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**SOME OLD NORSE HANG-UPS:
RITUAL ASPECTS OF HÁVAMÁL 134**

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Many scholars have approached *Hávamál* from varying perspectives over the years in an attempt to clarify certain ambiguities within the poem.¹ Strophe 134 of *Hávamál* is no exception, yet no one has fully explained the strophe from both a philological and contextual standpoint, taking into consideration broader questions of the poem's position in its possible social context. The strophe comes in the section of the poem referred to as *Loddfáfnismál* (strophes 111-137); it is strophe twenty-four of this section. It appears in a somewhat modified form of *galdratalag*, a meter commonly associated with charms and magic incantations. The first four lines of the strophe consist of the repeated phrases which open nearly all the strophes of this section:²

Ráðomk þér, Loddafafnir,
enn þú ráð nemir,
niða mundo, ef þú nemir,
þér munu góð, ef þú getr:

I counsel you, Loddafafnir,
and let you take these counsels,
you will enjoy [them], if you take [them],
[they] will be good for you, if you learn [them]:

The remaining nine lines, however, present an interesting problem. A literal translation is indeed difficult and, rather

1. For a discussion of earlier scholarship on *Hávamál* see Harris (1982: 68-157, particularly 147-148) which provides a bibliography of works on the poem.
2. All quotations of eddic verse from Kuhn (1969). Translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

than elucidating the meaning of the strophe, presents a vexing problem of interpretation.

The first contentual six lines of the strophe are quite straight-forward, and most scholars agree on a similar reading. This part of the strophe:

at háfom þul
 hlaðu aldregil
 opt er gott,
 þat er gamlir qveða;
 opt ór scorpom belg
 scilin orð koma,

is taken to mean:

at a grey haired sage [þulr] should you never laugh!
 often it is good, that which old men say;
 often out of shrivelled skin come wise words,

The word *þul* in the fourth line is worthy of close inspection.

While the question of defining *þulr* is certainly a broad one, a short explanation will suffice here for the purposes of this analysis. John Loewenthal (1919: 236) provides a speculative list of the possible etymologies of the word, linking it to the Latin *tulit*, and possibly the Germanic term **puliz* and the Indo-European term **tulis*, meaning a torrent of words. DeVries (1977: 626) rejects this etymology as arbitrary, maintaining that all of the current etymologies are hypothetical. He includes four other possibilities: from the Russian *tolki* for teaching or interpretation; from the Latvian *tulā*, *tulis* meaning anyone who is indispensable; related to **pus* meaning rage or roar; or from the Indo-European **tel* meaning enclosure. However, Mühlenschach (1929: 280), in his etymological dictionary of Latvian, follows *tāla* with a “?” and translates *tūlis* as “ein Stätisches, der nicht gerne von der Stätte geht.” Concerning the possible Latin form, *tulii*, Ernout and Meillet (1959: 706) suggest “alii dixerunt esse silanos, alii riuos, alii uehementes proiectiones sanguinis arcuatim fluentis...” Kuhn

(1983: 244) tentatively defines *þulr* as “Kultredner,” presumably one who performs and conveys the oral traditions of a cult. The question was taken up in great detail by Walter Heinrich Vogt (1927: 262) who considered the context of the attestations of the word *þulr*, as well as its correlates *þula* and *þylja*, and concluded that the *þulr* was not only a “Kultredner” but also an initiator, teacher, prophet and religious poet: “Sein Tun umfasst das ganze Volksleben, so weit es religiös in Handlung und Leiden tritt: den empfangenden und den wirkenden Verkehr mit den Göttern, das Recht, die Lehre, die Site und die göttlich geleitete Geschichte. Seine Kraft liegt konzentriert im Seher- und Magiewesen.” This view was also held by Edgar Polomé (1975: 661) and Erik Moltke (1932-1933), who considered the *þulr* as a link between the world of men and the world of the gods. Polomé (1975: 661-662) notes that “*þulr* has not been satisfactorily explained because it has not been placed in the proper context. In a set of Hittite texts the verb *tallia-* occurs, which applies to humans propitiating the gods... this would provide a quite attractive etymological connection for ON *þulr*. The IE root would be **tel-*, of which the reduced grade would be reflected by Gmc. **pul-*...” Axel Olrik (1909: 10) relates the practice of kings sitting on mounds to the *þulr*. He rejects the suggestion that the *þulr* was equivalent to the *skald*, saying “Vi lader thul'en blive ved sin høj, : hans thular stol, med sin religiøse indvielse, magiske baggrund, moralske belæring og borgerlige hævdinge dømme” (We let the *þulr* stay by his mound, in his *þular* seat, with his religious consecration, magical background, moral learning and civil chieftain rule). The *þulr* thus appears as a cult head, intimately involved in both the secular and religious life of the community.

The final three lines of the verse pose a somewhat complex translational problem, allowing for several distinct interpretations. These lines of the strophe were the subject of a heated debate between Finnur Jónsson (1897) and Eiríkr Magnússon (1887 and 1898) at the end of the nineteenth century. The lines read:

þeim er hangir með hámm

oc scollir með scrám
oc vǫfir með vilmgom.

The nouns *hám*, *scrám* and *vilmgom* along with the verbs *scollir* and *vǫfir* are subject to multivariant interpretation, thus forming the basis for Jónsson's and Magnússon's debate.

Loddǫfnismál itself has been a topic of scholarly debate, with Lindquist (1956) suggesting that the section is a later interpolation into a separate poem. This section, set off by rubrics in the *Codex regius* manuscript, relates the instruction of *Loddǫfnir*, presumably a young initiate, in the manner of requisite behavior, primarily respect for others, by an older man in the hall of the high one – "háva hǫllo at, háva hǫllo r" (at the hall of the high one, in the hall of the high one)(*Hávamál* 111). This instructor, often considered to be Odin, is also the poetic narrator and undoubtedly a sage – a *þur* if you will. The line "Mál er at þýla, þular stófi á" (It is time to recite, at the *þur*'s chair) supports this assignation of identity (*Hávamál* 111). The instruction of *Loddǫfnir* is possibly a form of ritual initiation, accounting for the location of the instruction and the partial *galdratalag* meter. Beyond the allusions to *þur*, *Loddǫfnismál* also contains specific references to witches and charms, "folkunnigri kono..." (woman skilled in magic) (*Hávamál* 113), "oc nem lcnargaldr..." (and learned healing spells) (*Hávamál* 120), "sfor þic um heilli halir..." (lest men would not enchant you) (*Hávamál* 129), which further underscore not only the ritual aspects of this section of *Hávamál* as initiation but also the importance of ritual and magic in the society. Thus it is plausible that the *þur* narrator is referring to a ritual involving someone like himself in strophe 134. This brings us back to the interpretation of the final three lines of the strophe and the words *hám*, *scrám*, *vilmgom*, *scollir*, and *vǫfir*.

The word *hám* is a dative plural form of the feminine noun *há*. De Vries (1977: 199) defines the word as "haut, fell..." (* < germ. **hauō*). Das wort ist mit *háð* verwandt und gehört zur idg. wzl *(s)ken 'bedecken...' Blöndahl (1920-1924: 283) defines it as "Skind... b. om Mennesker i enkelte Udr.: með

heilli há, helskindet" (Hide... in certain expressions concerning people means: *með heilli há*, unhurt). Kuhn (1983: 85) defines the word as "fell, haut." Cleasby (1957: 241-242) mentions "the hide of a horse or cattle, but *gerta* of a sheep." Jónsson (1931; reprinted 1966: 314) defines it as "skind" (skin, hide). The line "þeim er hangir með hám" translates as "from him who hangs among the skins." However, while most scholars accept this literal translation, Jónsson (1924: 131-132) believes in an implied meaning "som hænger blandt andre skind bet. blot: som færdes blandt andre lignende mænd med rynket hud" (who hangs among other skins means simply: who travels about with other similar men with wrinkled skin). He continues this line of reasoning in his interpretation of the following lines.³

The word *scrám* and its alliterative pair *scollir* pose a slightly more difficult translational problem. The word *scrám* is the dative plural form of the feminine noun *scrá*. *Scollir* comes from the verb *scolla*. Most scholars agree that this word means "to dangle." However, a secondary definition is "to cheat" or "to look down on." De Vries (1977: 498) gives "sich hängend hin und her bewegen; betrogen." Blöndahl (1920-1924: 735) suggests "dingle, hänge; skuffe, vise sig upalidelig over for en" (dangle, hang; disappoint, be impolite to someone else). Kuhn (1983: 177) defines it as "baumeln (Háv. 134); schweben (Vkv. 37)." Cleasby (1957: 554) mentions "to hang over, dangle; metaphorically: to sulk away, keep aloof." Jónsson (1931; reprinted 1966: 511) defines it as "holde sig i svævende afstand; hänge og dingle" (keep oneself hovering apart; hang and dangle). The definition of *scolla* is thus dependent on the definition of *scrá*.

3. An interesting aspect of the line is the use of the pronoun *þeim*. Here *þeim* is a demonstrative, third person singular masculine pronoun in the dative case. The pronoun is in the dative case because it assumes the position of *scorþom þelg* from two lines before, giving the line the implied form "opt þr þeim er hangir með hám scilin orð koma." The words *scorþom þelg*, in turn, are a description of the skin of the *hærom þul*. The following two lines also depend on this implied substitution for their syntactical integrity.

Concerning *scrá*, De Vries (1977: 500-501) says "trockenes fell; urkunde, gesetzbuch... vgl. nschw. dial. skrae, einge-schrumpfte person... vgl. *strælingr* und *stragggr*". Blöndahl (1920-1924: 738) gives "tört, sammenskrumpet Skind" (dry, shrivelled skin). Kuhn (1983: 178) concurs "haut, stück leder." Cleasby (1957: 556) also agrees with this definition. Jónsson (1924: 131) equates the word *scrá* with the word *há*. The preferred definition of the word suggests a piece of leather or skin which is either being dried, or is dried. However, there also seems to be some implication, especially in the later development of the word, that the word *scrá* can also be used to describe a person. This definition of the word would require Cleasby's metaphorical interpretation of the word *scolla*. Jónsson supports an interpretation of this nature. He bases this interpretation on the metaphorical use of the words *scqrþom belg* in line eight of the strophe. Since *scqrþom belg* alludes to the condition of a person's skin, so too must *hdm* and *scrám*. Magnússon, on the other hand, interprets both *hdm* and *scrám* literally, *scrám* being thin parchment and *hdm* a thicker hide. Magnússon (1887: 16) translates these two lines as:

hangs among hides (of large beasts)
and dangles among skins (of sheep, used for scrolls...)

Jónsson (1924: 31) interprets the lines as:

som hænger blandt andre skind bet. blot: som færdes blandt
andre lignende mænd med rynket hud, der her
sammenlignes med skind (bælg), der er hængt op i
ildhuset for at blive påvirket af røg...

who hangs among other skins means simply: who travels
about with other similar men with wrinkled skin, which
are here compared to hides (skins) which are hung up in
the smoke house to be treated with smoke...

The final line of the strophe provoked the greatest fury in
the aforementioned debate. The word *vilmgjom* appears to be

the dative plural form of the masculine noun, *vilmagi*. While De Vries offers no definition for this word, Blöndahl (1920-1924: 944) mentions, "Kallun, ophængt til Iudtørring i et Køkken" (abomasum, hung up to dry in a kitchen). Kuhn (1983: 227) defines it "labmagen, ?" Hummelstedt (1949: 25-27) supports this definition, "Det är hervid sannolika, att ordet *vilmögom* häntyder på en i taket dinglande löpmage" (It is here most likely, that the word *vilmögom* refers to an abomasum dangling from the roof). Magnússon is a strong proponent of this definition. He explains the word as follows:

Vilmgjom = *vilmögom* is also a correct dat. pl. of *vilmagi*,
literally: intestinal maw; *vil* being a common word for
intestines, bowels (see Cleasby, s.v.), *magi* = maw paunch.

When a suckling calf is slaughtered in Iceland... the
fourth stomach, the rennet, is preserved, and having
been cleaned and washed outside, is tied up with a
string, and hung up in the kitchen, to dry and smoke...
Now, while the rennet hangs up in the kitchen, it is
called *kálfs magi*... (Magnússon 1887: 15).

The word *vilmagi*, however, is not attested in any of the other
literature.

On the other side of the philological spectrum, Jónsson
(1924: 131-132) suggests that the manuscript should be read
vilmgjom. Thus, the word would be the dative plural form of
the noun *vilmgr*. Cleasby (1957: 717) defines this word as "a
son of toil, a bondsman." Kuhn (1983: 227) gives "bursche, der
schwere (schmutzige) arbeit tut ?" Gering (1915: 200) defines
it as "mensch von niederer herkunft, leibeigener, knecht."
Jónsson (1931; reprinted 1966: 625) defines the word as
"arbejdende person, en som har hårdt arbejde, træll... at antage
her et vilmagi er ganske grundløst" (working person, one who
has difficult work, thrall... to suggest here a *vilmagi* is without
basis). Jónsson's argument is supported by *For Setmis* 35:

par þér vilmegir

á viðar rótom
geita hland gefi

there, to you, the thralls
by the roots of the tree
may give goats' urine!

Here the word *vilmagir* has the definite sense of workmen or thralls. In response to Magnússon's interpretation, Jónsson (1897: 197) says:

Eiríkr Magnússon's fortvívlede vilmagi i Háv. 134 burde ikke have fundet tilslutning... et vilmagi har aldrig eksisteret, og har heller ikke på grund af dets irrationelle dannelse (vil er netop ikke nogen magi) kunnet det; hele udtrykket vil da også være ubegribelig smagløst.

Eiríkr Magnússon's dubious *vilmagi* in *Háv.* 134 should never have found endorsement... a *vilmagi* has never existed, and, because of its irrational formation, never could have (*vil* is just not a *magi*); the entire expression would also be inconceivably tasteless.

Magnússon (1898: 319) responds to Jónsson's attack:

Of course *vil* is not a stomachack; I have never maintained it was... the Dr.'s insinuation that I have so interpreted *vil* is gratuitous; it is a term that, in the dairy language, betokens the coagulated substance in the fourth stomachack of a sucking calf, that also goes by the name *hleyþir*...

Magnússon supports his definition of *vilmagi* as a rennet by citing contemporary evidence for the use of the word *vil* in the same manner as the word *hleyþir* (1898: 320). Also, one should note that the previous lines make specific reference to animal skins and therefore, to maintain consistency of imagery, it is

preferable to accept Magnússon's definition, regardless of the possible connotations of the words *há* and *scrá*.

Thus there seems to be a stand off. Jónsson (1931, reprinted 1966: 625) bases his argument on the assumption that the manuscript is defective, and the correct word is *vilmagom*. He defines the word *vífa* as "bevæge sig frem og tilbage, især om noget der hænger, dingle; færdes flakkende, flakker omkring" (move back and forth, especially concerning something that hangs or dangles; wander, rove about). He uses this second definition in his interpretation of the line, "Men her bet. váfir síkert ikke hænger, men færdes, flakker omkring" (But here *váfir* definitely does not mean hang, but wander, rove about) (Jónsson 1924: 131). On the other hand, *vífa* is defined by De Vries (1977: 638) as "schwanken, wanken." Blóndahl (1920-1924: 956) gives "bevæges hid og did, svæve frem og tilbage" (move here and there, sway back and forth). Kuhn (1983: 212) suggests "schwanken, baumeln." Cleasby (1957: 683) defines it as "to swing, vibrate to and fro." Gering (1915: 180) provides "sich schwankend hin und her bewegen." Jónsson's use of a secondary metaphorical interpretation is unnecessary, given the content of the previous two lines. By introducing the wandering man, he ruins the continuity of the image presented in the previous lines of skins hanging and swinging about in a drying area, an image which is preserved if the first definition he proposes is used.

Thus there are two distinct interpretations of the final three lines of the strophe. Jónsson's (1924: 131) lines read:

der hænger blandt andre bælgje (skind),
og (som) dingle blandt skind,
og (som) flakker omkring med elendige mænd (fatigje).

who hangs among other skins (hides),
and (who) dangles among hides,
and (who) wanders about with miserable men (poor men).

Jónsson insists that *galdratalag* is not being used here. Instead, this part of the strophe is a case of an overzealous collector

presenting all the variants of the last line, connecting them together with the conjunction *ok*. Thus, the last three lines are essentially three different ways of saying the same thing, namely that intelligent words are often spoken by old or indigent men. He supports his assertion that *vǫfir* means to wander by using that definition as an explanation of the Oldinic name *Vǫfuðr*, the wanderer (Jónsson 1924: 131). However, this name could just as easily mean the hanging one, being a reference to strophe 138 of *Hávamál*, "veit ec at ec hecc."⁴

Magnússon's (1887: 16) reading of the strophe pays closer attention to the manuscript, and does not rely on any emendations:

that hangs among hides,
and swings among skins,
and rocks among rennets.

However, in the final interpretation, Magnússon falls victim to the same interpretive vice that Jónsson does:

"yea", adds the epigonic wag, "even though they may happen to look, in the words of another proverb, like shrivelled bags, begrimed and sooty, having spent their life among associations which for humbleness might be paralleled with those of a real *belgr*, for wisdom can ally itself with the soot-churl just as well as with the exalted favourite of fortune" (Magnússon 1887: 16-17).

This secondary interpretation is completely unnecessary. The strophe may be taken quite literally.

A question arises, however, as to what a man is doing hanging among hides, swinging among skins and wafing about with tripe. Nevertheless, a reasonable explanation may exist for this seemingly odd behavior. Each of the last three lines of

the strophe represents a different type of tanning or smoking process. The *há* is the thickest of all, and must hang for the longest period of time, during tanning. The *scrá* is a thinner more pliable skin, often used for manuscripts and presumably hangs for a shorter period of time. Finally, the *vímagi* hangs for the least amount of time, during the curing period. The man, the *pulr*, hanging with these various animal parts, presumably hangs for an even shorter time. Thus one has a catalogue of the uses of a smoke-house/tanning enclosure: tanning hides, drying parchment, curing meat, and hanging a *pulr*. Although having a hoary sage dangling from the roof of a smoke house at first seems ludicrous, the practice may have its roots in ritual.

Ólrik, as mentioned above, pointed out the practice of the *pulr* raising themselves onto mounds or platforms, much like the *seiðkonur* (Strömbeck 1935: 139), as a means for initiating ritual performances: "det ophøjede sted er det mere hellige og højtidelige" (the elevated place is holier and more ceremonial) (Ólrik 1909: 5). In his interpretation of the Snoldelev rune stone, Ólrik asserts that "at være 'pulr & Salhaugum' skal forstås ganske bogstavelig som 'læremester på Salthøjene': han [pulr] har sin pular-stóll stænde på en af højene og bor selv i salen" (to be *pulr & Salhaugum* should be understood literally as 'teacher on the Sal mounds': he has his *pular* chair standing on one of the mounds and lives in the hall), thus arguing that a literal translation of the line is the most appropriate (1909: 9). The *pulr* has a high seat, presumably used during ritual, on the top of a mound and lives in a nearby hall. The performance of *Loddfjfnismál* itself implies an enclosure (see above), suggesting that the *pulr* at least occasionally performed ritual inside his hall. During initiation or other such wisdom ritual he ascends the seat or platform, either in his hall or on the mound (or both!), as an integral part of the ritual. Jost Trier identified the importance of enclosure to both political and religious power, including its use during dance, music drama and poetry performance (1942: 264). Enclosure, such as the *pulr*'s hall where his platform stands, helps establish a depiction of worldly boundaries, the inside of the enclosure

4. *Vǫfuðr* is also a poetic noun for "wind." (De Vries 1977: 238)

being elevated to the status of the holy (Trier 1942: 232). Trier comments "In geschlossene Hegung, als Zaun, trat man zusammen, wenn es galt, den Göttern Gebet und Opfer zu spenden, ein Orakel zu befragen, den Kultsprecher zu hören" (1942: 233). While Trier's enclosure is apparently open-air, the enclosed hall of the *þulr* seems to have fulfilled a similar function, Enclosed sacrifice and an elevated or hanging *þulr* during wisdom ritual taken in light of these arguments begins to seem plausible.

While there is no clear archaeological evidence that a wisdom ritual involving hanging and the heat of a smoke house existed in Old Norse society, rituals involving wisdom and numinous knowledge were undoubtedly important in early Scandinavia. Adam of Bremen mentions the existence of an entire ghetto of sooth-sayers and sages in Courland (present day Latvia):

all the houses are full of pagan soothsayers, diviners and necromancers, who are even arrayed in a monastic habit. Oracular responses are sought there from all parts of the world (1959:197).

He also includes a description which suggests that men and animals hung together in an enclosure during ritual in Uppsala:

The sacrifice is of this nature: of every living thing that is male they offer nine heads, with the blood of which it is customary to placate gods of this sort. Feasts and sacrifices of this kind are solemnized for nine days. On each day they offer a man along with other living beings in such a number that in the course of nine days they will have made offerings of seventy-two creatures. The bodies they hang in the sacred grove that adjoins the temple. Now this grove is so sacred that each and every tree in it is believed divine because of the death or putrefaction of the victims. Even dogs and horses hang their with men (1959: 208).

Ibn Rustah provides a further account, concerning the Rus:

There are *aitibba* (medicine men) who wield great power; they act as if they own everything. They tell people exactly what offerings of women, men and cattle to make... The *aitibba* then takes the offering, human or animal, and hangs it from a pole till all life has expired... (Brøndsted 1980: 268).

These accounts suggest that the men who hang among the animals are dead. However, if the hanging men are *þulir*, they may be engaged in a type of ecstatic voyage, and therefore only appear dead.

Although Adam of Bremen's account is at best second-hand, it supports the possible existence of such a ritual. Turville-Petre (1964; reprinted 1975: 244-246 and 251-262) considers both Adam of Bremen's description of the temple at Uppsala and the role of sacrifice in early Scandinavia. Particularly, he notes the sacrifice of humans to Odin by hanging, citing archaeological finds in part as evidence (Turville-Petre 1964; reprinted 1975: 253-254). While human sacrifice was quite probably an aspect of early Scandinavian religion, as suggested by R.L.M. Derolez (1963: 226-227) and De Vries (1956: 420-422), a mythic archetype for non-fatal ritual hanging also exists. *Hávamál* 138-139 report that Odin hangs in the tree for nine nights, a remarkable similarity to the ritual described by Adam of Bremen. After hanging in the tree, Odin falls back to earth; the result of the hanging is an increase in his numinous knowledge rather than death. Not all the hanged are necessarily human sacrifices; like Odin, they could be *þulir* engaged in ritual designed to increase their knowledge. De Vries (1956: 499, 501) suggests that such ritual undoubtedly involved an element of apparent death:

Wir hatten schon Gelegenheit, einen eigentümlichen Initiationsbrauch zu erwähnen... Erst soll der Initiandus von der Welt, in der er bisher gelebt hatte, losgelöst werden; dann muß er in die neue Gemeinschaft

übergeführt werden. Hierfür ist die Form oft ein Scheintod, ein Eingang in die Welt der Toten und eine darauf folgende Wiedergeburt... Wir fangen mit einigen Beispielen einer Opferhandlung an, die einen Scheintod zur Voraussetzung haben, und deshalb vielleicht in gleichem Sinne zu deuten sind. Das Geld an erster Stelle von Odins Selbstopfer (Háv. 138-141); der Gött hängt neun Tage am windigen Baum, sich selbst zum Opfer geweiht von einem Speer verwundet; weder Speise noch Trank hat man ihm dazugereicht. Als er hinablickte, fand er die Runen, die er sodann laut schreiend aufhob... Man darf also annehmen, daß es einmal einen Ritus gegeben hat, in dem ein Scheintod den Durchgang zum neuen Leben bildete.

Rolf Pipping (1928: 4) also finds evidence for such an initiation, suggesting that the *putr* in *Hávamál* 134 is not dead:

Denna skenbart så besynnerliga strof blir alldeles klar och får god mening, om vi tänka oss den gamle thulen såsom en trollkarl, vilken i rituellt syfte upphänges (i det heliga trädet) på ett sådant sätt, att hann icke avlivas, och där dinglar blandt de döda kropparna av genom verklig hängning avlivade människor och djur.

This apparently peculiar verse becomes somewhat clearer and develops a better meaning if we think of the old *putr* as a wizard who, during ritual, is hung (in the sacred tree) in such a way that he is not killed, and there dangles among the dead bodies of men and animals killed by actual hanging.

Both De Vries (1956: 501) and R. Pipping (1928: 8-9) refer to the sacrifice of King Vikar related in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* as further evidence for such a ritual.

Other cultures may provide clues to the form of early Scandinavian ritual. The closest shamanistic culture, that of the Lapps, exhibits some affinities with early Scandinavian

ritual.⁵ Strömback (1935: 191-200) points out the similarities between *seiðr* and Lapp shamanism, a view first proposed by Johan Fritzner (1877) and later endorsed by Ivar Lindqvist (1923) and Hugo Pipping (1925 and 1926). Also, Åke Ohlmarks (1939: 179) has identified the similarities between *seiðr* and sub-arctic shamanism, including ascent as a primary element in ritual. *Seið*, is probably part of the same complex as the functions of the *putr*. While the absolute influence of Lapp shamanism on early Scandinavian ritual practice is not measurable, Peter Buchholz (1971: 9) argues that a minority culture can influence the practices of a bordering majority culture.

In other cultures, there are documented accounts of climbing trees as part of shamanic ritual. Furthermore, there is a close relationship between the slaughter and preparation of sacrificial animals and these rituals. In Balagansk, a Buryat initiation ceremony revolves around two concepts: the slaughter and preparation of animals and a ritual ascent of a tree:

Headed by the father shaman leading the candidate... the whole group... sets out in a procession for the place where the row of birches has been set up. At a certain point, near a birch, the procession halts; a he-goat is sacrificed and the candidate, stripped to the waist, is anointed with blood on the head, eyes and ears, while the other shamans drum... Then nine or more animals are sacrificed, and while the meat is being prepared, the ritual ascent into the sky takes place. The "father shaman" climbs a birch and makes nine notches at the top of it... The candidate ascends in his turn, followed by the other shamans. As they climb, they all fall into ecstasy. Among the Buryat of Balagansk the candidate, seated on a felt carpet, is carried nine times around the

5. It is difficult to speculate on the form and function of early Scandinavian ritual. As yet unpublished works by Edgar Polomé and François Xavier Dillman will undoubtedly provide clear and helpful insight into these questions.

birches; he climbs each of them and makes nine notches at their summits. While at the top of each birch he shamanizes... By this time the meat is ready and, after offerings are made to the gods (by throwing pieces into the fire and into the air), the banquet begins. The shaman and his "sons" then withdraw into the yurt... The bones of the animals are wrapped in straw and hung on the nine birches (Eliade 1964: 119-120).

Here, a ritual performer shamanizes among animal parts in a tree. The preparation of the animals without doubt includes the removal of skins for tanning and the hanging of the carcass to drain the blood, calling to mind the image of a man, engaged in an ecstatic voyage, seemingly lifeless, high above the ground among the skins and innards of dead animals. Eliade (1964: 123-124) provides another parallel in the initiation of the Araucanian shamaness in South America:

The following day, the celebration is at its height. A crowd of guests arrives. The old *machi* form a circle, drumming and dancing one after the other. Finally they and the candidate go to the tree-ladder and begin the ascent, following one another... The ceremony is terminated by the sacrifice of a sheep... An animal is killed and its heart hung from one of the branches of the cannello... After other rites, the young initiate "climbs the rewe, dancing and drumming. The older women follow her, and steady themselves on the steps; her two sponsors stand on either side of her on the platform. They strip her of the necklace of greenery and the blood-stained fleece... and hang them on the branches of the shrubs. Time alone may destroy them for they are sacred. Then the college of sorceresses comes down again, their new colleague last, but moving backwards and keeping time. As soon as her feet touch the ground she is greeted by an immense uproar; it is triumph, frenzy, a real scuffle, for everyone wants to see her close,

to touch her hands, kiss her." The feast follows, with all those who have attended taking part.

Although a great celebration occurs after the initiate completes her descent, it is to welcome the new shamaness and celebrate her new status. The ritual itself "centers upon the ritual climbing of a tree trunk stripped of bark, called *rewe*" (Eliade 1964: 123).

Artistic representations from various shamanic cultures support the idea that ritual performers, while undertaking an ecstatic journey, are surrounded by animal skins and parts. The elderly Evenk shaman Vasilii Sharemikal's drawing of a Nyurumal clan shamanic ritual shows skins of animals hanging on a shamanic idol as well as the skin of a slaughtered reindeer hanging in a tree as a sacrifice to the gods (Brodzky et. al. 1977: 149). The Evenk shaman, during ritual, erects a tree inside his tent, while on other poles, the skins of sacrificed animals are hung. In the center of the tent, a small fire is lit and often the shaman will engage in "excessive smoking," during the building of this ritual tent (Ansimov 1972: 86, 93). Among the Arikara and the Algonkian, a tree is used for both ascension during shamanic ritual and for animal sacrifice (Brodzky et. al. 1977: 108).

Also linked to the hanging *puhr* is the intense heat of the smoke house. Other cultures include accounts of wisdom ritual and the use of intense heat. Eliade (1964: 412) elucidates the role of the *tapas* rite, "This excess of heat was obtained either by meditating close to a fire... or by holding the breath," and he mentions that such a rite is "...creative on both the cosmic and spiritual plane... it results in a kind of magical power." He also mentions "...that inner-heat (the result of *tapas*) forms an integral part of the technique of primitive magic" (Eliade 1964: 412). Native American and Eskimo rituals also include the use of intense heat as a means for gaining wisdom and contacting the spirit world. One of the important rituals in Eskimo society is the *maiqiq* or sweat bath. The important hunting feast often referred to as the Bladder Festival involves both animal parts and a ritual steam bath (Maresa 1986: 182-186). Seal bladders

are saved and stored in the *kashim* which also serves as a lodge during the hunting season for traveling hunters. On the day of the festival, the bladders are inflated, brought out to the ice, where they are deflated and submerged, after which all the men return to the *kashim* for the steam bath and a cleansing with urine. Edward Nelson (1899: 379) mentions at the end of the steam bath "They finish... the festival with trials of strength such as swinging themselves up to the smokehole by means of ropes." John Marassa, in his study of the Eskimo sweatbath rituals (1986: 231), stresses the link between hunter and animals, accounting for the presence of animal parts in the Eskimo rituals. Such a connection could also be made for pre-Christian Scandinavian society, especially in light of the relative geographic proximity of these groups.

A *pulr* undergoing either a ritual hanging or a trial by heat or both occur several times in the Eddic corpus aside from the strophe in question. The most prominent of these is *Hávamál* 138 and 139. In these famous strophes, Odin appears hanging in the world tree, undergoing a ritual mutilation as a means for gaining wisdom. Jere Fleck suggests that Odin is in fact hanging upside down, supporting this assertion with the method of animal slaughter in Old Norse society:

Such a sacrifice... can... best be performed with the victim hanging in the inverted position. This is still a standard slaughter practice today... we must consider this Germanic slaughter tradition as a contributing factor in the complex of ritual inversion (Fleck 1971: 128).

It is only a step further to link the draining of blood from a carcass by inverted hanging to the preparation of hides and meat in a smoke-house, or the hanging of animals in trees associated with ritual. The use of intense heat in wisdom ritual appears in *Grimnismál* 1 and 2. In that instance, Odin is placed between two fires for eight nights, which results in his recitation of the verses of the poem – a catalogue of numinous knowledge. This closely parallels the *tapas* rites described by Eliade mentioned above. The final hanging occurs in *Hávamál*

157, further underscoring the practice of men hanging in trees. If the tree alluded to in *Hávamál* 157 is part of a ritual similar to the one described by Adam of Bremen and Ibn Rustah, presumably the man would be hanging among animals, their skins and innards.

The transmission of the Eddic poems, particularly those dealing with heathen ritual, through the Christian period relies on the proverbial nature of much of the verse. Much of the "wisdom" of *Hávamál* and, in particular, *Loddfáfnismál*, appear couched in the vocabulary of the proverb. Strophe 134 relies on a repetition of the adverb *óþr*, a standard operator in the lexicon of the Old Norse proverb.⁶ Thus, a Christian audience could receive the strophe without necessarily being aware of the implications of the possible ritual origin of the lines.

Strophe 134 of *Hávamál* can be interpreted as an allusion to a type of wisdom ritual in which a ritual ascent and hanging and probably extreme heat are endured. The strophe should be translated literally and according to the manuscript. Although Jónsson's and Magnússon's final interpretations of the verse could be justified if there were no instances of hanging *pulir* in Old Norse literature, the existence of such a figure four verses later countermands their metaphorical interpretations. The allusion to various forms of animal flesh hanging up suggests either the ritual grove alluded to by Adam of Bremen and Ibn Rustah, or a smoke house. The fact that the strophe is in *galdratalag* implies that it is related to magic, as does the apparent role of *Loddfáfnismál* as an initiatory poem. Even if *Loddfáfnismál* is an interpolation, it is interpolated with a reason, mirroring the ritual ascent of *Hávamál* 138-139. Whatever the final interpretation of *Loddfáfnismál* and *Hávamál* may be, the aforementioned ritual interpretation is a possible conclusion which fits the context and content of the entire poem with an eye to the possible importance of ritual in pre-Christian Scandinavian society.

6. Finnur Jónsson (1912) and Bjarni Vðjálfnsson (1966) provide numerous examples of Old Norse and Icelandic proverbs in which the word *óþr* is an important operative.

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