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OTTAR AND ANGANTYR IN HYNDLULJÓÐ

Some recent interpretations

Hyndluljóð contains of a fragmentary dialogue between the goddess Freyja and the giantess Hyndla, a broad genealogy and a vision, called *Völuspá inn skamma* "the short Prophecy of the Sibyl", describing the fates of the gods from the fall of Baldr until Ragnarök. The intrigue of the poem is built on a contest about Ottar's lineage between him and a certain Angantyr. Freyja asks Ottar for help by seeking help of Hyndla.

The manuscript is only represented in *Flateyjarbók*, written in the 15th century and until 1657 belonging to a family on the West coast of Iceland. It has been suggested that the genealogy of Ottar was connected with this family, although there are no certain evidences. There are divergent opinions about Hyndluljóð's authenticity as an Eddic poem: is it a real poem or is it a pastiche in the Eddic form, or a mixture of both, where the copyists honour a contemporary by elaborating a noble pedigree to him?

There are also various hypotheses about the interpretation of Hyndluljóð, all of them focusing the contest between Ottar and Angantyr. Gurevitch declares that Ottar's genealogy must be seen in relation to the Law of Gulathing, where any man, who would claim his land as an *oðal*, i. e. belonging to him as his own property, must enumerate five male ancestors of his father's side to get his right.

Another hypothesis assumes that the poem is connected with the ideology of the king. One variant suggested by J. Fleck is build on the rare - yet existing - cases of ultimogeniture i. e. when the youngest son inherits the property. This is exemplified in *Ríghula*, where *Kónr*, the youngest son, becomes the king and furthermore in *Grimnismál*, where the younger of the brothers seizes the power. In Hyndluljóð Fleck suggests that the nickname *heimski* means "the one who is staying at home", not the usual translation "the stupid one". Ottar has to defend his birth-

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right with a knowledge-criterion against Angantyr's demand of primogeniture, and is helped by Freyja and the giantess.

Gro Steinsland claims that Hyndluljóð belongs to the Eddic poems, which illustrate the holy wedding between a god and a giantess, the recurrent topic of the ideology of the mythical kings in the North. Unlike most scholars Steinsland connects *Völuspá inn skamma* with the content of Hyndluljóð, where the giantess Hyndla acts as a *völva*, when she presents Ottar's pedigree. The genealogic strings of *Völuspá inn skamma* is thus connected with the origin of the royal dynasties as a result of the holy marriage between the king and the giantess.

Other suggestions of interpretation

The contest between Ottar and Angantyr could be apprehended as *mannjafnaðr*, a popular form of contest between men at the great festival in the king's hall, which included the laying of a wager. These types of contest were serious matters of honour, sometimes of life or death. The intrigue of "Hyndla" displays, however, that Ottar's difficulties are of two kinds: the wager with Angantyr about *vala málm* and to get his legacy, *födurleifr*. In both cases the knowledge of his ancestors is important to him; it seems, however, that the matter of

inheritance is more emphasized than the wager. Nevertheless, Ottar has to combat Angantyr by enumeration his ancestors in order to get his heritage and he had furthermore set a sum of gold as wager. Now the problems really begins, since we have to ask: who is Ottar? who is then Angantyr and what are his rights of demanding Ottar's legacy? For what reason is all this mythological apparatus called into the story? And finally, can such a simple business as a dispute of inheritance inspire the creation of a whole poem?

I would suggest another type of interpretation, leaving the possible historical evidences, but observing the structures of literary motifs connected with the names of Ottar and Angantyr. The name Ottar belongs to several persons in Old Norse literature, a o the king called Ottar Vendelkráka, described in *Ynglingatál*, in *Heimskringla*, Ari's genealogy and *Historia*

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Norwegia. Like most of the other persons acting in these chronicles, Ottar appears as an apocryphal character, although the archeological finds in Vendel from the 700th century, especially the Mound of Ottar, cast a weak glimpse of reality over his person.

Angantyr/Egil

Ottar is appearing in *Beowulf*, where he is called Othere, son of Ongentheow. Furthermore is the name Ongentheow, according to some scholars, identic with Angantyr. In the mentioned Nordic chronicles Ottar's father is called Egil. Moreover, Ari gives Egil the surname Vendelkráka. When comparing the names related to each other we find the following:

<u>Tjodolf</u>	<u>Snorri</u>	<u>Ari</u>	<u>Beowulf</u>
Egil father of Ottar	Egil the father of Ottar Vendelkráka	Egil Vendelkráka father of Ottar	Ongentheow father of Othere.

Beowulf depicts Ongentheow's heroic death against his foes, the Geatic heroes Eofor(boar) and Vulf(wolf) in Ravenswood. The West Nordic sources have another versions about Egil's death:

<u>Tjodolf</u>	<u>Snorri</u>	<u>Hist.Norw.</u>	<u>Ari</u>
Killed by Tunne	after along battle with the thrall Tunne killed by a bull	Killed by a bull(taurus)	a boar

Tjodolf's version describes how Egil flees from his land for the power of Tunne, combined by the power of iðtuns eykr, "the giants beast", by farra trióna, "the snout of a boar (or a bull)", and by skidlauss hæfis hjörr, "the tossing sword without a sheath". These are all kenningar, connoting an attack either of a boar or of a bull. Snorri and *Historia Norwegia* suggest a bull, Ari a boar, whereas the older source, *Ynglingatál* gives possibilities for both. Tunne means "tooth" and could imply the tusk of the boar. Farra trióna could hardly mean anything but "the snout of a boar", whereas iðtuns eykr "the snout of the giant" hints at the osseous riding animal of the Vikings, the wolf. These kenningar could thus be connected again

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with *Beowulf* from the eighth century: "there are no the killer"

names are later "Boar" - the snake still "Worm". Egil's fight is then identical with Ongentheow as a literary motif and there are also other indications in the poem:

Beowulf

Scyldingas: Ongentheow, Othere and Eadgils

Ynglingatal

Egil, belonging to Skilfinga nio, "the clan of Skilfing", whose offspring are Ottar and Adils.

This clan, Scyldingas or "Skilfingar" is mentioned in a number of sources, among other by Snorri as *Skelfir hét einn herkonungur ok er hans att kólluð Skilfinga att*. Furthermore, the name is mentioned twice in *Hyndluljóð* in connection with Ottar's genealogy. (11, 16).

We can now summarize the following similarities between Ongentheow and Egil:

1. They belong to the Scyldingas/Skilfingar.
2. Their sons are called Othere/Ottar and Onela/Ale.
3. Their grandsons are called Eadgils/Adils
4. They are killed by a boar/ a person named "boar".

All versions of the story about Ongentheow/Egil relates about a person, defeated in a combat. The name Angantyr appears in some other sources, most well-known in the "Saga of King Heidrek the Wise", who is conquered on Samsö by Örvar-Odd. His daughter-son and namesake Angantyr is killed by Heidrek. Finally, in the fourth generation, the names Hervor and Angantyr reappear as a courteous heroin and hero, probably belonging to another tale.

Ottar

The intention of *Hyndluljóð* seems to be Ottar's victory over Angantyr with the help of the goddess. The name Angantyr is moreover infrequent in Norse sources and gives the impression that we are, somehow, dealing with one and the same Angantyr, rather representing a type, than a historical person. Unlike Angantyr, his antagonist Ottar carries a common name. Several attempts have been made in order to identify Ottar in *Hyndluljóð* as a real person in the Nordic history. Some scholars have suggested Ottar Birting, a valet of Sigurd Jorsalafar,

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other that he and Angantyr are unknown persons originating from Hordaland, a province in Norway. These suggestions are, however, uncertain and no one of them is able to explain neither the surname *heimski*, nor other peculiarities of the poem.

Like the problem of Angantyr, there is nothing in the poem that hints at a historical person, so we are free to discuss the possibility that we are dealing with a type, wearing the name Ottar, who is belonging to a literary cycle connected with the name Angantyr.

The hypothesis of the Ottar-cycle can be compared with an investigation made by E. Phillipotts, H. Schneider and later G. Dumézil about the various traditions of heroes named Helgi. This proper name appears in the literature in three of the Edda poems: the two *Helgakvida Hundingsbani* and *Helgakvida Hjörvarsonar*, a romance saga *Hromundarsaga Greipsonar* and two different episodes in the second book of *Saxo*. The common opinion that Helgi is the name of two or even three heroes of independent existence, i.e. Helgi Hundingsbani "the murderer of Hunding", Helgi Hjörvardson "the son of Hjörvard" and Helgi Haddingjaskati,

a reincarnation of Helgi Hundingsbani, whereas Schneider's hypothesis claims that we are dealing with one and the same person. Schneider and Dumézil compared and analyzed the elements which coincide with the different poems and sagas about Helgi. If we use the same method on the sources where Ottar appear, we note the following correlations in the genealogical strings:

FRODI (Ottar's
grandfather)

SKÖLDUNGAR,
SKILFINGAR
ÖDLUNGAR
YNGLINGAR

FRODA (2025) father
of Fisawaru

ONELA younger son
of Ongentheow,
married to the
geatic princess
Yrsa. (62, 2610, killed
by Eadgils)

HEALFENE the
father of Hrothgar

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and Helga and Helgi
kongr Halvdansonar

Ynglingatál/Heimsk-
ringla

SKYLDINGAS,
SCYLFINGAS

Ottar is killed by
the earls of FRODE.
The origin is
Frode's attempts to
capture treasures.
ALE related to
Ottar
ALE enemy to Adils/
a king from Norway
killed by Adils on
the ice of Vänern.
HALFDAN most
powerful of
Skoldungar

SKILFINGAR,
YNGLINGAR

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Important correlations are Eriaut (Hill) and Freawaru (Beowulf). Both married to Frode/a son of Frode. Sigmand and Hereasa appear both in Hyndluljóð and Beowulf, other recognizable names in the genealogy of Ottar belong either to the Saga of King Heidrek, the Volunga Saga or the saga of Harald Wartooth. The conclusion is that the genealogy from other heroic epics is connected with Ottar in Hyndluljóð. There are also other motifs like the name Hildisvini:

Hyndluljóð

Heimskringla

Beowulf

Freyja rides the boar Hildisvini, made by the dwarves, Vain and Faine.	Hildsvinn is Adils helmet conquered from Ale.	Adils got the portentous horses as war trophy.
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The connection between the boar and the helmet must depend on the fact that the helmets were decorated with boars, which is documented in Tacitus Germania (45), Beowulf (303, 1286, 1450) and archeological finds as well.

The next motif connected with Ottar/Ottar's relatives is the combat about a treasure:

Ottar and Angantyr lay a wager about a treasure	Hrolf Krake tries to get the helmet Hildigöltr, the ring Sveagriss and other treasures from Adils	Ottar tries to defend his country from paying taxes to Frodi.
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To summarize this discussion about similar motifs and persons appearing in the genealogies of Beowulf, Hyndluljóð, Ynglingatál, Heimskringla and Skaldskaparmál I would like to suggest the following hypothesis:

There existed a cycle about a hero, called Ottar connected with the dynasty of Ynglingar/Skilfingar. This cycle does not confirm the historical existence of one or more Swedish kings, it merely gives an

explanation of these similar motifs appearing in various sources. Another hero, called Angantyr is associated to this cycle as the defeated one; nevertheless, he plays an important role in the Saga of Heidrek the Wise, still acting as a loser.

An objection against this hypothesis of the Ottar-cycle, is the fact that in Hyndluljóð Ottar is twice called the off-spring of Innstein, the son to Alf the Old, a genealogy agreeing with the Saga of Halfs and Halfrekkas. Moreover, Innstein is the hero of the poem Innsteinskviða, but according to this he dies young and without off-spring. These persons, Innstein and Alf are not present in Beowulf, Ynglingatal or Heimskringla, wherefore they possibly belong to another saga-cycle and are for some reason adapted in the genealogical strings of Hyndluljóð. Innstein's historic authenticity has been evaluated in the same way as Ottar's and Angantyr's and I would suggest that his presence in Ottar's lineage in Flateyjarbók depends on an interpolation, giving the Icelandic family a connection with the noble genealogies.

Saxo's story about Ottar

A strongly deviating story about Ottar, the son of Ebbo, is found in Saxo Grammaticus Gesta Danorum, book VII:

Ottar sees a shy girl Siritha, who dare not lift her eyes. She is carried away to a cave by a giant, from where Ottar rescues her. After that he abandons her abruptly and she continues her errand in the wilderness. A giantess takes care of her and she is watching goats when Ottar discovers her again. Siritha still refuses to gaze on him and he once more leaves the unwilling girl. She begins her wandering again and seeks protection at Ottar's home. Although the girl pretend to be a pauper Ottar's mother understands that she is highborn. Ottar now pretends to marry another girl. At the side of the nuptial bed the last act of this romance

takes place. Siritha is wearing the candle, which is almost gone out and she endures the pain in her hand, since her inward pain is much greater. When Ottar tells her to light out the candle she finally look into his eyes and the pretended wedding becomes a real one, now with Siritha as bride.

This story presents well-known motifs from the folklore as the princess carried away by evil monsters and the rescuing prince, the patient Griselda etc. The surprising moments in the story when Ottar abandons Siritha twice in the most discourteous manners, which contradicts his chivalry, arouses a suspicion

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about a corruption of the text.

Although deviating from the other narratives about Ottar, the Saxo-episode has some connections with the motifs from Hyndluljóð, Beowulf, Ynglingatal etc. for example that Ottar's father Ebbo, (same stem as eofor), is killed by king Halfdan, who is the leading character of the chapter. Other elements could be compared with the Lay of Hyndla: the giant-giantess, the cave, the goats and the erotic allusions. The giants' wish to carry away Freyja is well-documented, although there do not exist any real report of their succeeding. The cave is the usual place for giants, for example when Freyja wakes the giantess Hyndla with the words: "sister in the cave". The goats, which Siritha is watching appears in Hyndla's scorn about the goat Heidrun who runs in the heat with her billy-goats. Finally the erotic allusions of Freyja's relationship to Ottar could be compared with the love-story composed by Saxo, although much more romantic. One detail in a poem, which Ottar directs to Siritha: and return as partner in my bed intimates that the relations between them were not so chaste as we might expect.

Our material presents us with characters of heroic poetry and sagas, where Ottar as well as Angantyr seem to have constant motifs linked to him. The story may be lengthened, reworked, given a different course, the hero may enter into relations with new figures, the poets may multiply the doublets; but central essential lines, certain scenes, certain features linked to the hero of the story remain unmodified. This belonged undoubtedly to the form of the oral tradition and the expectations of the receivers.

Conclusion

This is an attempt to uncover the structure in Hyndluljóð, which will primarily help us not to plunge into difficulties considering its historical evidence. The main reason for this investigation is, however, to analyze the meaning of Hyndluljóð, compared with other heroic poems, as a reflection of an initiation of a warrior. The search for a lineage, the appearing

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of the monstrous and malevolent giantess, the humiliating nickname and the journey to the other world and finally the (pretended) combat with an experienced fighter are all typical elements in initiation. The names of Ottar and Angantyr in Hyndluljóð must be seen as fictitious allusion on old narratives, each of them representing a type, i.e. the uninitiated and the initiated warrior.

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