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VALFǪÐR, *VǪLUR*, AND *VALKYRJUR*: ÓÐINN AS A QUEER DEITY MEDIATING THE WARRIOR HALLS OF VIKING AGE SCANDINAVIA

VALFǪÐR, *VǪLUR*, E *VALKYRJUR*: ODINO COME DIVINITÀ QUEER E MEDIATORE NEL VALHALLA DELLA SCANDINAVIA MEDIOEVALE

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Abstract: Óðinn has long been a highly-debated figure with regard to his gender and sexuality. While some have interpreted him as a strictly masculine being, others have argued him to be queer, with caveats surrounding how this affected his role as a deity. I use a queer theoretical framework to firstly streamline my interpretation of Óðinn's gender, and set this within both a cultural context and a queer context. I then turn my attention to the context of the warrior hall. I demonstrate that the interpretation that this was a strictly masculine space is based in scholarly bias, primarily argued by Otto Höfler as part of his work for the National Socialist German Workers' Party (or Nazi Party), and has not since been sufficiently critically challenged. After reassessing the primary material to demonstrate the gender dynamics of the warrior hall, I then demonstrate that, by blurring boundaries and queering his gender, Óðinn acts in a way that mediates between the roles of men and women within the culture of the hall.

Keywords: Óðinn, queer theory, *seiðr*, warrior cult.

Riassunto: Tradizionalmente Odino rappresenta una figura problematica e ampiamente dibattuta, soprattutto quando si considera la sua identità di genere o la sua sessualità. Sebbene molti abbiano letto l'identità di Odino in termini strettamente mascolini, altri hanno proposto un'interpretazione *queer*, sottolineando come questo aspetto possa aver avuto una grande influenza sul suo ruolo di divinità. In questo articolo la figura di Odino verrà inquadrata nel contesto teorico della Queer Theory, per delineare una prima interpretazione dell'identità di genere della divinità, situandola all'interno del corrispettivo contesto culturale e del contesto *queer*. L'articolo si concentra successivamente sulla dimensione spaziale della sala dei guerrieri, il Valhalla. Si dimostrerà che l'interpretazione di questo spazio sociale come prevalentemente maschile e mascolinizzante, a lungo tempo prevalente nella critica, è dovuta a un vizio interpretativo che risale a Otto Höfler, che si occupò del tema come parte del suo lavoro per il Partito Nazista, e che da allora non è stato esaminato criticamente a sufficienza. Dopo un'approfondita rilettura delle fonti primarie, riconsiderando le dinamiche di genere in

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atto nella sala dei guerrieri, il presente articolo dimostra che Odino, attraversando diverse categorie e presentando il suo genere in un'ottica ambivalente e *queer*, agisce con successo come mediatore tra i ruoli maschili e femminili all'interno del Valhalla.

Parole chiave: Odino, queer theory, *seiðr,* culti odinici.

Introduction[2]

Óðinn's portrayal in the Old Norse sources is far-reaching and multi-faceted. He is shown as the god of death, war, poetry, a master of *seiðr*; he is connected to the *valkyrjur* and perhaps Freyja, Frigg, or Sága (Solli, 2008; Simek, 1993; De Vries, 1970; Ármann Jakobsson, 2011; Gunnell, 2015). His name may be linked to the idea of ecstatic fury through the root *óðr* (Old Norse) and *wut* (German) (Simek, 1993, p. 242), leading to interpretations of him as 'leader of the possessed' (Hedeager, 2011, p. 7).

Óðinn's gender has become a fiercely-debated element of his already complex identity. Ármann Jakobsson argues that 'Óðinn does not seem to easily [be] confined within a singular gender role' and that he 'is not only a patriarch but also a deviant, a sorcerer, a queer' (Ármann Jakobsson, 2011, p. 10, 7). Jens Peter Schjødt has argued that Óðinn was, 'above all else, the god of male bands, in this world and the next' (Schjødt, 2008, p. 51), which is partially echoed by Brit Solli, who states that 'as a god Odin thus constitutes a paradox: He is the *manliest* god of warriors, but he is also the *unmanly* master of seid' (Solli, 2008, p. 195).

I will be using these arguments, and particularly this last quote from Solli, as the points of departure for this article. I will demonstrate that Óðinn incorporates elements of queerness into his being, and that this allows him to act as a mediating figure within the hall-based culture, which I argue is not the strict masculine space it has been presented as being.

My analysis of Óðinn and the hall culture will primarily rely on textual sources, and will also make use of archaeological evidence. These written sources are, primarily, the *Poetic*

[2] This article is primarily based on sections of my MA thesis (Jefford Franks 2018), with revised arguments.

and *Prose Edda*, committed to vellum ca. 1270 and ca. 1220 respectively (Clunies Ross, 2016, p. 18, 23). The written sources are highly problematic due to this late date, and this has been extensively discussed by many other scholars. However, these sources are still valuable due to their grounding in oral composition and tradition in the late Viking Age. Similar notions are true of the skaldic poetry used in this article, which also has a late date for being written down, but has earlier compositions and oral transmission.

The *Prose Edda*, for example, has been attributed to Snorri Sturluson, but he appears to have drawn heavily on orally transmitted information, some of which can be seen in the *Poetic Edda*. Schjødt argues that this text was 'at least partially rooted in the pagan era' (Schjødt, 2016, p. 135). A Christian influence is undoubtedly seen in this text: the *Prologue* opens with the Christian creation of man (Snorri Sturluson, 2005, p. 3).

Despite this Christian influence, we are forced to include these medieval sources if we want access to narratives of Viking Age mythology aside from the few we see in skaldic poetry. We must therefore remember at all times that they are later (Schjødt, 2012). We must further be aware that we discuss the past through reconstructions, or models, not the past itself (see Jensen, 2009; Murphy, 2017; Schjødt, 2012, particularly p. 264-265, for more on models). Building a model works as though tracing a three-dimensional image with areas missing: the completed traced drawing, or model, cannot be an exact replica of the three-dimensional object, but carries enough information to make a well-informed analysis. Therefore, the way in which I discuss Óðinn's gender will not and cannot be a 1:1 replica of the beliefs of Viking Age peoples: it is a reconstruction based on the material available to us.[3]

I also make the caveat that, following the theories that are later mentioned surrounding religious diversity, this reconstruction cannot and does not replicate the mythology due to the vast number of conflicting and varied versions that have existed. Instead, I work with the myths as preserved: to attempt to explore them in a way beyond this often does not lead to

[3] I am very grateful to Sophie Bønding for many conversations regarding this concept, and for sharing as-yet-unpublished material with me to inform my views.

many new revelations due to the unknown historical contexts, and leads to a speculative discussion far beyond the bounds of any article.

This article makes use of a number of specialist terms that might be unfamiliar to those not well-versed in gender and queer studies, and therefore they are explained here. The first of these is *cisgender*—this term refers to an individual whose assigned sex at birth matches with their lived gender: if the doctors consider a baby to be a boy and that individual never disagrees with them, then they are *cisgender*. The prefix *cis-* is derived from Latin, and stands in opposition to *trans-*, with individuals whose lived gender does not match the gender doctors assigned them at birth being *transgender*.

The term *heteronormative* will also be utilised. The prefix *hetero-* is commonly used in a variety of contexts to mean relationally different or other: for example, heterogenous. As it is used here, *heteronormative* will refer specifically to the concept that heterosexuality is the dominant model within which a society functions. *Heteronormativity* assumes that all people are attracted to someone of the 'opposite' sex to themselves, and that all relationships of all kinds function within a heterosexual paradigm. As an extension of this, the term *cis-heteronormative* will also be used: this largely carries the same meaning, but places emphasis on the assumption that gender and sex[4] are the same as one another, and exist only within oppositional binary categories. Within this model, sexual and romantic attraction between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman is the assumed default within which people function.

A further related term is *cis-heteropatriarchal*. The foundation *patriarchal* within this term draws attention to the male-dominated structure within which a society functions. If we then take the *cis-hetero-* prefix from above, we can see that this term refers to a society in which men are an oppressive force over women, and within which cisgender and heterosexual identities are assumed as the default. Modern Western society functions with *cis-heteropatriarchy* as the dominant model, and this is assumed to be the default within all cultures, particularly those

[4] The relationship between these two terms will be explored in more detail in the following section on queer theory.

within a Western ideal: while there is no space here for greater discussion, it should be acknowledged that this model is seen as a colonial force in both historic and modern concepts (see, for example, Aizura *et al*. 2014; Binaohan, 2014).

The term *queer* will be utilised throughout this article to refer to the opposition of these concepts. Queer cannot be defined by what it is, but rather what it is not: it is existence beyond and resisting cis-heteropatriarchal norms.

Queer Theory

I draw on three key components of queer theory in order to analyse Óðinn's gender in this article. The first of these perspectives focuses on challenging the assumed cis-heteronormative power structures through which these sources are normally analysed. This builds upon the work of Solli, for example, who argues that 'queer defineres ikke som en essens, men som en posisjon som innebærer motstand mot den rådende normen, ja makte' (queer is not defined as an essence, but as a position that implies resistance to the prevailing norm or power) (Solli, 1998, p. 243. My translation). Furthermore, Chelsea Blackmore notes that queer theory deconstructs the normative, highlighting the disparity in nuanced understandings between our present lives and historical studies: 'while fluidity and plurality are easily conceived in a modern context, most examinations of prehistoric identity formation focus on one aspect of identity to the near exclusion of others' (Blackmore, 2011, p. 76). Alongside this, Robin Ryle encourages us to question the normative and to therefore be inherently distrustful of categories (Ryle, 2012, p. 90). As such, I do not aim to define a specific element of queerness that Óðinn adheres to.

Alongside this I also draw on approaches that explicitly acknowledge the relationship between sex and gender: these are not always directly connected to one another, and exist in multitudes beyond the cis-heteronormative binary. Lara Ghisleni *et al*. criticise the so-called 'two-sex/two-gender' model, which presents men and women as oppositional and normative social groups, where the assumed gender is defined by the culturally set biological sex and

genitalia (Ghisleni *et al*. 2016, p. 767-768). I further follow Laura Lee Downs' argument that 'gender identity was not a biological given but a social and historical creation' (Downs, 2010, p. 3). We can therefore begin to locate sex and gender within their cultural contexts. This in turn relies heavily on post-colonial theory: scholarly discussions of sex and gender are heavily influenced by the modern Western binary model. We must therefore recognise that this model is not true of all cultures. Indeed, Ryle draws attention to some key examples: India, Native American cultures, Thailand, and the Balkans have varying notions of gender outside of the Western binary (Ryle, 2012, p. 9). Furthermore, intersex identities have long been known, with Ruth Evans demonstrating the medieval context of this (Evans, 2018). As such, it is imperative that we acknowledge the multitude of ways to exist within and beyond binary sex and gender, and that cultural mindsets often have coexisting and competing views, which vary further between cultures.

It is also necessary to inherently criticise two approaches to gender often used within Old Norse studies. The first of these is the notion of a 'third gender' or 'third sex,' often used interchangeably, which has been particularly present in archaeological discussions since the 1990s (Moral 2016, p. 789). Ghisleni *et al*. note that by framing variations of gender productions as dismissible deviants, we ignore the nature of personhood (Ghisleni *et al*. 2016, p. 775). By discussing 'third genders' and 'third sexes' scholars reinforce the binary categories as 'natural, normal, and even universal binary opposites,' relying on assumptions that 'limits both sex and gender to normative and stagnated categories that are conceived as universal, ahistorical, and invariable' (Moral, 2016, p. 789-791).

The second of these approaches is Carol J. Clover's well-cited model, which largely follows Thomas Laqueur's one-sex model (Clover, 1993). Clover argues that within Old Norse-Icelandic literature, the term *blauðr* is defined as soft or weak, as well as feminine, while *hvatr* means bold or active, as well as masculine. She notes that these terms can be used for people regardless of what their culturally-constructed sex may appear to be, and that their social power and status is what determines what words they are described with (Clover, 1993).

Within this model, power becomes the determinate for gender. Jack Halberstam addresses the issue of gender as a relation of power, stating that:

> Women, within such a model ['slightly old-fashioned feminism'], is the name for those subjects within patriarchy who have no access to male power and who are regulated and confined by patriarchal structures. But what would Smith say to Monique Wittig's claim that lesbians are not women because they are not involved in the heterosexual matrix that produces sexual difference as a power relation? […] Are butch dykes women? Are male transvestites men? How does gender variance disrupt the flow of powers presumed by patriarchy in relations between men and women? […] It conveniently ignores the ways in which gender relations are scrambled where and when gender variance comes into play (Halberstam, 1998, p. 17).

Halberstam's critique is essential to my argument here: viewing women and femininity as the absence of power is disingenuous and does not assist us in understanding gender in an already-powerful being. It instead reinforces limiting, cis-heteropatriarchal paradigms of gender.

The final concept I draw upon is the argument that masculinity does not equal maleness, and femininity does not equal femaleness. As Halberstam argues, 'masculinity must not and cannot and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects' (Halberstam, 1998, p. 1). Furthermore, they state that 'this widespread indifference to female masculinity, I suggest, has clearly ideological motivations and has sustained the complex social structures that wed masculinity to maleness and to power and domination' (Halberstam, 1998, p. 2). By separating masculinity and femininity from the sites of male and female bodies, we can instead interpret more nuanced pictures in which individuals present a mix of masculinity and femininity. Instead of seeing these as binary categories forcing individuals into the oppositional groups of 'male' and 'female,' I instead posit that the 'actual sex' of the individual, in this case Óðinn, is irrelevant. Instead the negotiation of masculinity and femininity in his portrayal creates a queered figure. Due to Óðinn's nature as a mythical being, I demonstrate that this queerness is extremely useful to his function within pre-Christian Scandinavian society.

Queering Óðinn

When studying pre-Christian Scandinavia, parsing and identifying a queer identity is incredibly challenging. Following the first perspective of queer theory addressed above, identifying a queer identity here is less about defining a clear boundary of queerness, but instead understanding queerness as something that pushes against and exists beyond cis-heteronormative boundaries.

As such, the main perspective through which I identify Óðinn's queerness is the emic concept of *ergi* (the noun form, with the adjective form *argr* and metathesis *ragr*). This topic has a long and contentious research history, with Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's 1983 *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society* still being the most in-depth study on this phenomenon, though it is somewhat lacking when held to modern standards of queer and gender studies. Overall, the term has been argued to refer to a social construction of passive male homosexuality (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 18), which in turn carries implication of 'unmanliness' by most interpretations (e.g. Ármann Jakobsson 2011, 9-10). Ármann Jakobsson argues that *ergi*, in its medieval context, appears to be linked to concepts of masculinity and femininity, and is used to reference sorcery, cowardice, male homosexuality, female lust, and women more broadly (Ármann Jakobsson, 2011, p. 9-10).

In order for *ergi* to be understood in relation to Óðinn as a pre-Christian, and pre-medieval deity, we must attempt to consolidate a sense of meaning for this word. As argued by Solli, the term should not be used as a synonym for homosexuality as we would understand it today (Solli, 2008, p. 195). In doing so we would misunderstand what is, inherently, an emic category. Instead, I view *ergi* as a similar word to queer, in that its meaning relates to the pushing against boundaries, in this case in specific relation to gender and sexuality.

For the purposes of this study, there are three textual references that I will analyse in which Óðinn is referred to as a variant of *ergi*, all of which are taken from the *Poetic Edda*. Two of these occur in *Hárbarðsljóð*, in which Óðinn, in disguise as Hárbarðr, is called '*Hárbarðr inn*

ragi' (Hárbarðr the queer) twice by Þórr (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, I, 2014, p. 394, 397). This seems to be a response to a number of stanzas earlier, in which Hárbarðr boasts about his sexual exploits with various women (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, I, 2014, p. 392). This raises a number of questions about what was considered to be *ergi* behaviour. If the implications of incorrectly insulting a man as *ergi* are as severe as Meulengracht Sørensen argues (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 15-16), then why is Hárbarðr's behaviour in this poem *ergi*? One explanation for this lies in the single use of the term *gambanteinn* (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, I, 2014, p. 392), which appears to be a kind of magic staff, only known from this poem and *Skírnismál*. The exact meaning is unknown, but Leszek Gardeła argues that the element *gamban* is what indicates that this stick, *teinn*, was deemed to have magical properties (Gardeła, 2016, p. 138-140). This reference may therefore be indicative of Óðinn practising *seiðr*. However, it must be noted that the first occurrence of the *ergi* insult appears a number of stanzas after this mention of *gambanteinn*, during which a number of other insults are exchanged. Significantly, however, the *gambanteinn* is mentioned within the context of Óðinn seducing women:

> Miklar manvélar
> ek hafða við myrkriður;
> þá er ek vélta þær frá verum;
> harðan jǫtun
> ek hugða Hlébarð vera,
> gaf hann mér gambanteinn,
> en ek vélta hann ór viti (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, I, 2014, p. 392).

> Great love-tricks I have used on witches,
> Those who I have betrayed from their men.
> A strong *jǫtun* I think Hlébarð was,
> He gave me a *gambanteinn*,
> And I bewitched him out of his wits (My translation).

By combining this description of sexual excess with the mention of the *gambanteinn* an interesting picture of Óðinn's gender emerges. He is engaging with what appears to be erotically charged magic, but in a way that suggests sexual excess: the charge of *ergi* in relation to this appears to be more generally aligned with women than men (Ármann Jakobsson, 2011, p. 9-10). This raises a number of intriguing questions: while the practice of *seiðr* here could be *ergi* from a male perspective, it may also be *ergi* from a female perspective. Óðinn appears then to be pushing against the boundaries of expected behaviour of both men and women within this context, blurring, and queering, these boundaries.

Two alternative interpretations of this accusation are presented by Klaus von See *et al*., who firstly suggest that this accusation may be in relation to the exchange of verbal insults between Þórr and Hárbarðr/Óðinn. By their argument, this may be a reference to the lack of physical fight, which may then have been interpreted as cowardly, an implication of *ergi* (von See *et al*. 1997, 214). However, it must be acknowledged that this poem takes the form of a flyting—a way of exchanging verbal insults—and therefore it is questionable as to whether Þórr would call Hárbarðr/Óðinn a coward for his participation. The other explanation offered by von See *et al*. is that Hárbarðr's name, translating as 'grey beard,' is a reference to goats having beards, with goats apparently epitomising the notion of *ergi* (von See *et al*. 1997, p. 214). However, this connection between the grey beard and a goat is not explained further and therefore is tenuous.

The other occurrence of Óðinn being accused of *ergi* is a passage of *Lokasenna*, stanza 24, in which Loki taunts Óðinn that:

> En þik síða kóðu
> Sámseyju í,
> ok draptu á vétt sem vǫlur;
> vitka líki
> fórtu verþjóð yfir,
> ok hugðu ek það args aðal (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, I, 2014, p. 413).

You practiced *seiðr*
in Samsey,
and struck on a drum like a *vǫlva*;
in a wizard's form you travelled over mankind,
and I thought that was *ergi* in nature (my translation).

This stanza has been explored in detail by Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, who argues that the use of *verþjóð* specifically implies a group of men: to 'travel' over them implies having their love, in much the same way as 'að komast yfir' and 'að fara yfir' means to have someone's love, therefore interpreting Óðinn as queer in the traditional 'homosexual' sense (Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 2007, p. 127-128).[5] This intriguing analysis is further compounded by the greater scholarship surrounding the topic of *seiðr*.

The nature of *seiðr* as an *ergi* or queer practice has a vast research history that I will not recount here for the sake of brevity (for some key texts, see Price, 2002; Tolley, 2009; Strömbäck, 1935; Gardeła, 2016; Heide, 2006; Dillmann, 2006, particularly p. 431-456. For an example of the variance of portrayals of *seiðr* between literary genres, see Merkelbach (forthcoming)). What is significant is that Óðinn is being connected to these practices, as this plays a key role in the evidence for Óðinn being perceived as queer. The exact nature of *seiðr* is unknown, as specific details are rarely given. It is commonly speculated to be shamanistic in some form (Solli, 2008, p. 195), possibly as a borrowing from Sámi culture in the north of Scandinavia (Price 2002, 233; Dillmann 2006, 269-308). However, Solli takes this argument further and suggests that it involved an element of autoerotic asphyxiation (Solli, 2008, p. 199). While certainly a bizarre suggestion, this sexual practice could indeed be read as being *ergi* or queer, as it challenges the boundaries of normative sexual behaviour. Importantly, this challenges the stagnated argument that *seiðr*, and by extension *ergi*, is indicative of passive male homosexuality.

[5] I am very grateful to the anonymous reviewer who drew my attention to this article.

What seems more secure in our knowledge regarding *seiðr* is that it was most commonly performed by women, known as *vǫlur* in the plural and *vǫlva* in the singular, with the most detailed example appearing in *Eiríks saga rauða*. However, Óðinn is also not the only male figure said to practice *seiðr*: *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* relates the existence of eighty *seiðmenn*, who were later burnt for the crime of practicing *seiðr* (Snorri Sturluson, 1941, p. 139). Therefore, while our knowledge here is unclear, Price summarises this succinctly: 'the enactment of these rites seems to have placed so great a demand on their performers as to mark them with a different form of gender identity, outside the conventional norms of Viking Age society' (Price, 2002, p. 64).

Perhaps one of the best-known references to Óðinn practicing *seiðr* and being *ergi* appears in *Ynglinga saga*, the legendary section of the *konungasögur* which opens the collection of sagas known as *Heimskringla*, generally believed to have been authored by Snorri Sturluson. This text claims that

> Óðinn kunni þá íþrótt, svá at mestr máttr fylgði, ok framði sjálfr, er seiðr heitir, en af því mátti hann vita ørlǫg manna ok óorðna hluti, svá ok at gera mǫnnum bana eða óhamingju eða vanheilendi, svá ok at taka frá mǫnnum vit eða afl ok gefa ǫðrum. En þessi fjǫlkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmǫnnum skammlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kennd sú íþrótt. (Snorri Sturluson, 1941, p. 13).
>
> Óðinn knew and practiced that skill that was followed by the greatest strength, called *seiðr*, and from it he knew the fortunes of men and things that had not yet come to be, and also caused the deaths of men or bad luck or ill health, and also took from men wit or strength and gave it to others. And this magic, when it was practiced, comes with such great queerness that it was shameful for a man to practice it, and the skill was taught to the goddesses. (My translation).

This reinforces what other sources tell us about *seiðr*: the practitioners are usually women, but Óðinn also practiced it and as *ergi* for doing so.

The final piece of textual evidence is one of Óðinn's names: Jálkr. This name appears in both the Eddic poem *Grímnismál* and in the *Prose Edda*. In both, the name appears with little context, with *Gylfaginning* 2 of the *Prose Edda* stating that 'tólft Jálg eða Jálkr' (twelfth is Gelding) (Snorri Sturluson, 2005, p. 8), and *Grímnismál* 49 reading:

Grímni mik hétu
at Geirrøðar
en Jálk at Ásmundar (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason I, 2014, p. 378).

Masked One I call myself
To Geirrøðar,
And Gelding to Ásmundar. (My translation).

And *Grímnismál* 54:

Hétumk Þundr fyrir þat,
Vakr ok Skilfingr,
Váfuðr ok Hroptatýr,
Gautr ok Jálkr með goðum (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, I, 2014, p. 379).

I call myself Thunderer before that,
Awakener and Trembler,
Wanderer and Sage,
Gautr and Gelding with the gods. (My translation).

Jálkr translates to Gelding, a castrated male horse: this has implications surrounding Óðinn's gender and sexuality, and resonates with the interpretations of *ergi*. This again demonstrates a sense of Óðinn pushing against the boundaries of heteronormative values, apparently being known in some capacity as a 'weakened' man.

Beyond the textual evidence, it is helpful to draw attention to a particularly intriguing piece of material culture: the controversially-named Óðinn from Lejre. This miniature figure is made of silver and inlaid with niello, and stands less than 2cm tall, weighing less than 9g.

However, the detail it contains is incredible. The piece was found in Lejre in Sjælland, Denmark, as part of an excavation of a cultic hall, with the figure appearing to date to between 900 and 950 AD (Christensen, 2009, p. 7). The object shows a figure in what appears to be a long dress, possibly with a moustache, seated on a chair with carved headposts, and a bird on each armrest. The identification of the figure it represents has been debated, with some suggesting it could be Óðinn, while others believe it may be a male ruler from Lejre, or a woman (Christensen, 2009, p. 8; Mannering, 2013). Although identifying the figure with any degree of certainty is impossible and can lead to circular arguments, speculation about the depiction can pose some interesting notions. The seated human wears a jacket, a long dress of some kind, jewellery, and what appears to be a hat or helmet (Christensen, 2009, p. 11). Ulla Mannering notes that no clear gender identification can be made based on the headwear alone, but that the clothing is very reminiscent of women's clothing (Mannering, 2013, p. 83). Further, Tom Christensen notes that parallels can be drawn to figures of various genders (Christensen, 2009, p. 12-14). Based on the clothing, it would seem reasonable to suggest that this figure may be that of a woman, as argued by Mannering (2013, p. 84).

However, when we turn our attention to the seat and the elements combined in this, our image becomes more confused. The figure sits on an ornate throne, ornamented with what appears to be beast heads—it can be argued that this is somewhat reminiscent of Hlíðskjálf, Óðinn's high seat from the mythological sources, or an otherwise ornate throne for a ruler. On the armrests of this sits two birds, perhaps reminding us of Óðinn's ravens, Huginn and Muninn. We can develop this argument by contextualising Lejre: we know it was a central site for the élite (Christensen, 2009, p. 21), and that Óðinn was closely linked with this élite. A final piece of evidence to suggest that this could be Óðinn is found by focusing our attention on the eyes of the figure: it has been noted that one eye seems to have been scratched away, with Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh interpreting the figure as having a pupil in only one eye (Arwill-Nordbladh, 2013, p. 90). This could be due to damage sustained in the intervening millennium between its creation and its rediscovery by archaeologists. However, it is also not uncommon for iconography to depict a figure with some extent of damage to one eye, noted both by Arwill-Nordbladh (2013, 90), and explored in more detail by Neil Price and Paul Mortimer,

who explore a range of similar iconography and demonstrate their connections to Óðinn (2014).

While we cannot definitively identify this figure, I argue it is within the realms of possibility that this is a depiction of Óðinn. As Arwill-Nordbladh states, 'the figurine from Lejre indicates that the heteronormative gender order where masculinity and femininity were clearly distinguished and separated, at least in some instances was open for negotiation' (Arwill-Nordbladh, 2013, p. 90). As such, I believe this figure can be used, by extension, as evidence that Óðinn was queer, in that he pushed and blurred boundaries, even within his iconographical representations.

While the evidence for Óðinn as a queer deity is small in quantity, this is not insignificant within the dearth of sources available for the study of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. Therefore, at this stage it is reasonable to argue that Óðinn was queer, as he clearly pushed against, and perhaps existed beyond, the boundaries of expected gendered behaviours, bringing both the masculine and the feminine together within his being.

I would like to propose a highly speculative but substantiated argument in relation to this. In the last twenty years of the study of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion, increasing attention has been paid to the notion of religious diversity, and the implications this has. In particular, Schjødt has argued for four axes of variation along which we can trace religious diversity, these being chronological, geographic, social, and cognitive (Schjødt, 2013). The notion of geographic variation was very successfully demonstrated by Brink (2007), who has mapped a number of theophoric place names throughout Scandinavia, with distinctive patterns emerging: of particular importance here is the focus of Óðinn place-names within cultic central places, supporting the idea that Óðinn was associated with the élite classes and warrior halls.

Keeping the notion of geographic variation in mind, when analysing the sources suggesting Óðinn was queer another pattern emerges. Most explicitly, *Lokasenna* places Óðinn's practice of *seiðr* on the island of *Sámseyju*, modern Samsø, off the east coast of Jylland,

Denmark. Nearby is Lejre, the location of the find of the silver Óðinn figure. Furthermore, when reading *Hárbarðsljóð* in full, we see Þórr brag:

> Brúðir berserkja
> Barðak í Hléseyju;
> Þær hǫfðu verst unnit,
> Vélta þjóð alla (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, I, 2014, p. 395).
>
> Brides of *berserkir*
> I fought on Hlésey;
> They had done the worst things,
> Betrayed the whole people. (My translation).

The *berserkir* are closely connected to Óðinn throughout mythological sources, and are also connected to the feminine through their brides here. *Hléseyju* is the modern island of Læsø, off the coast of northern Jylland.

Alongside these connections, Samsø has a town named Onsbjerg, demonstrated through Brink's work to be an Óðinn place-name; Lejre is in close proximity to Onsved, the only Óðinn place-name on Sjælland (Brink, 2007). Furthermore, the construction of the Kanhave Canal in the eighth century in Samsø suggests that 'at least parts of the island were under centralised military control' (Christensen, 2007, p. 83). Óðinn has close links with warriors, as will be discussed later, and as such a connection here is not unreasonable.

I do not argue that this is 'proof' that Óðinn existed only as a queer deity within the Danish region: this could be a coincidence or an accident of preservation. However, I believe it to be an interesting speculation to suggest that this could be the pattern we are seeing, and one which would support theories of religious variation such as Schjødt's.

Warriors and Valkyrjur

As Solli argues, if we interpret Óðinn as a queer deity, we are therefore acknowledging a conflict between this and his role as a god of war: 'Odin thus constitutes a paradox: He is the *manliest* god of warriors, but he is also the *unmanly* master of seid' (Solli, 2008, p. 195). The warrior cult of Iron Age Scandinavia has been consistently interpreted as a strictly masculine sphere (for example, Höfler, 1934; Schjødt, 2008; Lindow, 1975; Kershaw, 2000; Murphy, 2013). As such, it would seem that Óðinn's queerness is in direct contradiction to his role here: how can a queer deity be the god of the male warriors' space?

I will argue that the concept of the halls being a strictly male space is derived from scholarly bias, particularly in light of Nazi ideology of 1930s Germany. Much of this scholarship was within the field of folklore at this time: of this, James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld note that 'among contemporary scholars in the German-speaking world, there is no doubt that a racially biased and irrational ideology penetrated this academic discipline in the Großdeutschland of that period' (Dow & Lixfeld, 1994, p. xi). I argue that the same level of understanding is absent in English-speaking scholarship, and that a concerning number of scholars and students are ignorant to the past of this scholarship. Moreover, where scholars are aware of this context, they do not critically deconstruct the harmful ideological roots of the ideas to the extent that is necessary. As such, the primary material needs to be re-evaluated within the framework of a queer methodology, in order to challenge the cis-heteropatriarchal power structures that dominate this narrative.[6] I demonstrate that men and women were equally present in these spaces in both the human and mythological realms. I therefore conclude that, using his blurred gender, Óðinn acts as a mediating figure in this space.

In his book *Decolonizing the Viking Age*, Fredrik Svanberg argues that 'the core of "the Viking Age" is a system of related axiomatic ideas that was put together about 130 years ago

[6] I would like to briefly draw attention to Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir's eloquent remark that all scholarship is the product of the author's bias and cannot be extricated from that. As such, it is worth remembering that while the scholarship I produce is borne from a different viewpoint to traditional scholarship in this area, this traditional scholarship comes from an equal position of personal bias and experience (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2019).

by some of the founding fathers of Scandinavian archaeology,' and that this 'system of ideas in question was constructed under heavy influence of the doctrines of nationalism' (Svanberg, 2003, p. 11). These foundational ideas are of the utmost importance to this section of my study: the concept of the 'Viking Age' as a point of historical study has, and still can, exist within a space of ethnocentric nationalism, and scholars must remain aware of this. I do not make any claims within this article to be dismantling that entirely: to do so requires the constant effort of the whole field. Instead, I hope to take some small steps towards deconstructing a small piece of this, to demonstrate new ideas beyond, in Svanberg's words, our inherited 'colonialism of the past' (Svanberg, 2003, p. 11).

The first piece of work on this topic was Heinrich Schurtz' 1902 book *Alterklassen Männerbunde — Eine Dar stellung der Grundformen der Gesselschaft* ('Age Groups and Men's Groups — A Representation of the Basic Forms of Society'). His work broadly focused on age and gender distinctions within social groups, alongside secret groups. This was a comparative study, rather than solely focusing on an ancient Germanic past (Schurtz, 1902). Within this work he coined the term *Männerbunde* or 'band of men,' which is pervasive to this day, expressing the implication of a universal biological contrast between men and women (Lund & Mateeva 1997, p. 208). While Schurtz passed away long before the rise of the National Socialist—or Nazi—Party in Germany, his work was still drawn on heavily in the *Ahnenerbe* publication *Männerbunde und Wissenschaften* ('Men's Groups and Science') in 1934 (Baeumler, 1934; Lund & Mateeva, 1997, p. 208).

The next two scholars to discuss this topic were Lily Weiser and Otto Höfler. There were two distinct camps in Germanic folklore studies in 1920s and 1930s Germany, the 'ritualists' and the 'mythologists'—both Weiser and Höfler belonged to the 'ritualist' school. I draw attention to this here as the 'ritualist' school long had the support of Himmler's organisation, the SS (Bockhorn 1994, p. 140).

Wieser's *Altgermanische Jünglingsweihen und Männerbund* ('Ancient Germanic Youth Consecration and Male Groups') was published in 1927. In this, she specifically argues that these warrior bands existed within a religious framework (Fehrle in Weiser, 1927, p. 7-8; Ipsen,

1928). In particular, she notes the association between these male groups and Óðinn, who she sees as the leader of the dead, ecstasy, nobles, and warriors (Weiser, 1297, p. 83). Weiser's relationship with the Nazi Party was complicated: they condemned her thesis, but she was still within the ritualist school, mentioned above, which had the support of the SS. Furthermore, the foreword to *Altgermanische Jünglingsweihen und Männerbund* was written by Eugen Ferhle. Another German scholar of the ritualist school, Fehrle worked for the SS from the late 1930s, but produced profoundly racist work on folk and race as early as the 1920s (Assion, 1994, p. 115). Indeed, it was said of Fehrle that 'even outside Heidelberg he is widely known as the "chief NS *Volkskunde* ideologist"' – the chief National Socialist folklore ideologist (Assion, 1994, p. 112-113). While the control Weiser had over the authorship of the foreword is unclear, the fact that this relationship clearly existed, and that her work was at least initially endorsed by a leading National Socialist scholar is deeply troubling. Furthermore, following the death of her husband her source of income was translating a number of Nordic works on ethnology and folklore into German for the Nazi organisation *Ahnenerbe*. However, throughout this time she is said to have remained starkly anti-Nazi, and is believed to have helped Jewish people in danger to safety, while resisting pressure to cooperate with the Nazi Party (Kvidelund, nbl.snl.no/Lily_Weiser_Aall).

Criticisms of Weiser's work extend beyond her ideological background. Lund and Mateeva argue that Weiser overstates Tacitus as a source, stating that 'die These von Männerbunde bei den Taciteischen Germanen bleibt also nach wie vor unbewiesen und unbeweisbar' (the thesis of male groups within Tacitus' *Germania* thus remains unproven and unprovable) (Lund & Mateeva, 1997, p. 216).

One of the most important texts in regards to both the discussions of the *Männerbunde* and Nazi scholarship is *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* ('Cultic Secret Societies of the Ancient Germans'), written by Otto Höfler in 1934. This text is important for two reasons: Höfler was a known member of the Nationalist Socialist party, and this work formed a key part of the *Ahnenerbe* ideology. Furthermore, scholars still deem it to be the foundational text for this topic: John Lindow's 2001 *Norse Mythology: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*

recommends the text for discussions on the *einherjar*, stating that 'the notion of an ecstatic Odin cult was best articulated by Otto Höfler' with no acknowledgement of the historical grounding in which this text was written (Lindow, 2001, p. 105). Rudolf Simek's *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* similarly recommends Höfler without commenting on the historical background, under the discussions of the *einherjar* and the Wild Hunt (Sime,k 1993; p. 71, 373).

Höfler opens *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* with a discussion of Óðinn and the Wild Hunt, which he argued had existed continuously, without disruption, since the 'ancient Germans.' He then brings this argument to the general concept of the *Männerbünde*, and the secret groups he believed existed, within this. Höfler states:

> Diese Kultformen nun erweisen sich als uraltertümlich und müssen ohne Abbruch bis in die Vorzeit zurürck reichen. Sie können nur von gefestigten Verbänden getragen worden sein, und darum müssen diese Bünde historisch mit Gliederungen der Urzeit zusammenhängen. So lange das Bundesritual seinen ursprünglichen Sinn nicht verloren hat, dürfen wir jene sozialen Gruppen 'kultisch' nennen, mag auch ihre politische und wirtschafliche Tätigkeit im übrigen so sehr angewachsen sein, daß sie das Gesamtbild völlig zu beherrschen scheint (Höfler, 1934, p. 2).
>
> These cult forms now prove to be ancient and must go back to prehistoric times without interruption. They can only have been carried [through time] by well-established associations, and therefore these groups must historically be related to primitive structures. As long as the ritual of the covenant has not lost its original meaning, we may call these social groups 'cultic,' though their political and economic activity may, moreover, have grown so much that they seem to dominate the picture as a whole. (My translation).

The idea of Germanic continuity is Höfler's predominant argument. He particularly focuses on Tacitus' *Germania*, and takes stock of Tacitus' description of a group known as the *Harii*, who are described as a warlike people. Höfler argued that, while Tacitus presented this as a Vandal ethnic group, there is no reason not to consider this to be the same group—and indeed word—as the *einherjar* (Höfler, 1934, p. 166). Höfler's closing statement is particularly striking:

> Wir wollen im folgenden zeigen, wie religiöse Feiern und Gemeinschaftskulte solcher Art noch im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit Höhepunkte des Gemeinschaftslebens bilden—und

> zwar auch bei sozialen Einheiten, von deren 'mythologischen' Hintergründen der Rationalismus nicht die leisteste Ahnung hatte. Wir warden Kultformen dieser Art in allen Gesellschaftsschichten wiederfinden—bei vornehmen und mächtigen Adelsgilden, in den scheinbar so nüchternen zünften, in Kriegerverbänden, Kaufmannsbünden und bäuerlichen Genossenschaften. Und es wird sich zeigen, wie lebendig jene 'mythologischen' Kräfte auch hier bis in späte Zeiten geblieben sind (Höfler, 1934, p. 341).
>
> In the following we will demonstrate how religious celebrations and communal cults of this kind are still highlights of communal life in the Middle Ages and the modern era—even in social units, of which 'mythological' backgrounds rationalism was not aware of. We find the cult forms of this kind in all strata of society—among noble and powerful aristocratic guilds, in seemingly plain guilds, in warrior associations, merchant covenants and peasant cooperatives. And it will become clear how lively those 'mythological' powers have remained here even in modern times. (My translation).

Wolfgang Emmerich discusses the implications of 'The Mythos of Germanic Continuity,' stating that:

> Still another folklorist, Otto Höfler, finally countered Dopsch with a continuity mythos that included a pseudoscientific theory complete in line with fascist Germanic tribal and racial ideology. He viewed cultural continuity as guaranteed by the uninterrupted succession of cultural *bearers* and in this way "solved" the continuity problem biologically, once and for all. Höfler found exclusively, "in culture-generating and continually procreative *peoples*, the real self-energizing force of history." He thus conceived of continuity as an "organic self-sufficiency in the development of pure Germanic life forms," a self-sufficiency, however, which was attributed only to the Germanic tribes. Programatically he called for newly established "primary foundations of our historical self-awareness" and for subsequently viewing Germanic antiquity and the Middle Ages as "having issued from a powerful fount." One would find continuity realized in four areas: race, speech, region, and state. Höfler thus aligned himself with the fascist synthesis of Germanic tribal life and the Nordic race. An investigation of the fanaticism for Germanic tribes, exceptionally popular right from their beginnings, makes it clear that Nazi racial teachings were finally able to build on this seemingly harmless foundation. The fascists spoke not only about the "Nordic" but just as often and just as incorrectly about the "Germanic" or "German" race (Emmerich, 1994, p. 41).

As Emmerich demonstrates, Höfler's work shared ideological motivations with the Nazi party, and with logical reason—in 1921 Höfler joined the Association of Germanists, a 'volkish' anti-Semitic group, and in 1922 he joined the 'Odnertruppe,' a forerunner to the SA, the Nazi Party's original paramilitary (Hausmann, 2002, p. 184). As such, we can see that Höfler's work, in particular that on 'Germanic continuity,' was likely designed to aid in the ideology of the Nazi Party. The implication of this 'Germanic continuity' was the justification for the Holocaust, with the Nazi Party killing 6 million Jewish people, alongside thousands of people of other groups they viewed as an enemy to Germanic culture, including queer, disabled, black, and Romani people. Furthermore, the concept of the *Männerbunde* and its continuity can be reflected in the existence of the SS. Within this context, we must remind ourselves that the Nazi Party actively benefitted from a narrative in which these groups consisted of strong able-bodied heterosexual cisgender men to the exclusion of anyone outside of those boundaries. As Irene Maria Manea notes, 'this new type of man [in Nazi Germany], characterized by rigidity, austerity, combative spirit, discipline, finds its legitimation in the ideologically manipulated ancient portrayal' (Manea, 2014, p. 72). Meier adds that Höfler's mystification of Germanic dead and ecstatic men's groups made him a spiritual pioneer for the SS: a damning contextualisation (Meier, 1999, p. 326).

Höfler and Weiser's work has received criticisms beyond their ideological biases. Meier notes that Höfler uses a very small number of sources which derive from different places, with unclear historical contexts. He further highlights that Höfler and Weiser also make use of circular arguments relying on medieval and modern folklores, and criticises their assumption of Germanic continuity, noting that this does not appear to exist (Meier, 1999, p. 324). Despite these varied criticisms, these texts have very powerful legacies within the study of the warrior hall, and more recent scholarly works still explore the warrior bands through the same cis-heteropatriarchal lens.

Lindow's 1975 *Comitatus, Individual and Honor: Studies in North Germanic Institutional Vocabulary* is one such study. He focuses on the linguistic evidence and traces the meanings of individual words linked to these concepts from their Proto-Indo-European roots through to

Old Icelandic. Within this, Lindow demonstrates that there is a small semantic shift in the language, which highlights a flaw in Höfler's argument for Germanic continuity within the pre-Modern period. However, Lindow still focuses on the *comitatus* or warbands as a solely male space (Lindow, 1975). I argue this is in part a hangover from Höfler's earlier arguments.

Michael Enright's 1996 study *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Téne to the Viking Age* begins to break from this cis-heteropatriarchal narrative. He highlights that all studies on the Germanic warbands focus on the relationship between the lord and his followers, and argues that women had the key role of assisting in the social cohesion of these groups (Enright, 1996, p. 2). Enright demonstrates the motif of women offering a cup first to the leader, and then to his men, in a way that acknowledges and established the ranking order (Enright, 1996, p. 12). Significantly, Enright states that 'it is now clear that the lady of the hall is an instrument of her husband used to express his lordship and maintain order among his *Gefolgschaft*' (Enright 1996, 14).

Andreas Nordberg similarly begins to break away from a cis-heteropatriarchal view of the warbands and their related halls. In his PhD dissertation 'Krigarnar i Odins sal: Dödsföreställningar och krigarkult i fornnordisk religion' ('Warriors in Odin's Hall: Death Performance and War Cult in Old Norse Religion'), Nordberg notes that there may have been some women in Valhǫll, and, in particular, 'sannolikt var Valhall en plats för såväl utvalda kvinnor som män, även om det i princip bara är Odins krigare som vo möter i källorna' (it is likely Valhǫll was a place for the selected women and men, but in principle it was only the warriors we meet in the sources) (Nordberg, 2004, p. 126). This is a significant consideration: historical sources often write women out of the narrative in a huge range of contexts.

Not all scholars have taken to reconsidering the nature of the warrior bands and their halls, however. In his 2000 book *The One-eyed God: Odin and the (Indo-)Germanic Männerbunde*, Kris Kershaw discusses the connection between Óðinn and the warbands in the human and mythical realms. While he does acknowledge the presence of the *valkyrjur* in this space, he still argues that the *Männerbunde* was a secret and sacral institution that began as a cultic group

and later evolved into the secular *Gefolgschaft*—an argument that is clearly in line with that of Höfler (Kershaw, 2000).

Similarly, Schjødt follows this argument, referencing Weiser and Höfler in particular, with no discussion of the historical context from which their scholarship arose. Schjødt argues that most Germanic people seem to have had secret male societies, and that Óðinn was 'above all else, the god of male bands, in this world and the next' (Schjødt, 2008, p. 51).

As this historiographical summary demonstrates, within the scholarship of the Germanic warbands and the related halls there is a clear cis-heteropatriarchal bias, with many of the key arguments on the topic deriving from scholarship written by and for the Nazi Party of 1930s Germany. As such, I provide a brief reassessment of some of the key material in reference to the warbands and halls of the human realm and Valhǫll of the mythological realm, to demonstrate the key roles women held in these spaces, therefore making them mixed spaces.

I therefore turn my attention to the primary sources in regard to the concept of battles and the battlefield itself. This is clearly a space where men were the primary fighters: while the genomic testing of the remains of Birka burial Bj. 581 suggest that this could have been a female warrior (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al*. 2017), this is a controversial idea which requires far more discussion than is possible here. Instead, I will merely note that the idea of one 'female warrior' is highly unlikely to reflect a widespread pattern that is notable enough to argue that women in the Viking Age consistently had a strong presence as warriors on the battlefield. Instead, women would have held a vast range of other relevant roles, for example following the army with supplies. Another important role derives from the mythological role of the *valkyrjur*.

The exact nature of the *valkyrjur* is somewhat unclear, but they appear to be female supernatural beings linked to battle. Indeed, the term *valkyrja* can be broken into two parts: *valr* and *kjósa*, translating to 'chooser of the slain', as noted by Jenny Jochens in her summary of the *valkyrjur* (Jochens, 1996, p. 38-39). The implication of this and from the sources is that

the *valkyrjur* choose which fallen warriors will go to Valhǫll. We can also see that the *valkyrjur* are strongly linked to Óðinn, for example in one of Óðinn's names, *Valkjósandi*, which carries the same 'chooser of the slain' meaning as the term *valkyrja* (Murphy,, 2013, p. 49). This is consistent with the information presented in *Gylfaginning* of the *Prose Edda*, in which it is said that 'þessar heita valkyrjur. Þær sendir Óðinn til hverrar orrostu. Þær kjósa feigð á men ok ráða sigri' (they are called *valkyrjur*. They are sent by Óðinn to every battle. They choose those men approaching death and decide victory) (Snorri Sturluson, 2005, p. 30).

Links with battle are central to the portrayal of the *valkyrjur*. *Vǫluspá* 30 names the *valkyrjur*, with such names included as Skuld, Gunnr, and Hildr (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn, Ólason, I, 2014, p. 298-299). *Grímnismál* 36 similarly names some *valkyrjur*, including Hrist, Mist, and Herfjǫtr (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólasson, I, 2014, p. 375). These names translate to elements relating to warfare, for example battle (*Gunnr*, *Hildr*) and war-fetter (*Herfjǫtur*). The sources also tell of the appearance of the *valkyrjur* in battles. For example, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 15 presents a particularly descriptive episode of this:

> Þá brá ljóma
> af Logafjǫllum,
> en af þeim ljómum
> leiptrir kvómu;
> hávar und hjálmum
> á Himinvanga;
> brynjur váru þeira
> blóði stokknar,
> en af geirum
> geislar stóðu. (Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, II, 2014, p. 249-250).
>
> Then light shone
> From Logafell,

And from that light
Came lightning flashes;
High under helmets
To Himinvanga [came the *valkyrjur*];
Their mail-coats were
Congealed with blood,
And from their spears
Beams shone. (My translation).

This example demonstrates the belief that the *valkyrjur* arrived on the battlefield to greet dying warriors and take them to Valhǫll. Murphy draws attention to this intriguing gender dynamic, noting that the *valkyrjur*, arriving in a position of power, are likely towering over a fallen warrior, 'and—perhaps most subversive of all—is in the process of exercising power and authority in the form of selection of warriors to die and go to Valhǫll' (Murphy, 2013, p. 145).

The importance and active role of *valkyrjur* in battle is also presented by *Hákonarmál*. The skaldic poem opens with:

Gǫndul ok Skǫgul
Sendi Gautatýr
At kjósa of konunga,
Hverr Yngva ættar
Skyldi með Óðni fara
Ok í Valhǫll vesa.

> The god of the Gautar [= Óðinn] sent Gǫndul and Skǫgul to choose among kings, which of the kin of Yngvi should go with Óðinn and live in Valhǫll (Fulk, 2012a, p. 174. Translation by Fulk.).

There are multiple occasions in this poem in which the *valkyrjur* are depicted as speaking, giving them a voice that centres their agency:

> 'Ríða vit skulum'
>
> kvað in ríkja Skǫgul,
>
> 'grœna heima goða,
>
> Óðni at segja,
>
> at nú mun allvaldr koma
>
> á hann sjalfan at séa.'

> 'We two shall ride' said the mighty Skǫgul, 'though the green abodes of the gods, to say to Óðinn that now a supreme ruler will come to look on him in person' (Fulk, 2012a, p. 187. Translation by Fulk.).

These examples demonstrate that women, in the form of the mythical *valkyrjur*, clearly held a distinct role in the battlefields. Furthermore, their names demonstrate that the concept of battle is inherent to their very being: it is impossible to separate one from the other.

This element is then extended into the mythological concept of Valhǫll, and the same appears to be true of the human equivalent in the halls. The *valkyrjur* have a distinct role in the serving of drinks. In the previously mentioned stanza of *Grímnismál*, the speaker asks Hrist and Mist to 'bear the horn' to them ('Hrist ok Mist / vil ek at mér horn beri' Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason, I, 2014, p. 375), before stating that 'þær bera einherjum ǫl' (they [the *valkyrjur*] bear ale to the *einherjar*) (Jónas Kristjánsson & Véstein Ólason, I, 2014, p. 375). Not only this, but *Gylfaginning* states that 'enn eru þær aðrar en þjóna skulu í Valhǫll, bera drykkju ok gæta borðbúnaðr ok ǫlganga' (and there are others which should serve in Valhǫll, bear

drinks and watch the tables and drinking vessels) (Snorri Sturluson, 2005, p. 30). This concept is demonstrated yet further in the skaldic poem *Eiríksmál*. The opening stanza reads:

> 'Hvat es þat drauma,
> es ek hugðumk fyr dag litlu
> Valhǫll ryðja
> fyr vegna folki?
> Vakða ek einherja,
> bað ek upp rísa
> borðker at leyðra,
> valkyrjur vín bera,
> sem vísi komi.'
>
> 'What kind of dream is this, that I thought that a little before daybreak I was preparing Valhǫll for a slain army? I awakened the *einherjar*, I asked them to get up to strew the benches, to rinse the drinking cups; [I asked] *valkyrjur* to bring wine, as if a leader should come' (Fulk, 2012b, p. 1006. Translation by Fulk).

It is evident that the *valkrjur*, who are only shown to be women, are clearly taking on an active and important role in Valhǫll—a role that is just as important as the role of the *einherjar*. This must not be overlooked: not only is it important on a practical level, but Enright demonstrates that this role had an important ritual function. In *Lady with a Mead Cup*, he argues that women held a vital role in the social cohesion of the warbands (Enright 1996, 2), and that by offering drink to her lord and then his followers, a woman not only performed a bonding rite key to the relationship within these warrior bands, but she also established the lordship (Enright, 1996, p. 10). There is further evidence that this Germanic practice was also intimately linked with the worship of Óðinn, as Enright demonstrates through an example from Jonas Bobbio's *Vita Columbani*, in which the author describes a meeting with an unknown Germanic group who have a cup of beer which they used as an offering to Wodan (Enright, 1996, p. 16).

As these sources show, much deeper nuance is needed in order to explore the warbands of Iron Age, and particularly Viking Age, Scandinavia. I do not dispute that battle was an important factor in the construction of masculinity: *Skáldskaparmál* states that 'af þessum heitum hafa skáldin kallat menn ask eða hlyn, lund eða ǫðrum viðar heitum karlkendum ok kent til víga eða skipa eða fjár' (of this name have the poet called men ash or maple, grove or other masculine woods and known by battle or ships or wealth) (Snorri Sturluson, 1998, p. 40). However, it also states that 'hvernig skal kenna orrostu? Svá at kalla veðr vápna eða hlífa eða Óðins eða valkyrju eða herkonunga eða gný eða glym' (how shall battle be known? Thus, to call it the weather of weapons or shields or Óðinn or *valkyrjur* or kings of armies, or din or clatter) (Snorri Sturluson, 1998, p. 66). What this demonstrates is that women, in the form of *valkyrjur*, played a key role in the understanding of battle, and were strongly associated with it.

By acknowledging that women had a key role in the interactions of the warrior cult, in choosing the slain and serving drinks, possibly in a ritualised fashion, we can begin to move beyond an artificially imposed gender division that exists within the bounds of cis-heteropatriarchal models. It is this artificial gender division that leads Solli, for example, to question this apparent contradiction between Óðinn's portrayals as crossing gendered boundaries and being the '*manliest* god of warriors' (Solli, 2008, p. 195).

If we instead view this as a space that mixed men and women of various roles together within a cultic mindset, we can clearly see that Óðinn exists as a mediator in this space. With intimate links to both the *valkyrjur* and the *einherjar*, he functions as one of, and lord of, both parties simultaneously. By moving between these groups, he functions as a figure that closes the gap and facilitates the melding of gendered groups in the physical and mythological halls. As such, no paradox or contradiction is seen: Óðinn is not a bizarrely unmanly god of a male space, but a queer figure that pushes at the boundaries of gender to draw the worlds of *valkyrjur* and *einherjar*, feminine and masculine, together into one space, whether that be the halls or within his own being.

Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that Óðinn was indeed a queer deity in Viking Age Scandinavia. I have not defined in what way he is queer in strict terms, and have instead defined this queerness as what it is not: a normative cis-heterosexual existence. Rather, Óðinn blurs and pushes against these boundaries, presenting in manners which are both masculine *and* feminine.

I have demonstrated that Óðinn's queerness does not put him in opposition with the Germanic warbands. Instead, I have demonstrated that the concept that this was a purely masculine space is a perspective derived from a cis-heteropatriarchal framework, and, in particular, borne from the work by and for the Nazi Party in 1930s Germany. Höfler's arguments of Germanic continuity of secret men's societies lay the groundwork for justification for both the SS and, in the long term, the Holocaust. These ideas have not been critically addressed to a necessary extent in the English-speaking scholarship of the history of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion.

I have shown that when these sources are reassessed without this framework, a new picture emerges: one of a gender-dynamic space, in which men and women in human and mythological realms function together within the space, all the time with differing roles.

By readjusting this picture, we can in turn understand Óðinn's function as a specifically *queer* deity: his blurring and pushing of gender boundaries allows him to move between gendered groups and ideas, and lets him mediate between the various groups of the warrior halls. Óðinn's queerness in this way becomes key to his role as a deity in Viking Age Scandinavia.

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