

### Myths to Play with: *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*

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Most readers of Old Norse literature remember *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* best for Bósi's sexual encounters, grotesque descriptions of battles and monsters, and exaggerated absurdities. In this paper I will focus on matters of mythology. After a discussion of *Bósa saga's* *fornaldarsaga* characteristics and a reassessment of recent criticism, I shall examine the presence of allusions to (stories about) Norse gods in three scenes of the saga. Finally, I will turn to *Snorra Edda* as a possible source of inspiration, which leads to a consideration of the saga author's background education. My goal is to show that *Bósa saga* is a skilfully composed narrative, for which the author has employed mythological discourses in similar thematic settings. These discourses add to the comic attitude displayed throughout the saga.

*Bósa saga* has always had a safe home in the corpus of the mythical-heroic sagas. Yet occasionally scholars have tried to assign it a room in the neighbouring hostel of the chivalric romances. Recently, Vésteinn Ólason has argued that 'a typical *fornaldarsaga* matter, the matter of the North, has been written into the genre of romance' (Ólason, 1994, 122). According to Ólason, *Bósa saga* is a parody of the *fornaldarsögur* genre. He stresses the carnivalesque character of the saga of which the elements mentioned at the beginning of this paper are exemplary.

From the outset it is clear that *Bósa saga* is a playful text and that its author, although anonymous, is not absent from his narrative. From time to time authorial comments interrupt the flow of the saga. Illustrative of these intrusions is the remark that Bósi himself did not want to have it written in his saga that he should have anything to do with magic. Another authorial comment is that *Buslubæn*, although allegedly famous in its time, was unfit to be cited in its entirety for a Christian audience. We are therefore dealing with a skilled narrative artist, which we have to keep in mind throughout this essay.

It is useful to start with a definition of mythical-heroic sagas. *Fornaldarsögur* are, according to Stephen A. Mitchell, 'Old Norse prose narratives based on traditional heroic themes, whose numerous fabulous episodes and motifs create an atmosphere of unreality' (Mitchell, 1991, 27). Among the mythical-heroic sagas there is a group of 'indigenous *fornaldarsögur* whose materials display a lengthy continuity within the Nordic cultural context' (*ibid.*). In this last respect, *Bósa saga* is an ugly duckling. Those looking for a continuity of a Bósi-Herrauðr tradition in the North soon have to realize their search is doomed to fail. Apart from the saga author's claim that Busla's verses were well-known, and there is every reason to assume that these verses are a creation of the author himself, this tradition is characterized by the absence of such continuity. If there had been a Bósi-Herrauðr tradition, its echoes must have died out quite quickly and astonishingly abruptly.

At the same time, however, *Bósa saga* is thoroughly rooted in a Scandinavian setting, both geographically, historically, and atmospherically. This holds especially true for the first seven chapters of the saga, before the heroes embark upon their extravagant bridal-quest adventures. The saga opens in the legendary past. A distinct

Scandinavian past, for we meet Hringr of Eystra-Gautland, son of Gauti, son of Óðinn of Sweden who had come from Asia and who was the progenitor of the most illustrious royal families in the North. Hringr is the brother of Gautrekr *inn milda*, whom we know from his own saga, *Gautreks saga*. Hringr's wife is the daughter of the jarl of Smálönd, whose sons serve in the *hirð* of Haraldr *hilditönn* of Danmörk. Herrauðr is Hringr's son (and Óðinn's great-grandson). Bósi's lineage is less royal, but equally Scandinavian in origin. He is the son of Þvari, a *vikingr mikill*, and Brynhildr, a *skaldmey*. When the two heroes begin their quests after their incarceration by Hringr and liberation by Busla,<sup>1</sup> they technically leave the boundaries of Scandinavia, but not its imaginary landscape. Their voyages take the youngsters to Bjarmaland, which borders with Scandinavia, and Glæsisvellir, an Otherworld realm which is to be located on the mental map of the Scandinavians. The Glæsisvellians toast heathen gods such as Óðinn, which underlines at least the saga author's perception of this realm as Nordic. Also, Herrauðr and Bósi fight against Haraldr *hilditönn* at the Battle of Brávellir, an uncertain location but placed in Scandinavia, and the saga's final battle takes place on Gautlandish soil again. In other words, Bósi and Herrauðr, descendants of Norse mythical-legendary persons, roam around in Scandinavia and closely associated places. During their voyages they encounter famed kings known from historical traditions, to which at the end of the saga a link is made: Herrauðr's daughter Þóra is given as a wife to Ragnar loðbrók. All the romantic and folklore elements to appear from chapter eight onward aside, *Bósa saga* is consistently fixed in the North, which makes it an apt *fornaldarsaga Norðrlanda*.

On the other hand, *Bósa saga* is not a true reflection of the 'Matter of the North' compared to Mitchell's 'indigenous' *fornaldarsögur* such as *Gautreks saga* and *Hervarar saga*. The building blocks of *Bósa saga* are not traditional relics such as older poems composed in eddic metres which have been gathered and cast into a saga. Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge that the saga contains elements characteristic of the *fornaldarsaga* genre. These elements are more than superficial embellishments; the saga author has gone at length to convey the notion of a *fornaldarsaga* in terms of setting and ambience. The extent to which he has succeeded in his efforts, or to which he was 'distracted' by a chivalric mode of narrative, is a different issue.

Ólason assigned a sense of strong self-consciousness to the author of *Bósa saga*. For the sake of the argument, therefore, we assume that the author was aware of the differences in narrative mode and subject matter of what we nowadays consider a *fornaldarsaga* and a chivalric romance. Based on the consistently constructed Scandinavian beginning of *Bósa saga*, it is obvious that its author was interested in creating a *fornaldarsaga* – at least initially. Since the author did not have a Bósi-Herrauðr tradition at his disposal, simply because such a tradition never existed, he turned to other works representative of the genre as an inspiration for his own imitation of a 'Matter of the North' saga. The result of his efforts, *Bósa saga*, shows the author's artistic skills, extensive knowledge of his exemplary models, and his ability to convey the notion of a traditional mythical-heroic saga.

<sup>1</sup> A stock scene, 'The Unjust Patriarch,' which also appears in *fornaldarsögur* and *fornaldarsaga*-like texts such as *Ynglinga saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* Book V, as McKinnell (2003, 119) has shown.

My assumption of authorial intention does not contradict Ólason's interpretation of the saga. Ólason sees *Bósa saga* as a work of parody. If we assume that Ólason's interpretation is plausible, we also have to presume that the audience of *Bósa saga* must have been familiar with the *fornaldarsögur* tradition. In order to appreciate a playful attitude towards a text and, moreover, in order to make the parody work, one has to know what exactly is parodied. Ólason is concerned with the lack of seriousness in *Bósa saga*. About saga opening he claims: 'lip service is paid to the convention of historicizing ... when the genealogy of the King of Gautland is traced to King Odinn who came to Sweden from Asia – Odinn is even said to have been the king's grandfather' (Ólason, 1994, 117). Ólason has reached this conclusion after having read the saga probably more than once. For a first time audience, however, the opening words must have sounded familiar and will have guided their expectations: this is exactly the stuff *fornaldarsögur* are made of. Ólason observes that 'no attempt is made to connect these features with Icelanders or their forefathers, and it seems quite obvious that these genealogies are a joke ... and would not have been taken seriously by any well-informed audience' (*ibid.*). Actually, such an attempt has been made at the end of the saga, where Herrauðr is linked to Ragnarr, which eventually could lead to prominent Icelanders such as Haukr Erlendsson. Ólason rightly assumes that the genealogies would not have been taken at face value, but this claim is far from surprising: after all, we are dealing with a parody. The question therefore is not whether the audience believed it, but whether they appreciated it. The same question applies to the entire construction of 'Scandinavia' in *Bósa saga*. What the author of *Bósa saga* offers is a consistent and convincing picture of the North as it was known – most of all – from *fornaldarsögur*. In other words, the author of *Bósa saga* did not process authentic traditions into this narrative, but he played with the literary tradition which dealt with these, the mythical-heroic sagas.

*Bósa saga* seems to be a cut-and-paste collage of other *fornaldarsögur*. It has been hinted that Bósi is a mock Sigurðr figure (Ólason, 1994, 119). The genealogical Óðinn opening has its counterpart in, for example, *Völsunga saga*. The kidnapping of a girl in a harp has its parallel in the first chapter of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. Þóra as Ragnarr's wife and the accompanying tale of how he won her by killing a snake is obviously taken from this saga.<sup>2</sup> Yet, an exhaustive survey of such intertextuality is not our goal. The observation that the author of *Bósa saga* was able to play with indigenous literary traditions leads us to the main topic of mythology. I will scrutinize the following three scenes: the wedding ceremony at the court of King Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir, Bósi's three coital conquests, and the travels to the farther North. These three scenes share a common theme, namely the desire for (and theft of) a valuable object (or person).

During the wedding ceremony, the people pass around memorial cups and drink a toast to Þórr, all the Æsir, Óðinn, and Freyja. This scene seems to be a literary

<sup>2</sup> In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, a Herrauðr is a jarl in Gautland, in *Ragnarssona þáttr* a Herrauðr is a jarl in Vestra-Gautland. According to the 'Sviakonungatal Arngríms lærða', however, Þóra was the daughter *baronis Gautlandiæ Gautrici* (Bjarni Guðnason, 1982, 75). Herrauðr, the snake-tale, and Þóra as Ragnarr's wife are traditional materials with a (lengthy) continuity, but I do not think *Bósa saga* taps into this continuity; it is a literary borrowing.

recreation of pre-Christian customs: pagans toast to pagan deities. To have the people of Glæsisvellir toast to Norse gods looks like a conceptual mistake made by the saga author. Nevertheless, it indicates that he perceived this realm as a Northern nation. Another explanation is that the author gives his implicit judgment of the people of Glæsisvellir. According to *Bósa saga*, Herrauðr is the offspring of King Óðinn. The fact that the Glæsisvellians regard this king as a deity makes them rather gullible if not a bit backwards, which aptly anticipates Bósi's abduction of the princess from their party.

The toasting of deities is accompanied by 'Sigurðr' playing the harp. Bósi had flayed the real master-musician Sigurðr and put on his skin as a mask. Perhaps *Bósa saga* is not the only saga in which a musical performance is described, but it is unique that the tunes played carry names: *Gýgjarslag*, *Drömbuð*, *Hjarrandahljóð*, *Faldafeykir*, and *Rammaslag* (Guðni Jónsson, 1954, 312). These names do not have to be anything more than fictions meant to show off the saga author's learnedness. One of the tunes, however, is clearly linked to the context of the narrative. When 'Sigurðr' plays *Faldafeykir*, 'Coif-Blower,' the women's coifs are blown off their heads. This link between the name of the tune and the context of the narrative gives reason to speculate that this onomastic invention is not a coincidence. The names of the tunes are so conspicuous that it is defensible to assign a function to them, especially in respect to the author's overall playful attitude throughout the saga.

With this observation in mind, I now turn to musical tune *Hjarrandahljóð*, 'The Song of Hjarrandi.'<sup>3</sup> Since we have no reasons to assume that *Bósa saga* is based on a well-known traditional story, it is unlikely that the name of the tune played at the wedding is a heritage from tradition. 'Hjarrandi' is one of the many poetic *heiti* for Óðinn and most definitely not the most common one. I therefore assign *Hjarrandahljóð* to the saga author's creative imagination; the name *Hjarrandahljóð* reveals his knowledge of poetic practice. The Óðinn-*heiti* 'Hjarrandi' is a meaningful name, which invites us to further speculation. Edith Marold has noticed the occurrence of 'Hjarrandi' in *Bósa saga*; in her discussion of the *Hildesage*, she briefly mentions a possible connection between the Hilde story and *Bósa saga* (1990, 204). 'Hjarrandi' calls to mind the eminent legendary singer from various Germanic cultures such as Heorrenda in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Dēor*.

In the North, Hjarrandi appears in connection with the *Hjaðningavíg* as the father of one of the protagonists. This myth is described in a variety of sources.<sup>4</sup> The *Hjaðningavíg* myth consists of two story elements combined. Freyja has obtained a magnificent necklace as a bed gift from four dwarves. Óðinn makes Loki steal this piece of jewellery. When Freyja discovers that the item is missing, she desires to have it back. This theme merges with Óðinn's condition to have Freyja start an everlasting battle with Ragnarök associations between two kings. The *Hjaðningavíg* which ensues between Heðinn, son of Hjarrandi, and Hogni gets a twist when Heðinn abducts Hogni's daughter Hildir, the beginning of a 'Brautraub' motif. A reference to the

<sup>3</sup> Pálsson and Edwards translate *Hjarrandahljóð* as 'Warrior' (1985, 220). Reifegerste claims to have no clue what the tune might mean (2005, 182).

<sup>4</sup> Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, Bragi Boddason's *Ragnarsdrápa*, Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*, Hall Þórarinnsson's and Rögvaldr Kolsson's *Háttalykil*, and *Sörla þáttur*. See Landolt (1999). The summary of the myth is based on Lindow (2002, 175).

*Hjaðningavíg* by means of the Óðinn-*heiti* 'Hjarrandi' in *Bósa saga* would make sense only if the author had a particular meaning for his saga in mind. The possibility that the author was making a loose reference which opened a window of associations with which he had no further intentions is far from satisfying. In general lines, the *Hjaðningavíg* myth befits the context of *Bósa saga*. Disguised as the master-musician 'Sigurðr,' comparable to Hjarrandi/Óðinn as god of poetry, Bósi sneaks his way into the feast to celebrate the wedding of Hleið and Siggeir. His intention is to regain – by abduction – a reluctant bride, a desired 'object.' The rescue of Hleið is congenially hinted at with an allusion to a myth which deals with the quest for a missing item, has a 'Brautwerbung' affinity, and bears cosmological consequences. This allusion underlines the comic-ironical tone of *Bósa saga* and the description of the wedding scene in particular. Bósi's over-the-top, but nevertheless earthly rescue operation receives a mythological dimension by dropping a single name with an Óðinn-*heiti*, *Hjarrandhljóð*. If *Bósa saga* were a skaldic stanza, we could speak of the employment of the rhetorical effect of *hjástælt*, a symbolic comparison between, in this case, a mythological tale and the context of the saga, not to flatter, but to embellish (Clunies Ross, 2005, 85). Since the *Hjaðningavíg* myth contains two elements equally appropriate to this context, the wedding scene is *tvíkennt*, its meaning concealed in an *ofljóst* manner, to stick to the skaldic poetic arsenal (Clunies Ross, 2005, 108, 111).

To an audience unfamiliar with the *Hjaðningavíg* and with 'Hjarrandi' as an Óðinn-*heiti*, the quaintness of the song's name probably seemed a learned piece of showing off. For the well-educated reader or listener, the scene becomes multi-layered and therefore even more enjoyable. This initiated audience would also see another, more concrete link between the tune performed and the saga's narrative context, as in the case of the tune *Faldafeykir*: after 'Sigurðr' has played *Hjarrandahljóð*, people start toasting no one other than Óðinn himself. This subtle literary technique points to a saga author with a poetic tooth. Less subtle, on the other hand, are Bósi's night games which I shall now discuss.

Twice before and once after the wedding scene, we witness Bósi's less warrior-like skills. Three times, Bósi sneaks into a maiden's bed and talks her into having intercourse with him. Bósi's bed games are characterized by wordplays; genitals are not mentioned explicitly but rather metaphorically, just as the acts of intercourse themselves. To give an example from the second encounter: 'I'd like to water my colt at your wine-spring' is Bósi's inspirational opening line (Pálsson and Edwards, 1985, 217). The three sex scenes are entirely described in such allusive language; this attitude never shifts towards a natural and explicit physical description of the act in progress.

Earlier commentators have drawn attention to the French 'fabliaux' tradition as a source for the sex scenes in *Bósa saga*. Although this is a valid observation, it does not account for the form in which the scenes appear in the saga – convincing direct parallels are not extant, so the similarity is indeed only one of inspiration.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the nightly activities contain metaphorical language which invites us to look for a possible function of the scenes, which contributes to the appreciation of the saga author's literary skills.

<sup>5</sup> See Renauld (1997) and Ólason (1994) for a different view.

At first sight, the function of the sex scenes is to offer sheer entertainment. On further consideration, Hans-Peter Naumann links the function of the sexual achievements to the triple kidnapping of a princess: 'It is not the invention of the author, but rather the prose paraphrase of a widespread type of erotic popular song' (Naumann, 1993, 54). This is a valid claim, but I think the author of *Bósa saga* is skilful enough for us to presuppose that he also gave his usage of this song-type an individual, innovative twist. By claiming that the three sex scenes owe their existence only as a counterpart to the kidnapping scenes, one denies the possibility that Bósi's acts might also serve a purpose of their own. A closer analysis of the saga needs to reveal whether Bósi's coital conquests are more than acts of carnal satisfaction for the sake of a good, though shameful laugh. After his night with the first girl, Bósi asks her where he might find the vulture's egg, the object which will re-establish peace between the foster-brothers and King Hringr. The second girl gives Bósi access to the wedding feast discussed above by revealing the king's favourite. The third girl grants him access to princess Edda's boudoir, which enables him to liberate her. Each nocturnal session ends with Bósi asking an important question, important not least for the progression of the narrative. In other words, three times Bósi gets what he needs by having intercourse with his female informant.

In the realm of the Norse gods, there is a parallel to Bósi's triple love-making. Óðinn is renowned for his sexual *do-ut-des* deeds. In *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri tells how the head of the Norse pantheon obtained the mead of poetry from the giant Suttungr's daughter Gunnlöð. Three nights in a row, Óðinn sleeps with her and after each night he is allowed to consume one third – which consists of three sips each – of the poetic liquid. Granted, Óðinn tricks Gunnlöð into giving him the mead and Bósi does not 'use' the girls just in order to obtain information: the lovers engage in a playful, consensual interaction. Óðinn sticks to one bed partner, whereas Bósi has to please three different girls, although this nevertheless corresponds to three nights of hard work. The basic underlying idea, however, remains the same: by means of sex, a valuable desideratum is obtained.

The metaphorical language of Bósi's second and third nocturnal visits is noteworthy in respect to the Óðinn-Gunnlöð story. The lovers' second dialogue is larded with references to the act of drinking (*drekka*) and drenching (*drekkja*) as well as all sorts of fluids (*vín*) and the consequences of too much drinking such as the state of inebriation and the consequence thereof, vomiting. The third girl's post-coital words may reveal an intentional, authorial allusion. Upon Bósi's question 'was it as good for you as it was for me,' the girl replies astutely: 'Nice as a drink of fresh mead' (Pálsson and Edwards, 1985, 223), which brings us back to the key element of Óðinn's quest.

It cannot be proven that the author of *Bósa saga* intended to play with the myth of Óðinn's quest for mead, but it is far from unlikely. As we have seen from the introductory passage of the saga and his knowledge of the Óðinn-*heiti* 'Hjarrandi,' the author of *Bósa saga* is no stranger to the figure of Óðinn. For an audience who do not perceive the echo of Óðinn in *Bósa saga*, the scenes still offer entertainment and a structural parallel to the triple kidnappings (and the three battles in which Bósi and

Herrauðr participate).<sup>6</sup> For those with the myth of the mead in mind, *Bósa saga* stands out as a sophisticated text that by means of allusion becomes further embellished. As in the case of the wedding scene described above, this elusive mythological discourse emphasizes the comic-ironical attitude displayed in *Bósa saga*: Bósi's rather trivial quest for information is related to the illustrious acquisition of the precious mead of poetry.

I will now move on to discuss the third and final scene. A traditional feature of many a *fornaldarsaga* is the expedition even further north. Travels to the North and to closely related underworld regions – such as Bósi and Herrauðr's visits to Bjarmaland and Glæsisvellir – often have a mythological connotation to them (Ólason, 1994, 112). These journeys echo Þórr's sojourns in comparable domains in the otherworld of myth. Regularly, the god of thunder takes a trip to the land of the giants to hammer away its inhabitants in search of a missing valuable object. It is plausible to assume that the 'image of Thor fighting giants in the North' lingered in the back of the audience's head while hearing of heroes travelling northwards (*ibid.*). With the image of the thunder god in mind, *Bósa saga* turns out to be a playful text once again. Whereas Þórr has violent interactions with (female) giants in search of meaningful objects to restore a cosmological equilibrium, Bósi has intercourse with lovely girls on his quest for an obscure vulture's egg and the re-abduction of two princesses. Once again, the theme of desire for and theft of a precious object as part of the saga's narrative acquires a mythological flavour by means of allusion and association.

With regard to the image of Þórr, Ólason speaks of 'an image which must be seen as an important one for the intertextuality of these sagas' (*ibid.*). Ólason refers to sagas which contain information about the conditions in northern Norway and descriptions of journeys to the North such as *Ketil saga hængs*. That saga discourses interact with and refer to each other is well-known. The image of Þórr is, I think, not necessarily included in *fornaldarsögur* which contain Northern scenes; it is a conceptual mode of thinking which may accompany or which may be sparked by these texts. It is not likely that the Þórr-associations in *Bósa saga* stem from local oral narratives as can be assumed in the case of *Ketils saga*, since *Bósa saga* does not rely on such traditions. In other words, the author of *Bósa saga* did not borrow the image of Þórr from other *fornaldarsögur*. Because of the fact that *Bósa saga* and other sagas share a capacity to evoke such imagery, we have to look for a different source of inspiration. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent stories about the pagan gods formed a part of the Icelanders' consciousness – or sub-consciousness – in the fourteenth century when *Bósa saga* was composed. Rather than turning to Margaret Cunies' concept of 'prolonged echoes' (1998), I shall focus on one extant literary manifestation of myths, *Snorra Edda*.

In the *Skáldskaparmál* section of his *Edda*, Snorri mentions his intended audience: 'young poets who desire to learn the language of poetry and to furnish themselves with a wide vocabulary using tradition' (Faulkes, 1995, 64). From this we can deduce that the art of skaldic composition was in decline in his days. We may infer that mythological knowledge, a prerequisite for this kind of poetry, was in need of

<sup>6</sup> A similar adaptation process is to be found in *Völsunga saga*, in which a fairy-tale element borrowed from the French *Eliduc* is changed in accordance with an Odinic theme in the saga (Clover, 1986, 83).

revivication too. It is difficult to establish the state of learning with respect to mythological knowledge in Snorri's days. We can in any case assume that this knowledge was resuscitated with the writing of *Snorri Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*.

It is hard to tell the impact which *Snorra Edda* had in the thirteenth century, that is, as a collection of *dæmi*, mythological narratives to elucidate skaldic practices. In its main function as a handbook in poetics, however, the reception of *Snorra Edda* is easier to follow. As a text on poetics, *Snorra Edda* was seen in connection with (other) grammatical literature; Snorri's work survived in the context of the so-called *Grammatical Treatises*. *Snorra Edda* as *ars poetica* was fittingly placed within the scholarly tradition of *ars grammatica*. The fourteenth-century manuscript transmission of *Snorra Edda* shows its function as a reference book or school text (Nordal, 2001, 68). The history of its copying shows that it was not Snorri's 'original' *Edda* that was copied, but rather sections from it, most notably *Skáldskaparmál*. The manuscripts also reveal that Snorri's work was exposed to source criticism and manipulation. *Skáldskaparmál*, was in this respect the most popular and 'movable' part of *Snorra Edda* (Nordal, 2001, 70).

While assessing a medieval Icelandic writer's education, we can take into account the possibility that he had come into contact with Snorri's *poetica*, in whatever form. At the same time, we may assume existing additional knowledge beyond the extant *Snorra Edda* texts. A teacher working with a re-ordered or summarized version of *Skáldskaparmál* may have had knowledge of a different or fuller version, whether this was derived from texts or memory. *Snorra Edda* was a classroom text that 'has been shown to be indebted to learned works in the field of mythography, grammatical, and encyclopaedic knowledge' (Nordal, 2001, 213). But as part of the curriculum, *Snorra Edda* itself must have functioned exactly like those type of texts to which it was indebted, perhaps not intentionally, but at least circumstantially. *Skáldskaparmál* could have been used solely as a work of *grammatica*, but at the same time the mythological information accompanying the elements essential to grammatical issues could have been brought to a student's attention. We can also imagine that where certain *dæmi* were not present in the text, such information was still transmitted, perhaps derived from a different textual source, perhaps as a (mental) gloss. The fact that many mythological *dæmi* are given in great detail, that is as 'complete' narratives, gives Clunies Ross reason to postulate that Snorri, at least, must have assigned them 'real intellectual value' (2005, 173).

The people responsible for the production of sagas could easily have been exposed to mythological information, perhaps not as a conceptual whole, but at least chopped up in the form of a number of *dæmi*. In addition to Clunies Ross' 'prolonged echoes,' we can take into account another resource for mythological knowledge, namely that which existed scattered throughout the (basic) 'tools of literacy,' to use Guðrún Nordal's term. With these observations in mind, I shall now return to the saga of *Bósi* and *Herrauður*.

*Bósa saga* was composed in the fourteenth century when three major manuscripts containing *Snorra Edda*, or parts of it, were committed to parchment. This is an important circumstance, not necessarily to prove that the allusions to mythological stories discussed above are correct, but to point to the possibility that the author of *Bósa saga* disposed of mythological information which he, playful as he has



shown himself in other aspects, integrated into his own 'traditional' *fornaldarsaga*. It is in this respect noteworthy that the younger versions of *Orvar-Odds saga*, *Gautreks saga*, and *Hervarar saga* which contain what are obviously additional mythological passages (Mitchell, 1991, 60-62), were written at the time when the manuscript dissemination of *Snorra Edda* was considerable and when its place in the curriculum was consolidated. As opposed to the writers of these sagas, the author of *Bósa saga* did not always process this mythological knowledge in a straightforward manner, but as subtle embellishments in his narrative, most notably in connection with recurring themes.

In this contribution I have discussed a number of scenes in which I have discerned allusions to stories about the Norse gods. Besides other *fornaldarsögur* and especially *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga* which are closely related, *Snorra Edda* seems to make a good candidate as source of inspiration for these parallels. The name Edda itself was thought fitting enough to serve as a princess' name. From *Snorra Edda* as a classroom text the author of *Bósa saga* could have taken the information of the 'Asian' origins of the Scandinavian royal families. The Óðinn-Gunnlöð myth is present as a complete narrative; the *heiti* 'Hjarrandi' is given and it shows up in connection with the story of the *Hjaðningavíg*. Various accounts of Þórr's dealings with giants and giantesses as well as the Nibelungen stories are extant in *Snorra Edda*.

All these separate notes and queries are to be found in a wide-ranging variety of texts as well. The influence of common, learned knowledge cannot be ruled out either. We may imagine that the author of *Bósa saga* had a massive library at his disposal, either physically in front of him or present in his head. However, taking *Snorra Edda* as an inspirational source, at least as a solid point of departure, concretely limits our search for potential sources for the parallels we have adduced to a single 'encyclopaedic' handbook. A peek into the author's kitchen then coincides with a classroom visit, our quest for creative origins with that of the author's introduction to literacy. What we nowadays consider to be legends and myths may have been nothing else than information for the author of *Bósa saga* to play with in the construction, or imitation, of his own *fornaldarsaga*, a type of *saga* characterized by and susceptible to the incorporation of exactly such information.

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