

## SOURCES AND ANALOGUES OF RAGNARS SAGA LOÐBRÓKAR

In his contribution to Old Norse Literature and Mythology (1969), the symposium dedicated to Lee M. Hollander, Edgar C. Polomé, the editor of the volume,<sup>1</sup> revives the suggestion made long ago by Jöran Sahlgren<sup>2</sup> that the name Lóðurr, mentioned in stanza 18 of Völuspá, derives from an earlier form \*Lopverr, the second component of which would be Old Norse verr, "man, husband", while the first component would be related to Gothic liudan, "to grow", and to the Old Norse past participle loðinn, meaning "hairy, shaggy, woolly, covered with thick grass". Sahlgren proposed \*Lopverr as a male counterpart to the fertility goddess Ludhgodha, Lopkona, whose names (attested by Swedish place-names) share this same first component, while their second components mean respectively "goddess" and "woman". In response to Sahlgren's suggestion, E.O.G. Turville-Petre, in his Myth and Religion of the North (1964) pointed out "the difficulty that an Icelandic scald of the twelfth century [Haukr Valdísarson, in Íslendingadrápa, str.1] rimes Lóðurr with glóða, showing that, for him, the root vowels were identical".<sup>3</sup> Polomé, however, who is aware of this difficulty (though he does not refer specifically to Turville-Petre / in this context), has assembled sufficient evidence for regarding it as a minor one. In particular, he points out that the interpretation of Lóðurr as a fertility god fits in well with the physiological qualities which, according to Völuspá, he grants to man; lá gaf Lóðurr / ok litu góða, says stanza 18 of the poem. Litir góðir appears to mean "healthy colouring", and lá, while it may mean "appearance, mien", can perhaps more

reasonably be translated as "hair". If I read Polomé correctly, he accepts Sahlgren's view that the form loðvR found in the relevant part of the Codex Regius should be normalized not to Lóðurr in order to provide the long first syllable required by the metre, but to Lobverr; he believes that the reduction of \*Lopverr to \*Loðvrr postdated the composition of Völuspá, that is, occurred after 950, and that while loss of the vowel of the second syllable in a word such as Lobverr does not necessarily entail compensatory lengthening of the vowel of the first component, such lengthening may have been assisted in the case of Lobverr by the influence of words such as lóð ("produce of the land") and lóða ("in heat"), both of which have associations of fertility. Thus developed the form Lóð(urr) which the twelfth-century scald was able to rhyme with glóð(a). Most interestingly, Polomé finds the name Lóðurr < \*Lopverr etymologically related to that of Liber, the Italian god of growth and vegetation, who came to be identified with his closest equivalent in the Greek Pantheon, Bacchus or Dionysus, the god of vegetation and especially of the vine-culture.

As far as I know, no one has previously drawn attention to the close similarity in meaning between the ideas conveyed by the different names \*Lopverr ("hairy man") and Loðbrók ("hairy breeks"). The semantic closeness of the two names becomes obvious when it is borne in mind that Nils Lid,<sup>4</sup> who has been followed in this respect by Jan de Vries, has linked the former name to the primitive custom of wearing plants at fertility-rituals, but Polomé does not refer to Lid or to the relevant part of de Vries's Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte.<sup>5</sup> Now the name (or nickname) Loðbrók, which is

found in connection with the hero of Ragnars saga loðbrókar, has never been satisfactorily explained.<sup>6</sup> The main purpose of this paper is to suggest that a recognition of the close connection between the names Lóðurr <<sup>\*</sup>Lobverr and Loðbrók may help to provide with an otherwise barely discernible unity the events of the major Scandinavian accounts of Ragnarr loðbrók and his sons — particularly Ragnars saga<sup>7</sup> itself and Book IX of Saxo's Gesta Danorum<sup>8</sup> — and may also help to elucidate some hitherto unexplained features of the traditions relating to Ragnarr loðbrók, such as the adoption of the name Loðbrók in the first place, the fact that Loðbrók is referred to as female in the Maeshowe runic inscription,<sup>9</sup> and the presence of a vinlaukr ("wine-leek") and a trémaðr ("tree-man, wooden man") in the first and last chapters of Ragnars saga respectively.

From the arguments outlined above, Polomé concludes that "Lóðurr, bestower of beautiful complexion and hair, appears in the Germanic North as the counterpart to the Italic Liber".<sup>10</sup> The god Liber is invoked by name in the opening lines of Virgil's first Georgic, where he is linked with, among other deities, Ceres, the goddess of vegetation; the woodland gods known as the Fauni, who were represented as part human and part animal; and Pan, who was originally the Greek god of woods and shepherds, but who came to be largely identified with the Italian Faunus, and who was represented with the legs of a goat. The worship of Liber is described in Virgil's second Georgic in a passage of great interest in the present context; here he is designated as Bacchus.

nec non Ausonii, Troia gens missa, coloni  
 versibus incomptis ludunt risuque soluto,  
 oraque corticibus sumunt horrenda cavatis,  
 et te, Bacche, vocant per carmina læta, tibi que  
 oscilla ex alta suspendunt mollia pinu.  
 hinc omnis largo pubescit vinea fetu,  
 complentur vallesque cavæ saltusque profundi  
 et quocumque deus circum caput egit honestum.<sup>11</sup>

(Georgics II, 385-92)

"The Italian settlers, moreover, a race sent from Troy, indulge in wild dances and unrestrained laughter, and put on awesome masks of hollowed bark; they call to you, Bacchus, with joyful songs, and hang small oscillating masks from the tall pine-tree in your honour. As a result every vineyard grows ripe with plentiful fruit; the hollow valleys and deep glades are filled with produce, as indeed is every place towards which the god has turned his handsome face".

If Lóðurr < \*Lopverr was indeed the Scandinavian equivalent of the Italian god Liber, and if his attributes and the manner of his worship were at all comparable to what Virgil here describes, it is easy to see how all that is conveyed by the word loðbrók could have become combined at an early stage with the associations of the name \*Lopverr. Liber was associated with such hairy-legged creatures as fauns and the god Pan, and a tree hung with a mask turning its face with the wind might well look uncannily like a human being, while the needles of the pine-tree — the tree mentioned by Virgil and one of the commonest trees in Scandinavia —

would give the human so simulated a hairy appearance. It is tempting to suggest that the concept of the trémaðr<sup>12</sup> may have had its origin in practices of the kind described by Virgil in the passage just quoted.

If we may trust Snorri's prose Edda, which includes Völuspá among its sources and often elaborates on it, it is in a context of humanized trees, or plants, that Lóðurr is mentioned in Völuspá. This poem as a whole, of course, describes the beginning and end of the world as viewed by a prophetess, and the stanzas relevant here (17 and 18) describe the creation of the first man and woman; they tell how three of the gods, Óðinn, Hœnir, and Lóðurr (the second and third of whom<sup>13</sup> are differently designated by Snorri) found Askr and Embla á landi (or "on land", implying perhaps that they had been washed ashore) and in a weak, inanimate state (lítt megandi, örloglaus). The gods then supplied them with qualities which they lacked: Óðinn gave them breath (and); Hœnir provided them with óðr, the divine spark or soul; and Lóðurr, finally, gave them lá ... ok litu góða, as already noted. Referring to the state in which they were found, Snorri describes these two beings unambiguously as trees<sup>14</sup>, and there is no doubt, as Nordal points out in his edition of Völuspá,<sup>15</sup> that the name of Askr, at least, is that of a tree — the ash. After briefly discussing the possibility that Embla's name may be related to a word meaning "elm", Nordal seems to accept Sperber's suggestion that it corresponds to the Greek word αμπελός, meaning "a vine" — a suggestion which, as Polomé hints,<sup>16</sup> is of great relevance to his own suggestion that Lóðurr corresponds to the wine-god Liber. Nordal also points out

the interesting coincidence that Askr and Embla have the same initials as Adam and Eve, who are of course — though he does not mention this — the first wearers of leafy costumes according to the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Now, according to de Vries's Heroic Song and Heroic Legend (1963),<sup>17</sup> conceptions of how the world and humankind were first created were basically much the same in many primitive societies, both within and outside the "Indo-European" area. Initiation-rituals were of great importance in such societies, symbolizing as they did the passage of a young man at the age of puberty through the death of childhood into the new life of adulthood. Perfect models for symbols of this kind of rebirth were found in creation-myths, which frequently represented organized life as arising out of chaos, the latter being often symbolized by monsters. Old Norse mythology is, of course, no exception in this respect. Although Völuspá does not overemphasize the element of primæval chaos in its account of the creation, Snorra Edda, drawing on a passage in Grímnismál<sup>18</sup> which is closely paralleled in Vafþrúðnismál,<sup>19</sup> records the doctrine that, in Ursula Dronke's words, "the physical universe is created out of a death, out of the corpse of the giant Ymir, killed by the gods."<sup>20</sup> In the initiation-ritual, then, as de Vries imagines it, the young man was often confronted with an artificially-constructed monster over which he must in some way triumph. The heroic nature of the triumph meant that this and other elements of the ritual became absorbed into heroic songs and legends as these developed in different societies. This, in de Vries's view, explains the international distribution of what he calls "the

21  
pattern of an heroic life"; while the sexual implications of the ritual explain why the winning of a maiden so often follows the slaying of a monster in heroic literature.

The attempts of various scholars to establish a pattern for the so-called international heroic biography have been instructively reviewed by Alan Dundes in his Study of Folklore (1965)<sup>22</sup> and, most recently, by Tomás Ó Cathasaigh in his edition of the Old Irish Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt (1977). Ó Cathasaigh gives cogent reasons for regarding de Vries's formulation of the pattern as preferable to any other, finding it neither over-rigid nor over-generalized.<sup>23</sup> J. de Vries sets up a sequence of ten items, numbered I-X in Roman figures, and gives examples of each item from many different traditions. Where necessary, he gives variant motifs, designated by the letters A, B, etc., under the heading of a particular item. I shall now attempt a summary analysis of Book IX of Saxo's Gesta Danorum and the 1824b text of Ragnars saga in the light of de Vries's formulation of the pattern. These are the longest and fullest accounts of Ragnarr loðbrók and his sons in Scandinavian tradition, and once they have been analysed in relation to the pattern it will be relatively easy to discuss other relevant accounts, Scandinavian and otherwise, in relation to it, though space will not allow me to do so here. I am encouraged to undertake this analysis for at least two reasons: if de Vries is correct, in some instances at least, in his view that the pattern has its origin primarily in creation-myths and secondarily in initiation-rituals, then his theory would find support in the case of Ragnars saga firstly in the link I have tried to establish

here between the name loðbrók and that of the creation-god Lóðurr, and secondly in the interesting fact, not hitherto mentioned, that a verse quoted in Ragnars saga emphasizes that it was at the age of fifteen — the age of majority in medieval Norway — that Ragnarr won the maiden Þóra as a result of slaying a monstrous serpent.<sup>24</sup>

Since, as will shortly appear, the two accounts analysed below show so many features of the international heroic biography as characterized by de Vries, and at times seem to fit his version of the pattern so neatly, it is perhaps surprising that he does not mention the story of Ragnarr loðbrók at all in his Heroic Song and Heroic Legend, and hardly does so in his earlier study of the "hero-pattern" characteristic of folk-tales.<sup>25</sup> This is probably due to the international scope of both these studies; the author seems to have thought that Völsunga saga and its sources would lend themselves more readily to comparison with non-Scandinavian examples of the pattern than the less well-known Ragnars saga. It should however be noted here that Völsunga saga immediately precedes Ragnars saga in MS Ny kgl. saml. 1824b and is closely related to it.<sup>26</sup> In the present analysis I shall use de Vries's numbering and lettering, mentioning variant motifs where relevant, but only where relevant. In the case of Ragnars saga I shall use the term "hero" to refer not only to Ragnarr himself, the formal hero of the narrative, but also to its heroine, Ragnarr's second wife Áslaug (also called Kráka or Randalín), the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, the hero and heroine of Völsunga saga. This use of the term is acceptable according to the important qualification involving an actual as opposed to a formal hero which Axel Olrik

makes to the law of concentration on a central character in his various writings on the epic laws of folk-narrative.<sup>27</sup> Olrik in fact mentions Áslaug as an example of "the actual character who finally has our sympathies", as opposed to Ragnarr, "the character who is the object of formal concentration".<sup>28</sup>

#### I. The begetting of the hero

A. The mother is a virgin, who ... has extra-marital relations with the hero's father.

This is the case with Áslaug's mother Brynhildr, if we may believe what she says in chapter 29 of Völsunga saga, where she refers to Sigurðr, "er ek vann eida a fiallenu, ok er hann minn frumverr", before instructing Heimir to bring up Áslaug, her daughter by Sigurðr. At no stage are Sigurðr and Brynhildr married to each other, although they twice (VS chs. 22 and 25) plight their troth; Sigurðr is tricked into marrying Guðrún Gjúkadóttir (VS ch. 28) and Brynhildr into marrying Gunnarr Gjúkason (ch. 29).

#### II. The birth of a hero

A. It takes place in an unnatural way.

Whether unnatural or not, the circumstances of Áslaug's birth are certainly obscure. Sigurðr and Brynhildr first meet on Hindarfjall in chapters 21-2 of Völsunga saga, and the passage quoted from chapter 29 under I, above, suggests that it was there they had the union which led to Áslaug's conception. Anne Holtmark, however, implies that in her view the conception had its origin in the house of Heimir, where Sigurðr and Brynhildr meet in chapters 24-5 of Völsunga saga.<sup>30</sup> Brynhildr's instructions about Áslaug's upbringing, referred to above under I, are made "on the

31  
same day" as that in which Sigurðr has completed a visit to Brynhildr lasting three nights, during which he, disguised as Gunnarr, has shared her bed with a drawn sword between himself and her. It is unlikely, for obvious reasons, that this encounter gave rise to the conception, though Brynhildr later (VS, ch. 31) implies to Gunnarr that Sigurðr betrayed Gunnarr's trust while sleeping with her on this occasion. Considerations of this kind, and the ambiguity of Brynhildr's professed loyalty to Gunnarr after she discovers that it was Sigurðr who slept with her in Gunnarr's semblance (VS, ch. 31), led Adolf Wechsler to observe: "Deshalb ist Aslög nicht die leibliche Tochter Brynhildens und Sigurds".  
32

### III. The youth of the hero is threatened

This is generally true of Regnerus in Saxo and of Aslaug in Ragnars saga, though not for the specific reasons mentioned by de Vries under variant A (i.e. exposure by one or other of the hero's parents).

In Saxo (Liber IX. III), Regnerus is the son of Siwardus Ring, who has the support of the Scanians and Zealanders in succeeding to the throne of Denmark, but is opposed by his cousin Ringo, master of Jutland, who tries to seize the throne during Siwardus's absence abroad. The Zealand supporters of Siwardus proclaim his son Regnerus as king "when he was scarcely dragged out of his cradle",  
33  
but fear being outnumbered by the enemy. Regnerus advises pretended reconciliation with the enemy as a temporary measure, and his advice is accepted and much admired. As his safety is feared for in Denmark, he is sent to Norway to be

brought up.

D. In Greek legend, various heroes are brought up by a mythical figure; e.g. by Chiron: Achilles, Aeneas, etc.

Heimir, who brings up Áslaug in Volsunga saga (ch. 29) and Ragnars saga (ch. 1) is perhaps more of a legendary than a mythical figure, if such distinctions must be insisted upon,<sup>34</sup> but he at least has mythical associations through being the brother-in-law of Brynhildr, a former valkyrie.

C. ... the child is found by (a) shepherds or (b) fishermen

In chapter 1 of Ragnars saga, Heimir fears for the safety of the three-year old Áslaug after hearing that Sigurðr and Brynhildr are dead. He hides her with some treasure in a skilfully-made harp, which he opens only to wash the girl and feed her with a vinlaukr,<sup>in Norway</sup> and journeys with her until he lodges<sup>at Spangarheiðr, the farm</sup> of Áki and Gríma. These two kill Heimir for his riches, and bring up Áslaug as their own daughter, calling her Kráka and making her work for them. One of her jobs, it later emerges (ch. 5), is to mind their sheep and goats, and Áki is presumably also a fisherman, since Áslaug-Kráka obtains a trout-net from him in order to fulfil Ragnarr's request to visit him "neither clad nor unclad".<sup>35</sup>

Attention has recently been drawn to classical parallels to Áslaug's early history which involve the recognition that Áki is a fisherman,<sup>36</sup> and to the fact that what is told of Sigurðr's early childhood in Piðriks saga is comparable to what is told of Áslaug's in the Faroese ballad of Brynhild.<sup>37</sup>

#### IV. The way in which the hero is brought up

A. The hero reveals his strength, courage, or other

particular features at a very early age.

As shown above under III, Regnerus in Saxo's account (IX.III) shows remarkable intelligence when scarcely out of his cradle in the advice he gives to his father's supporters when they fear the superior strength of the Jutlanders. His age at the time of his earliest exploits is not given, but it is evidently "soon after"<sup>38</sup> being sent to Norway for his upbringing that he succeeds to his father's throne. "At this time"<sup>39</sup> (IX. IV, 1-6) his paternal grandfather, king of the Norwegians, is slain by Fró, king of Sweden, and Regnerus, returning to Norway, is helped to avenge his grandfather by the amazon Lathgertha. He marries Lathgertha after killing a bear and a dog with which she attempts to protect herself from his advances. By her he has two daughters and a son, Fridlevus. Three years later he divorces Lathgertha and desires Thora, daughter of Heróthus, king of the Swedes. The exploit by which he wins her is noted under V and VI below, but it may be noted here that it is from a nurse (a nutrice)<sup>40</sup> that he receives his protective clothing for combating Thora's serpents; this may be intended to imply that he was relatively young at the time.

In Ragners saga (ch. 3), Ragnarr, son of Sigurðr hringr, king of Denmark, slays at the age of fifteen the serpent encircling the bower of Þóra, daughter of Herruðr, a jarl in Gautland. He keeps his identity secret, and when Þóra asks him his name and his business he replies with a verse, half of which may be quoted:

Hętt hefi ek leyfdv life.

lit favgr kona vitra.

va ek at folldar fiske.

xv gamall minv.<sup>41</sup>

In chapter 5 of Ragnars saga, Áslaug-Krása shows great intelligence (mikit vit)<sup>42</sup> at what is presumably still a young age in the way she responds to the riddling-conditions imposed on her by Ragnarr. She is to visit him "neither clad nor unclad, neither fed nor unfed, neither alone nor accompanied by man",<sup>43</sup> and fulfils these conditions by wearing nothing but a net under her flowing hair, by allowing her lips to smell of a leek she has tasted, and by taking a dog with her.

V. The hero often acquires invulnerability

In Saxo (IX. IV, 6-8), Regnerus protects himself with a woollen cloak and some hairy thigh-pieces from the two serpents reared by Thora, daughter of Herothus, whom Regnerus woos in preference to his first wife Lathgertha. He first strengthens the costume by soaking it in water and allowing it to freeze. After he has slain the serpents, Herothus gives him the nickname Lothbrog.

In the saga (ch. 3), Ragnarr protects himself from the snake encircling the bower of Þóra, daughter of Herruðr, with hairy breeches and a fur cloak, which he has prepared for the purpose by having them boiled in pitch. Later (ch. 15), when he rashly decides to invade England with only two merchant-ships, his second wife Áslaug-Raðdalín gives him a protective shirt of hair in repayment for a gold-embroidered shift which had belonged to Þóra and which Ragnarr had given to Áslaug-Krása (ch. 6) after Þóra's death (ch. 4). When captured and thrown into a snake-pit

by King Ellia of England Ragnarr remains unharmed until the shirt is forcibly removed.

Although the motif of the snake-pit is found in Saxo's account (IX. IV, 38-9), that of the protective garment does not occur there in connection with it.

VI. One of the most common heroic deeds is the fight with a dragon or another monster

In Saxo (IX. IV, 4-8), Regnerus slays the serpents raised by Thora, which, as a result of being fed daily on an ox-carcase, have grown to the extent of becoming a public nuisance. The enormous size and pestilential breath of both snakes are emphasized.

In the saga (chs. 2-3), Ragnarr slays the snake which Þóra had laid on her store of gold, which had then increased in bulk, though the snake itself grew so much that its head and tail met as it encircled Þóra's bower, and it required an ox for each meal. As he kills it, Ragnarr is protected by his costume from its gushing blood (cf. V, above).

VII. The hero wins a maiden, usually after overcoming great dangers

In Saxo (IX. IV, 2-3), Regnerus wins Lathgertha after killing a bear and a dog which she has placed at the door of her dwelling to protect her. The children of this marriage are noted under IV, above. After divorcing Lathgertha (IX.IV,4), Regnerus later (IX.IV,8) wins Þóra as a result of slaying the serpents as noted under V and VI, above. By her he has the sons Rathbarthus, Dunwatus, Sywardus, Biornus, Agnerus and Ivarus. Later still, after mention has briefly been made (IX.IV, 17) of his wife

Suanlogha, the mother of his sons Regnaldus, Withsercus, and Ericus, Regnerus seduces the daughter of Heabernus (IX.IV, 18-19; 26), gaining access to her carefully guarded quarters by disguising himself as a woman. By her he has the son Ubbo.

In the saga (chs. 3-4), Ragnarr wins Þóra after being identified as the slayer of the snake described under VI, above, by the discovery of his spear-point in its body. By her he has the sons Eirekr and Agnarr. Later (chs. 4-6), after Þóra's death, he eventually wins Aslaug-Kráka after she has put various difficulties in his way, including a dog which Ragnarr's followers kill when it bites the hand he stretches out to her in greeting. By her he has the sons Ivarr beinlauss, Björn járnsíða, Hvítserkr hvati, and Rognvaldr.

#### VIII. The hero makes an expedition to the Underworld

In Saxo (IX.IV, 22-5), Regnerus leads an expedition to Biarmia, the inhabitants of which have caused by magic the death of many of his followers through exposure to abnormal weather and disease. Regnerus, the conqueror of Rome, almost suffers the humiliation of defeat in Biarmia once its king has joined forces against him with Matullus, prince of Finmarchia, though he eventually defeats both parties by means of an ambush. In Orvar-Odds saga, which Halvdan Koht calls "the typical Viking saga", and which is comparable in many ways to Ragnars saga, the hero experiences difficulties of much the same kind as Regnerus in Bjarmaland and Finnmark, including exceptionally severe winds caused by Lappish magic. Koht has compared the supernatural adventures of Orvar-Oddr in these north-eastern regions with those of Odysseus in the cave of the Cyclops,

which Robert Graves takes together with other adventures of Ulysses as "metaphors for the death which he evaded", and for "the <sup>47</sup> Underworld".

The world of the dead was often depicted as a realm of serpents in Scandinavian tradition, a notion which, according to Ursula Dronke, need not be of exclusively Christian origin. <sup>48</sup> It is obviously significant, then, that both in Saxo's account (IX.IV, 38-9) and the saga (ch. 15) the hero dies in a snake-pit. The motif, noted under V, above, of the protective garment given to Ragnarr by his wife, which does not occur in Saxo, may be compared with that of the thread given by Ariadne to Theseus so that, after slaying the Minotaur, he can find his way safely out of the Cretan labyrinth, which de Vries regards as symbolic of the realm of the <sup>49</sup> dead.

IX. When the hero is banished in his youth he returns later and is victorious over his enemies. In some cases he has to leave the realm again which he has won with such difficulty.

In Saxo (IX.IV, 4), Regnerus is victorious over the Jutlanders, who had endangered his safety as a child (IX.III) by opposing his father's accession to the throne, so that he was sent in his own interests to Norway. The Jutes ally themselves with the Scanians (IX.IV, 9-11) and support Haraldus against Regnerus as a rival claimant to the throne. Regnerus defeats Haraldus with the help of his divorced wife Lathgertha, who still loves him; later (IX.IV, 15) he drives him into Germany. Later still (IX.IV, 26-8), he suppresses a rebellious attempt on the throne by his son Ubbe, killing Ubbe's grandfather Hesbernus, who had encouraged the

rebellion. He checks (IX.IV,36-7) another attempt on the throne by Haraldus, who is then converted to Christianity at Mainz by Louis the Pious and introduces the new religion to Denmark, though he reverts to paganism after Regnerus, a lifelong heathen, has once again defeated him.

In the saga (chs. 1, 6, 9), Aslaug eventually wins recognition as the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr and consequently a suitable wife for Ragnarr, who had thought of leaving her to marry Ingibjörg, the daughter of king Eysteinn of Sweden. She had earlier suffered years of ill-treatment in the course of her upbringing by the peasant couple, Áki and Gríma, whom she punishes with a curse for the murder of Heimir, her foster-father, when she was a child. Lukman has recently compared her fortunes with those of the Danish princess Ingeborg, wife of king Philip Augustus of France.<sup>50</sup>

#### X. The death of the hero

Heroes often die young ... In many cases their death is miraculous.

Neither in Saxo's account nor in the saga are we told the hero's age at the time of his death. Saxo (IX.IV, 38-9) hints at the untimeliness of his death, however, by seeing it as a punishment for his disparagement of Christianity, and as a lesson in the turns and changes of fortune. As already pointed out under V, above, the motif of the protective garment, which occurs in the relevant part of the saga, is not found in Saxo. After the snakes have gnawed at Regnerus's liver and approached his heart, he recites in order all the deeds of his life and says: "if the porkers were

aware of the boar's punishment, they would break into the sty and release him".<sup>51</sup> Suspecting that this may mean Regnerus's sons are still alive, Ella orders the snakes to be removed, but too late.

In the saga (ch. 15), Ragnarr's decision to invade England with only two merchant-ships, which is motivated by his wish to emulate his sons, is more what would be expected of a rash, youthful hero than of an experienced warrior. After his protective shirt has been removed he says, in the snake-pit: "the porkers would grunt if they knew what the old one was suffering",<sup>52</sup> and recites two verses before dying, in one of which he speaks of his battles and emphasizes the unexpected nature of his death, while in the other he repeats the hint about the probable reaction of his sons. Ella, suspecting and anxious to confirm that it is indeed Ragnarr who has been his victim, sends messengers to Denmark with news of his death.

These two accounts date from different periods of the thirteenth century. The names Ragnarr and Loðbrók are not found in combination with each other, or certainly designating the same person, until Ari's Islendingabók, dating from between 1122 and 1133.<sup>53</sup> The name Ragnarr corresponds to that of Reginheri, a Viking leader who according to contemporary Frankish sources sacked Paris in 845. He has been regarded as a historical model for Ragnarr loðbrók, partly because of his name and partly because certain events recorded in connection with him by ninth-century chroniclers are comparable to events related by Saxo in connection with Regnerus Lothbrog — notably the latter's adventures on his expedition to

54

Biarmia (see under VIII, above). The name Loðbrók, on the other hand, corresponds to the one occurring in the designation of a Viking leader by William of Jumieges in c. 1070 as Bier costae ferreae, Lotbroci regis filius. At much the same time, Adam of Bremen speaks of another Viking leader, Inguar filius lodparchi. These two figures, who may reasonably be regarded as models for Björn járnsíða and Ivarr, sons of Ragnarr loðbrók, may also be traced back to the historical Vikings Berno and Inwære who according to contemporary chronicles were active in the ninth century.

55

The main argument of this paper is that the reputation of the historical Reginheri was such that stories about him came to be associated with a heroic biographical pattern deriving ultimately from the myth of the creation of the first man and woman by (among others) Lóðurr, but more immediately from initiation-rituals in which this myth was re-enacted — with the use of, among other things, shaggy trouserwear. As a result of this association, Reginheri acquired the nickname Loðbrók. If Björn and Inwære were historically the sons of Reginheri, then the latter's acquisition of the nickname through association with the pattern may be assumed to have taken place by c. 1070, when William of Jumieges and Adam of Bremen were both writing. If not, then the patronymic designation of these two Vikings (which may or may not have a historical basis) by whatever name lies behind the forms Lotbrocus / Lodparchus must be assumed to have pre-dated Reginheri's acquisition of the nickname Loðbrók and to have assisted it by virtue of its similarity to the nickname. This latter assumption,

which does not, of course, rule out Reginheri's association with a pattern of the kind outlined above; has the disadvantage of leaving unexplained the ultimate origin(s) of the names Lotbrocus and Lodparchus, as used by William and Adam respectively. The acceptability of the former assumption, on the other hand, depends on the acceptability of the main argument of this paper, and I should welcome discussion of it.

To sum up, I would stress that the argument I have offered here has considerable advantages. As hinted earlier, it provides the life of Ragnarr loðbrók as described by Saxo and in Ragnars saga with a unity which is otherwise difficult to find. It helps to explain several hitherto unexplained features of these accounts — the nickname Loðbrók, Ragnarr's emphasis in the saga on his age at the time of his winning Þóra by slaying the serpent, and the presence of a trémaðr in the final chapter of the saga. If both accounts, as I suggest, are essentially relatively late realizations of an ancient myth of the creation of the first man and woman, then this may help to explain why, in Ragnars saga, almost as much weight is given to Aslaug as to Ragnarr in the heroic biographical pattern, and why, in Saxo's account, so much attention is paid to Reginheri's relations with women, including his disguising himself as one (see under VII, above). Here it may be remembered that Sahlgren's proposed derivation for Lóðurr depends on the relatively well-attested existence of a goddess Lopkona; she, or the first created woman, or indeed both, might well have been celebrated in fertility-rituals by loðbrók-clad figures who were either female or represented as such. This would

help to explain the fact that the Maeshowe runic inscription refers to Loðbrók as female, and Storm's suggestion that this was the name of the mother of certain Vikings who came to be regarded as sons of Ragnarr loðbrók.<sup>56</sup> The pattern outlined in this paper also has the advantage of providing a convenient framework for discussing the various sources and analogues of Ragnars saga, by no means all of which have been mentioned here.

I should like to return, finally, to the first chapter of Ragnars saga, where it is told how Heimir opens the harp in which he has concealed Áslaug, his foster-daughter, in order to wash her and to feed her with a vinlaukr, "the nature of which", according to the saga, "is that a man may live on it for a long time, even though he has no other food".<sup>57</sup> As noted <sup>under IV</sup> above, a leek (laukr) is also mentioned later in the saga (ch. 5) in connection with Áslaug's fulfilment of Ragnarr's second riddling-condition "neither fed nor unfed".<sup>58</sup> The meaning of the word vinlaukr seems to be uncertain; Fritzner glosses it simply as "a kind of grass or plant".<sup>59</sup> Now in Völuspá's account of the creation, it is said that, at the very beginning of the world (before the creation of man): pá var grund gróin/grœnum lauki (stanza 4). Nordal explains the word laukr here as meaning either "grass" in general, or as conveying the idea "that nothing but leeks grew on the earth in the golden age, they being the best of grass"<sup>60</sup> and cites Fritzner's quotation (under laukr) from a Danish folk-ballad: der gror ikke andet Græs end Løg, der rinder ikke andet Vand end Vin.<sup>61</sup> "No other grass grows there than leek, not other water runs there than wine". This implies that if leeks were considered an ideal for

of grass, wine was considered an ideal form of water. The two ideas are neatly combined in the word vinlaukr, which may be taken as conveying an ideal form of sustenance. If Lóðurr, a god of creation, was indeed the Scandinavian counterpart of the wine-god Liber, as Polomé suggests, and if Ragnars saga may indeed be regarded as a realization of a creation-myth with Áslaug representing the first created woman, what more appropriate nourishment for her can be imagined?

1. Edgar C. Polomé, "Some Comments on Völuspá, Stanzas 17-18", in Edgar C. Polomé, ed., Old Norse Literature and Mythology: a Symposium (1969), 265-90.
2. J. Sahlgren, "Förbjudna namn. V. Luggude, Ludgo och Luggavi", Namn och Bygd, VI (1918), 28-40.
3. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North (1964), 143.
4. Niels Lid, Religionshistorie. Nordisk Kultur XXVI (1942), 118.
5. Jan de Vries, Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte II. Zweite ... Auflage (1957), 335.
6. For a review of earlier explanations, see R.W. McTurk, "Ragnarr loðbrók in the Irish Annals?" in Bo Almqvist and David Greene, eds., Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress ... 1973 (1976), 93-123, p. 94, n. 14, and add Niels Lukman's explanation in his "Ragnarr loðbrók, Sigifrid, and the Saints of Flanders", Medieval Scandinavia, 9 (1976), 7-50, see pp. 20-1.
7. As edited by Magnus Olsen, Volsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur (1906-08).
8. As edited by J. Olrik and H. Ræder, Saxonis Gesta Danorum, I-II (1931-57).
9. For discussion of the relevant inscription see McTurk (1976), esp. p. 94, n. 14, and pp. 103-4
10. See Polomé, 289-90.
11. Quoted from H. Rushton Fairclough, ed. and trans., Virgil, I. The Loeb Classical Library. Revised edition (1956), 142.
12. For a discussion of this concept, with references, see D.E. ed. and trans., Martin Clarke, The Hávamál ... (1923), 107.

13. Snorri in fact refers to them only collectively in this context, as the sons of Borr. These, however, he had earlier named individually as Óðinn, Víli and Vé. See Finnur Jónsson, ed., Edda Snorra Sturlusonar (1931), 14, ll. 3-5; 16, l. 15.
14. See Jónsson, 16, l. 15.
15. See Sigurður Nordal, ed., B.S. Benedikz and John McKinnell, trans., Vǫluspá, Durham and St Andrews Medieval Texts, 1 (1978), 33-4.
16. See Polomé, 290, n. 97.
17. Jan de Vries, Heroic Song and Heroic Legend, trans. by B.J. Timmer (Oxford, 1963; originally published in Holland, 1959).
18. See Jónsson, 16, and Gustav Neckel, ed., H. Kuhn, rev., Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius (1962), 65, stanzas 40-1.
19. See Neckel, 48, stanzas 20-1.
20. See Ursula Dronke, "Beowulf and Ragnarök", Saga-Book XVII, 4 (1969), 302-25; see p. 307.
21. See chapter 11 of de Vries (1963), 210-26.
22. See Alan Dundes, The Study of Folklore (1965), 142-4.
23. See Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt (1977), 2-8.
24. See Olsen, 195.
25. See Jan de Vries, Betrachtungen zum Märchen besonders in seinem Verhältnis zu Heldensage und Mythos, FF Communications, 150 (1954), 124.
26. For a discussion of this relationship (among others) see R.W. McTurk, "The Relationship of Ragnars saga loðbrókar to Piðriks saga af Bern" in Sjöttíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni,

20. júlí 1977, II (1977), 568-85, with references.
27. For references to these see Dundés, 129-30, and 131, n. 1.
28. See Dundes, 139-40.
29. See Olsen, 68-9.
30. See Anne Holtmark, "Heroic Poetry and Legendary Sagas", Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies 1965 (1966), 9-21, p. 16.
31. See Olsen, 68, 11. 27-8.
32. See Adolf Wechsler, "Die Sage von Aslög der Tochter Sigurds, und Versuch ihrer Deutung". Verhandlungen des Vereins für Kunst und Alterthum von Ulm. N. R. 7 (1875), 10-14, p.12.
33. See Olrik and Røder, I, 250, 1. 24.
34. For a recent argument that "legend and myth cannot always be separated in practice", see G.S. Kirk, Myth: its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures (1971), 31-4.
35. See Olsen, 124, 11. 8-9 and 29-31.
36. See Lukman, pp. 9 and 30.
37. See McTurk (1977), 584.
38. See Olrik and Røder, I, 251, 1. 18.
39. See Olrik and Røder, I, 251, 1. 22.
40. See Olrik and Røder, I, 252, 11. 30-1.
41. See Olsen, 119, 11. 1-4.
42. See Olsen, 125, 1. 4.
43. See Olsen, 124, 11. 8-11.
44. See Halvdan Koht, The Old Norse Sagas, The American-Scandinavian Foundation (1931), 147.
45. See R.C. Boer, ed., Orvar-Odds saga (1888), 37, 11. 21-2.

46. See Koht, 147.
47. See Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, Volume Two, Penguin Books (1957), 366.
48. See Ursula Dronke, ed. and trans., The Poetic Edda, Volume I, Heroic Poems (1969), 66.
49. See de Vries (1963), 223.
50. See Lukman, 15-16.
51. See Olrik and Ræder, I, 262, ll. 14-15.
52. See Olsen, 158, ll. 15-16.
53. See McTurk (1976), 94-5.
54. See McTurk (1976), 95-6.
55. See McTurk (1976), 106-9.
56. See the references given under note 9, above.
57. See Olsen, 112, ll. 2-4.
58. See Olsen, 124-5.
59. See under vinlaukr in Johan Fritzner, Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog, I-IV, 4. utgave (1973).
60. See Nordal, 15-16.
61. See under laukr in Fritzner.