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OLD NORSE SKALDIC AUTHORITY: TRACING ITS MANIFESTATIONS

L'AUTORITE SCALDIQUE EN ANCIEN NORROIS: COMMENT TRACER SES MANIFESTATIONS

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Abstract: Snorri contributed much to the image, prestige, and authority of poets in Old Norse vernacular literature. However, he did not originate or conclude this lionization of poets and poetry in the culture, and those who came before and after him also played their parts in establishing a robust and impressive written reputation for the poets. From almost the beginning, Old Nose vernacular literature would gradually come to exalt poets and poetry in many domains. These domains would include grammar, historic factuality, prestigious origins, mythology, narrative uses, runes, and magic. To show that, this essay surveys key Old Norse works over a two hundred year period. The works considered here have been chosen because they deal with poetry and poets in a wide variety of ways, and they are notable or represent significant developments in Icelandic literature.

Keywords: Snorri Sturluson, sagas, grammatical treatises, skalds.

Résumé: Snorri à beaucoup contribué à l'image, au prestige et à l'autorité des poètes dans la littérature vernaculaire en ancien norrois. Cependant, il n'est ni l'instigateur ni le dernier chantre de cette glorification des poètes et de la poésie dans la culture, et ses prédécesseurs et successeurs jouent également un rôle dan l'établissement d'une réputation solide et impressionnante pour les poètes. Presque dés son commencement, la littérature vernaculaire en ancien Norrois exalte les poètes et la poésie dans de nombreux domaines. Ces derniers incluent la grammaire, la véracité historique, les origines prestigieuses, la mythologie, les usages narratifs, les runes et la magie. Afin de démontrer cela, cet essai passe en revue les travaux littéraires en ancien norrois sur une période de deux cent ans. Les œuvres étudiées ici ont été choisies car elle adressent la question des poètes et de la poésie de manières variées et représentent des développements significatifs dans la littérature islandaise.

Mots-clés: Snorri Sturluson, sagas, traités grammaticaux, scaldes.

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Introduction

"Tǫkum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk um ferðir þeira eða orrostur" (Snorri, 2002, p. 1:5).[2] Today, this sentence by Snorri from the *Heimskringla* prologue is probably the most well-known statement on the authority that Old Norse literature attributed to skalds. Although it was certainly convenient to his aims of bolstering the skaldic art, Snorri did not originate such skaldic authority or the prestige associated with it. Instead, he was contributing to the manifestation of such in Old Icelandic literature, just as those who came both before and after him did — manifestations that involved more than just the veracity of skaldic eyewitness testimony. Indeed, Icelanders valued their poetry and their poets so much that, over the centuries, they would avail themselves of the opportunity to expand the positive renown of the skaldic craft in as many directions as possible, enhancing the prestige for the art and its practitioners. Starting soon after the earliest materials, Old Nose vernacular literature would gradually come to exalt poets and poetry in the realms of grammar, historic factuality, prestigious origins, mythology, narrative uses, runes, and magic. To show that, this essay surveys key Old Norse works over a two hundred year period. The works considered here have been chosen because they deal with poetry and skalds in a wide variety of ways, and they are notable or represent significant developments in Icelandic literature. Undoubtedly, more works could be added to this list, but this selection aims to touch upon many of the most important ones. I consider the texts more or less in chronological order, grouped across three rough time periods: Pre-Snorri, Snorri, and Post-Snorri. The works, and their order considered here, are *Íslendingabók*, *The First Grammatical Treatise*, *Háttalykill, Orkneyinga saga, Litla Skálda; Snorra Edda* (*Háttatal*, *Skáldskaparmál*, *Gylfaginning*, *Prologue)*, *Heimskringla*, *Egils saga*, *The Fifth Grammatical Treatise*, *Skáldatal*; *The Third Grammatical Treatise*, *The Fourth Grammatical Treatise*, and *Grettis saga.*

Defining "Authority" and Other Relevant Terms

First, some definitions should be clarified. In this article, "authority" is used rather broadly. The root of this, of course, is that skaldic verses were considered factual authorities

[2] "We regard as true everything that is found in those poems about their expeditions and battles." (Snorri, 2011–2015, p. 1:3)

on historical matters by Snorri. More expansively here, "authority" is also the control or power over things that is attributed to skalds, such as the power to praise through their verses or the wielding of supernatural forces. It also generally refers to all of the expertise that is attributed to the skalds in these various matters. Such expertise and authority is also frequently accompanied by, and bolstered by, the prestige afforded to skalds and poetry, and matters of prestige will also feature in my arguments.

Another distinction that will occur in what follows is between *authenticating* and *situational* verses (Whaley, 1993, p. 251–56). Broadly stated, an *authenticating* verse is one that is cited by a medieval saga writer to provide evidence for something. Typically, this would be for the historicity of the particular prose narrative in which it is placed, in the belief of the time that such verses had often been composed contemporaneously with the events they described and passed down in oral tradition intact — however, the term will also be employed for verses used as evidence for other matters, such as linguistic arguments. Of course, modern scholars must be more careful in evaluating whether a particular verse is a reliable historical guide and is being interpreted correctly — but what matters in this discussion is that for the medieval writers, it often seems that the verse was proof enough, as the quote from Snorri at the beginning of this essay indicates. Such verses will typically stand apart from the narrative, and one could still follow the narrative if they were removed. A *situational* verse, on the other hand, is intrinsically embedded in the narrative and typically portrayed as the direct speech of a character in the narrative — so that if it were removed, there would be an obvious lacuna in the text, much like if one deleted a few lines of dialogue from a play. These are the rough divisions between the two, but it should be emphasized that they are rough, and they are based on how the verse is used in its surrounding text — in many cases it is easy to imagine that a particular verse could have been used in either an authenticating or a situational manner.

The Pre-Snorri Period

Íslendingabók is one of the earliest works in Old Norse, but only the barest indication of skaldic authority can be seen in it. Written by Ari Þorgilsson, it is dated to 1122–1133 (*Íslendingabók,* 1968, p. 1:xvii–xviii). He quotes an authenticating *dróttkvætt* couplet in chapter seven to support the detail of Hjalti Skeggjason's blasphemy conviction (Jakob Benediktsson,

1968, p. 1:15), and it is one of only two direct quotations in the work — the other is the prose speech of Þorgeirr just before announcing that Iceland was to become Christian (Jakob Benediktsson, 1968, p. 1:17). Yet this presence of skaldic authority is fairly slight — Ari is more concerned to secure the validity of his text with appeals to eyewitnesses or to the memories of elders who knew eyewitnesses, giving the names for his sources. These include, in chapter one, "Svá sagði Þorkell oss Gellissonr" (Jakob Benediktsson, 1968, p. 1:6),[3] and also Ari's appeals to the memory and wisdom of elders that he knew personally to be reliable (Jakob Benediktsson, 1968, p. 1:4). In chapter nine, he cites his own contemporaneousness with the events described (Jakob Benediktsson, 1968, p. 1:21). So although he has the oldest written quotation of skaldic poetry outside of runic inscriptions, its presence seems incidental. In its form, it would not even necessarily reflect a pre-existing tradition of prosimetrum. (It would be difficult to say much about how pre-literary mixtures of prose and verse in Iceland worked, but the runic evidence of the Swedish Rök stone from several centuries prior[4] at least suggests that such existed in Scandinavia for quite some time before Ari, and Ari's usage does not resemble that of the stone.) In any case, *Íslendingabók* cannot be seen as any kind of indication that Ari sought to deliberately present the authority of skalds or enhance their standing beyond the tradition that he received.

The *First Grammatical Treatise* came not long after *Íslendingabók*, but it shows a different attitude toward skalds through a direct appeal to their authority. It is dated to roughly the mid 1100's (Haugen, 1972, p. 4). Apparently feeling that a word in one of his examples of minimal pairs, "vel líkuðu Goþrøþe góþ røþe," might be too obscure for his readers, its author cites an authenticating skaldic verse to support *røþe* as a word meaning 'oars', saying "sem skáld kvað," (Haugen, 1972, p. 18).[5] Here he is implying that poets are authorities on such matters not long before his most explicit statement that: "Skáld eru hǫfundar allrar rýnni eða málsgreinar, sem smiðir [smíðar] eða lǫgmenn laga" (Haugen, 1972, p. 20).[6] Hreinn

[3] "As Þorkell Gellisson told us." (Translation mine)
[4] See, for instance, Lönnroth, 1977, p. 1–57.
[5] "Guðrøðr liked good oars well" … "As a poet recited" (Both translations mine).
[6] "The skalds are authorities on all writing or speaking, just as craftsmen on their craft and lawyers on the law." (Haugen, 1972, p. 21)

Benediktsson takes the view that the First Grammarian was breaking some new ground in the native tradition with that statement about the authority of skalds:

> In supporting his theoretical statements by examples from poetry he was doing nothing beyond what was the usual practice in traditional Latin grammar . . . and that this was not a familiar method in the native tradition of learning is shown by the need that the author obviously felt of justifying it. (Hreinn Benediktsson, 1972, p. 201)

In any case, that statement about skaldic authority is part of the author's sophisticated argument on a fine distinction of speech, namely whether *e* or *i* should be used for the first letter of what today is spelled *járn,* using normalized classical Old Norse orthography such as is found in *Íslenzkt fornrit*. He settles this by citing another authenticating stanza and noting that the requirements of its meter force the skald to split the word into two syllables and the skald used the sound spelled with *e* — therefore, it should be the same spelling and sound when it is only one syllable (Haugen, 1972, p. 20–21). He considers this the final authority on the facts of the matter, from which there can be no appeal. He follows this up and reveals his familiarity with the Latin tradition by quoting a Latin verse by Cato, not for a matter of linguistics (as that case is closed), but to make a moral point and end the discussion: "Contra verbosos noli contendere verbis; / sermo datur cunctis, animi sapientia paucis" (Haugen, 1972, p. 22). He translates this to Icelandic to make sure the point is not lost on any of his countrymen: "Hirð eigi þú at þræta við málrófsmenn; málrof er gefit mǫrgum, en spekin fám" (Haugen, 1972, p. 22).[7] Thus for him, after an appeal to poetic authority, the only further thing that can be done is a different kind of appeal to poetic authority — reinforcing the idea that the poets are the end of the line here. So even if an appeal to poets and poetry was something new for the tradition of Icelandic grammar, it seems clear that the First Grammarian was quite committed to it and expected it to have an effect. In the author's prose examples of minimal pairs, Haugen notes that they include mention of Þórgerð Hǫlgabrúð, Þórr, Hymir, and the legendary Ubbi, in addition to having rhyme and alliteration at times (Haugen, 1972, p. 77). It shows a tendency to rely on traditional mythology and poetics, perhaps all the more interesting since the examples are contrived, and these features are not necessary for the points he is making about minimal pairs. So, unlike *Íslendingabók*, the *First Grammatical Treatise* makes

[7] "Quarrel not with chatterboxes; the power of speech is given to many, but wisdom to few." (Haugen, 1972, p. 23)

a very strong statement for the authority of skalds, and quite in advance of Snorri. Whether it was always present or not, the tendency to use mythology and poetics for grammatical examples would continue its manifestations in the written record. Yet, as Guðrún Nordal observes, the First Grammarian does not include skaldic verse in discussing the uses for which Icelanders need an alphabet (Guðrún Nordal, 2001, p. 25–26). This implies that a need to have the oral poetic culture move into manuscript form to compete in prestige with the Latin poetic culture was not yet felt — a situation that would indeed change.

Háttalykill by Rǫgnvaldr jarl and Hallr Þórarinsson, is a *clavis metrica* and a potential influence on Snorri's later *Háttatal*.[8] It is probably from the 1140s (Jón Helgason and Holtsmark, 1941, p. 140). The name itself appears to be calque on *clavis metrica* (or *clavis rhythmica*), although there do not seem to be any pre-modern examples of the full phrase. The *-lykill* part, at least, is quite likely to be a calque on *clavis*, and thus an influence from Latin learning, as the more natural Old Norse words for poems that enumerate things are *tal* and *þula* (as seen, for instance, in *Háttatal*, *Ynglingatal*, *Rígsþula*). In any case, Latin works exemplifying a variety of different meters did exist in the middle ages and could have been a possible inspiration, although it is not certain whether they were known in Iceland at the appropriate time (Snorri, 2007, p. xii) — let alone the Orkneys, where Rǫgnvaldr was earl. It is not clear how long *Háttalykill* originally went, although 41 verse forms are in what has survived, and it seems likely there were at least a few more (Jón Helgason and Holtsmark, 1941, p. 98–99). Yet it starts the expansion of forms, for as Faulkes notes:

> *Háttalykill* was probably not designed as a survey of available Norse metres, but was a *tour de force* involving the use of various metres, some of which were traditional Norse ones, but some of which were clearly modelled on poetry in other languages. (Snorri, 2007, p. xiii)

No commentary is included with the verse in the preserved version of *Háttalykill*, but it may, on account of its title and the inflation of forms, show a concern with the standing of the skaldic art vis-à-vis the prestigious Latin poetic tradition. It exemplifies these metrical forms through the use of native themes in telling of the deeds and generosity of the kings and heroes mentioned (Tranter, 1997, p. 8–9) — reminiscent, perhaps, of the First Grammarian's use of traditional material. Even though the poem exemplifies various meters, it never says this

[8] See the paragraph on *Háttatal* below for some discussion of this.

explicitly — its only direct statement of purpose is in its first stanza, where it says it will "entertain" and give "ancient wisdom," and then the poem proceeds to speak of heroes and kings and their deeds in its various stanzas (Tranter, 1997, p. 8).

Here would be a good moment to note that although the exact chronological order of some of the texts considered here may be indeterminate, this is not a problem for the present argument, as their subject matters are quite different. These last two texts make the point nicely: *1GT* and *Háttalykill* are so different in their contents and purposes that the question of which actually came first would not have much relevance here.[9]

Orkneyinga saga, in many ways, can be see to show precedents that Snorri would expand upon. It is dated to roughly 1200–1210 (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. viii). The use of authenticating verses is well in evidence here, and situational verses also abound.[10] Many of the situational verses are attributed to Rǫgnvaldr jarl.[11] Reference is also made to Rǫgnvaldr jarl and Hallr Þórarinsson's composition of *Háttalykill* (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. 185). In the verses, poets are often seen reacting to and composing about what they experience, implying an eyewitness character for the verses. Rǫgnvaldr jarl is also seen to be a patron of poetry, and he holds the poets with him to high standards. He gives a gift to a poet named Ármóðr and asks for a verse in return, which he receives; he challenges Oddi Glúmsson to make a verse about a wall-hanging as quickly as he does, and without using any of the same words as him (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. 200–03). The verses by Rǫgnvaldr jarl and his poets highlight the presence of poetic activity among the aristocracy. One of them, in which Rǫgnvaldr boasts of his ability in verse as one of nine skills he's mastered, thus portrays verse making as part of a well-rounded set of talents for the nobility (Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. 130). It is perhaps notable that *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus, from around the same time period, also features many situational verses. It is thought to have been completed

[9] Here the First Grammatical Treatise is abbreviated as *1GT*, and its anonymous author has already been referred to as the First Grammarian. Corresponding abbreviations and references will be used for the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grammatical Treatises. However, as a manuscript witness and accepted practice generally consider Óláfr Þórðarson to be the Third Grammarian, the author of the *3GT* will be referred to by both names. It is not elegant for the abbreviations to start with numerals, but it is not any better for three of them to start with an *F*.

[10] For some authenticating verses, see Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. 43, 46–48, 50–52; for some situational verses, see Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. 131, 133, 166.

[11] For just a few of these, see Finnbogi Guðmundsson, 1965, p. 195–98.

between 1208 and 1218 (Saxo, 1979, p. 1), but determining whether any parts of the work prior to that time could have been an influence on *Orkneyinga saga* is beyond the scope here.

The short text known as *Litla Skálda* comes next, and it perhaps provides some key precedents that Snorri expanded upon. It is preserved in two manuscripts, AM 757a 4to and AM748 Ib 4to. Although characterized by Finnur Jónsson as a derivative of and supplement to *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson, 1931, p. lviii–lix), there is scarcely any justification for this, and it may well be the earlier text. For instance, its organizational structure cannot be derived from *Skáldskaparmál*; however, the other way around, *Skáldskaparmál* using it as a source, is much more plausible, and the differences in kennings between the two also bear this out (Males, 2017, p. 80–85). Also, the presentation of the material on poetry suggests that its author perhaps did not know the story of the poetic mead from *Skáldskaparmál* (Solvin, 2015, p. 112–15)[12] — very general kennings like "ship of dwarves" (but surprisingly also "ship of giants" and "ship of Óðinn") and "drink of giants" are present, but mention of Óðrœrir, Boðn, Són, Gunnlǫð, or Kvasir is not. Thus, *Litla Skálda* is taken as the earlier text here. However, it is nevertheless very closely associated with Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* in the only two surviving manuscripts in which it is found. Guðrún Nordal notes:

> It seems likely that it may originally have been transmitted independently of *Snorra Edda*, but when it was directly associated with *Skáldskaparmál* in [AM 748 Ib 4to] and then [AM 757a 4to], it was necessary to edit *Skáldskaparmál* in the light of *Litla Skálda* to avoid repetition. The editor regarded these two works as a unified whole. (Guðrún Nordal, 2001, p. 226)

Litla Skálda deals with kennings and *heiti*, but starts by giving pride of place to kennings for poetry itself, *skáldskapr* — something Snorri did also. For the most part, the kennings and *heiti* are just listed, but some poetry appears toward the end. First is a short verse, perhaps in a rough eddic meter: "Søgr hæitir sar ænn simvl stǫng bil ok hivki bera hann" ([*Litla Skálda*], 1848–1887, p. 2:431).[13] Then a version of *Grímnismál* 40–41 is cited in support of kennings that use Ymir's body parts. In the section about Fenrir, a seven-line piece of an otherwise unknown *ljóðaháttr* poem is cited for the ingredients of the fetter Gleipnir. This citing of anonymous

[12] Sovin also suggests the monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson as the possible author, and thus a potential dating of 1170–1219 for the text.

[13] "Sœgr ('Tumult') is a large cask, but Simul ('Always') a pole; Bil and Hjúki carry it." (Translation mine.) Also, thanks to Mikael Males for pointing out this verse that was hidden amongst the prose of the edition.

eddic poetry to support kennings and *heiti* is brief, but perhaps precedent-setting, and as will be seen, Snorri takes a different turn in expanding it.

The Snorri Period

Snorri's *Edda* is the full flowering of skaldic authority, which attributes much to the past and contributes much in its time. With Snorri's clear interest in maintaining and supporting the skaldic art, one may wonder whether his statements on the authority of skalds reflected the way things actually were or rather the improvements that he wanted to make. Nevertheless, his works represent an important point in the manifestation of skaldic authority. The four parts of *Edda* each touch on the matter of skaldic authority in different ways. It is now generally agreed that those four parts were written in reverse order, with *Háttatal* first (Wessén, 1940, p. 32), and they will be treated in that reverse order.

Even if *Háttatal* may have originally been written only to impress its recipients, King Hákon and Duke Skúli, it nevertheless establishes Snorri as a skald with authority in addition to expanding the authority of the skaldic art. Most likely written between 1220–1223 (Wanner, 2008, p. 100), *Háttatal* is unequaled in its diversity of forms, even if one adjusts for the cases where the number of forms may have been inflated in order to reach one hundred.[14] The idea may have been suggested to him by Latin works which also featured exemplification of one hundred different metrical forms, though a direct model cannot be identified (Snorri, 2007, p. xii). Snorri was trying to impress Hákon and Skúli with the number of verse forms, and he more or less says this near the end of the poem in stanza 100: "hróðrs ørverðr / skala maðr heitinn vera / ef sá fær alla háttu ort" (Snorri, 2007, p. 39).[15] However, the 102 verse forms[16] of *Háttatal* may also be seen as a statement (whether intended or not) that Norse poetry is just as impressive as Latin in its variety of forms. Such a bolstering of prestige for the skaldic art would be entirely in keeping with Snorri's probable aim: that of preserving the ability of the

[14] For instance, Snorri gives a multiplicity of *refhvǫrf* and *runhendur* forms (Snorri, 2007, p. 11–14, 33–37), often with only minor distinctions between them.
[15] "A man must not be called unworthy of renown if he is able to compose in all verse-forms." (Snorri, 1987, p. 220)
[16] Modern scholars may debate whether Snorri actually exemplifies that many forms in the poem, but that does not matter too much here: the poem itself proclaims, in stanza 100, when there are two more stanzas to go, that: "Gløggva grein / hefi ek gert til bragar, / svá er tírœtt hundrað talit" ["Close account have I given of poetic form so that ten tens are told"] (Snorri, 2007, p. 39; Snorri, 1987, p. 220).

skaldic art to gain rewards from kings and chieftains (Wanner, 2008, p. 158–61). Its nearest competitor in number of verse forms, *Háttalykill*, has far fewer verse forms[17] and it did not come with any commentary on the forms. *Háttalykill* is perhaps another possible influence on Snorri. Faulkes notes that *Háttatal* reproduces all of the forms in it, both the traditional and innovative ones, except for *núfuháttr*, but that "many of the correspondences between verses in the two poems are only approximate" (Snorri, 2007, p. xii–xvi). Snorri, however, does comment on his own poetry,[18] and he seems to be the first to do so in the vernacular, at least among the grammatical literature considered here. He establishes his mastery of poetic craft here which may have been crucial for the reception of the rest of *Edda.* As the First Grammarian's statement about the authority of skalds on matters of language suggests, Snorri's perceived authority for producing *Skáldskaparmál* and *Gylfaginning* would likely have been less without *Háttatal*.

Skáldskaparmál is usually thought to have come soon after *Háttatal*, and it bolsters skaldic authority in two ways: by rampant quotation of prior skalds in supporting its kennings and shoring up the mythological underpinnings for the art. It is the part of *Edda* that shows the most manuscript variation, indicating its use and reuse (Snorri, 1998, p. xii), and thus its importance after Snorri's death in the continuing tradition. Snorri cites a large amount of poetry as exemplars for the kennings, but it is only skaldic poetry, and primarily from named poets. In large part this must be due to the much higher occurrence of kennings and *heiti* in skaldic poetry over eddic poetry, although he easily could have found some eddic poetry to cite here and there just as the author of *Litla Skálda* did — if he wanted to. This also appears to produce (intentionally or not) a distinction in *Edda* between humans, who speak in skaldic verse here in *Skáldskaparmál*, and the gods, who will speak in eddic verse in *Gylfaginning*. Snorri also did not compose any of the verses in this section (Snorri, 1998, p. xiii). These points suggest that this time, he preferred to remind his readers of the great skalds of the past few centuries, as he usually gives the names of the poets he is quoting. When he begins quoting poetry in

[17] Although *Háttalykill* is fragmentary, it lacks the tendency toward variants as seen with Snorri's *refhvǫrf* and *runhendur* forms; therefore, its original number of forms is most unlikely to exceed Snorri's without postulating a rather large number of missing forms that did not get utilized by Snorri.
[18] Snorri's authorship of the commentary is less certain than his authorship of the poem, but the evidence is largely in favor of it. See Faulkes's discussion in Snorri, 2007, p. vii–ix.

Skáldskaparmál, he starts with kennings for Óðinn, but this is closely followed by kennings for poetry (and the later frequently appear in the verses for the former), putting the art itself and its chief patron ahead of everything that may be described with the art — except for the emphasis on Óðinn, this resembles the approach of *Litla Skalda*. In this, he may be taking a a cue from his predecessor, or perhaps both texts are manifesting a pre-existing tendency.

Its second major contribution to the written manifestation of skaldic authority is by setting out its mythological origins in the guise of providing the details for the kennings for poetry. Poetry is literally described as a mead brewed from the blood of a slain supernatural being. It is wrapped in a heroic tale which concludes with its winning by Óðinn and distribution among gods and humans. Of course, Snorri's contemporaries would not believe in Óðinn as a god the way they believed in Christ. Yet seen in conjunction with the euhemeristic material of the *Prologue* and *Ynglinga saga*, they might think of him as a distinguished ancestor with a noble pedigree and perhaps consider the story as a valuable part of their heritage, thus keeping it alive in a way that suited the times. Wanner contends that Snorri was indeed doing something like this to "preserve the intimate relationship between poets, nobles, and Óðinn posited in pagan ideology" (Wanner, 2008, p. 139). Snorri's implementation, of course, also has the effect of tracing those ancestors back to Troy, just as the Latin tradition did, and it can be seen as an attempt to compete in prestige.

A curious verse, however, both cites a skald and mythologizes poetry at the same time. Snorri quotes a stanza in *tøglag* from Bragi Boddason that poetically defines a poet:

> Skáld kalla mik
> skapsmið Viðurs,
> Gauts gjafrǫtuð,
> grepp óhneppan,
> Yggs ǫlbera,
> óðs skap-Móða,
> hagsmið bragar.
> Hvat er skáld nema þat? (Snorri, 1998, p. 83–84)[19]

Snorri thus puts a masterful statement about what a poet is at the beginning of his *ókend heiti* section, which starts with *heiti* for poetry itself. Also, three of the stanza's kennings for a

[19] "Poets call me Vidur's [Odin's] thought-smith, getter of Gaut's [Odin's] gift, lack-nought hero, server of Ygg's [Odin's] ale, song-making Modi, skilled smith of rhyme; what is a poet other than that?" (Snorri, 1987, p. 132)

skald connect to Óðinn. So in addition to taking another opportunity to put poetry itself first before other things (confirming that this was likely a deliberate choice), Snorri is also reminding his audience of the ancient pedigree of the skald's art through this verse attributed to the earliest known skald, who in turn closely connected himself to Óðinn — more recognition of the noble ancestors.

Gylfaginning is usually thought to have come third, and it provides the mythological raw material needed for Old Norse poetry and rhetoric, yet it draws on the authority of skaldic and eddic poetry as well. Having adequately cited known skalds and their poetry for kennings and *heiti* in *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri only cites two skaldic stanzas near the beginning, one each by Bragi Boddason and Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni. Both are used as authenticating verses for setting up Snorri's frame narrative in which Gylfi questions Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði — perhaps to suggest that the narrative should be seen as just as prestigious as the other historical writings that use authenticating verses. In any case, this narrative foreshadows the euhemeristic positioning of the mythology that will come in the *Prologue*. Thereafter, Snorri only cites anonymous eddic poetry in support of the mythological stories here. It may be that easier-to-understand poetry was desirable in this context, where the goal is to explain in a clear fashion the stories that are the basis of what can be rather complex kennings. It may also have the effect of portraying the gods as characters who speak in eddic verse, in contrast to the humans who speak in skaldic verse. Nevertheless, the citing of that eddic verse helps shore up the prestige of that poetry as well; Faulkes suggests that the consequences of *Gylfaginning* may have included the collecting of Eddic poems and the use of mythological material in *fornaldarsǫgur* (Snorri, 2005, p. xvi) — those authors sometimes quoted or wrote eddic-style poetry as well for their narratives. Although the dialogue form in the beginning of *Gylfaginning* is common in learned treatises, Faulkes notes that:

> There seems to have been an ancient Scandinavian tradition of composing poems of mythological instruction as dialogues or dramatic monologues. The closest parallel to *Gylfaginning* is *Vafþrúðnismál* (which is also a contest of wisdom) in which Óðinn gives information about the gods in third-person narrative; but there are similar devices in several other eddic poems, such as *Grímnismál*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Vǫluspá*. (Snorri, 2005, p. xxiv)

Thus Snorri, in taking the native poetic tradition of the wisdom contest, but turning it into prose like the learned Latin treatises, takes another step, whether intentional or not, that helps position the native tradition as equal to the Latin.

Gylfaginning also appears to make subtle connections that show compatibility with the biblical tradition as well, which (in connection withe the *Prologue*) would help the positioning of the skaldic tradition in the Christian Middle Ages. Some examples may be given, in which it seems that Snorri has creatively interpreted his source to make such a connection. First, for his frame narrative, he may have alluded to the Christian Trinity by naming the three mysterious informants as Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði, with Hár being analogous to God, Jafnhár indicating the equal standing of the three, and Þriði emphasizing that there are three of them (Males, 2017, p. 53–54). Snorri appears to get them from a list of Óðinn's names from *Grímnismál*, but the name list that he provides which contains all three of them (Snorri, 2005, p. 21–22) gives no indication that this particular Odinic triad was ever previously recognized. Second, he has worked a flood story into his narrative, based on what appears to be a creative reading of the word *lúðr* (which normally would not have 'boat' among its definitions) in *Vafþrúðnismál* 35 as a boat along the lines of Noah's Ark, getting there through a kind of skaldic word play (a kind of *ofljóst*), as the words ǫrk ('ark') and *lúðr* can both refer to a coffin (Holtsmark, 1946, p. 51–54). Third, one explanation given for the many names of Óðinn is that the various peoples of the world gave him names in their own languages, which could be seen as an allusion to the biblical division of languages after the Tower of Babel and a suggestion that other cultures are familiar with Óðinn also — although this seems a quite tortured claim, especially when it is realized that the names in the sample list that Snorri cites in connection with this (Snorri, 2005, p. 21–22)[20] are all in proper Old Norse. For how these biblical allusions help the skaldic tradition, it is necessary now to turn to the *Prologue*.

The main contribution of the *Prologue* to the *Edda* as a whole seems to be providing a euhemeristic framework and claiming the gods as distinguished ancestors in support of the other parts of *Edda*.[21] It is here that various gods are equated with characters from Trojan legend, who are then said to have left Troy for the North, fathered many royal lines in Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe, and were so magnificent that they were mistaken for gods. The mistake seems to be justified on the grounds that, after early generations deliberately

[20] This is the same list where Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði appear in seemingly unconnected fashion.
[21] Some portions of the text in this article, but more particularly this paragraph, are also found in my unpublished master's thesis. They were, however, originally written for this context. The thesis may be found at <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/52012 >.

forgot the name of God, their innocent descendants, still having the power of reason, concluded there must be someone or something in charge of creation, and eventually attributed this to the Æsir as they passed through, since they had not yet been provided with the Christian revelation which they surely would have recognized as truth if they had known it. So having shifted the blame for the misunderstanding completely off the Norse and the euhemerized Æsir, the *Prologue* clears the way to recognize them as noble ancestors and the source of the distinguished poetic art — thus good Christians could use this material in good conscience. Now a suggestion can be offered on the possible usefulness of the subtle biblical connections in *Gylfaginning*: their presence would show that garbled pieces of biblical lore survived in the mythology, thus making more plausible the *Prologue* story that this all really did go back to those early generations that deliberately forgot the name of God (but who were not quite perfect in their forgetfulness), without putting any overt Christian statements in *Gylfaginning*, which would have been out of place in that narrative. This, of course, suggests that Snorri was anticipating the need for the *Prologue* while writing *Gylfaginning*, but this presents no difficulties. One might suggest that Snorri composed *Háttatal* without any notion of where it might ultimately take him, but by the time he began preparing *Gylfaginning*, it is much more reasonable to assume that he had a plan in mind and could see where it was going.

Heimskringla is a watershed moment for manifestations of authenticating verses for narrative purposes in the literature, following the lead of *Orkneyinga saga*, and Snorri includes prose emphasis on the value of skalds as eyewitness. Though it is not clear exactly where in the timeline to put this in relation to the portions of *Edda*, it is close enough to them in my opinion that an exact ordering does not matter. Nevertheless, it has been dated to around 1220–1230 (Snorri, 2011–2015, p. 1:ix). Whereas Ari Þorgilsson relied primarily on eyewitnesses and the reliable memories of those who knew eyewitnesses with only a slight nod to skaldic authority, it is the other way around for Snorri when he says: "Eptir Þjóðólfs sǫgn er fyrst ritin ævi Ynglinga ok þar við aukit eptir sǫgn fróðra manna" (Snorri, 2002, p. 1:4).[22] To underscore this, stanzas from Þjóðólfr in hvinverski's poem, *Ynglingatal*, are quoted at key points in the *Ynglingasaga* text as authenticating verses, even though Þjóðolfr, of course, could not have

[22] "The history of the Ynglingar is written first according to Þjóðólfr's account, and augmented according to the account of learned men." (Snorri, 2011–2015, p. 1:3)

witnessed everything mentioned in *Ynglingatal*. Poets, however, can also be authoritative eyewitnesses, especially for the deeds of kings, and this is emphasized before the Battle of Stiklastaðir in *Óláfs saga ins helga*:

> Þá kallaði [Óláfr konungr] til sín skáld sín ok bað þá ganga í skjaldborgina. "Skuluð þér," segir hann, "hér vera ok sjá þau tíðendi, er hér gerask. Er yðr þá eigi segjandi saga til, því at þér skuluð frá segja ok yrkja um síðan." (Snorri, 2002, p. 2:358)[23]

The skalds indeed compose as they are told, and it is said: "Vísur þessar námu menn þá þegar" (Snorri, 2002, p. 2:360).[24] Snorri was aware of Ari Þorgilsson and his historical writings (Snorri, 2002, p. 1:5–6), so it is possible that in his elevation of skalds to the highest eyewitness authority, he has perhaps reacted to Ari's use of sources. However, given Snorri's advocacy for the skaldic art, it is not surprising that he would choose to emphasize this function of poets as keepers of lore for the people they compose about, as it is one that helps promote the demand for skalds. Throughout this vast work, Snorri frequently cites skaldic verses to authenticate various details.[25]

Egils saga represents a different twist on skaldic authority: rather than showcasing the textual authority of skalds, it takes the personal power of skalds in mythologizing directions. *Egils saga* cannot be later than the mid-13th century manuscript fragment of it that survives (Bjarni Einarsson, 2003, p. ix), and it is sometimes suspected of being the work of Snorri.[26] The verses in the saga are predominantly situational, most of them attributed to Egill. One also sees situational verses in *Orkneyinga* saga, but a possible mythological precedent for situational verse is in *Ynglingasaga*, where it is said about Óðinn, the ancestral progenitor of the skaldic art, that: "Mælti hann allt hendingum, svá sem nú er þat kveðit, er skáldskapr heitir" (Snorri, 2002, p. 1:17).[27] Since humans are not gods (euhemerized or not), it would be a natural extension of this that gifted humans would speak conversationally in verse only some (or

[23] "Then [King Óláfr] called his poets to him and told them to go inside the shield wall. 'You,' he says, 'shall be here and see the events that here take place. You will then not have to rely on verbal reports, for you will report them and compose about them later.'" (Snorri, 2011–2015, p. 2:239)
[24] "People memorised these verses on the spot." (Snorri, 2011–2015, p. 2:241)
[25] For some discussion on Snorri's use of verses in the text, see Whaley, 1991, p. 120–23.
[26] Such suspicions go back to at least Nordal's argument for it (Sigurður Nordal, 1933, p. lxx–xcv), and Hallberg has an interesting vocabulary analysis contribution (Hallberg, 1962, p. 184–88).
[27] "Everything he said was in rhyme, like the way what is now called poetry is composed." (Snorri, 2011–2015, p. 1:10)

perhaps much) of the time instead of all of it — or it was the other way around: conversational poetry came first, and Snorri (perhaps inadvertently) provided it with mythological authorization. Also, Egill has some feats of magic that are closely connected with poetry, two of which are of most significant here. The first feat is the testing of a poisoned drinking horn, in which Egill carves runes on the horn, stains them with his blood, and then speaks an extemporaneous stanza, with the result that the horn shatters, as it indeed had been poisoned:

> Rístum rún á horni,
> rjóðum spjǫll í dreyra,
> þau vel ek orð til eyrna
> óðs dýrs viðar róta.
> Drekkum veig sem viljum
> vel glýjaðra þýja;
> vitum hvé oss of eiri
> ǫl þat er Bárðr of signdi. (Bjarni Einarsson, 2003, p. 59)[28]

Regardless of the case for its invention, the scene as it appears in the saga has a notable resemblance to a tale (from Pope Gregory's *Dialogues* II, 3) in which St. Benedict has been offered a poisoned bottle of wine; he escapes death when he makes the sign of the cross on it, and it, too, shatters (Boyer, 1973, p. 18–19). The second feat is the curing of a sick girl by carving runes, after which Egill speaks a wisdom verse:

> Skalat maðr rúnar rísta
> nema ráða vel kunni.
> Þat verðr mǫrgum manni
> er um myrkvan staf villisk.
> Sá ek á telgðu tálkni
> tíu launstafi ristna.
> Þat hefir lauka lindi
> langs oftrega fengit. (Bjarni Einarsson, 2003, p. 136)[29]

The stanza is an unusual one. The first three lines of the stanza are a close match to those on a rune stick found in Trondheim and dated to roughly 1175–1225 (Knirk, 1994, p. 416–19). One possibility is that the first half-stanza had circulated as a traditional aphorism on runes, with the second half composed by the saga author with archaizing features to fit the

[28] "I carve a rune on the horn; I besmear the rune-words with blood; I choose these words for the horn; let us drink as much as we want of the beer of the excitable waitresses; let us find out how the beer which Bárðr has consecrated agrees with us." (Bjarni Einarsson, 2003, p. 59)

[29] "Nobody ought to carve runes unless he knows well how to read them. It happens to many a man to be mistaken about an obscure letter. I saw ten secret runes carved on a shaped bone. This has caused long suffering to the woman." (Bjarni Einarsson, 2003, p. 136)

circumstances of the verse, making it somewhat doubtful that it was actually composed by Egill (Males, 2011, p. 127–28). There are other explanations, including the possibility that the stanza was part of a tradition about Egill that was well known enough to have reached that particular rune stick in Trondheim. Whatever the source of the stanza, its inclusion in the saga highlights the famous poet's connection to runes and supports the material in the prose to make Egill a master of rune magic. Where is this emphasis on his magic via poetry and runes going? A possible model for the way Egill is portrayed in his saga is suggested by Clunies Ross: "Time and again, either by structural devices or by allusions in Egill's poetry, the skald's gift is tacitly aligned with the superhuman powers of a Christian saint" (Clunies Ross, 1989, p. 138).[30] This is not to suggest that Egill was actually a saint in any way; it is rather that the portrayal may suggest that noble pre-Christian Icelanders had their own analogues to the miracles of saints, insofar as that was possible, and that such positively-marked power resided in poetry and runes and was wielded by skalds. In any event, other stanzas in the saga appear to show signs of being composed when the saga was written (see, for instance, Males, 2014, p. 65). These pseudonymous compositions show that the inventing of verses was not a problem for the Icelandic sagas, Snorri's statement about the veracity of skaldic verse notwithstanding, even at an early time. That poets could be seen to command magic with their verses is also seen in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskáld*, where Þorleifr recites verses that bring forth fog and inflict harm on Hákon jarl and his men (Jónas Kristjánsson, 1956, p. 222–23). Thus, although the textual and factual authority of skalds is not at issue in *Egils saga*, the opportunity to show mythological and magical connections is well used.

Next is the *Fifth Grammatical Treatise*. The *5GT* survives only as a fragment, and it has recently been dated to c. 1231–1250 (Males, 2016, p. 135).[31] It comments on three matters of virtues or vices in verse forms, which are: sticking to the same subject matter for too long, consonant clusters in rhymes, and elision. It adapts these from Latinate sources, but as Guðrún Nordal notes, its author "has translated the technical terms into Icelandic and thus veiled the

[30] See also the rest of her article for a discussion of other scenes that bear a resemblance to saintly *exempla*.
[31] See also pages 122–23 in that source for a new edition and translation of the short fragment of the *5GT* that survives.

Latin source in his analysis of poetic diction" (Guðrún Nordal, 2001, p. 213).[32] Snorri wrote about native poetics with native examples and terminology; in his importation of Latin poetics, the Fifth Grammarian follows Snorri's example by also using native examples and terminology, another step in the direction of demonstrating a robust and complete native tradition. However, this use of native terminology for concepts from Latin would not prevail — the Third and Fourth Grammarians would generally retain the Latin terminology for what they were importing. Furthermore, the Fifth Grammarian did not take up Snorri's practice in *Háttatal* of writing poetry and then commenting on it, but instead quotes earlier poetry, as Snorri did in *Skáldskaparmál*. This reinforces the idea that a tally of poetic distinctions should be backed up by citations from older poets.

Before moving to the Post-Snorri period, there is the short text of *Skáldatal*. It lists kings and earls (going back to the legendary Ragnarr Loðbrók and continuing up into the 13th century) and the skalds who composed about them. Thus, a skald will often be mentioned under more than one king. *Skáldatal* survived in two manuscript versions: one in the *Kringla* manuscript, the other in the Codex Uppsaliensis.[33] As a text like this is especially prone to expansion by subsequent copyists, it would be very difficult and perhaps only of limited use to determine when it would have been started. In any event, the *Kringla* manuscript is dated to circa 1260 (Jørgensen, 2007, p. 80–82), and that provides enough of a terminus ante quem for considering *Skáldatal* at the end of the Snorri period for the purposes of this essay, especially as both extant versions include mention of Snorri Sturluson and his nephew Sturla Þorðarson. Guðrún Nordal notes that:

> Skáldatal does not provide a full list of practising poets in the thirteenth, only of court poets who had earned recognition abroad for their art. Those who composed for the Icelandic aristocrats are not included in the list. (Guðrún Nordal, 2001, p. 120)

In this, the list is thus a sort of skaldic "hall of fame," restricting its honors to the highest distinction that a poet could aspire to: being a court skald. The beginning of the text is significant: "Starkaðr hinn gamli var scáld. hans qvæði ero fornuzt þeirra er menn kunno nu.

[32] For a discussion of the use of Old Norse *skarbrot* for Latin *hiatus* in the 5GT, see Males, 2016, p. 128–29.

[33] Editions of both redactions are in *Skáldatal*, 1848–1887, p. 3:251–86. A recent edition and translation of the latter is in Snorri, 2012, p. 100–117.

hann orti um Dana kononga" (*Skáldatal*, 1848–1887, p. 3:251).[34] It then turns to King Ragnarr loðbrók and proceeds to go forward in time. Thus, the text takes its reader back to the earliest of significant historical times for the Norse, reminding the reader that the court skalds were always there, as far back as people can remember. In an analysis relevant to my purposes here, Guðrún Nordal, notes the relationship between *Skáldatal* and *Heimskringla*, and points out that:

> The implicit message of *Skáldatal*, that of the reliability of the testimony of skaldic poets, is also the main argument put forward in the [*Heimskringla*] Prologue. The central place of the genealogical poems, *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, especially in the earliest writing of the kings, is emphasized in both versions of *Skáldatal* and in the [*Heimskringla*] Prologue. . . . The argument raised in the Prologue to *Heimskringla* that the testimony of the poets is trustworthy is strengthened by shrewdly placing the poets in a chronological context in *Skáldatal*. (Guðrún Nordal, 2001, p. 123–24)

Finally, it may be noted that a strained relationship with one's king is no obstacle to inclusion in *Skáldatal*. The text itself mentions that Erpr lutandi was going to be executed by his king, but redeemed his head with a praise poem (*Skáldatal*, 1848–1887, p. 3:252, 260). Also, there is inclusion of Bragi inn gamli as a poet for Bjǫrn at Haugi, Egill Skallagrímsson as a poet for Eiríkr blóðøx, and Snorri Sturluson as a poet for Hákon Hákonarson — even though each of these poets, in other sources, were reported to have serious conflicts with their kings. Both Bragi and Egill were said to have redeemed their heads through poems (Bjarni Einarsson, 2003, p. 104–13), and Snorri was ultimately killed on Hákon's orders. To the extent that the antagonism was known by the audience for *Skáldatal*, it may serve to highlight just how valuable the poetry is, that its poet should still be honored and recognized, even when the poet has been an enemy of the king.

In its various aspects, the short *Skáldatal* makes important contributions skaldic authority and prestige by enhancing the perceived factual authority of the skalds and highlighting their long and distinguished history of composing for kings. By showcasing the most renowned poets, it provides an ideal for poets to aspire to while the skalds and their art as a venerable tradition to be maintained and respected.

[34] "Starkaðr the old was a skald. His poems are the oldest which people now know. He composed about the Danish kings." (Translation mine)

The Post-Snorri Period

The *Third Grammatical Treatise*, written by Óláfr Þórðarson, produces further interesting manifestations of skaldic authority. It is dated to around 1245 (Haugen, 1972, p. 5). It consists of two parts, *Málfræðinnar grundvǫllr*, based on part of Priscian's *Institutiones*, dealing with letters and syllables, and *Málskrúðsfræði*, based on the third book of Donatus' *Ars Maior*, dealing with virtues and vices of speech. It adapts the Latin grammatical tradition, but exemplifies it with native Icelandic material. This includes discussing runes instead of Latin letters as the basis of speech in the first part, something not previously seen in the vernacular.[35] The prominent mention of runes (whether magical or mundane) in *Egils saga* could well be one of the earliest such mentions in the sagas, as well as a prominent manuscript reminder that Icelanders had writing before the arrival of Latin learning; dealing with runes on a grammatical-treatise level serves as a natural complement to the saga mentions. It would also aid the portrayal of the native tradition as capable of the same sophistication as the Latin tradition. Also, that Óláfr is demonstrating that Icelandic poetry is equal to Latin is suggested early in the first part when Óláfr gives an example of two-syllable end rhyme in Latin verse and then provides a native example of the same thing in a verse by Snorri (Óláfr Þórðarson, 1927, p. 33). Throughout the second part, Óláfr provides poetic examples for all of the vices and virtues of speech, mostly from known skalds. However, out of 123 examples, there are 51 examples that are both anonymous and not known from elsewhere (Gísli Sigurðsson, 2000, p. 100). This makes it possible that some of these anonymous verse may be his own invention in instances where native examples were lacking, in order to show that the skaldic tradition can exemplify of all the things found in Latin rhetoric. However, if he has invented verses for the purpose of commentary, he does not draw attention to this, unlike Snorri and *Háttatal*. It may be that allowing the readers to conclude for themselves that an authoritative verse might be old, or at least not reminding them of its newness, would be the optimal approach in a context that places much value on the past. Of course, it is possible that many of the anonymous verses were by prior skalds whose names were unknown. Alternatively, it may be that the author

[35] There is a brief mention of runes (*rúnar*) in *1GT*. However, it is only in passing as one of the First Grammarian's examples of a minimal pair, contrasted with the word for a boar (*rúnar*). See Haugen, 1972, p. 18–19.

thought the verses were well-known enough not to need attribution — for instance, some of the unattributed verses in the *3GT* are elsewhere attributed to known poets (Gísli Sigurðsson, 2000, p. 103). It would, however, be very difficult to see all of the anonymous verses in the *3GT* (and especially the *4GT*) in this fashion.

However, most striking is when Óláfr takes Snorri's claim that the Æsir came from Troy in Asia, and appears to enhance it in a big way by saying:

> Ǫll er ein listin skáldskapr sá, er rómverskir spekingar námu í Athenisborg á Griklandi ok sneru síðan í látínu-mál, ok sá ljóða-háttr eða skáldskapr, er Óðinn ok aðrir Ásíamenn fluttu norðr higat í norðrhálfu heimsins ok kendu mǫnnum á sína tungu þess konar list, svá sem þeir hǫfðu skipat ok numit í sjálfu Ásíalandi, þar sem mest var fegrð ok ríkdómr ok fróðleikr veraldarinnar. (Óláfr Þórðarson, 1927, p. 39)[36]

Óláfr seems to imply the skaldic art is superior to the Roman because, although both ultimately came from Troy, the Icelandic version is a more direct product of the original tongue and thus closest to the pure source of that beauty and magnificence, whereas the Romans had only a translation of it.[37] This is quite a bold statement and shows that the promoters of skaldic art, who had only been introduced to Latin writing perhaps not even two centuries earlier, had developed enough confidence in their vernacular to rate it so highly against the great prestige of Rome.

The *Fourth Grammatical Treatise* continues the tradition of skaldic authority and may break new ground in the use of custom-built poetry. It is from no earlier than 1309 and is found only in Codex Wormianus, a circa-1350 manuscript (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. xi-xiii), along with the first three grammatical treatises.[38] It exemplifies *figurae*, mainly from *Doctrinale* by Alexander de Villa-Dei and *Graecismus* by Eberhard of Béthune (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. xix). To do so, it uses skaldic verse, but the number of anonymous stanzas is rather high:

> There are 62 individual stanzas or part-stanzas cited by the author of [the *4GT*] and, of these, 47 are not ascribed to any named poet. While it is possible that some of these are by poets whose

[36] "All is one craft — the art of poetry that Roman wise men learned in Athens in Greece and turned then into the Latin tongue and the metre or art of poetry which Óðinn and other men of Asia brought up here to the northern part of the world; and they taught that kind of skill to men in their (own) tongue, just as they had organized and learned it in Asia itself where there was the most beauty and magnificence and knowledge on earth." (Frank, 1981, p. 156)

[37] Thanks to Mikael Males for this observation.

[38] It is from their order in this manuscript that the first four grammatical treatises have received the names they are usually known by.

> identity we do not know, it is likely that the majority are compositions of the author of [the *4GT*] himself or of someone composing to his direction. (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. xlv)

This is a greater percentage of anonymous stanzas than in *Edda* or *3GT* (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. xlix–l). Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, in considering the various anonymous stanzas, note that:

> There is a group that is clearly modelled on the Latin examples given in either [*Doctrinale*] or [*Graecismus*] or in related commentaries and must have been invented specifically for the purpose of reproducing in Icelandic dress the figures recommended in [the *4GT*'s] source texts. (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. l)[39]

The author is perhaps motivated by the need for Icelandic examples, which did not yet exist, of the Latin *figurae* he is explicating (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. xviii). At this point, it is likely obligatory to exemplify those *figurae* with skaldic poetry (just as was done in *Snorra Edda* and *3GT*) and at this late date he appears to have no qualms about inventing stanzas himself. Geoffrey of Vinslauf's *Poetria nova*, who also makes his own examples for what he is discussing, may have partly been an inspiration for the Fourth Grammarian to do this as well (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. l), perhaps in addition to taking a cue from Snorri's *Háttatal*. (Again, as with the *3GT*, it may be that some unattributed stanzas that were truly anonymous or well-known enough not to need attribution.) Like the *3GT* before it, the *4GT* does not draw undue attention to the verses that may have been invented for the text, perhaps continuing the expected decorum. For a named poet, the author will typically introduce a verse with something like "sem Þorleifr kvað" but for the unattributed verses, the introduction is usually a simple "sem hier" (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. 2).[40] In any event, the corpus of native poetry is thus extended so that it is not found wanting in comparison to Latin — which adds to the skaldic tradition's authority.

The treatise also acknowledges its predecessors, and positions itself well within the tradition — which will now implicitly acknowledge Snorri as an authority by citing Snorri and continuing one of his concepts. Its unknown author is conscious of coming after Ólafr Þórðarson, the author of *3GT*, and the author refers to him (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014,

[39] For their complete discussion on the anonymous verses, see pages xlix–liii.
[40] "as Þorleifr said" … "as here" (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. 3).

p. xiii). The Fourth Grammarian also links himself to a venerable line of skalds (as Snorri and Óláfr did), going back to the earliest known skald, Bragi:

> The skaldic canon familiar from *Snorra Edda* and [*3GT*] is still represented to some extent in [*4GT*] through citations from the poetry of Bragi Boddason, Arnórr jarlaskáld, Einar Skúlason, Snorri Sturluson, and possibly Eilífr kúlnasveinn and Óláfr Þórðarson. (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. xlvi)

Furthermore, the Fourth Grammarian continues the disapproval of the figure Snorri called *nykrat* ('monstrous'), and which Óláfr Þórðarson called *finngalknað* ('monstrous'), with explicit reference to Óláfr and his term for it (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. lv, 18, 20). He also maintains Snorri's approval of the form called *stælt* ('inlaid'), by using two of Snorri's stanzas (Clunies Ross and Wellendorf, 2014, p. lvi). Thus even though the Fourth Grammarian could be breaking new ground in creating his own verse, he is careful to give honor to his forebears — which his audience may expect, lest his attempt at expanding skaldic authority (through his demonstration that the tradition can do the things found in Latin) be rejected.

Grettis saga shows the impact of a mature tradition of skaldic authority, and it may look back to Snorri for inspiration in some of its stanzas. However, it makes no new advances. It appears to portray Grettir as a poet as much it can under the circumstances. It had been thought to have been written around 1310–1320 (Guðni Jónsson, 1936, p. lxx), but a more recent view is that it was written close to 1400 (Örnólfur Thorsson, 2005, p. ix), yet it is frequently compared favorably to the classical 13th-century Icelandic Sagas. The majority of the verses in the saga seem to be situational, but there are a few authenticating verses also. Most of its poetry was likely composed quite some time after the events described in the saga, perhaps around the time the saga was written, and there are good linguistic reasons for suspecting this, for at least 40 of the 73 verses (Guðni Jónsson, 1936, p. xxxiii–xxxvi). Like the *4GT*, the use here of what are likely invented verses continues to be non-problematic (if it ever was problematic to begin with), and, like the other later texts considered here, it seems to have a higher number of such invented verses when compared with the earlier texts. One possible explanation for this is that it may be a case of a mature literature that has used up most of the older oral verses, but which continues to valorize that particular time period and its poetry.

In that continued valorization, it does what it can. Whether invented or not, the verses attributed to Grettir are very numerous and in diverse circumstances, befitting a gifted

warrior-poet in the sagas. Although not precocious like Egill, he is a verse maker at a young age, with his first verse in the saga not long after reaching the age of ten (Guðni Jónsson, 1936, p. 37). He makes verses about his battles against group of berserks and against a bear (Guðni Jónsson, 1936, p. 70, 77). He composes a *flokkr* in honor of his friend Hallmundr (Guðni Jónsson, 1936, p. 184–85). In chapter 80, after receiving the wound that will lead to his death, he makes his final five verses of the saga, reflecting on some of his exploits (Guðni Jónsson, 1936, p. 252–54). More examples could be given. However, even though Grettir is said to have met Sveinn jarl Hákonarson and Ólafr konungr Haraldsson, he is not said to compose any praise poetry for them, not even to help get himself out of trouble for having killed people. This conspicuous lack in such an apparently prolific poet warrants an explanation. One possibility is that the saga author is constrained by *Skáldatal*, which makes no mention of Grettir Ásmundarson as a court skald. Another possibility is that in the late 14th century of its composition, long after Iceland came under Norwegian rule, the earlier ideal of the well-rewarded court skald no longer has the appeal it once had.

At the end of chapter 52, Vermundr asks Grettir several questions, and he replies to each with a half-stanza (Guðni Jónsson, 1936, p. 170–72), a continuation of the theme of poets speaking conversationally in verse. Two of these stanzas betray an influence from Snorri, with their use of the unusual word *reynirunnr* and the phrase *Sifjar vers tveggja handa hjǫlp* in making a reference to a woman named Þórbjǫrg in a manner that is really only explicable by their being directly modeled on Snorri's story of Þórr once being saved by a rowan tree (and that word, *reynirunnr*, only appears in the *Konungsbók* version of the story) (Males, 2014, p. 72), showing the continued interest in his *Edda* as a guide for poetry. Also, there is a nod to the poet's knowledge of runes (although not for magical uses) at the end of chapter 66, when Grettir slays a giant and leaves behind a staff carved with two stanzas in runes to tell a priest about this (Guðni Jónsson, 1936, p. 216–17).

In these various aspects, *Grettis saga* is a late text that looks back to earlier material in maintaining what it can of the image of a poet. The unknown composer of many of Grettir's verses has done his or her part in bolstering that portrayal, and clearly felt a need for it, having been influenced by the received tradition. Grettir is portrayed with much of the versatility expected of a poet, although the receiving of rewards for his poetry is not part of that.

However, the saga is merely a maintenance point for skaldic authority, as it breaks no new ground for the poets or their poetry.

Conclusion

Although only slight in *Íslendingabók*, skaldic authority and emphasis manifested quickly in later literature. The First Grammarian emphasized skaldic authority for linguistic and moral points. Others, whether intentionally or not, would progressively show that the skaldic tradition could do everything that could be done in the prestigious Latin tradition — thus expanding its authority, yet emphasizing native material instead of abandoning it for the Latin. *Háttalykill* as a *clavis metrica* is perhaps the earliest indicator of this, built on heroic themes, and *Litla Skálda* starts the process of citing native poetry to support its kennings. Snorri's *Edda* can be seen to build on points from all of these in creating a manifold handbook of native poetics. Though aimed at supporting the native art, it also has the effect of bringing the native art to the manuscript tradition where it can more fully compete with the Latin art. These include its 102 meters in *Háttatal*, its showcasing of the skaldic tradition in *Skáldskaparmál*, and the showcasing of the eddic tradition in *Gylfaginning*, while at the same time making the tales of the gods more compatible with biblical tradition. Across the multiple parts of *Edda*, there is also euhemerism and the embellishment of the connection to the East so that the native poetry may, in Christian times, have prestigious roots in Troy just like the Latin, and still be solidly connected to the traditional gods as ancestors. In *Heimskringla*, Snorri sets skaldic verse as the best preserver of historical fact over the knowledge of learned men and emphasizes skalds themselves as the best eyewitnesses, perhaps building on earlier precedents set by the use of verse in *Orkneyinga saga*. *Skáldatal*, among other things, honors the most distinguished of skalds who gained renown by composing for kings and earls. *Egils saga* extends the mythology of the poet as a powerful figure who often converses in verse and commands runes and magic, perhaps as the pre-Christian counterpart of a saint. The Fifth Grammarian makes an interesting start on exemplifying aspects of Latin rhetoric through native examples and with native terminology, while the Third and Fourth Grammarians continue this foray into realm of the traditional Latin rhetoric, but with Latin terminology, likely creating poetic examples of their own if suitable examples did not already exist — while

continuing to look to past Norse skalds, including Snorri, as authorities. The Third Grammarian also works in a runic connection. Finally, *Grettis saga* shows a saga author looking back to Snorri as a guide for poetry, as well as continuing the tropes from *Egils saga* of runes and conversing in verse, doing what it can to portray Grettir as a notable poet. Thus Snorri, who looked to past skalds in promoting the skaldic authority ultimately came to be regarded as an authority himself, a position that he still enjoys today.

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