**Image and ascendancy in Úlfr’s *Húsdrápa***

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*Húsdrápa* (‘Eulogy of the house’) imagines images in a house whose fate it was lucky not to share. The house is long gone, but the poem survived, if less entirely than the great Cross of Ruthwell in 1642, by being broken up in pieces over a younger terrain. The ground in this case is *Skáldskaparmál* (‘poetics’), part of the Prose *Edda* by the Icelandic mythographer Snorri Sturluson (1178/9-1241).[[1]](#footnote-1) Snorri here refers to *Húsdrápa* twice by name; probably all thirteen verse citations he ascribes to Úlfr, its poet, belong to this poem. In the following I shall ponder what the lost images looked like and why they, the house and the poem were commissioned.

Let us start with the poet. According to *Laxdœla saga*, written in the mid-thirteenth century, Úlfr Uggason was hired by Óláfr Hǫskuldsson, a chieftain of Laxárdalir in western Iceland. One summer Óláfr, shortly after coming back with some timber from Norway, built a hall. In the spring, with the hall finished, he married his daughter there, Þuríðr, to a Norwegian named Geirmundr *gnýr* (or Geirmundr ‘the clash’) from Hordaland. Contextually this wedding has been dated *c*. 978 x *c*. 985, the period of the Mammen style.[[2]](#footnote-2) No expense was spared. According to the saga, Óláfr’s house was

meira ok betra en menn hefði fyrr sét. Váru þar markaðar ágætligar sǫgur á þilviðinum ok svá á ræfrinu; var þat svá vel smíðat, at þá þótti miklu skrautligra, er eigi váru tjǫldin uppi. (ch. 29)[[3]](#footnote-3)

Earlier the craftsmen working for Óláfr are named as Án the White, his brother Án the Black and Beinir the Strong (ch. 24). The work that endured, however, was that of a poet from southern Iceland. According to the fragment of *Laxdœla saga* that provides an older version than the complete but shortened text:[[4]](#footnote-4)

skal boð vera at álíðnum vetri í Hjarðarholti; þat boð var allfjǫlmennt, því at þá var algǫrt eldhúsit. Þar var at boði Úlfr Uggason ok hafði nýorta drápu um Óláf Hǫskuldsson ok um sǫgur allar, er skrifaðar váru á eldhúsinu, ok fœrði hann þar at boðinu. Þetta kvæði er kallat Húsdrápa ok er vel ort. Óláfr launaði vel kvæðit. (ch. 29)[[5]](#footnote-5)

So Úlfr finished his poem just in time. The marriage was not a success, for Geirmundr ran off, but the wedding was: ‘þótti Óláfr vaxit hafa’ ‘Óláfr was thought to have gone up in the world’ (ch. 29). From this chapter it is already clear that Óláfr commissioned Úlfr to elevate him socially as the owner of the biggest most splendid hall in Iceland.

Now for the poem. Unfortunately the author of *Laxdœla saga,* who knew *Húsdrápa*, gives no quotations. The thirteen verses surviving in *Skáldskaparmál* are probably a fraction of *Húsdrápa* as it was, for, as we have seen, the oldest surviving text of *Laxdœla* claims that Úlfr composed on ‘all’ the carvings of the hall, and the hall was massive. As to the order of events within *Húsdrápa*, Úlfr’s verses have since been put in sequence so as to present three stories, all of them myths of Norse gods: one stanza tells of a duel between Heimdallr and Loki over Freyja’s necklace, the *Brísingamen* (*Húsdrápa* ‘2’); five half-stanzas, two of which are sometimes joined, relate Þórr’s fishing-trip with a giant which ends in a confrontation with the World Serpent (st. ‘3-6’); a further five half-stanzas tell of the procession of Freyr, Heimdallr and Óðinn together with ravens and valkyries to Baldr’s funeral pyre and then the launching of this ship (st. ‘7-11’); and a half-stanza survives in which the poet appears to sum up (part of) his work as something completed (st. ‘12’).[[6]](#footnote-6) This sequence of episodes could easily be changed. Baldr’s death triggers the end of the world in Snorri’s *Gylfaginning*, the mythography preceding *Skáldskaparmál*;[[7]](#footnote-7) as it appears to do in his greatest source, the Eddic poem *Vǫluspá*, as well as in *Lokasenna* (st. 28); but it also falls long before the action in *Skírnismál* (st. 21-2) and *Vafþrúðnismál* (st. 54). Below I shall put Úlfr’s (half-) stanzas mostly in the time-honoured order. There is no way of telling if Norse gods were all that was carved, then painted, on the walls and ceiling of Óláfr’s hall. But in their thematic groups the surviving verses of Úlfr’s poem, when interpreted, do help us imagine the style, colour and function of the images which his patron put there.

**Dedication**

The first verse of *Húsdrápa* is among fifteen half-stanzas Snorri quotes from late tenth-century poets to illustrate the range of pre-Christian ‘kennings’ or periphrases for ‘poetry’. Thirteenth is a half-stanza assigned to ‘Úlfr Uggason’, now known as *Húsdrápa* ‘1’:

Hoddmildum ték Hildar hugreifum Óleifi

(hann vilk at gjǫf Grímnis) geð-Njarðar lá (kveðja). (vs. 39)

[For the hoard-generous Óláfr who is brave in heart — him will I

summon to the gift of Grímnir — I draw a wave from Hildr’s soul-Njǫrðr]

So runs the text in RTW, three of the four main manuscripts of *Skáldskaparmál*. Óðinn, or Grímnir as he is named here, stole poetry from the giants by drinking it, as mead, in the mountain of the giants. To get the mead he seduced Gunnlǫð, daughter of Suttungr, drinking one vat for each of the three nights he agreed to spend with her. Afterwards he flew back in bird-shape to his citadel, with Suttungr in hot pursuit, and spewed out the mead into vats that the Norse gods had set out beneath him. Poetry was Óðinn’s gift to mankind, but at the same time Úlfr, in drawing a wave from ‘Hildr’s soul-Njǫrðr’, presents Óðinn as war-god. Through Hildr, the valkyrie who eponymizes ‘battle’ (*hildr*), Óðinn is the sea-god (Njǫrðr) of the soul who directs the slaughter in battle. This is a straightforward kenning for poetry by the norms of the other surviving tenth-century ‘skaldic’ or occasional poems.[[8]](#footnote-8) There is a more baroque version of it in the half-stanza in U:

Hjaldrgegnis telk Hildar herreifum Óleifi

(hann vilk at gjǫf Grímnis) geðfjarðar lá (kveðja). (vs. 39)

[For Óláfr who is brave in war — him will I summon to the gift

of Grímnir — I recount a wave of the fjord of the soul of Hildr’s din-server]

In this variant Úlfr refers to his poem as just one draught of the many which he pulls to order from the war-god’s mead-vat. Probably because this version of the kenning is more developed, its verse is more often chosen as the first half-stanza of *Húsdrápa*.

**The duel of Heimdallr and Loki**

At least two hall images underlie *Húsdrápa* ‘2’, the only full stanza to survive from this poem. This stanza is quoted by Snorri at the end of his list of kennings for Norse gods in *Skáldskaparmál*. First he tells us that Heimdallr, among other sobriquets, has the names ‘Loka dólg, mensœkir Freyju’ ‘Loki’s foe, Freyja’s necklace-seeker’, and a little later he is ‘tilsœkir Singasteins ok Vágaskers’, either ‘striver for’ or ‘visitor to’ what most scholars believe to be places, ‘*Singa*-stone’ and ‘Wave-Rock’:

þá deildi hann við Loka um Brísingamen. Hann heitir ok Vindlér. Úlfr Uggason kvað í Húsdrápu langa stund eptir þeiri frásǫgu; er þess þar getit at þeir váru í sela líkjum. (ch. 8)[[9]](#footnote-9)

Snorri seems to come back to this divine seal-duel in his kennings for Loki, whom he designates as ‘son Fárbauta’ ‘son of Fárbauti’ [Fear-Beater] and ‘þrætudólg Heimdala[r] ok Skaða’ ‘wrestling-foe of Heimdallr and Skaði’. Snorri proceeds to illustrate Loki’s wrestling with Heimdallr ‘svá sem hér segir Úlfr Uggason’ ‘just as Úlfr Uggason says here’:

Ráðgegninn bregðr ragna rein– at singasteini

frægr við firna slœgjan Fárbauta mǫg –vári.

Móðǫflugr ræðr mœðra mǫgr hafnýra fǫgru

(kynnik) áðr ok einnar átta (mærðar þáttum). (vs. 64)

[Ready with a plan, the gods’ land-warmer transforms for the blessing-jewel, renowned for facing the monstrously sly kinsman of Fárbauti.

Mighty in spirit, the son of eight plus one mothers — I proclaim [Óláfr]

in strands of renown — is the first to get control over the dazzling sea-kidney.]

There are more semantic difficulties in this stanza than in rest of the extant *Húsdrápa*.[[10]](#footnote-10) Clearly there is a contest between Loki and Heimdallr, the one ‘ready with a plan’ and the other ‘monstrously sly’; each gets a genealogy, with Loki as a giant’s son in the first half-stanza, Heimdallr as divinely born in the second. But after that interpretations can vary. Finnur Jónsson was the first to read a tmesis in the first two long lines, reading an epithet for Heimdallr as the gods’ watchman in *ragna rein-vári*.[[11]](#footnote-11) Most have accepted this reading, which is in keeping with Heimdallr’s known role as ‘vǫrðr goða’ ‘gods’ sentinel’ (*Lokasenna* 48); and the word ‘rein’, which can refer to a strip of land between fields, may be taken as Bifrǫst, Heimdallr’s traditional ‘road’, the bridge between gods and giants.[[12]](#footnote-12) On the other hand, the etymology of the once-attested ‘vári’ remains unclear. Finnur Jónsson related it to the adjective *varr* ‘aware’,[[13]](#footnote-13) but it has become customary to connect ‘vári’ with *verja* ‘to defend’, even if its long vowel fails to match with the short vowel and weak class of *verja*.[[14]](#footnote-14) If Heimdallr is the gods’ ‘defender’, the half-giant Loki could be seen as a dark allusion to Ragnarǫk, to the giants’ assault on Ásgarðr at the end of the world.[[15]](#footnote-15) A third reading of ‘vári’ as ‘trusty one, the gods’ confederate’ is related to the feminine noun *vár* ‘pledge’.[[16]](#footnote-16) This meaning too suits Heimdallr’s role as the gods’ watchman in the Last Days; according to Snorri in *Gylfaginning* (ch. 51) Heimdallr and Loki kill each other in Ragnarǫk.

In my turn, I suggest that *vári* is the *nomen agentis* of *værr* ‘comfortable, snug’, hence ‘warm’. This is how Heimdallr’s house is described in *Grímnismál* 13:

Himinbiǫrg ero in átto, enn þar Heimdall

qveða valda véom;

þar vǫrðr goða dreccr í væro ranni,

glaðr, inn góða miǫð.[[17]](#footnote-17)

[‘Heaven-hills’ are the eighth [god’s abode], and it is there they say

Heimdallr rules the sanctuaries;

there in a warm house the gods’ sentinel, gleaming,

drinks the good mead.]

I link these forms on analogy with two other combinations: *skærr* ‘white, pure’ with *skári* ‘young seagull’ (perhaps ‘whitener’, whose droppings whiten the rock); and *kærr* ‘loving’ and *kæra* ‘to murmur, complain’ with *Kári*, a name for the wind. This idea keeps Heimdallr’s designation in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’ related to his recovery of Freyja’s necklace from Loki. In other words, the ‘god’s land-warmer’ recovers her Brísingamen in order to stop everything freezing to death in winter. The meaning of this otherwise unattested noun ‘vári’ is at least straightforwardly related to that of the neuter noun *vár* ‘spring’.[[18]](#footnote-18) It can be identified with the word in ‘Fárbauta mǫg vára’, similarly positioned at the end of a line which Úlfr probably borrowed from *Haustlǫng*, a shield-poem nearly a century older than *Húsdrápa*.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The next problem is the meaning of ‘bregðr’. As Kurt Schier and others have noted, the simple verb *bregða*, which denotes sudden movement, may be intransitive or intransitive, whereby Heimdallr either ‘rushes (himself)’, or ‘jerks (something)’ towards a place or object named *singasteinn*; with *við* as preposition, *bregða* may mean ‘compete (with)’; in an adverbial phrase with *við*, as in *bregða einhverju við*, it may even mean ‘to talk about something’.[[20]](#footnote-20) Edith Marold prefers the transitive *bregða*, accepting no tmesis in the first half of *Húsdrápa* ‘2’, but reading ‘ragna . . . vári’ as a kenning for Heimdallr, ‘bregðr’ as verb and ‘rein’ as object: ‘Der ratkluge, berühmte Wächter der Götter nimmt beim Singasteinn das Land vom überaus schlauen Sohn des Fárbauti weg’.[[21]](#footnote-21) Mostly Marold follows Schier, who reads the Heimdallr-Loki contest as part of an otherwise forgotten creation myth in which Loki, having helped Heimdallr to raise the gods’ rich earth from the sea, keeps some of this back in his mouth; they wrestle underwater until Heimdallr, the defender of the gods’ rich earth takes this last piece of it from him.[[22]](#footnote-22) The unique compound ‘hafnýra’ or ‘sea-kidney’ in the second half of Úlfr’s stanza is accordingly explained as a kenning for ‘earth’.[[23]](#footnote-23) In general this reading works. The meanings of *bregðr* and *rein* are pliable enough to allow us to read this stanza with Schier as ‘den Rest eines überaus weit verbreitetes dualistischen Schöpfungsmythos’.[[24]](#footnote-24) But Schier throws the net out far from home: his parallels, inspired by Georges Dumézil, come from Eurasian mythology, Finnish, Russian, ‘Ugric’ and Turkish; Marold pushes it when she calls these ‘osteuropäischen Erzählungen’. Consequently Marold rules out the Brísingamen from *Húsdrápa* ‘2’, relegating this necklace, in a footnote, to obscurity as one of Snorri’s ‘mythologischen Kombinationen’: produced, presumably, whenever his Icelandic fails him.[[25]](#footnote-25) Although Heimdallr cannot be called a creator god, Marold implies that Óðinn, who is one, might have been included in a part of the context now lost: Norse gods come in threes according to Dumézil.[[26]](#footnote-26) If we keep Snorri in mind, however, it is worth noting that he makes no mention of Óðinn in Heimdallr’s duel with Loki in *Húsdrápa*.

As we have seen, Snorri says that Heimdallr struggled with Loki for the Brísingamen. Loki’s theft of this necklace is known from *Haustlǫng* (*c.* 900), in which the Norwegian skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir calls Loki ‘Brísings goða girðiþjófr’ ‘thief of the gods’ Brísing-girdle’ (st. 9) as he abducts the fertility goddess Iðunn to the land of the giants.[[27]](#footnote-27) As we have *Húsdrápa*, Úlfr’s stanza delivers one, if not two, kennings that can be interpreted as denotations for Freyja’s necklace in line with one etymology of *brísa*, stem of the first element of *Brísingamen* ‘necklace of the Brísingar’ as ‘to shine’.[[28]](#footnote-28) There is ‘hafnýra fǫgru’ ‘dazzling sea-kidney’ in the dative after ‘ræðr’ ‘gets control over’. Birger Pering took this phrase to refer to the tradition of *vettenyrer*, kidney-shaped Molucca Beans washed up by the Gulf Stream on the shores of Norway, Iceland and the Western Isles.[[29]](#footnote-29) This interpretation of the unique *hafnýra* alludes to women’s use of birth talismans that Freyja, as Gefjun or Gefn, might have given them from the sea; we may include this meaning as secondary.[[30]](#footnote-30) The primary meaning, however, must reside in a kenning. The brightness and marine origin both suggest a golden treasure: more than 200 skaldic kennings survive in which gold is indicated as the fire of the sea.[[31]](#footnote-31) What is then unusual in ‘hafnýra fǫgru’ is the kidney-shape, which, if not to be explained purely as an allusion to *vettenyrer*, must be taken as representing something on the panels at Hjarðarholt. Perhaps this is a deformed circle representing a necklace.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Úlfr’s other kenning for Freyja’s necklace, if he has one here, is to be seen in the phrase *at singasteini* in the first half of *Húsdrápa* ‘2’. Almost all commentators have decided to treat *singasteinn* as a place-name, although an airing of the older view of this as a kenning for the Brísingamen can still be found in erudite discussion.[[33]](#footnote-33) The problem arises in the *singa*-element, for which no Old Icelandic cognate has been found. It might be possible to treat this as a now-lost adjective (\**sinnigr* ?‘ancient’: Gothic *sinneigs*) with a thematic vowel for use in compounds.[[34]](#footnote-34) This notion of ‘Singasteinn’ compares with ‘Frecasteinn’, a battle-site in the eleventh-century Helgi Lays.[[35]](#footnote-35) No ‘Singasteinn’ is elsewhere recorded as a place-name, as one might expect, but the word seems comparable with ‘Vágasker’ ‘Wave-Rock’ in Snorri’s typification of the Heimdallr-kenning ‘tilsœkir Singasteins ok Vágaskers’. Yet it remains true that whereas ‘Vágasker’ is a place-name, the word ‘singasteinn’ may not be: when Snorri, in another case, tells us that Loki may be called ‘þrætudólg Heimdala[r] ok Skaða’ ‘wrestling-foe of Heimdallr and Skaði’, he covers two separate stories with the same base-word.[[36]](#footnote-36) Likewise, the base-word ‘tilsœkir’ may support two aspects of Heimdallr: ‘visitor to Wave-Rock’, as a stanza now missing from *Húsdrápa* might have told us; and ‘striver for’ an object, Úlfr’s *singasteinn*.

As to the first element in this compound, Pering has seen *singa* as a miscopying of *signa*, a loanword from Latin *signum* (‘sign; miracle’). Pering’s idea is to define the *singasteinn* as an amulet in keeping with his reading of *hafnýra* as a birth-talisman, but Schier rejects this interpretation on the grounds that *signum*, which is borrowed into thirteenth-century sagas in *signask* ‘to bless oneself’ and *prímsigning* (< *prima signatio*) does not appear in Icelandic texts as old as the late tenth century.[[37]](#footnote-37) It is plausible, however, that the Christian Irish introduced Latin *signum* into Icelandic in the ninth century, particularly in the west where so many settlers, more in fact than given in *Laxdœla saga*, claimed Irish descent.[[38]](#footnote-38) The Old Irish word word *sén*, from *signum*, could mean ‘the blessing of God’: a verbal form such as *signid* (‘he makes a sign’) shows the word as used by Irish clergy such as the *papar* (‘fathers’) who lived in Iceland when the first settlers arrived; the cognate Scots Gaelic *seun* (‘charm; an amulet to render a warrior invulnerable’) gives a physical aspect to *signum* which fits with *steinn*.[[39]](#footnote-39) The simplex can mean ‘jewel’: in ‘breiða steina’ ‘broad jewels’ it is used for gemstones in Freyja’s necklace (*Þrymskviða* 16 and 19); the compound ‘iarknasteinn’ (*Vǫlundarkviða* 25) appears to mean ‘gem’ or ‘pearl’, as does the Old English cognate *eorcnanstan*.[[40]](#footnote-40) As an unusual kenning, rather than a transparent descriptive term, the word *singasteinn* would refer to the sun as a ‘jewel’ whose rays bless creation. The thirteenth-century *Landnámabók* ‘Book of Settlements’) tells us that Þorkell *máni* (‘moon’), law-speaker and astronomer, was a man:

er einn heiðinna manna hefir bezt verit siðaðr, at því er menn vitu dœmi til. Hann lét sik bera í sólargeisla í banasótt sinni ok fal sik á hendi þeim guði, er sólina hafði skapat; hafði hann ok lifat svá hreinliga sem þeir kristnir menn, er bezt eru siðaðir.[[41]](#footnote-41)

So the crux *singasteinn* in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’, if metathesized from \**signa-steinn*, may be read as ‘blessing-jewel’. Óláfr Hǫskuldsson is said to have learned Irish from his mother Melkorka, his father’s concubine, whose fabulous secret was that she was the daughter of Mýrkjartan, king of Ireland.[[42]](#footnote-42)

In *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri says that Heimdallr fights Loki in the shape of a seal. The change into seal’s shape may be seen in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’, if we take Úlfr’s verb *bregðr* in the first half of the stanza to be an ellipse for *bregðr sér* ‘transforms himself, changes shape’.[[43]](#footnote-43) The idiom is used by Snorri three times in *Gylfaginning* to describe divine shape-shifting: in one, Loki ‘changed into the shape of a woman’ to hear about Baldr (‘brá sér í konu líki’, ch. 49); in another, ‘into salmon-shape’ to escape the gods (‘brá hann sér í laxlíki’, ch. 50); in a third, the gods ‘changed Váli, Loki’s son, into the shape of a wolf’ (‘brugðu Æsir Vála í vargs líki’, ch. 50).[[44]](#footnote-44) With ‘kvað’ for *kvazk* in stanza ‘3’, there is already such an omission of *sér* in *Húsdrápa*.[[45]](#footnote-45) In my interpretation, as the jewel hits the water, Heimdallr turns into a seal to save the Brísingamen from sinking out of reach. This would explain why Heimdallr is initially ‘ráðgegninn’ ‘ready with a plan’ and why, changing so fast, Heimdallr gets control (‘ræðr’) over the necklace (‘hafnýra fǫgru’) before Loki (‘áðr’).[[46]](#footnote-46) With these words Úlfr appears to capture the moment in the story at which both gods change into seals in pursuit of a necklace which he likens to the sun sinking in the western ocean.

Thus the story behind this stanza may be quite different from Schier’s image of Heimdallr lifting earth from the sea. The myth as we have it in *Húsdrápa* is still a fragment; but *Sǫrla þáttr*, a story in the fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók*, tells how Óðinn forced Loki to steal Freyja’s necklace, then kept it from her until she arranged the war of the Hjaðningar, an endless sea-battle between two kings in which her magic constantly revives the dead.[[47]](#footnote-47) The story of this battle is told in Bragi’s *Ragnarsdrápa* (*c*. 850), as one of four extant representations of images on a shield.[[48]](#footnote-48) The later *Sǫrla þáttr* is a composite story in that it appears to add Óðinn’s necromancy to the simpler tale of Loki’s theft of the necklace from Freyja (who got it by sleeping with the (many) dwarves who made it). There is no Heimdallr in *Sǫrla þáttr* to return the necklace to Freyja, but if *Sǫrla þáttr* contains a reflex of the story behind *Húsdrápa* ‘2’, as most believe, it may be that he was replaced at some stage with Óðinn. Úlfr’s verse can be read as praise for Heimdallr, who needs the necklace to end the winter and warm up life in Iceland with spring.

Elsewhere I have suggested that Heimdallr, having recovered the Brísingamen, is rewarded with the sexual favours of its owner.[[49]](#footnote-49) *Lokasenna* is a poem probably of the early Christian period in the eleventh century, in which Loki, mocking the Norse gods one by one, deconstructs each of their divine mysteries by moralizing these as flaws of character. In *Lokasenna* 20, when Loki alleges the goddess Gefjun’s prostitution with *sveinn inn hvíti* —

Þegi þu, Gefion, þess mun ek nú geta,

er þik glapði at geði —

sveinn inn hvíti, er þér sigli gaf

ok þú lagðir lær yfir.[[50]](#footnote-50)

[‘Hold your tongue, Gefjun, now will I tell of the one

who seduced your senses —

that blond boy who gave you a trinket and whom

you laid your thigh over.’]

— he seems to moralize the idea of Heimdallr restoring the Brísingamen to Freyja. Less satirically, Heimdallr is known as ‘hvítastr ása’ ‘whitest of the gods’, in *Þrymskviða* 15 and as ‘hvíti Áss’ ‘the white god’ in *Skáldskaparmál*.[[51]](#footnote-51) Gefjun is identifiable with Freyja, one of whose names, ‘Gefn’, with a meaning such as ‘giver’, is formally related to Gefjun; in the same phrase in *Gylfaginning*, Freyja’s name Mardǫll suggests a connection between her and Heimdallr, in that the prefixes ‘sea’ (*marr*) and ‘world’ (*heimr*) go together as complements.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The name Heimdallr name has been interpreted as ‘world tree’ (*heim*-*dallr*), an idea which sheds light on several of the curious things about him: his names Vindhlér ‘wind-shelter’ and Hallinskíði ‘leant-board’; the name of his abode Himinbjǫrg ‘heaven-hill’ and his position as the gods’ watchman ‘við himinsenda’ ‘on edge of heaven’; his ability to see over a hundred leagues; and the oddity which Úlfr reveals in *Húsdrápa* that Heimdallr is born of nine mothers (his roots).[[53]](#footnote-53) Heimdallr’s ‘whiteness’ seems related to the ‘white loam’ (‘hvíta auri’) which is poured on the bole of the World Tree in *Vǫluspá* 19.[[54]](#footnote-54) In all, he is a mysterious god whose role, I suggest, as ‘gods’ land-warmer’ in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’ appears to be one of saving the sun, all life and abundance from the giants. His procreation of renewal with Freyja, goddess of fertility, is entirely explicable in terms of the word *ráð* with which he is introduced on the first line. As ‘ráðgegninn’, it appears that Heimdallr is not only ‘ready with a plan’ to save the Brísingamen, but also ‘ready with a family plan’ for men and women. He is celebrated for this role in two other poems: as Rígr (Irish *rí*, ‘king’) in *Rígsþula*, a poem which can thus be associated with the Norse areas of Ireland; and in the first stanza of *Vǫluspá*, where the sibyl’s voice asks silence from all humanity, the ‘meiri ok minni mǫgo Heimdal[l]ar’ ‘greater and lesser sons of Heimdallr’.[[55]](#footnote-55) In *Rígsþula* we find Heimdallr going to bed between three sets of husband and wife for three nights in each case, begetting or helping to beget sons successively named ‘Thrall’, ‘Churl’ and ‘Earl’. The poet introduces Heimdallr as ‘ǫflgan ok aldinn ás kunnigan, ramman ok rǫskvan’ ‘a strong and aged sagacious god, robust and ripe-grown’ (st. 1);[[56]](#footnote-56) just as he is described as ‘móðǫflugr’ ‘mighty in spirit’ in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’. As the poet says of each set of parents in a refrain, ‘Rígr kunni þeim ráð at segia’ ‘Rígr was able to offer them advice’.[[57]](#footnote-57) The saga tells us that *Húsdrápa* was performed not only in the spring, but at a wedding.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Visually in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’, if the word *þáttr* is taken literally, as ‘strand’, Úlfr may also be telling us that he found his Heimdallr-Loki tale on a tapestry. In skaldic verse the word *þáttr* appears to have been used figuratively to suggest ‘strand (of destiny)’ as early as the tenth century; the sense ‘part (of a poem)’, which has been regularly read into it here, appears to have no earlier example than *Húsdrápa*.[[59]](#footnote-59) The fact that Úlfr’s *þættir* is plural is a mild problem for the meaning ‘part of a poem’ which Finnur Jónsson chose for ‘mærðar þáttum’.[[60]](#footnote-60) ‘Themes’ might seem better, given Snorri’s words for the handling of heroic and other stories by skalds: ‘eptir þessum sǫgum hafa flest skáld ort ok tekit ýmsa þáttu’.[[61]](#footnote-61) Even though a meaning such as this is probably primary, it seems that Úlfr plays on the meanings of *þættir* as he appears to do with *ráð* and other words in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’. In this case he would describe his poem as a tapestry, a ‘text’. Fragments of tapestries have survived in the ninth-century Oseberg ship-find (a procession with men and women, wagons and horses with riders), and in the Rolvsøy grave in Østfold (a group of people by a boat).[[62]](#footnote-62)

We can see some of the images that underlie this stanza. Biographical terms such as ‘ráðgegninn’ and ‘firna slœgr’, or even the genealogies of Heimdallr and Loki, can hardly have been embroidered, carved or painted. Eliminating these, however, we can focus on narrative actions which are centred on the two verbs ‘bregðr’ and ‘ræðr’. If ‘bregðr’ means ‘transforms’, as I suggest, then there were at least two images of Heimdallr: one perhaps as a man, as he appears on the west face of the tenth-century Gosforth Cross in Cumbria;[[63]](#footnote-63) another as the seal into which (Snorri says) he transforms when dealing with Loki. Loki as a seal is also necessary to the second image, as is a depiction of the Brísingamen with a kidney-shape (‘hafnýra’) and metallic boss or inset surface or outline (‘fǫgru’).[[64]](#footnote-64) As Schier points out, individual images on surviving Scandinavian artefacts and monuments are often unintelligible if they are not related to a whole, one which provides the means of illuminating their meaning; conversely a picture may be interpreted solely through one of its details.[[65]](#footnote-65) In this case, we can presume one human image with a definer, such as a horn, to give an idea of Heimdallr before his transformation; and another of two seals adjacent to a necklace, one of them right next to it. In all, these are two images. As large and splendid as such images doubtless were, however, the greater effect comes from the meanings we read into the language of *Húsdrápa* ‘2’.

**Þórr, Hymir and the World Serpent**

Elsewhere in *Húsdrápa*, Úlfr deals with Þórr’s fishing trip with the giant Hymir for the World Serpent. This is one of the most popular myths to survive from the Viking Age in poetic and graphic form. Snorri writes an entertaining version in *Gylfaginning* and this story is also known in Bragi’s *Ragnarsdrápa*, in works attributed to three other skalds of the ninth and tenth centuries and in the Eddic, probably early fourteenth-century, poem *Hymiskviða*.[[66]](#footnote-66) The same story is interpreted on an eighth-century Gotland memorial stone (Ardre VIII), on a tenth-century sandstone frieze in Gosforth, and on the Hørdum stone from Thy, Denmark, and less reliably (there is no Hymir) on the Altuna stone from Uppland, Sweden, both carvings of the eleventh century.[[67]](#footnote-67) Snorri’s synoptic version allows us to put the relevant part of *Húsdrápa* into a sequence. Snorri follows on from Þórr’s failures to impress a giant named ‘Útgarða-Loki’ ‘the Loki of the Outworld’ (a trickster). Þórr, having failed to lift more than a paw of the giant’s cat from the ground, learns from his host the next day that this was the World Serpent (ch. 47); he returns to the Middle World but almost immediately sets out again, ‘sem ungr drengr’ ‘as a young fellow’, on a mission to destroy him (ch. 48). He stays the night with a giant named Hymir whom next day he asks to accompany on a fishing trip. Hymir says he would be of little use to him ‘er hann var lítill ok ungmenni eitt’ ‘seeing that he was a little youngster’. When he tells Þórr to get the bait, the god tears the head off his prize ox, carries this into the boat and rows off at full pressure, with Hymir in the bow rowing hard to keep up. Þórr twice makes Hymir row on when they reach the giant’s favourite fishing grounds, and at the edge of the world Þórr throws out the ox-head on a hook and line; the World Serpent falls for this no less easily than Þórr was tricked earlier into taking him for a cat. When the Serpent sees Þórr he lashes back, forcing him to the edge of the boat; Þórr kicks against him, putting both feet through the boat on to the sea-floor. For a moment they eye one another, the Serpent blowing poison while Þórr gets his hammer. Then Hymir panics and cuts the line and the Serpent sinks back into the sea. Þórr throws the hammer after the monster, but perhaps in vain. Snorri’s narrator (Hár), although he says that some think Þórr hits the the Serpent and kills him, prefers to believe that the creature still lives encircling the earth.

Five fragments survive from Úlfr’s treatment of a depiction of this myth on the walls of Hjarðarholt. If we follow the order of Snorri’s narrative, supported by the version in *Hymiskviða*, the first verse would be *Húsdrápa* ‘4’ (only in W: Skj B I, 128, 4), which describes Þórr’s stare at the Serpent:

Innmáni skein ennis ǫndótts vinar banda;

áss skaut œgigeislum orðsæll á men storðar.

[The inner forehead-moon of the powers’ fierce friend shone;

the renowned god shot terrifying rays at the necklace of the wood-realm

[: World Serpent]]

Úlfr’s kenning for Þórr’s eye, ‘innmáni’, is reminiscent of ‘ennitungl’ ‘forehead-moons’, Bragi’s term in *Ragnarsdrápa* for the eight eyes of Gefjun’s oxen.[[68]](#footnote-68) The poet Egill appears to allude to the World Serpent in his *Arinbjarnarkviða* 5 (*c*. 960), describing his lucky escape from King Eiríkr in York: he says it was not safe to look at his enemy’s ‘tunglskin’ ‘lunar shine’: ‘þás ormfránn ennimáni skein allvalds œgigeislum’ ‘when the all-powerful’s serpent-glittering forehead-moon shone with terrifying rays’.[[69]](#footnote-69) In this way, Úlfr’s imagery is traditional, but it is also possible in each case that he and Bragi emphasize the circle of the eye because this was an inlaid metallic image. In *Húsdrápa* ‘5’, Úlfr describes the Serpent as a rope around the earth, Þórr as the enemy of monsters:

En stirðþinull starði storðar leggs fyrir borði

fróns á fólka reyni fránleitr ok blés eitri (vs. 316, also in vs. 210)

[But the taut rope of the wood-realm’s leg, glittering-featured,

stared from across the gunwale at earth-folk’s adversary and blew poison]

None of the stone carvings show the monster over the waterline. Since the word ‘storð’ appears in this verse as well as in *Húsdrápa* ‘4’ above, it seems unlikely that they belonged to the same stanza. Marold would swell *Húsdrápa* here with two stanzas assigned to Bragi, on the strength of their burlesque.[[70]](#footnote-70) If the first of these truly comes out of *Húsdrápa*, against its attribution to Bragi not long before the Jǫrmunrekkr-section of *Ragnarsdrápa* in *Skáldskaparmál*, then it is just possible that the second half of *Húsdrápa* ‘5’ went as follows:

þá er forns Litar flotna á fangboða ǫngli

hrøkkviáll of hrokkinn hekk Vǫlsunga drekku. (vs. 153)[[71]](#footnote-71)

[when the coiling eel of the Vǫlsungs’ drink hung curled

on the hook of the wrestling-challenger of the shipmates of old Litr.]

A stanza’s second half often elaborates on the first: here the snake would blow poison when the giants’ enemy hooked it up out of the sea. The kenning for Þórr in this verse might seem to refer to the story most fully known from *Skáldskaparmál*, in which the giant Suttungr rows out to sea with two dwarves, killers of his uncle and aunt, threatening to leave them on a tidal rock unless they repay him with the mead of poetry.[[72]](#footnote-72) The problem is that Þórr does not wrestle with giants.[[73]](#footnote-73) With the name ‘Litr’, however, perhaps with the word *hrokkinn* also, the poet appears to allude to the story of Baldr’s wild funeral, in which Þórr kicks the dwarf Litr into the pyre when the gods stop him from killing the giantess Hyrrokkin, the only creature who can dislodge Baldr’s funeral ship.[[74]](#footnote-74) Whether or not it was Úlfr, rather than Bragi, who composed the verse above, we can now proceed to *Húsdrápa* ‘3’, which is attributed to Bragi in two manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* (RW) and to Úlfr in one U; omitted in T):

Þjokkvǫxnum kvað þykkja þikling firinmikla

hafra njóts at [W: hǫfgum] hætting megindrætti. (vs. 54)

[It is said the thick-grown stumpy-legs thought he was in monstrously

big danger from the billy-goat-employer’s [W: heavy] mighty haul.]

Hymir’s fright, in Snorri’s story, leads him to cut the line just as Þórr swings the hammer. With his verb *kvað*, Úlfr openly refers to such a story in his own time.[[75]](#footnote-75) If he seems to remove himself from the images before him, it is really to acknowledge that the giant’s thoughts are not depicted. His desire to supply these thoughts is an act of interpretation. It may show that here we are close to a group of narrative tableaux on a painted carved panel or on a tapestry. Úlfr’s provision of a reason for what happens next, the cutting of the line, shows that the picture, as he sees it, may feature the World Serpent’s head raised into a position from where it can frighten Hymir. Perhaps this is as high as the gunwale. The word *þikling* allows us to glimpse the modest size of Hymir’s figure in relation to that of Þórr, who must stand close to the World-Serpent if Úlfr’s description of their face-off is based on an image.[[76]](#footnote-76) With the word ‘þjokkvǫxnum’ we also appear to see the width of the giant’s limbs offsetting his smaller size. In a stanza which is lost after this one Úlfr makes Hymir cut the fishing line. Inspite of this, in *Húsdrápa* ‘6/5-8’, Þórr succeeds in killing the Serpent:

Víðgymnir laust Vimrar vaðs af fránum naðri

hlusta grunn við hrǫnnum. Hlaut innan svá minnum. (vs. 56)

[The Wide-Wader of the ford of Vimur struck off into the waves the earhole’s

pediment from the glittering adder of the fishing line. He got it from Norway

with images like this.]

In *Húsdrápa* ‘6/1-4’, Þórr appears to pay Hymir for his sabotage:

Fullǫflugr lét fellir fjall-Gauts hnefa skjalla

(ramt mein var [þat]) reyni reyrar leggs við eyra. (vs. 55)

[The fully-endowed feller of the mountain-Gaut made his fist crack

([that] was a mighty injury) against the ear of the explorer of the reed’s leg.]

This half-stanza appears to be the last one we still have in the section of *Húsdrápa* that deals with Þórr’s fishing trip. In the foregoing two quotations I have chosen to reverse Snorri’s order (one clear in the numbering of verses 55 and 56). Until recently most commentators took the kenning for Þórr’s opponent in vs. 55 (‘reynir reyrar leggs’) as a term for the Serpent, joining these lines to half-stanza vs. 56, which Snorri cites after a second attribution to Úlfr. Perhaps it is safe to assume that Snorri or one of his scribes followed the flow of his (complete) text of Úlfr’s poem in their search for quotations. But these two verses are clearly separated in three of the four main manuscripts of *Skáldskaparmál* (RTW); and even where they are not (U), Faulkes points out that the initial capital *V* is placed out at the margin as well as a *v* (for *vísa*, ‘verse’).[[77]](#footnote-77) Roberta Frank, moreover, identifies the words *reyni reyrar leggs* (in her words ‘explorer (or rowan tree) of the hollow bone of the reed’) as Úlfr’s kenning for Hymir, not the Serpent.[[78]](#footnote-78) In this case, we could follow Snorri’s order of incident in *Gylfaginning* and place vs. 55 (Hymir) after vs. 56 (the Serpent).

In vs. 56 Þórr is presented as the victor against a giantess in the tale of his journey to the giant Geirrøðr. In vs. 55 he is presented no longer as a goat-driver (as he is on arrival at Hymir’s house in *Hymiskviða* 7 and perhaps elsewhere in the house-carvings), but again in his role of giant-killer.[[79]](#footnote-79) This suits what he does in context, slinging his hammer after the Serpent’s retreating head, while it sinks back into the ocean; then knocking Hymir out of the boat with such force that he hits the sea-floor. It is all very quick; speed of action is also a feature of Heimdallr in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’.

‘Ok segja menn’, says Snorri of Þórr and the Serpent in his version, ‘at hann lysti af honum hǫfuðit við grunninum’ ‘and people say he struck its head off into the deep’ (ch. 48). This is probably how Úlfr saw it, although at least one scholar takes him to mean that Serpent’s head hits the waves still joined to its body.[[80]](#footnote-80) Scholars disagree on whether the Serpent’s death here, rather than in Ragnarǫk (as given in *Vǫluspá* 53), was Úlfr’s innovation or an old variant to the Serpent’s escape or indeed the only form of this myth prior to the Christianized eschatology of *Vǫluspá*.[[81]](#footnote-81) Meulengracht Sørensen treats the Serpent’s survival as the older mythic form, consistent with his idea that the story expresses Þórr’s failure to disrupt ‘a cosmic balance’.[[82]](#footnote-82) But one cannot base this version on Bragi’s ninth-century verses, as he does: not all of these have come down to us. Schier follows many others in comparing this myth with Indra’s slaying of the dragon Vrtra, although he might cite the Greek myth of Apollo and Python nearer home.[[83]](#footnote-83) In addition, it is unclear why Þórr’s fishing trip is so widespread on Norse monuments if it really was a story of divine failure.[[84]](#footnote-84) On balance, it seems better to define it as a tale of Þórr’s triumph: a young triumph, if we agree with Sørensen that Þórr’s guise here in *Gylfaginning* as ‘ungr drengr’ ‘a young fellow’, and Bragi’s adverb ‘snimma’ ‘in old times’ in *Ragnarsdrápa* ‘14’, both show that the story belongs to Þórr’s early career.[[85]](#footnote-85)

In other words, there is little in these verses of *Húsdrápa*, any more than in the Heimdallr-Loki stanza, to show Ragnarǫk weighing heavily on Úlfr’s mind. Indeed the mood of his poem suggests otherwise. The kenning ‘Víðgymnir Vimrar vaðs’, which celebrates Þórr in another tale, seems to mean ‘Wide-Wader [a giant’s name] of the ford of Vimur’: not only does he hold on while the Serpent’s wake engulfs him and Hymir in their boat; but crossing the Vimur to get to Geirrøðr, Þórr and his human helper Þjalfi find themselves swamped in the urine of a giantess straddling the river. The latter tale is told in six stanzas (*Skáldskaparmál*, vs. 76-81) of the great *Þórsdrápa* which the skald Eilífr Goðrúnarson, probably a Norwegian, is thought to have composed for Earl Hákon of Norway (*c*. 975 – *c*. 995) in the late 980s.[[86]](#footnote-86) It also survives in an Eddic fragment and in Snorri’s prose narrative after *Þórsdrápa*.[[87]](#footnote-87) Þórr here survives the flood by lobbing a boulder at the giantess which stops her flow at its source. Úlfr’s indelicate kenning puts Þórr’s fishing-trip triumph in a light more suitable for a society wedding in Iceland.

**Baldr’s funeral**

In *Gylfaginning* Snorri moves out from Þórr’s fishing trip into the myth of Baldr.[[88]](#footnote-88) This is the god whose young death at the instigation of Loki brings on Ragnarǫk, the end of Norse gods. First, in response to the anxiety of his mother Frigg, all things living and lifeless swear oaths to protect Baldr’s life. Loki, however, thwarts their intention by making mistletoe, a plant too young to swear the oath, into the head of a spear which he hands to Hǫðr, blind brother of Baldr, to shoot at the god. Baldr falls dead. In their grief the gods try to get him back, and Hermóðr is sent riding down to the world below, meets Hel and wins her promise to restore Baldr if all things living and lifeless agree to weep for Baldr’s death. In all this Snorri paraphrases a lost Eddic poem which we could call \**Baldrsmál*. He quotes what is possibly the final stanza of this poem at the moment an old crone in a cave, Loki in another form, thwarts the common purpose by refusing to weep for Baldr’s death.[[89]](#footnote-89) Into this myth of mortality Snorri weaves a paraphrase of what were probably the essentials of Úlfr’s *þáttr* on Baldr in *Húsdrápa*. While Hermóðr sets off, the gods burn Baldr’s remains on a funeral pyre. With the fire lit, a procession begins in which Snorri mentions chiefly gods and giants: first Óðinn, then Frigg, Óðinn’s valkyries and ravens, Freyr ‘í kerru’ ‘in a chariot’ pulled by his golden boar, Heimdallr on his horse Gulltoppr, Freyja with her cats and finally a host of frost-ogres and mountain-giants. In *Húsdrápa* ‘7’, the protocol is different, as is the image of Freyr:

Ríðr á bǫrg til borgar bǫðfróðr sonar Óðins

Freyr ok fólkum stýrir fyrst ok gulli byrstum. (vs. 63)

[Rides in first place, and on a boar with bristles of gold, the battle-wise

Freyr to the stronghold of Óðinn’s son and he guides the people.]

As yet the pyre is just *borg*, a fortification of logs, so it looks as if Úlfr treated Þórr’s consecration towards the end of this *þáttr*, separately from the scene with Hyrrokkin. With straightforward kennings and use of the present tense, Úlfr puts Freyr first, shows him riding on the boar without vehicle and gives him a host (*folk*), something in keeping with Freyr’s introductory epithet ‘fólkvaldi goða’ ‘field-marshal of gods’ (st. 3) at the head of *Skírnismál*.[[90]](#footnote-90) The Oseberg tapestry procession might be taken as support for the idea that the gods in the Hjarðarholt panels move from right to left.[[91]](#footnote-91) Snorri, in his paraphrase of some of *Húsdrápa*, seems to bring Óðinn, Frigg and their entourage forward to the head of the procession because he is keen to keep Óðinn as lord of the Æsir. If he leaves Úlfr’s hierarchy otherwise unchanged, the god after Freyr is Heimdallr. In *Húsdrápa* ‘10’:

Kostigr ríðr at kesti kynfróðs þeim er goð hlóðu

hrafnfreistaðar hesti Heimdallr at mǫg fallinn. (vs. 19)

[Heimdallr rides splendid on his horse to the pyre which the gods

have loaded for the fallen son of the strangely-wise tester of ravens.]

In this verse Baldr’s funeral pyre is still not lit. Gulltoppr, Heimdallr’s horse, was doubtless more elaborately described in the half-stanza which accompanied this one, given that Snorri names him as he does Freyr’s boar earlier. In both cases it is the ‘gold’ of these mounts (Gullinbursti ‘golden-bristle’ and Gulltoppr ‘gold-top’) which is emphasized, as if a striking use was made of gold leaf on the original panel.

A couple of winged shapes in black paint are also to be glimpsed in Úlfr’s kenning for Óðinn as the raven-god. With the adjective *kynfróðr* in particular, Úlfr describes Óðinn as ‘strangely wise’: from his practice of augury with Huginn and Muninn; wise also from the prophecy a sibyl gave him about Baldr’s death (as in *Vǫluspá* 28-9);[[92]](#footnote-92) possibly also ‘kindred-fertile’, by which he would connote Óðinn as the begetter on the princess Rindr of a new son to avenge Baldr, in a story to which the skald Kormákr +gmundarson alludes with the proverb ‘seið Yggr til Rindar’ ‘Yggr bewitched Rindr’ in *Sigurðardrápa* (*c*. 960).[[93]](#footnote-93) In any case, Úlfr has prepared us for Óðinn from Freyr’s verse onwards. In the next passage from *Húsdrápa*, I join *Húsdrápa* ‘8’ with ‘9’, so as to make a complete stanza: [[94]](#footnote-94)

Ríðr at vilgi víðu víðfrægr (en mér líða)

Hropta-týr (of hvapta hróðrmál) sonar báli. (vs. 8)

Þar hykk sigrunni svinnum sylgs valkyrjur fylgja

heilags tafns ok hrafna. Hlaut innan svá minnum. (vs. 14)

[Rides to his son’s exceedingly wide bonfire (while words of glory

flow over my jaws) the God of Secrets widely renowned.

There I think come valkyries and ravens following the wise-at-swallowing

victory-tree to the holy sacrifice. He got it from Norway with images like

this.]

By now the ‘borg’ is a ‘bál’, a ‘pyre’ that is lit. With ‘Hropta-týr’ Úlfr describes Óðinn as wise in the runic secrets which, as *hroptr rǫgna*, he has acquired from the dead (‘the gods’ master of things hidden’, *Hávamál* 142). Another aspect of Óðinn to which Úlfr alludes in this verse is the gift of the mead of poetry, a story implicit in the liquid image of poetry that rushes into and back out of the poet’s mouth (‘en mér líða (…) of hvapta’). The same image appears to underlie the kenning for Óðinn in vs. 14, *sigrunnr svinnr sylgs*, whereby the god’s mighty ingestion of mead in Gunnlǫð’s cave is hailed as a victory for wisdom of poetry.[[95]](#footnote-95) Next, after Óðinn and his birds, Úlfr perhaps described Frigg, and then Freyja with her cats, before indicating the arrival of more giants.

Presumably his sequel to this was the death of Nanna, which seals Baldr’s funeral at the launch. Snorri tells us that the gods have moved Baldr’s body to Hringhorni, his ship near the shore. This vessel is the largest on earth. No-one can launch it until they send for a *gýgr* (‘ogress’) named Hyrrokkin (perhaps ‘Sooty-from-fire’), who arrives in troll style on the back of a wolf with a snake for reins. The four warriors from Valhǫll whom Óðinn appoints to hold her wild mount do so by cutting it down. Hyrrokkinn responds by shoving the ship out awkwardly stern first.[[96]](#footnote-96) Fire flashes from the slipway and the earth shakes. In anger Þórr reaches for his hammer but the gods restrain him. To quote *Húsdrápa* ‘11’ from Úlfr again in *Skáldskaparmál*:

Fullǫflug lét fjalla fram haf-Sleipni þramma

Hildr, en Hropts of gildar hjálmelda mar feldu. (vs. 242)

[The fully-endowed mountain-Hildr made the ocean-Sleipnir [: sea-horse: ship] trundle forwards while the empowerers of Hroptr’s helmet-fires [:Óðinn’s warriors] felled her steed.]

As no other narrative on Baldr’s funeral survives, it is tempting to regard the lost half of this stanza, probably the first half, as Snorri’s source for his description of the wolf and snake-reins. Striking is the resemblance between the first half-line of the above verse, ‘fullǫflug lét fjalla’, and the first half-line of *Húsdrápa* ‘6’ (vs. 55), *‘*fullǫflugr lét fellir’: almost as if Úlfr intended to use Hyrrokkin to recall Þórr’s dispatch of Hymir; or *vice versa*. Then, who knows?, Þórr may kill her: in a tenth-century fragment of an apostrophe of Þórr which Snorri attributes to Þorbjǫrn dísarskáld, Hyrrokkin is listed among the god’s victims.[[97]](#footnote-97)

After this, in *Gylfaginning*, and probably in a lost stanza of *Húsdrápa*, Baldr is laid on the pyre, ‘ok er þat sá kona hans Nanna Nepsdóttir þá sprakk hon af harmi ok dó’ ‘and when his wife, Nanna daughter of Nepr, saw this, her heart burst with grief and she died’.[[98]](#footnote-98) Nanna is put on the same pyre, which Þórr consecrates with his hammer. When the dwarf named Litr runs innocently by, Þórr kicks him into the flames to join them.[[99]](#footnote-99) At this unseemly moment, I suggest Úlfr focused on the death of Nanna. Probably in *Húsdrápa* as in *Gylfaginning*, any comedy in Þórr’s funeral brawl was offset by her great marital ideal. For the sake of a contemporary bride and groom, this may be the construction Úlfr wished to place on his patron’s procession of images in Hjarðarholt.

**Óláfr’s decorated hall**

Indicative of Úlfr’s style is the phrase ‘Þar hykk’ ‘There I think’. These words reveal a view more individual than any to be found in the other skaldic artistic commentaries preserved by Snorri. In his *Ragnarsdrápa*, Bragi pictures the World Serpent on his shield with the words ‘þat erum sýnt’ ‘That is visible to me’; with the words ‘sék far’ ‘I see the journey’, Þjóðólfr conveys the opening image of the wayfaring Óðinn, Loki and Hœnir on the shield which gave rise to *Haustlǫng*.[[100]](#footnote-100) To the earlier poets the stories of gods and heroes are all history, for they happened long ago. The stories that went into and came out of disparate images on public slabs, shields and panels were a renewable common property. Describing Jǫrmunrekkr, Bragi says ‘Þat segik fall á fǫgrum flotna randar botni’ ‘I show this fall of men on the shining surface of the shield’, and ‘þats á Leifa landa laufi fátt’ ‘that is painted on the leaf of Leifi’s lands [: shield of the ship]’;[[101]](#footnote-101) Þjóðólfr confirms that he is not lying, the story of Þjazi is really there, with ‘Þats of fátt á fjall Finns ilja brú minni’ ‘A memorial of that is painted on my bridge of the foot-soles of the Lapp of the fells [: shield]’ (st. 13) and likewise with Þórr and Hrungnir in ‘Gǫrla lítk á Geitis garði þær of ferðir’ ‘I behold these expeditions clearly on the fortress of Geitr [: shield]’ (st. 20).[[102]](#footnote-102) Two or three generations later, apparently in *c*. 960, Kormákr invoked public knowledge of mythology in a poem which he composed in honour of Earl Sigurðr of Hlaðir and his son Hákon.[[103]](#footnote-103) Kormákr punctuates his eulogy with asides which seem to have nothing to do his subject: such as ‘sitr Þórr í reiðum’ ‘Þórr sits in his chariot’, st. ‘5’.[[104]](#footnote-104) Taken together, however, they show that he was probably comparing Sigurðr with Óðinn and Hákon with Þórr.[[105]](#footnote-105) Kormákr’s asides have long been regarded as references to images on panels in Earl Sigurðr’s hall in Trøndelag.[[106]](#footnote-106) Snorri says of this type of aside, which he calls *hjástælt* ‘abutted’, that ‘skal orðtak vera forn minni’ ‘the expression must be old proverbial statements’.[[107]](#footnote-107) In *Húsdrápa*, a generation later, Úlfr joins in his turn delivers the stories presented in the *minni* of Hjarðarholt (‘(memorial) images’, st. ‘6’ and ‘9’). His word ‘hróðrmál’ (‘words of glory’) is an expression for this activity in the verse above. Even in its poor fragmentary state, *Húsdrápa* is about praising Óláfr, and it is odd, but understandable, that this purpose is rarely emphasized in discussions of this poem.

In narrative action the present tense is more widespread in *Húsdrápa* than in the three earlier commentary poems. Úlfr’s use of this tense probably shows that he is more interested than Bragi, Þjóðólfr and Kormákr in mediating something of the outward form of the paintings before him. This does not mean that his past tense reveals the absence of underlying images, as was once proposed in the case of his verses on the World Serpent and Hyrrokkin.[[108]](#footnote-108) What can be said of Úlfr’s present tense is that it reveals an aesthetic approach. The comic impresario Þjóðólfr, who is thought to be less interested in the artistry of his shield, stints on the present tense: Þjazi, with his eagle-wings on fire, ‘sviðnar’ ‘singes’ (*Haustlǫng* 13);[[109]](#footnote-109) and Loki, as he clings to a pole hanging from the airborne Þjazi, is called ‘farmr Sigynjar arma sás ǫll regin eygja (…) í bǫndum’ ‘the cargo of Sigyn’s arms, whom all the divine powers glare at in his bonds’ (st. 7). This image of Loki is on an eighth-century picture on a stone in Gotland and also in a Last Days combination on the tenth-century Gosforth Cross.[[110]](#footnote-110) But if it was also on Þjóðólfr’s shield in Hordaland in *c*. 900, Þjóðólfr does not develop it into a story. There is a similar reserve in Kormákr, with only one present tense in the surviving *minni*: Þórr in the chariot ‘Þórr sitr í reiðum’, a painted relief or idol of Þórr which he juxtaposes with his patron’s son. By contrast, the use of the present tense in *Húsdrápa* is sustained, delivering neither a narrative culmination nor an aside but a visual foreground.

This stylistic feature amounts to a poet’s attempt at explication rather than description. As an observer of the Hjarðarholt carvings for the winter it took him to work on *Húsdrápa*, Úlfr would doubtless have been ‘forced to extrapolate meaning’ from ‘selected, and suggestive, juxtapositionings’ of motifs on the panels, just like the admirers of the bold heathen-Christian combinations in Gosforth in the first half of the tenth century.[[111]](#footnote-111) His occasional, but sustained, uses of the present tense illuminate a sequence of images beneath both what survives of the Heimdallr-Loki conflict in *Húsdrápa* ‘2’ and Baldr’s funeral procession in stanzas ‘7-10’. If we unite the images with what survives of their context, Úlfr’s present tense gives focus to a golden disk or kidney shape, seals, the sea, a golden boar and horse, black ravens and a conflagration over a ship. Other verses allow us to see also a serpent and a wolf with rider and snakes. In the tenth-century Mammen style it appears that some of these images could have been bordered, or even drawn, with semi-naturalistic or ribbon-shaped quadrupeds and birds looped asymmetrically together, their heads emphasizing eyes and snouts in abrupt outlines.[[112]](#footnote-112) The Möðrufell panel fragments, probably from the early eleventh century, have only leafless scrolls and tendrils, such as may have accompanied the figures in Hjarðarholt, whereas the three intertwined animals on a bone mount in Årnes (Romsdal og Møre) could show us something of Heimdallr and Loki; the lion-rider holding snakes on a memorial stone in Hunnestad (Skåne) might give an impression of Hyrrokkin; the lion and bird juxtaposed in flight on the now-destroyed Cammin Casket might help us to visualize Óðinn with his valkyries and ravens.[[113]](#footnote-113) The colours are perhaps better imagined on the basis of the patron’s nickname, Óláfr *pái* (‘peacock’). This was a name bestowed on him either by his father at the age of twelve, according to *Laxdœla saga*, or by people in his adulthood, or, as seems most likely, by posterity in the eleventh century after his death.[[114]](#footnote-114) Implicit in his peacock name is Óláfr’s love of display. In his case this was perhaps visualized in the form of colours on ovals, eyes and filaments painted on carvings all over his new house.

The memorial images that inspired *Húsdrápa* have long been taken as a key to the words ‘hlaut innan svá minnum’ (st. ‘6’ and ‘9’). The meaning of this refrain is obscure, however. The verb *hljóta*, which primarily means ‘to receive by lot’, could be used impersonally with a meaning such as ‘to turn out’, so as to render ‘my memory of the interior has turned out thus’.[[115]](#footnote-115) But this refrain could be elliptical, a *klofastef* (‘split refrain’) with its missing words to be found in the last line of a stanza now lost.[[116]](#footnote-116) The strains imposed by treating the words ‘hlaut innan svá minnum’ as an entire phrase do not arise if we treat them as a *klofastef*. Accordingly, most scholars take the verb ‘hlaut’ as an auxiliary for the passive which is missing its subject and complement, as in ‘[The hall] was thus [adorned] within with [old] memorials’.[[117]](#footnote-117) In my turn, I propose to look for another subject. The title of this work and its surviving mythological character have led commentators to make the ‘house’ the subject of the refrain as if this were all on which Úlfr composed. Yet in the story in *Laxdœla saga*, as we have seen, he is said first to have made the poem on Óláfr and second on the stories in the pictures (ch. 29), a priority which is also clear in the first extant verse of *Húsdrápa*. In this way it is more likely that Óláfr is the missing subject of ‘hlaut innan svá minnum’. With a personal subject the verb ‘hlaut’ will mean that Óláfr either ‘got’ something or ‘got to do’ or ‘had to do’ something (if we assume an infinitive is the missing complement). Neither usage presents any difficulty in the verse of this period: Einarr *skálaglamm* (‘cup-tinkle’) Helgason, the Pindar of the Norse tenth century, follows both idioms when in one verse, speaking of his patron Earl Hákon of Norway, he says ‘hans mæti knák hljóta’ ‘I did get precious things from him’ (*Vellekla* 33) and in another, he says ‘hljóta munk at ausa’ ‘I shall have to bail’ (the ship of poetry, st. 3).[[118]](#footnote-118) The first construction seems to work better in the *Húsdrápa* refrain. Indeed the title itself can give us the missing object of ‘hlaut’: ‘[Óláfr] got [the house] with images like this within’. The advantage of this reading is that it includes not one but both subjects of Úlfr’s eulogy around the verb. If it is thought that the adverb ‘innan’ is now redundant, we can take it in its primary sense, ‘from within’ rather than ‘within’. This allows us to see Óláfr’s new house coming from Norway. This idiom can be seen in two ways: not only in the conventional obverse *fara út* (‘go out (west), to Iceland’) and *koma útan* (‘go (east) from Iceland’), the obverse of treating *inn* and *innan* as terms for Norway; but also in Snorri’s words when he says, for example, that when the Norwegians turned to St Óláfr on one occasion, ‘fóru þá margir menn innan ór Þrándheimi’‘many men then came out of Trøndelag from the east’).[[119]](#footnote-119) The *innan* of *Húsdrápa*’s refrain, if the context supports a Norwegian link, especially one with Trondheim, may be understood as ‘west’, i.e. ‘from Norway’. The refrain might then be read as ‘He [Óláfr] got it [the house] from Norway with images like this’. In both *Ragnarsdrápa* and *Haustlǫng* the poet appears to end by hailing both his patron and the shield on which he based his work.[[120]](#footnote-120) At the end of *Húsdrápa*, therefore, it seems likely that Úlfr completed his refrain with Óláfr’s name and a term for the house.

**Conclusion**

The concluding lines of Úlfr’s poem are now lost, although the first half of this stanza may be *Húsdrápa* ‘12’, a verse cited late in *Skáldskaparmál*:

Þar kømr á, en æri endr bark mærð af hendi

(ofrak svá) til sævar, sverðregns (lofi þegna). (vs. 303)

[There comes a river to the sea, while once again I have delivered renown

(thus I lift up the praise of thegns) for the herald of sword-rain.]

In this verse Úlfr describes his poem as a tide of water. Having begun with the ‘wave of the fjord’ (‘-fjarðar lá’, U) of Óðinn in stanza ‘1’ or just his ‘wave’ (‘lá’, RTW), somewhere in the middle (*Húsdrápa* ‘8’) he conceives of poetry moving to and fro ‘over my jaws’, as if the teeth were rocks under the tide (‘mér líða of hvapta’); finally he describes his poem flowing into the open sea in a shower of (sword-)rain.[[121]](#footnote-121) With these expressions, his verse echoes the sonorous conceits of Einarr skálaglamm. Einarr composed the *Vellekla* (‘Gold-dearth’) for Earl Hákon of Norway probably *c*. 990, not too long after the earl’s victory against the Danes in the battle of Hjǫrungavágr in *c*. 985.[[122]](#footnote-122) ‘The wholeness of Einarr’s vision’, Frank remarks, ‘takes the form of a hydrocycle’.[[123]](#footnote-123) In what can be deduced as the *Vellekla* proem, poetry is first the tide breaking on the shores of the fjords inside Norway (‘Kvasir’s blood’; the ‘surf of the yeast of the fellows of the fjord’s limb [: giants]’, st. 1); then water on a tidal reef (‘liquid of the rock of the guarding dwarves [: Suttungr’s threatened victims]’, st. 2); then the high seas as they swamp the ship’s sides (‘the flooding of War-God’s wine-boat’, st. 3); then the explosion of sea-spray around headlands (‘Rǫgnir’s [: Óðinn’s] wave surges’, ‘the wave of Óðrørir’s sea resounds against the flat rock of chants [: tongue]’, st. 5); finally, the mountain force swelling with rain (‘the wave of the mountain-Saxons’ Boðn [: one of Suttungr’s vats]’ as it ‘starts to swell’, st. 6).[[124]](#footnote-124) It is reasonable to suppose that Snorri would have quoted Úlfr’s poetry kennings more fully if Úlfr had composed any that matched those of Einarr in *Vellekla*. But the ‘hydrocycle’ that we do see in Úlfr’s kennings suggests that he was aware of Einarr’s innovation and wished to emulate it in *Húsdrápa*.

The problem is that *Vellekla* has been dated at *c*. 990, *Húsdrápa* as early as *c*. 978.[[125]](#footnote-125) At first the plausibility of the earlier date for *Húsdrápa* seems strengthened by a story about Úlfr Uggason which places him in the early 980s. In *Njáls saga* it is said that Úlfr lost an inheritance claim brought against him by Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson. When the plaintiff (fifth cousin of Járngerðr, Úlfr’s wife) faces the prospect of losing his suit for the property now held by Úlfr, Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi saves the day by challenging the poet to a duel.[[126]](#footnote-126) Úlfr backs down, humbled like the *parvenu* they seem to think he is. As the author of *Njáls saga* says, ‘Úlfr hlaut at greiða fé allt’ ‘Úlfr had to pay up the whole amount’ (ch. 60), perhaps alluding ironically to the refrain of *Húsdrápa*.[[127]](#footnote-127) This case would have gone to court before Gunnarr’s death in c. 990.[[128]](#footnote-128) However, there are problems with a date for *Húsdrápa* in the 980s or before. It is not clear that Kjartan Óláfsson was born as early as 970, as Einar Ólafur supposes, or why his marriage (ch. 44), shortly after the conversion in *c*. 1000, should take place as many as 15-22 years after that of his sister to the Norwegian (ch. 29).[[129]](#footnote-129) Although Einar Ólafur dates Þuríðr’s marriage to 978 on the basis of the ages of her sons by her second marriage, he has misgivings about the earlier chronology of *Laxdœla saga*.[[130]](#footnote-130) Úlfr is known to have been active up to the years *c*. 996-8, during Þangbrandr’s ill-fated mission to Iceland, when he is said to have composed a stanza in an oral correspondence with an anti-Christian zealot named Þorvaldr veili. Þorvaldr, portraying Úlfr as a protégé of Óðinn, asks him to join forces to kill the Christians; Úlfr, deriding Þorvaldr both as an amateur poet and as Þórr when this god is mocked by Óðinn on the wrong side of a fjord, cautiously declines.[[131]](#footnote-131) In these ways it is quite possible that the Hjarðarholt panels were finished, Þuríðr first married, and *Húsdrápa* composed, as late as *c*. 995: later, at any rate, than the circulation of *Vellekla* in which Úlfr could have made an attempt to imitate Einarr skálaglamm.

If we leave the poets and turn to their respective masters in *Laxdœla saga* (ch. 29), we see that Óláfr gets the wood for his house from Earl Hákon. After years of marriage, Óláfr tells his wife one day that he wants to go to Norway. Buying a ship from nearby he sails to Hordaland, where by chance a local landowner who has heard of him, Geirmundr gnýr, comes down and invites him to stay. Geirmundr is a retired viking and a retainer of Earl Hákon. As winter draws to an end, Óláfr reveals that he wants to get some timber. Geirmundr says that Hákon has the best forests, one of which will surely be placed at his disposal (‘þér mun sú innan handar’) if he visits the earl and asks him. Geirmundr is right: in the spring, when Óláfr frames the question after another winter’s stay, the earl instantly grants him the royal timber, ‘því at vér hyggjum, at oss sœki eigi heim hversdagliga slíkir menn af Íslandi’ ‘because in our opinion such men from Iceland don’t visit us every day’ (ch. 29). Hákon is here referring to Óláfr’s lineage, widely touted as royal since Óláfr came back from Ireland; also to his wealth, increased as it is by the gifts of the earl’s predecessors, Queen Gunnhildr and her son Haraldr *gráfeldr* (‘grey-cloak’) Eiríksson (chs. 21-2). From other sources the earl is known to have had these rivals killed in Denmark before taking over their power in Norway in *c*. 975. Indeed Óláfr’s allegedly warm friendship with Gunnhildr and her son might be read in the saga as his reason for approaching Earl Hákon by such roundabout means. Once they meet, however, Óláfr works his charm and Hákon presents him with an inlaid axe, an important treasure, before they part ‘með inum mesta kærleik’ ‘with the greatest affection’. When Óláfr makes ready to sail, he finds that Geirmundr has secretly sold up his lands in the meantime and moved his all goods aboard Óláfr’s ship; but Geirmundr is so rich that Óláfr takes him to Iceland anyway and invites him to stay. That summer work begins on the new hall with the carving of noble stories on panels, while the surly Geirmundr drifts about until he falls in love. Óláfr rejects the offer of marriage with Þuríðr that follows, but then ‘berr Geirmundr fé undir Þorgerði, til þess er hann næði ráðinu’ ‘Geirmundr proffered money secretly to Þorgerðr until he secured the marriage’. Óláfr lets it go ahead, still voicing doubts to Þorgerðr, whom he mocks three years later for her (and her father’s legendary) greed when Geirmundr runs off (ch. 30). But all the same Óláfr gives him a merchant ship. The wind drops and after two weeks’ lying off at anchor, Geirmundr is tricked when Þuríðr switches Fótbítr (‘Footbiter’), his beloved sword, with Gróa, their unfortunate daughter. Geirmundr curses her family with loss of its best man, sails off and drowns with all hands off Stad in Norway.

The last part is made up, for the author could not know how Geirmundr’s ship was lost if there were no survivors. The Norwegian’s name also seems fictitious, for Geirmundr is too much like Guðmundr (Sǫlmundarson), the name of Þuríðr’s second husband (ch. 31); nor is he introduced with a father or connections. Geirmundr might be in the narrative so that his sword Fótbítr may be used later to kill Kjartan Óláfsson (ch. 49), in keeping with his curse, but this plot needs none of the other details: his generosity towards Óláfr when he comes to Hordaland, the secrecy with which he leaves, the lack of his own ship, his reason for staying with Óláfr, or why he returns to Norway. Nor is it clear why Óláfr mocks Þorgerðr for taking Geirmundr’s money for their daughter, when he has taken money for the Norwegian’s passage to Iceland. In short, the story looks worked up to protect Óláfr’s reputation. The author blames Þorgerðr for her daughter’s husband, but if we focus on the plot of this story, rather than on the innocent motives attributed to Óláfr, it is he who chooses to bring home a retainer of Earl Hákon, invites him to stay and sanctions a match between him and their daughter. In outline it appears that Óláfr could have brought the Norwegian to Hjarðarholt as a trophy son-in-law, together with Earl Hákon’s timber, as part of the same project. It is tempting to believe that if ‘Geirmundr’ existed, he and the house were both put on show as evidence of a friendship between Óláfr and Earl Hákon of Norway.

In *Húsdrápa* the words ‘frægr’ for Heimdallr (st. ‘2’), ‘orðsæll’ for Þórr (st. ‘4’) and ‘víðfrægr’ for Óðinn (st. ‘6’) indicate Óláfr’s aim to be equally ‘renowned’ as a *goði* ‘divine representative chieftain’ to his people. In the saga records the audience he hopes to impress is made up of rich neighbours and other guests from all over Iceland, who contribute the ‘lof þegna’ ‘praise of thegns’ which Úlfr lifts up in the closing verse of *Húsdrápa*. Some years after the wedding, however, Óláfr is seen in *Laxdœla saga* showing off his house to the aged seer Gestr inn spaki. This occurs after Gestr’s reading of the four dreams of his kinswoman Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir (ch. 33). Gestr has come to stay with her family, for Ósvífr Helgason, Guðrún’s father, is his first cousin once removed. Perhaps he agrees to see the house at Hjarðarholt because he has twice declined an offer from Óláfr to stay there. His praise when he sees the panels is material rather than aesthetic: ‘kvað eigi þar fé til sparat bœjar þess’ ‘he said that no money had been spared on that farmstead’. He goes to the river with Óláfr escorting him personally, then lets slip a premonition of Kjartan’s early death. This story shows Óláfr using his beautiful panels to compete with Ósvífr, an aim which can also be inferred from their original construction, even from the composition of *Húsdrápa* itself. Ósvífr’s high-born kindred is given in ch. 33, from which it can be deduced that Óláfr is his third cousin once removed.[[132]](#footnote-132) Although he is introduced after the famous wedding in ch. 29, he must have been on its guest-list, though not mentioned there. Also omitted is the fact that Ósvífr had a brother, none other than the skald Einarr skálaglamm. Einarr is mentioned neither here nor elsewhere in *Laxdœla saga*. This is an odd omission, for the author probably knew *Egils saga*, in which Einarr is given as a friend of Egill Skalla-Grímsson, Óláfr’s father-in-law.[[133]](#footnote-133) The family relationships make it certain that Ósvífr was renowned locally as a brother of the retainer and leading skald of Earl Hákon. Traces of an imitation of Einarr’s ‘hydrocycle’ in *Húsdrápa* make it reasonable to suppose that Úlfr was hired to put Óláfr, rather than Ósvífr or his brother, on the map as Hákon’s man in Iceland.

If this was the glorious image of himself that Óláfr wished to broadcast in *Húsdrápa*, the cheerful style of Úlfr’s mythology so close to the millennial conversion of Iceland becomes easier to explain. His context militates against the grim portents of Ragnarǫk. Rather this poem is a rampant celebration of Norse gods sometimes at war, sometimes in marital aspect, such as we find in *Þórsdrápa* and other eulogies composed for Earl Hákon of Norway. In Óláfr, the pagan revivalism of Hákon’s decadent years seems thus to have crossed to western Iceland to flourish in flagrant disregard of the Christianity which was even then, in or before *c*. 995, working on the imagination of the poet of *Vǫluspá*. In contrast with the sublime ambitions of this poet, Úlfr’s job was to stoke the jealousies of a province. The sequence of his stories, as we have seen, is unknown, as is the form of the tapestries and painted carvings on which he based his *Húsdrápa*. The house cannot be reassembled, as some hope the poem can be, or indeed as the best scholars know that the most of the cross at Ruthwell has been. But if Úlfr’s aim was to commemorate a patron, as the saga says, then *Húsdrápa* shows that the house does survive after all, as a witness to the ascendancy of one cousin over another.

1. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1997). In the following quotations I treat Faulkes’ verse-lines properly as half-lines by setting out each pair as one full line with caesura: this I call a ‘line’, though I still number by the half-line. I contract forms in Faulkes, with *vilk* for *vil ek* and so on. ‘St.’ is for ‘stanza’, ‘vs.’ for ‘verse’. *Snorra Edda* MS abbreviations RTUW: R: *Codex Regius*, *c*. 1325, copied from a now-lost exemplar of *c*. 1250-1300 (GkS 2367 quarto, Royal Library, Copenhagen); T: *Codex Trajectinus*, *c*. 1600, copied from a now-lost exemplar of *c*. 1250-1300 (MS No. 1374, University Library, Utrecht); U: *Uppsala-Handskriften*, *c*. 1300 (DG 11, University Library, Uppsala); W: *Codex Wormianus*, *c*. 1340-50 (AM [Arnamagnaean] 242 fol., Arnamagnaean Institute, Copenhagen). I am endebted to Jane Roberts and James Graham-Campbell for reading drafts of this piece, also to the latter for my references to Scandinavian art. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 5 (Reykjavik, 1934), lix (an edition based on the complete but shortened text in Möðruvallabók (M)). Signe Horn Fuglesang, ‘II. Decorative Arts’, in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner, with Hugh Brigstocke (London and New York, 1996), s.v. ‘Viking Art’, pp. 512-34, esp. 514-27, at 517, and 521-4 (pictorial narrative art). See also her ‘Stylistic Groups in late Viking Art’, in *Anglo-Saxon and Viking Age Sculpture and its Context: Papers from the Collingwood Symposium on Insular Sculpture from 800 to 1066*, ed. James Lang, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 49 (Oxford, 1978), 205-16, esp. 205 and 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, 79: ‘bigger and better than anyone had seen before. Carved on the wood of the wainscoting, and likewise on the ceiling, were noble stories; the workmanship was so good that the place seemed much showier when the tapestries were not hung’. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. AM 162 E, fol. See *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, lxxvii-xxx. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, 80: ‘the wedding party was to take place in Hjarðarholt when winter had passed; this party was attended by huge numbers of people because building on the great hall was now finished. Present at the wedding was Úlfr Uggason who had just composed a eulogy about Óláfr Hǫskuldsson and all the stories painted on the great hall, and he performed it there at the wedding. This poem is called ‘Eulogy of the House’ and it is a good piece of work. Óláfr paid well for the poem’; M has *ort kvæði* (‘composed a poem’) for *nýorta drápu*, and *þær* (‘those [stories]’) for *allar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As in *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (henceforth *Skj*), 4 vols. [A I, II: diplomatic; B I, II: normalized] (Copenhagen, 1912-15), A I, 136-8, esp. 136; B I, 128-30, esp. 128, 1; and in *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen* [henceforth *Ska*] ed. E. A. Kock (Lund, 1946-9), I, 71-2, esp. 71, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (Oxford, 1982), pp. 46-7 (ch. 49). On this sequencing of stanzas, see Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, Studies in Northern Civilization 7 (Odense, 1994), 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, Islandica 42 (Ithaca and London, 1978), 42-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 19 (ch. 8): ‘that was when he struggled with Loki over the Brísing necklace. He is also called Wind-Shelter. Úlfr Uggason based a long passage on this tale when he composed Eulogy of the House; it is said there that they were in seal-shapes’. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 20 (ch. 16) and 168-9. Clive Tolley, ‘Heimdallr and the Myth of the Brísingamen in *Húsdrápa*’, *TijdSchrift voor Skandinavistiek* 17.1 (1996), 83-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Finnur Jónsson, ‘Kenningers ledomstilling og tmesis’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 49 (1933), 1-23, esp. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Johannes Fritzner, *Ordbog over det Gamle Norske Sprog*, 3 vols., plus a Supplementary 4th vol. (Kristiania [Oslo], 1886-96 and 1972) III, s.v. ‘Rein’. Finnur, ‘Kenningers ledomstilling og tmesis’, 13: ‘*ragna rein* ‘gudernes vej’ [the gods’ road]: Bivrost’; followed by Britt-Mari Näsström, *Fornskandinavisk religion: en grundbok* (Lund, 2001), pp. 130-1: ‘Den vise mäktige beskyddaren (= Heimdall) av gudarnas väg (= Bifrost)’ [‘The wise powerful protector of the gods’ road’]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Finnur, ‘Kenningers ledomstilling og tmesis’, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Alexander Johannesson, *Altisländisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern, 1956), p. 149. Kurt Schier, ‘Húsdrápa 2: Heimdall, Loki und die Meerniere’, in *Festgabe für Otto Höfler zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Helmut Birkhan and Otto Gschwantler (Vienna, 1976), pp. 577-88, esp. 578. Edith Marold, ‘Kosmogonische Mythen in der *Húsdrápa* des Úlfr Uggason’, in *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber: ein runder Knäuel, so rollt’ es uns leicht aus den Händen*, ed. Michael Dallapiazza, Olaf Hansen, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and Yvonne S. Bonnetain, Hesperides: Letterature e Culture Occidentali 12 (Trieste, 2000), 281-92, esp. 283, n. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Thomas Krömmelbein, *Skaldische Metaphorik: Studien zum Funktion der Kenningsprache in skaldischen Dichtungen des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts*, Hochschul-Produktionen Germanistik-Linguistik-Literaturwissenschaft 7 (Freiburg, 1983), 222 and 224-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Discussed in Schier, ‘Húsdrápa 2’, p. 578; favoured by Hans Kuhn, *Das Dróttkvætt* (Heidelberg, 1983), p. 296; rejected by Marold, ‘Kosmogonische Mythen in der *Húsdrápa*’, p. 283. ‘Trusty one’ is preferred to ‘defender’ in *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes II, 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, es. Gustav Neckel, rev. Hans Kuhn, 2 vols., 5th ed. (Heidelberg, 1983) I, 59-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Johannesson (*Altisländisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 153) connects OIce *værr* (‘freundlich, ruhig, angenehm’) formally with *várar* (‘feierliche versicherung’) and *Vár* (‘göttin des versprechen, treue’). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *The Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir*, ed. Richard North (Enfield Lock, 1997), pp. 4-5 (text 5/1-4) and 25-7 (note). Þjóðólfr’s two long lines, whose meaning is disputed, are *Fljótt bað foldar dróttinn* *Fárbauta mǫg vára* | *þekkiligr með þegnum* *þrymseilar hval deila*, which I now translate as ‘Swiftly the handsome lord of the land [: Óðinn] bade Fárbauti’s boy [: Loki] deal out the whale of the cracking rope of spring-times [: whale of the traces: plough-ox] among the thegns’. The scene is their serving up of Þjazi’s meal. See also Tolley, ‘Heimdallr and Brísingamen in *Húsdrápa*’, 93-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Fritzner, *Ordbog* I, s.v. ‘bregða’. Kurt Schier, ‘Húsdrápa 2’, pp. 579-81, esp. 580. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes II, 250. Marold, ‘Kosmogonische Mythen in der *Húsdrápa*’, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Marold, ‘Kosmogonische Mythen in der *Húsdrápa*’, 283-5, esp. 284: ‘the counsel-clever famed watchman of the gods takes the land away from the supremely sly son of Fárbauti at the *Singa*-stone’. Tmesis here was first rejected by E. A. Kock, in *Notationes Norrœnæ*, 2 vols. (Lund, 1923-41), § 240; in § 1952, however, Kock emends *rein at* to *reinar*, as in *ragna reinar vári*, a phrase which has much the same meaning as the kenning of Finnur Jónsson’s which he opposed (as in *Ska* I, 71,2). Schier follows Kock with \**reinar* in ‘Húsdrápa 2’, p. 581. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Kurt Schier, ‘Die Erdschöpfung aus dem Urmeer und die Kosmogonie der Völuspá’, in *Märchen, Mythos, Dichtung: Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag Friedrich von der Leyens*, ed. Hans Kuhn and Kurt Schier (Munich, 1963), pp. 303-34. See also his: ‘Húsdrápa 2’, pp. 583-6; and ‘Die Húsdrápa von Úlfr Uggason und die bildliche Überlieferung altnordischer Mythen’, in *Minnjar og Menntir. Afmælisrit helgað Kristjáni Eldjárn, 6 desember 1976*, ed. Guðni Kolbeinsson (Reykjavik, 1976), pp. 425-43, esp. 427-33. Accepted, as an allusion to a myth of creation as male pseudo-creation, in Clunies Ross, *Prolongued Echoes*, 173-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Marold, ‘Kosmogonische Mythen in der *Húsdrápa*’, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Schier, ‘Die Húsdrápa von Úlfr Uggason’, p. 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Marold, ‘Kosmogonische Mythen in der *Húsdrápa*’, 284-8, esp. 285 (‘eastern European narratives’) and n. 18 (‘mythological combinations’). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Georges Dumézil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, ed. Einar Haugen (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973). For a criticism of Dumézil’s presentation of Norse mythology, see R. I. Page, ‘Dumézil Revisited’, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 20 (1978-9), 49-69, esp. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Haustlǫng*, ed. North, pp. 6-7 and 40-1 (n. to 9/6-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Birger Pering, *Heimdall* (Lund, 1941), p. 227. Tolley, ‘Heimdallr and Brísingamen in *Húsdrápa*’, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Pering, *Heimdall*, pp. 217-19. For an illustration (of 1700), see James Graham-Campbell, *The Viking Age Gold and* *Silver of Scotand (850-1150)* (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 180 (p. 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Audrey Meaney, ‘Driftseeds and the Brísingamen’, *Folklore* 94 (1983), 33-9. Tolley, ‘Heimdallr and Brísingamen in *Húsdrápa*’, 89-90. Näsström, *Fornskandinavisk religion*, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik* (Bonn and Leipzig, 1921), pp. 229-32 (§ 87. o: ‘Die stärkste Gruppe der Goldkenningar’). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Schier, ‘Húsdrápa 2’, p. 583: ‘Vielleicht wurde das Grundwort *nýra* “Niere” bestimmt durch die Art der Abbildung in der Schnitzerei von Hjarðarholt, so dass sich die Kenning unmittelbar aus der Ausschauung erklären liess’. Accepted, however, in *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes II, 299 (s.v. ‘hafnýra’). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Krömmelbein, *Skaldische Metaphorik*, 222-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Discussed in Schier, ‘Húsdrápa 2’, p. 584. See Tolley, ‘Heimdallr and Brísingamen in *Húsdrápa*’, 82 (‘The ready in counsel, famous guardian of the territory of the gods turns against the monstrously sly son of Fárbauti over the Gleaming Stone’) and 87-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* I, 44, 53, *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* 39, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 19 (ch. 8). Margaret Clunies Ross, ‘Why Skaði Laughed: Comic Seriousness in Old Norse Mythic Narrative’, *Mål og Minne* (1989), 1-14. Richard North, ‘Loki’s Gender, or why Skaði laughed’, in *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, ed. Karin E. Olsen and Luuk A. J. R. Houwen, (Louvain, 2001), pp. 141-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Pering, *Heimdall*, p. 219. Schier, ‘Húsdrápa 2’, p. 584. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The Irish were there first, according to Ari’s *Íslendingabók* (ch. 1), in *Íslendingabók–Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Íslenzk fornrit 1 (Reykjavik, 1986), 5. On the suppression of Irish ancestry in *Laxdœla saga*, in all but the heroes, see Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, ‘Norge og Irland i *Laxdœla saga*’, in *At Fortælle Historien: Studier i den gamle nordiske Litteratur. Telling History: Studies in Norse Literature*, Hesperides: Letterature e Culture Occidentali 16 (Trieste, 2001), 71-80, esp. 74-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Joseph Vendryes, *Lexique Étymologique de l’Irlandais Ancien: RS* (Dublin and Paris, 1974), s.v. ‘sén’: ‘signe, présage, d’où bénédiction, bonheur… bénédiction de Dieu’; s.v. also ‘sigen’. *Signum* was borrowed into Irish again as *sigen*, as in *sigen na crochi* (‘sign of the cross’). *A Pronouncing and Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language: Gaelic-English, English-Gaelic*, ed. Malcolm Maclennan (Edinburgh, 1925), s.v. ‘seun’. *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, ed. Niall Ó Dónaill and rev. Tómas de Bhaldraithe (Baile Átha Cliath [Dublin], 1977), s.v. ‘séan’. Compare OIce *bjannak* (‘blessing’), from Irish *beannacht*. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Edda II*, ed. Dronke, pp. 318-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Íslendingabók–Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob, 46 (*Sturlubók*, ch. 9; also in *Hauksbók*, ch. 10): ‘who was the most moral of any heathen men of whose case men had knowledge. In his final illness he had himself carried into the sun’s rays and commended himself into the hands of the god who made the sun; he had also lived as cleanly as those Christian men who are the most moral’. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, 51 (end of ch. 20) and 57-9 (ch. 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Fritzner, *Ordbog* I, s.v. ‘bregða’: ‘5. forandre, omdanne noget (*e-u*) saa at det bliver af anden Beskaffenhed, andet Udseende end det havde før’ (5. change, alter something (*einhverju*) so that it becomes of another nature, another appearance from what it had before’. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 45, 48 and 59. See also Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi, of everyone said *at hann brygði sér hvárki við sár né við bana*, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavik, 1954), 189: ‘that he changed his composure neither at wounds nor at his death’ (ch. 77). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 16-17 (ch. 4: vs. 54: RW (attributed to Bragi) and U; omitted in T). *Sér* for *sézk* is furthermore found in *Haustlǫng* 14; ed. North, pp. 8 and 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Heimdallr’s *ráð* is discussed in Tolley, ‘Heimdallr and Brísingamen in *Húsdrápa*’, 84, as comparable with the everlasting OE *ræd* (properly ‘benefit’) with Hama, a distant Anglo-Saxon analogue in *Beowulf* 1197-1201, is shown to gain in taking the *Brosinga mene* away from Eormanric, its cunning Gothic owner. See also Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 22 (Cambridge, 1997), 196-8. More sombrely Krömmelbein (*Skaldische Metaphorik*, p. 224) connects *ráðgegninn* with Heimdallr’s fine hearing in his role ‘als ein endzeitlich programmierter Hüter’ (‘as a guardian programmed for the End Time’). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger, 3 vols. (Christiania [Oslo], 1860-68) I, 275-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *Skj* B I, 1-4, esp. 3. For a recent text and discussion, see Karin Olsen, ‘Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa*: a Monstrous Poem’, in *Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Olsen and Houwen, pp. 123-39, esp. 131-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. J. R[ichard]. J. North, ‘Words in context: an investigation into the meanings of early English words by comparison of vocabulary and narrative themes in Old English and Old Norse poetry’, unpublished PhD dissertation, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 217-24; *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, pp. 221-26, esp. 222-3 and n. 70. Accepted in *The Poetic Edda II*, ed. Dronke, pp. 360-1 (n. to *Lokasenna* 20) and in Tolley, ‘Heimdallr and Brísingamen in *Húsdrápa*’, 85-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *The Poetic Edda: Volume II: Mythological Poems*, ed., trans. and comm. Ursula Dronke (Oxford, 1997), pp. 337 (text) and 360-1 (note). My translation is adapted from that of Dronke. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn I, 113. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 19 (ch. 8). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, p. 29 (ch. 35). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Hugo Pipping, ‘Eddastudier I’, *Studier i nordisk filologi* 16 (1925), 7-52, esp. 8-19; ‘Eddastudier II’, *Studier i nordisk filologi* 17 (1926), 120-30. On his nature, see Snorri’s summary in *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, pp. 25-6 (ch. 27). Pering interprets Heimdallr as a ram, in *Heimdallr*, pp. 248-54, esp. 254: ‘Er ist derjenige, “der zu Hause umhergeht”’ (‘he is the one “who walks around the house”’). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *The Poetic Edda II*, ed. Dronke, pp. 11-12 and 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *The Poetic Edda II*, ed. Dronke, pp. 7 and 162-73 and 202-8, esp. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Translation from *The Poetic Edda II*, ed. Dronke, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *Rígsþula* 3/1-2, 5/1-2, 17/1-2, 33/1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Tolley, ‘Heimdallr and Brísingamen in *Húsdrápa*’, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. John Lindow, ‘Old Icelandic *þáttr*: Early Usage and Semantic History’, *Scripta Islandica: Isländska sällskapets årsbok* 29 (1978), 3-44, esp. 22-4 and 24, n. 19: ‘One might even imagine that the *þættir* are the stories behind the artwork in Óláfr pái’s hall’. Lindow dates the poem to 985. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. *Skj* B I, 128, 2: *kynni ek mærðar þáttum*: ‘det gör jeg bekendt i et digterafsnit’ [‘I make this known in a section of the poem’]. Krömmelbein adjusts to the plural, in *Skaldische Metaphorik*, p. 222: ‘ich mache dies in den Abschnitten des Preisgedichtes bekannt’. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 50: ‘on these stories most poets have composed and taken various themes from them’ (ch. 42). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Signe Horn Fuglesang, ‘Early Viking Art’, in *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, Series altera, Vol. II, ed. Hjalmar Torp and J. Rasmus Brandt (Oslo, 1982), 125-73, esp. 170-1 and figs. 40-1. David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, 2nd ed. (London, 1980), pp. 82-3 and pl. XIXa. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Known by his horn, the ‘Gjallarhorn’, in a Doomsday scene: *The British Academy Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture in England: General Introduction and Volume II*, ed. Rosemary Cramp and R. N. Bailey (Oxford, 1988), pp. 100-109, esp. 100-102 (ill. 288-308). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. For metallic bosses on the Oseberg woodcarvings, see Wilson and Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, pls. XIV and XV(a) and (c). The word *fagr* means ‘shining’ (hence my ‘dazzling’). For the sun: ‘fagrahvél’ ‘shining-wheel’, in the *Þulur* (*Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 133 (vs. 517/2). For Sigurðr’s treasure: ‘Grana fagrbyrðr’(his horse) ‘Grani’s shining burden’, in *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 60, vs. 188. For a shield: ‘fagr botn randar’ ‘rim’s shining base’, in Bragi’s *Ragnarsdrápa* (*Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 51 (vs. 158). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Kurt Schier, ‘Zur Problematik der Beziehung zwischen Bilddetail und Bildganzen’, in *Medieval Iconography and Narrative: a Symposium: Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium organized by the Centre for the Study of Vernacular Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Flemming G. Andersen, Esther Nyholm, Marianne Powell and Flemming Talbo Stubkjær (Odense, 1980), pp. 167-82, esp. 168-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, pp. 44-5 (ch. 28). For Bragi’s stanzas, see Olsen, ‘Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa*’, pp. 127-31. The remaining skalds are +lvir hnúfa (great-uncle of Egill Skalla-Grímsson), Gamli gnæfaðarskáld and Eysteinn Valdason, respectively at *Skj* B I, 6, 131 and 132. Discussed in Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, ‘Thor’s Fishing Expedition’, in *At Fortælle Historien*, pp. 59-70, esp. 62-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Gabriel Gustafson and Fredrik Nordin, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, with drawings by Olof Sörling and photographs by Harald Faith-Ell, rev. Sune Lindqvist, 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1941) I, 18-24, esp. 22-4 (§ 19) and ill. 311 (Ardre VIII). Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: the Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London, 1970), pls. 26.b-c. For Gosforth, see *The British Academy Corpus*, ed. Cramp and Bailey, pp. 108-9 (ill. 332). For discussion and reservations, see Signe Horn Fuglesang, ‘Viking Art’, in *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (New York and London, 1993), pp. 694-700, esp. 697: ‘There has been, and still exists, a philological propensity to link haphazardly surviving pictures with equally fortuitously transmitted texts, disregarding elementary rules of methodological control’. See also John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in late Norse Heathendom*, with an *Appendix* by Maria Elena Ruggerini Philologia 1 (Rome, 1994), pp. 17-18 and figs. 6 (Altuna), 7 (the Gosforth ‘Fishing Stone’) and 13 (Hørdum). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Olsen, ‘Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa*’, p. 124. Roberta Frank argues that ‘the repeated image of a circle or shield rim’ is Bragi’s device to link the four (extant) episodes of *Ragnarsdrápa*, in *Old Norse Court Poetry*, pp. 108-110, esp. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *Egils saga*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 259 (ch. 78). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Edith Marold, *Kenningkunst. Ein Beitrag zu einer Poetik der Skaldendichtung*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der germanischen Völker, n.s. 80 (Berlin, 1983), 109-110. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 50 (ch. 42). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 3 (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 57). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. How about *fangboði forns Litar flotna*, ‘wrestling-challenger of the old Litr of sailors’? ‘Litr’, as a smaller person the crew kick around a ship, may be a woman; with *forn*, the old woman whom Þórr challenges to a wrestle is Elli, *kerling ein gǫmul*, in Snorri’s tale of Útgarða-Loki. See *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, p. 42: ‘an old crone’ (ch. 46). There is not much *gravitas* here. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. So Krömmelbein, *Skaldische Metaphorik*, 81-3, who suggests that Þórr wrestles with Litr first. A god wrestling a dwarf? [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Russell Poole, but not Faulkes (ed., I, 137), reads *Þjokkvaxinn kvezk…þiklingr* in U, in *Viking Poems on War and Peace: a Study in Skaldic Narrative* (Toronto, 1991), pp. 52-3: ‘The stoutly grown thick creature [giant] says he sees extremely great danger in Þórr’s heavy and mighty catch’. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Schier, ‘Die Húsdrápa von Úlfr Uggason’, p. 428: ‘Man hat den Eindruck, in der anschaulichen Darstellung in diesen Strophen die Bildvorlage besonders deutlich zu erkennen’. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 165-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, pp. 110-12, esp. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, I, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Krömmelbein, *Skaldische Metaphorik*, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. On the possible debt of *Vǫluspá* to Revelation, see Richard North, ‘End Time and the date of *Vǫluspá*: two models of conversion’ (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Sørensen, ‘Thor’s Fishing Expedition’, pp. 66-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Schier, ‘Die Húsdrápa von Úlfr Uggason’, pp. 434-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Marold, ‘Kosmogonische Mythen in der *Húsdrápa*’, 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Margaret Clunies Ross refrains from placing this story in mythic time, in *Prolonged Echoes*, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Ed. Daphne L. Davidson, ‘Earl Hákon and his Poets’ (unpubl. D.Phil. dissertation, Oxford University, 1983). Cited respectfully by Snorri in a sequence of 19 stanzas, with two more probably part of it (vs. 44 and 53), in *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 15 (vs. 44), 16 (vs. 43), 25-30 (vs. 73-91) and 171-2 (note). *Skj* B I, 139-44. Discussed as aetiology for Þórr’s hammer, in Roberta Frank, ‘Hand Tools and Power Tools in Eilífr’s *Þórsdrápa*’, in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, ed. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd W. Weber (Odense, 1986), pp. 94-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 25 (ch. 18: vs. 72). [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, pp. 45-8 (ch. 49). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Cf. Snorri’s quotation of *Skírnismál*’s final stanza at the end of his story of Freyr in *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, p. 31 (ch. 37). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Edda II*, ed. Dronke, p. 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Wilson and Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, pp. 82-3 and pl. XIXa. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Edda II*, ed. Dronke, pp. 14-15 and 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 9 (v. 12) and 85 (vs. 308). *Skj* B I, 69, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. In defence of this join, it might be said that the initial consonant of the non-alliterating penultimate word in ‘2/4’ seems to trigger the alliteration in ‘2/5-6’: that is, ‘*m*ǫg’ leads on to ‘*M*óðǫflugr ræðr *m*œðra *m*ǫgr hafnýra fǫgru’. This is also the effect of ‘*s*onar’ in ‘8/4’ with ‘Þar hykk *s*igrunni *s*vinnum *s*ylgs valkyrjur fylgja’ in ‘9/1-2’.. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The word *sylgs* is more often taken with *heilags tafns*, so as to make ‘blood of the holy sacrifice’: *Skj* B I, 129, 8 (‘blod’); E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 67-70, esp. 69; Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, p. 270 (‘ “the drink of the holy carrion”’, as the funeral feast); *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes II, 409 (‘sylgr’). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Þórr is held to be jealous because Hyrrokkin produced ‘the sort of cosmic disturbance that normally characterized his own actions’, in Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 17 (ch. 4): *Hyrrokkin dó fyrri* (‘Hyrrokkin died earlier’). *Skj* B I, 35; *Ska* I, 74, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. *Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, p. 46 (ch. 49). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. To become Baldr’s servant in the next world, in the view of Näsström, *Fornskandinavisk religion*, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Olsen, ‘Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa*’, pp. 127-8; *Haustlǫng*, ed. North, pp. 2 and 14-15 (st. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 51 (vs. 158); Olsen, ‘Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa*’, p. 136 (‘b’). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. *Haustlǫng*, ed. North, pp. 8 and 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. On the date and conception of *Sigurðardrápa*, see Fidjestøl, *Det Norrøne Fyrstediktet*, pp. 92-3, and Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp. 50-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Five others survive. *Skj* B I, 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Richard North, ‘*goð geyja*: the Limits of Humour in Old Norse-Icelandic Paganism’, *Quaestio: Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic*, 1 (Cambridge, 2000), 1-22, esp. 11-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Helmut de Boor, ‘Die religiöse Sprache der Vǫluspá und verwandter Denkmäler’, *Deutsche Islandforschung 1930*, 1. Kultur (Breslau, 1930), 68-142, esp. 84; repr. In his *Kleine Schriften*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1964) I, 209-83, esp. 229. Schier, ‘Die Húsdrápa von Úlfr Uggason’, pp. 439-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (Oxford, 1991), p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Axel Åkerblom, ‘Bruket av historiskt presens i den tidigare isländske skaldediktningen (till omkr. 1100)’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 33, N.F. 29 (1917), 293-31, esp. 296-8. Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp. 24-56, esp. 51-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Emended to *sviðna* by Åkerblom, in order to exclude the present historic from this graphic poem, in his ‘Bruket av historiskt presens’, 296. On Þjóðólfr’s being more detached from shield-images than Bragi, see Hallvard Lie, ‘Billedbeskrivende dikt’, in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder* (Copenhagen, 1956) I, 543-4, esp. 544: ‘synes ikke å ha vært ledet av en så klar kunstnerisk idé under sin formgivning’. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. *Gotlands Bildsteine*, rev. Lindqvist I, 22-4 (§ 11). *The British Academy Corpus*, ed. Cramp and Bailey, pp. 102-3 (ill. 289, 291). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Richard N. Bailey, ‘Scandinavian Myth on Viking-period Stone Sculpture in England’, in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, *The 11th International Saga Conference, 2-7 July 2000*, ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sidney, 2000), pp. 15-23, esp. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Signe Horn Fuglesang, ‘The Axehead from Mammen and the Mammen Style’, in *Mammen: Grav, Kunst og Samfund i Vikingetid*, ed. Mette Iversen, with Ulf Näsman and Jens Vellev, Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter 28 (Århus, 1991), 83-107, esp. 85 and 97-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Illustrated in Fuglesang, ‘Mammen Style’, 86-95 (‘Mammen style: a handlist’), esp. 87 (5c: Hunnestad lion-rider), 89 (13: Möðrufell panels), 90 (15: Cammin Casket) and 91 (17: Årnes bone mount). [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. *Laxdœla saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, 39 (ch. 16). *Íslendingabók–Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob, 143 (*Sturlubók*, ch. 105). The peacock skeleton and feathers found in the Gokstad ship-burial show that this creature was known to some in SE Norway in the middle of the ninth century. See Torleif Sjøvold, *Osebergfunnet og de andre vikingskipsfunn* (Oslo, 1957), pp. 54 and 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Krömmelbein, *Skaldische Metaphorik*, 225: ‘So ist (mir) die Erinnerung (des Innern)’. Likewise *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*, trans. Anthony Faulkes (London, 1987), pp. 68 and 74: ‘within have appeared these motifs’. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes II, 313: ‘hljóta’. Snorri defines the *klofastef* in *Háttatal*, ed. Faulkes, p. 30 (vs. 70). [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. *Lexikon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguæ Septentrionalis*, ed. Sveinbjörn Egilsson, rev., Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1931), sv. ‘hljóta’: ‘[Hallen] blev således indvendig [prydet] med [gamle] minder’. So Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, p. 69: ‘Thus was the hall adorned with pictures?’; Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, p. 112: ‘[the hall] was thus adorned within with memorials’; Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, p. 55: ‘Inside thus, with old stories, was [the hall decorated]’; *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 159 (vs. 14); Marold, ‘Kosmogonische Mythen in der *Húsdrápa*’, p. 289: ‘Es (das Haus) erhielt auf der Innenseite auch die (alten) Sagen(darstellungen)’. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 62 (vs. 197) and 10 (vs. 18). *Skj* B I, 117 and 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: an Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 52-4. *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla II*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 2nd ed., Íslenzk fornrit 27 (Reykjavik, 1979), 72 (*Óláfs saga Helga*, ch. 56). [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes I, 51 (vs. 158): ‘Ræs gáfumk reiðar mána Ragnarr ok fjǫlð sagna’ ‘He gave me the moon of King Rær’s chariot, did Ragnarr, along with a heap of stories’. *Haustlǫng*, ed. North, p. 10 (st. 20; cf. st. 13): ‘Baugs þák bifum fáða bifkleif at Þórleifi’ ‘I have received the coloured cliff of the shield-rim, painted with tales, from Þórleifr’. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Noted by Carol J. Clover, ‘Skaldic Sensibility’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 93 (1978), 63-81, esp. 70-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (London, 1970), pp. 358-40, esp. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, pp. 60-62, esp. 60. See also Foote and Wilson, *The Viking Achievement*, pp. 365-6; and Davidson, ‘Earl Hákon and his Poets’, pp. 186-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Davidson, ‘Earl Hákon and his Poets’, pp. 160-1: *Kvasis dreyra* and *fyrða fjarðleggjar brim dreggjar* (*Vellekla* 1); *bergs geymilá dverga* (st. 2); *Her-Týs austr vín-Gnóðar* (st. 3); *eisar vágr Rǫgnis* and *þýtr Óðrøris alda hafs við fles galdra* (st. 5); *Boðnar bára berg-Saxa tér vaxa* (st. 6). On reconstructing parts of *Vellekla*, see Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det Norrøne Fyrstediktet* (Øvre-Ervik, 1982), pp. 96-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, lviii-lix (*c*. 978); so Sørensen, ‘Thor’s Fishing Expedition’, p. 61. Schier, ‘Die Húsdrápa von Úlfr Uggason’, p. 426 (*c*. 980). Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, pp. 104-5 (*c*. 985). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. *Íslendingabók–Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob, Genealogical Tables III.a and XXXV. Teitr Ketilbjarnarson, Ásgrímr’s maternal grandfather, was the grandson of Þórðr skeggi, whose brother Ørlygi gamli was the grandfather of Þorgerðr Valþjófsdóttir, Járngerðr’s paternal grandmother. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavik, 1954), 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, lxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, l-li. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, lix: ‘ekki er þess að dyljast, að mörg fyrri ártölin eru lítið annað en sennilegar ágizkunir’ [‘it cannot be denied that many of the earlier dates are little but likely guesses’]. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. For textual elucidation, see *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, 262-3 (ch. 102). For interpretation, see North, ‘*goð geyja*: the Limits of Humour’, 20-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, Genealogical Tables I, II.a, III.a and IV. Ósvífr’s great-grandfather Bjǫrn the Easterner was the brother of Unnr the Deep-Minded (or Deeply-Wealthy), whose grand-daughter Þorgerðr Þórsteinsdóttir was Óláfr’s paternal grandmother. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. *Laxdœla Saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur, xxvii. *Egils saga*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 268-73 (ch. 78). [↑](#footnote-ref-133)