Hyndl* and the underworld woman's in the Hadingus saga.

There are thus several features that direct one's thoughts towards initiation in connection with Hadingus' journey to the underworld. Whether we are to regard the episode as an actual initiation depends on whether we see it in isolation or as an element in a longer sequence. Seen in isolation, we are dealing only with an acquisition of knowledge as it is not a question of the subject having attained an irreversibly higher status, at least not in the way that emerges explicitly in our text. On the other hand, the whole of the Hadingus saga seems, as Dumézil has also demonstrated (1970), to form a process in which, to a greater and greater degree, the hero approaches Óðinn, and this process culminates in an Odinic death by hanging.

Sequential analysis

It is necessary to examine whether it is possible to view both of the episodes analysed above as links in one long sequence which contains other elements in the form of meetings with other supernatural beings and wars against various enemies.[15] If we try – in the first instance hypothetically – to assume that the two episodes with Óðinn (primarily, however, the former) and the one that deals with the journey to the underworld are elements in one and the same initiatory sequence, two possibilities are open to us. We may be dealing with a series of more or less independent entities (initiations), dispersed over a large part of the subject's life, which together form a complete initiation; or we may be faced with a sequence of events which constitutes a single initiation and in which Saxo has merely inserted a series of episodes and possibly reversed the sequence of the basic elements, which would not be the only place in *Gesta Danorum* where that happened (cf. Skovgaard-Petersen 1987, 44). The former possibility does not seem likely, although it cannot be ruled out, as it does not explain why there are 'defects' in both accounts. At the meeting with Óðinn, the oppositional pairs which we have otherwise come across are not present – or only quite vaguely so – and the journey to the underworld does not give Hadingus an irreversibly higher status. If, however, we consider the two episodes as different phases of one and the same initiation, and if we assume furthermore that Saxo, for some unknown reason, but apparently as a link in the transformation of 'myth' to 'romance', has in fact reversed them, much falls into place. The probability that the episode with the woman in fact precedes the meeting with Óðinn can be enhanced by the marked similarities with Harthgrepa: we are still in the Vanic phase of Hadingus's life in which the protector is a feminine entity with clear connections to the chthonic. That she emerges from the ground can perhaps indicate in the light of this reasoning that the motif must be seen as an extension of Harthgrepa's death. If this assumption is correct, it gives us an explanation for why the underworld episode thematises the descent to The Other World, whereas the meet-

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[15] It will hardly be possible to render probable, let alone prove, that all these features can be generated from an actual initiation sequence – ritualistic or mythical – but a couple of features seem so conspicuous that they may legitimately form part of an argument that we are actually dealing with an initiation scenario. These are the two

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'markings' which Hadingus is exposed to. One of them consists of a wound in his foot (viii 4), which makes him lame for the rest of his life, and the other is a ring, which his future wife Regnilda places inside a wound in his leg in order to be able to recognise him later on and choose him for husband (viii 13). Both of these 'markings' are important for the rest of Hadingus's life, the former because it marks him physically and the latter because it makes his marriage possible. It is therefore imaginable that this is a form of initiatory marking, which is interwoven into the narrative context of the story in a way that might direct our thoughts towards popular folktales, but which nevertheless would make good sense, seen as an element in an initiation. The same holds good for the battles against monsters. But the way in which Saxo weaves together motifs of different origins makes it very difficult to unravel them again.

ing with Óðinn primarily thematises Hadingus's return to This World. The assumption is strengthened by the fact that when the woman (who cannot scale the wall, so it must be assumed that she has to remain in the kingdom of the dead) and Hadingus have reached the wall and heard the cock crow, the passage ends quite abruptly and without any further ceremony Hadingus is back on earth. It seems absolutely necessary to assume that something or other has been lost here – something which could explain how Hadingus forced the wall and came back to the world of the living (cf. Kroesen 1987, 418). Everything would fall into place if the Óðinn episode followed this: Hadingus would quite simply be brought back by Óðinn himself.[16] Furthermore, we can see that the two episodes supplement each other with regard to knowledge. Firstly, Hadingus sees what is in store for him as an Óðinn-hero after death, and secondly he is instructed by the god himself about his future and drinks both mead and blood (from the lion), through which he becomes qualified as a king (he wins the first battle against Handwanus and Suipdagerus and then assumes power in his kingdom and with this obtains an irreversibly higher status). The emphasis is then laid on various aspects of Valhǫll. Both meetings thus include elements of that which is involved in becoming one of Óðinn's chosen.

We thus come across a liminal scenario, which contains the feminine and the sexual as well as the Odinic. In this way the two episodes are complementary as two sides of the Óðinn-hero's liminality: on one side the mythical Other World, which we have come across several times previously including death, femininity and the underworld, and on the other the meeting with the 'tutelary deity' himself.

It is not until the two episodes are seen as part of the same sequence that the full initiation scenario appears, comprising knowledge from The Other World, which gives the subject an irreversibly higher status;

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[16] Perhaps we ought to say 'nearly everything would fall into place', because we still have the problem of the prophecy and its fulfilment regarding Hadingus's capture and the killing of a lion. This presumably happens after Hadingus had been brought back to the upper world, but it ought to be a part of the liminal phase and so take place in a liminal space. Has Saxo here, too, merely brought confusion to the sequence of the motifs, or was it in fact a matter of different liminal phases, probably in a series of connected but independent rituals, as suggested above (the first possibility)? We have no chance of answering this question and have to resign ourselves to the fact that in the Hadingus narrative we get an outline of a recognisable structure, but with important lacunae in respect of the details.

the relationship between the two worlds, which is thematised in a series of binary oppositions; and the triadic sequence with the journey from This World to The Other World and back again. It must be presumed that it is also in this connection that we are to find the explanation of Valhǫll's location in the underworld: the liminal space that is established in the Hadingus saga is both the underworld and the upper world because, in this account, we find ourselves in a grey area between the world of the gods and the world of human beings and, into the bargain, it is disguised as legendary history. In the mythical scenario, the relationship between the two worlds, as we have seen, is constructed in most cases as a spatial opposition between the upper world and the underworld. In the human perspective this may also be the case, but the opposites here have more to do with the relationship between the human world and the different worlds which are populated by supernatural beings. And one of these is the world of the Æsir in which Óðinn especially plays a decisive role as the god of initiands or at least as the god of some of those to be initiated – the god who helps the initiated and to whose house they come after death.

It is obvious that there are differences between the Hadingus saga and the rest of the sequences we have examined. The sequence, as it appears in Saxo, has been divided up in a more radical way than we have seen so far, so that the order of the motifs is more uncertain and elements may have been mixed up. But it is more interesting that there are also considerable similarities and that the two episodes *together* form a complete initiation scenario.

8.2 Sigurðr

We will now consider a narrative sequence that has been transmitted in a number of sources. It is the first part of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani's career, which lays the foundation for his fame.[17] The narrative is in a heroic mode, but it is close to the mythical by virtue of the fact that the gods for once in Scandinavian mythology play an important role in the interplay with human beings. There is no doubt, however, that it is Sigurðr who is the main character. One could ask whether the initiation structure that can be discovered here could have anything to do with actual royal consecrations so that this analysis could actually have been placed in Chapter 9.5. Uncertainty on this point is considerable, however, and as we discussed in Chapter 2.2, it is difficult in some places to draw a clear line between myth and ritual in the Scandinavian material. For this reason, we will only carry out an analysis of the structure and symbolism of the narrative sequence here, but in conclusion we will return to the possibility that we may have a closer association with an actual ritual than has previously been thought.[18]

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[17] Most scholars agree that the different parts of *Vǫls* can be divided into different parts and that the first part of Sigurðr's life is kept in another genre than that of his later career (cf. Würth 2003, 105-6)

The sources

Motifs concerning Sigurðr's youth can be found in a number of places both in Scandinavian and other European literature. In the Elder Edda, it is the poems *Reg*, *Fáfn* and *Sigdr* that are relevant but, in addition, the main points are recounted briefly in *Skm* chapters 40-1 and *Norna-Gests þáttr* chapters 5-6. Beside these sources the motifs appear in later popular ballads and in *Þiðreks saga af Bern* chapters 164-8 (cf. Schneider 1962, 150-70 and Holtsmark 1956-78).[19] We also know scenes from various pictorial representations (Margeson 1980). However, the only important account about Sigurðr that gives us an increased understanding by way of a context for the three eddic poems listed above is *Vǫlsunga saga (Vǫls)* chapters 13-22 (*FSN* I, 140-65). In the following analysis, we will draw copiously on statements in this saga, the more so because the lacuna in the Codex Regius begins at *Sigdr*.

It could be an objection that treating the various sources in this way indicates a lack of respect for the generic differences they clearly manifest, and that is true, but generic distinctions are only of secondary interest to an analysis of structures. If a series of pieces of information, taken from different sources about the same hero or the same subject and with a common basic narrative structure, *together* clearly point towards a connection with an initiation complex, it is not expedient to reject this connection just because every piece of information is not found in the same source or within the same genre. In the light of the last fifty years of structuralist analyses, it ought to be a commonplace point of agreement that sources, irrespective of their difference in age and genre can supplement each other on the subject of representations of a specific mythical complex (see also above Chapter 4.3).

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[18] A shortened version of the following analysis has appeared in Schjødt 1994.

[19] With regard to the whole question of the relationship to the Continental tradition and to historical events (see, among others, Höfler 1961 and Talbot 1983), which is not significant in this context, we refer to Schneider (1962, 125-70) where the relationship to *Beowulf* is also discussed. Furthermore, Schneider gives (*loc. cit.*) a synopsis of the entire 'Sigurðr-saga', which is useful, as it provides us with the variations in the various sources in the form of an overview.

It is well known that the poetry about Sigurðr has been the subject of enormous interest from the disciplines of history and the history of literature,[20] as scholars have often tried to reconstruct original versions and fill in lacunae in the Codex Regius (see e.g. Heusler 1902 and Andersson 1981), while interest from historians of religion has been limited as a rule to the account of the origin of the Andvari treasure in *Reg.*[21] In the light of the results we have obtained so far, there seems to be a whole series of features in the history of Sigurðr's youth that provide associations with the structure and symbolism we have seen earlier. Naturally, this does not mean that we have proof that these poems are 'old', or that they were connected more or less directly with cultic contexts. It only means that in their point of origin they have drawn on a semantic universe that existed before the period in which they were written down.[22]

If we look at the sequence of events as it develops in the three poems, and in addition make use of *Vǫlsunga saga*, we reach the conclusion that the following elements form a sequence in agreement with the initiation schema:

Sigurðr is brought up by Reginn, who teaches him many things. Reginn is portrayed as a dwarf (*dvergr of vǫxt*), and he is clever, ill-tempered and skilled in magic (*Reg*).[23] The corresponding passage in *Vǫls* reads: 'Reginn was the name of Sigurðr's foster-father and he was the son of Hreiðmarr. He taught him sports, chess and runes, and how to speak many languages, as was usual for kings' sons then, and many other things.'[24] In addition to this, we learn in *Vǫls* that the choice of the horse Grani is not Sigurðr's own, as it appears from *Reg*, but is due to Óðinn, who advises him about how he is to choose and who knows that the horse is a descendant of Sleipnir. In the analysis it will emerge that this is in all likelihood an old feature. Then follows the story about the Andvari gold, an accompanying explanation that the gold is Fáfnir's property, and then Reginn's request to kill his brother. The next item of importance is that Sigurðr gets a sword from Reginn, who is a smith. In this too *Vǫls* is far more detailed than *Reg*, as Sigurðr twice gets a sword which is not strong enough for his enormous strength (Chapter 15); finally, he visits his mother and demands the pieces of the sword Gramr, which his father Sigmundr had owned, and from these Reginn then forges a sword which has quite extraordinary qualities. Reginn now again requests Sigurðr to kill Fáfnir, but he insists on first avenging his father, Sigmundr (here *Vǫls* inserts Grípir's prophecy which in the Codex Regius comes immediately before *Reg).*[25] On the journey to the battle with the sons of Hundingr, Sigurðr meets an old man (Óðinn) whom he takes with him on board his ship and, by doing this, secures a good wind. He tells Sigurðr of the omens to which he must pay attention before battle and gives him some other pieces of advice which he, as a warrior must pay attention to.[26] After this Sigurðr conquers the sons of Hundingr, something which is only mentioned briefly in *Reg* but is developed in minute detail in *Vǫls* (chapter 17), where one gets the impression that Sigurðr not only fights well, but that a true berserker fury takes possession of him, making his fighting prowess almost 'supernatural'.

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[20] An overview can be found in de Vries 1964-67, I, 88-90 and Schneider 1962, 73-6, both with references.

[21] Historians of religion have only shown a limited interest in the heroic poetry in general. A striking exception is Höfler 1952a who, basing himself on the Helgi-poetry, manages to say important things about the king's role in various rituals. For the most part these are seasonal rituals and the initiation sequence is not involved here.

[22] De Vries (1964-67, I, 296) concedes that although the poems, as they have been handed down to us, are not old, parts of them may be.

[23] vitr, grimmr ok fiǫlkunnigr

Sigurðr now sets out to get Fáfnir by digging a deep trench and thrusting his sword into Fáfnir when he slides across above him (*Fáfn*, prose). Again, *Vǫls* (chapter 18) is more detailed. Here we learn that Reginn indeed advises Sigurðr to dig a trench under Fáfnir, but an old man (Óðinn) tells him that he must dig several trenches in order that the serpent's *sveiti* – probably blood and venom – can run off the one in which Sigurðr sits. He does this and kills Fáfnir. Here, then, begins the actual *Fáfnismál*, a poem in dialogue in which the dying Fáfnir and Sigurðr speak in turn, and of which Terry Gunnell says that it has 'all the traits of a formal initiation ceremony' (1995, 356; cf. also 265-9). This results in information of various kinds, including mythological lore, but Fáfnir speaks especially of the future and warns Sigurðr that Reginn will betray him. Reginn then cuts out Fáfnir's heart and drinks the blood from the wound, asking Sigurðr to roast the heart for him while he is asleep. But when Sigurðr puts a finger stained with some of Fáfnir's life-blood into his mouth, he suddenly becomes able to understand the language of birds. Some tits are sitting in a tree above him and they are saying that Reginn will kill him if he does not kill Reginn first, and that he ought to eat Fáfnir's heart himself. Sigurðr does that then and, besides eating the heart, he also drinks both Fáfnir's and Reginn's blood. The tits say further that he must take Fáfnir's treasure and advise him to travel to Hindarfjall, to the valkyrie who sleeps there. He does as suggested and takes the gold, the *ægishjálmr* – the helmet of terror that Fáfnir has had – a coat-of-mail of gold together with a sword and other valuables, and rides away.

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[24] Reginn hét fóstri Sigurðar ok var Hreiðmars son. Hann kenndi honum íþróttir, tafl ok rúnar ok tungur margar at mæla, sem þá var títt konungasonum, ok marga hluti aðra. (FSN I, 140)

[25] For a short discussion of *Grp*'s relationship to the rest of the Sigurðr-poems see R. L. Harris 1971. The poem is undoubtedly inserted in the Codex Regius as a resumé of the events that follow.

[26] As mentioned, there is a complete parallel here with events in the life of Hadingus (*Gesta Danorum* I, viii, 16).

In *Sigdr*, he comes to Hindarfjall and is surprised – in spite of the birds' prediction – that it is a woman who is lying asleep there. He wakes her up and she tells him, after she has given him a horn full of mead – a drink of recollection (*minnisveig*) – how she was pierced by Óðinn with a silver thorn in punishment for having been disobedient to him. Then she again mentions the drink, which is filled with magic qualities, and tells him about a long series of various types of runes he must know in order to control a magic universe. Here, we also get several pieces of interesting mythical information, which, however, are not particularly relevant to our study. Stanzas 22-37 contain more pieces of common advice about sensible behaviour in various situations which is rendered in prose in *Vǫls* (chapter 21). *Vǫls* (chapter 22) is a description of Sigurðr in which it is mentioned, among other things, that he carries a dragon emblem on all his equipment, that he is handsome, and that he is very famous.[27] The following passage is the most characteristic:

> And his strength is greater than his height. He can hew well with his sword and shoot with his spear and throw spear-shafts and hold his shield and draw a bow or ride a horse, and many kinds of chivalry he learnt in his childhood. He was a wise man in that he knew things that had not yet happened. He understood the language of birds. And because of such things few things came as a surprise to him. He could speak long and wisely, and he would not stop until all thought that there was no other way of acting, except for the way he says. (Byock 1990, 72)[28]

Sigurðr is thus superior to all others in both the use of weapons and in knowledge, in both physical as well as in intellectual abilities.

Sequence analysis

In a more schematic form we have a sequence of motifs, which looks like this:

1. Sigurðr is fostered by Reginn, who is skilled in magic (he is a dwarf and consequently attached to the underworld, cf. Motz 1983, 98-9).
2. Sigurðr obtains help from Óðinn (for choosing Grani, who is descended from Sleipnir, the only horse who is able to ride to the underworld, cf. *Gylf* 49)
3. Sigurðr receives a sword with extraordinary qualities, forged by Reginn but originally coming from Óðinn.
4. Sigurðr gets knowledge from Grípir.

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[27] These features clearly carry the stamp of knightly culture which was dominant at the time when the saga was written down. Still, we ought to take note of the placing of the statement: immediately after he has left Hindarfjall.

[28] Ok hans afl er meira en vöxtr. Vel kann hann sverði at beita ok spjóti at skjóta ok skafti at verpa ok skildi at halda, boga at spenna eða hesti at riða, ok margs konar kurteisi nam hann í æsku. Hann var vitr maðr, svá at hann vissi fyrir óordna hluti. Hann skildi fuglsrödd. Ok af slikum hlutum kómu honum fáir hlutir á óvart. Hann var langtalaðr ok málsnjallr, svá at ekki tók hann þat erendi at mæla, at hann mundi fyrr hætta en svá sýnist öllum sem enga leið muni eiga at vera nema svá sem han segir. (*FSN* I, 164-5)

5. Sigurðr gets knowledge from Óðinn (the ship-sequence).
6. Sigurðr fights with extraordinary strength against the sons of Hundingr.
7. Sigurðr gets advice from Óðinn (about the extra trench).
8. Sigurðr digs a trench (goes underground) and kills Fáfnir.
9. Sigurðr obtains knowledge from Fáfnir.
10. Sigurðr tastes Fáfnir's blood and now understands the language of birds, which gives him knowledge of Reginn's plans.
11. Sigurðr kills Reginn.
12. Sigurðr drinks the blood of Fáfnir and Reginn and eats Fáfnir's heart.
13. Sigurðr obtains treasures and magic things (among other things the *ægishjálmr, er ǫll kvikvendi hræðask, er sja* 'which all living creatures fear who see it' cf. *Skm* 40) from Fáfnir's dwelling, which had been *grafit í iǫrð niðr* 'dug down into the earth' (prose after *Fáfn* 44).
14. Sigurðr meets a woman who is in a death-like sleep on the mountain.
15. Sigurðr receives magic mead from her.
16. Sigurðr receives knowledge of runes from her.
17. Sigurðr rides away from the woman (*Vǫls* 22).
18. Sigurðr has a dragon as his emblem, he is handsome, strong, has abilities in the use of weapons and is wise (he understands the language of animals, and he can see into the future).

It seems evident that in the whole of this series of events there is a reflection of ingredients that we know from the structure and symbolism of initiation. Nevertheless, unlike the case of Sinfjǫtli, which we will examine more closely below in Chapter 8.3, Sigurðr has never played any considerable role in the disparate attempts that have been made to examine the phenomenon of initiation, except for my own article from 1994.[29] A scholar who has suggested that *Reg* at least reflects elements of initiation is Lotte Motz who, with some justification, regards Reginn as a kind of initiator and Sigurðr as the initiand (Motz 1983, 95-6). Her analysis remains at the level of suggestion and is not a complete analysis of the sequence described above. This is also true of Gunnell 1995, who, as mentioned, speaks of initiation in relation to *Fáfn*, but does not pursue this theory.

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[29] On the other hand, Sigurðr's later career has been the object of studies with relevance to the history of religion, among other things his likeness to Baldr, which has to do particularly with the death of the two figures and their possible connection with fertility rituals (Schröder 1955b, 7-9 and Polomé 1970, 71-2). In that connection, the motif of the dragon has naturally also been studied (Schröder 1955b, 14-5, who, as usual, compares it to Semitic material). Höfler (1961) gives a long explanation in which he places

The existing sequence is not as easily reduced to a version of van Gennep's three stage sequence as was the case with Óðinn's acquisitions of knowledge. There may be several reasons for this, but the crucial fact is that we actually *can* analyse a sequence that corresponds to the structure of initiation. If we examine the initial phase (1) in which Sigurðr is a child, he is brought up by Reginn who is skilled in magic and who, so to speak, prepares him for that deed which more than anything else will mark him for the future and procure for him the new nickname 'Fáfnisbani'. In this phase, Sigurðr does not have any of the abilities (although the potential must naturally be presumed for he is, after all, the son of Sigmundr and through him descends from Óðinn), which characterise him in the final phase, as this is described in *Vǫls* 18. This is all something he is given during the sequence. It is striking how many times Sigurðr is given knowledge or resources of a numinous nature, which, as mentioned, begins already in the initial phase (motifs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16).

In the first instance, it is possible to establish that we do have a final phase, which is characterised by being at a higher level than the initial phase and by this higher level being irreversible. This elevation is the result of a series of the numinous elements which were given to Sigurðr and which helped him both in the sequence itself and in the rest of his life. These include his horse, which later comes to be of great importance as it is the only one which can penetrate the flames leading to Brynhildr (*Vǫls* 27) who, as we will see, is probably *inside* a mountain (2); his sword, for which he was partly indebted to Reginn who, *qua* dwarf, is a representative of the underworld, and partly to Óðinn who, as we have seen, is a representative of the upper world with an affinity

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Sigfried in relation to Arminius and thinks that this connection can explain both the battle with the dragon (1961, 19-20 and 107-10) and many other elements in Sigfried's later life. It is a question that will not be taken up here, but one can only wonder that Höfler, who otherwise has an eye for the elements of initiation, does not touch on such a possibility at all in connection with the young Sigurðr.

to the underworld – a sword, which he uses both to fight so hard with against the sons of Hundingr and to kill Fáfnir (3); the knowledge that he receives from Grípir, and which makes him knowledgeable about the future (4); the knowledge, which he receives from Óðinn, that helps in battle (5); knowledge about the extra trench, also from Óðinn, who must be supposed to rescue him in the fight with Fáfnir (7); knowledge from Fáfnir, which makes him knowledgeable about the future and rescues him (together with the birds' speech) from Reginn (9); the blood which is structurally a variant of Fáfnir's words (as it helps him to see through Reginn's plans) (10); blood and heart which probably here, as in other cases,[30] transfer qualities from those beings to whom they had originally belonged (this means strength and knowledge from Fáfnir and knowledge from Reginn)[31] (12). The helmet of terror apparently does not play any role in the further action and, in any case, its importance is eclipsed by the treasure (13). Mead and runes, we have seen, are knowledge objects *par excellence* in the semantic universe surrounding the acquisition of knowledge, and although their later use is not specified in the saga, we may assume that a part of Sigurðr's greatness is due to them (15, 16). We will not go into detail about these elements here, as many of them have been discussed above and therefore must be considered as recurring ingredients in the acquisition of knowledge. This, at least, is true of knowledge of the future, blood, mead and runes.

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[30] See above (Chapter 5.2) on Kvasir and below (Chapter 9.4) about entry into foster-brotherhood.

[31] In this connection, one could form the hypothesis that the heart primarily transfers strength, whereas the blood primarily transfers numinous qualities (cf. also *Hrólfs saga kraka* chapter 35, where Hǫttr besides drinking blood also eats part of the monster's heart (cf. Chapter 8.4 below). Saxo's statement that Hialto drinks the bear's blood because he believed that it increased his strength is, however, problematic in this regard (*Gesta Danorum* II, vi, 11: *Creditum namque erat hoc potionis genere corporei roboris incrementa præstari* – 'For it was believed that this type of drink afforded an increased bodily vigour' [Davidson and Fischer 1979, 55]). On the other hand, it could be a rationalisation after the event, about which Saxo apparently only knew that Hialto drank the blood. See also *Yng* 34 where the heart of a wolf is given to Ingjaldr, apparently with a view to increasing his strength but, indeed, with the (unintended?) consequence that he acquires an unpleasant disposition. It is, however, also possible that ideas about the specific abilities that were transferred with the heart and the blood were quite vague and inconsistent.

It is therefore these numinous objects that raise Sigurðr to a higher level. But there is more because, if we examine more concretely how he receives this whole series of objects, we notice that they all, so to speak, have an affinity with the underworld. The horse, which descends from Sleipnir and can cross the border to Hel, is a mediator between the upper world and the underworld; Óðinn seeks knowledge about the future in the underworld, and it is also from here that he fetches the mead, from here that the runes originate, and this is also where the blood must have been before it acquires numinous power, as was the case with Kvasir. The Sigurðr narrative, therefore, in agreement with the results we have previously reached, can easily be associated with a journey to the underworld.

We must examine this 'journey to the underworld' more closely, because it involves several elements in the sequence. Sigurðr digs one or more trenches into which he enters and *from where he kills Fáfnir*. This is important because Fáfnir is certainly a dragon, but is said to be in *orms líki* 'in the shape of a serpent' (*Skm* 40, and in the prose passage after *Reg* 14) – to have changed into *inum versta ormi* 'the worst [kind of] serpent' (*Vǫls* 14). We have previously seen that the snake in the Gunnlǫð episode may be considered an unambiguously chthonic symbol. Now it may be argued that, when Sigurðr enters a trench, this is just a cunning strategic manoeuvre such as it is also portrayed in the saga and *Fáfn*. Nevertheless, we must maintain that Sigurðr goes *down* into the trench in order to kill a creature that has chthonic connotations. Besides, Fáfnir's house is dug down into the ground. Thus, we have three signposts to an affinity with the underworld, or – more carefully expressed – three signposts to the fact that the upper versus lower opposition has been thematised.[32] The question of how far Gnitaheiðr is possibly identical with an historical battlefield, as Höfler suggested (1961, 107-10) does not influence the fact that, in the sequence, it connotes an Other World locality.[33] Thus, Fáfnir is killed in a locality which has affinity with the underworld, in the same way as Kvasir and Mímir are killed in the underworld; and, just as they are, he is transformed at his death into a purveyor of knowledge, as Mímir is by speaking wise words and as Kvasir is in that his blood also confers extraordinary abilities.

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[32] It ought also to be noticed that Fáfnir lies on the gold, just as Gunnlǫð guarded the mead without using it actively in contrast to the Æsir, who know how gold can be used to create culture (cf. *Vsp* 8).

[33] It must be emphasised in this connection that this analysis in no way aims to refute the possible historical roots of the Sigurðr figure (see also Talbot 1983 with references). It could easily be the case that there are such roots, but that is not what this investigation aims to uncover.

Sigurðr is thus located in this Other World when he kills Reginn, drinks the blood, eats the heart and fetches the treasure and the magic resources. Then he continues on his journey and comes to a mountain, as it says in *Sigdr*: *Sigurðr reið up* á *Hindarfiall ... Á fiallino sá han liós mikit* ... 'Sigurðr rode up onto Hindarfjall … On the mountain he saw a great light …', and it is here that he finds Sigrdrífa. Whether we are still in the underworld will have to remain uncertain. As in *Fj*, the words seem to indicate that the hero comes *onto* a mountain. Whether this is in the underworld, or whether Sigrdrífa had originally been placed *inside* the mountain, we cannot know for certain.[34] One could imagine that the fairly realistic scene in which all these sources place Sigurðr has necessitated the location on the mountain; one could hardly let Sigurðr come to Sigrdrífa *inside* a mountain and at the same time preserve this realistic backdrop. The fact that Sigrdrífa is in a death-like condition signals that we are at least in a different world from the one in which people normally live – in a liminal scenario from which numinous knowledge can be fetched, as Sigrdrífa informs Sigurðr both in words and with a drink. The whole scene is thus reminiscent of a combination of Óðinn's meeting with Gunnlǫð and with the *vǫlva* in *Bdr*: with the woman who is raised from a deathlike sleep and who gives information of a numinous nature, who gives a magic drink, and who takes part in a mutual marriage-vow (cf. the *Hávm*-version of the relationship between Gunnlǫð and Óðinn) which, in itself, provides an association with sexuality.

In any case, we know that Sigurðr and Brynhildr produce a daughter, Aslaug (*Ragn* chapter 9 [*FSN* I, 242-7]; cf. McTurk 1991, 149-85). It cannot be decided for sure whether her conception originally took place in connection with Sigurðr's stay on Hindarfjall or later, but according to the internal logic of the saga it must have happened here, because when he later forces his way in to Brynhildr, Sigurðr puts a sword between them. This sexual feature may later have been changed with reference to a specific literary context.[35] In the light of the parallel examples of the acquisition of knowledge that we have seen above, it seems that there is a certain likelihood of our still being in a scenario with underworld connotations, seeing that Sigurðr gets knowledge from Sigrdrífa. But whether this is the case or not, it is clear that the motifs from 8 to 13 (and probably 8 to 16) take place in such a scenario, and that it is those things which have taken place here, which are the prerequisites for the figure that we are presented with in 18.[36]

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[34] Sigrdrífa is inside a wall of shields (*scialdborg*), but how this is to be understood more closely is unclear. On the other hand, we learn that Brynhildr lives in a hall (*Vǫls* 27), when Sigurðr in the shape of Gunnarr rides in to her (for the second time?).

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[35] It is well known that there are many problems with the logical sequence of the following passages in *Vǫlsunga saga* (Finch speaks of ‘structural defects’ 1993, 711; cf. also J. Harris 1993, 582 and Torfi Tulinius 2002, 146), because Brynhildr is identified with the valkyrie who has learned explicitly that she must not fight any more, but get married instead. Apparently is it a question of a doubling of the motif when Sigurðr has to ride to her twice. The first time he comes to a shield-wall, which shines like *eldr brynni*, after which he enters and wakes her up. The second time (after he and Brynhildr have promised to be faithful to each other once more [chapter 24], even though Brynhildr knows the future, which Sigurðr, apparently, does not) he comes in the shape of Gunnarr because Brynhildr will only have for her husband the man who *rídi eld brennanda, er sleginn er um sal hennar* ‘who rides through the burning fire, which is surrounding her hall’ (chapter 27), something that seems to refer to the prose text after *Sigdr* 4, in which Sigrdrífa says that she wants to marry the man who cannot be afraid. Whatever the circumstances, the composition seems to be so confused that one may reasonably conclude that several different stories have been joined together. This *could* mean that in an older, perhaps more mythical tradition, Sigurðr had ridden only once to the valkyrie (see also Schröder 1966, 114), slept with her there for three nights and not necessarily with a sword between them (an action which in the plot of the saga is completely absurd since Brynhildr must then be already pregnant with Aslaug, if this tradition is to be credited). The latter is a chivalric motif which only serves to show Sigurðr’s loyalty to Gunnarr (cf. Ney 2000, 370-2), but which is of no importance if one assumes a variant in which there is one meeting, which happened before Sigurðr had met the Giukungs at all. Besides, we know from other contexts (first and foremost the Helgi-poems), that valkyries and men could have sexual relationships (*Hhund I.* 56; *HHj* in prose after stanza 30 and *Hhund II* 14-15; also *Vkv* 1-2). For a brief research-historical explanation and a discussion of the problem, see Reichert 1974.

[36] In this connection it ought to be emphasised that many of the abilities that Sigurðr is said to have obtained seem, to put it mildly, to be very toned down in the following passages in *Vǫls*. The whole of his magical know-how does not seem to be put to use, and even his ability to look into the future seems to have disappeared from the moment he arrives at the Giukungs’ dwelling. This, too, indicates that whereas part of the saga takes place in a magic universe, another part has been inserted into a more ‘realistic’, although romantic and chivalric framework.

If the supposition that Sigurðr and Sigrdrífa have sexual intercourse is correct, there is an exact parallel with the Kvasir myth, where we have both a killing in the underworld that releases a liquid object of knowledge (the blood) and sexual intercourse (or at least an analogy to it in the form of the marriage-vow), which includes the drinking of mead as a condition of the subject's position in the final phase of the sequence. The mead is given as a drink of recollection and is mentioned for the second time (though as beer) in stanza 5, in which we read:

> Beer I give you, apple-tree of battle,
> mixed with magical power and mighty glory;
> it is full of spells and favourable letters,
> good charms and joyful runes.[37] (Larrington 1996, 167)

Here, the main part of the knowledge that Sigurðr is given during the meeting with the valkyrie is anticipated.[38] As we have seen previously, the stanza stresses that all forms of numinous knowledge are brought together in the mead (or the beer). Whether with Dörner (1993, 50-1) one needs to assume an actual or ritual mixing of the runes (with the mead or beer) is perhaps doubtful, but not impossible.[39]

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[37] Biór fœri ec þér
brynþings apaldr
magni blandinn
oc megintíri;
fullr er hann lióða
oc lícnstafa
góðra galdra
oc gamanrúna.
(NK 1962, 190)

[38] It has been debated what status the valkyrie in fact has – whether she is a human being or a mythical being, and whether Sigrdrífa and Brynhildr are identical. Both questions have been taken up together by Steblin-Kaminskij (1982), who brings to our notice that the sources quite simply contradict one another about the identity of the two women. *Vǫls* and *Helr* operate with this identity, whereas *Grip* and *Fáfn* assert the opposite. After having rejected the possibility that an historical development has influenced them, Steblin-Kamenskij writes: 'It is … far more probable that lays where Brynhildr is identified with the valkyrie and those where no such identification occurs coexisted, and that their coexistence is simply a manifestation of the above-mentioned tendency to treat female figures as having a double aspect – human and superhuman, sacred, divine' (1982, 84). It is possible that Steblin-Kaminskij is right, and that this double aspect in the valkyries is fundamental, although it seems just as likely that the idea of the heavenly *valkyrjur* 'choosers of the slain' could have given cause for an identification with the 'shield-maidens' (Dörner 1993, 43 thinks, for example, that Sigrdrífa must unambiguously be considered a human being). But it seems generally likely that the double aspect is very old, and for this reason it is of less importance for

Our sequence shows that in motif 1 we have an uninformed man who is to be educated for the test that will forever make him famous. 2-7 comprise the preparatory learning, the purpose of which is for him to pass the test. 8-16 take place in an underworld-like scenario and contain a killing and (probably) sexual intercourse together with the acquisition of sundry objects of knowledge, among which is a drink, and 17 (which by and large is not developed) takes us to the final state (18). The horizontal structure is thus in perfect harmony with the one we find in initiation and in the Óðinn myths. In addition, we have seen that the difference between the initial phase and the final phase is due to the acquisition of the numinous objects. All that is left to examine are the oppositional pairs which mark the relationship between, on the one hand, the initial phase and the final phase of the sequence and, on the other, the liminal phase.

We have seen that the dichotomy between the upper world and the underworld is in all likelihood present, and we need not clarify that further. There are several oppositional pairs, although the structure is, as already stated, more complicated here than in those myths we have examined previously. We have life versus death in connection with two figures in the myths, Reginn and Fáfnir. Both are wise while they are alive, but it is not until they are dead that their wisdom (as far as Reginn is concerned in the form of the blood) gets a chance to become actively utilised by the subject in the final phase. In the initial phase of the myth, Reginn was in the upper world, but his affinity with the un-

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one to decide whether Sigrdrífa is 'human' or 'superhuman'. In *Sigdr* she is, in any case, from The Other World. In the same way, it is not of absolute importance either to the problematisation of initiation whether Brynhildr and Sigrdrífa are identical. Granted, it was a widespread assumption in the Middle Ages that this was in fact the case, but one could argue that not one but two figures are actually involved, partly on account of their psychological difference and partly on account of the fact that Sigurðr *twice* has to force himself in behind the fire.

[39] Dörner (1993, 46-7) has an interesting discussion of the liquid in which, as mentioned above, he connects the *hvita aurr* 'shining mud' (*Vsp* 19) that pours over Yggdrasill, Mímir's well and the mead of knowledge. It can hardly be doubted that a semantic kinship is involved.

derworld has already been established from the beginning via his status as a dwarf. We must consider Fáfnir as a chthonic being from the time when, in the shape of a snake, he lies down on Gnitaheiðr, but his death brings about a transformation from a physical to an intellectual entity. With respect to both of them, it is their transformation to blood (and heart) via the killing, which gives the subject of the myth essential elements that are necessary in order to change his status. This also holds good for the treasure and the helmet of terror, which cannot be used until after they have been brought to the upper world in the final phase of the myth. Here we also have an opposition, latent versus manifest, as we have already observed. We can see the same pattern in this part of the liminal phase as in connection with Kvasir. Fáfnir and Reginn, while alive and in their solid form, are merely latent wells of knowledge (in fact, the only thing we hear about Reginn in the upper world is that he has knowledge and is skilled in magic and, indeed, that he teaches Sigurðr certain things, but there is no indication that he actually helps him. It seems to a far greater degree to be due to Óðinn that things turn out so spectacularly for Sigurðr, as is the case) while they function actively only after their killing. But the parallel with Kvasir goes further, because we have a knowledge object (Fáfnir's blood) that comes into existence through a killing, caused by dwarfs (in *Reg* and *Vǫls* Reginn is advisor to Sigurðr, whereas Fjalarr and Galarr are directly responsible for killing Kvasir).

Sigurðr, thereafter, travels to Sigrdrífa. If the supposition is correct that we are still in the underworld at this meeting, or at least in a liminal space, then we have almost an exact parallel to the second part of the Kvasir myth in which Óðinn has intercourse with Gunnlǫð. With the arrival of the masculine hero, the latent knowledge can be transferred to the upper world where it can be used. We are thus also presented with the opposition masculine versus feminine, with the feminine pole as an ingredient in the liminal space.

As a mediator, we have first of all Grani, who carries Sigurðr through the flames to Sigrdrífa (as Sleipnir is able to ride to the underworld in the Baldr myth, Grani is the only horse which can force its way through the flames to The Other World). Viewed in connection with Chapter 6.1 in which Yggdrasill 'carries' Óðinn to The Other World, it seems to indicate that the horse as a means of transport has been able to mediate between the two worlds in their spatial aspect.

It is noteworthy that Sigrdrífa also possesses mediating features. She is inside the mountain in a death-like condition, but she is at the same time attached to Óðinn by being a valkyrie. She is thus at the same time an actor in The Other World and a mediator, a feature, as we will see, which also applies to Freyja (Chapter 10.1). Furthermore, both Fáfnir and Reginn, in the same way as Mímir and Kvasir, have mediating features: they die physically but, with their deaths, their blood becomes an active object of knowledge.

We have thus been able to analyse a structure and a symbolism that is parallel to those myths we have previously examined. It is, however, just as clear that there are also differences. First of all, there is nothing that indicates that we are dealing with a 'foundation myth', such as was the case with both the Mímir and Kvasir complexes, which begin at the point in time when the gods' society was being established, or the self-hanging myth or the Loki complex, which both deal with the fundamental knowledge which, for better or worse, establishes the world. The Sigurðr story is, in the form in which we know it, a hero-legend. It is more closely related to folktales with a considerably smaller reach than foundation myths. This makes us ask what kind of narrative we encounter here? It is not a myth in the same sense as those we have examined in connection with Óðinn, even though there are many mythical features. It is obviously not an actual ritual text either, understood as a story accompanying a ritual that was actually performed. But what is it then? The main character himself, Sigurðr, might have roots in an historical person (Höfler 1961 and Talbot 1983) or he could have been modelled on a god (Schröder 1955b), or the Sigurðr whom we encounter in all three poems might have his roots in a completely other place, or be a composite character. There can hardly be any doubt that the Sigurðr-story, as it is told especially in *Vǫlsunga saga*, is made up of several components, and that a connecting line going back to a myth-like formation appears most likely (Turville-Petre 1964, 198). We will not pursue this complex of problems further, as this is primarily a task for historians of literature, but this analysis has shown that the Sigurðr we come across in the three poems is quite strikingly different from the one we come across in the latter part of *Vǫls*. At the same time, the analysis also shows that the structure and symbolism, which is present and which demonstrates such close parallels to actual myths and to the initiation-complex as we come across it all over the world, must go far back into pagan times. As mentioned, it does not tell us anything, however, about the age of the literary products we encounter, neither in the poems of the Elder Edda nor in *Vǫls*.

As far as the content is concerned, we are dealing with something which could perhaps best be characterised as a heroic legend, but that does not imply that the text tells us less about the world-view that ruled in pre-Christian Scandinavia than actual myths do. The account is in a number of respects a transformation of other accounts, and as such it is, irrespective of what genre it belongs to, an ingredient in this world-view, *in casu* a reflection of how a young untried man becomes qualified to be a prince.

As a provisional hypothesis, one could propose that the 'initiation' which Sigurðr undergoes during the course of the narrative is reminiscent of some actual consecration-rituals – perhaps containing features that formed part of the esoteric knowledge that certain categories of initiated persons were to be given. In that case, it must have been a consecration at a very high level and not a common warrior-consecration (which we will examine below). One could imagine that Sigurðr had been perceived as a prototype of a descendant of Óðinn himself, therefore perhaps a king or rather a prototypical king, who has so many features in common with Óðinn that he would be able to take care of the royal power and its condition: communication with The Other World (see below Chapter 9.5 and Schjødt 1990b). Seen in the light of Dumézil's trifunctional schema, we come across elements in the liminal phase that are tied to all three functions, namely sexuality (Sigrdrífa), the battle (Fáfnir) and intellectuality (which is acquired several times during the sequence, but primarily via Óðinn). In that sense Sigurðr, if anyone, would be the 'archetypical' Germanic king.[40] Given that such contentions are ultimately unprovable, it seems most profitable, if we are to search for the young Sigurðr's *Sitz im Leben*, to fasten on the mythology and the rituals which have surrounded the ideology of kingship. That possibility is also present in the cases of other legendary kings, such as Hadingus and Sigmundr, who experience a sequence of events which can be connected with the consecration of kings.

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[40] Turville-Petre speaks here about a 'demi-god' (1964, 205), but Schröder (1955b, 20) expresses it better, and I quite agree with him, when he says: 'Und schliesslich ist die Frage: Gott oder Mensch? gar müssig, wenn wir bedenken, dass der König der Urzeit, der Priesterkönig, letzhin beides ist, als Repräsentant, als Inkarnation des Göttersohnes' 'And finally, the question: a god or a human being? is quite superfluous when we consider that the king in ancient times, the priest-king, is both a representative, and an incarnation of the son of the god.' This understanding has a high degree of support in the analysis produced here.

8.3 Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli

The episode from *Vǫlsunga saga* dealing with Sigmundr's and Sinfjǫtli's experiences in the forest while they are waiting to take revenge on King Siggeirr contains obvious elements from initiation rituals, even if the form in which we encounter them in *Vǫls* is not in itself a description of a ritual. Some scholars have wanted to see the narrative as preserving reminiscences of a warrior initiation, and both Weiser (1927, 70-82) and Höfler (1934, 188-91) have analysed it thoroughly from the perspective of initiation. A brief paraphrase of chapters 2 to 10 (*FSN* I, 110-34) appears below.

The sequence

We hear that King Sigmundr, son of King Vǫlsungr, whose birth has come about through Óðinn's intervention and who descends directly from Óðinn, has nine younger brothers and one sister, Signý. A large tree stood in Vǫlsungr's hall. There was a king named Siggeirr who ruled over Gautland and wished to marry Signý, who, however, did not wish to marry him, but she nevertheless let her father decide. The wedding took place in Vǫlsungr's hall, and in the evening a man, whom nobody had seen before, came into the hall. He was old and had only one eye, and he thrust a sword into the tree right up to the hilt. Then he said that the one who was able to pull it out would get it as a gift, and that it was an especially outstanding sword. Nobody, however, was able to move the sword until Sigmundr tried. He had no difficulty in pulling it out. Siggeirr wanted to buy the sword from Sigmundr but received only a disdainful rejection. Siggeirr decided to take vengeance, and at his departure he invited Vǫlsungr and his sons to visit him three months later.

When Vǫlsungr arrived with his retinue, Signý warned them that Siggeirr had gathered a mighty army and she urged them to go home. To Signý's regret, Vǫlsungr rejected this advice out of pride. However, they were attacked and everybody was killed except Vǫlsungr's sons, who were taken prisoner. Signý asked Siggeirr not to kill her brothers, but instead to put them in the stocks. They were placed in the stocks out in a forest, and during the night a large she-wolf appeared and ate one of them. The same thing happened over the following nine nights and at last only Sigmundr remained alive. With the help of Signý, Sigmundr managed to kill the she-wolf, because she got her helper to smear Sigmundr's face and mouth with honey, by means of which it becomes possible for him to bite the she-wolf's tongue off when she licked his mouth. It is added parenthetically that some people think that the she-wolf was Siggeirr's mother, who had changed her shape by means of magic. After this, Sigmundr prepared to live in a dwelling in the ground (*jarðhús*) within the forest, and Signý supplied him with provisions.

Siggeirr, who believed that all Vǫlsungr's sons were dead, had two sons by Signý. When the older one was ten years old, Signý sent him out into the forest to help Sigmundr take vengeance on Siggeirr. The boy now had to undergo a test, which consisted in Sigmundr asking him to bake a loaf of bread, giving him a sack of flour. But the boy did not dare bake the bread because there was something moving in the sack and when he proved to lack courage in this situation, Signý urged Sigmundr to kill him. The same thing happened to the younger son.

Later, Signý exchanged shape with a sorceress (*seiðkona – 'seiðr-*woman') and went to her brother in the forest. They slept together for three nights and, after she had reached home and had changed back into her own form, it appeared that she was pregnant. She gave birth to a boy who was named Sinfjǫtli. When he was ten years old, Signý sent him, too, out into the forest.

The following part of the sequence is so important that it will be quoted here in full:

> Before sending her first sons to Sigmund, she had tested them by stitching the cuffs of their kirtles to their hands, passing the needle through both flesh and skin. They withstood the ordeal poorly and cried out in pain. She also did this to Sinfjotli; he did not flinch. Then she ripped the kirtle from him, so that the skin followed the sleeves. She said that it must certainly be painful for him. He replied, "Such pain would seem trifling to Volsung."

Then the boy came to Sigmund. Sigmund asked him to knead their flour while he went to look for firewood. He handed the boy a sack and then went off for the wood. When he returned, Sinfjotli had finished the baking. Then Sigmund asked if he had discovered anything in the flour. "I am not without suspicion," he said "that there was something alive in the flour when I first began kneading, but I have kneaded it in, whatever it was." Then Sigmund said and laughed as he spoke: "I do not think you should make your meal from this bread tonight, for you have kneaded into it the most poisonous of snakes." Sigmund was so hardy that he could eat poison with no ill effect. Sinfjotli, however, although he could tolerate poison externally, could neither eat nor drink it.

(Chapter 8)

It is now to be told that Sigmund thought Sinfjotli too young to seek vengeance with him, and that he first wanted to accustom the boy to hardship. During the summers they traveled widely through the forests, killing men for booty. It seemed to Sigmund that Sinfjotli took much after the Volsung race. Nevertheless, he believed the boy to be the son of King Siggeir and to have the evil disposition of his father along with the fierce zeal of the Volsungs. Sigmund felt that Sinfjotli did not put much store in kinship, for the boy often reminded Sigmund of his grievances, strongly urging the man to kill King Siggeir.

One time, they went again to the forest to get themselves some riches, and they found a house. Inside it were two sleeping men, with thick gold rings. A spell had been cast upon them: wolfskins hung over them in the house and only every tenth day could they shed the skins. They were the sons of kings. Sigmund and Sinfjotli put the skins on and could not get them off. And the weird power was there as before: they howled like wolves, but understanding the sounds. Now they set out into the forest, each going his own way. They agreed then that they would risk a fight with as many as seven men, but not with more, and that the one being attacked by more would howl with his wolf's voice. "Do not break this agreement," said Sigmund, "because you are young and daring, and men will want to hunt you."

Now each went his own way. And when they had parted, Sigmund found seven men and howled in his wolf's voice. Sinfjotli heard him, came at once, and killed them all. They parted again. Before Sinfjotli had traveled very far in the forest, he met with eleven men and fought them. In the end he killed them all. Badly wounded, Sinfjotli went under an oak tree to rest. Then Sigmund came and said: "Why didn't you call?" Sinfjotli replied: "I did not want to call you for help. You accepted help to kill seven men, I am a child in age next to you, but I did not ask help in killing eleven men." Sigmund leapt at him so fiercely that Sinfjotli staggered and fell. Sigmund bit him in the windpipe. That day they were not able to come out of the wolfskins. Sigmund laid Sinfjotli over his shoulder, carried him home to the hut, and sat over him. He cursed the wolfskins, bidding the trolls to take them.

One day Sigmund saw two weasels. One bit the other in the windpipe and then ran into the woods, returning with a leaf and laying it on the wound. The other weasel sprang up healed. Sigmund went out and saw a raven flying with a leaf. The raven brought the leaf to Sigmund, who drew it over Sinfjotli's wound. At once Sinfjotli sprang up healed, as if he had never been injured.

Then they went to the underground dwelling and stayed there until they were to take off the wolfskins. They took the skins and burned them in the fire, hoping that these objects would cause no further harm. Under that magic spell they had performed many feats in King Siggeir's kingdom.

> When Sinfjotli was fully grown Sigmund thought he had tested him fully. (Byock 1990, 43-5)[41]

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[41] Hún hafði þá raun gert við ina fyrri sonu sína, áðr hún sendi þá til Sigmundar, at hún saumaði at höndum þeim med holdi ok skinni. Þeir þoldu illa ok kriktu um. Ok svá gerði hún Sinfjötla. Hann brást ekki við. Hún fló hann þá af kyrtlinum, svá at skinnit fylgi errmunum. Hún kvað honum mundu sárt við verða.
Hann segir: 'Lítit mundi slíkt sárt þykkja Völsungi'.
Ok nú kemr sveinninn til Sigmundar. Þá bað Sigmundr hann knoða ór mjöli þeira, en hann vill sækja þeim eldivið, fær í hönd honum einn belg. Síðan ferr hann at viðinum. Ok er hann kom aftr, þá hafði Sinfjötli lokit at baka.
Þá spurði Sigmundr, ef hann hafi nokkut fundit í mjölinu.
'Eigi er mér grunlaust,' sagði hann, at eigi hafi í verit nokkut kykt í mjölinu, fyrst er ek tók at knoða, ok hér hefi ek með knoðat þat, er í var.'
Þá mælti Sigmundr ok hló við: 'Eigi get ek þik hafa mat af þessu brauði í kveld, því at þar hefir þú knoðat med inn mesta eitrorm.'
Sigmundr var svá mikill fyrir sér, at hann mátti eta eitr, svá at hann skaðaði ekki, en Sinfjötla hlýddi þat, at eitr kæmi utan á hann, en eigi hlýddi honum at eta þat né drekka.
(Chapter 8) Þat er nú at segja, at Sigmundi þykkir Sinfjötli of ungr til hefnda med sér ok vill nú fyrst venja hann með nokkut harðræði, fara nú um sumrum viða um skóga ok drepa menn til fjár sér. Sigmundi þykkir hann mjök í ætt Völsunga, ok þó hyggr hann, at hann sé sonr Siggeirs Konungs, ok hyggr hann hafa illsku föður sins, en kapp Völsunga ok ætlar hann eigi mjök frændrækinn, þvi at hann minnir oft Sigmund á sína harma ok eggjar mjök at drepa Siggeir Konung.
Nú er þat eitthvert sinn, at þeir fara enn á skóginn at afla sér fjár, en þeir finna eitt hús ok tvá menn sofandi í húsinu með digrum gullhringum. Þeir höfðu orðit fyrer ósköpum, þvi at úlfhamir hengu í húsinu yfir þeim. It tíunda hvert dægr máttu þeir komast ór hömunum. Þeir váru konungasynir. Þeir Sigmundr fóru í hamina ok mátti eigi ór komast, ok fylgdi sú náttúra, sem áðr var, létu ok vargsröddu. Þeir skildu báðir röddina.
Nú leggjast þeir ok á merkr, ok ferr sína leið hvárr þeira, Þeir gera þann mála med sér, at þeir skulti til hætta, þótt sjau menn sé, en eigi framar, en sá láta úlfsrödd, er fyrir ófriði yrði. 'Bregðum nú eigi af þessu,' segir Sigmundr, 'því at þú ert ungr ok áræðisfullr. Munu menn gott hyggja til at veiða þik.'
Nú ferr sína leið hvárr þeira. Ok er þeir váru skildir, finnr Sigmundr sjau menn ok lætr úlfröddu. Ok er Sinfjötli heyrir þat, ferr han til þegar ok drepr alla.
Þeir skiljast enn. Ok er Sinfjötli hefir eigi lengi farit um skóginn, finnr hann ellefu menn ok berst við þá, ok ferr svá, at han drepr þá alla. Hann verðr ok sárr mjök, ferr under eina eik, hvílist þar. Eigi beið hann Sigmundar lengi, ok fara báðir samt um hríð.
Hann mælti til Sigmundar: 'Þú þátt lið at drepa sjau menn, en ek em barn at aldri hjá þér, ok kvadda ek eigi liðs at drepa ellefu menn.'
Sigmundr hjeypr at honum svá hart, at hann stakar við ok fellr. Sigmundr bítre í barkann framan. Þann dag máttu þeir eigi komast ór úlfahömunum. Sigmundr leggr hann nú á bak sér ok berr heim í skálann, ok sat hann yfir honum, en bað tröll taka úlfahamina.

After this, they try to avenge themselves, but they are captured by Siggeirr, who locks them up in a mound from which they escape with the help of Signý and by means of Sigmundr's extraordinary sword. After this, they go to Siggeirr's hall and set it alight. Signý now tells Sigmundr how Sinfjǫtli's conception came about. But she wants to die and so enters the burning hall.

Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli now return to the country of their kin, and Sigmundr becomes a famous king and later has two sons, Helgi and Hámundr. In the following passages, the saga concentrates mostly on Helgi who goes to war against King Granmarr; Sinfjǫtli becomes involved in it by taking part in a *senna* or exchange of insults with Granmarr. After Helgi's victory, they return home, and we now learn that Sinfjǫtli has become a famous warrior who travels around plundering. Before that, he killed a man in a fight over a woman and this man was the brother of Borghildr, Sigmundr's wife. When Sinfjǫtli comes home, Borghildr wants to take revenge for her brother and tries to poison Sinfjǫtli with a drink. Twice Sinfjǫtli refuses the drink and lets Sigmundr drink in his stead, but the third time he drinks and falls down dead. Sigmundr picks up the corpse and carries it out and he comes to a fjord. Here he meets a man in a little boat who offers to ferry them across. But, as he only has room for one at a time, he takes Sinfjǫtli into the boat and disappears.

Weiser and Höfler have both analysed the episode thoroughly for features of initiation, so the two analyses must necessarily look similar to one another, although Höfler has reservations about some of Weiser's suggestions while he develops others. Weiser gives the following commentary on the episode (1927, 70-1):

> In dieser Geschichte ist einmal eine volkommene Initiation erzählt: 1. Die Knabensprobe, eine Mut- und Standhaftigkeitspro-

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Sigmundr sér einn dag, hvar hreysikettir tveir váru ok bítr annarr í barkann öðrum, ok rann sá til skógar ok hefir eitt blað ok færir yfir sárit, ok sprettr upp hreysiköttrinn heill. Sigmundr gengr út ok sér, hvar hrafn flýgr med blaðit ok færði honum. Hann dregr þetta yfir sárit Sinfjötla, enn hann sprettr upp þegar heill, sem han hefði aldri sárr verit. Eftir þat fara þeir til jarðhúss ok eru þar, til þess er þeir skyldu fara ór úlfhömunum. Þá taka þeir ok renna í eldi báðu engum at meini verða. Ok í þeim ósköpum unnu þeir mörg frægðarverk í ríki Siggeirs konungs. Ok er Sinfjötli er frumvaxti, þá þykkist Sigmundr hafa reynt hann mjök.(*FSN* I, 122-4)

> be. Wie ernst es mit dieser Probe gemeint was sieht man daraus, wie es den beiden anderen Knaben erging. 2. Die Lehrzeit in Tierkleidung und mit Tierbesessenheit, in der Krigsführung und Ausdauer erlernt wird und in der Sinfjötli 3. die Mannhaftigkeitsprobe, sieben bis elf Feinden Stand zu halten ablegt.

> For once, a complete tale of initiation is told in this narrative. 1. The test of a boy, a test of courage and perseverance. How serious this test is meant to be can be seen from what happened to the other two boys. 2. The time of instruction in the animal-skins and being possessed by the animals, and in the learning of warfare and endurance, and in that Sinfjǫtli 3. The test of courage by withstanding from seven to eleven enemies.

Moreover, Weiser correctly emphasises that the author of the saga no longer understood the meaning of the many elements that appear in the episode – such as we also saw was the case with Saxo in the Hadingus narrative. Weiser does not make much more out of the narrative, but immediately passes on to extract examples of a definite 'traineeship' period in the various warrior bands. Höfler correctly adds that the killing of Sinfjǫtli and his 'restoration to life' is of great importance (1934, 192-3), and that the honourable place that he occupies in *Eiríksmál* is in no way accidental but is precisely due to the fact that he above all is an Óðinn-hero, who is fetched at his death in both *Frá dauða Sinfiǫtla* and *Vǫls* by Óðinn himself (1934, 194-7 and 212). However, Höfler has reservations about that part of the saga that mentions the tests because it seems to have suffered from quite late reconstructions (Höfler 1934, 201),[42] demonstrated primarily by the style which he designates as 'literary' and 'folktale-like' in general.[43]

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[42] Höfler's interpretation of the development of the motifs in the literature (1934, 210-19) is, however, unconvincing. There is no doubt that the saga is a late product, but how it originated with the motifs it brings forth can hardly be reconstructed, and Höfler's suggestion is nothing but a hypothesis.

[43] For possible literary parallels to this episode, see de Vries 1953, who views Sigmundr's assault on Sinfjǫtli as an Indo-Eurpean mytheme with a father-son conflict as the main ingredient (1953, 273), something that also had a connection to old initiation rituals. Talbot (1983) searches for possible historical roots in the Sigmundr-figure as we encounter him in various literary representations. None of these angles are of any importance in the present work.

There is nothing to object to in the way that both Weiser and Höfler analysed the elements they included, but there are still some aspects which need to be added and commented on in connection with our characterisation of initiation.

Sigmundr

Before Sinfjǫtli's birth we are told that his father Sigmundr had passed a test set by Óðinn himself, as he had placed a sword in a tree which only Sigmundr was able to pull out (Chapter 3). Sigmundr, in Höfler's terminology, is already an Óðinn hero[44] who is also a descendant of Óðinn and who in the end is 'brought home' by Óðinn himself (*Vǫls* chapter 11).[45] But his tests are not finished with that, because after King Siggeirr has killed his father, he and his nine brothers are placed under a pile of logs out in the forest where, for nine nights running, a she-wolf arrives and eats one of them each night. By means of cunning and with the help of his sister, Signý, Sigmundr survives. The episode with the she-wolf is significant in at least one respect: Sigmundr kills it, just as we have previously seen the killings of monsters of one kind or another take place in the liminal phase. The manner in which the killing takes place is very unusual, but it is not possible to determine more closely the meaning the honey has here. The possibility of a transformation of the motif associated with the origin of the mead of knowledge cannot be excluded, as honey is an essential ingredient of mead but how this happens must remain uncertain.[46]

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[44] Concerning Óðinn's role, see also Torfi Tulinius 2002, 150-1. It seems to me that Torfi focuses too much on the saga author's conscious manipulations (e.g. he is imitating Snorri's ideas in *Ynglinga saga*). As we know that probably most of the Germanic kings saw themselves as descendants of Óðinn, it seems quite natural that this was also the case for the most famous legendary family: the Vǫlsungar.

[45] Ok er orrosta hafði staðit um hríð, þá kom maðr í bardagann með síðan hött ok heklu blá. Hann hafði eitt auga ok geir í hendi. Þessi maðr kom á mót Sigmundi konungi ok brá upp geirinum fyrir hann. Ok er Sigmundr konungr hjó fast, kom sverðit í geirinn ok brast í sundr í tvá hluti. (*FSN* I, 136-7) 'And when the battle had lasted for some time, a man with a broad hat and blue cape then entered the battle. He had only one eye and a spear in his hand. This man came against Sigmundr and held the spear up towards him. And when King Sigmundr struck hard, the sword hit the spear and broke into two pieces'. (Byock 1990, 52)

[46] As a hypothesis, we may suggest that in the same way as the honey gives Kvasir 'life' in a transformed shape but still in a liminal condition (he remains in the under-

After this, Sigmundr stays in hiding, first in the forest, which is clearly here contrasted with the 'civilised' society of human beings and so connotes the 'uncivilised', then in a *jarðhús*, that is, a space under the ground (cf. *Fritzner*: *jarðhús*), and later inside a mound in which he remains until he has avenged his father. Here, we have already a couple of ingredients, which can be linked to initiation as we know it from the phenomenological quarter, namely tests, which are significantly life-threatening and in which the protagonist is confronted by a she-wolf (King Siggeirr's mother who knows magic and therefore has numinous abilities) – a feminine, but not sexual, semantic element – which he kills, and also a sequestration under the ground in the forest. It looks as if we have here a duplication of a myth in which both the forest and the underworld function as spatially liminal symbols, which might refer respectively to a ritual and a mythical liminal space.[47] Furthermore, during his stay in the liminal space Sigmundr has intercourse with his sister, and with this element we are introduced to the masculine/feminine opposition. Signý takes the form of a *seiðr*-woman and in this respect has affinity to the numinous and even to the Vanir because both her magic abilities and the incestuous element in the relationship connect her to Freyja. By this means, a connection is also established with both the Óttarr and Hadingus episodes. The two women, Signý and Siggeirr's mother, both master the art of metamorphosis, but whereas one of them kills and is killed, the other is characterised by her sexuality.

There are thus several factors that indicate that Sigmundr himself must have undergone an initiation. The first is that, at an early age, he comes to 'belong' to Óðinn from whom he is also descended; secondly, he is isolated and nearly dies; thirdly, he experiences a series of events on his own that are characteristic of the liminal phase. He kills an enemy (the she-wolf), he has sexual intercourse with his sister, and other elements are added with Sinfjǫtli's introduction, which we will exam-

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world), the honey gives Sigmundr life because he gets the chance to kill his enemy while at the same time remaining in the liminal scenario.

[47] If the *jarðhús* was an isolated motif, it could be a matter of over-interpretation, but because the mound also appears, a place that is normally connected with death, we can hardly assume that it is a matter of chance. Besides, the earthen cave is an obvious possibility when one wants to portray the underworld symbolically in a 'realistic' scenario.

ine below. Fourthly, Sigmundr completes his revenge and *gerist nú ríkr konungr ok ágætr, vitr ok stórráðr* 'now becomes a powerful king, wise and ambitious' (Chapter 8). We thus have a sequence which is an exact parallel to that of initiation with its oppositional pairs of upper world versus underworld (here supplemented with civilised versus uncivilised), and masculine (Sigmundr) versus feminine (she-wolf/Signý), in which not even 'knowledge' is lacking in the final phase, although how Sigmundr obtains it in the liminal phase is not revealed. Furthermore, the life/death opposition is present because Sigmundr is, firstly, near death (he escapes only with Signý's help and because Siggeirr believes that he is dead) and, secondly, in his relation to the two sorceresses: one is killed and he has intercourse with the other.

Sinfjǫtli

The story about Sinfjǫtli is woven into this sequence. To begin with the conclusion, we, along with Höfler, must also understand Sinfjǫtli as an Óðinn-warrior who, after his death, is fetched by the god himself (Chapter 10). Now he is, indeed, the son of Sigmundr and Signý, which could provide an explanation, but it is even clearer than was the case with Sigmundr that Sinfjǫtli endures tests, which – taking the context into consideration – can hardly be understood as anything other than an initiation, as was also indicated by Weiser. There are the motifs of the shirt and the flour, which are naturally tests of courage, but more important is the transformation into wolves. This, first of all, evokes associations with the concept *úlfheðnar* 'men clad in wolf skins', probably a designation for certain warrior bands in the pre-Christian North (Kershaw 2000, 59-64, cf. Schjødt 2007c), who fought in a particularly fierce way (cf. Chapter 8: *ok í þeim óskӧpum unnu þeir mörg frægðarverk í ríki Siggeirs konungs* 'and under that magic spell they had performed many feats in King Siggeir's kingdom'). Secondly we are informed directly that they understand the language of wolves and, thirdly, that Sinfjǫtli dies while he is in the shape of a wolf (we must understand his condition as such after Sigmundr has bitten him) and is later restored to life. After the restoration to life, which is to be seen as a rebirth, they escape from the wolves' pelts, which they burn, and thus they become humans again, but this time humans who have an element of wolf nature. As Höfler has also observed, we must pay attention to the fact that the leaf by which Sinfjǫtli is restored to life is brought by a raven, Óðinn's bird *par excellence*, and in his new existence he can then be characterised as an Óðinn-warrior connected in some mystical way to the wolves. As a direct extension of this theme we learn that Sigmundr now wants to see if Sinfjǫtli is able to help him taking revenge. This suggests he has now finished with the tests and ought to be able to undertake the task for which he was, in fact, created. But before the final state can be reached, he has to spend time in a mound, a place which is normally associated with the dead and in which, under normal circumstances, he would die, but as we know he manages to break out. So here, too, it seems clear that a process which is analogous to the death/rebirth process and which is thus redundant in relation to the death-process that he has in fact already experienced, is at stake. It is also possible that we are actually dealing here with an element in a more complex initiation structure where the stay in the mound is a secondary liminal phase between the actual liminal phase (life in the forest) and the final condition (cf. van Gennep 1909, 117).

Thus, the sequence corresponds in essence to the one we would expect in an initiation: 1) a descent (their stay in the earth-house) and, as we also saw in connection with Sigmundr, a stay in the forest; tests which culminate in a transformation into an animal-shape (wolf – one of Óðinn's animals, cf. Geri and Freki); 2) the acquisition of another language; death and restoration to life through the intervention of the god; 3) a new existence in which he masters the necessary abilities and which is, in principle, irreversible. As far as knowledge is concerned, we are poorly informed about how this was transferred in the liminal phase, as was also the case with Sigmundr, but we have at least the acquisition of a new language as a consequence of the metamorphosis into wolves, something that also plays a role in the life of Sigurðr when he comes to understand the language of birds.[48] And there is absolutely no doubt that Sinfjǫtli has learnt something in the final phase that he did not know in the initial phase, something that must have been given to him during his stay in the liminal space.

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[48] We must also consider the very experience which he took upon himself when excessive self-confidence led to his death. This motif may include reminiscences of the rules involving trials of degrees of strength, which warrior bands may have required (Weiser 1927, 62-8; cf. *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* chapter 10).

Firstly, we have a sequence that corresponds to that of initiation; secondly, we have an acquisition of abilities, which makes Sinfjǫtli able to fulfil his new status; the third factor is that the new status itself is irreversible as he remains a warrior for the rest of his life and in death apparently acquires a special position in Valhǫll (*Eiríksmál* 5); and finally, we have a series of oppositional pairs, which partly correspond to those that we have seen in Turner's discussion of the liminal, partly to those we have encountered in the rest of the mythical material: upper world versus underworld (*jarðhús* and the mound), life versus death and civilised versus uncivilised (the forest). On the other hand, as far as Sinfjǫtli is concerned, there are no traces of the otherwise widespread dichotomy between masculine and feminine.

Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli – similarities and differences

Now we must examine more closely the relationship between the two initiands. Although it is clear that both undergo the sequence, which is interpreted here as an initiation sequence, there are also some striking differences, which means that we cannot simply see one of the figures as a double of the other. The supposition that the final phases are different is intimated by Sinfjǫtli's death, which reveals a difference in the two men's ability to tolerate poison. But far more importantly, whereas Sigmundr is a king and continues his family line with the greatest of all the heroes, Sigurðr, Sinfjǫtli lives in his way a parenthetical existence. It is not necessary for him to be in the saga at all for its epic nature to progress; Sigmundr could presumably have carried out the revenge alone and Sinfjǫtli remains a subordinate character (first in relation to Sigmundr and later to Helgi). The most striking event that is told about Sinfjǫtli after the revenge on Siggeirr is his participation in the *senna* which occurs in Helgi's battle with Hǫdbroddr (Chapter 11, and *Hhund I* 33-44),[49] in which he mocks his opponent with all manner of insults. But this is not an essential ingredient in the progress of the plot. Sinfjǫtli's role seems solely to be that of a warrior, so it follows that the structure and the symbolism, outlined above, must be that of a warrior consecration. The situation is different with Sigmundr, who is certainly a warrior, as all the heroes of the *fornaldarsögur* are, but he is first of all a king with responsibility for the perpetuation of the royal line and in this respect he is the father of the real main player in the saga. This difference in the final situations could be imagined to have been played out in the way that the initiation was performed, if, in fact, the descriptions incorporate reminiscences of actual rituals. However, some elements contribute to veil the difference, for instance that kings were also warriors (at least as an ideal) in early Scandinavia and the fact that Óðinn, to whom both Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli are closely attached, was the god of both kings and warrior bands (Schjødt 2007c, cf. Liberman 2005).

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[49] In this *senna* it is remarkable how often the wolf nature of Sinfjǫtli is touched upon, which indicates that *úlfheðnar* were, in fact, imagined symbolically to be wolves.

The most striking difference in the initiation sequences between these two characters is obviously that, whereas Sinfjǫtli is killed by Sigmundr, who also restores him to life, we do not get a corresponding event connected with Sigmundr. On the contrary, we find that the motif with the wolf is thematised completely differently in relation to the two heroes: whereas Sinfjǫtli is killed by a man who is transformed into a wolf (Sigmundr), Sigmundr, however, kills (apart from Sinfjǫtli) a woman, who is also transformed into a wolf and who had killed his nine brothers.

With the killing of Sinfjǫtli, it is made probable that Sigmundr should be seen as his initiator: it is he who brings him up and teaches him reason and common sense in the fighting of battles, and, finally, both kills him and restores him to life. Thus, he functions in several respects in the role of a traditional initiator in the sequence. He himself undergoes the liminal phase via the space in which he is, but his sovereignty in connection with this space seems conspicuous in relation to Sinfjǫtli's. Structurally, Sigmundr occupies a role that is parallel to Bǫðvarr's in relation to Hǫttr (cf. Chapter 8.4 below). It may, therefore, be presumed that the differences in the sequences mirror the fact that we are dealing with two different initiations, each of which aims towards its own final situation in agreement with the proposition that Sigmundr is initiated into a higher degree than Sinfjǫtli. This could mean that we are dealing with ingredients in an actual consecration of a king, although the scenario varies in several details from those that we have seen earlier. Correspondingly, the sequence with Sinfjǫtli might then mirror a warrior initiation in which a human initiator was apparently necessary, whereas the only figure to appear in anything that looks like an initiator's role in relation to Sigmundr is Óðinn, as we also saw in connection with Hadingus.[50]

Once more, it must be emphasised that the relationship with an actual ritual is here as in the other myths not without problems, something we have touched upon above. We will not pursue it more closely here, but return to in Chapters 10 and 11.

Finally, we will examine Signý's role a little more closely. It was stated above that whereas a human initiator was apparently necessary in a warrior initiation or in any case for Sinfjǫtli, this seems not to be the case with Sigmundr. This does not imply that he does not have a helper. Signý appears throughout the sequence as a helper of both heroes, but to a far greater degree for Sigmundr than for Sinfjǫtli. Just as Freyja was a helper of Óttarr in *Hyndl* and a Freyja-like figure of Hadingus, so Signý supports Sigmundr here. And Freyja and Signý do have several features in common. Signý takes on the shape of a *seiðr*-woman in order to have intercourse with Sigmundr. *Seiðr* is, as mentioned, also a distinguishing characteristic of Freyja (cf. *Yng* 4), which means that Signý can be associated with the goddess, and this also holds good for the incestuous relationship between her and Sigmundr which takes place in the liminal phase. Signý has thus a considerable semantic affinity with the Vanir, who, as we have seen, play a role in several of the myths that have been analysed here. It is naturally not a question of any conscious 'copying' on the saga-author's part, but the elements of *seiðr* and incest evoke clear associations with Freyja.

8.4 Bǫðvarr and Hǫttr

In the form we know it, *Hrólfs saga kraka* is a relatively late literary product (fourteenth or fifteenth century). There is, however, no doubt that the material that is found in it is derived from various legendary accounts. The passage to be considered here originates from the so-called **Bǫðvars þáttr bjarka*, whose title character became the greatest of Hrólfr's warriors.[51] But at his side another person also appears, Hǫttr, who is the more important in our context. Bǫðvarr, however, also has an identifiable connection with the initiation sequence, so we will undertake a close examination of his career before he comes to King Hrólfr. A relatively detailed account of the narrative appears below.[52]

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[50] One could perhaps also imagine that Sinfjǫtli's initiation mirrors a puberty rite and that Sigmundr's is an actual warrior consecration. If that is the case, we have problems with the relationship between the wolf-episode on the one hand and Höfler's theory that we have a clear relationship here with the *úlfheðnar* or *berserkir* on the other, seeing that puberty consecrations can hardly be assumed to have given admission to such warrior bands. Besides, the status of the two protagonists in the final situation seems to point unambiguously towards the status of a king and the status of a warrior respectively.

The source

A prince by the name of Bjǫrn is in love with Bera, the daughter of a peasant. Once, while his father is on a military expedition, he rejects his stepmother's advances, so she changes him into a bear (yet only so that he is a man during the night, but a bear during the day). The stepmother was the daughter of the king of the Finns and skilled in magic. Bera discovers how things stand and visits Bjǫrn during the night. One night he tells her that he expects to be killed the next day, and he gives her some instructions and predictions. Among other things, he tells her that she will give birth to three sons and that, even if the queen forces her, she must not eat any of the killed bear's (his own) flesh because in that case their sons' appearance will be badly affected. He also tells her that she should give the sons the names Elgfróði, Þórir and Bǫðvarr. Everything naturally happens as he predicted, and he is killed the next day. Bera cannot completely refuse to eat the meat that the queen places before her, and she eats one morsel and a small part of another. The consequence of this is that the first son she gives birth to is an elk from the navel down, the next son has dog paws instead of feet, but there is nothing at all wrong with the third son, and she loved him the most.

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[51] The relationship between Hrólfr's warriors (*kappar*) and his *berserkir* is problematic. The two groups are placed in opposition to one another to a great degree throughout the saga. This contrast is, however, more of a literary feature, creating a stage for the heroes' courage and strength, than a description of two actual groups. The *berserkir* appear exclusively as opponents to the *kappar*, but there are features that indicate that the two groups, both of which consist of twelve persons, may be considered identical (Schjødt 2007c, 145-6).

[52] A much abbreviated variant of this narrative is found in Saxo II vi 9-11, in which the only addition of importance for this analysis is that the animal is identified as a large bear, and that it is explicitly claimed in connection with Hjalti's drinking of the blood that people believed that this would give him added strength.

The boys grow up and are uncontrollable, and when they are twelve years old, Elgfróði wishes to move away from those areas where human beings are living: *ok má ek ekki við menn eiga* 'and I cannot have anything to do with men'(Chapter 28). Before this, however, as his two brothers must do later on, he has to fetch the inheritance, which his father has determined for him, from the cave in which the father lived as a bear and in which the three brothers were conceived.[53] Þórir, too, moves away and later becomes king in Gautland or Götaland. Bǫðvarr remains at home for a while yet and avenges his father. His inheritance consists, among other things, of a sword, which has that quality that it cannot be pulled from the scabbard without causing the death of a man. After this, he first travels to his brother Elgfróði but, before it dawns on Elgfróði who his guest is, they get into a fight where Elgfróði proves himself the stronger. He advises Bǫðvarr to go to King Hrólfr and become one of his men. When they are about to part company, he makes Bǫðvarr drink some blood from his calf so that his brother can increase his strength. Bǫðvarr visits his other brother, Þórir, too. Þórir is not at home, but as the two brothers look so much alike, everybody, including his wife, thinks that it is Þórir who has come home. Bǫðvarr sleeps with the queen, but not under the same blanket, which surprises her, and he tells her the truth. After this, they talk together every night until his brother returns.

When Þórir returns home, the joy of seeing each other is great, but Bǫðvarr soon sets out and comes to Denmark. Because of a terrible storm, he seeks shelter for the night with a peasant. When he mentions Hrólfr and his warriors, the peasant-woman begins to cry and then tells him how her son Hǫttr is being kept a prisoner against his will at the king's castle where the king's warriors have placed him in a pile of bones and throw bones at him, so that most of the time he is in imminent danger of death. Bǫðvarr does not care for such behaviour and, when he comes to the king's hall, he pulls Hǫttr out of the pile of bones and places him next to himself on the bench. Hǫttr is terrified of being hit by one of the warrior's bones, but Bǫðvarr tells him to be quiet, takes him outside and washes him. In the evening, the retainers come into the hall and start throwing bones towards Hǫttr and Bǫðvarr. When a large bone comes flying through the air, Bǫðvarr grabs it and throws it back so that it kills the one who threw it. Bǫðvarr is now summoned before the king and asked if he will be one of his men. Bǫðvarr agrees to this on condition that both he and Hǫttr are placed on the bench nearest the king. This is accepted, although the king cannot see any honour in Hǫttr.

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[53] In this connection, we encounter the same motif which we also saw in connection with Sigmundr, namely that they must pull a sword out of the rock (or the tree). Only Bǫðvarr is able to do this. It is, of course, a widespread feature in popular narratives but, seen in connection with initiation, we may ask where it comes from. It may be a question of a Celtic influence, but also here it happens in connection with an initiation-like scenario. The possibility of a pagan ritualistic feature cannot be excluded and it is well known that folktales contain several of these.

The following passage (Chapters 35 and 36) will be given in full:

> As the Yuletime drew near, gloom settled over the men. Bodvar asked Hott what caused their dejection. Hott told him that a huge, monstrous beast had come there the past two winters. 'The creature has wings on its back and it usually flies. For two autumns now it has come here, causing much damage. No weapon can bite into it, and the king's champions, even the greatest among them, do not return home.'
>
> Bodvar said, 'The hall is not so well manned as I had thought, if one animal alone could destroy the king's lands and his livestock.'
>
> Hott said, 'It is not an animal, rather it is the greatest of trolls.'
>
> Then came Yule eve, and the king said, 'It is my wish that tonight men remain calm, making no noise, and I forbid any of my men to put themselves in danger with the beast. The livestock will be left to their fate, because I do not want to lose any of my men.' Everyone faithfully promised the king to do as he asked.
>
> Bodvar stole away in the night and took Hott with him. Hott went only after being forced to do so, declaring that he was being steered straight toward death. Bodvar said, 'Things will turn out for the better.'
>
> They now left the hall behind them, with Bodvarr carrying Hott because he was so frightened. They saw the

creature, and immediately Hott started to scream as loudly as he could, crying that the beast would swallow him. Bodvar told the dog to be quiet and threw him down on the moor. There he lay, not a little scared, at the same time not daring to go home.

Bodvar now went against the beast. He was hampered by his sword, which, as he tried to draw it, stuck fast in its scabbard. Determined, Bodvar urged the sword out until the scabbard squeaked. Then he grasped the scabbard and the sword came out of the sheath. Immediately he thrust it up under the beast's shoulder, striking so hard that the blade reached quickly into the heart. Then the beast fell dead to the ground.

After this encounter Bodvar went to the place where Hott was lying. He picked up Hott and carried him to where the beast lay dead. Hott was trembling violently.

Bodvar said, 'Now you will drink the beast's blood.' For a while Hott was unwilling, although certainly he dared do nothing else. Bodvar made him drink two large mouthfuls as well as eat some of the beast's heart. After that Bodvar seized Hott, and they fought each other for a long time.

Bodvar said, 'You have now become remarkably strong, and I expect that from this day forward you will have no fear of King Hrolf's retainers.'

Hott replied, 'From now on, I will fear neither them nor you.'

'Then, Hott, my friend,' said Bodvar, 'things have turned out well. Let us now go back to the beast, raising him up in such a way that men will think the creature must be alive.'

They did just that and afterward went home. They kept these events to themselves, and so no one knew what they had done.

In the morning, the king asked what was known about the beast, whether it had visited them in the night. He was told that all the livestock were safe in the pens, unharmed. The king ordered men to inquire if there were any indications that the beast had visited them. The guard went out but quickly returned. They told the king that the beast was coming toward them, furiously advancing on the stronghold. The king ordered his retainers to be valiant. Each was to do his best according to his courage, so that they might overcome this monster. Obeying the king's command, the men prepared themselves.

The king looked toward to the beast, saying finally. 'I see no movement in it, but which one of you will now seize the opportunity to go against it?'

Bodvar said, 'That would likely satisfy the curiosity of the bravest man. Hott, my friend, throw off the slander that men have laid on you, claiming that you have neither spirit nor courage. Go and kill the beast. You can see that no one else is too eager to do so.'

'Right,' said Hott, 'I will set myself to that task.'

The king said, 'I do not know where your courage has come from, Hott, but much has changed about you in a short time.'

Hott said, 'For this task, give me the sword Golden hilt, the one that you are holding, and then I will either kill the beast or find my own death.'

King Hrolf said, 'That sword is not to be carried except by a man who is both strong in body and noble in spirit.'

Hott replied, 'Assume, Sire, that I am made from such a mould.'

The king retorted, 'How can one tell? Perhaps more has changed about you than is evident. Few would think that you are the same person. Take the sword, for it will serve you well if my instincts about you turn out to be correct.'

Then Hott went boldly against the beast, thrusting at it as soon as he was within striking distance. The beast fell down dead.

Bodvar said, 'See, Sire, what he has now accomplished.'

The king answered, 'Certainly he has changed greatly, but Hott alone did not kill the beast; rather you did it.'

Bodvar said, 'That may be.'

> The king said, ‘I knew when you came here that few would be your equal, but it seems to me that your finest achievement is that you have made Hott into another champion. He was previously thought to be a man in whom there was little probability of much luck. I do not want him called Hott any longer; instead, from now on he will be called Hjalti. You will now be called after the sword Golden Hilt.’[54] (Byock 1998, 50-2)

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[54] Ok sem leið at jólum, gerðust menn ókátir. Böðvarr spyrr Hött, hverju þetta sætti. Hann segir honum, at dýr eitt hafi þar komit tvá vetr í samt, mikit ok ógurligt, - ‘ok hefir vængi á bakinu, ok flýgr þat jafnan. Tvau haust hefir þat nú hingat vitjat ok gert mikinn skaða. Á þat bíta ekki vápn, en kappar konungs koma ekki heim, þeir sem at eru einna mestir.’

Böðvarr mælti: ‘Ekki er höllin svá vel skipuð sem ek ætlaði, ef eitt dýr skal hér eyða ríki ok fé konungsins.’

Höttr sagði: ‘Þat er ekki dýr, heldr er þat tröll.’

Nú kemr jólaaftan. Þá mælti konnungr: ‘Nú vil ek, at menn sé kyrrir ok hljóðir í nótt, ok banna ek öllum mínum mönnum at ganga í nokkurn háska við dýrit, en fé ferr eftir því, sem auðnar. Menn mína vil ek ekki missa.’

Allir heita hér góðu um at gera eftir því, sem konungr bauð.

Böðvarr leynist í burt um nóttina. Hann lætr Hött fara með sér, ok gerir hann þat nauðaugr, ok kallaði hann sér stýrt í bana. Böðvarr segir, at betr mundu takast. Þeir ganga í burt frá höllinni, ok verðr Böðvarr at bera hann, svá er hann hræddr.

Nú sjá þeir dýrit. Ok þvi næst æpir Höttr slíkt sem hann má ok kvað dýrit mundu gleypa hann. Böðvarr bað bikkjuna hans þegja ok kastar honum niðr í mosann, ok þar liggr hann ok eigi með öllu óhræddr. Eigi þorir hann heim at fara heldr. Nú gengr Böðvarr móti dýrinu. Þat hæfir honum, at sverðit er fast ií umgerðinnni, ok nú fær hann brugðit umgerðinni, svá at sverðit gengr ór slíðrunum, ok leggr þegar undir bægi dýrsins ok svá fast, at stóð í hjartanu, ok datt þá dýrit till jarðar dautt niðr.

Efter þat ferr hann þangat, sem Höttr liggr. Böðvarr tekr hann up ok berr þangat, sem dýrit liggr dautt. Höttr skelfr ákaft.

Böðvarr mælti: ‘Nú skultu drekka blóð dýrsins.’

Hann er lengi tregr, en þó þorir hann víst eigi annat. Böðvarr lætr hann drekka tvá sopa stóra. Hann lét hann ok eta nokkut af dýrshjartanu. Eftir þetta tekr Böðvarr til hans, ok áttust þeir við lengi.

Böðvarr mælti: ‘Helzt ertu nú sterkr orðinn, ok ekki vænti ek, at þú hræðist nú hirðmenn Hrólfs konungs.’

Höttr sagði: ‘Eigi mun ek þá hræðast ok eigi þik upp frá þessu.’

‘Vel er þá orðit, Höttr félagi. Förum vit nú til ok reisum upp dýrit ok búum svá um, at aðrir ætli kvikt muni vera.’

Þeir gera nú svá. Eftir þat fara þeir heim ok hafa kyrrt um sik, ok veit engi maðr, hvat þeir hafa iðjat.

In the rest of the saga, Hjalti is indeed a great warrior among King Hrólfr's retainers.

Bǫðvarr

That is the story about Bǫðvarr and Hǫttr. If we first consider Bǫðvarr, there is not much that immediately directs our thought towards initiation in connection with his joining Hrólfr's retainers when this episode is seen in isolation. But on closer analysis, there are several features which can be included unproblematically in an initiation sequence. The

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Konungr spyr um morguninn, hvart þeir viti til dýrsins, hvárt þat hafi nokkut þangat vitjat um nóttina. Honum var sagt, at fé allt væri heilt í grindum ok ósakat. Konungr bað menn forvitnast, hvárt engi sæi líkendi til, at þat hefði heim komit. Varðmenn gerðu svá ok kómu skjótt aftr ok sögðu konungi, at dýrit færi þar ok heldr geyst at borginni. Konungr bað hirðmenn vera hrausta ok duga nú hvern eftir því, sem hann hefði hug til, ok ráða af óvætt þenna. Ok svá var gert sem konungr bauð, at þeir bjuggu sik til þess.
Konungr horfði á dýrit ok mælti síðan: 'Enga sé ek för á dýrinu, en hverr vill nú taka kaup einn ok ganga í móti því?'
Böðvarr mælti: 'Þat væri næsta hraustS manns forvitnisbót. Höttr félagi, rektu nú af ér illmælit þat, at menn láta sem engi krellr né dugr muni í þér vera. Far nú ok drép þú dýrit; máttu sjá, at engi er allfúss til þess annarra.'
'Ja,' sagði Höttr, 'ek mun til þessa ráðast.'
Konungr mælti: 'Ekki veit ek, hvaðan þessi hreysti er at þér komin, Höttr, ok mikit hefir um þik skipazt á skammri stundu.'
Höttr mælti: 'Gef mér til sverðit Gullinhjalta, er þú heldr á, ok skal ek þá fella dýrit eða fá bana.'
Hrólfr konungr mælti: 'Þetta sverð er ekki beranda nema þeim manni, sem bæði er góðr drengr ok hraustr.'
Höttr sagði: 'Svá skaltu til ætla, at mér sé svá háttat.'
Konungr mælti: 'Hvat má vita, nema fleira hafi skipzt um hagi þína en sjá þykkir? En fæstir menn þykkjast þik kenna, at þú sért inn sami maðr. Nú tak við sverðinu ok njót manna bezt, ef þetta er vel unnit.'
Síðan gengr Höttr at dýrinu alldjarfliga ok höggr til þess, þá hann kemr í höggfæri, ok fellr dýrit niðr dautt.
Böðvarr mælti: 'Sjáið nú, herra, hvat hann hefir til unnit.'
Konungr segir: 'Víst hefir hann mikit skipazt, en ekki hefir Höttr einn dýrit drepit, heldr hefir þú þat gert.'
Böðvarr segir: 'Vera má, at svá sé.'
Konungr segir: 'Vissa ek, þá þú komst hér, at fáir mundu þínir jafningjar vera, en þat þykki mér þó þitt verk frækiligast, at þú hefir gert hér annan kappa, þar Höttr er ok óvænligr þótti til mikillar giftu. Ok nú vil ek hann heiti eigi Höttr lengr, ok skal hann heita Hjalti upp frá þessu. Skultu heita eftir sverðinu Gullinhjalta.'(*FSN* I, 66-9)

first thing we notice is that he is the son of a woman and a bear, or at least of a figure who is half bear, and so as a matter of course can be categorised as a liminal actor. Besides, he is conceived while the father is on the border between life and death, therefore in a liminal situation. His descent from a bear is never repudiated as, in Hrólfr's last battle, Bǫðvarr fights in the shape of a bear (Chapter 50). Secondly, he drinks the blood of a being who is stronger than himself and thus increases his strength – a feature we have come across several times and which is repeated in connection with Hǫttr. One can therefore state with confidence that Bǫðvarr's birth and youth, before be arrives at Lejre, have prepared him for the life and position he occupies for the rest of his life and which is irreversible: he is a warrior in a courtly retinue and with a king who clearly has a special affinity to Óðinn (Chapters 39 and 46), who first exposes his devotees to tests and helps them in this, but finally fails them because they reject his gifts.[55]

A tripartite sequence, which runs parallel to that of initiation, can be difficult to perceive because the various phases are not clearly separated, but the sequence seems to a certain degree to follow Bǫðvarr's pattern of physical movements: his residence at home with his mother naturally forms the initial phase; his journey to the cave where he obtains his father's sword equals the separation phase; his sojourn with his brothers, especially with Elgfróði, forms the liminal phase;[56] the further journey to Hrólfr the integration phase and the life at Lejre the final phase.

There are only sporadic traces of the binary oppositional pairs which we have discovered elsewhere. In the initial and final phases, Bǫðvarr lives in royal castles, whereas in the intervening phases he lives mainly in caves and huts where numinous objects are acquired (in the cave, the sword which always kills when it is drawn from the scabbard, and in the hut, Elgfróði's blood). Both places are characterised as liminal: the cave in which the bear and his mother conceived the three brothers, and the hut which is situated in a place where there are no human beings. It is clear from this that there is an opposition of civilised versus uncivilised present. But before Bǫðvarr arrives in Denmark, he also visits his second brother, whose wife he sleeps with; and they talk every night until Þórir comes home. The sexual element which we have come across several times previously, seems also to be present here, although the narrative emphasises that they were not lying under the same blanket. This feature forms an almost exact parallel to Sigurðr's visit to Brynhildr in which a sword is placed between them because Brynhildr is to be married to Sigurðr's foster-brother, Gunnarr. Whether this is a literary feature intended to show the hero's firm character, which may be a manipulation of a more original feature in which the heroes were not quite so tough, or whether the motif actually signals abstinence, sexuality is at least thematised and the liminal aspect emphasised by the 'abnormality' of the situation. If the first suggestion is correct, both Bǫðvarr and Sigurðr engage in intercourse with a brother's[57] wife (a wife-to-be or an actual wife) and, if the latter is the case, the abstinence must be considered as quite unusual in itself. It is also possible that the upper world/underworld opposition is present by virtue of the fact that Bǫðvarr acquires his supernatural sword in a cave, a locality that connotes the underworld also in other instances. We have, therefore, a liminal phase which, in spite of the epic frame, contains several features that also contrast with regard to the subject's 'normal' life.

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[55] We have already seen in connection with Sigurðr, Sigmundr and Hadingus that Óðinn has a special attachment to kings – also as initiator.

[56] Referring to our earlier analyses, it seems as if Elgfróði in this passage can be regarded as the initiator: he is the one who sets the tests and the one who provides the subject with the means (the blood) that is needed in order to obtain the necessary strength (see below on Bǫðvarr's own role in Hǫttr's initiation).

Finally, both the sword with its supernatural qualities and the blood from a person against whom the subject has fought a fight (although a fictitious one), are sufficient to render them as numinous objects. Nor can we exclude the possibility that the conversation that takes place between Bǫðvarr and Þórir's wife has the character of the provision of knowledge parallel to Sigrdrífa's instruction of Sigurðr, although the text itself does not hint at anything of that kind. But the very fact that the narrative mentions that they conversed *(skrǫ́fuðust)* might perhaps indicate that originally it was a matter of something more than and different from simply killing time until the brother came home.

In this way it is possible to see an almost complete initiation sequence connected with Bǫðvarr, changing the subject to a different person than he was before – a new person who, in what follows, is among other things able to function as an initiator of others, just as

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[57] A blood-brother as far as Sigurðr is concerned.

Sigmundr is able to initiate Sinfjǫtli. But the initiation sequence is far clearer with regard to the narrative's second subject, Hǫttr.

Hǫttr

On the face of it, we have here a simple story about how a frightened boy becomes a formidable warrior. And there certainly are various features in the narrative, which in themselves act as incidental trappings of a folktale figure, but which nevertheless seem to form a pattern if we consider them as elements in an overarching structure. And this structure, we will see, is the one that we have come across in previous analyses, namely the structure of initiation. Other researchers have indicated that certain features in the narrative may remind us of elements of initiation (e.g. Dumézil 1959, 111-12), but they have never undertaken a systematic analysis of its structure and symbolism to determine the extent to which the text is really comparable with initiation rituals.

If we first examine the narrative, it is clear that the process Hǫttr undergoes from being a frightened weakling to becoming one of the most striking warriors in Hrólfr's retinue is irreversible. He dies as a paticularly courageous man. We can also see that the process can be divided into three phases. The initial phase takes place in the hall where Hǫttr sits in his heap of bones. Then he comes under the protection of Bǫðvarr who washes him, among other things. According to the logic of the saga, he does this simply because Hǫttr is filthy when Bǫðvarr first sees him, but it is hardly an exaggeration to see here the first part of the process that follows, suggesting that we are dealing with reminiscences of a purification rite as an element in Hǫttr's separation from his old way of life. From then on, Bǫðvarr and Hǫttr remain together until Hǫttr becomes Hjalti. The events immediately following take place in the hall in which Hǫttr sees how a proper warrior deals with a bone that is thrown towards him: he hurls it back and kills the presumptuous man. When the monster appears at Yule-tide, [58] the liminal phase begins: Hǫttr leaves the hall with his protector and goes to a place that is clearly characterised as an Other World. The monster is here, and is thus identified as an actor from The Other World. In the first instance, Hǫttr is thrown down into a bog where he remains while the killing takes place and from which he does not emerge until he is forced to drink the blood and eat some of the heart of the monster. Irrespective of what other connotations it may have had, the bog is a watery area, and as such it probably symbolised that which is amorphous and that which is chaotic, both often characteristics of The Other World.[59] After this, the monster is killed and Hǫttr thus consumes some elements which originate from The Other World, namely the blood and the heart. This consumption, which is a consequence of the killing, is the high point in Hǫttr's transformation. Then he and Bǫðvarr go back to the hall. It remains now only for Hǫttr to show the king that he has, in fact, acquired the qualifications that make him into a great warrior, which is done by means of the sham killing, and the whole sequence is concluded by his receiving a new name, an extremely common feature of initiations that naturally symbolises the fact that he has become a new person.

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[58] The timing is hardly a matter of chance. Irrespective of when the pagan Yule was celebrated, it is at some time in the dark season of the year (at the beginning of the winter, at the solstice or later, cf. Feilberg 1904, 94 and Nordberg 2006, 100-18). It is a dangerous time in which the dead have special power, and in which perhaps Óðinn, too, (cf. the name Jólnir) is thought especially to be present. In other words, it is a season that possesses strong liminal characteristics.

There is no doubt what makes Hǫttr into a new person. It is the consumption of the blood and the heart, which, as we have seen, are the seat of a being's qualities. These therefore constitute the numinous objects which forever change Hǫttr's existence. Finally, it is clear that we are dealing with a set of binary oppositions: the hall versus the bog, which can be abstracted to a kind of culture/nature dichotomy; we have life versus death by virtue of the fact that the killing takes place in the liminal space and that the death of the animal is a prerequisite for the spiritual life which, for the warrior, consists in courage and strength.

Bǫðvarr's role in the narrative can be included in the sequence unproblematically as part of the general initiatory structure. There is hardly any doubt that he functions as initiator and in this capacity instructs the initiand or neophyte and procures the numinous objects for him. In the same way as he himself fought with Elgfróði, he fights with Hǫttr, who now proves to have become strong.

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[59] The bog can perhaps be seen as a reminiscence, which may be connected with the so-called bog-sacrifices that may have been sacrifices to a god of the Óðinn-type. The watery element in a bog can, besides, be assumed hypothetically to have been associated with the water that was used in the pouring of water on a baby. In that case, we can further associate it with one of the most widespread symbols known from initiation, namely that which deals with the relationship between death and rebirth. It must, however, be emphasised that this interpretation is purely hypothetical and will not play any further part in this analysis.

The last, but perhaps the most important, element to be examined is the apparently absurd episode with the animal which, in Saxo's version, is said to be a bear. It is first killed by Bǫðvarr, only to be 'killed' again by Hǫttr. As we saw above (Chapter 7.1), Dumézil compares this element to the episode with Mǫkkurkálfi in the myth about Þórr's battle with Hrungnir (*Skm* chapter 17). The common feature in these two myths is that an antagonistic creature which looks dangerous but is, in fact, not so, is killed by the young hero. But whereas the episode in the Hrungnir-myth is quite obscure, it seems easily explicable in the Hǫttr - episode when the latter is compared with the structure of initiation. Just as in Tacitus's *Germania* 31, where we are told that among the Chatti the young warriors had to kill an enemy before they could assume a normal civilised appearance (cf. Chapter 9.1 below), Hǫttr does not become a warrior until after he has killed an 'enemy'. But, in contrast to the Chatti warriors, Hǫttr's adversary is not a normal enemy, and it is not a question of Hǫttr becoming a common warrior, since he becomes a member of the most famous known warrior band. If Saxo was actually referring to an old tradition when he claimed the animal was a bear, it becomes possible to associate this narrative with the entire berserk-complex, because the berserks, as appears not least from several passages in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, would comprise an especially outstanding group of warriors among the king's men.[60] These warriors, who were thought to have had some of the qualities of animals, such as superhuman strength and ferocity, have undoubtedly been understood more or less as bears or other animals in a symbolic sense (cf. the term *úlfheðnar* 'wolf skins'). This clearly appears from Bǫðvarr's transformation into a bear in chapter 50, and perhaps also from his descent. The saga indicates here that, in order to become a member of a special warrior band, one must kill (at least symbolically) a creature that has greater strength than oneself – a creature that has a symbolic affinity with the members of the same league into which the subject is to enter. The creature is further a liminal being in the sense that it is either characterised as a representative of the 'uncivilised' world or of that which belong to animals or as a 'both-and-category' which is both human and animal at the same time. Whether the 'battle' is against a dangerous animal or a human actor, who symbolically represents this animal, is therefore not crucial for the religious ideas connected with this symbolic representation, since in both cases the process deals with special warrior-groups who had been consecrated into this special status, because they had attained some of the qualities of bears and wolves. This means, therefore, that the bear or 'the animal' does not only represent an enemy, but also an adversary who is already established as what the young warrior must become. By this means, he will prove himself worthy to become a member of this special warrior league[61] which is distinguished by the animal qualities of its members (cf. Bǫðvarr's descent).

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[60] The literary use of the designation *berserkir* for roaming thugs who had to be conquered by a hero – a *topos* in several sagas – may have its roots in older notions that the young hero must pass a test, which is a battle against a 'bear', cf. the etymology of the word *berserkr* (*ber* = bear and *serkr* = shirt). i.e. warriors in bear suits (see, however, Liberman 2005).

The absurdity of the animal being dead when Hǫttr is to prove his courage in front of the king can hardly be explained outside a ritual framework because it is precisely in such a context that it becomes possible to represent a killing as an action relatively free from danger, which is crucial if the action is to remain within the control of society. It cannot be decided whether this was a supplement to a killing that had actually occurred, as Tacitus seems to imply, or whether it stood alone. The point is only that a sham killing is the ritual representation of a real killing, and Hǫttr's deed can therefore only be understood if the ritual representation is included in the interpretation.

There are thus several features in the account of Bǫðvarr and Hǫttr that do not immediately seem connected but which become fully illuminated when they are seen as elements in an initiation. With regard to Hǫttr, it even looks as if we have the most 'ritualistic' of all the scenarios we have analysed, but at the same time it is evident that the structure and symbolism are very close to several of the 'mythic' scenarios we have examined previously.

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[61] Svipdagr must also kill a berserk before he can become Aðils' man (chapter 19), and both Bǫðvarr and Hjalti conquer berserks while they are staying with King Hrólfr, though not until they have reached the final phase (chapter 37). It is, again, clear that a possible ritual was not known by the saga author, but the recurrent contrast between the heroes and the most prominent warriors indicates a pattern generated by ideas connected with ritual acts.

8.5. Other Initiation Scenarios

The narrative passages analysed in this chapter are certainly not the only ones that may have contained reminiscences of an initiation problematic. They have been chosen because the accounts are sufficiently copious to make it possible to apply the four fundamental criteria that we established in Chapter 3. In other accounts it will also be possible to see elements which may be connected with initiation scenarios, but it will only be a matter of isolated elements, so that it is difficult to distinguish between initiation scenarios and pure folktale features.

As we saw in Chapter 2.2, Danielli and others (e.g. Arent 1969, 184-99) have thought they were able to find traces of initiation in *Grettis saga*, which is certainly not impossible, but convincing evidence is lacking. In the same way, we could certainly find features of the same nature in many of the *fornaldarsögur* and in Saxo, where a hero, as an element in the acquisition of his hero status, has to experience a series of 'tests' which will qualify him for this status. This is probably the case in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* (cf. Kroesen 1985). The problem is that such tests form a natural part of the narrative, in such a way that there is quite simply no need for other explanations for the motifs included than those which arise directly from the narrative context. It is different with regard to the heroes we have examined in this chapter. In the cases of Hadingus, Sigurðr, Sigmundr, Sinfjǫtli, Bǫðvarr and Hǫttr, we have seen that there are elements included which can only be explained if they are viewed as elements in an initiation sequence, and, if they are so regarded, there are virtually no problems in explaining them. On the whole it is true that an explanatory model, if it is to have any value, must be able to explain elements in a more adequate manner than other models can.

Further illustrative material will not be included here, even though, as mentioned, traces in other narratives could probably be found which, we may assume, could touch on the initiation problematic.[62] It is also possible that an analytical survey of a larger quantity of source material could, in fact, bring sequences into the open, which could refer in all probability to the initiation sequence. However, the resultant uncertainty would certainly be greater than in those scenarios we have already analysed, nor would it provide us with any essential information with regard to these. For example, an investigation of the whole corpus of the *fornaldarsögur* would be a different project from the one undertaken here, which aims to show that the initiation model forms a perspective with considerable explanatory value when it comes to otherwise obscure accounts and elements in them. In Chapter 10 we will return to this point and show how all the elements together form a semantic network in which each individual element adds a new meaning to the general basic structure, which reaches far beyond initiation in a narrow sense.

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[62] One example may be the title character in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, who kills the dragon that keeps Þóra a prisoner (cf. McTurk 1991, 35-7): Ragnarr wears hairy

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clothes, which protect him against the dragon's blood, clothes which perhaps could be interpreted as a pendant to a bear suit. In one way or another, this is a test of manhood (the killing takes place when he is fifteen years old); afterwards he is married to the earl's daughter and thus obtains a new status. And finally, we could also argue that the dragon is a liminal creature with some affinity to the chthonic. There are therefore several things at play, which reminds us of the accounts we have examined above. But, even if several things thus point in the direction of an initiation scenario, it is not an inevitable model of interpretation. The same could also be said about *Beowulf* in the way that Arent has analysed the epic poem (1969, 149-84) and probably also of other epic scenarios (there seem to be individual features in Saxo's account of Gram and Hotherus, among others, which could be analysed as reminiscences of initiation symbolism).

Chapter 9

Rituals

As a point of departure for the choice of sources for initiation rituals, we will keep to the classification that van Gennep established, omitting the cyclical rituals he deals with in Chapter 9 of his book, as we indicated above in Chapter 3.3. Such transitional or initiation rituals, which we can find in all religions, are, as mentioned, not described in any early Scandinavian text in a way that gives us a detailed picture of the sequence of the ritual if, for the moment, we disregard Ibn Fadlan's description of the cremation of a Rus chieftain by the river Volga.

Obviously, this absence of information does not mean that such rituals did not exist. We have already seen in the mythical material that various elements hint at a ritual practice in connection with becoming a warrior and a king. Further, those sources that describe rituals in general in Scandinavian religion are, as mentioned, of such a nature that we cannot attribute importance to the *argumenta ex silentio* (cf. Chapter 4.3) with a view to rejecting the existence of certain types of rituals. On the other hand, we will only be able to reconstruct their symbolism and structure on the basis of these sources with the greatest care and with many limitations, often with reference to the material discussed above.

9.1 Rituals Associated with Birth, Puberty and Weddings

Birth

Our knowledge of actual rituals associated with birth from the pagan period in Scandinavia is extremely inadequate. From the folklore of the Middle Ages and later, we know that a whole series of various customs were attached to the event, in which partly the mother, partly the child formed the focal point[1] (see Gotfredsen 1956-78 with references, together with Näsström 2002, 70-2). It is impossible to distinguish clearly here between what has been inspired by Christianity and what is purely pagan.

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[1] In fact, two different rituals are involved here, which are both occasioned by the birth, such as we also will see is the case with death (see Chapter 9.2). One ritual sequence was to make the child a member of society; another was to bring the mother into her new status.

There is no reason to doubt that rituals took place in connection with a birth, as both the known practice of sprinkling the baby with water *(ausa vatni)*[2] as well as the giving of a name (e.g. *Rþ* 34) must obviously be considered as rites in a connected ritual sequence, the aim of which was to incorporate the child into society (de Vries 1956-57, I, 179 and Näsström 1996). The problem is that we have no information from any source about how and where in the ritual sequence these rites were in fact carried out. Yet, although we have no textual examples, it seems likely that the pouring of water over the child should be understood as a *rite de séparation* with a cleansing function, whereas giving the child a name should probably be seen as a *rite d'agrégation* which, so to speak, invests the newly-born child with the identity which it is to function under in society.[3]

The possibility that some form or other of divination was carried out in association with a birth cannot be excluded either. *HhundI* stanzas 1-8 indicates this when – admittedly in a mythical scenario – we hear that the norns arrived after Helgi has been born and twisted with strength the threads of destiny *(snero þær af afli ørlǫgsþátto)* (stanza 3/2). This indicates that numinous knowledge, in this case knowledge about the future, played some part in rituals associated with birth, although we have no possibility of forming any impression of the actual performance of the ritual from the extant texts. The extent to which we can use this particular text as support for the nature of general birth rituals is also debatable. First of all, its whole tone is 'mythical' and, secondly, Helgi is clearly not a common child: he is a king, he is a kinsman of Sigmundr and destined to become one of the greatest warriors.

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[2] Water played a role in initiations other than name-giving. *Hávm* 158 indicates that Óðinn himself can *verpa vatni á* a young man *(ungr þegn)*, probably as an element in either a puberty or a warrior ritual.

[3] There is no doubt that a person's name played a considerable part in the individual's identity. Whether this significance has had anything to do with the transmigration of souls cannot be discussed further here, but it seems obvious to couple the two things together (cf. the end prose in both *HHj* and *Hhund* I). *Harðar saga* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, 22) chapter 8 says that it is murder to kill children who have had water poured over them, whereas before this happens they can be put out for exposure. Name-giving must therefore be a ritual which integrates a person into the society itself.

The elements of uncertainty that affect an examination of symbolism and structure associated with birth are, thus, too great for us to be able to reconstruct a ritual sequence that can be interpreted in accordance with the four criteria we have previously set out. *A priori*, it seems likely that rituals of an initiatory type took place in association with births, but our material does not afford us a closer view of the specific rites and symbolism connected with them.

Puberty

It is paradoxical that puberty rituals are hardly represented in the Scandinavian source material, even though these particular rituals have been of the greatest interest within the history of religion and social anthropology in general.[4] The material relating to the South Germanic area is likewise problematical, although we seem to be a little better placed here, as we shall see below. In spite of this general lack of evidence, the only monograph so far to have focussed exclusively on initiation was written in connection with puberty initiations, namely Weiser's *Altgermanische Jünglingsweihen und Männerbünde* from 1927. This book has already been discussed in Chapters 2.2 and 8.3. It has many good qualities, not least that there is an excellent collection of material, but there are two general problems that emerge again and again. The first is, as we see in so many works from that period, that the whole representation is wrapped up in an evolutionary perspective and, consequently, uses comparative material in a completely uncontrolled manner. The second problem, which is the more important at this juncture, is that she does not on the whole distinguish between puberty consecrations (*Jünglingsweihe*) on the one hand and consecrations into warrior bands on the other. She does attempt this in the first part of the book, which is arranged 'ethnographically', but in connection with the Germanic material the two categories in most cases merge into one. Weiser uses Tacitus primarily to shed light on South Germanic conditions, and there is little doubt that we can find some dispersed information about initiation rites here, notwithstanding the paucity of information to be had from the old Roman about structure, symbolism and meaning, mainly because he does not inform us about any entire sequence. Tacitus is primarily interested in the meaning that the various 'customs' have for social morality and not in the symbolism that also inhered in them.[5]

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[4] It is striking that Jan de Vries in his very comprehensive study of Germanic religion mentions birth-, wedding- and burial rituals (and, of course, warrior initiations) (de Vries 1956-7, I, 178-83 and 483-505), but there is no mention of puberty rituals. True enough, he speaks about *die jungen Krieger* 'the young warriors' (e.g. 1956-7, I,494) who have to experience an initiation ritual, but, as will become clear below, de Vries is here in agreement with Weiser and others who neither wish to, nor are they able to, distinguish between puberty- and warrior initiations, although the former clearly belong to Eliade's category 1, whereas the latter just as clearly belong to category 2 (Eliade 1975, 2).

In connection with the Scandinavian material, it is clear that Weiser is actually discussing warrior bands (1927, 43-82), although she mentions that the period of consecration lasted from when the initiands were twelve years old until they turned eighteen, which inevitably makes one think of puberty rites (1927, 72).

As far as the South Germanic material is concerned, we will briefly examine what Tacitus has to say about the Chatti in *Germania* (Chapter 31):

> The ceremony, practised by other German peoples only occasionally, and by individual hardihood, has with the Chatti become a convention, to let the hair and beard grow when a youth has attained manhood, and to put off the facial garb vowed and held as due to manliness only after an enemy has been slain: standing above the sanguinary spoil, they remove the face's cover, and advertise that then and not before have they paid the price of their birth-pangs, and are worthy of their kin and country. Cowards and weaklings remain unkempt. The bravest also wear a ring of iron – the badge of shame on other occasions among this people – in token of chains, until each man frees himself by the slaughter of an enemy: this symbolism is very popular, and men already growing grey still wear this uniform for the pointing finger of friends and foe. Every battle begins with these men: the front rank is made up of them and is a curious sight. Nay, even in peace they allow no tamer life to enervate them.

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[5] The considerable discussion about the value of Tacitus as a source will not be taken up at this place. It is, after all, of secondary importance here. A recent balanced evaluation (but not beyond dispute) is Timpe 1992.

> None of them has house or land or any business: wherever they present themselves they are entertained, wasteful of the substance of others, indifferent to personal possessions, until the weakness of old age makes them unequal to heroism so hardy. (Warmington, 1970, 179-81)[6]

Here we have two different groups of warriors, the young men in general and the most valiant ones *(fortissimi)*, who are not allowed to own property or have any other obligations.[7] Weiser is aware of this distinction and compares these 'professional' soldiers to berserks (Weiser 1927, 36-7), which indicates that we are no longer dealing with the group of adult men generally (apart from those who remain *ignavus et imbellis* 'cowardly and unfit for war'). This passage seems to indicate that among the Chatti there were tests designed to show that a man had become an adult – tests distinguished from those that professional warriors had to undergo. We are not informed about their symbolism, however. To let one's hair and beard grow seems to have been institutionalised in a way so we must understand this as an element of an initiation, and in that case as an expression for a non-civilised condition, which is a phenomenon, as we saw above, that is characteristic also of Scandinavian liminality. We will, however, not attempt to interpret the Tacitus passage further here,[8] but only emphasise once more that Tacitus's description, whether or not it is credible in all particulars, deals with South Germanic conditions in the first century, and therefore can only give a hint that such rituals *may* have been inherited from a proto-Germanic tradition.

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[6] Et aliis Germanorum populis usurpatum raro et privata euiusque audentia, apud Chattos in consensum vertit, ut primum adoleverint, crinem barhamque submittere, nec nisi hoste caeso exuere votivum obligatumque virtuti oris habitum. super sanguinem et spolia revelant frontem seque tum demum pretia nascendi rettulisse dignosque patria ac parentibus ferunt: ignavis et imbellibus manet squalor. fortissimus quisque ferreum insuper anulum – ignominiosum id genti – velut vinculum gestat, donec se caede hostis absolvat. plurimis Chattorum hic placet habitus, iamque canent insignes et hostibus simul suisque monstrati, omnium penes hos initia pugnarum; haec prima semper acies, visu nova; nam ne in pace quidem vultu mitiore mansuescunt. nulli domus aut ager aut aliqua cura ; prout ad quemque venere, aluntur, prodigi alieni, contemptores sui, donec exanguis senectus tam durae virtuti impares faciat. (Warmington 1970, 178-80)

[7] I take it for granted that *Omnium penes hos* ... only applies to the bravest ones, as a society would otherwise hardly be able to exist. Fehrle (1959, 118) understands the passage in the same way: *Diese Freiwilligen der älteren Mannschaft können im Wehrdienst bleiben* ... 'These volunteers of the older warriors could remain in the forces...'. Only a limited number of men remained warriors in this way. For a similar understanding, see Perl 1990, 214-15.

Weddings

On the subject of weddings, we are not much better placed than we are with rituals that have to do with births. We have no actual descriptions of wedding rituals that could give us an insight into their symbolism and structure. True, there are a few fragments of rituals extant (cf. Näsström 2002, 77-8), but an entire sequence does not survive.

The phenomenon of entry into the institution of marriage has given rise to rituals, which may be categorised as transitional rituals (see e.g. van Gennep 1909, 165-209) in so many cultures that a culture which does not have such a practice must be considered exceptional. Entering into marriage is a transition in more than one sense: firstly, one of the spouses must leave his or her family and join the family of the other. In Scandinavia, as well as in other predominantly patriarchal societies, it is naturally the woman who leaves her family and becomes a member of her husband's family (de Vries 1956-57, I, 186), which in itself seems to be a sufficient justification for a transitional ritual. But, in addition, it is as a rule a matter of beginning a new chapter in their life for both parties, as they leave behind some of the possibilities (and limitations) that are attached to life as an unmarried person and in return acquire those that are characteristic of the condition of being a couple. The most obvious thing to mention here is the fertility aspect: the ability to have children and thus to continue the family.[9]

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[8] A crucial problem is what *hic habitus* refers to: probably to the men's uncivilised appearance. But they do away with the ring as a symbol of dishonour, so why not also the uncivilised appearance? Can the very brave not be distinguished from the unwarlike? And in that case, what significance has it? A guess is that both the unwarlike and the bravest must be imagined to remain in a type of liminal condition, and that the similarity with the unwarlike so to speak must accentuate the requirement that they must kill yet more enemies – that they cannot be satisfied with one killing. In this way, they take some characteristics of the liminal condition 'across into' the final phase, as may well also have been the case with the berserks many centuries later (cf. below Chapter 9.3).

Although it is reasonable to assume that rituals associated with weddings did take place in early Scandinavia, it is not possible to reconstruct the symbolism of the liminal phase, for example, from the scanty allusions we get from the sources. It seems confirmed from Adam of Bremen's account that Freyr played a role in such rituals. Similarly, it is probable that Þórr appeared in the liminal phase of wedding rites via his hammer (cf. *Þry* and above in Chapter 7.1), where the hammer itself may have taken on the role of a fertility symbol and thus that of the giver of fertility, or it may have had an apotropeic function as a protector against chaos (*in casu*: barrenness). The latter corresponds more to the usual mythical function of the hammer, and it is fully compatible with the motif of fertility, since the conquering of chaos in the marriage includes fertility at all levels – indicating that the marriage will succeed in the widest sense.

It is not possible to enumerate the oppositions that are equivalent to liminal versus non-liminal, nor to decide with certainty whether a transmission of knowledge has taken place. Again it seems *a priori* likely, seen from a phenomenological perspective, but all things considered we do not have the smallest statement which positively confirms it.[10] This is also true of the death/rebirth symbolism, which is not present in a transparent form.

We must thus conclude that, although a comparative perspective tells us that marriages were likely to be associated with rituals of the initiation type, there is no basis in our material for a reconstruction of such a ritual.

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[9] Thus Adam of Bremen emphasises that, at a wedding, people firstly turn to Freyr with sacrifices (Adam of Bremen IV, 27), and just before that, we have learnt that the image of Freyr in the temple is equipped with a phallus. The connection between marriage and fertility is thus clearly marked.

[10] Gro Steinsland's suggested interpretation (1990, 84) of *guldgubber* (small pieces of gold foil depicting human pairs) as an element in rituals associated with weddings and the consecrations of princes is interesting in connection with the question of the transmission of knowledge, as the author correctly points to allusions to a myth of origin from a marriage between a god and a giant woman (cf. Steinsland 1991a). It is quite imaginable that such a myth of origin was transmitted in connection with marriages. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that, even if this interpretation holds good, the deposition of these gold foil figures can only relate to the families of princes, so the expansion of the hypothesis to cover marriages at the lower levels of society is purely speculative.

9.2 Rituals Associated with Death and Burials

The transition from life to death is one of the 'biological' transitions on which our sources have shed most light. This does not mean that we are actually able to reconstruct a 'proto-ritual' that would have been used in all cases in this connection. There are still considerable lacunae in the sources regarding both the actual sequence of the events and the meaning and symbolism that were connected with the ritual. In addition, we must *a priori* expect considerable differences in the performance of the rituals, in regard to both regional and social distinctions (cf. Roesdahl 1987, 177-80; DuBois 1999, 70-2; Schjødt 2007d). Furthermore, our most copious source for funerals is problematical in an unusual manner. Whereas we normally have reservations about the relationship between the period from which the source originates and the one in which we are told the action took place, that is not the problem here, as we are able to date both the writing of the source and the event that it describes with great precision – namely to 923 and 922 or 921, respectively. The question is, however, whether the account is dealing with a Scandinavian person at all. The source is, of course, Ibn Fadlan's description of the cremation of a chieftain among a group of Rus people by the river Volga. Although it is far from the only source to shed light on death rituals among the Scandinavians, it is the one that most clearly gives an insight into the structure and symbolism of such rituals, and it is the only one which covers the whole sequence from the death to the conclusion of the ritual. In our analysis, we cannot decide definitively the key question of whether we are, in fact, dealing with a prototypical Scandinavian burial, but we can demonstrate that a wealth of details in the narrative can be included without any difficulty in the semantic universe we have previously encountered. There is no denying that the use of Ibn Fadlan's account does raise methodological problems, because on the one hand we wish to use it to shed light on Scandinavian customs, while on the other we use the Scandinavian customs to give plausibility to the hypothesis that the text is relevant to our enterprise. It is, however, a problem which does not only affect this text, so the analysis must be evaluated with this complex of problems in mind. Its articulatory power will depend upon a series of general viewpoints on the so-called Varangian problem, which will not be discussed in greater detail here.[11]

With regard to the rest of the sources, there is a wealth of both archaeological and written testimonies that tell us that rituals took place in connection with death. The archaeological sources give us detailed information about grave-gifts and the various methods of disposal of the corpse, including both cremation and inhumation. On the other hand, they do not tell us much about what had taken place prior to the dead person's entering the hereafter, that is, the ritual sequence or the symbolism involved. There are, however, discoveries such as the Oseberg ship with its accompanying pictorial representations where we have such copious material that we may possibly be able to reach some hypotheses which bear something other than the stamp of chance. To do this, we must combine archaeological analysis with close study of the written sources (cf. Andrén 2006, 105-8). However, the elements of uncertainty here are so many and so great, as is the case with most interpretations of pictorial representation of rites, that we will not pursue them further since they would demand an entire book on their own.

Apart from Ibn Fadlan's description, the written sources do not give us an entire sequence, but in the poems of the Elder Edda, in Snorri's *Edda* and in the sagas there is a good deal of scattered information, which for the most part belongs within a specific literary context, but which nevertheless may be supposed to shed light in some places on rites that had been carried out in pagan times.

It must be emphasised that we will *not* examine more closely ideas about the dead person's fate in the final phase; did people imagine a kind of soul beyond the one that was attached to the corpse itself; did the dead continue to live in a mound or in Valhǫll or in an entirely different place? The topic is of considerable interest for the history of Scandinavian religion generally, but is outside the scope of the present project, and only to a very limited extent does it have any importance for the evaluation of the symbolism and structure of initiation.[12]

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[11] See further K. R. Schmidt 1970; Pritsak 1981 and 1993; Duczko 2004; and Montgomery 2000.

[12] Some of the interesting works which treat these ideas in various ways can be found in Ellis 1943, Unwerth 1911, Klare 1933-4, Nedkvitne 1997, Neckel 1913, and Nordberg 2003, who evaluate them very differently. Generally, we can say that the sources seem

The Elder Edda and Snorri's Edda

It is common for the few and scattered pieces of information about death rituals in eddic poetry and Snorri's *Edda* that they are placed in a mythical or heroic context. And it is also common that there is no complete sequence of events in these passages, something that is also true of saga literature.

Eddic poems about the gods contain nothing of importance, except a couple of allusions to cremation (e.g. *Hávm* 71 and 81, *Vsp* 33, *Bdr* 10 and 11) which do not tell us anything about the content of the actual rituals. Conditions are not much different in the heroic poems. Here, too, there are a couple of references to cremation (first and foremost in *Sigsk* 65-9 in connection with the deaths of Brynhildr and Sigurðr). In addition, there are references to a funeral feast (*Am* 75 and *Ghv* 8) and the burning of slaves (*Sigsk* 67 and *Gudr* 1 together with the prose passage after stanza 27). In the prose introduction to *Helr*, it is furthermore mentioned that a carriage was placed on Brynhildr's funeral pyre for her drive to Hel. Thus eddic poetry does not furnish us with any information that gives an insight into the symbolism associated with the actions performed in connection with funerals.

We learn a little more in Snorri's *Edda*. Here, in the narration of Baldr's cremation, there is a vague hint of a sequence (*Gylf* 49; Faulkes 2005, 46-7). The text speaks of cremation on a ship in the sea, which perhaps may be considered an especially honourable form (Uecker 1966, 83-91). It is difficult to determine whether the individual elements mentioned in connection with this cremation are generally applicable to funerals of prominent persons or are particular and only exist in the world of myth. The Hyrrokkin episode can hardly have had the status of ritual,[13] while the burning of widows, as exemplified by

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contradictory on a series of points when it has to do with the fate of human beings in the hereafter. Here, as with so many other topics within the history of Scandinavian religion, most scholars turn to more or less relevant source criticism and reject those sources which do not fit their theory. (e.g. Unwerth 1911, 28, and in opposition Klare 1933-4, 15). A brief but clear account of the various abodes of the dead is found in Å. V. Ström 1975, 182-94.

[13] Lindqvist suggests extremely speculatively (1921, 171) that Hyrrokkin corresponds to the wind, which, according to Ibn Fadlan, is said to carry the dead chieftain up to his master. If one dares interpret the role of this giantess, it must be that she represents fire (cf. the first syllable *hyrr* = fire), but this is uncertain. For a good overview of research

Nanna's death, is attested in other sources (cf. above with reference to Brynhildr and women who seek death with their men: *Gesta Danorum* I, viii 4 and II, v 5 together with Ibn Rustah [Birkeland 1954, 17]); and the same is true of the horse that is led onto the pyre. No other source indicates that a funeral pyre has to be consecrated, as this text states that Þórr does, but it seems likely that some form or other of sanctification must have occurred, probably with the aim of furthering life and for an apotropaic purpose (cf. Lindow 1997, 93). Although this cannot be proven, it may have been a rite that was actually performed, represented here in its mythic form.[14] On the other hand, it is not possible to provide a plausible cultic parallel to the episode with Lítr, whose importance is completely obscure. Finally, there is the statement about the ring Draupnir which is placed on the pyre with Baldr. We cannot exclude the possibility that we are dealing with a rite here, since the ring may have a symbolic content with connotations of the cyclical and so refer to the concept of rebirth in the hereafter.[15] But this hypothesis is so uncertain that it cannot allow us to develop theories on the basis of this element in the narrative.

One detail that does not appear in *Gylf* 49, but which is of importance in this connection, is the reference to something that Óðinn whispers in Baldr's ear (cf. *Vafðr* 54 and *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* chapter 10). Nobody except Óðinn himself knows what this is; and the only thing that is certain is that it has to do with a profound secret. Nevertheless, scholars have made guesses, and it has been suggested that the message to Baldr has to do with his return to the world of the gods (Olrik 1902, 267) or a message to him not to haunt the world (Rosén 1918, 127). In the nature of things, it can only be a matter of guesswork, but there are two characteristics connected with the circumstances in which this communication takes place that seem of spe-

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on this subject and possible parallels to Hyrrokkin, see Lindow 1997, 74-80. Lindow's understanding of the figure (1997, 88) – that she is a representative of the socially inferior group of giants, but nevertheless is necessary in this, the most serious situation in the life of the Æsir, and so accentuates the problematical relationship between the gods and the giants – seems probable, but this is naturally a pure mythological construction, which has meaning only with reference to Baldr's cremation and not to rituals in the human world.

[14] On the Baldr myth as a 'model myth', see Polomé 1970.

[15] Egill, too, places gold rings in his brother Þórólfr's grave (Sigurður Nordal 1933, 142).

cial importance. Firstly, it is the very secrecy that surrounds it which the literary context focuses on. Secondly, there is the point in time, namely immediately before Baldr's final journey to the kingdom of the dead (the cremation itself). The secret must, therefore, be a message which only the dead are allowed to know (and naturally the god-king and the king of the dead himself) but which, on the other hand, must be of great importance to them, something that can only be understood as having significance for the existence they are about to enter into. Transformed to earthly conditions, this may indicate that the dead person is entrusted with some piece of knowledge of special importance for the life beyond by an especially consecrated person who thereby has affinity with death as a semantic category. This transference of knowledge takes place at the point in time when the liminal phase culminates, namely immediately before the final journey to the kingdom of the dead (which is strengthened by *Hákonar saga góða* chapter 32, which we will examine below). With regard to the particulars of the message, we can only guess, but its function must have been to prepare the dead for their coming existence. Óðinn's message seems thus to be a prototype of the numinous knowledge which the dead would be required to use in the hereafter.

Although this description of funerary rituals is the most copious in the mythological and legendary corpus, it is clear that it cannot be used to afford a more detailed insight into ritual symbolism and structure.[16] The memorial feast ought not to be considered as part of the ritual sequence that aims to ensure the dead person's transition to the world of the dead, but may rather be seen as an element in a cult of the dead, the function of which was, above all, to commemorate the dead (cf. the noun *minni* 'memory, memorial, memorial toast') and honour them, while transferring the dead person's property and position to the nearest kin.[17]

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[16] *Húsdrápa*'s description of Baldr's cremation does not add anything new on the subject of mortuary ritual to Snorri's statement.

[17] There are several examples in the saga material that indicate that the aim of memorial feasts was primarily to transfer the dead person's position (and with this, naturally, the actual inheritance), for example *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* chapter 11, which, however, is a little complicated since Angantýr is crowned king at the Althing, but does not take possession of his highseat until after he has avenged his father and does not celebrate the memorial feast until then. The act of taking possession of the highseat

Other written sources

If we turn to the remaining written sources, the situation does not change very much. True, there are several statements that tell us something about the action that takes place when a person has died, but they are not sufficient to allow us to reconstruct a prototypical ritual.[18] However, the existence of a series of funerary rites is beyond doubt. First of all, we notice that some of the acts described must have served an apotropaeic purpose (e.g. the closing of the dead person's eyes, cf. F. Ström 1942, 242-4)[19] and so would not necessarily have been a part of the ritual sequence in which the deceased was the subject. But in addition to this, in several passages we find indications of a 'preliminary burial' (e.g. *Droplaugarsona saga* chapter 6 and *Brennu-Njáls saga* chapter 17), which we will return to in Ibn Fadlan's narrative. In all

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obviously played a considerable symbolic role in the assumption of power and may, therefore, correctly be considered as a reintegration rite in the ritual sequence, with the new 'leader' as its object; see also *Yng* 36, where it is stated that the new king may only sit down in the highseat when he has drunk from the Bragi-cup' (*Bragafull*; on this see de Vries 1956-67, I, 457-8), but when this has taken place he can enter fully and completely into his new role. Birkeli 1944, 19-21 has clearly demonstrated that the highseat has both a social and a religious significance, and it will not be discussed further here. From the passages mentioned, it also appears that, in connection with the drinking, oaths are sworn with regard to various forms of heroic action that will be carried out in the future, thereby marking the qualitative difference that the final phase will bring. Whether an *erfikvæði* was recited during the funeral feast itself cannot be decided with certainty, but a passage in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (chapter 78) might indicate this. On the other hand, we have no statements that support the idea that such a funeral poem would have had the function of bringing the dead into the kingdom of the dead, so the memorial feast seems not to have served as an element in the funeral ritual. The question of whether there was an actual 'death meal' is more problematical, and the comparative perspective, which both Birkeli (1938, 64-5) and de Vries (1956-57, I, 195-7) adopt, does not give us any possibility of stating anything about the symbolic meaning that may have been involved in it. It is obvious that the arrangement of an *erfi,* which may best be translated as 'feast of inheritance' or 'memorial feast', in addition to the function it may have had with regard to the heir, also served to honour the memory of the dead person, but these functions seem to have nothing to do with any representation of the dead person's entry into another world.

[18] An attempt to set up a sequence of events from saga material has been carried out by I. V. Hansen 1981, 135-9. But here, too, there is exceedingly great uncertainty involved in setting up such a sequence.

[19] The extant texts do not provide sufficient evidence to allow us to decide whether the act of closing the dead person's eyes was motivated by fear of the eyes, of the dead in general or only of special categories of the dead (see I. V. Hansen 1981, 39-40).

circumstances, it is usual for the corpse to be covered, which is perhaps due to the risk of it being molested by wild animals, and this is given as a reason for the practice in *Grágás* I, 88. People also gave burial gifts of various kinds, both animal and human, which the archaeological material also demonstrates, but what we are not told is what rites of this type actually consisted in (again with the exception of Ibn Fadlan). It appears likewise from several passages that before burial the corpse had to be prepared according to certain customs (e.g. *Gísla saga* chapter 14). This may perhaps have included the closing of the nostrils and eyes together with the dressing of the corpse and possibly the binding of shoes on the dead person (*helskór*) (e.g. *Gísla saga* chapters 14 and 17).[20] But it is not possible here either to see through to a certain symbolic pattern, although it is likely that different rites of separation were involved.

For the liminal rites, to the extent that it is possible to identify them, the testimonies we have are even more uncertain. Most interesting is the statement in *Hákonar saga góða* chapter 32 where Snorri writes in connection with Hákon's death: 'They spoke thus over his grave, as was the custom of pagan men, [as] they showed him the way to Valhǫll'.[21] What they said is hardly the poem *Hákonarmál* as we know it, although Snorri quotes this poem at the end of the chapter, because the wording that is used here by Snorri rather suggests the kind of formulas we know from other religions,[22] which are intended to lead the dead person to the kingdom of the dead, and in this way makes his entering of it easier. The character of *Hákonarmál* seems, on the other hand, not in itself to have the character of an instruction about how to behave in the hereafter and must be regarded primarily as a poem of homage; nor is there anything 'secret' in it, which one would expect if it were to form an element in an exchange of numinous knowledge for the dead king.[23] But the fact that something is actually said in connection with the placing of the dead person in the burial mound, something which has to do with the future life if Snorri can be believed, is important although we do not know exactly when it took place during the mortuary sequence. The example is, however, singular, since other cases in which something is said at the burial of a dead person is either for apotropeic purposes or for other specific personal reasons, such as sorrow (e.g. Egill's poem at his brother's burial in *Egils saga* chapter 55). Whether we can accept the possibility that numinous knowledge about the dead person's future status was transmitted from the living to the dead during funerary rituals must remain undecided but, compared with Óðinn's whispering in Baldr's ear, it seems a reasonable assumption. Alongside such a rite, it seems natural also to include with the liminal rites the placing of grave goods and possibly the killing of animals and human beings, the existence of which is confirmed from archaeological finds. But the material does not give us any possibility of gaining a precise insight into the manner in which these actions took place.[24]

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[20] As this passage is the only place where the binding of hell-shoes is mentioned, it may perhaps be doubted whether this was a fixed custom. One can argue, however, as Rosén more or less explicitly does (1918, 128-9) that the custom was exceedingly common, since the author of the saga presupposed that his readers would know it. Whether Rosén, and several others who also accept the information as authentic, are correct when they presume that the custom was in general use in Scandinavia, we cannot know for certain, but it seems reasonable to argue in this case, as in others, that customs that were known by most people would not be mentioned each time they took place. Thus *argumenta ex silentio* are useless here, too. Rosén's argument is tenable as far as it goes, that is, that at least in some environments in Iceland the custom must have been generally known.

[21] Mæltu þeir svá fyrir grepti hans sem heiðinna manna siðr war til, visuðu honum til Valhallar. (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979, 193)

[22] The closest examples are the so-called Orphic gold tablets, found in graves in Greece and Italy which instruct the dead on what to do and what not to do at the various stages on the road to the kingdom of the dead (see Zuntz 1971, 299-393 and Albinus 2000, 141-52).

We find another interesting piece of information, which we have touched on previously, in Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga* (Chapter 9), namely that both Óðinn and Njǫrðr who, according to this text, die a non-violent death have themselves marked with a spear. It says directly that we are dealing with an action which will secure for the dead a life with Óðinn (with Óðinn himself as the prototypical example). But this custom, too, has only been transmitted to us by Snorri, and so we may wonder whether we can consider such an action as normative. It cannot be completely rejected, at least not when it has to do with kings or chieftains. The rite is probably a liminal one, as it takes place on the border between an existence among the living and one among the dead. On the other hand, it is clear that it can only be practised in connection with people who die from illness, when it is possible to anticipate the death, but not when it has to do with a killing or some other kind of sudden death. It is, however, likely that an action with a similar symbolic value had taken place here when it was possible for practical reasons: to throw one's spear out among the enemy before a battle is thus overtly a counterpart to this, and with the same symbolic value – to secure for the dead person(s) a life with Óðinn. It is reasonable to think that for those who die suddenly, without having been consecrated in this manner, the time between death and the actual funeral may have contained actions of the same nature, but this cannot be confirmed from any source. Finally, the possibility must not be overlooked that warriors were already consecrated to Óðinn at their initiation into warrior bands (cf. Chapter 9.3 below).

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[23] The fact that stanza 16 is a direct address to the king about his future life hardly alters the point that the poem does not primarily aim at the transmission of knowledge, because the statement is placed in the mouth of Bragi and so is only to be seen as a link in the series of direct utterances that are attributed to both the king himself and the divine actors.

[24] This holds good also for the relatively detailed description in connection with Sigurðr's and Brynhildr's cremation in *Vǫlsunga saga* 31, where a number of servants are burnt together with Sigurðr. The description in *Beowulf* (line 3137-82), on the other hand, indicates that the funeral gifts are not placed there until *after* the cremation, that is, after the liminal phase and as a part of the reintegration. Ibn Fadlan asserts the opposite, so whether it was a question of regional or historical differences, or whether *Beowulf* simply cannot be credited on this point, cannot be decided.

As far as reintegration rites are concerned, they seem not to have been very prominent in the ritual, as far as we can see from the sources. Although van Gennep argues that we often see in funeral ceremonies that both the liminal and post-liminal rites play a considerably greater role than one would expect (van Gennep 1909, 209), this seems not to have been the case in Scandinavia, at least not when it has to do with the post-liminal rites (unless we include *erfi* as part of the reintegration, which, as mentioned, seems unlikely). We can probably view the act of closing the grave mound and the possible erecting of a stone or a wooden grave marker[25] as the concluding rites. The case may have been different when we are dealing with wicked ghosts. No doubt they required especial precautions which may have both an apotropaic character, and at the same time they may constitute an element in the reintegration into the future existence (or, as far as the ghosts are concerned, rather a non-existence), namely in the form of annihilation.

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[25] Uecker (1966, 111-6) has collected all the material that is connected with the erection of grave markers.

The rites of the three ritual phases, thus, cannot be sharply distinguished, as the ritual naturally began at death or possibly immediately before death, if this could be predicted, and most likely finished with the closing of the mound or the cremation. And in between these two events a series of rites were carried out, the purpose of which was to separate the dead person from the world of the living and cause him to enter the world of the dead. The dead person was thus for a period in a *betwixt and between*-condition. The ritual expression of this condition is clarified in Ibn Fadlan's narrative, to which we will now turn.

Ibn Fadlan's description

For reasons of space, we will not examine every individual detail in this otherwise very detailed description.[26] It deals with the cremation of a chieftain among the Rus people living by the river Volga, and the most spectacular passage is one which has to do with a female slave who is to be burnt together with the chieftain. In summary, the sequence runs as follows: a chieftain has died and is placed in a provisional grave for ten days (or nine nights?). After this, a slave woman, who is to follow him on the pyre, is selected, and during this period she is accompanied by a couple of slaves who function rather as servants, since, among other things, they wash her feet. This can only be interpreted to mean that she had changed status and has become a kind of 'substitute wife' to the dead chieftain.[27] When the day for the cremation arrives, various animals are sacrificed[28] and are placed with other things in the ship in which the dead man is to be burnt. The slave woman carries out a series of actions which are clearly of a ritual nature. Among other things, such as drinking Nabidh, some sort of alcoholic drink, she has sexual intercourse with several of the dead chieftain's relatives, and she is lifted up across a 'door frame' from which she is able to look into The Other World. Finally, she is killed by a combination of stabbing and strangulation by a woman whom Ibn Fadlan calls 'the angel of death' and her daughters, after which a person, who must be presumed to be the chieftain's closest kinsman, ignites the funeral pyre.[29]

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[26] The English translation is that by Wladyslaw Duczko 2004 (the relevant passage is on pp. 139-41).

[27] This is even more evident in Amin Razi's version (cf. Duczko 2004, 145).

[28] The hen is the most uncertain element in this passage, but it seems reasonable to draw a parallel with Saxo's Hadingus story (I, viii, 14), which we examined above in Chapter 8.1, where Hadingus and a woman from the underworld in the underworld itself reach a wall that they cannot scale. The woman, who brings a cock along, cuts its head off and throws it onto the other side where it comes to life again. The situation here is partly an inversion of the rite in Ibn Fadlan: Hadingus and the woman are themselves in the underworld or the kingdom of the dead, and they reach the wall, therefore, from the other side; it is the head they throw into the world of the living, whereas it is uncertain whether in Ibn Fadlan the head or the body is thrown into the world of the dead (here symbolised by the ship); and in Ibn Fadlan the bird is a hen, whereas in Saxo

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it is a cock, just as in the former it is a woman who is going to The Other World, whereas in the latter it is a man who is going to This World. At the risk of over-interpretation, a pattern seems to emerge here in which the head of the cock must symbolise masculinity and intellect. In Saxo, this is of significance with regard to the return to This World of a masculine individual, whereas the hen's body, which must correspond to femininity and sexuality, in Ibn Fadlan symbolises a transition to The Other World of a feminine individual. Again, we come across the oppositional pairs, masculine versus feminine, head versus body, life versus death. In both cases we are in a symbolic space – liminal space – in which the transition between two worlds takes place, and the two sources thus support each other with regard to the authenticity of the semantic universe within which they operate (cf. Schjødt 2007b).

[29] The manner in which he ignites the ship can only be understood when it is seen in a symbolic-ritual context: he approaches the ship walking backwards with a piece of burning wood in one hand while he keeps the other behind his back, covering his anus; and in addition he is naked. This rite has been understood as an apotropeic touch (F. Ström 1961, 214; Sass and Warmind 1989, 43), as researchers refer to the widespread fear of a dead person, a horror or fear, which Ibn Fadlan also mentions himself (paragraph 86). As a reason for the apparently strange way of behaving described here, this suggestion seems, however, not to be enough. F. Ström reminds us of the fear of a dead person's eyes (1961, 214), but as the dead man is sitting inside his tent up on the ship, this cannot be the motive for the fear. Nor does it seem to be likely to assume with Sass and Warmind that the clothes would have been 'polluted' by contact with the ship. For one thing, the naked man is only igniting it; for another both the angel of death and the six men who have killed the slave woman were in considerably closer contact with the ship, and they were not naked (at least not all the time), something that Ibn Fadlan would otherwise have mentioned. We hardly can obtain any final explanation of the behaviour, but a message that has considerable greater value as an explanation than the apotropaical 'theory' referred to is to see the rite in the light of the initiation symbolism, as this has emerged in the rest of the material that shed light on the Scandinavian conditions, and to an even greater degree in the phenomenology of religion. If nakedness is assumed to be a reintegration rite in the rite sequence, which has the new chieftain as the subject, it will be obvious to see it as a birth symbolism (cf. Eliade 1975, 32).The second crucial element in the ignition confirms the probability of this suggestion, namely that he walks backwards with his face towards the world of the living. This

The whole ritual ends with the people constructing a mound and erecting a pole made of birch wood on which they write the dead chieftain's name and that of the Rus king – probably a parallel to the erection of memorial stones, although these were not provided with runes. But the pole is of a memorial nature. After this has been completed they leave, and Ibn Fadlan does not give us any more information about this ritual, which, however, does not necessarily mean that nothing more took place.

As mentioned, this description is singular, but although it has been generally recognised that it is of great importance for our understanding of the rituals of the Viking Age (cf. Duczko 2004), scholars have not systematically analysed the details with a view to understanding the ritual symbolism.

First of all, we must recognise that we are in reality faced with three intertwined sequences, all of which are released by the death of the chieftain. These three sequences deal with 1) the dead chieftain, who is to be sent to the kingdom of the dead; 2) the slave woman, who is to accompany him but who must first change her status in order to fulfil her role, and 3) the new chieftain, who has to change his status from not being a chieftain to being one. As far as the latter is concerned, it would be logical to treat this sequence under Chapter 9.5, but as we only have a single rite, namely the igniting of the pyre, which has him as its primary subject, it will be discussed in this context.

Operating with three sequences is naturally only an analytical move connected with the subjects. Ibn Fadlan does not distinguish between them, nor, as far as I know, has any historian of religion done so, which is perhaps the reason that the narrative, in spite of the wealth of details, has never before been analysed structurally. A contributing factor to the lack of distinction between them, although the three sequences are, in fact, conspicuous enough, is that the individual rites have a meaning in more than one sequence. For instance, if we take the ignition of the pyre, this is itself an element in the process aimed at sending the dead chieftain into the other world, something stated directly in paragraph

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alludes to the fact that he, although he is about to ignite the pyre, symbolically is on his way to This World. It is, therefore, the symbolic birth of the new chieftain that is involved in both the nakedness as well as in the demonstrative turning towards This World.

92. The special manner in which the ignition is carried out, however, suggests that the new chieftain is born as a chieftain at the moment when he ignites the pyre. The same is the case with the door frame rite. The slave woman is placed in a position so that she can see the final condition into which she will soon enter; however, the fact that she can see her dead master sitting in 'paradise' must at the same time be presumed to have some sort of magical effect in relation to the chieftain's final condition, because, at this point in time, he does not actually sit in paradise yet, if we are to take the information in paragraph 92 seriously. It is not until the cremation itself that both he and the slave woman may be imagined to reach their new position. The words she utters must thus be imagined to have had the specific effect of guaranteeing a position in Valhǫll,[30] and are therefore magical in the traditional sense. Finally, the intercourse motif is a good example of how the sequences of the rites are mixed. Again, it is naturally the slave woman who is the focus, but it is obvious that the dead chieftain is imagined to enjoy it – it is done, as the text says, out of consideration for him. The slave woman is, so to speak, the medium between This World, represented by the six men, and The Other World, represented by the dead chieftain, which means that she is already now in a liminal position. The men who have intercourse with her provide her with fertility, the purpose of which is not quite clear. Either it indicates that the dead man's family would be able to reproduce in the hereafter, and in that case the six men represent the chieftain himself,[31] or it has to do with the actual revival of the dead in paradise. Perhaps both symbolisms are involved, so that the men are representatives both of This World and of the dead man. The uncertainty is considerable as far as the details are concerned, probably also for the Rus people themselves, but it seems certain that we are dealing with fertility symbolism that relates to the hereafter.

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[30] There can be hardly any doubt that it is Valhǫll that is intended in Ibn Fadlan's account of 'paradise': how else would one translate the designation of such a kingdom of the dead into Arabic?

[31] Sayers' arguments (1988, 178) against viewing the intercourse as a kind of 'substitution' for the dead man's own contribution, since it is not very honourable for a chieftain to have intercourse with a female slave, is quite untenable. He completely overlooks the fact that the slave woman is *no longer* a slave woman on account of the rites that she has undergone. She has changed status.

We can thus see that the general ritual is exceedingly complicated, not least symbolically, which naturally also makes it complicated to determine the various categories of rites. It seems clear though that the first thing of interest is the placing of the dead man in the provisional grave. It is evidently a separation rite in the sequence of which the chieftain is the subject. From then on, we do not hear any more about rites associated with the dead man until the ten days have passed, but there is little doubt that preparations of a practical nature, though probably in a ritualised form, must have taken place regarding the arrangement of the ship and the pyre. It is likewise probable that rites took place which had the new chieftain as subject, but Ibn Fadlan does not say anything about this either, perhaps because such rites, which would have included both separation and liminal rites, were secret, as is usually the case with various rites in an initiation sequence, or because Ibn Fadlan was simply not at the locality when they took place (Montgomery 2000, 13). On the other hand, we get some important information about the separation rites and the liminal rites connected with the girl. According to the text, the first stage consists simply in her offering up of herself; but more must be supposed to have taken place before she relinquished her previous status, as an element in the preparations for the next world, and was able to act as wife to the chieftain for some time. In this phase, she ingests a sacred drink and sings certain songs, perhaps songs she actually learns in this phase. In any case, we have seen that the ingestion of a drink has several times played a part in the liminal phase.

The culmination of the ritual's liminal phase takes place on the day on which the chieftain and the slave woman are to be burnt. The central part is whatever takes place in the tent and is thus hidden from the eyes of the crowd. Before that, we hear about the sacrificial animals, among which the horses, at least, have been subjected to special treatment which consists in their being brought into a condition that apparently makes them especially suitable as sacrificial animals in this connection. The sacrifice of the animals and the rest of the sacrificial gifts together with the sexual intercourse is something people do for the dead man, that is, something that will be of importance for him in the hereafter. In this connection, the slave woman is only a medium, a mediating factor between the world of the dead and that of the living. On the other hand, the symbolism of the door frame rite indicates that she is now approaching the final transition to the kingdom of the dead. She is probably still an instrument for securing the dead chieftain's life in the hereafter, but at the same time it is the wished-for end of her own liminal phase that she expresses in her own words, strengthened through the symbolism of the hen. Although this latter symbolism is not transparent in details, it has clear connotations of a situation of transition, in parallel, as we saw, with the story of Hadingus.

The rites that are involved in the leave-taking of her female friends, the removing of her jewels and the final drink all seem to have the slave woman herself as subject. The same seems also to be the case with the killing, which, if it is a consecration to Óðinn, aims to bring her to Valhǫll,[32] while the chieftain already through his status as a chieftain and possibly in an earlier consecration into a warrior band *is* Óðinn's man.

The cremation itself is a rite of reintegration into the new condition both for the chieftain and the slave woman, and presumably also for the new chieftain about whom we otherwise hear nothing. And the same is true of the building of the grave mound and the inscription that marks the conclusion of the ritual both for the dead man and the bereaved.

We thus have before us a great ritual complex that contains elements from several partly independent rituals. There are, as we have seen, ritual elements from three different sequences, which we may designate phenomenologically as death rites, rites of intronisation and status-elevating rites. An incident, namely the chieftain's death, releases the whole complex, which then begins with separation rites. These cannot here be precisely distinguished from the liminal rites, which for their part culminate in sacrifices and the killing of the slave woman, followed by the only two rites which can certainly be connected with reintegration, namely the cremation itself and, as far as the new chieftain is concerned, the symbolism associated with the manner in which he ignites the funeral pyre. The evidence of Ibn Fadlan's text suggests that we have here a three-fold initiation, so we should be able to apply to it the four determining critera of initiation that were enunciated in Chapter 3.3.

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[32] This, of course, is an acceptance that women other than valkyries could go to Valhǫll. The question whether this was a possibility has been vividly discussed, and I doubt if a final solution will ever be reached. Maybe the most realistic solution would be to argue that there were no definite ideas as to whether there were women there. It is obvious that the focus in the texts is on the warriors staying in Valhǫll, but it does not exclude the possibility that some women were believed to go there, too.

It is true of all three of the subjects that their status is irreversibly 'higher' – with regard to the dead man and the slave woman, it is understood as 'higher' since they obtain a status that is desirable in terms of the ideology of the pagan Scandinavians. We have seen that the triadic sequence is present in the separation from the known world; in liminality which, as far as the slave woman is concerned, means a change of status and for the chieftain his placing in a preliminary grave, which is sequestered from the world of the living but is still not a symbolic expression of a lasting condition; and finally in reintegration, which comes about through the cremation, expressed directly through the building of the grave mound and the carving of the inscription. These two actions are perhaps rites that are aimed to a greater degree at the reintegration of the bereaved – and therefore form a part of a ritual of crisis – than at the two dead, though this cannot be decided with certainty. In connection with the new chieftain, we do not have any rites from the first two categories, whereas the symbolism seems clear in connection with reintegration. As far as death/rebirth-symbolism is concerned, it is difficult to perceive what may be due to the fact that the ritual has to do with an actual death, so it is difficult to argue that, for instance, the placing in the provisional grave is an expression of a symbolism of death, when the man is in fact dead. On the other hand, the birth-symbolism seems clear in connection with the new chieftain.

As far as the binary oppositional pairs are concerned, they are present here in a way that is different from their presence in the mythical examples, and they are, as is often the case in ritual contexts, considerably more difficult to interpret. The well-known masculine versus feminine and life versus death and other pairs are present, but are difficult to penetrate in this ritual complex. On the other hand, we can see some elements that are known from the phenomenological literature, such as sequestration in relation to the dead chieftain and change of identity in relation to the slave woman. In addition, we can also reasonably see the symbolism in the door frame rite as accentuating the life/death opposition, just as 'the angel of death' and her daughters can be seen as the female element which is characteristic of The Other World. In all circumstances, it is clear that both the chieftain and the girl are in a liminal space that is *completely* different compared to the life they had lived before the liminal phase.

When we reach the question of whether the dedicated objects have the character of numinous knowledge, there are also difficulties, not least because it may be difficult to see any acquired object at all as associated with the liminal phase. The emphasis on the slave woman's drinking of *nabidh* may possibly be understood as an acquistion of knowledge, in the light of the role that drink occupies in the complex. The songs, which are mentioned several times, may also be an expression of knowledge acquired during the sequence. In addition, leaving aside their obvious connotations of fertility, the sexual aspects may also have played a role in the mediating of numinous power, as we have seen in connection with Gunnlǫð. As far as the dead chieftain is concerned, we do not get any information about a transmission of numinous knowledge, and the same pertains to the new chieftain. But this is not to be expected, since Ibn Fadlan may not have been attentive to rites which had the latter as subject, and he seems not to have known what happened in connection with the ten days in the provisional grave, nor could he probably have had detailed knowledge of the last period in the tent on the ship (was something possibly said there – perhaps something whispered in the dead man's ear – that would bring him to Valhǫll?).

It must be emphasised that Ibn Fadlan quite obviously did not have information about everything that took place during the sequence; we get a wealth of details, but it would be naïve to think that the description is exhaustive with regard to what actually took place. We are thus faced with a methodological problem, namely that we must take into account this lack of information – more happened than we are told – while refraining from 'filling out' the lacunae ourselves from a general hypothesis. In spite of this danger, there seems to be much that supports the idea that we have a ritual complex, which agrees in large measure with what we established earlier as characteristic of the structure and symbolism of initiation. Thus it is relevant to our enquiry to see Ibn Fadlan's description as an example of a complex that contains most of the elements that must be present in order for us to accept it as an initiation – or, rather, as three intiation sequences.

Conclusion

In concluding this section on rituals connected with death and burial, we can make the following observations. Nowhere do we find any description of a ritual which allows us to see a ritual sequence that obviously belongs to the category of initiation as it is defined above. On the other hand, there seem to be so many elements present in the various sources, and above all in Ibn Fadlan's report which belong in this complex, that we may glimpse the contours of both the structure and the symbolism that we have outlined above through an analysis of myths. There are obviously many problems with the interpretations on account of the details, and that will always be the case when one dares to interpret material of this kind, but the initiation model as a whole does seem to form an interpretative framework that can shed light on various elements in the sources, elements that could not be understood to the same extent from the use of any other model.

9.3 Initiations of Warriors

Without doubt the phenomenon of warrior initiations has attracted most attention in the study of Scandinavian pre-Christian religion. This is partly due to the nature of the source material, which includes several half-mythical accounts in the *fornaldarsögur*, as we have seen in Chapter 8, but it is also because the two scholars who have been of greatest importance in the field of research into initiation, Lily Weiser and Otto Höfler, have written extensively about warrior initiations.[33] Their work has already been evaluated in Chapter 2.2, but further issues are raised by their research which require discussion here.

Among the most important of Weiser's and Höfler's results is the interpretation of the relationship of warrior bands to The Other World. They argued that the two designations *úlfheðnar* 'wolf skins' and *berserkir* 'bear shirts' were alternatives and that these groups were human counterparts to the *einherjar*, the dead warriors taken into Valhǫll. These were furthermore thought to have formed an actual army of dead men, which must be commented on in a little more detail. The fact is that both Weiser and Höfler make much of this similarity between the mythical army of dead warriors and their human counterparts, the berserkers. The main problem for both Weiser and Höfler is that they have not succeeded in explaining why animal masks or animal shapes should be special distinguishing marks of the army of dead warriors. Weiser draws our attention, among other things, to the fact that, while Bǫðvarr Bjarki in *Hrólfs saga kraka* chapter 50 is lying as if lifeless, he is in fact fighting outside in the form of a bear (cf. also *Yng* chapter 7). It is obvious that this is an expression of the belief that the soul is able to separate itself from the body, but the notion that it should be an indication that one could become like a dead person in this way seems completely opaque. It seems reasonable that animal forms may be understood as expressions of an affinity with The Other World, but that they should symbolise the army of dead warriors in particular has not been rendered sufficiently probable. Even though both the dead and those who have shape-shifting abilities, as we have seen above, belong to the semantic field that we call The Other World, so that some sort of relationship between them may be accepted, it does not necessarily mean that they are identical.[34] What we probably could argue is that having been a berserk in one's life (having been initiated into a warrior band) means that one has got a special relationship with Óðinn which again implies that one become one of the *einherjar* after death (Schjødt 2007c). In other words: the relationship between *berserkir/úlfheðnar* and *einherjar* is not paradigmatic, as was indicated by Weiser and Höfler, but syntagmatic (cf. Jacobson and Halle 1956, 81).

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[33] In the following discussion, we will use the designations 'warrior bands' and 'bands of men' without making any subtle distinction between them. Both thus cover the same content as the German *Männerbund*.

One more of Weiser's observations ought to be mentioned, namely that in connection with initiation she thinks that the berserks functioned as initiators, just as we saw in connection with Bǫðvarr, and that they, like 'the bravest' among the Chatti warriors (*Germania* chapter 31), remained warriors,[35] whereas the normal thing was that men went on a Viking expedition for some years before they settled down as farmers and started families (1927, 61-2). In that case, the role of initiator must be supposed to have functioned only with regard to the new members of the warrior bands, and not for all who were to go on a Viking expedition.[36]

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[34] I shall not go into a more detailed discussion of these matters, as I have argued against Weiser's and Höfler's interpretations before, especially Höfler's use of the Harii by Tacitus (Chapter 43) (Schjødt 1999a, 201-2)

[35] A possible parallel to the statement about the Chatti is found in Saxo II, vi, 12, which says that everybody who became a member of the king's retainers should promise to carry out a heroic deed of some kind or other.

One insight in Höfler's work, beyond what has already been mentioned, is of great importance for the present study, namely that Óðinn was indissolubly attached to the warrior bands. Höfler arrives at this result in two ways, partly through seeing Óðinn/Wodan as the leader of the wild army or the wild hunt, and partly by analysing his role in the Sigmundr/Sinfjǫtli-episode (1934, 188-226). The explanatory value of this connection is great because Höfler is able to elucidate many obscure problems, among others, the many-faceted character of Óðinn himself (1934, 323-41). It is not unproblematic that he sees Óðinn as the god of 'ecstasy' (1934, 329), something to which we will return (Chapter 11.2) but it was obviously a great step forward in 1934 and is not far from the central meaning that the figure of Óðinn must have had. It is, therefore, a question of a *Weihekriegertum*, a society of consecrated warriors where Óðinn's role as the god of the warrior bands explains his role with regard not only to the warriors, but also to the leaders of these bands, i.e. the kings and chieftains.

Weiser's and Höfler's investigations seem, therefore, to have proven that, from Tacitus's time, some warrior bands existed in the Germanic area and formed distinct social groups. From a religious point of view, they were characterised by a kind of ecstasy which, according to their own and their society's world view, was the result of their consecration to Óðinn. And this ecstasy caused them to function optimally in battle and thus to secure a place in Valhǫll among the *einherjar* after death.

The majority of the sources that are included to shed light on initiation into warrior bands are, as mentioned, mythical and semi-mythical and they have been analysed above in Chapter 8. However, there is some scattered information, which may be of dubious value from the perspective of the traditional history of events, but which may still reflect some vague memory of customs going back to pagan times. This information sheds light on neither structure nor symbolism, however, but rather on other elements such as the age when someone was admitted into the warrior bands, which was probably between twelve and eighteen (*Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* chapter 10; *Jómsvíkinga saga* chapter 24), and on certain tests that may have been included, about which we also learn in *Hálfs saga.* There, it is stated about those who were to sail with the king that they had to undergo a trial of strength which required them to lift a large stone from the ground,[37] and they had to have a certain measure of courage. The story later indicates that each of them had the strength of twelve ordinary men, and they were not to have their wounds dressed the same day that they were wounded. Besides, there were rules about the kinds of weapons they could own, just as there were certain ethical rules (they were not allowed to take women and children prisoners). The sources are, as mentioned, doubtful but, *a priori,* it seems quite imaginable that tests of courage and strength were included in warrior initiations, just as it is likely that the initiands received instructions concerning various aspects of the life of a warrior, just as we also saw in connection with Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli.

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[36] Kershaw suggests that *berserkir* were the elite warriors, whereas the *úlfheðnar* were young, not fully initiated warriors (Kershaw 2000, 61).

9.4 The Formation of Blood-Brotherhood

The formation of blood-brotherhood is one of the few institutions, the description of which is copious enough for us to be able to say at least a little about the symbolism and structure of the ritual associated with it. The institution is mentioned in several places, but it is only in the sources discussed below that we learn anything about how it was carried out.[38]

Sources

Those passages that contain information of value for the initiation complex in a ritual context are as follows:

Gísla saga Súrssonar chapter 6:

> Now they walk out onto Eyrarhválloddi and cut from the ground a strip of turf (*jarðarmen*) so that both ends were attached to the

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[37] Steinn mikill stóð í garðinum. Eigi skyldi fara, sá sem eigi fengit hafit steininn af jörðu (*FSN* 1959, II, 107).

[38] Hellmuth 1975, 14-54 has a complete register of the passages in the sources.

> ground, and they put an inlaid spear under it, on which a man with his hand could reach to the spear nails. Those four, Þorgrímr, Gísli, Þorkell and Vésteinn were to go beneath it. And now they make their blood flow and let it be mixed in the earth that had been cut up under the strip of turf and they mix it all together, the earth and the blood; and afterwards they all fell to their knees and swear that oath that each one should avenge the other one as if [he were] his brother, and they name all the gods as witnesses. (my translation)[39]

Fóstbrœðra saga chapter 2:

> That custom had been maintained among famous men who held that agreement amongst themselves that the one who lived longer should avenge the other one, that they should go beneath three strips of turf and that was their oath. That practice happened in this way that three long strips of turf were to be cut from the ground. Their ends were to remain fast in the ground with the loops pulled up so that men could go underneath. (my translation)[40]

Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar chapter 21:

> 'Now, I will offer you that condition, if you let Beli live, that we swear foster-brotherhood' … This was later confirmed by a firm engagement. They let blood run into the palms of their hands and went under a strip of turf and there swore oaths that each would

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[39] Ganga nú út í Eyrarhválsodda ok rista þar upp ór jǫrðu jarðarmen svá at báðir endar váru fastir í jǫrðu ok settu þar undir málaspjót þat er maðr mátti taka hendi sinni til geirnagla. Þeir skyldu þar fjórir undir ganga, Þorgrímr, Gísli, Þorkell ok Vésteinn. Ok nú vekja þeir sér blóð ok láta renna saman dreyra sinn í þeiri moldu er upp var skorin undan jarðarmeninu og hrœra saman allt, moldina ok blóðit. En síðan fellu þeir allir á kné ok sverja þann eið at hverr skal annars hefna sem bróður síns ok nefna ǫll goðin í vitni. (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943, 22-3)

[40] Hafði sú siðvenja verit hǫfð frægra manna, þeira er þat lǫgmál settu sín í milli, at sá skyldi annars hefna, er lengr lifði, þá skyldu þeir ganga undir þrjú jarðarmen, ok var þat eiðr þeira. Sá leikr var á þá lund, at rísta skyldi þrjár torfur ór jǫrðu langar; þeira endar skyldu allir fastir í jǫrðu ok heimta upp lykkjurnar, svá at menn mætti ganga undir. (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943, 125)

> avenge the other if one of them was killed by weapons. (my translation)[41]

Besides these examples, which have in common that they all include the expression *ganga undir jarðarmen*, there are some further examples of entry into foster-brotherhood where people let blood run into their footprints. Brynhildr says to Gunnarr in *Brot* 17: 'you clearly did not remember, Gunnarr, that you both let your blood run into a trench (actually footprints)?' (Larrington 1996, 176).[42] Furthermore we read in *Gesta Danorum* I, vi, 7:

> An aged man, with only one eye, happened to take pity on the lonely Hading, robbed of his nurse, and brought him into friendship with a pirate Liser by establishing a covenant between them. Now our ancestors, when they meant to strike a pact, would sprinkle their combined blod in their footprints and mingle it, so as to strengthen the pledge of their fellowship. (Fisher 1979, 24).[43]

Although all these sources are of a fairly recent date with regard to the time that they pretend to describe, most scholars agree that they give us some idea of how the formation of foster-brotherhood did, in fact, take place, if only because the customs are so 'strange' that an influence from Christianity is unlikely. On the other hand, there is considerable disagreement about what the meaning of the rituals might have been.[44] Common to the first three examples of the ritual is that the participants are to *ganga undir jarðarmen* 'go under a strip of turf' (*lit.* an 'earth-necklace') and that they must swear an oath (the two elements, however, may apparently be understood as identical in *Fóstbræðra saga.*

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[41] 'Nú vil ek bjóða þér þann kost, ef þú gefr Bela líf, at vit sverjumst í fóstbræðralag' … Var þetta síðan bundit fastmælum. Þeir vǫktu sér blóð í lófum ok gengu undir jarðarmen ok sóru þar eiða, at hverr skyldi annars hefna, ef nokkurr þeira yrði með vápnum veginn. (FSN III, 59)

[42] 'Mantattu, Gunnarr, til gorva þat, er þit blóði í spor báðir rendot'? (NK 1962, 200).

[43] Spolitatum nutrice Hadingum grandævus forete quidam, altero orbus osculo, solitarium miseratus Lisero cuidam piratæ solemni pactionis iure conciliat. Siquidem icturi foedus veteres vestigia sua mutui sanguinis aspersione perfundere consueverant amicitiarium pignus alterni cruoris commercio firmaturi. (Olrik and Ræder 1931, 23)

[44] Hellmuth 1975, 78-84 gives a detailed research overview.

This is an important fact as it indicates that, in the ritual sequence, an oath-taking must have taken place during the *jarðarmen*-rite itself). What consequences the taking of the oath may have had socially, we will not debate further here, but it is certain that it is of importance to the parties involved for the rest of their lives and, among other things, includes the duty to avenge each other, as appears from the examples. In that sense it is, therefore, a matter of a 'new existence' – an existence in which a new relationship reaches beyond the old ones and may come into conflict with them (*Gísla saga* is, for example, constructed around this problem). Thus, it is a transition which we may presume to have been accompanied by an initiation ritual. And the rite *ganga undir jarðarmen* to a great degree corroborates this.[45]

Viewpoints in the history of research

The purpose of the rite has, as mentioned, been much discussed. Konrad Maurer thought that its function was purely to strengthen the oath itself, which is obviously an important aspect; but nevertheless, it must have had a meaning that was understood, consciously or unconsciously, by the people who carried it out, thus including some symbolism, an element which Maurer does not touch on much (Maurer 1874, and 1907, 240-1).

The first real attempt at an interpretation of religio-historical value was carried out by Max Pappenheim, who discussed the topic in several articles and reached the conclusion that the meaning of the rites performed in the formation of foster-brotherhood consisted in a symbolic rebirth from the earth, which in turn symbolised the uterus (Pappenheim 1919, 78-80 and 1924, 116). Pappenheim realised that this interpretation could only explain the rite when it was used in connection with foster-brotherhood and argued, therefore, that it was not until it entered this context that it acquired the meaning of rebirth (Pappenheim 1924, 117). The connection between *ganga undir jarðarmen* and the formation of foster-brotherhood was something that came about late, according to Pappenheim, as this formation would originally have been confirmed by the drinking of one another's blood, and then later on blood mixed in the men's footprints would have been used. Not until that stage had been reached would it have become common to *ganga undir jarðarmen* (Pappenheim 1919, 86 and 1924, 124). A more detailed discussion of Pappenheim's arguments is without importance here, but it may be stated that the various lines of development that he thinks one could draw are constructed on methods of a comparative kind, which are predominantly evolutionary in their orientation. Most scholars who have followed him have accepted the rebirth-symbolism as an important part of the *jarðarmen*-rite (for instance Boyer 1986, 149), although they have based their arguments on different premises.

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[45] Below, we will return to the observation that the rite was apparently also used in a completely different context than in connection with the forming of blood-brotherhood (see, among others, Pappenheim 1919, 70). In *Laxdœla saga* chapter 18 it seems to serve as a *Gottesurteil* and in *Vatnsdœla saga* chapter 33 as a kind of act of penitence in which something shameful was involved (cf. also *Brennu-Njáls saga*, chapter 119).

Jan de Vries had a different opinion of the turf-rite and argued that the original meaning is to be found in the entry into foster-brotherhood and that the symbolism of death and rebirth is the heart of the matter. He aligned this with the concept of the family as an institution, into which one cannot simply enter (as a brother), but into which one has to be born. His further explanation reads (de Vries 1929, 132):

> Um das zu bewerkstelligen, muss man sich erst in der Welt der Toten versetzen, dort muss der Fremde durch den Ritus der Blutmischung mit der Sippe verbunden werden, und erst durch die magische Partizipation an der geschlossenen Kette der Familie befindet er sich in der Lage, als ihr Mitglied wiedergeboren zu werden.
>
> In order to accomplish that, one has first to be removed to the world of the dead, and there the outsider must be connected with the kin-group through the rite of blood-mixing, and he will not be reborn as a member of the family until he has undergone magical participation in the closed chain of the family.

It is possible that de Vries is correct, but there are not immediately any elements in the texts that point in the direction of this precise symbolism. It is possible that it was implicitly present in the minds of those involved, but neither the death symbolism nor the birth symbolism can be deduced from the descriptions as we have them. If the death/rebirth-symbolism was present, it must, therefore, have been via some semantic relationships between the oppositional pairs upper world/underworld and life/death. The following analysis seems to confirm that this is the case.

De Vries did not succeed either in finding a common meaning for all the various uses of the expression *ganga undir jarðarmen*. Whereas he maintained the original attachment of the rite to the formation of blood-brotherhood, he thought that, with the introduction of Christianity, it was downgraded to pagan magic that was associated with having contact with the underworld; at the same time, the meaning of the mixing of blood was forgotten so that the oath became separated from the rite, which, therefore, could be used as a means of humiliation (de Vries 1929, 133-5). De Vries has an interesting observation in connection with a Norwegian popular belief: if one places a turf on one's head, one can obtain supernatural knowledge because, by entering into the world of the dead, one may obtain the abilities of the spirits (de Vries 1929, 118-22). He thus adds an aspect of numinous knowledge to the ritual and also emphasises the social consequence of the mixing of blood: one becomes a part of the family with all that this entails or, in other words, one acquires a new social identity.

The most thorough and comprehensive treatment of Germanic blood-brotherhood to date was carried out by Leopold Hellmuth who deals with all aspects of the topic in his *Die germanische Blutsbrüderschaft* of 1975. We cannot go into details about his reasoning, but we can state that he, too, understands *ganga undir jarðarmen* as an expression of a death/rebirth-symbolism (Hellmuth 1975, 180 and 193-201), and that he thinks that it is not possible to trace all the various uses of the *jarðarmen*-rite back to one and the same original idea. He views the statements in *Laxdœla saga* and *Vatnsdœla saga* as later products of the imagination (Hellmuth 1975, 75).[46] Hellmuth argues further that the mixing of blood and earth, described in *Gísla saga*, is only a variant of the actual act of mixing blood, and that this mixing and the *jarðarmen*-

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[46] Hellmuth refers here to Heller 1969 who has argued that at least the example from *Laxdœla saga* is pure invention. This may be so, but, as will appear below, it is in fact possible to find a trace of a common semantic centre in the three uses of the *jarðarmen*-rite. I cannot agree with him either in his reasoning in another place (Heller 1976, 116-22) that both *Laxdœla saga* and *Fóstbrœdra saga* have simply 'borrowed' the motif from *Gísla saga*. The 'conspicuous' agreement in the wording in question is easily understandable if the rite they mention is actually the same.

rite, which symbolises cultic death and rebirth are two different angles of the ritual, which have not 'supplanted' one another but which, together with the taking of the oath, constitute the consecration to blood-brotherhood (1975, 81-2).

Hellmuth further refers to similarities between entering into blood-brotherhood, on the one hand, and entering into the secret societies in which a 'guardian' plays a role, on the other hand (Hellmuth 1975, 218):

> Wenn Óðinn als der 'fóstri' der Blutsbrüder wie der Bundbrüder überhaupt galt und sich die Blutsbrüder als seine 'Ziehsöhne', seine 'Söhne' verstanden, dann war das 'fóstbrœdrelag' keineswegs bloss eine soziale Angelegenheit auf rein menschlicher Ebene, sondern die Verwandschaft der 'Brüder' war dann nur die eine Seite eines Ganzen, das seinem Ursprung und seiner Natur nach einer höheren Sphäre angehörte.

> If Óðinn was understood as the 'foster-father' of the blood-brothers just as with the brothers of the band, and the blood-brothers were understood to be his 'foster-sons', his 'sons', then the 'fosterbrotherhood' was in no way only a social matter on purely human grounds, but the family-relationship of the 'brothers' was then only one side of a whole, which belonged in its origin and nature to a higher sphere.

Hellmuth argues (1975, 202) that there is no major difference between the *Männerbünde,* men's bands, and the blood-brother relationship. He refers to several examples in which Óðinn appears as 'the master' of the men's bands, and at the same time he plays up the example from Saxo.[47]

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[47] The examples of entry into blood-brotherhood are, however, very scarce, and Hellmuth has primarily kept to the passage referred to in Saxo, which in itself is somewhat vague with regard to whether Óðinn in fact institutionalises blood-brotherhood, and in addition to this it is a unique case. The reasoning, which to a large extent is constructed on Höfler's arguments, nevertheless, seems enticing in that Hellmuth includes several examples of warrior-associations which appear as *Brüder-Bünde* 'bands of brothers'. If a god has acquired an important role in these circumstances, Hellmuth's reasoning is far preferable to that of Garmonsway (1950, 421-5), who advances the view that Freyr

Hellmuth discusses the relationship between entry into blood-brotherhood and initiation. He mentions examples of entry into blood-brotherhood in other cultures, which definitely have to be understood as initiations (1975, 190-2). This suggests that the Scandinavian evidence should also be examined to see whether such ritual patterns occur there, too, although one has to be careful not to argue that all transitions, which appear in one culture to follow an initiation-pattern, necessarily do so in another.[48] Furthermore, Hellmuth emphasises that all those who step under the strips of turf, that is, under the ground, undergo a radical change and are born into a new existence, even when it does not happen in connection with blood-brotherhood (1975, 193-200), such as in cases of illness and of the acquisition of various abilities. He concludes with regard to the symbolic meaning:

> Die Fähigkeit, dämonische Wesen in ihrer wahren Natur zu erkennen und insbesonders die Begabung mit initiatorischer Weisheit, die denjenigen zuteil wurde, die unter den Rasen traten, rührt meiner Meinung nach daher, dass der Mensch, der sich 'unter die Erde' begab, eigenlich kein Mensch mehr war; er wurde Toten und Geistern gleich und erlangte übermenschliche Fähigkeiten wie diese (1975, 200).

> The ability to recognise demonic beings in their true nature, and especially the endowment with initiatory wisdom, which would fall to the share of each of those who went under the turf, is, according to my opinion, due to the idea that the person who proceeded 'under the ground' was in fact not a human being any more; he had become like the dead or the spirits and acquired superhuman abilities like them.

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played a role in the *jarðarmen*-rite, for which circumstantial evidence is completely lacking.

[48] Hellmuth belongs to that large group of scholars who have been inspired by Otto Höfler (who has written the preface to Hellmuth's dissertation), as is also the case with Renate Doht, whose work was mentioned in connection with the skaldic mead. This 'school' includes, in most cases, a great wealth of comparative material, both from other Indo-European cultures and from entirely different regions of the world, which, as mentioned, may cause certain methodological problems (cf. Schjødt 1986a and 1999b).

This conclusion, which is in agreement with Höfler's understanding of the members of the men's bands, seems to go further than the evidence allows. While it seems certain that the initiate attains knowledge and certain abilities that are fetched from the underworld, it is something else to claim that he becomes like the dead or like the spirits, and that he ceases to be a human being. In connection with the Óðinn myths, we have demonstrated that Óðinn does not cease to be a representative of the upper world, even though, time after time, he seeks and obtains new knowledge from the underworld; he does not change in the same way as was the case with Mímir and Kvasir, and he remains, above all, at the pole that designates 'life' in the life-death-opposition. It is naturally correct that the initiated person – both here and in all other cases – in a certain sense becomes a 'new' person, and of course it cannot be denied that the journey to the dead and the journey to the underworld may alternate as mythemes, but the crucial point is that one returns to the upper world *bringing something of that which is characteristic of the underworld, and with that also the state of being dead*, but one does not symbolically remain with the dead, either spatially or in terms of one's condition.

As far as knowledge is concerned, Hellmuth does not seem quite clear when he says that, in various situations in which the motif of going under the ground, appears it involves an expansion of the subject's knowledge and abilities; but in connection with blood-brotherhood he is actually very reticent, and thus does not mention what it is that, in fact, transmits knowledge. We must admit that the sources are not exactly explicit on this point either but, in what follows, we will attempt to see how we may be able to place this 'wisdom' (*Weisheit*), the existence of which Hellmuth acknowledges unconditionally as an element in the complex of blood-brotherhood.

Analysis

The most copious description of the process of entering into foster-brotherhood contains three elements: the taking of the oath, the mixing of blood and the action entitled *ganga undir jarðarmen.*[49] The taking of the oath must be seen as a confirmation of the entry into foster-brotherhood both for the people involved and the gods (cf. *Gísla saga*), and we hear about it in many passages in the sagas, though often without learning anything about the accompanying rites (Hellmuth 1975, 16-53). The taking of an oath in a religious society is in the very nature of things a rite. It must therefore be in the oath and the two other characteristic rites, which we come across in *Gísla saga* and in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, that we have to search for the transmission of knowledge, if that may be found at all.

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[49] We ought not to conclude too much from the fact that all these elements only appear in two of the descriptions (cf. that which has been said above about *argumenta ex silentio*). It is thus not necessary to accept, as Hellmuth (1975, 193) does, that the episode in

We know from the previous chapters that the underworld, which we must consider as an implicit symbolic entity in the *jarðarmen*-rite, provides the person who comes there with numinous knowledge. Likewise, we also know that words and blood are elements that are often used as mediators of this knowledge, and for this reason we must investigate their place in the ritual structure. But where the myths, as we have seen, make it relatively easy to 'explain' the way in which a meeting with the underworld may imply an acquisition of knowledge, this may be difficult to understand from the ritual context because the participants in the ritual must be supposed to have the whole, or at least part, of the mythical context in their minds (in contrast to those authors who described them centuries later). If, as a beginning, we assume that one or more of the myths discussed have actually formed the frame of reference, which was able to give the participants in the blood-mixing ritual a 'meaning' for what they were doing, it becomes possible to penetrate into the ideas that were combined with specific actions.

The question will, therefore, be: what is it that *may* have given the participants in the rituals their numinous knowledge? And the answer must be that both the taking of the common oath as well as the mixing of blood may have served this purpose, which we will return to presently. It *may* also be the *jarðarmen*-rite itself, which, however, in the context only seems to form the necessary backdrop to the actual acqui-

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Fóstbræðra saga might be a manifestation of a complete description. In spite of everything, our point of departure must be the most detailed description available. That does not mean that the individual rites could not have existed independently, perhaps in other contexts than in the entering into foster-brotherhood, such as it seems to be the case with *ganga undir jarðamen*, as was indicated above.

sition of knowledge.[50] The mythical examples that we have examined above have all demonstrated that, in the underworld or in the state of being dead, 'something or other' happens – that a form of numinous power is acquired. The *jarðarmen*-rite then has the purpose of creating a symbolic space in which such an acquisition becomes possible.

If we first of all look at the meaning of the expression *ganga under jarðarmen*, we must suppose that in all three of the examples in which the action is described in connection with entry into foster-brotherhood, it is included in the structural position in which the journey to the underworld is to be found in the mythic staging. The journey to the underworld contains, as we have seen, a descent (or a death), a stay (or a state of being dead) together with the concomitant acquisition of knowledge and a return (a rebirth). It need not trouble us that van Gennep's three categories of rites are not explicitly expressed here, partly because a great deal may have happened that the authors of the sagas have not imparted to us, and partly because a descent under the ground and a return is sufficient – if the behaviour has been ritualised – to form *rites de séparation* and *rites d'agrégation*. If the acquisition of knowledge has now taken place in agreement with those ideas that are expressed in our myths, it must have taken place mainly in the central phase, therefore, after the descent and before the ascent, or, in other words, while the men involved were in the hollow that had been made under the elevated strips of turf (Pappenheim 1924, 99). It is probably also in this phase that, according to the most copious of our sources, *Gísla saga*, people let things take place in connection with the ritual, namely the mixing of blood and the taking of the oath, as it explicitly says that the blood is mixed with the earth that was lying under the turf strips. We cannot use the episode in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* as support for a different understanding of the sequence (*þeir vöktu sér*

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[50] There is probably no reason to doubt the examples that de Vries mentions (1929, 118) in which a person, by placing a turf on his or her head, is able to obtain supernatural knowledge. But first of all, there is that important difference between these examples and the *jarðarmen*-rite connected with entry into blood-brotherhood that the former are obviously not a question of initiation but rather of some sort of magical practice. In contrast to entry into blood-brotherhood it is definitely reversible. As far as the latter is concerned, it is quite imaginable that the symbolically constructed underworld in question here may be imagined to contain in itself one or more elements of those that we have seen above so that all of the underworld's potential knowledge – perhaps without any specific symbolising – is called forth by means of this simple action.

blóð í lófum ok gengu undir jarðarmen 'they let blood run into the palms of their hands and went under a strip of turf'). The *ok* 'and' that connects the two actions cannot be used as support for the idea that the mixing of blood had taken place *before* they descended under the turf strips. Whether the author had any specific purpose in joining his clauses in this way can always be debated, but *ok* can in any case be understood as introducing a normal coordinate clause: they both mixed blood *and* descended under the turf strips, without anything being said about the sequence of events. Furthermore, it is likely that *þar* 'there' used about the place in which they take the oath indicates the place under the turf strips. It is not clear either what meaning the *síðan* 'afterwards' in *Gísla saga* has in the transition to the oath. It *may* mean that the taking of the oath takes place after the *jarðarmen*-rite, but it may just as well refer to the mixing of blood so that this is the action that preceded the oath. In that case, both the oath and the mixing of blood would have taken place under the turf. The fact that the gods are taken as witnesses indicates, in any case, that the participants are still in the ritual phase in which the contact with them is strongest, and that means the liminal phase – before they have left the symbolically constructed underworld. When it can thus be rendered probable that both the taking of the oath and the mixing of blood have occurred in this central phase, it must also be here that we need to look for the transmission of knowledge.

As far as the content of the oath is concerned, the sources do not tell us anything about its wording, but we know from virtually all initiation rituals that the knowledge the novices receive is knowledge that, among other things, is necessary in order to take care of their future functions, both of a practical and a sacral nature (e.g. Piddington 1932, 33, 46; Mühlmann 1955, 29; V. Turner 1967, 102-3). In connection with entry into foster-brotherhood, this means that they must be given some knowledge in connection with the duties they take on, for example in connection with revenge and about the general relationship they will have to one another and perhaps, as suggested by Hellmuth (1975, 203-18), to Óðinn. We may thus assume that the oath included some formulaic rigmarole with a content such as we have outlined here. It may seem unreasonable to postulate that such oaths would be expressions for the acquisition of numinous knowledge since obligations of this kind would not be unknown in advance. Thus we do not hear anything about an initiator in connection with the entry into foster-brotherhood, which would probably have been necessary if unknown material was at issue.[51] The crucial fact in this connection is, however, not whether the content was actually known, but whether the oath was uttered in a formalistic way *at the right time and place* in the ritual. That is the decisive fact that may, so to speak, invest every triviality with numinous value. We can, therefore, without any difficulty understand the oath as having communicated knowledge of a numinous nature.

We shall now turn to the role played by the blood, and here the problem is more complicated. In the two texts in which the mixing of blood is combined with the *jarðarmen*-rite, it happens in two apparently different ways. In *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, we read that they *vöktu ser blóð í lófum. Lófi* means the palm of the hand, the flat of the hand, especially the middle part (cf. *Fritzner: lófi*), and nothing is mentioned here about the ground that comes into contact with the blood such as is clearly the case in *Gísla saga*, in which they *láta renna saman dreyra sinn í þeiri moldu, er upp var skorin undan jarðarmeninu, ok hrœra saman allt, moldina ok blóðit* 'they make their blood flow and let it be nixed in the earth that had been cut up under the strip of turf and they mix it all together, the earth and the blood'. We notice, however, that the two passages in the text do not contradict each other but may rather be imagined to be complementary. If that is the case, a reconstruction of the rite will look like this: the parties involved go down under the turf strips. They wound themselves in the hand and take the hands of the others so the blood is thus mixed, then the blood runs onto the soil on the ground (perhaps, with Saxo, into their footprints, cf. Hellmuth 1975, 83), with which it is then mixed. After this, they take the oath and then leave the place under the turf. It cannot, of course, be decided with certainty that the rite was in fact like this, but neither of the two passages in the sagas can be assumed to have recorded all the details from the beginning. The same commentary may be given with regard to the passage in *Fóstbrœðra saga*. It would be naïve to argue that we have here an example of, let alone 'proof', that entering into foster-brotherhood could actually take place without the mixing of blood. From the outset, the probability of omissions must here be considered as greater than the likelihood of additions to the two other passages. Naturally, we cannot exclude the possibility that the various texts reflect different traditions (with regard to time and place), but, as the analysis will demonstrate, there is a greater probability that we are dealing with a complex that includes all three rites.

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[51] On the other hand, it probably cannot be excluded that such instruction may have preceded the *jarðarmen*-rite, in that case as part of the separation.

If this proposed reconstruction is close to reality, the blood is involved in two mixings: men mix blood with each other and they mix blood with the earth (the earth in the liminal space). As far the former is concerned, I partly agree with de Vries when he writes (1929, 116):

> Wenn also das Blut des einen Menschen in der Körper des andern übergeht, so sind die beiden Personen substantiell dieselben geworden, da ja die ganze Persönlichkeit mit allen ihr anhaftende Eigenschaften zusammen mit dem Blute übertragen worden ist.[52]
>
> When the blood, therefore, flows from one person into the body of another, then both persons substantially become the same, since indeed the whole personality with all its inherent characteristics is transferred together with the blood.

One's reservation about taking de Vries exactly at his word comes from the fact that he speaks of a transference of *die ganze Persönlichkeit*, for which no proof can be found within the Scandinavian material.[53] In several passages, however, among others *Hrólfs saga kraka* chapter 35, (cf. also *Gesta Danorum* II, vi, 11), it emerges that essential qualities, including abilities, can be transferred along with blood, as we found above. The significance of the action of the foster-brothers in mixing blood is, therefore, that they are to transfer essential qualities and abilities to one another. The blood that is mixed can thus be understood as the medium for the transference of numinous power.

It now remains to discuss the mixing of blood and earth and, in that connection, also the footprints, which we saw played a role in *Brot* 17 and *Gesta Danorum* I, vi, 7. Hellmuth's interpretation of the footprint rite as an exact symbolic parallel to the ordinary mixing of blood, since the relationship of the footprints to the person who has made them is understood as a *pars pro toto* relationship (Hellmuth 1975, 68-9), seems obvious. The two actions of 'mixing blood' must in that case simply be considered as two variants of the same theme, namely the exchange of qualities, either through the palms of the hands or through the footprints.[54]

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[52] In justification it must be said that the quotation is, indeed, an expression for de Vries's attitude to the Scandinavian people's understanding of the mixing of blood, but he bases it on a general phenomenological observation. It is, therefore, not a viewpoint that may unambiguously be deduced from the Scandinavian material itself.

[53] For the same reason, I have also to reject Hellmuth's bombastic statements (1975, 66) about the total identity between the parties involved.

Before we leave the blood-mixing ritual, we will return to a theme which has been a major subject of research, namely that the *jarðarmen*-rite was apparently able to play a part in many different contexts. We will attempt here to form a hypothesis that may perhaps put some of the elements in place.

Besides being connected with blood-brotherhood, the rite is also found associated with what we may call a 'divine judgement' in *Laxdœla saga* chapter 18 and with an apparently very humiliating act in *Vatnsdœla saga* chapter 33 in which it is a question of a kind of penalty.[55]

If we first look at the *jarðarmen*-rite as a disgraceful act, we have to ask what, in fact, it is that constitutes the shamefulness surrounding its practitioners. Scholars have not agreed on this, and most have thought that it was either a question of a product of the saga authors' imagination, or that this was a degenerate use of the rite in which the actual meaning had been completely forgotten. As far as I am aware, the only scholar who has attempted a solution and who takes *Vatnsdœla saga*'s descriptions seriously as a semantic phenomenon is Margaret Clunies Ross. In an article from 1973 she proposed that 'the use to which *jarðarmen* is put in the *Vatnsdœla saga* is closer to its earliest significance than those already mentioned' (1973, 90). The last part of the sentence refers to de Vries's theory of rebirth as blood-brothers and to Toivonen, who supports the theory about the strengthening function of the oath (Toivonen 1940) and who refers back to Maurer. Clunies Ross's arguments are constructed on the basis of the idea that the turf strips symbolise the anus, in conformity with the many pejorative references to rings in Icelandic literature (Clunies Ross 1973, 80-1), and that the *Vatnsdœla saga* episode involves the *ergi*-complex with its connotations of homosexuality, perversity and cowardice. The *ergi*-complex has been mentioned earlier, but it is so complicated from a semantic point of view that it is not possible to enter into a more detailed discussion of it here. Thus, we have to limit ourselves to stating that the situation in *Vatnsdœla saga*, especially Jǫkull's strong reaction against *being blemished*, supports the understanding of a connection between the *ergi*-complex and the use of the *jarðarmen* here.[56] If Clunies Ross's analysis is correct, and is combined with what the foregoing analysis has demonstrated of the genuinely pagan nature of the connection of the rite with initiation to blood-brotherhood, then there can hardly be any doubt that the same rite was able to symbolise the transition to a new (and higher) existence as well as being able to be placed within the most disgraceful complex in the pagan world-view.

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[54] One possible interpretation, which probably cannot be excluded, is that the blood as well as the footprints are regarded as a sacrifice which the novices bring to the chthonic powers (Näsström 2002, 79); and in this connection it is naturally the *pars pro toto* relationship to the initiates that is crucial, as this is the means by which they are giving *themselves*. In that case, the symbolism is that, by giving blood, they die as a prerequisite for being reborn, which would be in agreement with de Vries's basic understanding of the *jarðarmen*-rite.

[55] A similar understanding is, apparently, behind the reference in *Njáls saga* chapter 119.

The key to the problem, it seems, lies in our being able to understand that the *jarðarmen*-rite is actually only a rite – a ritual unit which is usually combined with other ritual units to form a ritual proper – but a rite which had the capacity to form a part of several different rituals. The ritual context is therefore the deciding factor in whether a rite had a positive or a negative value. In the two types of ritual in which we meet the *jarðarmen* rite, it appears that there is an opposition between voluntariness and involuntariness, which is of importance in relation to the status associated with the subject who experiences the rite. Our analyses so far have also clearly shown that the underworld is indeed a place where one may acquire knowledge and numinous power, but it is also the place in which Loki changes sex and acts like a woman. We are again reminded that the numinous does not denote a definite content, and that it cannot even be designated as exclusively positive. It is only different – in a negative way as well as in a positive one, and it is the context that must be the deciding factor in its evaluation.

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[56] Works which have all discussed the *ergi*-complex from different angles, although in most cases these are associated with the *níð*-complex, are F. Ström 1972 and 1974; Markey (who gives some good etymological explanations of *níð* 1972, 14-6 and *ergi* 1972, 17-8) and Meulengracht Sørensen 1980, who all give copious additional references.

According to our sources, the rite thus seems to have been able to participate in (at least) two different rituals. In the first, about whose symbolic value we are unfortunately very poorly informed, it must be viewed as a part of the *ergi*-complex; in the second, namely the entry into blood-brotherhood, the rite focused on the positive knowledge potential, which is also a part of the underworld. It is, therefore, not necessary to assume that a connection existed between historical development and changing use of the *jarðarmen*-rite. Both the acquisition of knowledge and the disgrace associated with the *ergi*-complex fit quite well, seen from a semantic viewpoint, into the space that has to do with an approach to the chthonic sphere. The same rite can, therefore, by means of the symbolic connotations that are attached to it, form a fitting part of different ritual contexts.[57] The common denominator for the two complexes is, therefore, that those men who go down under the turf strips are equipped with or attributed with *extraordinary* abilities – whether positive or negative – which are acquired by moving into the liminal space.

The third form of use – the divine judgement or however we are to understand the very different use of the rite – we hear of only in *Laxdœla saga*. Its reliability has been strongly questioned by Rolf Heller (1969), who argues that the saga author here, as in other passages in the same saga, is completely unreliable as far as historical accuracy is concerned. This, however, is true of so many of the saga authors, and in our context it is more important to examine whether it is possible to find a semantic relationship between the *jarðarmen*-rite and the type of tests (*skírsla*) in question. Again, it must be the conception of the underworld that forms the point of departure for a plausible suggestion. The crucial factor here must be that, no matter how, we may otherwise characterise it, the underworld is dangerous: it contains death and killing, and it requires special qualifications to be successful there. From this, the assumption that a crime against the gods in the form of perjury would make a (symbolic) journey to the underworld especially dangerous is probably not very far away. Thus, in this connection, it is also meaningful to find a semantic centre in the symbolic journey to the underworld that is conveyed by the expression *ganga undir jarðarmen*.

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[57] We need only think, for example, of sacrifices, which have formed part of a wealth of different rituals, often with very different purposes (Beck 1967, 89-95 and Derolez 1959, 195-205: see also Widengren 1969, 280-327 for a more general discussion), or, perhaps better suited for compararison in this connection, the act of hanging which, as we have seen, could be used both as an element in a sacrifice and an initiation, but which presumably could also be an element in the punishment of crimes (cf. *Germania* chapter 12: *proditores et transfugas arboribus suspendunt* 'traitors and deserters are hung from trees' [Warmington 1970,148-9]), perhaps combined with the practice of sacrifice.

Conclusion

From an analytical perspective, it is far more difficult to see the semantic content of entering into blood-brotherhood than was the case in connection with the myths. This cannot surprise us, since, as mentioned, myths must have a certain explanatory value in order to be able to function, whereas rituals depend to a great extent on the participants' knowledge of these myths.

With regard to our four criteria, however, we can state that the subjects have irreversibly changed status. Whether this status is 'higher' may perhaps be debated, but in the consciousness of the initiates there is no doubt that such is the case, as their new status is the direct reason for carrying out the ritual. The sequence also fits un-problematically into our sequence characterisation. Although we are obviously not informed about everything that happened, the sequence includes a descent into a space in which something happens that changes the status of the subjects, after which they return. The *jarðarmen*-rite demonstrates the presence of the oppositional pair upper world versus underworld. If the above interpretation of the rite in *Vatnsdœla saga* is included, we can also see an outline of an opposition that may be called masculine versus feminine. On the other hand, we only come across the life/death-opposition indirectly, and for this reason it is not obvious that we should include an actual and conscious rebirth-symbolism. But, although there is nothing that immediately indicates that we should imagine the initiands symbolically dying in the course of the rite, we must be receptive to the possibility that death as a semantic category might be implicitly present as a consequence of the fact that it is actually an element connected with the chthonic, as appears from several of the previous analyses. Finally, we have seen that both the oaths that are sworn as well as the blood presumably contain a form of numinous power.

9.5 Initiations of Kings

Van Gennep realised that the process of becoming a leader of a small or large group in a society was often accompanied by *rites des passage*. In that connection, it is of little importance whether we are dealing with a 'king' in the traditional sense or a leader of humbler status. Such a distinction plays no role in this section, and we will not embark on a discussion of a king's political position in relation to other groups in the societies of pagan Scandinavia. Even though many historians argue that it is unreasonable to speak of kings before the beginning of the Viking Age, rituals associated with the transition from not being a leader, whether political or religious, to becoming one was, no doubt, much older.

The situation of the sources concerning such rituals is very problematical, and we may argue with some justification that there are no sources at all for them – at least no sources that explicitly describe a specific initiation.[58] But in connection with this phenomenon it is not to the purpose either to use *argumenta ex silentio* regarding our material. When, from a global perspective, initiation ritual associated with a new political leader is so common, it seems acceptable to attempt to go behind the direct descriptions (or the lack of such) to see whether we may find elements in the sources that indicate an initiation sequence associated with becoming a leader. Steinsland (2002) has recently attempted such an argument with special reference to *Skí*, where she focuses especially on the king's badge of rank.[59]

The whole question of sacral kingship has a certain relevance to the problem, and it has been vehemently debated in the history of research.[60] I have discussed this topic elsewhere (Schjødt 1990b) and will, therefore, not enter into it here. In the article referred to, I attempt to show that there are no reasonable arguments for rejecting the proposition that a ‘sacral kingship’ could have existed in Scandinavia. In all circumstances, it seems to be a fixed idea that a prince was possessed of special powers, which are extraordinary in relation to other people. What we will argue in the following section is that these special powers are obtained through a ritual of the initiation type.

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[58] Sawyer says bluntly (2001, 385) that 'There is no evidence for pre-Christian inauguration in Scandinavia'. Sundqvist 2001, 627 is more nuanced.

[59] See Sundqvist 2001 for a general outline of associated problems.

[60] A splendid outline is found in McTurk 1974-7. The Scandinavian sources that are of importance are mentioned in Baetke 1964 and those that deal with South Germanic conditions are in Wolfram 1968. With special reference to the importance of Tacitus for the understanding of a Germanic sacred kingdom, see Picard 1991. More recent sum-

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As mentioned, we do not have any description of a complete ritual sequence, so we are left with having to piece one together from various pieces of indirect information. In earlier chapters, we indicated that certain features in mythical or semi-mythical episodes *might* be thought to have a connection with the consecration of kings (Sigurðr, Sigmundr, Hadingus and Óttarr). *Rþ*, with its description of Konr and his activities, is the account that gives most information in this regard. No doubt we are dealing here with a figure in whom the acquisition of knowledge and the acquisition of a kingdom are connected. Jere Fleck (1970) has provided an analysis indicating that we are, in fact, dealing with an acquisition of knowledge that forms an element in an initiation. Fleck compares Konr to Óttarr, whom we previously discussed in connection with the analysis of *Hyndl*, as well as to Geirrǫðr (in *Grí*). His point is that in all cases do we find a divine actor imparting knowledge to a potential king and that their relationship is crucial for the discharging of the latter’s duties in the sacral kingship. Fleck is aware of the conjectural nature of his argument, but he postulates that the only reasonable way to understand *Rþ 45*, where Jarl and Konr are discussing runes (Fleck understands *deila* ‘to contend’ as an indication that we are dealing with a knowledge-competition), is that Konr is the superior because Rígr has instructed him. Fleck’s own conclusion to his analysis of *Rþ* reads (1970, 42):

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maries of the discussion within the Scandinavian area are given by Steinsland 1991a, 307-13; Schjødt 1990b and Sundqvist 2002, 18-38. Sundqvist thoroughly discusses a series of aspects of the phenomenon (regarding the relationship between the mythical and the historical especially in skaldic poems, see Sundqvist 1997).

> I contend that here a ritual education in numinous knowledge as a part of a young/youngest son's individual consecration to a godly figure formed the decisive factor in the succession to a Germanic sacred kingship.[61]

In order to determine the strength of Fleck's reasoning we must examine the crucial stanzas in *Rþ* more closely and then compare them with the criteria that have been set out above.

To begin with, it is Jarl who is knowledgeable about runes (stanza 36) because Rígr instructs him. It is clear that we are dealing here with an element in an assumption of power (the right to allodial land – *óðalvellir*). In addition, Jarl is taught about his origin and he is able to take over his father's name.[62] In the following stanzas, we hear how Jarl becomes a great warrior and a significant prince; how he obtains a wife and twelve sons, the youngest of whom is Konr. He, too, knows runes, as stanza 43/1-2 says: 'But young Kin knew runes (Larrington 1996, 252) (*Enn Konr ungr kunni rúnar*) (Neckel and Kuhn 1962, 286), but without our learning from where he got this knowledge. Fleck thinks that he must have been instructed by his divine paternal grandfather, Rígr. It also seems more likely than that Konr would be distinguished from Jarl by *not* needing instruction, as has been suggested by von See *et al.* 2000, 654. The attachment to Rígr – also as far as Konr is concerned – is indisputable. It is evident that a couple of those skills, which this stanza tells us that Konr has, are also known from the description of Óðinn in *Yng* chapters 6 and 7, namely his ability to blunt the edges of weapons and calm the waves.[63] It is, therefore, possible to see them as part of a constant repertoire of the ideal king. The skills that Konr is in possession of in this and the following stanzas belong indisputably to the area, which here is called numinous knowledge and which constitutes the factor that separates the initiated person from the non-initiated person, the king from the people (cf. Mazo 1985, 754).

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[61] Fleck's discussion of 'ultimogeniture' and 'primogeniture' is not crucial to the discussion that will be carried on here. Nevertheless, it is naturally interesting for the whole question of who could become king. But in addition to this it is also important with regard to a general mythical 'mechanism'. For, as Fleck mentions (1970, 41), 'primogeniture' was in fact more common, whereas the myths apparently agree to let the inheritance go to a younger son. The explanation of this apparent paradox seems to be that the myth emphasises the importance of 'the knowledge' – suggesting that the knowledge is more important than 'primogeniture'. A younger son is useful for this purpose. That, however, does not mean, if anybody were to suggest it, that the myths mirror an historical period in which 'ultimogeniture' was the rule.

[62] The name Rígr is most probably related to the Irish *ríg* 'king' (*AEW* 446), so, if the meaning was known to the poet, Jarl could add the title of king to his name.

Konr's abilities in this area are greater than Jarl's, as we learn in stanza 45, and in the 'confrontation' with Jarl he proves himself superior and so obtains the right to use the name Rígr and the knowledge of runes. There is no doubt here that Konr quite simply takes over that status which Jarl has previously had. The conclusion of the poem has been lost, as is well known, but in the last three preserved stanzas it seems clear that Konr begins to carry out a series of deeds that are the preserve of the prototypical king.

There is no need to deal with other parts of the poem than those that we have mentioned here. In connection with initiation, the crucial factors are the knowledge that is thematised in connection with both Jarl and Konr, and, as far as both are concerned, the final situation into which they enter. The latter is in both cases characterised by their acquisition of a prince-like position, presumably accentuated by the epithet Rígr, at least if the traditional etymology can be believed.

As we have mentioned, Jarl acquires his knowledge from Rígr, but this is not said directly about Konr. Nevertheless, Fleck's conjecture seems reasonable because the numinous actor in the poem is Rígr who is, therefore, the only one able to mediate knowledge of a numinous character. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that Konr, by demonstrating his mastery of the runes, makes himself worthy of being called Rígr. The runic knowledge and the Rígr-figure must thus belong to the same sphere.

We can now proceed to apply our four criteria to the two figures in *Rþ*. Firstly, they have, as mentioned, both acquired a prince-like position in the final situation. Konr must presumably be seen as a prototypical king, and his position is, as such, in principle irreversible. The competition in knowledge between Jarl and Konr, which apparently has to do with the assumption of royal power, must be the way in which the myth tells us that the one who is most proficient in the region of the numinous must also be the best king.[64]

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[63] Whether this may be taken as an indication that Rígr is only secondarily identified as Heimdallr in the prose of the poem is not certain, but it is probable that he was understood as an Óðinn-hypostasis in the poem itself (cf. Simek 1984, 330). Óðinn has, as we have seen, a tendency to be the being *par excellence* in possession of knowledge, but it will hardly be reasonable to exclude the possibility that other gods in certain traditions might have occupied a similar role.

As far as the triadic horizontal sequence is concerned, it is not possible in *Rþ* nor in any other source to see this demonstrated in connection with anything that has to do unambiguously with the assumption of princely office. We can see neither a symbolic death nor a journey to the underworld. The only connection to The Other World is the god Rígr; and there is thus no Other-World scenario that can provide parallels to the rest of the mythic examples. For this reason, there is no possibility of advancing any oppositional pairs that are analogous to the relationship between the liminal and the non-liminal. On the other hand, it is clear that we are dealing with a form of numinous knowledge.

Some of the other elements that could possibly be included in relation to the ritualisation of princely office include the placing of the king on a stone or a high seat (see Vestergaard 1990, 120), which is mentioned in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* chapter 8, and which seems to have been a fixed ingredient in the consecration of kings.[65] Whether this signified some kind of symbolic connection to The Other World cannot be determined.[66] It is obvious that the situation itself marks a difference with regard to the profane life but, besides this, it hardly seems defensible to want to determine the symbolism further.

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[64] This must be understood purely ideologically. A whole series of factors would have played a part when a king were to be chosen, and besides, we have to assume that many other members of the society were in possession of a knowledge of the numinous, which would have been superior to the king's knowledge. The crucial factor in the articulation of the myth is, therefore, that the part of the ritual that had to do with the acquisition of numinous knowledge is of immense importance and was strongly prioritised ideologically.

[65] Several possible elements are mentioned by Sundqvist 2001, 628-44, among others, a ritual progress (see also Schmidt 2001).

[66] See also de Vries 1956-57, I, 345-9 with references. He mentions various connections in which stones are included. The examples *might* indicate a special connection to The Other World, but the meaning is not explicit anywhere.

Conclusion

Our material about the consecration of kings is sparse. As was mentioned in the introduction, there are no clear descriptions of the rituals to turn to. On the other hand, both *Rþ* and a series of heroic descriptions, analysed above, seem to support the possibility that such rituals may also have existed in Scandinavia, something that Steinsland (2000, 69-74) also urges, using different arguments. More carefully expressed, we may state that notions about these rituals existed in pre-Christian Scandinavia – notions about what a future king or chieftain had to master in the field of numinous knowledge and numinous powers and something of how these could be acquired.

As far as our four basic elements are concerned, we are only able to apply them to *Rþ* by means of various conjectures. However, if we compare the results of Fleck's analysis with some of the analyses above and consider the *a priori* probability that initiation would have taken place in connection with this transition, it seems not only possible, but also probable, that such a ritual existed and contained the four basic elements as a prerequisite for exercising princely office. Yet, our material does not give us the possibility of obtaining any deeper insight into neither the structure of such a ritual nor its symbolically expressed meaning, nor does it allow us to provide a detailed reconstruction of the ceremonies that were actually performed.

Chapter 10

The Acquisition of the Numinous and The Other World: An Analysis of the Semantics of Liminality

The analysis of the liminal which is to be carried out in this chapter will at the same time serve as a sort of conclusion. As a first step, however, it is necessary to examine the complex dealing with the relationship between the Æsir and Vanir more closely. While we have certainly touched on this subject in previous analyses, it has not been discussed as a whole. After that, we will examine how the Scandinavian material as a whole can be seen in the light of the four criteria that were established in Chapter 3.3. And, finally, we will gather together the threads of the emerging image of the semantic universe, to the extent that the analyses allow it. We must state immediately that this will not appear as a semantic universe which is consistent in all details, and in which all variations can be seen as variations of a specific 'original myth'. There is no reason to assume that such an 'original myth' would ever have existed.

It must be emphasised that the analysis in this chapter builds upon the results of the individual analyses already presented. Thus, we will not repeat our arguments for the reconstructions of the mythic sequences that have been analysed in earlier chapters. It should also be mentioned that the sequences that have to do with the acquisition of knowledge, but that do not fulfil the criteria that we have established for qualifying as initiations, will also be included. The reason for this is that the liminal scenario and its place in the triadic sequence are apparently not different – at least not directly – from the actual initiation sequences. To this we will return to below.

10.1 The Other World in the Mythic *Mise-en-scène*

At first, we will briefly discuss the complex of problems involved in expressing the opposition between This World and The Other World in a mythic *mise-en-scène* and, in continuation of this, we will carry out an analysis of the relationship between the Æsir and the Vanir, which forms a myth complex that is exceedingly important in terms of shedding light on this problematic.

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, there are a couple of conditions that must be fulfilled as a minimum before it is meaningful to speak of the phenomenon of religion. One of them is that the religious world view must operate with an Other World, that is, a world that can only be defined structurally in relation to *our* world, the world that we are living in here and now, because, as we indicated earlier, it is everything that this world is *not*.[1] Besides, in many religions, The Other World will in fact be several other worlds. With regard to Scandinavian religion, it is not only a matter of the world of the gods, but also the world of the giants, of the dwarfs, of the dead and of many other worlds (of that which Régis Boyer calls *le monde du double* 'the world of the double', 1986, 29-32). Some form or other of communication normally takes place between these various worlds (such as an exchange of gifts, of women, of knowledge etc.), and they are, therefore, not isolated entities, but all enter into a common universe of meaning together with our world. As far as the second important prerequisite is concerned, if we are to speak of a religion, it is that a kind of communication between This World and The Other World must take place. This communication can occur in many different ways, but it always includes a form of reciprocity: human beings turn to The Other World by means of prayers, sacrifices and so forth and the actors in The Other World answer by means of signs, which are interpreted by human beings (Schjødt 1990c, 140-3) as manifestations of The Other World.

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[1] Cf. Leach 1976, 72: 'The topographical details of such metaphysical cosmology may vary greatly. The "other world" may be above the sky, below the sea, in the mountains, in the forest, across the bay, across the desert. The only thing that can be said about it in general is that it is *not* here and now! Frequently, it is differentiated into layer and contrasts – e.g. Heaven, Hell, Purgatory. But to some extent at least the opposition "This world (of physical knowledge)" versus "The other World (of metaphysical belief)" nearly always becomes confused with such oppositions as "Human/Animal", "Tame/Wild", "Culture/Nature", where Cultural may be defined as "the way of life which *we* humans experience in *our* society" (i.e. "Civilisation") and nature is everything else'. Although the choice of words is different and the understanding of The Other World so too, it is, as we saw in Chapter 1, also the relationship between This World and The Other World that is involved through the whole of Rudolf Otto's book about the sacred (Otto 1963), expressed in the classic term *Das ganz Andere* 'the completely different'.

In any culture The Other World may, therefore, be divided into a whole series of 'other worlds', and which of these other worlds one approaches is not unimportant, because at least one criterion must be fulfilled when we are dealing with initiation: during the sequence, one has to be able to acquire an ability that relates to the final situation at which the ritual in question aims, or about which the myth in question is thematised.[2] However, the symbolic construction that is necessary in order to fulfil this aim is not of the same nature in the various myths. In the myths that do not have Óðinn as subject, we find heroes who experience an initiation sequence and in this way – although in a mythical or semi-mythical scenario – may be said to communicate between This World (understood as the world of human beings, the world of the here

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[2] In the analysis of Þórr-myths, for example, it became clear that Þórr is leaving his own world in order to get to another world. But this is the world of the giants and, therefore, apparently a completely different world from the one to which Óðinn travels in the myths in which he is expected to obtain numinous knowledge. It is therefore also characteristic that what takes place in that other world to which Þórr travels is something completely different from what takes place in the other world of the Óðinn myths. Þórr kills giants because the other world, which they represent, is a threat to our world. It is thus not a world which is primarily characterised by knowledge, although certain giants are, as we know, clever enough, but these appear almost exclusively in the Óðinn-myths. And those giants who lose their lives at Þórr's hand do not at the moment of their death give Þórr good advice for his journey, such as we saw after Sigurðr had killed Fáfnir (who in this way acquires the character of a 'wise giant'). In other words, it is not Útgarðr one has to go to if one wishes to obtain numinous knowledge. On the other hand, any other world may apparently be invoked in connection with the practice of magic (but not when *acquiring* magic or magical tools), as appears, for example, from *Buslubœn*, where Busla threatens the king with the following stanza from *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* chapter 5 (*FSN* III, 294)):

May trolls and elves	Tröll ok álfa
and sorceresses	ok töfranornir.
mound-dwellers, mountain giants	búar, bergrisar
burn your halls,	brenni þínar hallir,
frost giants hate you	hati þik hrímþursar,
horses take you	hestar streði þik
straws prick you	strán stangi þik,
storms make you fertile,	en stormar æri þik
and grief to you,	ok vei verði þér,
if you do not follow my wishes.	nema þú vilja minn gerir.

and now) and The Other World. For good reasons, this is not true of the Óðinn-myths. Here, we do not have a communication between This World and The Other World, but between two 'other worlds' – namely on the one hand the world which the subject – Óðinn – represents in the initial and final situations of the myth, and, on the other hand, the world, which he or the object of knowledge that becomes his in the final phase, has encountered or has stayed in during the liminal phase. It is therefore crucial that one of these other worlds should be constructed in relation to the other in such a way that it can constitute a representation of This World. If the theoretical point of departure in the present investigation is correct, we must be able to argue that one of these other worlds represents our world, the here and now, in the context of the acquisition of knowledge, whereas the other one represents that which is *not* here and now. If that is possible, it has an important consequence, namely that the symbolism acquires a paradigmatic or 'archetypal' status *qua* myth (Eliade 1974, 416-19) and in this respect constitutes an attempt to *explain* the symbolism that is normally taken for granted in the rituals.

As has been mentioned several times, the relationship between the Æsir and the Vanir explicitly plays a part in two of our most important myths, namely the one about Mímir and the one about the acquisition of the mead. It will, therefore, be natural to look more closely at the relationship between these two groups of gods and the 'worlds' they belong to.

Æsir and Vanir

The relationship between the Æsir and the Vanir has been the subject of much discussion within the field of research on Scandinavian mythology. The chief positions are held by historians, on the one hand, like Helm and Philippson[3], and, on the other, by structural comparativists, represented first and foremost by Dumézil (1959, 3-39). The tendency of more recent research has clearly gone in the direction of the structural viewpoint, even if several of the scholars do not in general accept Dumézil's theories, or at least only to a limited extent (e.g. Haugen 1966; Östvold 1969; Boyer 1981 and DuBois 1999, 56); and it is basically also a structural viewpoint that forms the basis for the following analysis.[4] The characterisation of the Vanir is found dispersed over a great deal of the source material (de Vries 1956-57, II, 163-208 and 307-13), and it emerges clearly that their primary area of function was fertility understood in a broad sense: sexuality, the abundance of nature, riches and peace (as a prerequisite for fertility). The Vanir are thus good to worship in order to obtain *ár ok friðr* 'abundance and peace' – a formula that is obviously old in Scandinavia (Hultgård 1993, 253). But, in addition, we can see that Freyja, as indicated several times above, has a relationship with death because she receives half of the slain, whereas Óðinn receives the other half (*Grí* 14).

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[3] The following quotation by Philippson is representative of the historical viewpoint in spite of the greater and lesser variation between the various historical positions (cf. also Helm 1955). He writes: 'Der Unterschied zwischen Wanenreligion und Asenreligion ist fundamental: die Wanenreligion war die ältere authochthone, entwickelt aus der Ackerbaukultur; die Asenreligion war die jüngere, der Ausdrück einer mannhaften, kriegerischen, aber auch geistigeren Zeit. Die Kluft zwischen diesen Göttervorstellungen war dem Heidentum bewusst, wenn sie auch den römischen Berichterstattern entging: die nordgermanische Sage vom Wanenkrieg bezeugt es' 'The difference between the Vanir

In the phenomenology of religion, we often see that gods who show an affinity to both death and fertility are understood as chthonic; so it is natural to examine this possibility more closely in connection with the Vanir. Our sources do not explicitly express the idea that the Vanir may be associated with the underworld. Snorri maintains that they lived in Vanaheimr (*Yng* 4), which must be imagined as a place in Asia, given the euhemeristic model he uses in *Yng*. When we try to place the Vanir as a group of gods, the crucial problem is that we hear almost only about three individualised Vanir gods, namely the hostages who were sent to the Æsir as part of a peace agreement. The fact that these three, Njǫrðr, Freyr and Freyja, reside at Ásgarðr, does not say anything about

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religion and the Æsir religion is fundamental: the Vanir religion was the older autochthonous religion, developed from the agricultural culture; the Æsir religion was the younger, the expression of a brave warlike, but also more spiritual age. Paganism was aware of the chasm between these concepts of the gods even if they were not reported by Roman writers: the North Germanic story of the Vanir war proves this' (1953, 19). A more recent attempt at an historical reading is that of Motz 1996a, who suggests two waves of immigrants that worshipped the Æsir and Vanir, respectively (1996a, 103). The viewpoint seems, however, anachronistic and does not pay attention to the considerable research that has been carried out since Dumézil.

[4] The analysis, as carried out in this section, may be found broadly outlined in Schjødt 1991a, although parts of the earlier article have been abbreviated here, while others have been expanded.

their original location, apart from the likelihood that it must have been somewhere other than Ásgarðr. One's immediate impulse is to associate their location with somewhere oppositional to the world of the Æsir. If we are to go behind Snorri's euhemeristic understanding, we are thus obliged to analyse a series of statements that do not speak directly of the Vanir's place in the cosmos.

The strongest argument that the Vanir did, in fact, constitute a chthonic group, aside from their area of functionality, is their relationship to the elves (*álfar*), a relationship which basically ought to be interpreted as an identity.[5] We hear in *Grí* that Freyr lives in Álfheimr, and in *Lok* Eldir says, as Loki steps into the hall, that 'among the Æsir and *álfar* herein nobody in a word is your friend', although both in the introductory prose as well as in the *senna* itself only the Æsir and Vanir are mentioned.[6] Snorri explains in *Gylf* 17 that there are two kinds of elves, and that the light elves, who shine more brightly than the sun, live in Álfheimr, whereas the dark elves live down in the ground. De Vries (1956-57, I, 259) thinks that this division is an invention on Snorri's part, whereas Turville-Petre (1964, 231) understands the statement as expressing the two sides of the elves, namely as beings of death and of fertility, which seems plausible, considering their function.[7] The ambiguity of the elves emerges perhaps most clearly in the story about Óláfr Guðrøðarson (*Flat* II, 7 cf. *Yng* 48 and 49). After his death, Óláfr receives sacrifices in return for granting fertility; he is directly called 'Geirstaðaálfr' after the placename Geirstaðr where he was buried. The dead Óláfr seems here to be identified with an elf from whom people expect fertility, and there is a remarkable similarity with Freyr who, after his death, receives tribute in the mound in which he is buried, followed by a year's peace (*Yng* 10).[8] The light elves all live in the same place as Freyr, and he, then, appears as the individualised figure who is the ruler of Álfheimr (F. Ström 1954, 28; cf. Gunnell 2007, 124-7), whereas the dark elves are clearly described as chthonic.[9] The elves appear in the sources only as a collective, which is also the case for the Vanir, the three hostages apart. The only thing we hear about the Vanir after the peace agreement concerns their treatment of Mímir (and Hœnir).

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[5] A large number of scholars have observed that there is an affinity, to some degree or other, especially between Freyr and the elves. See for example de Vries 1956-57, I, 259 and II, 203; Turville-Petre 1964, 231; F. Ström 1954, 28; Näström 1995, 61. For a recent survey, see Gunnell 2007.

[6] Of the other passages in the Elder Edda that clearly indicate a merging, there is *Grí* 4, which mentions a sacred land situated close to the Æsir and elves, probably Ásgarðr, where the Æsir and Vanir reside; also *Ski* 7, where Freyr complains about the Æsir and elves, but where it is indicated that this is the group to which he himself belongs. Snorri too talks about *einnhvern af Ásum eða álfum* (Faulkes 1998, 5) 'each of the Æsir or the elves', where it is clear that this refers to the gods as a group.

[7] When the aspects of death and fertility are so closely connected to one another, as generally is the case with chthonic powers, it does not seem to the purpose to debate whether the elves are *either* powers of death *or* powers of fertility, such as the tendency has been within the history of research (see especially de Vries 1932 and Ellekilde 1933 and a summary in de Vries 1956-57, I, 257-60 and Turville-Petre 1964, 230-5). If only one of the two aspects was represented, it would rather be the exception than the rule, and the material seems, as mentioned, not to give any reason to reject neither the one nor the other aspect.

If we can establish a functional (and with it to a certain extent also a spatial) identity between the Vanir and the elves,[10] we can then examine the Vanir's connection to the pole 'down' in the oppositional pair up versus down. We find this same connection on a 'microcosmic' or an anthropological level, where it is the lower part of the human body to which the Vanir are especially related. Clearly, it is the general connection to sexuality that is repeated both in Freyr and Freyja, where Freyr appears as a phallic image (Adam of Bremen IV, 26), whereas Freyja's sexual life seems generally rather dissipated. In addition to this, we have the puzzling narrative in which Njǫrðr is chosen by the giantess Skaði. In this well-known episode, it is his beautiful feet from which the daughter of the giant drew a false conclusion, and, irrespective of the meaning this myth might otherwise have had, it seems to accentuate the Vanir's attachment to the body's lower parts (cf. Renauld-Krantz 1972, 215). We see clearly that this attachment forms an opposition with Óðinn from the Mímir myth, where it is precisely the head, characterised by its intellect, that is sent to Óðinn, who is the god of intellect above all others throughout Norse mythology. That means that the Vanir's attachment to the body's lower parts and Óðinn's to the head also turns into an opposition of instincts versus intellect, which helps to cement Óðinn's role as the practising magician of the myths.

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[8] Cf. further the similarities and circumstances at Frotho III's death and burial and, on the whole, the apparent identity between Freyr and Frotho (see Schier 1968, especially 396 for references), Furthermore, a passage in *Skjǫldunga saga* (Bjarni Guðnason 1982. 73) tells of a family living in Álfheimr bearing names compounded with Álfr; two brothers named Álfr and Yngvi appear in it. Also in *Yng* there are several men with the name Álfr or names that incorporate it as an element.

[9] In addition, the elves are obviously functionally attached to some chthonic group or other, namely the land-spirits (cf. among others things the *landvættir* in *Egils saga* chapter 57 and the term *landálfr* in Egil's *lausavísa* 20 [Finnur Jónsson 1908-15 B 1, 47] and furthermore, the description in de Vries 1956-57, I, 260-1). The distinction here is, as is also true of the collective chthonic groups, on the whole unclear, and there is nothing to indicate that these distinctions were sharp in pagan consciousness: various 'beings' lived in the underworld and were associated with death, fertility and the protection of the land.

[10] Motz (1973-4, 94-102) points out some striking features of the elves which, I believe, are rather associated with the Vanir than with the dwarfs, as is Motz's view. This is true of the two brothers Álfr and Yngvi (references in Motz 1973-4, note 17) as well as of Haraldr hárfagri's descent from Óðinn on his father's side and from Álfr on his mother's, as we hear in *Hversu Noregr byggðisk* chapters 3 and 4 (*FSN* II, 83-4). This seems completely in agreement with the connotations of the masculine and feminine of the Æsir and Vanir respectively, as we will see below. A further indication of a close relationship between elves and Vanir is found in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* chapters 28-9 (*FSN* II, 322-33) in which a king is named Álfr and his wife Gyðja 'priestess, goddess'. She is therefore a priestess and, presumably, especially attached to Freyr (cf. several formulations that emphasise Freyr in the *senna* between her and Oddr).

It looks, thus, as if we have an opposition between the Vanir on the one hand and Óðinn, as the representative of the Æsir, on the other, which corresponds to the relationship between down and up or low and high. It appears from the relationship which the two groups have to death that this again corresponds to the relationship between The Other World and This World. Below, we will see that death is not an unambiguous entity, because the application of the terms physical and psychic or, rather, intellectual (cf. Chapter 5.1), is of importance here. With regard to the Æsir/Vanir-dichotomy, it is most interesting to examine the relationship which, respectively, Freyja and Óðinn have to the dead.[11] In *Grí* 14 we hear that they divide the slain between them. Connected with this is the fact that they both have a clear association with war because they can both cause discord; and just as Óðinn collects the dead warriors in Valhǫll, so Freyja resides in Fólkvangr. Freyja is, besides, associated with the valkyries (Dronke 1988, 229-30; R. Boyer 1995, 136), whereas Óðinn sends out the valkyries to choose the slain (e.g. *Sigdr).* In this regard, there does not seem to be a great difference between the relationship on both their parts to war and the fallen, but it is important to notice that Freyja's valkyrie-function is not a fact until *after* the exchange of hostages. The sources do not tell us directly what her role was before this. Folke Ström has, however, developed an interesting argument for a considerable affinity between Hel and Freyja (Ström 1954, 70-9; 1956, 64-8), and he concludes (F. Ström 1956, 66):

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[11] Whether Freyr and Njǫrðr have had any connection to the dead and the kingdom of the dead cannot be determined from the surviving sources. It is, indeed, conspicuous that the semi-mythical Yngling kings, who are descendants of Freyr (and so of Njǫrðr) almost all die in an unusual way (Steinsland 1991a, 227-31), just as Freyr himself plays an important role concerning fertility after his death (Schier 1968). But we cannot establish any relationship to 'human' death.

> Wenn man sagen kann, dass Freyja in ihrer Walkürengestalt mit dem Walhall der gefallenen Kriegerscharen zusammengehört, ist es ebenso sicher, dass sie auch in dem Todesreiche der allgemeineren Glaubensvorstellung als Herrscherin in *Hel* oder als die personifizierte *Hel* zu Hause ist.
>
> If we can say that Freyja in her valkyrie form belongs with the Valhǫll of the crowds of fallen warriors, it is just as certain that she is equally at home in the kingdom of the dead, according to the general ideology of belief, as the female ruler in *Hel*, or as *Hel* personified.

Whether we must see an original identity between Freyja and Hel is not crucial here; but it is crucial, on the other hand, as Ström has demonstrated, that the chthonic goddess of those dead who comes to the underworld has a clear semantic affinity with a goddess who was originally chthonic, but who now shares those who died in battle with Óðinn in an 'upper world kingdom of the dead' – a semantic affinity, which, as we have seen, is also true of the unknown woman who leads Hadingus to an underground kingdom of the dead. It is in this semantic affinity that we will seek part of the explanation for the paradoxes that surround Freyja's relationship to the dead in the mythology. On the one hand, she receives half the slain and, on the other, she receives women, if Þorgerðr's statement in *Egils saga* chapter 78 (Sigurður Nordal 1933, 244) may be credited. The latter, however, does not fit well into the Valhǫll complex, but it is in harmony with what we know about Hel where those who die of illnesses go, that is, those who have not died in battle or who are not consecrated to Óðinn.[12] There is no doubt that the question of the places of residence of the dead in Scandinavia is far more complicated than this simple dichotomy indicates[13] – nor any doubt that Snorri in his description has certainly been influenced by Christianity (Hultgård 1999) – but the distinction, nevertheless, seems significant and completely in agreement with the general system of classification, as we have seen in the poles of the oppositional pairs that were analysed earlier. The Valhǫll/Hel dichotomy ought, therefore, to be seen more as a semantic opposition (Hastrup 1985, 149) than as an expression of fixed ideas about life after death, although there are enough sources, particularly of an archaeological kind (e.g. Roesdahl 1983), that show that the ideas were real enough, but in a far less systematised form than the one Snorri presents us with (cf. Nedkvitne 1997, 33).

There is, however, one factor that is striking in the descriptions of the two abodes, the authenticity of which there is no reason to doubt. As far as Hel is concerned, it is the notion of irreversibility which is expressly emphasised, or, to put it another way, the linear or durative aspect of existence there, a characteristic which is most conspicuous in the case of the Baldr myth.[14] When a person dies and goes to Hel, he or she remains dead – that must in all circumstances be one of the main points in the story of Baldr's fate.[15] From the perspective of Valhǫll, things look completely different. Here, the dead live a life that is extremely cyclic or iterative: every evening, after the warriors have been killed in battle during the day, they come to life again and ride home together (*Vafðr* 41 and *Gylf* 38). We have, therefore, an opposition of durative versus iterative with respect to death, and the two kingdoms of death become, in relation to one another, as death is to life, because the iterative implies changing phases of death and life. We thus get, life : death :: Valhǫll : Hel. And this is further emphasised by the 'quality of life' that is in question: in Hel existence is without joy, as Snorri says in *Gylf* 34, whereas life in Valhǫll seems extremely comfortable. With these two kingdoms of death, we have, therefore, an oppositional pair that plays itself out over several dichotomies: death versus life, the underworld versus the upper world, and further in the gender-dichotomy which manifests itself through the actor who is in control of either the one or the other world: Hel, who is feminine, and Óðinn, who is masculine. In addition, we come across yet another dichotomy, namely passive (existence in Hel must be understood as such) versus active which, to a great extent, characterises existence in Valhǫll.[16] We

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[12] It is also possible that we should understand 'going to Hel' as a more general term which, in its point of departure, only meant 'to die' (Ellis 1943, 83).

[13] As previously mentioned, Å. V. Ström gives a splendid overview of the most important residences (1975, 181-94), and a more detailed presentation may be found in R. Boyer 1994 and Nedkvitne 1997, 19-47. The question of who went where is far too complicated and, in spite of everything, far too peripheral in the context of the present topic for it to be examined more thoroughly here. Generally, we can say that the manner of death may have been one of the determinants, that people's social classification may have played a part, that there were variations from region to region, and that these and several other factors may have been combined so that we have no possibility of an exact reconstruction of pre-Christian Scandinavian ideas of death. Sources such as the findings in the Oseberg burial or the last stanza in *Sonatorrek* demonstrate how great the difficulties we encounter are. But apart from the problems associated with the sources, there is hardly any area within the phenomenology of religion in which notions *are* more imprecise and inconsistent than ideas concerning life after death; and that is true even in modern religious societies.

[14] And this is true irrespective of what understanding we might have of Baldr: if he does come back, it is not until after Ragnarǫk.

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[15] This point does not contradict Dumézil's interpretation of the Baldr myth (1959, 78-105), although it could appear to do so. It is quite true, here, that Baldr returns, but it is expressly a return which does not take place until Ragnarǫk when some gods can take possession of a new earth. Besides, the two interpretations function on different levels: the one by Dumézil aims at a cosmic level, whereas the irrevocability of death rather must be understood anthropologically (cf. Lindow 1997, 31).

[16] We may, besides, glimpse in the concept of the two kingdoms of death a dichotomy between the individual and the collective: the residents of Valhǫll are warriors and those who have been consecrated to Óðinn and are thus collective groups, whereas the residents of Hel are individual dead persons. By this means the cyclical in the collective group's life is mirrored (when a warrior dies, new ones arrive), but it is transformed to the individual level in the Valhǫll-representations (where the warriors preserve their individuality, cf. *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*), whereas the durative or linear, which characterises the individual's life, corresponds to the ideas of Hel, but is here changed to an undifferentiated collective of dead persons (individuality has ceased). This relationship may be illustrated in the following manner:

Table 10.3

	Warriors	Ordinary people
Life	Iterative and collective	Durative and individual
Death	Iterative and individual	Durative and collective

have seen all of these oppositional pairs before in the myths analysed in the previous chapters; and precisely these four oppositional pairs thus play a decisive role in constituting the semantic universe of liminality.

If Freyja is identical to Hel, as Ström argued, or if there is at least a semantic affinity between them, this means that we have an oppositional pair named Freyja versus Óðinn, that is, the Vanir's most prominent (and only) female representative opposite the Æsir's most prominent masculine representative. The question must naturally be how we are to explain Freyja's dual role as ruler of Fólkvangr, on the one hand, and her affinity with Hel on the other. The only reasonable solution to the problem is that Fólkvangr did not come into her possession until *after* she had been sent from the Vanir as a hostage. Freyja has, therefore, as a true member of the Vanir, an affinity with Hel, whereas, as a hostage, she resides in a kingdom of the dead for warriors, which can scarcely be distinguished from Óðinn's Valhǫll, and the exchange of hostages is thus the answer the myth gives to this paradox. But there are more paradoxes connected with the Vanir hostages: functionally, they are to be considered as chthonic, but they live in Ásgarðr; and they are fertility gods, but without success in marriage. The latter, at least as far as the male Vanir hostages are concerned, is connected to their manner of entering into marriage. Originally, their marriages were incestuous, but, as incest was not allowed among the Æsir, they married extremely exogamously, namely to giant women, whereas, although the Æsir themselves took giant mistresses, they did not marry giantesses.[17] Freyja is also unsuccessful in the sphere of marriage, as she never can find Óðr[18] and, for this reason, she weeps tears of gold while she is

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Furthermore, it is perhaps also reasonable to point out, with R. Boyer (1994, 180), the relationship between spiritual and physical death as a semantic opposition corresponding to the relationship between Valhǫll and Hel (yet without Boyer's chronological perspective [e.g. 1994, 224], which seems less convincing).

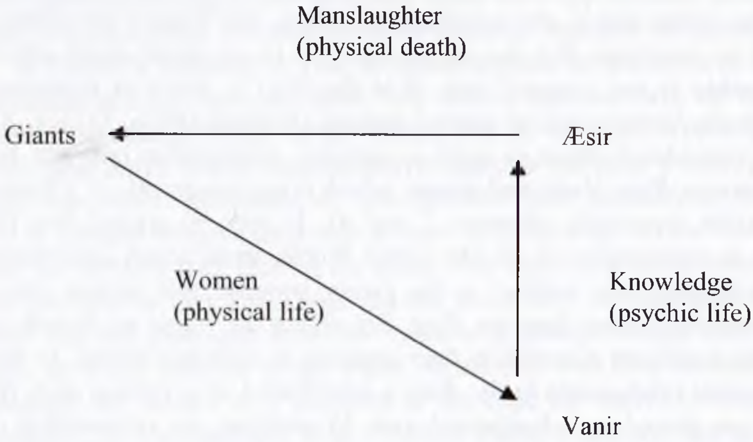
[17] The literature about these two marriages is considerable and will not be examined more closely here. For a discussion of the relationship between Freyr and Gerðr, see Steinsland 1991a, 30-8, and, on the relationship between Njǫrðr and Skaði, Clunies Ross 1989a and 1994, 131-43.

[18] It is striking that the names Óðr and Óðinn are etymologically connected, and it is difficult not to see an affinity between them (see also de Vries 1956-57, II, 87-8). There is hardly any doubt that they were separated in the minds of the pagan Scandinavians, although we know myths about Óðinn's disappearance (e.g. *Yng* 2 and 3), but these are not presented in a way which can be compared to Óðr's almost permanent absence.

searching for him. The marriages of the male Vanir are especially significant in relation to the Æsir. Whereas the latter have a relationship with the giants that is characterised by killing, the Vanir's are characterised by marriage. But the myths leave us in no doubt about which relationship is the 'correct' one. It is the Æsir's, which is expressed through the Vanir's lack of marital success (Schjødt 1991a, 311-2). All things considered, there is quite a complex relationship between the three groups Æsir, Vanir and giants, which is asymmetrical (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, especially chapters 2 and 4). It may be argued that the Vanir, as representatives of The Other World, from which knowledge can be fetched, are 'similar' to the giants, because both groups represent something other than the Æsir. But where the Vanir are bound up with the numinous potential in their capacity as chthonic beings, so that their spatial relationship to the Æsir is established on a vertical axis, the giants are placed on a horizontal axis. In addition, the relationship of the Vanir and the giants, respectively, to the Æsir is inverted. The Vanir provide the Æsir (primarily Óðinn) with psychic or intellectual life, whereas the giants 'receive' physical death from the Æsir (primarily from Þórr):

Nevertheless, the relationship is interesting because it adds new dimensions to the relationship between Óðinn and Freyja, as we saw in connection with the kingdoms of the dead. That there is, in addition, a certain affinity between Frigg and Freyja (Näström 1992, 195 and 1995, 104-11), both mythically and functionally, indicates that we are dealing here with a significant relationship.

Table 10.4

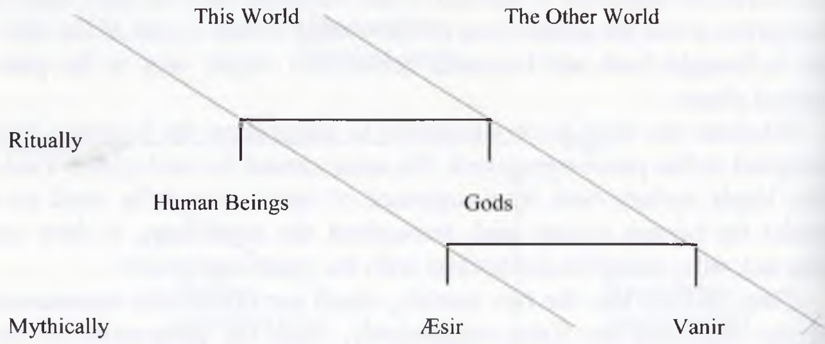


This brings us to a discussion of the valorisation expressed in this myth complex. The norms that the Æsir stand for are 'the right ones' in relation to the Vanir, that is, they are those which stand for the society in which the myths functioned, and they are the ones to which the Vanir had to subject themselves. With regard to these norms, the Vanir's original incestuous marriages are marked as something pre-cultural, or as a form of 'nature'. Nature is an entity that, in the same way as is often the case with the liminal pole in the oppositional pair that connotes the relationship between the liminal and the non-liminal, only gains semantic value in its opposition to the non-liminal pole (pure 'nature' is not found in the semantic universe of the myths). The pre-cultural is emphasised in the mythic sequence of the central myth about the relationship between Æsir and Vanir, the one that has to do with their war and peace-agreement. This clearly demonstrates how a past is supplanted by a present that is based on the institution of a *complete* society of gods with the necessary functions that the ideology prescribes. The Vanir as a collective group thus represent a semantic category which is, at one and the same time, temporal and spatial: it is before and it is outside. Society here and now is characterised by the Æsir element together with that contribution from the Vanir functions brought in by the hostages who take with them something of the 'pre-cultural conditions'. By this means, the oppositional pairs may be established, not only on a synchronic axis, but also on a diachronic one. The narrative sequence is parallel to the sequence that we have seen in the myths about the acquisition of knowledge where a part of the liminal is brought back and becomes active in a 'right' way in the post-liminal phase.

Whereas the Æsir were successful in integrating the hostages they accepted at the peace-agreement, the same cannot be said of the Vanir. The Vanir society with its acceptance of incest cannot be used as a model for human society and, throughout the mythology, it does not play any role, except in connection with the peace-agreement.

Thus, we see that the two worlds, which are mythically represented by the Æsir and the Vanir respectively, from the perspective of the Æsir, assume a relationship to one another reminiscent of the one that This World has to The Other World seen from a human and thus a ritual perspective. By this means, it has been possible to establish the two worlds that are necessary in order for us to be able to speak about an exchange (of knowledge and abilities) in a mythic *mise-en-scène*. The liminal space and The Other World, which constitute the decisive factor in initiation rituals, can thus also be thematised in the myth's own world, because Vanir society and the connotations associated with it becomes a model also for those myths in which the Vanir element is not explicitly present. We will return to this again below. The relationship between the mythic opposition and the ritual can be illustrated in the following manner:

Table 10.5



The Vanir hostages occupy their paradoxical position here, too: they are attached to 'natural functions' in their capacity as Vanir, but they have been 'acculturated' in their capacity as hostages (their precultural marriage practice having been proscribed). They cannot escape the paradox, however, because they remain fertility gods[19] (and function excellently as such in a cultic sphere), but they have no success in their own marriages.[20]

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[19] When Motz (1992, 163) attempts to separate sexuality and fertility in connection with Freyja and argues that sexuality is central, this seems to be ascribable to the paradoxes that surround the Vanir.

[20] This nature/culture dichotomy contains, as we have seen, no references to the giants. This is due to the fact that the giants' attachment to nature is far from unambiguous. The opposition nature versus culture is of a complementary character. Nature is potential culture, which is exactly what the Vanir war seems to assert. The 'nature' that the giants exist in, on the other hand, has the character of chaos, and as such it is antagonistic to the ordered world (cosmos, culture) (see also Schjødt 1990a, 49-54). Nevertheless, we are obviously dealing with some sort of affinity, because the opposition both to the world of the giants and to that of the Vanir is the world of the Æsir, which is characterised as being 'the world that is here and now'. One can thus argue that nature is a weakened chaos-term. In Scandinavia we may thus see that both Útgarðr and the underworld, rather than being complete negations of 'correct order' are expressions of 'another order'. But again: Útgarðr's 'order' is closer to chaos – understood as a potential threat – than the one which is present in the underworld of the Vanir. But as mentioned, giant-*women*, who can form a positive potential, play a role also in relation to the underworld. At the social level this, is carried out, among other things, in relation to the Saami (Lapps), who also represent the foreign (cf. Mundal 1996 and Simek 2001,

In order to understand the actual function of the Vanir hostages, we must also examine their relationship to some of the oppositional pairs that we have analysed earlier. These are death (Hel) versus life (Valhǫll); the underworld versus the upper world; nature versus culture and feminine versus masculine. In all these oppositional pairs, the Vanir hostages function as mediators.[21] We saw that, with regard to the Hel/Valhǫll-dichotomy, Freyja is a mediator, since she has moved in the mythic sequence from one place to another; the hostages are sent from the underworld to the upper world; the hostages have lived incestuously but do not do so anymore – they have become acculturated; and, in relation to the feminine/masculine dichotomy, the two poles have been separated, either with the prohibition of incest or through the split into a sister and a brother, probably twins, instead of a previous androgyny. The Vanir's connection with the feminine has been discussed by Renauld-Krantz (1972, 204-5), and we can add that the whole debate about the relationship between Nerthus (*Germania* chapter 40) and Njǫrðr and the change of gender that had taken place, indicates that either Nerthus formed the female[22] part in the sibling/marriage-relationship (see de Vries 1956-57, II, 163-5 with references), or that this god was simply understood to be androgynous (Näsström 1995, 67). Irrespective of what solution we choose (cf. Dumézil 1955), it is clear that the masculine/feminine theme is essential in relation to the Vanir, and that both the sibling-expression (weakly) as well as the androgyny (strongly) place them in an in-between position in relation to the poles of this gender-dichotomy.[23]

What we find in the Æsir/Vanir dichotomy is, thus, a series of oppositional pairs and some mediators, who create contact between the

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244-6) and who are associated with numinous abilities. Saami thus form a category which, regarded mythically, is between the giants and the Vanir and is connected with the foreignness of these categories, something that is also true of the *vǫlur* – at least the mythic ones – who, besides being 'dead' and feminine, are associated with giants (Quinn 1994, 138-9).

[21] Clunies Ross (1994, 187) also accepts the Vanir hostages as mediators, as they 'overlap both semantic fields' (culture and nature).

[22] Nerthus, however, seems to be a masculine form, and it is possible that he actually was the male part in a couple in which the female part, then, would be an *Erþō.

[23] In this connection, I have to disagree completely with R. Boyer (2000) when he reads the masculine/feminine thematic exclusively within an historical framework.

two worlds to which the oppositions are analogous. These correspond closely to the general characteristics that we have discovered in connection with the complex surrounding the acquisition of knowledge; and this is also true of the combination of death and fertility, as we have seen in both places. So, we are able to draw the conclusion that, in the ideology of the early Scandinavians, although the Vanir only play a role on par with several other beings in the acquisition of knowledge in the liminal space, they, and Freyja especially, were of crucial importance for constituting *that* other world which the acquisition of knowledge made use of, primarily in connection with the Mímir and Kvasir complexes, but also in other places. In this connection, the Vanir *hostages* in their capacity as mediators were central.

In conclusion, we can state that the mythic formation that deals with the relationship between the Æsir and Vanir does not in itself include an initiation structure, but it forms an important prerequisite for the mythic universe which initiation makes use of. This is the result of two factors. The first one is that an 'opposite world' is established with the Vanir's world in contrast to that of the Æsir which, at the mythic level, forms a representation of 'our world'. The marked pole in this oppositional pair is the world of the Vanir: it is the underworld and contains both death and fertility; and it is characterised as a locality with a special affinity to the feminine. Secondly, the mediating process we are presented with is exemplary of the semantic inventory of initiation, because it forms a transformation-process between various codes: the insurmountable life/death opposition is isomorphous with a spatial opposition between the upper world and the underworld, which, in the unfolding of the myth, is for its own part made isomorphous with the 'ethnic' opposition between Æsir and Vanir, where the hostages form the ultimate mediator. With this process of 'isomorphisation', it becomes possible in the first instance to travel between the two localities, and then to exchange objects and information with the inhabitants of The Other World.

10.2 Initiation and the Semantics of the Liminal

We will now proceed to confront the results of the analysis with the four criteria of initiation. For the sake of convenience, we will indicate the myths by a number in the rest of the book, and they will be numbered in the following manner:

The first part of the Kvasir-complex (until Óðinn makes his entrance) = M1a
The second part (Óðinn/Gunlǫð) = M1b
The Mímir complex = M2
The self-hanging = M3
Óðinn's and Loki's mixing of blood = M4
Óðinn and the *vǫlva* (*Vsp*) = M5
Óðinn and the *vǫlva* (*Bdr*) = M6
Óttarr (*Hyndl*) = M7
Svipdagr (*Gróg*) = M8
The first part of the Sigurðr-saga (Sigurðr and Fáfnir) = M9a
The second part of the Sigurðr-saga (Sigurðr and Sigrdrífa) = M9b
The first episode in the Hadingus-saga (Hadingus and Óðinn) = M10a
The second episode in the Hadingus-saga (Hadingus and the woman) = M10b
Sigmundr = M11
Sinfjǫtli = M12
Bǫðvarr = M13
Hǫttr = M 14[24]

Irreversibility

The first of our four criteria, which has to do with the irreversibly higher status of the final phase, will not need extensive discussion in this connection. The myths that are included in this semantic analysis are, as has been pointed out, not all initiation myths precisely because the subject does not achieve an irreversibly higher status in the final phase in all of them. This is true of M5, M6 and M8 in which the very nature of the knowledge that is mediated makes it unlikely for us to reckon with such irreversibility. In some of the other myths, the lack of context causes a problem and, for this reason the reconstructions that we have arrived at in previous chapters are crucial in allowing us to consider these myths initiations. This is especially true of M2 and M4.

As indicated above, the present chapter is primarily aimed at a description of the liminal scenario as it is expressed, not only in initiation but, more generally, in the acquisition of numinous abilities in mythical and semi-mythical *mise-en-scène*. However, it should be stated that the initiation myths are the primary focus, so elements that occur in the general acquisition of knowledge will not be included in the analysis of what constitutes the structure of initiation unless they also occur in the actual initiation myths. That there are many common features in those myths that have been designated initiatory myths above and in those that cannot be considered as such, is clear, but we will also examine whether we can observe any systematic differences in Other World scenarios in the two categories (cf. Chapter 10.3 below).

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[24] The notation a/b indicates that the two narratives are part of the same sequence and have the same subject, whereas, for example, Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli are numbered as two different narratives in spite of the fact that they are interrelated, something that has been demonstrated in the individual analyses in Chapter 8.3.

At all events, we have seen that it appears explicitly from the context or from the reconstructed sequence that M1, M2, M3, M4, M7, M9, M10, M11, M12, M13 and M14[25] have a final phase, which, as far as the subject is concerned, includes the acquisition of an irreversibly higher status.

The narrative structure

In all of the myths discussed above, we have been able to deduce a narrative structure, to which it is theoretically possible to apply van Gennep's 3-phase schema, supplemented additionally with an initial and a final phase. As a sequential structure, this can be illustrated in a simple way:

Table 10.6

Subject (- knowledge)				Subject (+ knowledge)
Initial phase	Separation phase	Liminal phase	Reintegration phase	Final phase

Transformation of subject through the acquisition
of the object of knowledge or numinous power

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[25] When those narratives that are separated into a and b in the notation are described without this division, e.g. M1, the notation holds for the complete narrative.

This sequence forms a part of the general 'syntax' belonging to these myths, and it is the elements in this, together with the characteristics of the actors and their acquired competence, that constitute the ideology of initiation as it appeared in early Scandinavia. We will discuss the binary oppositions and the objects of knowledge below. Certain of the themes to be discussed overlap and will be considered from various perspectives in several contexts. In this section, we will, among other things, examine more closely how some of the symbols, which can be seen to be more or less universally dispersed across the general history of religion, are present in the Scandinavian material. As this will also play a role in relation to the treatment of the objects of knowledge, it will necessarily involve some references backwards and forwards.

It has become clear that not all myths follow the schema in a simple way. Whether they do so or not depends, among other things, on the relationship between the subject and the object of knowledge, which we must examine more closely. With regard to the structure of initiation, as it has been established above, it is the subject from This World who moves into the liminal space and who brings back knowledge from that place and so functions as a mediator. There may be other mediators who are instrumental in obtaining knowledge from the liminal space, for instance in the form of initiators,[26] but it is crucial in the ritual model that the subject himself experiences the liminal.

All the same, we have a problem in that respect with two of the semantically weightiest and therefore most important myths connected with the acquisition of knowledge, namely the Mímir and the Kvasir complexes. The problem, however, is not of the same nature in the two complexes. In the case of Mímir, there is no hint that Óðinn, who must be considered the subject because it is he who benefits in the final phase, embarks on a journey or dies or in some other way comes into contact with the liminal space. It is only Mímir who has undertaken such a journey and has suffered death. In connection with Kvasir, we have a similar structure to a certain point in the myth: it is the figure which constitutes the object of knowledge in the final phase who moves to the liminal space and is here transformed from an original subject to an object of knowledge (M1a). But in this case, the Gunnlǫð-episode is added, and here Óðinn traverses a regular initiation sequence, thus acquiring the object of knowledge (M1b). It may, therefore, be relevant to ask if it is at all meaningful to talk about initiation in connection with the Mímir-complex.

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[26] The Bǫðvarr and Hǫttr episode springs to mind. Bǫðvarr follows Hǫttr through the liminal phase and he also gets him to drink the monster's blood with the well-known positive consequences as a result. In that sense, Bǫðvarr may be seen both as a mediator and an initiator. He is unambiguously a This World-figure, but at the same time he is so conversant with the liminal that he is able to counsel Hǫttr. In the same way, Freyja, in *Hyndl*, must be seen as a This World-figure, because, in comparison to Hyndla, she represents the upper world in relation to the underworld. But on the other hand she has, as we saw, an affinity to The Other World as a member of the Vanir group and, furthermore, as a mediator (via her function as a hostage) she has special qualifications for occupying the role of initiator – a role that, by definition, includes a kind of mediation.

The answer must be in the affirmative. True, we do not encounter a structure that observes the regular pattern of initiation, as the subject in the initial phase is not identical with the subject in the final phase, but that is connected with the nature of the myth as an explanatory instrument. The myth about Mímir is by and large exemplary as an initiation myth, not because it follows the observable sequence of initiation ritual in all respects, but because it corresponds to the symbolic sequence: the subject who leaves the initial situation is different from the one who possesses knowledge in the final phase. The subject has become something completely different – 'he has become *another*', as Eliade expresses it (1975, x) or, in other words, it has been transformed to the essential, namely to intellect, and here to a part of Óðinn's intellect. The myth does not imply that Mímir and Óðinn are more or less identical, or that their affinity is deeper or of another kind than the one we have already discussed in Chapter 5.1. What is of importance is that the Mímir complex emphasises the most crucial aspect of initiation, namely that the reason why one approaches The Other World in order to obtain knowledge is because it is here that the object of knowledge acquires its numinous value, which is fundamental to its function in the upper world and so for the status of the subject in the final phase. The Mímir complex is, therefore, not an initiation myth in the ordinary sense, as one could argue that, for instance, the self-hanging myth is when it mentions the god's own initiation. It is, on the contrary, an initiation myth in the sense that it seeks ideologically to explain the prerequisites of initiation, namely that a physical entity becomes an intellectual one through the meeting with The Other World, here manifested as the world of the Vanir, which, among other things, contains death and the transformation connected with that. But, at the same time, it is a prerequisite for the manifestation of this knowledge that it is attached to a physical subject from This World, *in casu* Óðinn, because it is this subject who actively uses it. Our ability to relate the myth to the real core of the initiation complex is connected to the fact that it is both different from and similar to the other myths we have examined. As far as the similarities are concerned, the evidence is primarily supplied by the Kvasir myth. In Chapter 10.3 below, we will return to the relationship between the various myths which, to a certain extent, corresponds to the concept of a transformational group, as this term is used within the field of the structural study of myth.

Before we leave the problematic concerning the relationship between the subject and the object of knowledge, we must, however, emphasise the character of the object of knowledge as being a part of the subject in the final phase. Whether the object of knowledge is concretely constituted as a head, mead, blood or runes, or is simply 'pure' knowledge in the form of knowledge of incantations, sorcery, magic formulae or is only experience (possibly combined with a magic object) obtained in the liminal phase, it will always be in a metonymical relationship to the subject – be a part of the subject – in the final phase. The reason for this is, in the language of the myth, that it has been given to him, or that he has fetched it. It is, thus, decisive for whether the knowledge that the subject is in possession of in the final phase has numinous value, that the object of knowledge or the one who procures the knowledge has an attachment to The Other World. And in all the examples that we have examined, this is actually the case, but they have it in various ways. Some are stationary in their Other World (e.g. Fáfnir, the monster in M14, the giant women in M5 and M6), whereas others leave The Other World in order to bring the subject knowledge (e.g. Mímir and Loki). This implies then that, if a subject from the upper world is to be given knowledge from the first group of knowledge mediators, he then has to journey to The Other World and, thus, step into a liminal condition. We only come across the other type of knowledge procurers in connection with Óðinn, which is hardly accidental, as these myths must be considered in advance – simply because Óðinn is a purely mythic subject – more paradigmatic than 'the hero myths'. But – and that is important – it is always the character of the object of knowledge as an Other World phenomenon that is crucial to its numinosity. The subject's journey, real or symbolic death, change of gender, or other forms of the liminal condition may, so to speak, be seen as necessary preparations for getting in touch with or acquiring the numinous object. This is so because they are symbolic expressions for that kind of otherness that is necessary in order to obtain the competence *that is of The Other World*, and which one can bring back to the subject's own world, where numinous knowledge can be *used*. It is here that we find the rationale that lies behind initiation: the fact that the knowledge is about and from The Other World constitutes what is numinous about it, and therefore the numinous cannot be numinous if it is not from The Other World. That is the decisive claim of the myths that we have analysed.

In practice, this means that we must understand the liminal phase in the ideology as the phase in which the object of knowledge is established as accessible to the subject from the upper world. Again, it is M1 and M2 that form the paradigmatic myths, as it is in these that we see how the object is transformed in The Other World. M1 is of fundamental importance because it introduces us, not only to death and the underworld as semantic categories, but also to the feminine and the passive and latent, introducing the notion of sexuality, which is a prerequisite for manifestations of the numious in This World.

The simple manifestation of the initiation sequence that is involved in the main part of our myths is, therefore, not true of the two perhaps most important and semantically most weighty myths. We can illustrate these two myths schematically in the following manner:

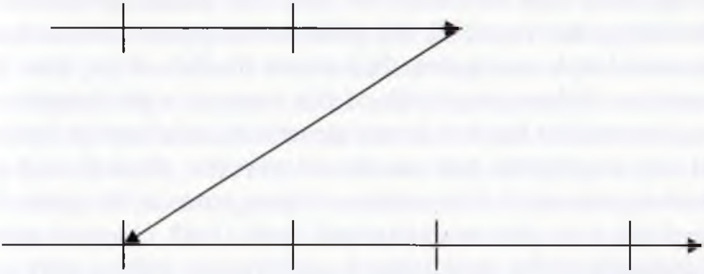
Table 10.7

M1

Phases:

Initial Separation Liminal Reintegration Final

Subject 1 (Kvasir): transformation of subject 1 to object of knowledge



Subject 2 (Óðinn): transformation of subject 2 through acquisition of object of knowledge.

M2

Phases:

Initial Separation Liminal Reintegration Final

Subject 1 (Mímir)

Subject 2
+ Object of Knowledge

Transformation of Subject 1 to object of knowledge

We have seen that the sexual element is introduced with Gunnlǫð, and we must further examine how the symbolism that contains killing and sexuality is organised in relation to the narrative sequence, and also more generally in relation to the semantic universe of initiation.

The final phase is, in relation to the initial phase and as we have observed in all the myths, characterised by 'spiritual' or intellectual life. Where the relationship between the liminal phase and the two others is characterised by an oppositional structure, manifested in several codes, the relationship between the initial phase and the final phase is characterised by a process that thematises a qualitative difference in respect of an absence or possession of numinous abilities together with the consequences that these entail.

We thus face two kinds of life: one which is without numinous knowledge and forms the life of the initial phase; and another in which the initial lack is negated. This forms the life of the final phase. The presence of these two kinds of life leads to a problematic which has been mentioned several times, namely the relationship between physical and intellectual life and their inversion: physical and intellectual death together with the position of these terms in the general structure. We have seen that sexuality and death, both concepts treated rather realistically in the myths, that is, as physical entities, play an essential role in the acquisition of numinous qualities, which are, naturally, an intellectual concept, even though it is given a physical expression in several of the myths (as head, mead, blood, etc.). We will now examine this complex of problems more closely, because, among other things, it may be thought to touch on that part of the symbolism in the initiation complex that deals with death and rebirth, which has been considered by many scholars to form the very basis for the initiation complex.

It is crucial that both life and death can each have one of two epithets, namely intellectual and physical; and it is this play around the change of epithets that initiation juggles with, and which is based both on the process of forming analogies and on inversion. We have seen from the narrative structure that the subject becomes involved with death in his approach to The Other World: he dies himself (M3, M12), he meets a dead person (M5, M6, M7, M8, M10), he kills an actor from The Other World (M9a, M10a,[27] M11, M13, M14), or he acquires an object of knowledge, which is a transformation of a dead person (M1b and M2).[28] In all cases, a physical death occurs, whether it is the subject or the object of knowledge that is 'sacrificed', and whether we hear of a killing or only encounter a dead actor in the myths. In the first instance, it is not a question of whether it is death as a process or as a state that operates within the myth: some form or other of connection with physical death is present in all cases (with exception of M4) and may be seen as an important basis for the acquisition of the potential for the numinous and thus for the intellectual life. The boundary between death and life thus becomes more of a boundary between two forms of being than a boundary between being and not-being (cf. R. Boyer 1995, 158). The connection with physical death does not mean that the subject necessarily dies physically. This happens in the self-hanging and in connection with Sinfjǫtli, but the crucial factor is that the object of knowledge is linked to physical death, either by the person himself dying and so obtaining the object of knowledge, or – and this is far more common – by a person travelling to The Other World and meeting a dead person there, possibly carrying out a killing himself, and with that acquiring numinous power.

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[27] It has here to do with the lion, which, the old man predicts, must be vanquished.

In several places, the stay in the liminal space also entails a direct or indirect representation of physical sexuality (most directly in connection with Gunnlǫð, but also – seen in the light of the analyses – in M4, M7, M9b, M10b, M11 and M13). In this way, the purely intellectual process which is the real goal of initiation is made analogous to the physical process that has to do with birth, life and death and, for this reason, it probably also makes a certain sense to talk of the phenomenon of rebirth. It is, however, difficult to identify an actual rebirth in the sources as, in most cases, we have only vague references to sexuality, the prerequisite for the concept of rebirth. But in M1b, we see that the process that brings the object of knowledge from the liminal phase to the final phase may be expressed as a kind of rebirth: Kvasir dies physically and Kvasir is reborn, transformed into intellect. But, in connection with the stated relationship between the subject and the object of knowledge, it is the object of knowledge that is 'reborn' here. We may also see Sinfjǫtli's death and revival in M12 in this light: Sinfjǫtli dies in the liminal phase and is restored to life as a warrior who has learnt the art of moderation, without female individuals being involved. The leaf that restores him to life is sent by a raven and it is, therefore, Óðinn who is behind it. It is here a question of what Clunies Ross calls 'pseudo-procreation … held by its practitioners to generate the spiritual person and so to give enduring life' (1994, 151). We must obviously see the sexual elements in the myths concerned in this light: the sexual element (the basis for the creation of physical life) is thematised with a view to demonstrating the parallelism and, at the same time, the oppositions between the way in which women and men create life, that is, physical and intellectual life, respectively. When people in Scandinavia (and in many other places) connected the terms life and death with This World and The Other World, respectively, something we will discuss further in the next section, the transitions between the two worlds could have affinity with the terms dying and rebirth. On the other hand, this terminology has certainly not been prominent; because the myths have been displayed spatially (*that* Other World, which contains the numinous potential, has been established in the Æsir/Vanir-complex once and for all as the underworld), metaphors relating to journeys have been considerably more dispersed, since, in the mythical universe we have examined, we have been able to ascertain that it is possible to travel to The Other World without dying and consequently without being reborn.[29] When one has merely been in contact with death, and sexuality has possibly been thematised, one can become a 'spiritual' person. And there is nothing to indicate that this was due to a degeneration and thus a late development. Death is, therefore, tied to a definite *place* – a place to which one can travel, if one knows how, in the same way as the Æsir and Vanir can exchange hostages.

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[28] That death does not play any role in the Loki complex is apparently due to the fact that this is found at the periphery of that transformational group formed by the myths about the acquisition of knowledge. We will return to this below.

What is involved, therefore, is the establishment of an analogy between physical and intellectual existence. Contact with physical death in some form or other is a prerequisite for the acquisition of numinous power. This is a widespread idea, as we saw in the overview of research in Chapter 2, and it must be connected with the apparently logical reasoning that knowledge and abilities that are beyond the experiences of everyday life have to be fetched from a world which is beyond the world of everyday life; and the most radical otherness that may possibly be abstracted is probably death (see also Lauf 1980).[30] We can hardly get closer to an explanation of the close connection between death and numinous knowledge.

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[29] I cannot, therefore, agree with Folke Ström (1947, especially 73) when he fixes exclusively on ideas of death in connection with numinous knowledge (which he primarily considers as divinatory). The analyses here have demonstrated that death is a means of approaching The Other World because it is an important ingredient in this Other World, but certainly not the only one.

What the main part of the myths tells us, expressed schematically, is that numinous knowledge is not present prior to physical death, but it cannot, on the other hand, be used actively in the state of being dead but has to be fetched back from there to physical life. The physical life that has preceded death is intellectually dead, whereas physical death gives intellectual life – an intellectual life which can only be manifested through a return or a rebirth to physical life. And it is in this connection that we must view the sexually feminine entity in the liminal space. Through sexuality, the road is prepared for the liberation of the object of knowledge, whether this is found in the form of mead, as in the

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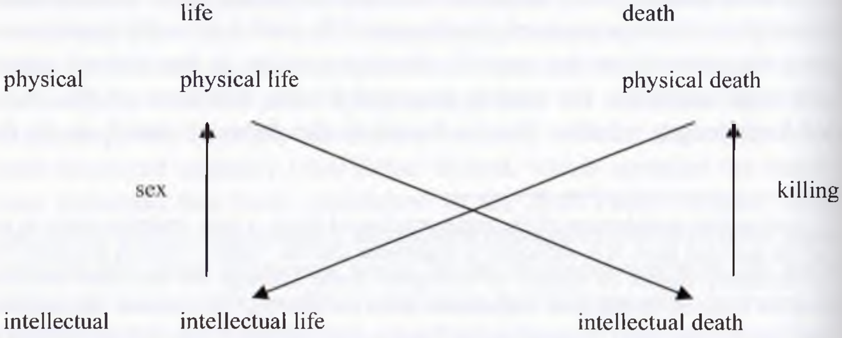
[30] A thorough examination of the understanding of death, a very complex topic, is out of the question here. It is sufficient to emphasise that the 'death' which is characteristic of liminality cannot be equated to biological death, although the one must naturally acquire some of its symbolic expressions from the other as, for instance, the passivity and the lack of ability to manifest itself in the world of the living. In that connection, we ought to state that revenants, about which the sagas are so richly descriptive, have a completely different role to play from the one that is attributed to the dead in the liminal space. Revenants have their right of existence in the semantic universe precisely in that they are the living dead. They therefore occupy an in-between position with regard to the physically living and the physically dead, and it is precisely this in-between position that is frightening and dangerous, among other things, because it entails a threat of death to the living; but also because it escapes normal criteria of classification and thus is 'unclean' (cf. Douglas 1966). Semantically, there are two different types of 'dead', according to whether we encounter revenants or purveyors of knowledge, and it is also in two different complexes that they appear. Having said this, it is also necessary to note that, with a point of departure in the term 'dead', there is an associative relationship between the two groups, and for this reason we may sometimes see the living dead procure an often divinatory knowledge. Without being able to examine this problematic more closely, it is presumably a fundamentally ambiguous attitude towards the dead that forms the basis for these different uses of death as a category, namely in part a fear of everything that has to do with death, in part the hope of a form of life after death, and in part a regret for the loss of the dead. However that may be, none of these psychological aspects can, in themselves, explain why the dead are especially connected with knowledge. This relationship is of a purely semantic character with 'otherness' as the common pivotal point, thematised in a series of different codes.

Gunnlǫð complex, in the form of *seiðr*, as in the Loki complex, or only in the form of speech. It is characteristic that, in M1, M9, M11 and M13, a killing has preceded the meeting with the sexual object. The physical life is negated in order to bring about the intellectual; and the manifestation of this may be associated with a physical sexual act.[31]

In spite of the fact that not every individual myth contains all elements, we can draw up the following figure to illustrate the ideal syntax of initiation in relation to the terms life and death with the two thematised epithets physical and intellectual:

Table 10.8



Death is a characteristic of The Other World, because the latter is just as different from This World as death is from life. And it is from this concept that the symbolic complex with killing and sexuality is derived.

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[31] It is perhaps characteristic that in *Hhund II*, stanzas 43-9 which, indeed, hardly belong to the oldest stratum of eddic poetry, there is a situation which is in many ways an inversion of the sexuality that we have in the Gunnlǫð-episode: Sigrún goes to the dead Helgi's grave-mound and has intercourse with him, but the only consequence of this is that Helgi rides to Valhǫll. This cannot be rejected out of hand as a kind of rebirth, but it is apparently far removed from initiation since no transfer of knowledge takes place. On the other hand, we are perhaps dealing with a parallel with regard to the sexual elements that are present in Ibn Fadlan's description of the cremation of the Rus chieftain. One might assume that sex between a living, feminine being from the upper world and a dead, masculine figure from the underworld, might lead to the dead man being reborn, in this case in Valhǫll, but in neither of the passages is it a question of the activation of a form of numinous knowledge.

Irrespective of which variation of the term, death is involved, it is a question of an emphasis on the liminal space as, among other things, the space of death. Thus, even though the movement from the initial to the liminal phase in the main part of the myths is expressed through metaphors of physical movement, the liminal space itself and the liminal phase is characterised in nearly all cases by containing death as a certain kind of existence.

But M3 and M12 are the only two among the analysed myths that slavishly follow the symbolism with the death and rebirth of the subject, which Eliade considered a *sine qua non* for being able to identify an initiation. This implies that we may have to reject or perhaps rather modify Eliade's characterisation of what is basic to the phenomenon: The Other World certainly contains death as a semantic category, but the subject need not die symbolically in order to get there. Similarly, with rebirth: the transition between the liminal phase and the final phase is only very weakly represented as a rebirth in our material. In M1b it is, indeed, a question of a kind of birth, but it is the object of knowledge and not the subject that is 'being born'. Again, M3 is perhaps closer to a regular rebirth symbolism, but here, too, it is only vaguely thematised. M12 is the only one of our myths to contain an example of death and rebirth symbolism. On the other hand, the theme of rebirth in Ibn Fadlan seems to appear in connection with 'the new chieftain', and perhaps also further in connection with the entry into blood-brotherhood. The latter is, however, quite uncertain, as the passage under the turf strips could just as well denote a symbolic journey as a symbolic birth.

The connection between death and sexuality that we encounter in initiation has obviously also been known in other contexts, as Steinsland has shown (1992, 321-31 and 1994). Whether actual ideas about death that can be formulated as a meeting between the dead masculine subject and the female ruler[32] of the kingdom of the dead have 'lent' this collocation to the initiation complex, or whether it is the other way round, has to be left uncertain. But, on the face of it, the latter seems the most obvious, since sexuality has a well defined role as the basis of reproduction and the bringing forth of life and with that would be able to function as the pivotal point for drawing parallels between two kinds of life, the physical and the intellectual.

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[32] For example, *Yt* 7 and 32; several examples from the texts in Steinsland 1992, 325-31 and from pictures in Steinsland 1994, 144-50.

Before we leave the triadic sequence, we will just state that the symbolism that is present in so many initiation rituals the world over, and which has to do with fertility, is also present in Scandinavia. Here, it is sexuality that is in focus. Sexuality, the bringing forth of life, rebirth and other terms that are taken from the physical sphere are, explicitly or implicitly, present in connection with the acquisition of numinous abilities by means of which the establishment of analogies between the physical and the intellectual life occurs. Inseparable from these are, naturally, the metaphors of death, which in the same way link physical and intellectual death together. By way of the symbolic entities that are used, we find a crucial assertion, namely that 'knowledge' is life and that it is, moreover life at a higher level than the physical and, furthermore, that it is a masculine phenomenon (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 156 -8).[33]

The binary oppositions

In the analyses of the myths above we have called attention to a series of oppositional pairs, some of which may be found in the majority of those myths and myth complexes that we have investigated, whereas others are only present in a few or in a single context. We will examine them all more closely because the difference in frequency does not necessarily correspond to a difference in importance.

If we begin by tabulating the basic and the recurring oppositional pairs that we have discovered in the myth sequences that have the acquisition of knowledge as their main ingredient, we get the following:[34]

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[33] The close relationship between knowledge and life is perhaps expressed most forcefully in the metaphor of liquid: the liquid (often in the form of mead) contains both life and knowledge (cf. Schjødt 1983).

[34] Apart from the oppositional pairs that are marked, whose presence we have argued for in Chapters 5-8, others may also be present. For example, it will be possible in M2 to refer to masculine versus feminine because the killing of Mímir takes place in the sphere of the Vanir who, as we have seen, form part of a pole in this opposition in relation to the Æsir. The marking pertains, however, only to the oppositional pairs that are directly thematised in the myths concerned. Parentheses mark a weak and, in some cases, an uncertain theme.

Table 10.9

	life vs death	upper world vs underworld	manifest/active vs latent/passive[35]	masculine vs feminine	civilised vs uncivilised
M1	x	x	x	x	
M2	x	x	x		
M3	x	x		x	
M4		x		x	
M5	x	x		x	
M6	x	x		x	
M7	x	x		x	
M8	x	x		x	
M9	x	x		x	x
M10	x	x		x	
M11	x	(x)		x	x
M12	x	(x)			x
M13	x	(x)		x	x
M14	x				x

In addition to those listed above, there are two oppositional pairs which are important, as we will see below, but are only present in M1 and M2, respectively, namely solid form versus liquid form and body/whole versus head/part. Besides, we have seen the hint of a dichotomy consisting of nature and culture, which was expressed in the Æsir/Vanir complex but which, in a certain sense, recurs (although implicitly) in several myths since the subject moves from the known world, which can be characterised primarily by the connotations that also characterises the culture that produce the myths (Schjødt 1990a, 50).

The oppositional pairs appear with varying frequency. Life versus death, upper world versus underworld, masculine versus feminine and, implicitly, also active versus passive and manifest versus latent recur in so many myths that we may operate with them as a general semantic inventory. The two oppositions that appear only in M1 and M2 are, however, also of crucial importance, not only in connection with the forming of the object of knowledge (mead, living intellect in a dead body), as we will see below, but also because they appear in myths that are of a paradigmatic character.

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[35] This opposition is by and large present in all myths since the latent numinous is present in the liminal space but, characteristically, it is most strongly thematised in the foundation myths M1 and M2.

We could also have placed killing and peace agreement as an opposition, but it is obvious that we cannot immediately claim that this is equivalent to the opposition liminal versus non-liminal. Outside the two myths in which it appears, the peace agreement has no special attachment to either the one or the other of these modes of existence. It is crucial that the peace agreement is synonymous with the establishment of the gods' society, as has been demonstrated by Dumézil (1959, 34). And it is precisely at this point in mythic history that Mímir and Kvasir appear on the mythic stage. By this means, the two myths acquire the character of foundation myths and so each becomes paradigmatic in the same way as the Æsir/Vanir conflict itself. On the one hand, this provides evidence for the importance of the object of knowledge in the ideology of the Scandinavian people. On the other hand, it is just as important that, in the first instance, it is only a potential (the living Mímir and the living Kvasir), that we have procured here, because the realisation requires a killing which takes place in a definite space in respect of both of these figures.

As we have seen, the introduction of Mímir and Kvasir has significance only as a condition for their deaths, as it is through these that the actual object of knowledge is obtained. As we saw previously, the killing involves a transformation of the two main actors from physical subjects to intellectual objects or objects of knowledge, figuratively expressed through their change of state (from body/whole to head/part and from solid form to liquid form). At this point, the role of both figures is played out. What is important here is that, in the majority of cases of the acquisition of numinous knowledge, this knowledge is basically transferred either by liquid means or in words, given or spoken by an actor with a semantic affinity to death. We must, therefore, view these two myth complexes, in which a mythic *explanation* is given for the connection between death and wise speech, and between-death and the knowledge-containing liquid, as basic for the appearance of numinous knowledge. The self-hanging, which, naturally, also has the character of being paradigmatic, tells us, on the other hand, about the actual process of acquisition and is, therefore, closer to the ritual.[36]

The three oppositional pairs, peace agreement versus killing, solid form versus liquid form and body/whole versus head/part are therefore present in M1 and M2, and their importance is that they contribute to the explanation of the emergence of the numinous object, which coincides with the actual establishment of the gods' society and so establishes the connection to the relationship between the Æsir and the Vanir. But, in this way, they also help to establish The Other World as a semantic category, because the second term in the three oppositional pairs suggests essential characteristics of that world from which knowledge comes: it is characterised by a transformative potential, which is able to create intellectual life through physical death in the one who frequents it.

We will now turn to the rest of the oppositional pairs, which contribute more generally to the characterisation of The Other World.

We have seen that The Other World is expressed, in most cases, as the underworld, which is evident from the actors that are connected with it, and from the oppositional pairs and mediators that we meet. We are able to see that the numinous knowledge or the numinous equipment in the vast majority of cases must be fetched from *below*: from the dead, the dwarfs and the Vanir's abode, from inside mountains, from caves and from wherever the well originates. In the previous chapters, we referred to all these places under the one heading as the underworld. This does not necessarily imply that they formed a well-defined and delimited space in the world-view of the Scandinavians, but the hints we get about their location imply that *that* other world which has to do with the acquisition of knowledge has a marked tendency to be placed

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[36] This observation is not intended to argue that actual initiation rituals would necessarily have included hangings, as has been suggested by Grønvik (1999 and 2000a). This does not seem to have been the case, as the rituals analysed in Chapter 9 have demonstrated. At the same time, however, we have seen in Ibn Fadlan's report that a means of death had been practised (as far as the female slave is concerned) that is reminiscent of hanging. The attachment of the self-hanging myth to the ritual consists, apparently, alone in its deep structure, namely that through death one gains the possibility of acquiring knowledge from The Other World, together with the notion that this acquisition is of a general importance for the status of the subject in the final situation.

below in a topographical sense.[37] However, it is remarkable that in those scenarios, which beforehand give more of an impression of being 'ritual', namely M11, M12, M13 and M14, the underworld as a mythical location is only vaguely thematised. In M14, it is almost completely absent, whereas in M11 and M12 it is present in the form of the earth-house and the inside of the mound, both of which are portrayed quite 'unmythically', as is also the case in M13. As it appears in Table 10.9, the opposition upper world versus underworld is here, apparently, substituted for and supplemented by the opposition civilised versus uncivilised. We will return to this below. The underworld is furnished with a specific inventory (various specific actors) and with some specific qualities, which form the one pole in the remaining oppositional pairs and which has as the other pole that world in which the subject's normal existence is played out.

It is characteristic of the underworld, as we have seen, that death plays a central role. The life/death-opposition appears in all the myths that we have dealt with (except M4), both in those that are definitely initiations, and in those that can only be characterised as 'acquisitions of knowledge'. It is therefore fundamental.

We have already discussed the term 'death' and its status in the structure and will only emphasise here that death and the underworld supplement one another as characteristics of The Other World. All in all, there seems little doubt that, in the whole complex involving the acquisition of numinous abilities, we ought to see the underworld and death as closely connected if not simply alternating mythemes which, indeed, belong to different codes, but which are more or less identical in the universe of the myths.[38] They can appear together, or one or the other may be more or less underemphasised without this involving changes in our understanding of The Other World, because both death and the underworld are expressions for the *Other* as oppositions to the condition and place that is the stage for human society.[39]

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[37] With regard to the opposition liminal versus non-liminal and its universal status, this placing is 'accidental' since The Other World may be placed anywhere, as long as it is a *completely* different place from the one in which everyday life is played out. Thus, it may be in heaven, across a great ocean, in the jungle, etc. When, in Scandinavia (as in many other places), it is in the underworld, this is undoubtedly connected with the fact that the Æsir are the representatives of This World, so their placing in the upper world is incontrovertible, just as that other world which Útgarðr forms in the horizontal cosmic model has completely different connotations, and therefore it is used in other connections, as we saw above in Chapter 10.1 (see also Schjødt 1990a).

[38] In a completely different connection, which is very far from the mythical universe that we have been occupied with up to now, we also have the acquisition of poetic abilities from the underworld and from a dead person, namely in *Þorleifs þáttr jar-*

In this way, we have to do with different symbolic collocations that serve to establish a liminal space, namely *that* liminal space whose central function is to provide the possibility for the acquisition of a special numinous competence – without the individual symbolic entity necessarily needing to be present in all cases. Just as is the case with the relation death/underworld, where the dead belong to the underworld, so that the one term includes an association with the other, we will also be able to view the remaining Other World-terms.

This is true not least of the category of the feminine, because we can observe in the majority of the myths that the knowledge-purveyor, either as a definite Other World actor or as a helper of the subject, is feminine. This is clearly the case in M1b, M5, M6, M7, M8, M9b. M10b and M13 and appears more indirectly in M2, where the Vanir represent the 'feminine' in opposition to the Æsir, in M4, where Loki is transformed into a woman, and in M11, where Sigmundr has intercourse with a female performer of *seiðr*. The opposition masculine versus feminine is, therefore, also fundamental as an expression of the relationship between This World and The Other World. It ought to be obvious that we have to operate, once again, with the terms as semantic categories. The underworld is not only inhabited by female beings, and knowledge is not exclusively mediated through dead women, but also through dying male beings (e.g. Fáfnir), but the tendency in those myths that we have examined is clear enough: when a figure with some

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laskálds chapter 8 (Jonas Kristjánsson 1956. 227-9), in which a certain Hallbjǫrn receives the ability to compose poems from an inhabitant of a grave mound. We will not attempt here to make the further connection more precise, but it is characteristic that, even in such a late product as this *þáttr*, we have the combination death and the underworld connected with the acquisition of knowledge. This is not surprising, however, since it is well known that death is connected semantically with the underworld in a wealth of religions across the world.

[39] There is little doubt that the empirically conditioned observation that the dead are placed in the ground or in a mound has played a part in this symbolic formation. But whether it is this observation or the common quality of otherness shared by the two concepts that provides the original reason for the collocation cannot be decided and, in any case, does not play any part in this analysis.

sort of affinity to the underworld prophesies knowledge, voluntarity or by coercion, it comes in most cases from a woman. True enough, the text of Loki's journey to the underworld does not say anything about meetings with 'women', but on the other hand, his behaviour in the underworld is so marked by femininity that, in conjunction with all his other roles as a woman or a female animal, it demonstrates abundantly that it is not necessary, as far as Loki is concerned, to have contact with women; he contains the feminine element within himself.

In others of the myths we have analysed, the feminine element seems to be completely absent. This is true of Hadingus's first journey to The Other World (M10a), Sigurðr's killing of Fáfnir (M9a), Hǫttr's killing of the monster (M14) and Sinfjǫtli's experiences in the forest (M12). And this is also true of the self-hanging (M3). However, in the cases of the first two, it is observable that Hadingus and Sigurðr, before they reach the final phase, have been in contact with feminine entities so that, just as in the complex of the mead of knowledge, one sequence that takes place in the underworld and does not contain the feminine element (corresponding to the dwarfs' killing of Kvasir), is immediately followed by one in which the feminine *is* present. On the other hand, there are no traces of femininity in M12 and M14. We could argue that the description of the meeting with the monster in M14 is very brief (we do not have any explicit upper world/underworld-opposition either) and from a semantic point of view is hardly exhaustive with regard to those scenarios that may have formed the background for the descriptions. On the other hand, there is no reason to postulate an original existence of a feminine entity, because the killing in a space (the bog) which is *outside* the royal residence, followed by the acquisition of new abilities, has probably been sufficient to arouse associations of a liminal space in this half-mythic and half-ritual account.

In exactly the same way that death and the underworld can appear together or individually, it is also likely that other fundamental connotations, which are linked to The Other World from which the numinous potential is fetched, are able to appear in semantic bundles or to stand alone. They can appear in combination and thus give each other the status of liminal phenomena, or individually without the liminal space necessarily changing its character. The same is true of M12 and, to a certain extent, of M3.[40] But the prerequisite for the individual symbolic expression being 'sufficient' is, of course, that there are myths in which the combination *is*, in fact, present, and which, therefore, acquire the status of referential myths. Besides, as we will see below in 10.3, there is a possible connection between, on the one hand, an absence or presence of the sexual and, on the other hand, the final situation to which a person is initiated. This is apparently different in M12 and in M14 in relation to the rest of the myths with human subjects.

We saw above how the feminine, among other things, was of crucial importance in establishing an analogy between physical and intellectual life. But, in addition and out of necessity, it forms an opposite pole to the masculine and appears therefore as the 'Other' in the classification system that characterises the culture which is the subject of this book. As a semantic category, it is very suitable as a purveyor of a potential, whose procurement is analogous to the production of physical life, and which is numinous – which is of and about the *Other* and which contains the mysteries of life and death. It is important to maintain that we are talking about a semantic category here, and not, like Kress 1990 and others, make the relationship between masculine and feminine into social categories, even if the two types of categories would have been able to influence each other.

It is this potential which is a latent and passive entity in the underworld, while the masculine subject has to bring it to the upper world in order for it to become something more and other than just a potential. These two oppositions, latent versus manifest and passive versus active, thus also become fundamental, although they are only thematised directly in M1 and M2, by virtue of the fact that they explicitly characterise the objects of knowledge in the liminal and final phases, respectively.

The continually recurring oppositions life versus death, upper world versus underworld, masculine versus feminine, active/manifest versus passive/latent establish certain codes, which we may designate respectively as biological, spatial or cosmological, sexual and generic. All of these codes together assist in characterising The Other World which the liminal phase of the acquisition of knowledge aims to obtain contact with, and which is more than the sum of the individual codes.[41] It is characterised by being that which This World is *not*. This means that it is characterised by a fundamentally other form of existence, namely the state of being dead (which is *not* a negation of life but, by contrast, *another* form of life); by being in another place (under the world that we live in); by not being marked by the traditional masculine virtues, which the societies of the Viking Age worshipped as ideals, but contrarily that which these virtues have no possibility of influencing; by being stationary in relation to our world's constant activity (an activity that is necessary in order to survive in a world in which time plays an important role, but which is without importance in the 'timelessness' which the state of being dead is an expression of). The potential that The Other World contains is therefore also present only in latent form, because it is useless in a condition in which there is no activity that can make it manifest.

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[40] M3 is unusual in this regard because it does not directly mention the inventory in the liminal space. Indirectly, we can see that the runes must belong here, but *Hávm* is silent about whatever else Óðinn has encountered in the underworld. For this reason, too, the self-hanging seems to be closer to the ritual than the rest of the Óðinn-myths.

In this way, a semantic space has been established, a space which is fundamentally different from the one that the subject of the narrative comes from. And it is confirmed that this Other World is marked in its construction as an opposite to that world, which is 'ours' – the human world, with respect to the above-mentioned codes. In the Óðinn-myths, it is clear that the world of the mythological subject (Óðinn), from which he comes before he approaches The Other World and to which he likewise returns, is a world that is certainly 'another world' than the world of human beings since it is inhabited by gods and other non-human beings together with everything that that entails. But, in relation to that Other World which we have been able to analyse in this book, it is characterised as the known world (cf. above Chapter 10.1).

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[41] It is, therefore, the *combined* codes that enter the corpus which are of critical importance. An individual code is, naturally, interesting analytically, but the combination is more than the sum of the individual codes. Lévi-Strauss says in this connection in his criticism of Max Müller (1971, 38): 'Le mythe ne se laisse réduire par aucun code pris en particulier et il ne résulte pas non plus de l'addition de plusieurs. Il faudrait plutôt dire qu'un groupe de mythes constitue par lui-même un code d'une puissance supérieure á chacun de ceux qu'il utilise pour chiffrer des messages multiples'. 'The myth cannot be reduced to any particular code, nor can it any more be reduced by the addition of several. It would be better to say that a group of myths constitutes a code by itself with a power superior to each of those codes that it uses to decipher manifold messages'. In our myths, this superior power can be expressed as the contrasts between This World and The Other World or the non-liminal and the liminal.

The myths we have dealt with previously, which are not Óðinn myths, occupy in this regard a kind of in-between position because we are actually dealing with human subjects; but so far as they are put into a mythical or semi-mythical context, it is also this mythical universe that primarily characterises their liminal phase; we have, for instance, seen the Vanic elements in connection with the Other-World actors in M7, M9b, M10b and M11. Besides, we can see that Óðinn, directly or indirectly, plays a role as an Other-World actor in several sequences (M9, M10, M11 and M12) through which the opposition between This World and The Other World, as we have seen it in the Óðinn myths, is suspended and, in relation to the human subject, turns into various aspects of The Other World. In this way, it can be argued that 'the hero myths' mediate between the 'true' myths (those that are exclusively inhabited by supernatural beings) and the rituals (which, at a certain level, are played exclusively by human actors), because their Other World contains characteristics from those two worlds that are represented in the Óðinn-myths.

When this is so, it must be regarded as a confirmation of the fact that the purpose of the mythic dichotomy, within the world of the gods itself, is to provide human beings with a paradigmatic structure and symbolism, with the divine possessor of knowledge *par excellence*, Óðinn, as a prototype and so as a possible helper.

In the myths that we have analysed above, we have drawn attention to the fact that various mediators intervene. They are of different character, and some are more obvious than others. This, for example, is true of the source in M2 and Yggdrasill in M3, both mediating between the upper world and the underworld, because their material elaboration implies that they participate in both worlds. When it appears so clearly here, it is because we are dealing with mediators which are permanently both/and. It is more complicated to see the mediating function in, for example, Sigurðr's horse Grani which does not in any apparent way connote the underworld. This is because the mediating function is established by means of a dynamic principle: the horse can move from one place to another.

Aside from the meaning that mediation generally has in myths, it is of special importance in a complex of ideas whose main ingredient is communication between two worlds, as is the case with initiation. Mediation between a pair of terms, each one of which forms a pole in the series of oppositional pairs that we have analysed, is crucial to whether it is at all possible to make contact between these poles and the worlds they represent. Mediation is, therefore, a *sine qua non* of the logic that makes contact between the liminal and non-liminal worlds possible in the context of initiation, and as such it is an important factor in the construction of the semantic universe itself, a factor without which initiation would not have any meaning. And the mediator *par excellence* is, naturally, the subject who undergoes the initiation process, and who, in the final phase - due to the knowledge acquired – will, therefore, be both of This and The Other World.

The mediating process is quite complicated, as it makes use of various 'techniques'; partly the insertion of various elements which serve as mediators in relation to defined codes, and partly the transformation between the various codes themselves. Therefore, for instance, the strong opposition between life and death, besides the insertion of the permanent mediators head and drink, is substituted for the weaker opposition upper world versus underworld in which a dynamic mediator may be placed. The weaker opposition forms a spatial code, within which it becomes possible to mediate, since one can move from one space to another.

Summing up, we can see that The Other World, as far as our sources let us gain an insight into it, is characterised by certain defined codes. As we saw, we have what we might call a 'biological' code, thematised through the life/death dichotomy. There is a sexual code, thematised through the masculine/feminine dichotomy, and there is a cosmological code that is thematised through the upper world/underworld dichotomy. In addition, and derived from the first of these, we have the active/passive dichotomy and the manifest/latent dichotomy. But it is important to emphasise that, although these Other-World terms in some of the myths are all present, they are not necessarily all involved in each individual myth. This can possibly be because of the form in which the myths have been transmitted, where something may have been lost (and much obviously *is* lost), but it may also be due to the fact that we are dealing with a composite topos where a single element (or a few of them) is enough to signal that we are dealing with a liminal scenario, and that its use in a context that involves initiation and the acquisition of knowledge implies an association with all the others, which illustrates a structural dictum, namely that myths first and foremost refer to other myths (Lévi-Strauss 1971, 576 and 1983, 152).

The nature of numinous power in the acquired object

It is characteristic of the majority of the myths that there is a concrete object which contains a numinous potentiality. In addition to this, most myths include numinous information in words, either as a supplement to the object or, in a few cases (M5, M6 and M8), as an alternative. These words, thus, also acquire the character of an object of knowledge.

It may be difficult to keep the various representations of numinous power separate from one another. In the discussion above, we have spoken of 'knowledge', 'competence', 'abilities' and other qualities (and will continue to do so below). The pivotal point, however, is that numinous power is brought to a subject, who then acquires certain abilities which, in most cases (and always in the Óðinn-myths), include numinous knowledge. As mentioned, it is usually a question of a concrete object, which to a higher degree makes it possible that this knowledge or these abilities can be made explicit in the narrative's representation.

We have seen that liquid plays an important role, either as blood or mead. In combination with the head, it forms part of the object of knowledge in M2 in the form of the well. In M1, it is the creation of the liquid itself that is involved, and both of its primary forms of representation are explicit here: the blood is the crucial ingredient in the mead (the other one, honey, is otherwise found only in M11). We have come across the liquid in the form of blood in M4, M9a, M10a, M13 and M14. In M7, M9b and M10b, we have it in the form of mead and, furthermore, it is indicated in M3. M12 and M11 are problematical as they are apparently without an object of knowledge, although it is clear enough that a form of numinous power is acquired during the stay in the forest. Besides this, the drink is only absent in M5, M6 and M8 – the myths which we referred to earlier as acquisitions of knowledge, but not as initiations. This is obviously significant and will be discussed in the next section. There is no reason to wonder how intoxicating drink could be understood as containing knowledge (cf. Edwards 1986 and Doht 1974, 152), and it is probably correct that the ingestion of a liquid and the uttering of words have been understood as elements in the same process (Stephens 1972, 265). But it is more important that, here, we find again a manipulation of the relationship between physical and intellectual life, because the mead also helps to maintain the 'physical' life, which the *einherjar* live in Valhǫll. They drink from the mead which comes from the goat Heiðrún (*Grí* 25)[42] – a mythic statement which helps to generate new meaning in the complex concerning the acquisition of knowledge.[43]

At first glance, the blood seems more difficult to understand. But it is certain, as we have seen above, that abilities can be transferred by means of blood (which naturally also applies to the role of blood as an ingredient in the mead of knowledge). This assumption is connected with the idea that blood, together with the heart, is the seat of physical life (Ranke 1978, 78).[44] Physical life is in the blood, although one does not become immortal in a physical sense by ingesting it; but physical strength (M10a, M13 and M14) and numinous abilities (M4 and M9a) are transferred to one. The structural parallel between these two entities, physical strength and numinous abilities, which characterise the subjects' position in the final phase, brings it about that physical strength also acquires a numinous element: it is strength from an Other

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[42] Heiðrún gets her food from Yggdrasill, and, when mead streams from her udder, this must be connected with Yggdrasill's role as a mediator between the upper world and the underworld. Yggdrasill obtains *its* nourishment from a damp substance called *hvíta aurr* (*Vsp* 19), therefore from the earth. This dampness is possibly at the heart of the idea about the importance of liquid (cf. Dörner 1993, 46), without our being able to clarify further the connection between *hvíta aurr* and the drink of knowledge. But it seems beyond doubt that Mímir's well has played a role, as Dörner suggests. See also Mundal 1992a, who makes several pertinent observations about the relationship between Heiðrún, fertility and the world tree.

[43] We are in no way arguing that the knowledge-complex preceded the *einherjar*-complex chronologically or vice versa. The crucial fact is that the elements from one complex can be reused in another, with just as good a meaning, and that the first complex will also acquire meaning from the second. It seems obvious, here, that the drink of knowledge in initiation and the *einherjar*'s drink of life have a common pivotal point in the relationship between physical and intellectual life. But which one 'came first' seems, in part, impossible to answer (if the question can be asked meaningfully at all) and, in part, it is of no interest, at least in this context.

[44] Ranke 1978 also mentions a series of other understandings of the role of the blood connected with various ritual phenomena. It seems *a priori* likely that a connection between these existed, but a more extensive investigation of this matter is outside the framework of the present study.

World. It is, therefore, not accidental that it has to do with the blood of dragons, bears, elks and lions – creatures that are all characterised by great strength. But it is just as characteristic that the requisite abilities of warriors are not only physical strength. Another, and just as important aspect, is mental strength which is found in courage (cf. the nickname which is later is given to Hjalti, *inn hugprúði*), intelligence, and ferocity – qualities also attributed to the animals mentioned above.[45] This mental component, the ability to 'set oneself up' has, as it appears from *Yng* 6, clear affinity with the numinous.

It appears clearly from M9a and M3 that the liquid is connected with the runes,[46] also constituting an object of knowledge. This is a relationship in which two objects of knowledge could partly alternate and partly supplement each other just as is also the case in *Guðr* II, 22 and 23, where a magic drink, among other things, consists of *hvers kyns stafir* 'staves of each kind', and *Sigdr* 18, where the runes are poured into the mead and sent to various groups of beings (presumably by Óðinn, who can thus give the runes to whomever he wants in the same way as he can with the mead). And the connection appears, perhaps most clearly, in *Sigdr* 5 where the drink that Sigurðr has to drink *fullr er hann lióða oc lícnstafa, góðra galdra oc gamanrúna* 'it is full of songs and comfort-staves, of good charms and amusement-runes', where the mixing of drink, different types of runes and magic incantations/formulas is total. The *seiðr* in M4 occupies a special position because in its masculine form, it is evaluated negatively, something we will return to in the following section. But there is no doubt that this, too, is connected with incantations of various kinds.

All in all, it appears from the sources that the objects of knowledge mutually and in relation to the verbal information cannot, and ought not, be kept sharply separated. That there are technical differences in their use – that people had various forms of magical practice – cannot be doubted, but with regard to the subject of this enquiry, namely the semantic universe of the acquisition of knowledge, a rigid differentiation does not serve any purpose,[47] because all the objects originate in The Other World. For the same reason, it cannot be crucial to determine whether the meaning of *rún* was 'runic characters' or only secrets in general. It is clear that several meanings are present in our material (see *LP: rún*), but the semantic core remains the same in all cases. We have also encountered runes as objects of knowledge in M2, M3 and M9, and in the same sources we have also met with liquid, magic formulas or wise speech. It is thus characteristic that several of the objects of knowledge can play a role in the same complex – apparently without any systematic differentiation.

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[45] It is thus characteristic that Óðinn, whose association with war is strikingly mental (cf.Schjødt 2004), both gives advice to kings about the battle-formation of armies and gives warriors courage and ferocity or makes them furious (cf. *óðr* 'inspired, enraged').

[46] This is most likely connected with the fact that the runes were presumably painted in a red colour, which may originally have been blood from sacrificial victims (de Vries 1956-57, I, 309).

The myths are thus a catalogue of a series of objects that have been associated with the idea of numinous competence; but, even if we have to reckon with significant lacunae in our information about the numinous, there is no reason to assume any clear-cut classification of the relationship between the material elaboration of objects of knowledge and the knowledge it brought with it. It is possible that there were some tendencies to connect certain entities. Blood, for instance, may have had a special attachment to abilities in battle, or the runes may have been linked to magical activities. But the material that has been analysed here gives us no sure indications in that direction. Rather, the mythic material indicates that all these objects of knowledge, each individually or all together, formed a broadly numinous potentiality.

As became clear in the individual analyses, there are accounts which do not state anything explicitly about the acquisition of knowledge (M11, M12, M13 and M14). Again, this may be due to problems of transmission, but here, too, is another possible explanation. In M13 and M14, an element is included which in other connections clearly contains numinous abilities, namely blood, but in these two accounts it apparently has as its only purpose, the strengthening of the subject's physical abilities. But, as we have seen, part of the idea that has to do with the ingestion of blood is that one acquires some of the abilities that characterise a being of a liminal character from whom the blood comes and, also, that physical strength is united by this means with numinous abilities.

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[47] The relationship between various forms of magical practices, especially in connection with runic magic is mentioned in Flowers 1986, 135. The whole of chapter 5 of this book is especially relevant to magic in Scandinavian religion and contains, among other things, an outline of the magic connections in which runes are used alone or together with other 'magical' aids (1986, 158-166). For a general survey of magic in the *Íslendinga sǫgur*, see Dillmann 2006.

In M11 and M12, the situation is slightly different. Here, two elements which involve knowledge appear explicitly, namely that Sigmundr, when he returns home, is a wise king, and that both Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli speak the language of wolves. And in addition, Sinfjǫtli has learnt something about the profession of war: he must know his limits, and if he does not, he will die. So, although M12 does not have an object of knowledge, nor a kind of knowledge which explicitly has the same numinous qualities that we have come across in the rest of the myths, we nevertheless have clear traces of a procurement of numinous qualities. These myths thus contain an acquisition of – not numinous knowledge in a narrow sense – but, rather, of numinous competence broadly understood. This may contain definite knowledge about and from The Other World, possibly in the form of material objects, but it may also be abilities that were simply understood as belonging to The Other World.

Summing up, we can state that the majority of the myths that we have examined includes one or more objects of knowledge, which the subject acquires in the course of the narrative process. These are objects which make the subject forever able to carry out the functions that are required of him in the final phase, and so we must understand 'knowledge' in quite a broad sense, as it generally has to do with mental qualities with numinous value, i.e. qualities which are not of This World.

10.3 The Liminal Scenario: The Actors in The Other World

The Other World is first and foremost characterised by the actors that the subject meets there, but also by the mediators of communication between the two worlds. Here, we will examine more closely these fundamental elements in the whole corpus of myths under discussion, and, to the extent that this is possible, examine the importance of the differences or similarities that are present in the variants. It has become clear that the myths we have examined form a cohesive group, but one in which the individual myths demonstrate both differences and similarities in relation to one another. This could indicate that we are dealing with a collection of myths that is close to what Lévi-Strauss has called a transformational group.[48] The analysis undertaken earlier in this chapter has bordered on transformational analysis, understood as an analysis of the variations that are involved in a group of myths, and in this section we will attempt to gather some of the threads together.[49]

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[48] Lévi-Strauss has characterised mythic thought as being *par essence transformatrice* 'essentially transformative' (1971, 603). That means that a group of myths which, on the surface, may look very different, may still have a connection to each other. In other words, the transformation concept includes the notion that comparing a group of myths in which the differences are perhaps more dominant than the similarities may produce additional meaning. It will be meaningful to the extent that the differences are systematic rather than accidental. The important factor in our context is that the differences that exist between the individual myths may help to construct the semantic field of the particular transformational group; and it is only in regard to this that the meaning of the individual myth is fully displayed.

[49] Lévi-Strauss (1964, 205) uses three concepts in his transformational analyses, namely *armature*, *code* and *message*. He defines them thus: 'Convenons d'appeler *armature* un ensemble de propriétés qui restent invariantes dans deux ou plusieurs mythes: code, le système des fonctions assignées par chaque mythe á ces propriétés: *message*, le contenu d'un mythe particulier'. 'Let us agree to call *armature* a collection of characteristics, which remain invariable in two or more myths: *code*, the system of functions assigned by each myth to those characteristics; *message*, the content of a particular myth'. With regard to our myths, we may say about the *armature* that it forms a sequence in which an entity from This World moves to The Other World, where a transformation with regard to numinous knowledge or mental capacity takes place in such a way that the entity (if it has to do with the object of knowledge) becomes pure intellect or (if it has to do with the subject) acquires an object of knowledge; after this, the object of knowledge is brought back to This World and can be used by the subject. Thus, knowledge and mental abilities are the pivotal points. The most important of the codes are: the sexual (the gender-dichotomy), the biological (life versus death) and the spatial or cosmological (upper world versus underworld); but others also play a role. The message is, as it appears from the quotation, different from myth to myth (the invention of fire, the origin of tobacco, the origin of honey, etc.). In our myths, it has to do with the establishing and acquisition of the various objects of knowledge. A regular transformational analysis, as Lévi-Strauss demonstrates it in the four volumes of *Mythologiques,* cannot be carried out on myths about the acquisition of knowledge in Scandinavia. The theme is too narrow for this purpose, and the myths that are analysed are too similar, as they follow a definite narrative structure combined with a definite message, namely that numinous knowledge is procured in one of a limited number of ways. The Scandinavian material itself, however, seems too modest. Quite simply, too many myths and mythic details have been lost, so we would be forced to make far too many reconstructions in order to connect the surviving myths. Reconstruction is to a certain extent unavoidable, as we have seen, in studies of Scandinavian mythology, but reconstructions of individual myths from scattered pieces of information is and remains such an uncertain method that it ought to be avoided as far as possible. In the following section, the terms 'trans-

In principle, every myth in a transformational group can constitute the point of departure for an analysis, but in practice we have to choose a reference myth with a certain density of semantic elements (Lévi-Strauss 1964, 10). This is also true here, and, in our material, the myth about the creation and acquisition of the mead of poetry will be most suitable, as it contains most of the relationships and semantic elements that connect it with a number of the other myths. The basis for the important parts of the analysis that was carried out in Chapter 5 on both the Kvasir/Gunnlǫð complex and the Mímir complex is the fundamental concept of the Æsir/Vanir dichotomy for which we argued above in 10.1. This myth-complex must, therefore, be considered as a part of the 'ethnographic context' that – although we are not dealing with a myth which is directly about the acquisition of knowledge – must be included and has been included as part of the analysis (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1964, 181).

We have already seen (10. 2) that M2 and, in part, M1 are atypical because the object of knowledge, rather than the subject, moves into the liminal space. This variation from the rest of the myths could be explained by recognising that these two myths had a paradigmatic status in the actual establishment of numinous potential. Common to M1a and M2 is, thus, the fact that the object of knowledge has the role of subject in the initial phase, although it later turns out that the real subject is Óðinn. Furthermore, both myths give an account of the conditions that lead to the creation of an object of knowledge. The message of the two myths is thus almost the same, as the variations only apply to the Other-World actors who are, respectively, dwarfs and Vanir, a variation which we have attempted to explain in Chapter 5.2, together with the concrete symbolic form of the knowledge object, namely the mead and the head. But, with regard to the latter variation, we have also seen that the myths meet along a syntagmatic axis: the head is in the well and drinks from the well. Common to both myths are, furthermore, the biological and the cosmological codes and the thematisation of the relationship between war and peace agreement, and the relationship between physical and intellectual life, which is established by the killing and transformation of the two main actors.

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formational group' and 'transformational analysis' will, therefore, not be used in a narrow technical sense.

In this way, the two myths reach out to other myths in which killings appear in the liminal phase (M3, M9a, M10a, M11, M12 and M14) and, further, to the myths in which a dead person prophesies knowledge (M5, M6, M7, M8 and partly M9b).[50]

But M1a is followed by M1b and, through this, another variant is established, namely the one that thematises the sexual code, as we have also found in M7, M9b, M10b, M11 and M13. These myths contain both death and sexuality. In M7, it has to do with the dead Hyndla and the sexual Freyja (who is also related to death); in M9b, we also have a feminine purveyor of knowledge, who has affinity with death as a valkyrie but is at the same time sexual; M10b indicates that Hadingus has a sexual relationship with the woman who leads him to the kingdom of the dead, and in M11, Sigmundr kills the female wolf and has intercourse with Signý, whereas Bǫðvarr, in M13, sleeps with his brother's wife and before that has killed his grandfather's wife, who is skilled in magic. With this, the sexual code is established, and in this way we get a message which tells us that the feminine – like death – is an ingredient in the space from which knowledge and mental abilities may be fetched, and that intercourse is one way in which one may acquire them.

We thus have three groups of mythic sequences within the corpus, each of which is characterised individually by the events that the subject experiences in The Other World and by the characteristics of the Other-World actors. First is a group in which a killing is involved (M1a, M2, M3, M9a, M10a, M11, M12, M13 and M14). Here, the Other-World actors, to the extent that they can be identified, are chiefly masculine or monstrous in their form (fabulous beings or known animals), but in both M11 and M13 they are female. The second group is related to the first in that the Other-World actors are dead. These are, in contrast, all feminine (M5, M6, M7 [Hyndla] and M8). Here, the subject is passive in the liminal phase. In the third group, we are also dealing with feminine actors who, in spite of their affinity to death, are not dead but, rather, sexual, and this characterises their relationship to the subject (M1b, M7 [Freyja], M9b, M10b, M11 and M13). Thus, the second group acquires a mediating role with regard to the first and third groups, which are characterised, respectively, by killing and the opposite to killing, sexuality. It is characteristic that the mediation is also established within the individual myth, either by duplicating the Other-World actor, as we can see in M7 (Hyndla and Freyja) and M11 (the female wolf and Signý) and in the myths that are marked a/b or by letting the Other World actors acquire an in-between position, as in M9b and perhaps also in M10b, in which the woman can hardly be understood as dead, but nevertheless arrives from the underworld and is able to show Hadingus around among the dead.

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[50] The reservation is on account of Sigrdrífa's condition, which must be designated as an in-between position between death and sleep.

We are left with M4, where we are also dealing with 'pure' sexuality, but a sexuality which, both in its execution and its outcome, may be viewed as an inversion of the other myths. Even though the sexual and the spatial codes are present in the Loki complex, the message is a different one here. Loki's role in the blood-mixing myth occupies a special position among the purveyors of knowledge. As is well known, Loki is often attributed with a certain form of bisexuality or androgyny[51] and appears several times as giving birth, that is, taking the feminine part in reproduction. This role is a clear indication that he is close to the liminal, and he is so not only as a masculine subject from the upper world but, on the contrary, as the (partly) feminine purveyor of knowledge, by which means the semantic categories become mixed, with the catastrophic consequences that then occur (Schjødt 1981a, 83-4). It is, therefore, the physical connotations that are bound up in the creation of numinous knowledge that must be imagined to make Loki 'unnatural' (*argr*). It is natural in this context to examine the *ergi* that is usually associated with the masculine performers of *seiðr*. Although the sources do not allow us to draw definite conclusions, it seems likely that the problematical element in their behaviour, considered from an ideological perspective, consists in some form or other of androgynous expression which, in that case, is a consequence of their dual role as both passive and active actors. In the context of the acquisition of knowledge, it means that they not only 'fetch' knowledge from The Other World, but that they also, so to speak, are an expression of or a part of that world. And, as mentioned, it is a world with which (living) masculine individuals are semantically incompatible. Loki has to be understood as a purveyor of knowledge, given that he mixes his blood with Óðinn and by this means transfers abilities. In that sense, he is an actor in the liminal space; but he is also a mediator, because, in contrast to the feminine and the monstrous liminal actors, he does not remain in the liminal space, but on the contrary returns and *uses* his queer abilities in the non-liminal space.

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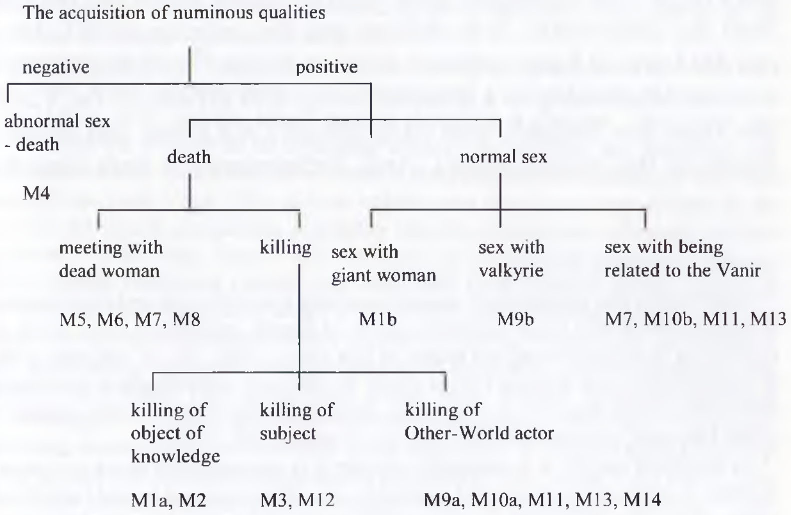
[51] As we mentioned in connection with the Nerthus figure in Tacitus, androgyny may be understood as a strong version of the incest-theme, which is present in several of the myths because, in both cases, it is a question of a lack of distance with regard to the sexual: the incest motif keeps at least the duality of the sexual, whereas androgyny radically abolishes the distance between the sexual partners.

In the blood-mixing complex, there is thus an inversion of the other myths, not least those in which Óðinn acquires knowledge. First of all, Loki has apparently no sexual relation or contact at all with any feminine entity during his journey to the underworld, yet he produces children, as women do. Nor is it a question of death, so in this way, too, the myth is different from the rest in that the possessor of knowledge is neither dead (nor has the least affinity with death) nor womanly. Secondly, and in contrast to the rest of the myths which thematise sexuality, he obtains no legitimate numinous abilities through legitimate sexuality, but on the contrary perverted abilities (for men) by means of perverse sexuality (for men) (cf. Clunies Ross 1994, 210-11). It is, thus, conspicuous that M4, as the only myth in which the life/death opposition is not present, is at the same time the only myth in which the competence that is purveyed must be considered as negative. This could indicate that the myth forms a negative variant of initiation symbolism, which entails a negative variant of numinous competence, namely masculine sorcery (*seiðr*). In spite of these marked differences, fundamentally similar ingredients are present here as in a number of the rest of the complexes, although they are partially expressed in inverted form: numinous abilities, sexuality, a journey to the underworld. M4 is, therefore, outside the three groups, since neither death nor (normal) sexuality is involved, and since the numinosity which is acquired is considered as negative (even if it is necessary). It thus forms an example of that 'game' that myths can also play, where various relationships and the consequences that the various constellations bring about are twisted and turned (cf. Glosecki 2007a, 57-8).

As far as the essential codes are concerned, it is characteristic that, even if they are not all explicitly present in every individual myth, their presence can often be brought out in analysis when a greater part of the semantic universe to which they belong is included. On the other hand, they are not equally dominant in the various groups, since the sexual code is only displayed in the third group while, in the second, we encounter a gender-dichotomy, though this is not thematised by a sexual act or by another relationship that is equivalent to one such. In the same way, the biological code is the most prominent in the first group while, in the second, we find the life/death-opposition, but it is not thematised by a killing. In this regard, too, the second group occupies a mediating position by virtue of the fact that the myths here are weakened versions of those in both the first and the third groups.

This grouping of the myths can be illustrated in the following way:

Table 10.10


The acquisition of numinous qualities
negative
positive
abnormal sex - death
M4
death
normal sex
meeting with dead woman
M5, M6, M7, M8
killing
sex with giant woman
M1b
sex with valkyrie
M9b
sex with being related to the Vanir
M7, M10b, M11, M13
killing of object of knowledge
M1a, M2
killing of subject
M3, M12
killing of Other-World actor
M9a, M10a, M11, M13, M14

Many of the Other-World actors are female, but they have varying status: Freyja is a goddess of the Vanir, and it is likely that we should also consider the woman in M10b as associated with the Vanir, an association that is also present in M11 and M13 on account of the theme of incest. Freyja has a sexual relationship with Óðinn, but is also connected with him in war and killing since they share the slain between them. Because she is a valkyrie,[52] Sigrdrífa has a relationship with Óðinn that is characterised by war and killing, but she has a sexual relationship with Sigurðr who is a descendant of Óðinn. Signý takes on the form of a performer of *seiðr*, being thus related to Freyja (cf. *Yng* 4), and she, too, has an incestuous sexual relationship with a descendant of Óðinn – her own brother, whereby the connection with the 'Vanic' is strengthened. An incest-like relationship is also present between Bǫðvarr and his brother's wife,[53] and it is also indicated in the relationship between Hadingus and the unknown woman. In spite of the differences in the status of the actors, they are variations on the common basic theme, namely the one we saw developed above concerning the relationship between the Æsir and the Vanir, especially between Óðinn and Freyja – the masculine actor from the upper world and the feminine from the underworld. It is striking that the subjects in M7, M9, M10 and M11 are all kings or pretenders to a throne,[54] and that they all have a sexual relationship to a feminine being with affinity to the Vanir (neither Hǫttr nor Sinfjǫtli, who were certainly *not* kings, had sexual intercourse in the liminal phase). And, furthermore, as both Sigurðr, Sigmundr, and Hadingus are strongly thematised as heroes of Óðinn,[55] it will be natural to see this special sexuality with a representative of the Vanir as fundamental for accession to a royal throne. The model was without doubt the erotic alliance between Óðinn himself and Freyja.[56]

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[52] Folke Ström has convincingly argued, not only that valkyries and *dísir* represent two different aspects of a single collective group of female goddesses (1954, 70-9), but also that Freyja is the individualised leader of this group (1954, 72; cf. Näström 1995, 141). It is significant, not because Freyja might be identical with Sigrdrífa, but because the two myths in this way become part of a group of myths that thematise various aspects of the feminine, chthonic element. See also Dronke 1988, 229-30.

[53] As indicated earlier, it is debatable whether it is reasonable to speak of a sexual relationship at all here, when the text expressly says that it was not sexual (which is also to some extent true of Sigurðr's relationship to the valkyrie). As indicated, it is understandable enough that, if the relationship were originally sexual, the saga author might have changed this detail to conform to medieval expectations of heroic behaviour. On the other hand, this is not crucial in order to speak of incest, seeing that the relation is clearly thematised as sexual, and since the two characters are in bed together. Even if the theme of abstinence were involved, it would still continue to be a question of a liminal phenomenon, hinting at the relationship between the physical sexual act (in this case an incestuous one) and the acquisition of numinous competence.

[54] We may note that Bǫðvarr, too, in M13 has affinity to the throne since, before he sets out to meet his brothers, it is said that he *tekr þar við ríki* (chapter 30) which seems to indicate that he actually functioned as a king for a time. It may, however, be justly said that his career after the sequence, which may be considered as an initiatory sequence, is only as a warrior.

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[55] We cannot say anything similar about Óttarr on the evidence of *Hyndl.* This does not mean that he cannot have been an Óðinn-hero, but only that the poem, the only source that mentions Óttarr, does not refer to it beyond stating that Óðinn is the ancestor of several of those families that Óttarr becomes a part of. It is also possible that the audience to whom the myth was told – not necessarily in the form that we know it in *Hyndl* – knew through their mythic competence that such a figure *was* specially attached to Óðinn. In that case, it again has to do with the fact that information, known from certain myths, automatically and implicitly constituted a fixed mythical repertoire, which it was not necessary to express in the individual texts in order still to be present in the consciousness of the person using the myth.

[56] This insistence that the pretender to the throne should have a special relationship with a woman with 'Vanic' connotations is, to some degree, a contradiction of Steinsland's argument (1991a, 308) that the king's partner should be a giantess. That Gerðr and Skaði, who play the main roles in Steinsland's book, for instance, are giantesses can naturally not be denied. But, on the other hand, it is striking that it is precisely these two who married two male Vanir. This at least implies that they have some affinity to the Vanir, and so we cannot exclude the possibility that this affinity was influential on their role as partners to the king. Since I will not insist on a consistent distinction between the various mythic categories (people may well have used different mythic figures in relation to the special problematic which is involved in the individual myth), and since also at least one giantess, Gunnlǫð, clearly plays a role in our context, just as a valkyrie, Sigrdrífa, is included, it will not serve any purpose to enter into a closer discussion with Steinsland on this point. The crucial point is that these women represent something 'other'. With regard to Skaði and Gerðr and their relationship to the male Vanir gods, the opposition incest/-incest is thematised as we saw above. It is also striking that several of the women that Steinsland discusses in connection with *Yt* and *Yng* (1991a, 199-206) could just as well be understood to connote Vanir as giantesses. The term 'troll-woman' does not evoke special associations with giants. We know the practice of *seiðr*, for example, from Gullveig/Heiðr in *Vsp*, who may be considered one of the Vanir, and on the whole, the Vanir, rather than the giants, are in possession of magical expertise, although, as mentioned above, this relationship is far from consistent. I will not reject the possibility that giant-women may have had the sort of role that Steinsland attributes to them, but the Vanir-element and the thematising of incestuous sexuality cannot be overlooked, as the above analyses have shown. On the whole, it would be problematic from a structural point of view to argue for an 'original version' of a specific theme. The actors should be able to be changed around according to what relationship is involved in a certain myth. But the type of 'otherness' that is involved here demands particular actors and an action-sequence which must have Vanir connotations. But it is certainly possible that other elements in the 'king-theme' were orientated towards giant-women.

Gunnlǫð, on the other hand, is a giantess and is attached to the previous actors mainly by having sexual intercourse with a male subject. However, as a giantess she establishes a connection with the *vǫlur* in M5 and M6 and with Hyndla and, more indirectly with Loki, who is of giant descent. But both Gunnlǫð and the giantesses in M5, M6 and M7 and perhaps also in M8[57] are, in addition, chthonic in the same way as we saw that the Vanir were. Loki, for his part, purveys the *seiðr*, which again is attached to the Vanir. The underground *vǫlur* are dead, and for this reason have a connection with the killings we encounter in M2, M3, M9a, M10a, M11, M12 and M14. The chthonic element of the Vanir and the dead connects them to the dwarfs, whom we meet in M1a and M9a. The dwarfs also take part in and procure the numinous – not through sex, but by means of craftsman-like abilities, since they master the art of creating objects with clearly numinous qualities (cf. e.g. the myth in which they create the treasures of the gods in *Skm* 35 [Faulkes 1998, 41-3]).

The actors whom the subject comes across in the underworld are thus of two kinds: on the one hand feminine individuals, who are either characterised by their sexuality or by being dead. In some cases, they are sexual *as well as* having an affinity to death, as we saw with Sigrdrífa and the woman in M10b, by which means they then unite the two groups that in Table 10.10 are called 'normal sex' and 'meeting with a dead woman', respectively. It is, therefore, a matter of two extremes in human existence, namely the one that precedes existence and the one that follows it. The sexual element and death are both ingredients in the liminal universe and are logically connected, but each individual myth or part of a mythical sequence is thematised each in its own part of this symbolism and in different ways. In those myths in which both phenomena appear we note that the 'natural' sequence is reversed: the killing comes before the meeting with the sexual woman (M9, M10, M11 and M13). In this, the character of the liminal is again emphasised in contrast to the one which characterises human life, as it is played out in This World where one is born and dies.[58] The female actors, as we saw, may belong to or have affinity to various mythic groups (Vanir, valkyries, giants).

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[57] Whether Gróa can be considered a giantess is debatable. On the one hand, her role is parallel to that of the dead *vǫlur* in *Vsp* and *Bdr*, but on the other hand she is mother to Svipdagr, who does not appear to be a giant. The question is not crucial to our general interpretation.

On the other hand, we have some masculine actors who either already have a chthonic attachment, such as the dwarfs (Reginn, Fjalarr and Galarr), or obtain liminal status by being killed (Mímir, Kvasir, Fáfnir) or by another act of transgression (Loki). Besides, we meet a special category of beings, who, possibly together with other characteristics, obtain their liminal status by not belonging to any known category of beings but are, rather, monstrous – they are both/and. This is true of Fáfnir, who is both human *and* dragon, the female wolf in M11, who is woman *and* wolf, Elgfróði, who is man *and* elk. And the initiators in M12 and M14 are also characterised as mediating elements by a double status. Sigmundr is a wolf when he kills Sinfjǫtli and Bǫðvarr is the son of a bear and a woman.

All of these actors are quite different, and it may be difficult immediately to find any semantic core that is common to all of them. Such one is, however, established in the myths themselves, which, as mentioned, operate with basically the same narrative sequences and with the use of the same codes, and which, in addition, individually contain elements that connect them specifically to other myths in the corpus. By this means they identify a series of categories as liminal – categories which do not necessarily have any direct connection with each other outside the world of the myths, but acquire it through a *mise-en-scène* that emphasises their common opposition with regard to terms that represent This World, and which are included at a definite place in the narrative structure, namely in the liminal phase.

In spite of the differences, we can see that there are three fundamental terms that characterise purveyors of knowledge, in combination or individually, namely that they are dead, that they are chthonic and that they are feminine. It is, therefore, primarily via the status of the actors that we are able to establish the three codes that we saw above (10. 2). There are two categories of actors in the corpus who help to bring the subject the numinous power, namely 'pure' Other-World actors, on the one hand, and on the other, the helpers or mediators who in, some cases, may be seen as initiators. The two categories are not sharply distinguished, and in Table 10.11 they will appear in some places both as Other-World actors and as helpers/initiators. It is striking and significant that the helpers are not present in the Óðinn myths, because the god is not in need of them, in the way that the human subjects are.

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[58] This may perhaps be understood as a variant of the death-rebirth symbolism, which also implies the claim that death comes *before* birth.

We have seen further that the individual myth, through the establishment of different Other-World characteristics, is able to bring in new liminal elements (e.g. via its belonging to a group in which the individual myth partly draws on the group's liminal characteristics and partly supplies liminal characteristics to that same group) and thus new semantic information comes into play. Through this characteristic, the liminal actors are able to function as originators or mediators of numinous knowledge and of numinous competence in general. The identity of the actors will be determined by whatever elements are important in the encounter (whether this involves killing or sex, or whether it requires a craftsman-like skill in order to produce an object). The determining factor is the foreignness which is common to all, and which is the quality on which their character as object of knowledge or mediator of knowledge is based. In spite of the complexity, we can draw up the following Table of the mythic actors and the objects of knowledge in our corpus:

Table 10.11

	Possessor of numinous powers	Helper/ initiator	Object of knowledge	Subject
M1	Kvasir/ Gunnloð		Blood/mead	Kvasir/ Óðinn
M2	Mímir		Head	Mímir/ Óðinn
M3	?		Runes	Oðinn
M4	Loki	Loki	Blood/*seiðr*	Loki/ Óðinn
M5	Vǫlva		Words	Óðinn
M6	Vǫlva		Words	Óðinn
M7	Hyndla	Freyia	Words/drink	Óttarr
M8	Gróa		Words	Svipdagr
M9	Fáfnir/ Sigrdrifa	Reginn/ Oðinn	Words//mead/ runes/blood	Sigurðr
M10	Óðinn/ woman/lion	Oðinn/ woman	Words/blood/ mead	Hadingus
M11	Signý (as sorceress)	Signý [59]	Words	Sigmundr
M12	?	Sigmundr	Words/experience	Sinfjǫtli
M13	Elgfróði/ Þorir's wife	Elgfróði	Words/blood	Bǫðvarr
M14	The monster	Bǫðvarr	Blood	Hǫttr

The connections between the various liminal actors criss-cross one another and form a semantic network. The connecting lines are numerous, and a discussion of which ones are the most 'original' is on the one hand impossible and on the other less essential when we operate within a transformational group that forms a logical collocation. This forms a synchronic space of myths and cannot immediately be used to map out the 'migration'[60] of a motif. It is in the light of this that we must view the variation in investment in both oppositional pairs and objects of knowledge. Every myth does not need to have the whole repertoire (then one such myth would be sufficient), because it is, on the contrary, the combination of similarity and dissimilarity that makes it meaningful to talk of a semantic universe, founded on a whole series of myths, each of which brings in new elements that in their totality form this semantic universe, and which new formations – both ritual and mythical – can draw on. When, for instance, sexuality is absent from the self-hanging, as is the case, it would be difficult to understand the ambiguity in the terminology of stanza 141, if one only considered this myth in isolation. But it is exactly because the whole complex surrounding the acquisition of knowledge has been more or less consciously present in the ideology of the users of the myths, that it has without doubt given additional meaning and has strengthened the association between physical death and intellectual life. This is likewise true in relation to the Other-World actors, so that the connection between such very different entities as dwarfs, Vanir and dead giantesses, who each play different roles in the mythology, which may be difficult for us to see, has been present in the consciousness of the users of the myths (they all belong to the underworld), without this having necessarily been made explicit in each individual myth. On the contrary, the associations have caused every individual myth to have a tremendous generative power in which the elements, which have apparently been pulled out of their 'original' context, are used in a new way at the same time as – and this must be emphasised – the associations attached to their 'old' context 'have been brought along', too[61] (cf. Turner 1969b).

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[59] Just as in M9, we may assume that Óðinn has also acted as helper or initiator. True, it does not say so explicitly, but Sigmundr's relation to Óðinn, both as far as his ancestors are concerned and with regard to the sword that he pulls from the tree, as well as the very manner of his death, clearly demonstrates that he is an Óðinn-hero.

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[60] This, of course, does not imply a claim that the elements might have originated 'at the same time' or that migrations of motifs could not have taken place. Naturally, they have. But, at one time or another, a culture will have had a certain repertoire of motifs, or, better, 'relational figures', at its disposal, and it is the rationale behind the collocation of these motifs around the phenomenon of initiation that we are dealing with here.

[61] It may, thus, be to the purpose to understand the role of the giantess in connection with sacral kingship in Scandinavia, such as has been pointed out by Steinsland 1991a, as an offshoot of the semantics that have developed around her: the giantess and the sexuality that she represents with regard to initiation and the acquisition of numinous knowledge and, not least, in relation to The Other World, forms an aspect which the king has to know. In other words, the generative element in the myth has been able to

We can state, thus, that a limited series of various aspects of otherness have come together in order to characterise *that* other world that contains numinous competence and the actors who are in it, so that The Other World remains operational in both a mythic and a ritual context. The inventory certainly differs. Things are transformed and inverted from one sequence to another: killings become sex, masculine individuals become feminine, Vanir become valkyries, old figures become young, dwarfs become giants and so forth. But in every case a subject obtains an object of knowledge or a mental ability by means of contact with actors who are, in some way or other, characterised as liminal. Together the myths play out various themes that link them within that group which forms our corpus, at the same time as they also reach out to other groups.

To sum up: the group of myths that we have investigated are, as has always been the case with transformational groups, characterised by a combination of similarity and dissimilarity. It is the numinous potential and the knowledge that may be acquired in The Other World together with a narrative structure – in other words, the structure of initiation – which forms the common element in the myths that are analysed here. These are the qualities which, in Lévi-Strauss's terminology, form the *armature*. The fundamental codes, which are more or less accentuated, while some are even absent in individual myths, are likewise fundamentally the same across the whole corpus. On the other hand, we can see that there are variations in the messages of an individual myth since the knowledge that is acquired serves various purposes, and the way in which it is acquired (by killing or by sex or only by a meeting with an Other-World actor), is different just as the Other-World actors involved are of a completely different character from one myth to another. In this

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give the giantess a place in kingly ideology, which is only meaningful if it is seen in connection with the place and function that she occupies in the acquisition-of-knowledge-complex. In that connection we ought to emphasise that the giantess, as we see her in these contexts, cannot by and large be understood as primarily a 'giant' of the Útgarðr-type, with whom the Æsir are constantly engaged in conflict. Giantesses are of course feminine, they are often dead and, as such, must be identified as beings of the underworld. As we have seen, it is at the same time clear that 'the Útgarðr giants' are also placed in 'another world' (but not the one from which knowledge is obtained), so that the 'otherness' of these giantesses is, so to speak, double.

way, they establish a semantic field which goes far beyond the meaning of the individual myths; but, as stated, we encounter the same basic narrative structure and the same insistence on the requirement that the subject has to visit a liminal space. The relative invariability, which the codes also demonstrate, makes it probable beyond all reasonable doubt that we are dealing with a corpus that contains a common fundamental postulate, namely that *a prerequisite for the subject, who is always a living masculine individual from the upper world, being able to attain a new status that is irreversibly higher than the one which he comes from, is that he acquires a numinous potential, which is of an Other World. In a number of ways, this is an inversion of the world from which the subject comes, and death and sex are present as conditions that allow the numinous to be released for use in This World.*

Chapter 11

Perspectives and Conclusions

The previous chapter, as was mentioned, should be considered as a kind of conclusion to the extent that this is possible in a work of this nature, which involves analyses of a series of individual myths seen from a general perspective. This last chapter will not attempt any further conclusions drawn from the analyses. Instead, we shall briefly touch on some possible perspectives that may be deduced from some of the results which the analyses have led to. The chapter will conclude with a summary of results and a discussion relating to the general objectives of the book.

11.1 The Variable Status of the Myths – Myth and Ritual

In the previous chapter, our sole focus was on some of the fundamental relationships internal to the myths. Nevertheless, it has been indicated several times that the variations that seem to emerge may also have had external relations with specific forms of practice, such as the performance of magical rites, consecrations of kings and so on. In this chapter, we will discuss these external relations in parallel to the differences in the myths. We must state at once that, because of the kind of material and the relatively limited number of myths at our disposal, such a procedure will be rather uncertain. Nevertheless, we will attempt to point out some possible connections between differences in the myths, on the one hand, and differences in actual social situations on the other.

As we saw in Chapter 10, there is no clear-cut system in relation to which objects of knowledge are acquired, just as we cannot detect, on the basis of any of the material analysed, a fixed relationship between the codes that are accentuated and the Other-World actors that appear, although we may notice certain tendencies. Whether this apparent lack of system is owing to the nature of the material, or whether it is a question of an obscurity built into such religious conceptions, cannot be decided. *A priori*, it seems most likely that both reasons have been influential.

Initiation and the Acquisition of Knowledge

There seems to be a pattern in the relationship between common non-initiatory acquisitions of knowledge (M5, M6, and M8), on the one hand, and, on the other, the remaining acquisitions of numinous power, which form an element in the structure of initiation. In the former group, neither sexuality nor killings appear. The living masculine subject from the upper world contacts the dead feminine mediator of knowledge from the underworld and receives information that has to do with specific actions. These three myths, which do not give the subject an irreversibly higher status, are, therefore, different from the rest in that the feminine mediator of knowledge is not sexual because she is dead. In the liminal phase, the subject is passive in contrast to the subject in initiation myths. The initiation scenario always contains the elements killing and/or sexuality, where the latter may be expressed directly or indirectly, as the subject is in a sexual relationship either with a possessor of knowledge (M1b, M9b, M13 and probably in an atypical way also M4[1]) or a feminine individual (M7, M10b and M11[2]), who has the character of a mediator. The killing is thematised in M1a, M2, M3, M9a, M10, M11, M12, M13 and M14.[3] The analyses thus indicate that killing and sexuality, together or individually, are inevitable elements in the liminal space of initiation, but, on the other hand, not in the liminal space which is used in connection with the general acquisition of knowledge. The obvious supposition about the reason for this is that the qualitative difference involved in determining whether one is in possession of initiatory knowledge or not demands a strong emphasis on the transition between the initial and the final phase, an emphasis that has to make use of the two most striking transitional terms imaginable, namely killing that results in death, and sexuality that results in birth. In comparison with this, it is of lesser importance whether one knows something or not about certain future events.

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[1] We do not learn anything about the identity of the father of Loki's offspring in the journey to the underworld, but the birth of children of course presupposes sexual intimacy.

[2] The fact that the sexual connection is expressed explicitly only in M1b and M11 ought not to prevent us from viewing M7, M9b, M10b and M13 as reflecting sexual relationships. In the individual analyses above, reasons are given for why we can see Freyja, Sigrdrífa and the unknown woman as sexual partners for the subject. In the individual analyses, this deduction is not unavoidable, but, seen in the light of all the analyses, it seems difficult to explain the presence of these feminine entities, if we do not acknowledge their role – potential or real – as feminine partners for the subject.

[3] But here, too, the forms vary. In M1a and M2, it is not the subject who does the killing. In M3 the subject kills himself. In M12 and M14 it is the initiator who does the killing, by virtue of the fact that he is already initiated and therefore is able to function as a mediating masculine individual, but in M14 he kills a liminal antagonist, whereas in M12 he kills the initiand; and in M9a, M10a and M11 it is the subject himself who kills the Other-World actors. However, in all cases, physical death is thematised in connection with the procurement of the numinous.

We can, therefore, imagine that the liminal scenario in the acquisition of knowledge (a dead person informs a living one) may have formed a dimension of the necromancy, which was one of several divinatory forms of practice. On the other hand, there has not, judging by the three myths examined here, been much room for action during the ritual performance. In the liminal phase, at least, the subject must have been virtually passive, and it is unlikely that these scenarios could generate a more spectacular ritualisation.

From Myths to Rituals

Alongside this pattern, there is another and, in its own way, far more important one, which has been mentioned before, namely that it is possible to place initiation myths along an axis which has foundation myths, where there is an attempt to represent the rationale behind initiation symbolism at one end, and at the other end, a scenario that can be represented ritually in a more direct way.

At first we have to ask the question: to what extent were these myths 'models' for human thought and human behaviour, including rituals that were actually performed? There is an overall general division of the myths into those in which Óðinn is the subject, and those in which human subjects are involved. Within these two general groups, there are further divisions. Firstly, among the Óðinn myths there are some which are not initiations, but only acquisitions of knowledge. Secondly, the initiation myths in which Óðinn is the subject also have varying status. All of them have a paradigmatic character to a higher degree than is the case for the rest of the myths because the subject is the divine possessor of numinous power. They deal with the creation of the objects of knowledge and the first condition for their being under Óðinn's protection. M1 has to do with the mead, M2 with the establishment of the dead person, Mímir, as sheer intellect and so as a purveyor *par excellence* of numinous knowledge to the intellectual god

Óðinn. M4 tells us of how the *feminine seiðr* has been made available to the masculine Óðinn. M3 is atypical in this regard in that it deals with Óðinn's acquisition of the runes, without having an earlier history that tells us about the transformation of the object of knowledge. Its focus is solely on the actual acquisition of the runes which we will presently return to. M4, as we have seen above, is atypical because it constitutes an inversion, but here, too, we are no doubt dealing with a paradigmatic myth, but only in a negative sense. The first four myths thus establish some crucial objects of knowledge and explain why and how they have become Óðinn's property. In relation to these, the rest of the initiation myths have a 'lower' status. They are, so to speak, paradigmatic on a 'lower' level, and the main reason for this is that their subjects are humans who, for the most part, have a clear affinity with Óðinn. But they are 'lower' also because, compared to the Óðinn myths, the knowledge and the objects of knowledge they acquire have already been established and are in The Other World, where they are only waiting to be brought into This World in order to be used actively. This also holds good for M3, which achieves its paradigmatic status because, in contrast to M1, M2 and M4, Óðinn experiences a sequence in which he comes into contact with death in the most direct way possible – he dies himself – and with this he acquires an object of knowledge. This myth, which contains an exemplary initiation sequence, thus becomes a model for (but not an explanation of) the sequence that we come across in the rest of the myths (and perhaps in rituals), namely that the subject has to enter a liminal space, which is characterised by killing, in order to come into contact with The Other World.[4]

As far as the heroes in the initiation scenarios are concerned, we can see that Óðinn enters in several places as an advisor or helper – a phenomenon which we can also observe in connection with other heroes, both kings and warriors, in whose stories, however, we cannot immediately see any initiation scenario, such as Haraldr hilditǫnn, Hrólfr kraki and Starkaðr.[5] Óðinn thus appears as a kind of *fóstri* 'foster-father' to these heroes, which strongly indicates that the relationship that existed between god and human hero is a consequence of the fact that the latter is in a kind of kinship relationship to the god – a relationship which is typically brought about through an initiation. This is confirmed by several of our myths, as Óðinn directly forms a part of the initiatory sequence for Hadingus and Sigurðr and is behind the restoration to life of Sinfjǫtli. The fact that he is not included in M13 and M14 may be the result of the conditions of transmission of the text, where the explicitly pagan element is toned down.

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[4] In this way, the killing of an Other-World actor appears as a weaker version of the contrast between life and death: the death of one's self is only a more pregnant expression of the idea that contact with death is a necessity in order to obtain the numinous.

[5] With regard to these and other heroes attached to Óðinn, it is not unlikely that they were, in fact, understood as initiated to the god and that the initiatory sequence has either disappeared in the course of transmission (in *Gautreks saga* there seems, how-

The heroes, as we have seen, attain a status as warriors and kings in the final phase, but there appear to be differences in the initiatory sequences according to whether we are dealing with one or the other of these two categories: whereas the 'kings' have sexual intercourse with a woman with 'Vanic' connotations, the sexual element is absent in connection with the 'warriors' Sinfjǫtli and Hǫttr. These, on the other hand, have a masculine initiator attached to them (respectively Sigmundr and Bǫðvarr), something which we do not find in connection with the kings.[6] With the proviso that these differences may quite simply be a question of something missing in the tradition, it may indicate that the king, who is responsible for the wellbeing of the country at all levels, including the fertility of the earth, has to experience a sexual act with a female chthonic actor at his initiation, a figure who then comes to symbolise the land itself (cf. F. Ström 1983; Steinsland 2002, 93 and 98; and Frank 2007, 179-80).[7] The warrior, on the other hand, being

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ever, to be some remains of an Óðinn-consecration as far as Starkaðr is concerned), or was perhaps never thematised, yet has been present as an internal, latent condition in the minds of the audience.

[6] This does not imply a rejection of the idea that an 'instructor' may also have been involved in connection with the kings – perhaps in a priest-like form. But the textual material indicates that such a possible figure did not have a formalised role in the same way as is the case in connection with the warriors. This seems by and large logical since a king in principle does not have anybody above him in relation to the divine, because he functions as *primus inter pares* (cf. Schjødt 1990b), something that is not the case with warriors. The only one who is closer to The Other World than the king himself is his guardian god, which, therefore, in the myths will be the initiating figure. But it is, naturally, possible that a priest may have acquired the role of 'divine' instructor in a ritual context.

[7] According to Steinsland 1991a, 120-9, this figure should be a giantess. However, this does not seem to be a requirement in the light of the above analyses. It is, rather, the

responsible for death and killing, does not need this experience, perhaps because the element of fertility that may also be involved here is not of a physical nature, but only aims at a rebirth in the hereafter. However, the relationship becomes complicated in that kings were also warriors and killing appears in a majority of those myths that have persons who have an affinity with kingship as their subjects. In spite of the fact that the liminal content shows similarities in all the myths analysed, it is thus not certain that they all had a possible external reference to the same type of ritual. This does not imply that we should consider the myths with human actors as 'ritual myths' in the sense that they would have been part of an accompanying narrative to rituals that were actually performed. But, in the same way as the Óðinn myths did, the hero myths certainly played a part in the ideology of initiation, as they contributed to the semantic content which has probably been symbolically represented in certain rituals.

Furthermore, we have seen that elements appear in some of the narrative sequences which are only understandable if we assume that they are derived from a ritual scenario in which they would actually be meaningful (cf. Schjødt 2000b). This is true of the monster in M14, which is placed in an upright position after it has been killed, and in that condition is 'killed' for a second time by the initiand. Here, the obvious interpretation is that the initiand must carry out a symbolic killing of an enemy. Something similar may be behind some features of M12, where the initiand himself, by putting on a wolf skin, acquires the form of a wolf in which he will fight a certain number of enemies (cf. *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* chapter 10), and where he then dies and is revived; here, too, one may immediately imagine a ritual prototype. Besides the absence of a female actor and consequently of sexuality, we have noted that, precisely in these two myths, the cosmological, vertical opposition upper world versus underworld is substituted and supplemented, respectively, by an unambiguously horizontal and so a more 'realistic' opposition of royal palace versus bog/forest which in more abstract terms, may be seen as an opposition between the civilised and the uncivilised, or between culture and nature. In M11 and M13 also, we have scenarios that it would be possible to represent ritually without

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feminine as a principle that is involved. Whether it is a question of a giantess or another female figure seems not to have been crucial.

great difficulty. On the other hand, M7, M9, and M10 would be difficult (but perhaps not impossible) to translate into ritual scenarios.

It looks, then, as if the hero myths probably contained features that go far back to such rites, as has been strongly argued by Gunnell (1995, 356), even if none of them in their entirety can be considered as models for initiation rituals. It seems at least obvious that we cannot explain a whole series of these accounts if we do not assume an intertextual reference to the rest of the narratives in the corpus, taking into consideration the ritual thought processes where such features were fundamental to representations of the ideal relationship between the initiand (irrespective of whatever final situation one is initiated into) and The Other World. We will, therefore, now return to a discussion of the ritual occurrences that we analysed in Chapter 9, and compare them to the semantic universe that has been revealed above, and so draw conclusions about initiation as a ritual that was actually performed.

The Rituals

It appeared from Chapter 9 that there are only a few cases in which it is possible to deduce anything about the semantics of liminality from descriptions of rituals. The information that we have about the rituals associated with birth, puberty and weddings gives us very little to work with (cf. Näsström 2002). The consecration of warriors, as we discussed above, only becomes rewarding in the context of Weiser's and Höfler's analyses, which are not based on actual descriptions of rituals. The type of initiations they discuss will, therefore, not be debated further. The only ones left are death rituals, entry into blood-brotherhood and the consecration of kings, each of which provides some kinds of information that may be connected with the results of the analyses of the myths. However, it is only in the ritual witnessed by Ibn Fadlan that we find elements that give us any new knowledge about the semantics of liminality. We will briefly return to this description below.

As far as death rituals are concerned, we can see that the only element that is present unambiguously and which we can interpret in agreement with the mythic structure is the knowledge we encountered in connection with Baldr and in *Hákonar saga goða* chapter 32.[8] In both passages, it is likely that we have to reckon with actual initiatory knowledge bearing on the future existence of the dead person. But how this knowledge has been given to him in an actual ritual is unclear. Implicitly, there is no doubt that the status the dead person attains is in a certain way irreversibly higher. But the acquisition of knowledge and irreversibility are only two of the four criteria and, as a matter of fact, we can only render the initiatory character of the actions concerned probable because we encounter situations which, we know from comparative evidence, are normally accompanied by initiation rituals, and because we instinctively include statements from the mythical material about concepts of the dead. If we disregard Ibn Fadlan's evidence, there is very little in the descriptions of death rituals that in itself give us insight into the symbolism of initiation.

We fare a little better with rituals associated with blood-brotherhood and the accession to the throne. As far as the first category is concerned, we have here, besides the knowledge that is expressed in the oaths, and the irreversibility that characterises the final phase, a clear opposition between upper world and underworld. We saw, besides, if we include other contexts in which the *jarðarmen* rite appears, that we may glimpse an opposition masculine versus feminine. Furthermore, the descriptions of these rituals seem, in spite of their brevity, to contain a pattern which by and large can be placed within the triadic structure. Here, we thus have all four criteria represented, but realistically this does not mean anything other than that we can state that initiation rituals were, in fact, carried out among the Scandinavian people, which is not exactly surprising. On the other hand, it is not possible to relate this ritual category in detail to the mythic scenario: there is no killing, there is no female mediator of knowledge involved, there is no explicit instruction and so on.

The rituals connected with the assumption of the position of leaders work in the same way as was the case with death rituals: the final situation is in principle irreversible and the probability that numinous abilities are transmitted is so great that it ought to be included as a certain element. On the other hand, we do not learn anything about either the triadic sequence or the binary oppositions and thus nothing about the semantics of liminality. Therefore, we cannot decide from the sources alone whether the ritualisation of the process of entering into the function of leader followed the structure of initiation, although some elements point strongly in that direction.

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[8] As we saw, there are other elements that *may* be interpreted in a initiatory context. But these interpretations are so uncertain that they will not be used to confirm a connection between mythic and ritual symbolism.

Before we return to Ibn Fadlan's description, we can thus confirm that there is no passage containing a description of a ritual that provides firm evidence that rituals followed the symbolism that we have analysed in the myths. The texts – which, in the main, are provided by the sagas – are of such a nature that this negative result should not force us to conclude that such symbolism was absent. It would be rather strange if we had a saga description of a ritual in which the author explicitly told us the meaning-content that constituted the basis for the actions carried out. Irrespective of what types of religious actions are described in the sagas, we quite simply do not get that kind of information, perhaps because the author did not know it, perhaps because he did not find it important, or perhaps because the saga genre does not leave space for it. If we had had other types of sources to shed light on these rituals, the case might quite possibly have been different, and Ibn Fadlan's description seems to prove this point.

With the reservations enunciated in Chapter 9.2, it seems that Ibn Fadlan's report gives us a sufficiently detailed – although far from exhaustive – insight into the rites that were carried out in connection with the funeral of a distinguished person for us to be able to form an impression of the symbolism behind it. All four of our criteria are present here. Irreversibility applies to the dead chieftain, the slave woman and the new chieftain; the sequence can be seen in relation to the dead man and to the slave woman; oppositions that are equivalent to non-liminal versus liminal are also clear for these two; and finally, it seems that the drink and the incantations that the slave woman sings are equivalent to the objects of knowledge that we have seen in connection with the myths. Whereas the only thing that we learn about the deceased is that he is in a provisional grave – therefore clearly in an in-between condition that is played out in a locality that is *betwixt and between* – we gain considerable insight into the semantics of the liminal in the description of the slave woman. The acts of sexual intercourse must be assumed to be equivalent to the kind of sexuality which is directly or indirectly present in a good many of the myths, and the whole scenario in this way gains an affinity to the sphere we have called 'Vanic'. Along with her daughters, 'the Angel of Death' plays a role as a liminal actor who 'helps' the slave woman into the final condition. In all probability, this is a ritualised reworking of the dead, female and chthonic figure whom we have come across many times, even if we do not explicitly learn that she transfers numinous abilities to the slave woman.

Ibn Fadlan's account, in spite of the lack of many details, seems to include a series of the same semantic elements that we have discovered in the myths analysed above. But on the other hand, it is also clear that, without the statements of the myths, we would be at a disadvantage in evaluating the individual features of the description.

All in all, we must admit that we have only a very limited possibility of actually reconstructing an initiation ritual, even if we are able to analyse a relatively constant semantic universe in a series of myths, and even if we have scattered descriptions of rituals, or at least of elements that formed part of rituals. Nevertheless, there are virtually no other roads to take towards an insight into the meaning of those rituals that are discussed in Chapter 9 (and perhaps of rituals generally in the history of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion), than combining the semantics of myths with those few ritual elements which are related. This means that any actual conclusion regarding the nature of initiation rituals performed in early Scandinavia must be rather modest:[9] it is probable that they existed and that they contained elements which we know both from the general phenomenology of religion and from the myths that may be argued with great certainty to have had an initiation structure. But, apart from that, we can only 'reconstruct' these rituals from some general observations of how myths and rituals relate to one another.

11.2 Óðinn

As we have seen, Óðinn played a role at two levels in the analyses associated with initiation, namely as subject in Chapters 5 and 6 and as helper or initiator in Chapter 8. We shall now ask what consequences the conclusions of this investigation have for our understanding of the figure of Óðinn.

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[9] It is thus a matter of great uncertainty when we seek to connect eddic poems with rituals. Such a connection may be regarded as probable, but cannot be formulated more specifically; cf. Gunnell 1995 and Motz 1996b, 115.

Óðinn appears to be a highly composite figure, and he has, as we know, acquired a correspondingly large role in the literature about Scandinavian religion. An underlying theme in the discussion so far is whether this compositeness ought to be understood as an historical development, or whether it ought rather to be seen as fundamental to the character of this god. The most prominent representatives of the two positions are, respectively, Karl Helm (1946) and Georges Dumézil (1959). This discussion will not occupy us here since our focus is not upon a possible historical development.[10] On the other hand, we should observe that the role which Óðinn acquires in the initiation complex makes it possible for us to see the Óðinn figure in our myths as a consistent one, at least in the Viking Age[11] (and there is no significant reason to regard this consistency as something that did not emerge until then).[12]

It seems incontrovertible to state that a crucial characteristic of Óðinn, as he appears in the sources,[13] is his numinous knowledge (cf. Mitchell 1993, 444). Jere Fleck, for example, mentioned this idea in his dissertation of 1968, where Óðinn is considered as the heavenly counterpart to the *þulr* (Fleck 1968, 142, cf. Quinn 2000, 52-3), referring, among other things, to de Vries 1934b, where it is argued that this

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[10] Vikstrand 2001, 134-8 offers a brief discussion of the various views and a conclusion which does not support the historical argument. A challenging book which accepts that Óðinn has basically, at least since the Iron Age, had the position that he has in the medieval sources is Kalif and Sundquist 2004 who, nevertheless, suggest that the cult of Óðinn was influenced by the Roman cult of Midhras (cf. also Glosecki 2007a, 52).

[11] It is, however, clear from various sources that a reinterpretation of Óðinn which primarily involves an ethical *evaluation* of the god (cf. Bergur Þorgeirsson 2000, 131-33 and Mazo 1985, 756) took place after the Christianisation.

[12] A question that will not be discussed here is to what extent Óðinn was worshipped and by whom. There is hardly any doubt that he was mainly worshipped in princely circles, but, as has recently been argued, he possibly also played a greater role in Iceland than was previously assumed (Guðrún Nordal 1999).

[13] There are several more or less complete lists of passages in the sources in which Óðinn appears, e.g. de Vries 1956-57, II, 27-106 and Turville-Petre 1964, 35-74, and most thoroughly in Lassen 2005. An excellent description of the history of research up to the 1970s is found in Dillmann 1979, 167-71, where there is also a list of the most essential sources.

'priest-like' figure was the purveyor of wisdom poetry (de Vries 1934b, 56-9). But, together with this, he is also a divine king, as he has himself obtained the knowledge that has brought him the rank of ruler (Fleck 1968, 127). So the focus is both the aspect of ruler and the aspect of knowledge. This combination is analysed in more detail by Renauld-Krantz (1972 and 1976), who concludes (1976, 208):

> Ainsi tous les traits de la personnalité d'Odin qui ne découlent pas directement de son caractère de magicien, découlent de son caractère de souverain. Et comme nous l'avons déjà dit, entre ces deux caractères fondamentaux, il n'existe aucune contradiction, mais au contraire une profonde affinité: La magie est le moyen d'action du souverain.

> Thus all the traits of Óðinn's personality, which do not derive directly from his character of magician, derive from his character of sovereign. And as we have already said, between those two basic characters there is no contradiction, but on the contrary a profound affinity: magic is the medium of the sovereign's action.

What Renauld-Krantz calls 'magic' corresponds to what is called 'numinous abilities' or 'numinous power'[14] here. And many other scholars have also focused on Óðinn's knowledge as a central aspect. It seems therefore uncontroversial to state that numinous knowledge is a central phenomenon in the understanding of Óðinn's role in Scandinavian mythology.[15] When, for example, *Yng* 6 states that he is master of the wind, sea and fire and gives special abilities to warriors, this is precisely through the power of his words and thus his ability to engage in magical manipulation and, naturally the same is true of his *seiðr* and his ability to raise people from the dead (Schjødt 2001). Furthermore, we can understand his having only one eye as an expression of his special knowledge: by sacrificing one eye he obtains wisdom (cf. Chapter 5.1 and Lassen 2003, 116-20). In that sense, we may also argue that Óðinn is a god of transition at all levels. To focus on a single one of the codes in which this transition is thematised seems to be a misunderstanding. When, for instance, Britt Solli (2002, 166) suggests, on the basis of *queer theory,* that Óðinn tends towards androgyny, it is in my opinion an over-interpretation. Óðinn does not tend towards androgyny. He is a thoroughly masculine figure in the same way as he is not dead because he has sacrificed himself and has visited the dead, and in the same way as he is not chthonic because he visits the underworld. Óðinn is the one who, by means of his numinous knowledge, masters a whole series of magical techniques including *seiðr* which, out of necessity, must contain an element of something feminine. In general, Óðinn's status has to do with the fact that, to a greater extent than other gods and to a greater degree than human magicians, he can *include* everything that characterises the liminal, and he can use it for certain purposes. Óðinn is quite unambiguously a 'This-World-figure', but, to a greater degree than others, he is a figure who can involve The Other World in his doings. It is, therefore, the total number of Other-World characteristics that Óðinn has knowledge of and is able to use, including the feminine, which explains his position as the most powerful of the gods, a position which is nevertheless always manifested in This World, namely among the Æsir and human beings to whom he is able to give his numinous knowledge.

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[14] Renauld-Krantz has a whole series of valuable observations about the figure of Óðinn, not least his elucidation of the logic that connects his various aspects. In addition to those functions that clearly emerge in chapters 6 and 7 of *Yng*, Renauld-Krantz also discusses a possible fertility aspect, which may be expressed in connection with Óláfr trételgja (*Yng* 43), who is given to Óðinn, being sacrificed *til árs* 'for prosperity'. However, this might involve the relationship Óðinn has to the king, who is both especially attached to this god, and is responsible for the well-being of the country.

[15] See further an interesting article by Richard Auld (1976), which has its point of departure in a Jungian-inspired analysis, where he argues that Óðinn is primarily to be seen as a figure who mediates between consciousness and unconsciousness. This is unlikely to be correct, but the article leaves us in no doubt that the god's acquisition of knowledge is of crucial importance for our understanding of him.

In the light of the present investigation, there cannot be any doubt that numinous knowledge and initiation are connected, so we will examine more closely the roles that Óðinn has in relation to initiation in order to support a theory that his position in the pantheon, and in the religion in general, is not only due to his knowledge, but to a great extent also to those consequences which this knowledge has for his relationship to certain social groups.[16]

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[16] In recent years, there has been a tendency on the part of some scholars to see Óðinn in the context of shamanistic concepts – as the divine shaman (e.g. Hedeager 1997 and

As mentioned, Óðinn plays two different roles in initiation myths, since he partly corresponds to the initiand, as the one who benefits from the acquired knowledge, and partly, in other myths, occupies the role of initiator, because he instructs the subject or provides him with objects that are from The Other World, just as he functions as a kind of guardian god who takes the heroes 'home' after their death – presumably to a life in Valhǫll.

When Óðinn appears in a variety of mythic contexts as the god of kings or warriors, or at least of certain warriors, namely the members of men's bands (cf. Höfler 1934; Kershaw 2000), it is highly likely that the main reason for this is that these kings and warriors are initiated to him.[17] In the world of myth, Óðinn is first and foremost characterised as a god who is in possession of numinous knowledge, *which he has acquired through a series of initiation-like scenarios*, but in his relationship to the world of human beings he is characterised by being the one who, *as initiator*, gives certain social categories a range of numinous knowledge and thereby makes them suitable to assume the position that they have in the final phase. It is, therefore, as the god of initiation that Óðinn's role in relation to his chosen heroes become understandable and meaningful; and it is as the god of initiation that his possession of numinous knowledge can be explained. In other words: it is Óðinn's knowledge of The Other World that makes him able to function as an initiator and so as the tutelary deity of his chosen ones. He is, thus, simultaneously a model for and a helper to the human subject.

To be initiated to Óðinn includes not only the idea that one becomes able to perform a certain function for the rest of one's life, but it must also be seen as the prerequisite for the ultimate warrior existence in the

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1999; 1999, 230 includes references to older discussions of Óðinn and shamanism; see also Solli 2002 and Price 2002). In another context, I have demonstrated (Schjødt 2001) that, although there are several features about Óðinn which we can also find in the complex of ideas relating to shamanism, he is in addition characterised in a way that makes it meaningless to reduce him to a 'shaman'. In the same article, there is also a brief analysis of all of Óðinn's functions in which knowledge and sovereignty are pointed out as the central semantic part from which the rest is to be understood.

[17] One might imagine that there are others besides kings and members of the warrior leagues who could have been initiated to Óðinn. For instance, it is plausible to imagine that poets, priests and individual warriors (e.g. Egill Skallagrímsson and Starkaðr) could in some way have been initiated to the god, but we lack positive statements that support such a supposition.

hereafter – in Valhǫll (cf. *Yng* chapter 9). In this way, yet another aspect, which dominates the sources, is added to the Óðinn figure, namely his role as god of the dead, and this fits beautifully into the overall picture which has at it centre the numinous knowledge that has been acquired through initiation, and which neither warriors nor kings can be without. He is the god of those who have died physically, but at the same time he is also the giver of intellectual life.

It is thus crucial for an adequate understanding of Óðinn that we are conscious of this connection between his various principal functions, and that they may all lead back to his dual role as initiand and initiator – as model and helper.[18] It is this dual role that constitutes Óðinn in the mythology and in the religion.

11.3 Conclusions

As was stated in Chapter 1, this study has had several purposes, the first of which has been to develop a useful working definition of the phenomenon of initiation, which encompasses the general meaning the term has had within the fields of anthropology and the history of religions, while at the same time being applicable to the material that we have at our disposal in working with pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. This definitional work is preliminary to the second part of the objective, which is the more important part. This consists of an investigation into whether, by using such a working definition as an analytical model, we will be able to find a pattern of initiation in Scandinavian pre-Christian religion. By identifying phenomenological characteristics, we should thus be able to obtain an increased understanding of a series of otherwise incomprehensible features in those narrative entities that constitute our corpus. With regard to the myths of initiation, we may *a priori* expect that these narrative entities form a transformational group in which the elements in one myth must also be included in the analysis of the rest in order for us to be able to state anything about the total semantic potential of initiation. It is time to determine to what extent this aim has been realised.

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[18] Without going deeper into this connection, we can add that all the functions of Óðinn that are possible to see in the source material (with the exception of some texts that are obviously coloured by Christian interpretations) could be analysed as precisely the functions of the semantic centre, which the knowledge forms.

In Chapters 2 and 3, through a selective review of research, we discussed how a meaningful working definition might look when seen from a semantic perspective which gives rise to an analytical model. The results of this review cannot claim a status that allows us to state once and for all, and from whatever perspective, what kind of phenomenon initiation is (not even if we qualify it as an exclusively religious phenomenon). As has been mentioned several times, an operational definition, as well as a mere characteristic, must always take its point of departure in a certain perspective. In this book, the perspective derives from a wish to apply phenomenological categories to pre-Christian Scandinavian religion in order to be able through this to carry out a semantic analysis of the religio-historical source material which may shed light on this religion. The perspective is thus religio-phenomenological (without insisting on belonging to any specific 'school'). For example, a sociological or psychological or a semiotic perspective demands other elements in the characteristic, or at least a shift of emphasis of the status of the elements, as was demonstrated in Chapter 3.

From the elements that have, both empirically and theoretically, been in focus in research into initiation, it has thus become possible to enunciate four criteria which, in the religio-phenomenological context, form a model against which the Scandinavian medieval texts can be tested.

Chapter 4 discusses the problem of the main sources and concludes that even if the texts are difficult to date, there are no theoretical reasons which prevent their use in a semantic analysis of the world view of the pre-Christian Scandinavians.

The analyses of Chapters 5 to 8 have clearly demonstrated that – irrespective of many obscure issues of both a philological and a semantic nature – we can find the four points in a series of narratives, which together also characterise the structural sequence that can be designated as the fundamental structure of initiation. These narratives, which we have called myths, are thus on a certain level of abstraction identical, because they all incorporate an acquisition of numinous power or numinous knowledge. But the power is expressed in a material fashion through a series of different objects of knowledge: runes, mead, blood, incantations, speaking heads or merely information about hidden things. Nevertheless, it is obviously the same thing that is involved in all of them, namely that something that is of another world must be procured from this other world, the primary characteristic of which is its status in opposition to the world that the subject belongs to. The same is the case with the Other-World actors and the rest of the elements that we have drawn out from the semantics of liminality: in spite of their differences, they contain a common element of contrast which binds them together in a semantic universe that is sufficiently consistent for us to justify talking of a common core. Yet, the elements are also so different that they can generate new meaning and, among other things, explain various forms of religious and magical practice.

And the same holds good for the remaining criteria discussed in Chapter 3.3. Irrespective of how different the myths are on the surface, we can see behind the differences a common narrative structure which includes an irreversible change in the subject who appears in them. By and large, there seems not to be any doubt that the structure of initiation, as we know if from the phenomenology of religion, is present in the Scandinavian material.

On the other hand, there are considerably greater difficulties in finding this structure in the rituals, discussed in Chapter 9. Even if we have to assume *a priori* that those ritual occasions that are analysed were, in fact, accompanied by initiation rituals, we can hardly argue that the initiation pattern has been demonstrated here to the same extent as was the case with the myths. When the individual descriptions, howeyer, are interpreted in the light of the results obtained in Chapters 5 to 8, there are several cases in which there is a considerable degree of probability that they contained structural and symbolic characteristics of the same type as those that emerged from the analyses of the myths, without it being possible to draw any definite conclusions about the individual symbolic elements. Apart from the fact that, in all cases, the context indicates an irreversibly higher status for the subject, there are only vague traces of the symbolism, the sequence structure and the acquisition of numinous powers that can be used to establish parallels with the corresponding elements in the myths. This is quite understandable when the nature of the sources is taken into consideration, but it implies that we cannot point to any ritual that unambiguously emerges from the elements that characterise initiation rituals phenomenologically. Whether the ritual situation itself, combined with the results from the analyses of the myths, is sufficient for us to be able to accept that the rituals must have contained an initiatory symbolic structure will to some degree have to be a question of opinion – in contrast to demonstrating that the structure as such, as this emerges from the myths, existed in the ideology of the Scandinavians. From a hypercritical or positivistic perspective, it might perhaps be argued that a certain structural and symbolic configuration, such as we normally find in rituals, may have been present in Scandinavia only in an exclusively narrative form. This seems, however, not to be particularly probable, and its very presence as an ideological structure, which is a prerequisite for an identical ritual structure, makes it extremely plausible – in spite of lacunae in the material – to assume that some rituals were played out within a semantic field which had at its centre the acquisition of numinous abilities, with a view to achieving a new and higher mode of existence. The question of whether any eddic poems formed an actual accompanying text to rituals, as has most recently been argued by Gunnell (1995), has not been touched on in the discussion and will be neither proved nor disproved by the present study. On the other hand, we must consider it likely that the *content* that is related in the poems (and for that matter in Snorri) was also present in the performance of the rituals.[19]

The following point has been mentioned several times, but it should be emphasised once more: we are analysing a semantic universe that has been generated in the myths and, probably, also in the rituals; but how far this semantic universe can be used for the reconstruction of a non-ritual 'reality' is another matter. When, for example, it has been argued (Price 2002, 374; cf. also Kershaw 2000, 61) that one difference between *úlfheðnar* and *berserkir* was that they constituted different types of warrior bands (corresponding to lighter and heavier forms of equipment), this seems to me a misinterpretation of both the pictorial and the textual material. What is in question here is most likely a *ritual* attachment to wolves and bears that focuses on the animal aspect of The Other World, but hardly on warriors who literally acted as animals. If anything like that were the case, the historical sources would scarcely leave us in any doubt about it.[20] It is, rather, a matter of a semantic universe, which has influenced the ideology and the rituals to a greater extent than the strategies of political and military reality, not in such a way that this reality could not be under the influence of the ideology, but only in the way that the ideological and the ritual cannot necessarily be transferred to the 'real' world with all the practical considerations that have to be included in this.

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[19] In addition, it must be considered likely that a 'drama' in Gunnell's broad sense of the word (1995, 10-21) was present in connection with initiations, primarily because Scandinavia would otherwise be an exception in relation to almost all other cultures. Generally, Gunnell's understanding of the presence of an actual drama seems also more likely than the claim that it was only a question of one 'performer' (e.g. Lönnroth 1990, 79).

Thus, it is clear that the use of the initiation model has, in fact, proven its value and shed light on the myths that have been analysed and in general on the world view of pagan Scandinavia, as it has been demonstrated in Chapter 10. It is evident that features such as, for example, the decapitation of Mímir, Sigmundr's and Signý's incestuous relationship and the dead monster, which Hǫttr kills, only become comprehensible in the light of this model and in the light of the remaining myths in the group. A comprehensive conclusion of the analyses – apart from what we arrived at in Chapter 10 – can naturally not be presented. But it must be emphasised that I have not attempted to reduce the totality of the myths to a single scenario, imagining this to form *the scenario* of initiation in pagan Scandinavia. Apart from a common anchoring in the basic structure of the initiation model, the myths are not only very different but their status, as we have seen, is also very different. There are foundational myths that explain the emergence of the numinous; there are myths that tell us how it can be acquired; there are myths that appear to be adaptations of ritual elements. But it is obvious that there never was one single idea of how numinous knowledge manifests itself, where it is located (in almost all cases it is, indeed, a question of an underworld, but it is not a firmly defined underworld), and what is required in order to bring it into This World (killing and sex are apparently the basic elements, but in several narratives they are just hinted at, or they may be left out completely). There are some general categories that are used when one has to obtain numinous abilities, but there are great variations voncerning the way in which this happens. One might think that the reason for this is to be found in the transmission of the myths, during which they may have been distorted so that an original consistent and clear representation has been mixed with 'non-original' features. Although this has definitely happened, it is, however, hardly a realistic explanation. Within the field of research into cognition it has been demonstrated that there are considerable differences from one individual to another in how people understand religious categories and, even in the same individual, there are inconsistencies in their religious world view. Ideas that can appear self-contradictory are the rule rather than the exception in the sphere of religion. Lack of consistency is, therefore, a basic condition when we analyse religious ideas,[21] and this holds good in relation to the individual, from one individual to another and from one area to another (cf. Schjødt 2007d and Brink 2007). The search for contradiction-free models that might have ruled within a larger area, or within a certain 'religion', and which the older religio-historical research was especially occupied with seems, therefore, to be a mere fiction and therefore fruitless (cf. Hultgård 1993, 232-3; DuBois 1999, 42; Raudvere 2002, 46; Glosecki 2007b, xxxiv; Koziol 2007). Rituals vary to a greater or lesser degree from place to place and from one performance to the next; myths are told in different ways, and a particular notion is not necessarily dealt with each time it is narrated (without it necessarily being absent from the consciousness of the audience). This does not mean that there is, so to speak, a 'free choice' when telling a myth or performing a ritual. The culture one is attached to (and this is also true of various sub-cultures) obviously sets up boundaries, which are fluid but which nevertheless form a barrier against thinking, speaking and doing simply whatever one wants. But the boundaries move in the course of history, and both geographical and social differences play a role according to where they are at a given point in time.[22]

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[20] Something similar is also true of other parts of Price's otherwise impressive investigation of Scandinavian magic. It is clear from the above that I disagree with a great many of Price's conclusions, in particular with regard to his understanding of Óðinn as a shaman. But, generally, I consider that the greatest problem is the author's extremely broad use of the terms *seiðr* and shamanism. For me, there is absolutely nothing about either the *berserkir* or the *úlfheðnar* that can be meaningfully connected with either *seiðr* or shamanism. The only common pivotal point is the importance of a relation to The Other World – a pivotal point, which can be applied to an infinite number of actions in a religious society. It seems that initiation and not shamanism forms a far more adequate explanation of the similarities that exist between, for example, Óðinn and the warrior bands or between warriors and magicians.

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[21] Stausberg (2001) has a good discussion of variability.

[22] One of the few articles to deal with this problem within the Scandinavian area is Mundal 1994. The relationship we mentioned between stability and variation in the

We lack material to allow us to set up these boundaries for the society of the Viking Age – nor can we do this for particular semantic fields like that of initiation. We can certainly assume that they existed, but the material does not give us any possibility of finding out exactly where they were. Similarly, we cannot determine with certainty whether the ideas expressed in the myths existed in *detail* in the consciousness of all individuals or only in a single individual, whether it is solely a question of transformations within a relatively well-defined semantic universe, or whether differences in the material also mirror temporal, regional and social differences. What we are able to deduce for certain from this investigation is that the material demonstrates some tendencies that make it necessary to assume the existence of a complete – although not in all respects consistent – *complex* of ideas about initiation in pre-Christian Scandinavia. This complex included a relatively stable series of elements that formed the culture's ideas about how the four elements of initiation, which characterise the phenomenon universally, could be manifested, as well as how the semantic universe that formed The Other World and also the contact with it could be constructed (Chapter 10). But in no circumstance should it be postulated that, if only the source material were better, all the details would fall into place in an unshakable pattern. Such patterns are only present on a very general level in the world of religion.

In any case, it appears to have been proven that myths and mythical themes that have been analysed in this study form variations of a common phenomenological basic theme, namely that of initiation. They deal with 'the same things', but they do so in different ways. The common features are a basic structure and certain stable elements. The differences are the ways in which these elements are brought into play in

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understanding of symbols is thoroughly discussed in Whitehouse 2000, e.g. p. 11 (with reference to initiation). In Whitehouse's terminology, Scandinavian religion may be considered an 'imagistic' religion, i. e. a religion that is not 'doctrinal', and which, therefore, is more firmly fixed in what is called 'episodic' memory than for example Christianity, which to a greater degree is firmly fixed in a 'semantic' memory. Imagistic religion has, therefore, a 'low level of uniformity in the individual interpretation of symbols' (2000, 111). Transferred to our material, it means that there will be considerable room for individual and local variations in the understanding of and so in the application of symbols, and also when it has to do with the relationship between myths and rituals.

order to form constellations that constitute transformations of one another.

With regard to the consequences of this investigation for our understanding of Scandinavian religion, we can state in summary: 1) that there existed in the period before Christianity entered into the consciousness of the Scandinavian people an initiation structure and initiation symbolism which, in all likelihood, had an impact on their ritual performances; 2) that, when we want to state anything about the semantic content of the rituals, we have to approach them in a different way than has usually been the case, namely through myths and myth-like narratives, which allow us to see a sequence and thus the position of the individual elements in a general structure; 3) that we cannot use a traditional source criticism based on the historical study of political events when we evaluate the sources – more recent sources may contain 'pagan' ideas just as much as older ones; 4) that we do not necessarily have to interpret differences in the statements in the sources as reflecting understandings that were in use from various periods or geographical areas; before such a solution is chosen, we ought to investigate whether it might not be a question of a group of narratives that are transformations of one another. This idea that different, perhaps even contradicting, understandings are necessarily relicts from different periods is, no doubt, due to the romantic idea that religious world views are without contradictions, at least if we go far enough back in time.

In a wider methodological perspective, this study has attempted to demonstrate that there is a considerable potential for enhancing our understanding of the sources of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion – or, for that matter, of any now non-existent religion – as well as the basic religious structures involved, if we apply phenomenological categories and if we recognise the insights gained from comparative research. This phenomenological or comparative perspective is able to, perhaps even necessary in order to contribute at the general religious level and in terms of the general reconnaissance of the material. On the other hand, when analysing the specific deployment and detailed organisation of the elements in order to obtain an increased understanding of the material, it is useful to take one's point of departure from within a certain cultural context, how ever such a cultural context may be delimited,[23] so that one can determine what is constant and what is variable in the corpus through a comparison of the various narratives and thus discover their internal meaning and cohesion.

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[23] The term 'a certain cultural context' is certainly not unproblematical since there are no fixed boundaries between 'cultures'. As has been demonstrated recently by many scholars (i.e. DuBois 1999; Glosecki 2007b and Schjødt 2007d), ideological elements from one 'culture' can easily flow into another and thus create new ideas.

[illegible]

[illegible]

Abbreviations

AEW = J. de Vries: *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch. Leiden 1961*
Alv = *Alvíssmál*
ANF = *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*
APS = *Acta Philologica Scandinavica*
Bdr = *Baldrs draumar*
Brot = *Brot af Sigurðarqviðu*
Fáfn = *Fáfnismál*
Fj = *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*
Flat = *Flateyjarbók*
Fritzner = J. Fritzner: *Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog* I-III. Christiania 1883-96 [1954-72]
FSN = Gúðni Jónsson (ed.): *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda I-IV.* Reykjavík 1959 [1954]
Ghv = *Guðrúnarhvǫt*
Grí = *Grímnismál*
GRM = *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift*
Gríp = *Grípisspá*
Gróg = *Grógaldr*
Gylf = *Gylfaginning*
Gúðr = *Guðrúnarkviða*
Hárb = *Hárbarðsljóð*
Hávm = *Hávamál*
Helr = *Helreið Brynhildar*
HHj = *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*
Hhund = *Helgakviða Hundingsbana*
Hym = *Hymiskviða*
Hyndl = *Hyndluljóð*
ÍF = Íslenzk Fornrit
KLNM = *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder fra Vikingetid til Middelalder 1-22.* Copenhagen 1956-78
Lok = *Lokasenna*
LP = Finnur Jónsson: *Lexicon Poeticum* (2. ed.). Copenhagen 1931
MM = *Maal og Minne*

MS = *Mediaeval Scandinavia*
NK = *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern.* Herausgegeben von G. Neckel. I. Text. (3. ed. by H. Kuhn)
Ragn = *Ragnars saga*
Reg = *Reginsmál*
Rþ = *Rígsþula*
SG = *Die Lieder der Edda* I-III (eds. by B. Sijmons and H. Gering). Halle 1906-31
Sigrdr = *Sigrdrífumál*
Sigsk = *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*
Skí = *Skírnismál*
Skm = *Skáldskaparmál*
SS = *Scandinavian Studies*
Vafþr = *Vafþrúðnismál*
Vs = *Vǫlsunga saga*
Vsp = *Vǫluspá*
Vǫls = *Vǫlsunga saga*
Yng = *Ynglinga saga*
Yt = *Ynglingatal*
Þdr = *Þórsdrápa*
Þry = *Þrymskviða*

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