

Uses of Wodan
The Development of his Cult and of
Medieval Literary Responses to It

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Abstract

Scholars working on Germanic pre-Christian religion have generally considered Wodan to have been a deity of considerable importance to most if not all Germanic tribes. This understanding is, however, based on a failure to approach the available evidence for Wodan within appropriate contemporary contexts. This thesis re-contextualises the evidence, therefore, building a model of the general nature of Germanic heathenisms in the Migration Age, within which the cult of Wodan can be located. Set against this model, and with due consideration given to its social, political and religious contexts, the earliest evidence for Wodan can be seen as the beginning of a Christian re-imagining of this deity. A plausible model of Wodan's cult is established, which sees this cult as being geographically limited, and originating probably within the first half millennium of the Common Era; the cult of Óðinn would appear, moreover, to be substantially separate in development from that of Wodan. Furthermore, a complex set of eighth-century scholarly re-uses of Wodan are shown to have shaped subsequent understandings of the deity, both in the medieval period and up to the present day.

Having considered how the traditions of eighth-century scholarship have misled modern scholarship, the thesis then examines the further development of these traditions in Anglo-Saxon England. In this context, Wodan assumes still more various guises, and is conflated with Óðinn, thus helping to cement modern scholarship's belief in the original unity of these two figures. This process is strengthened, moreover, by the strong influence which Anglo-Saxon England exerted on Scandinavia both around the time of the conversion of Scandinavia and at the period when much of the extant Scandinavian mythography was written down.

This Scandinavian mythography is examined briefly in the final chapter, which points out some important areas of misreading of pre-Christian mythology in thirteenth-century Scandinavian mythography, as well as arguing for substantial extra-Scandinavian influences on such mythography. This leads, finally, to a consideration of how Óðinn appears in what little certainly pre-Christian evidence exists for him.

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A Note on Terminology

A number of terms appear in this thesis with a more specific meaning than that normally attached to them. It will be helpful, therefore, briefly to discuss them. The term ‘heathen’ is synonymous with ‘pagan’ in quotidian usage, but is here used to refer to non-Christian religious expressions and manifestations originating specifically and uniquely among Germanic tribes or peoples. ‘Pagan’, in contrast, is used to refer to non-Christian religions not originating solely among Germani. The cult of Þunor might therefore be described as heathen, but the cult of Mars — even when practised by Germanic individuals, and even when Mars is conflated with a deity of Germanic origin¹ — would be described as pagan.

It will also be noted that the term ‘myth’, although popular in previous scholarship, appears rarely here. This term is imprecise, and therefore usually mythology or mythography will be used, since these terms allow us to draw a clear distinction between oral and written myths. In a few cases, however, in which both mythology and mythography are referred to, ‘myth’ is used.

The forms of names used should also be discussed here. The names of Germanic deities appear in different forms in different Germanic languages (on which see section 2.2.3, below). The most widely used forms in modern texts tend to be normalised Old Icelandic forms (Óðinn, Þórr), normalised Old English forms (Woden, Þunor), modern German forms (Wotan, Donar), or some common modern English forms, often based on Old Icelandic forms (Odin, Thor). The last two groups mentioned are problematic because they do not always provide forms for some of the less frequently-mentioned deities (e.g. Ullr, Forsete), and their uniformity creates the misleading impression of uniformity in medieval use and understanding of the deity. Normalised forms of medieval versions of the names are more useful in that they at least provide standardised forms for

¹ Both these conditions are evidenced by the inscription from Housesteads, on Hadrian’s Wall, to ‘Mars Thincsus’ (see Karl Helm, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, Germanische Bibliothek, 1.5.2; also *Religionswissenschaftliche Bibliothek*, 5, 2 vols [vol 2 in two parts] (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1913-1953), 1, 366-67).

the names of all deities, but the second criticism remains. It would be quite impractical to adopt the usage of each text in discussing the presentation of Wodan in that text; not only would this render comparisons between texts confusing, but in any case many individual medieval texts spell a given name in several different ways. One can broadly distinguish between the presentation of heathen deities in Scandinavian mythography, their presentation in Anglo-Saxon England, and their presentation outside England and Scandinavia (which last is generally early, and is therefore often thought to provide some evidence for the cult of Wodan). The usage adopted here will, therefore, be to refer to Óðinn (normalised Old Icelandic) when dealing with Scandinavian sources, Woden (normalised Old English) when dealing with English sources, and Wodan (the form which appears in the earliest text to mention Wodan, the inscription on the Nordendorf brooch; this is discussed in section 3.6.1 below) when dealing with continental sources. This indicates the variety of spellings and pronunciations of the name without creating undue obscurity. The same rules will be adopted, as far as possible, with the names of other Germanic deities (e.g. Þórr for Scandinavia, Þunor for England and Þonar for the continent). When talking about Wodan generally, rather than specifically as he appears in Scandinavia, England, or on the continent, the form Wodan will be used.

Preface

The study of pre- and non-christian religious expression among the Germanic tribes has brought forth some of the most various and exciting, if not always the most plausible, scholarship of the modern period. One deity in particular has attracted a great deal of attention, namely Wodan. The extraordinary variety of evidence — or supposed evidence — for the cult of Wodan and for mythological narratives relating to Wodan has done much to create this situation. The huge geographical and chronological range of such evidence has also played a part in these developments. The methodologies and approaches applied in studying this evidence, however, have not always been well-defined or, indeed, capable of producing plausible results.

Many studies of heathen religion and mythology have failed to set out their methodologies. Moreover, they have often suffered from a lack of attention to the geographical and chronological patterns found in their evidence, and from failures to identify all the useful evidence or to exclude evidence which cannot safely be used. This has resulted in the development of a modern, scholarly picture of Wodan which represents a monolithic construction of evidence good, bad, and indifferent into a composite figure believed somehow to have pervaded the pre-christian Germanic world from the Iron Age through to the conversion of Scandinavia.

The present study seeks to disperse this monolithic figure. It sets out and discusses the methodologies which it employs, and these methodologies allow for the development of a very different picture of Wodan. In fact, the starting point for this study is the understanding that we cannot have a picture of Wodan; Wodan is not a single phenomenon, but a complex of figures developing in various contexts, for various reasons. We must allow for the possibility of chronological and regional variations. We must also allow for the possibility that Wodan does not always appear in his capacity as a heathen deity.

With this in mind, I will now outline the scope and aims of this study. It seeks to provide a plausible new model for the development of Wodan as a cult figure, by asking the following questions: When and where was Wodan actually worshipped as a deity, and

by whom? How did his cult arise, and how did it change and develop throughout its lifespan? What were the causes of this development? One must also recognise, however, that Wodan has an extremely vigorous afterlife as a figure appearing in christian contexts; in fact, this study argues that he was probably more important, in much of the Germanic area, after christianisation than before. The following questions are therefore also posed: What forms does Wodan take at different times and in different places? How and why is he re-used and re-imagined in christian contexts? Can one trace patterns in these developments, and connections between manifestations of Wodan?

To begin answering these questions, we would do well to consider briefly some post-medieval readings and representations of Wodan; that is, the previous scholarship on Wodan.

I. Previous Scholarship

I.1 Introduction

Wodan, also known as Woden, Óðinn, Godan, Uþin and by a host of other names, is the most versatile Germanic heathen deity ever created. Not only does his name vary from place to place, time to time, author to author, and even within a single text, but also his uses vary enormously. In some contexts he appears as a war-god, or as a god of trickery; in others he is portrayed as a human king or magician; sometimes his name seems to be nothing more than a vaguely-defined word with magical connotations. This is as true of modern representations of Wodan as it is of medieval representations. This thesis is circular; in examining the medieval representations of Wodan, one must begin with a discussion of previous scholarship on these representations. Such scholarship is, however, merely a continuation of the processes of reading and representing Wodan which created the medieval traditions and representations which will be examined in this thesis; indeed, this thesis is itself yet another representation of Wodan. The sheer volume of post-medieval scholarship relating to Wodan, and to heathen religious expression and its medieval literary representations, precludes a detailed examination of any substantial proportion of the scholarship in the limited space available here. This survey will, therefore, examine the broad trends of such scholarship with reference to certain specific examples (although many others could be mentioned).

I.2 The Beginnings of Modern Scholarship on Germanic Pre-Christian Religions

Acknowledging that, as argued above, any attempt to pinpoint the origins of modern scholarship on heathen deities, their cults and their representations, is merely to point to an arbitrary text, let us dub Olaus Magnus's *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*

the first piece of modern scholarship on heathen deities. First published at Rome in 1555, this work is admittedly not the first historiographical work to treat of heathen deities; that distinction belongs to Fredegar's *Chronicon* or the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, both of the seventh century CE. Nor is it the first historiographical work which discusses the origins of heathen deities and specifically attempts to synthesise the author's sources for heathenism into a more or less coherent picture; Saxo Grammaticus and Snorri Sturluson made efforts in this direction centuries before Magnus. Both Saxo and Snorri quote from their sources, moreover, and both make some attempt to assess the validity of their sources. Magnus in fact follows his sources — Saxo looming large among these — very closely, and the division between his work and that of the thirteenth-century mythographers is really an arbitrary chronological division which may reflect other political and social developments in Europe between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, but which does not easily fit the development of traditions concerning heathen religion and mythology. Magnus, nevertheless, provides the first original work of the early modern period on heathen religion and mythology (the first printed edition of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* also belongs to this period, appearing in 1514), and his work continued to be influential into the nineteenth century.¹

What, then, does Magnus have to say about Wodan? He repeats information from Adam of Bremen's description of the temple at Uppsala but ascribes it to Ioannes Magnus, Archbishop of Uppsala; draws in Saxo's euhemeristic portrait of Óðinn; derives 'Odens dag' from Óðinn; and suggests that Jordanes's Gothic Mars was Wodan and was offered human sacrifice.² Other material from Saxo also appears, portraying Óðinn as a soothsayer (pp. 115, 122-23). Magnus did not know all the sources which are now available to scholars, but he knew several of the richer (if not necessarily more reliable or useful)

¹ On the date of the first printed edition of the *Gesta Danorum*, and Walter Scott's use of Magnus Olaus, see Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 17-18 and 71. On the relationship of the *editio princeps* of the *Gesta Danorum* to Saxo's original composition, see Ivan Boserup, 'The Angers Fragment and the Archetype of *Gesta Danorum*', in *Saxo Grammaticus: A Medieval Author between Norse and Latin Culture*, ed. by Karsten Friis-Jensen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1981), pp. 9-26.

² *Olaus Magnus: Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus: Romae 1555*, introduction by John Granlund (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1972), p. 100.

ones, such as Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. He makes some attempt to order the information available to him, and to draw conclusions from his sources. With his conclusions, however, scholarship on heathen religion, and particularly on Wodan, was already faltering. The interpretation of Jordanes's Mars as Wodan created a new Wodan who had not existed previously, and who remains to this day the Wodan of most popular conceptions and much scholarship. This is Wodan the pan-Germanic deity, the bloodthirsty war-god, demanding human sacrifice. By establishing Wodan as a deity known to the Goths, Magnus set up an orthodoxy in which Wodan must have existed prior to the Gothic migration, and among most if not all Germanic tribes (many scholars still assume that this was the case, but there is no firm evidence for this understanding of the geographical spread of the cult of Wodan; see section 2.2.3, below). The suggestion of human sacrifice also became a commonplace in modern depictions of Wodan, although the evidence that the cult of Wodan involved human sacrifice rests solely on relatively late medieval Scandinavian sources, such as Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* and Old Icelandic sagas.³ As we shall see, such sources provide very poor evidence for extra-Scandinavian early medieval heathenisms (see section 2.1, below). Magnus's method of reading a Roman pagan deity-name as equivalent to a heathen deity, moreover, set a highly undesirable methodological precedent which is often unthinkingly followed to this day.⁴ It is true that medieval texts had equated heathen and pagan deities since the seventh century CE, but these equations arise in the context of specific attempts to draw parallels between pagan and heathen deities, or even to argue that these deities

³ *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, in *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*, ed. by G. Waitz, B. Schmeidler, H. Bresslau and G. Pertz, trans. by Werner Trillmich and K. Nobbe, *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 11 (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1961), p. 472 (book 4, chapter 27). See also the well-known narrative of Starkaðr's sacrifice of King Víkarr to Óðinn in *Gautreks saga*, in *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Edda, 1950), IV, 30-31.

⁴ See, for instance, H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Pagan Scandinavia*, *Ancient Peoples and Places*, 58 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), p. 72; David Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 23; Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 79; Rudolf Simek, *A Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Angela Hall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 211-12; Lotte Motz, *The King, the Champion and the Sorcerer: A Study in Germanic Myth*, *Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia*, 1 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1996), p. 101; Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, *Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England*, 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 79.

were identical. Such attempts do not, however, prove that the use of a pagan deity-name alone could refer to a heathen deity; quite the opposite, for if medieval writers had felt that they could use a pagan deity-name — on its own, and without explanation — to refer to a heathen deity, they would scarcely have attempted to draw parallels between, or argue for the identity of, pagan and heathen deities.

1.3 Gods of the Norsemen: Recovering Edda and Saga in the Nineteenth Century

So much for the father of modern scholarship on heathen religion and mythology. Magnus's implicit methods and assumptions are still to be found in recent scholarship, but the next major change in scholarship on heathen religion and mythology came with the modern dissemination of the Old Icelandic sources which were, apparently, not used by Magnus. The nineteenth century saw a rash of publications of syntheses of Old Icelandic mythography. A typical example is R. B. Anderson's impressively-titled *Norse Mythology: or, The Religion of our Forefathers, containing all the Myths of the Eddas, systematized and interpreted*, whose preface makes the no less impressive claim 'that it is the *first complete and systematic presentation of the Norse mythology in the English language*'⁵. In Anderson's work are reflected the nationalistic and romantic ideals of his day. Describing Longfellow as 'the Nestor among American writers on Scandinavian themes' (p. 11), he goes on to invent heathens as noble savages, '[nearly] in sympathy with Christianity' (p. 27), in touch with nature and full of poetry: 'The old mythological stories of the Norsemen abound in poetry of the truest and most touching character. These stories tell us in sublime and wonderful speech of the workings of external nature' (p. 33).

⁵ R. B. Anderson, *Norse Mythology: Or, The Religion of Our Forefathers, Containing All the Myths of the Eddas, Systematized and Interpreted*, 2nd edn, (Chicago: Griggs; London: Trübner, 1876), p. 8 (Anderson's italics). Further references to this work in the paragraphs which follow are given in parentheses in the text.

The nationalistic side of Anderson's views is perhaps more disturbing to a modern reader. He begins his first chapter with a harangue against the use of non-Germanic loanwords in English: 'we have watered our mother tongue long enough with bastard Latin; let us now brace and steel it with the life-water of our own sweet and soft and rich and shining and clear-ringing and manly and world-ranging, ever-dearest ENGLISH' (p. 23). This 'world-ranging' is strangely echoed, moreover, in the opening paragraph of Anderson's section on Wodan (Anderson refers to him as 'Odin'), in which he claims that the deity's name is derived from the verb *vada* 'to walk', and that Wodan 'is the all-pervading spirit of the world' (p. 215; Anderson's italics). It is curious that Anderson's linguistic nationalism allows him here not only to use, but even to stress, the Latin loanword 'pervade', but, leaving this oddity aside, Wodan pervading the world seems to recall English ranging the world; the more so, since Anderson takes the euhemerism of Saxo and Snorri at face value, but credits his 'historical Odin' (pp. 232-236) with teaching 'the art of poetry to the Norsemen' (p. 235). Anderson's Wodan is a euhemerised historical hero, not only of inward-looking linguistic nationalism, but also of nationalism of a more militant kind, directed against Latin-speaking Rome (p. 232).

These are strands which prove common enough in the nineteenth-century handbooks of Old Icelandic myth. Nationalism and Romanticism combine in much of this material to produce an idealised vision of Germanic pre-Christian religion which takes no account of the chronological problems posed by the Old Icelandic evidence, and which is, in many ways, not dissimilar to Tacitus's equally unreliable presentation of the Germani as noble savages.

The nineteenth century also saw, by contrast, the beginnings of scholarly efforts to disentangle the developments of pre- and non-Christian religious expression from the complex chronological and geographical spread of evidence. H. M. Chadwick's *Cult of Othin* represents an important example of this trend, and one which deserves a special place in this survey as a relatively large-scale study directed specifically at the cult of

Wodan and its development.⁶ To this day, it remains an admirably complete and well-argued piece of scholarship. Unfortunately, its fundamental premises and assumptions are quite untenable, and these insecure foundations prejudice the value of the majority of the book's conclusions. Chadwick makes extensive use of saga material to build up a picture of Wodan,⁷ and, using this picture as a guide, then seeks to establish where, when and how Wodan was culted in Germania from the first century CE onwards.⁸ Chadwick's arguments are generally well-constructed, but his assumptions fail him completely; material in sagas, Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, and a few ambiguous skaldic by-names suffice for Chadwick to view hanging as a preferred method of sacrificing to Wodan.⁹ The argument is plausible, but only if one accepts (and few scholars now do) that all of these sources constitute reliable evidence for pre-Christian religious practice. On this basis Chadwick goes on to argue that all instances in ancient writers of Germanic tribes hanging people are evidence of those tribes culting Wodan.¹⁰ As is usual, moreover, Chadwick reads classical references to Germani worshipping Mercury (and, contradictorily, also Ares) as references to the worship of Wodan.¹¹ These flaws render Chadwick's conclusions almost worthless, although his work does assemble much of the most important textual evidence for the cult of Wodan, and some of that for later representations and uses of Wodan.

1.4 Attempts at an *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*: Systematising Histories of Heathenism

Chadwick's work is notable also as an attempt at a more systematic study of heathen religion, which attempts to contextualise mythology within cult practice. His

⁶ H. M. Chadwick, *The Cult of Othin: An Essay in the Ancient Religion of the North* (London: Clay, 1899).

⁷ Chadwick, pp. 3-28.

⁸ Chadwick, pp. 29-48.

⁹ Chadwick, pp. 16-20.

¹⁰ Chadwick, pp. 35-39.

¹¹ Chadwick, pp. 30 and 53-54.

reliance on medieval mythography presents considerable chronological difficulties, but his work does represent a significant move away from the common nineteenth-century tendency to view pre-Christian religion largely in terms of anachronistically well-ordered mythological cycles. This tendency, moreover, leads into a new and still useful approach to heathen religions, which attempts to synthesise heathen mythology and cult practices, viewing both as manifestations of heathen religions.

This approach is broader in its use of evidence, drawing in both medieval mythography and the historiography and hagiography of the late classical and early medieval periods. The move to broaden the evidential bases of studies of heathen cult is also reflected in an increased focus on archaeological, toponymic and epigraphic evidence.

To this movement towards a more broadly-based approach to studying heathenisms belong two important works entitled *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, one by Jan de Vries, the other by Karl Helm.¹² Both works were published in two volumes over the course of the earlier part of the twentieth century, with the final instalment, the second part of Helm's second volume, appearing in 1953. Both scholars recognised the problematic disjunction between the evidence for North Germanic cults and that for the religious beliefs and practices of the extra-Scandinavian Germanic tribes, although Helm never published the projected third part of his second volume, on North Germanic religions. They also took account of the chronological gap between early archaeological evidence and classical historiography and ethnography, on the one hand, and the medieval sources, on the other hand.

This understanding of the complexities of the subject is important, and continues to be so. These grand projects of religious history are still valuable as reference works, drawing together prodigious volumes of evidence for pre-Christian religion among the Germani. The interpretations of this evidence that are put forward in these works are, however, not always so useful. Although their accounts are often plausible, they are also often marred by the drawing of injudicious connections between disparate evidence.

¹² Helm, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*; Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*, 12, 2 vols (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1935-1937); see also Helm's more specific study, *Wodan: Ausbreitung und Wanderung seines Kultes*, *Giessener Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie*, 85 (Giessen: W. Schmitz, 1946).

Thus, although some of the major problems of non-contiguous patterns of evidence are recognised in these works, they still fall prey, when examining phenomena on a smaller scale, to making unjustified associations between pieces of evidence which need hardly be related. This perhaps results in part from a sense that, just as Germanic heathenisms could be examined in large-scale, monolithic publications, so these forms of religious expression were themselves more homogenous and monolithic than we might now suppose.¹³ As the shared title says, these were histories not of Germanic religions, but of Germanic religion.

Despite their shortcomings, however, these ambitious attempts at a total history of heathenism are not without their usefulness, not only as a mine of information, but also because they lay substantial foundations which much subsequent scholarship builds on and modifies. The more focussed studies of particular regions and developments which have followed these works owe much to them for beginning to disintegrate the myth of a homogenous heathenism, and at the same time the amassing of evidence, undertaken in an attempt to create a history capable of accounting for heathenism as a whole, has provided a valuable, if sometimes simplistic, model on which to build.

1.5 *Volk* and Folklore: Reading Modern Reflexes of Heathenisms

The attempt to broaden the evidential bases of studies of pre-Christian religions did not seek simply to bring into consideration under-explored classical and medieval evidence. Another possible source of evidence which began to be considered was modern folklore, which, it was thought, could provide evidence for heathen cult beliefs and practices, if it could be established that particular elements of folklore stemmed from pre-Christian times. This is a perfectly reasonable position to take, save for the fact that it can never be determined with any degree of certainty that modern folklore has such ancient

¹³ Such a position was not without its early critics, however, such as Wilhelm Boudriot, who points out the difficulties both of unconnected evidence, and of evidence which is essentially dependent on literary sources, in the preface to his *Die altgermanische Religion in der amtlichen*

origins. Occasionally one can be reasonably certain that a practice or belief did not begin until the medieval period, or even later, but this does not prove the antiquity of those practices and beliefs which cannot be shown to have begun in or after the medieval period. Only unequivocal contemporary evidence can prove the antiquity of a cult element, and, where such evidence exists, recourse to later evidence is hardly necessary.

The folkloric method is foreshadowed in Benjamin Thorpe's impressive compendium of nineteenth-century Germanic folk beliefs, but this text focuses on description more than analysis of such beliefs.¹⁴ For the development of a genuine folkloric method we must look a little later. An important application of the folkloric method to the cult of Wodan occurs in Otto Höfler's *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*.¹⁵ It does not seem implausible that, among some Germanic tribes, military specialist groups with an exclusive membership existed.¹⁶ Höfler (and, indeed, Wallace-Hadrill) may be correct that such groups had some religious observances or beliefs specific to them, but it is hard to establish certainly that this is the case. This, however, is precisely what Höfler does, adducing as evidence modern and late medieval folkloric male-only groups with a martial flavour, ranging from the Wild Hunt, through Robin Hood and company, to Morris dancers.¹⁷

The results of such a method are vivid, but hardly uniformly convincing. Nevertheless, less extreme arguments from folklore are often accepted. Wodan's supposed leadership of the Wild Hunt, for instance, continues to appear in some accounts of his

kirchlichen Literatur des Abendlandes vom 5. bis 11. Jahrhundert (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1964), pp. 1-8.

¹⁴ Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology: Comprising the Principal Popular Traditions and Superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany and the Netherlands*, 3 vols (London: Lumley, 1851-1852), II and III.

¹⁵ Otto Höfler, *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Moritz Diesterweg, 1934).

¹⁶ See, for instance, J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings and Other Studies in Frankish History* (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 154-55.

¹⁷ Höfler, pp. 36-37, 48-49. De Vries, also writing in the 1930s, urged extreme caution in dealing with folklore evidence, concluding that 'when we possess an accurate knowledge of the origin of a modern popular tradition we may trace the line of development downwards, but to seek from modern folklore the way to a source which is only superficially known to us, seems to me a fruitless task' (Jan de Vries, *Contributions to the Study of Othin Especially in His Relation to Agricultural Practices in Modern Popular Lore*, Folklore Fellows Communications, 94 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1931), p. 63).

cult.¹⁸ The folkloric method should perhaps be seen within the wider context of 1930s German nationalism, with its development of the neo-pagan reconstructive religiosity of the *Jugendbewegung*, and its emphasis on the German peasant or farmer as the lifeblood of the nation; an emphasis, moreover, which came to a chilling dead-end in the Second World War. At the same time, a folkloric approach to pre-Christian religion has had less unpleasant popular reflexes, as in post-war Britain, where it formed the basis for another reconstructive religious movement known as Wicca, founded by Gerald Gardner.¹⁹

1.6 Heathenism, Nationalism and Racism: The Second World War

In 1936, looking out from a relatively untroubled Switzerland at the increasingly stormy political life of Germany, Carl Jung wrote an essay entitled, simply, 'Wotan'; an essay which, ten years on, appeared to be as much prophecy as reflection on contemporary troubles. 'Wotan', Jung argues, 'is an *Ergreifer* of men and he is really the only explanation [for National Socialism], unless we wish to deify Hitler'²⁰. Not that Jung literally saw a one-eyed deity with his spear and ravens as the root cause of National Socialism, rather he understood Wodan as a personification of the psychological and social patterns and imperatives which, in his view, drove the development of National Socialism:

Wotan is a fundamental characteristic of the German soul, an irrational, psychic factor, which acts like a cyclone on the high pressure of civilization and blows it away [...] Wotan represents a primeval Germanic factor, and [...] is the most accurate expression of a basic human quality which is particularly characteristic of the German.²¹

¹⁸ For examples, Motz, pp. 78-79.

¹⁹ Gardner sets out his ideas in two monographs published in the 1950s: Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider, 1954) and G. B. Gardner, *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (London: Aquarian Press, 1959).

²⁰ C. G. Jung, 'Wotan', trans. by Barbara Hannah, in C. G. Jung, *Essays on Contemporary Events*, trans. by Elizabeth Welsh, Barbara Hannah and Mary Briner (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), pp. 1-16 (p. 7).

²¹ Jung, p. 8.

This, in its own right, constitutes a scholarly approach to the study of pre-Christian religions, arguing that they can all be understood essentially as figurative representations of human psychology through myth. Such a method could be seen as a reasonable enough way to read religious practice, or, for that matter, any other form of human endeavour at all, since all human activity is necessarily shaped by human psychology. One should simply note the caution, however, that the psychology of the citizens of Switzerland in the early twentieth century may well have been quite dissimilar from that of early medieval Germani; attempting to read from human activity to human psychology is difficult but not unreasonable, whereas reading from human psychology to human activity is at best useless.

What is remarkable about Jung's essay, in fact, is not his central psychological reading of National Socialism, but his recognition that, although Wodan the 'psychic factor' acted essentially within the sphere of the irrational, even the intellectual life of Germany was profoundly influenced by National Socialism. In few areas of research is this more apparent than in studies of Germanic heathenisms, and it is precisely this area of study which Jung himself picks out, not only obliquely in the title of his essay, but also specifically in his comments on Martin Ninck's *Wodan und germanischer Schicksalsglaube*.²² Ninck is, Jung avers, one of those men *ergriffen* by Wodan the *Ergreifer*, and this is abundantly clear in his work.²³

Hitler's fondness for the operatic works of Wagner has often been remarked; indeed, Wagner's popularity has suffered as a result.²⁴ These artistic reworkings of Germanic mythography were not, however, the only works on heathenism which found favour in Nazi circles. Wilhelm Grönbech's Danish work *Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden*, published in Copenhagen between 1909 and 1912, was translated into German in the late 1930s, and received, in the translated edition, a preface by Otto Höfler which appeals to the rhetoric of the German *Volk* and its *Bauern* which informed National Socialism to such a great degree:

²² Martin Ninck, *Wodan und germanischer Schicksalsglaube* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1935).

²³ Jung, p. 9.

Die Volkskunde findet bei Grönbech die lang entbehrte großangelegte Darstellung des altgermanischen Bauertums, das wir kennen müssen, wenn wir die späteren Entfaltungen unseres Volkstums historisch begreifen wollen.²⁵

As we have already seen, studies of heathenism were often used as platforms for nineteenth-century nationalism, and, as we can see here, still more sinister forms of early twentieth-century nationalism also found their scholarly reflexes in such studies. Nor, indeed, has this tendency entirely disappeared (see section 1.8, below, on Danish scholarly nationalism), although it has not since been associated with nationalistic movements after the stamp of National Socialism.

1.7 Religion within Society: Dumézil and the Linguistic-Religious Fallacy

The French scholar Georges Dumézil argued that heathen mythology reflects an ancient pan-Indo-European theological structure involving a central trinity of deities responsible for three crucial socio-political functions, namely rulership ('souveraineté'), military power ('force'), and fertility ('fécondité').²⁶ One of the difficulties with this approach is that Dumézil's evidence for his views is largely drawn from Scandinavian mythographic materials, such as Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus; as is discussed below (section 2.1), basing models of heathen cult on such late, literary evidence is not particularly safe. A still greater difficulty, moreover, is that Dumézil's model simplistically imagines religious and mythological ideas as developing in much the same way that languages do, in a branching chronological tree, usually only slightly disturbed by cross-dialect transfers such as loanwords and pidginisation. There is

²⁴ See, for instance, the examination of Thomas Mann's changing attitudes towards Wagner in George Bridges, 'The Almost Irresistible Appeal of Fascism, Or: Is It Okay to Like Richard Wagner?', *The Germanic Review*, 64 (1989), 42-48.

²⁵ Wilhelm Grönbech, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, trans. by Ellen Hofmeyer, ed. by Otto Höfler (Hamburg: hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1937), p. 9.

²⁶ Georges Dumézil, *Les Dieux des Germains: Essai sur la Formation de la Religion Scandinave, Mythes et Religions* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), p. 1.

simply no reason to suppose that religious and mythological ideas do develop in this way. The fact that proto-Germanic **Tiwaz* is cognate with Greek *Ζεῦς* and the first element of Latin *Jupiter* does suggest that **Tiwaz* may be seen as developing from a pan-Indo-European god who also gave rise to Jupiter and Zeus, but no other heathen god can be shown to develop in this way.²⁷ On the contrary, there is considerable evidence of transfers between heathen and non-heathen religions, and such transfers can occur much more readily and on much greater scales than can linguistic transfers; the most dramatic example is, of course, the conversions of the various Germanic groupings to christianity, in which a more or less complete replacement of heathen cults by christian cults was achieved in a remarkably short space of time, and over wide geographical areas. The replacement of Celtic languages by a Germanic dialect — English — in the British Isles, by contrast, has been underway for more than a millennium and a half, and is not yet complete in some regions.

1.8 The Age of the Improbable: Directions in Scholarship from the 1960s to the Present

In general, scholars have become increasingly reluctant to attempt studies of heathen religious expression. Since the 1960s this subject has been relatively little studied, largely in reaction to some of the more extreme and improbable previous scholarship, and perhaps also as a response to the misreadings and misappropriations of Germanic myth for nationalistic and racist ends before and during the Second World War (see section 1.6, above).

There has, nevertheless, been a steady, if slight, production of work in this area. There are those who still champion fanciful interpretations. The very title of Otto Hantl's *Der Urglaube Alteuropas: Die Edda als Schlüssel zur Steinzeit* is enough to arouse one's suspicions, and the contents amply confirm them; here is a real *wilde Jagd*, chasing

²⁷ Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2nd edn (Leiden: Brill, 1977), sub *Týr*.

likenesses of deities out of rock formations and using the *Poetic Edda* as the key evidence for a reconstruction of a proto-Indo-European mythology and religion.²⁸

A quite different tack is exemplified by Richard North's *Heathen Deities in Old English Literature*, in which North conjures heathen deities from the vernacular literature of christian Anglo-Saxon England with remarkable ease, and, of course, the aid of the Scandinavian mythographic key which is so often thought to unlock every secret of heathen religion.

The work of Karl Hauck and others on the bracteates should also be mentioned here. Again, Scandinavian mythography is used as a key to far earlier, and far less clear, evidence. In this case the bracteates are interpreted as depicting Wodan, and, again, there is little or no evidence to support the thesis.²⁹

Hauck's work has found enthusiastic support in Denmark, whence many of the bracteate-finds originate. The importance of certain areas of Denmark as centres for the production of bracteates, when taken together with Hauck's connection of Wodan with the bracteates, has reinforced a new scholarly nationalism which is particularly evident in Scandinavia, and especially in Denmark. Erik Moltke has written a monograph on the origins and development of the runic script, arguing that Denmark was the cradle of the elder futhark.³⁰

A similar emphasis can be seen in Lotte Hedeager's recent monograph, *Skygger af en anden virkelighed: Oldnordiske myter*, which draws on archaeological and literary evidence (primarily Old Icelandic mythography) to claim that Wodan originated in Scandinavia and spread from there throughout Germania as the chief deity of the Migration Age's warrior aristocracy.³¹ Margaret Clunies Ross rightly dismisses this argument as highly implausible in her review of Hedeager's book, but she nevertheless

²⁸ Otto Hantl, *Der Urglaube Alteuropas: Die Edda als Schlüssel zur Steinzeit*, Veröffentlichungen aus Hochschule, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 9 (Tübingen: Grabert, 1983).

²⁹ See sections 2.2.1 and 2.3.2. See also Kathryn Starkey, 'Imagining an Early Odin: Gold Bracteates as Visual Evidence?', *Scandinavian Studies*, 71 (1999), 373-92, who argues convincingly, on the basis of comparisons between later textual sources and bracteate iconography, that Wodan/Óðinn need not be depicted on the bracteates; even by the exercise of Hauck's own method, then, his identifications are insecure.

³⁰ Erik Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere*, trans. by Peter G. Foote (Copenhagen: National Museum, 1985).

accepts that the Æsir were ‘a widely known pantheon’ through Migration Age Germania.³² As we shall see, the situation — at least as regards Wodan — was rather more complex than this suggests.

A case bearing some similarities to that of Hedeager — although based more on literature and folklore, and less on archaeology — is made by Lotte Motz in *The King, the Champion and the Sorcerer: A Study in Germanic Myth*. This book presents a sophisticated view of Wodan’s development as a cult figure, arguing that ‘the chief divinity of the Germanic nations did not find his origin in a mythical but in a cultic context, that he was fashioned in the image of an ecstatic visionary, possibly a wandering priest, as exemplified by the *metogyrtes* of the Phrygian Mountain Mother Cybele, and that he was reshaped into a mounted warrior-magician in the context of a martial culture’³³. Unfortunately, this model suffers from being based mainly upon the evidence of Scandinavian mythography and contemporary folklore, and by ignoring crucial earlier evidence such as the various versions of the Langobard ethnogenesis.

A rather different, but no more plausible, understanding of Woden appears in an article by Kenneth Harrison, which argues that Woden was a human king who actually lived in the Migration Age.³⁴ The difficulties with this interpretation are discussed in section 3.5, below. Thor Heyerdahl and Per Lillieström have also espoused such neo-euhemerism, but arguing that Wodan in fact lived not in Germania but in the Azov area.³⁵

³¹ Lotte Hedeager, *Skygger af en Anden Virkelighed: Oldnordiske Myter* (Haslev: Samleren, 1997).

³² Clunies Ross, *Alvíssmál*, 8 (1998), 113-15 (p. 114).

³³ Motz, *The King, the Champion and the Sorcerer*, p. 70.

³⁴ ‘Woden’, in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. by Gerald Bonner (London: SPCK, 1976), pp. 351-56.

³⁵ Thor Heyerdahl and Per Lillieström, *Jakten på Odin: På Sporet av vår Fortid* (Oslo: Stenersen, 2001).

1.9 Understanding Literary Evidence: Re-Using and Re-Imagining Wodan

One response to the problems inherent in dealing with the cult of Wodan has been more constructive than the silence which is the norm. Several scholars have recognised the possibility and value of studying references to Wodan as evidence for christian re-uses and re-imaginings of the deity. Work by scholars such as David Dumville and Craig Davis on the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies has done much to help us understand the nature and uses of these particular texts, and hence, why they use Woden.³⁶ This work clearly shows the political stimuli for the development of these genealogies, and moves us away from the simplistic idea that Woden was believed to be an ancestor by heathen Anglo-Saxons, and from the still more implausible view that the cult of Woden among the heathen Anglo-Saxons involved a form of sacral kingship.

In response to an article by J. S. Ryan, which attempted — like North's *Heathen Gods*, but with more restraint — to discern traces and reminiscences of the cult of Woden in Old English literature, Audrey Meaney argued for understanding literary, toponymic and iconographical evidence within its contemporary cultural context, rather than viewing it as evidence for much earlier cultural life.³⁷ This recognition of the need to see evidence within plausible contexts is an important element of the present work (see the discussion of this in section 2.1, below). Meaney also notes the importance of making 'a clear enough distinction between Woden and Othin', a point which is taken up and

³⁶ David N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 5 (1976), 23-50; Craig R. Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 21 (1992), 23-36. See also Kenneth Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', in *British Academy Papers on Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by E. G. Stanley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 145-204, and Thomas D. Hill, 'Woden as "Ninth Father": Numerical Patterning in Some Old English Royal Genealogies', in *Germania: Comparative Studies in the Old Germanic Languages and Literatures*, ed. by Daniel G. Calder and T. Craig Christy (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988), pp. 161-74.

³⁷ J. S. Ryan, 'Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England', *Folklore*, 74 (1963), 460-80; A. L. Meaney, 'Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence', *Folklore*, 77 (1966), 105-15.

extended in the present work (see section 2.2.3, below).³⁸ Ryan's approach, however, has not been entirely abandoned more recently; North's *Heathen Gods* is, in many ways, a larger-scale application of Ryan's method, while Raymond Tripp has also argued for the implicit representation of Óðinn's ability to converse with the dead in the Old English elegies.³⁹

Thomas DuBois's recent book *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* is a good, if slightly mis-titled, piece of scholarship. DuBois concedes the problems of using late medieval literary evidence for pre-Christian religion, and therefore structures his book around not only an account of some important features of pre-Christian religion, but also some case studies of literary responses to, and representations of, Scandinavian heathenisms in the sagas. He also points out the problems of specificity and localisation of cult — alongside the difficulties of using sagas as evidence — in his recognition of conflicting evidence from literature, for instance in the case of Valhøll as a centralised afterlife destination, as against the localised, family-specific destinations encountered in some sources.⁴⁰ The work still suffers, however, from a slight tendency to assume the reliability of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century witnesses to pre-Christian practices, and this particularly impacts on DuBois's arguments for Finno-Ugric shamanic influences on Scandinavian religious practices.

1.10 Conclusion

The development of scholarship on Germanic heathenisms and their literary reflexes and representations is, in general, a process of recognition of new sources and new methods. Attempts to identify new sources for Germanic pre-Christian religion have not

³⁸ Meaney, 'Woden in England', p. 105.

³⁹ Raymond P. Tripp, 'Odin's Powers and the Old English Elegies', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1983), pp. 57-68.

⁴⁰ Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 74-81.

always been entirely successful; the possibilities of modern folklore and of the bracteates, for instance, have been rather overstated by some of their more enthusiastic proponents. Equally, some new sources have not immediately been complemented by effective methodologies for their interpretation; the evidence of sagas, and of the Eddas, for instance, has been used as evidence for far longer than it has been viewed within its thirteenth-century, literary context. A number of approaches which seemed valuable in earlier scholarship are not now regarded as being as valuable as they once were, but it is hard to deny that present scholarship would be much the poorer and less developed had they not once had their day. With the observation, then, that our own methods, approaches and assumptions may not seem as useful in ten years' time as they do now, but should be understood as part of an ongoing process of invention of heathenisms, rather than as a culmination of the previous scholarship, discussed in this chapter, let us turn to 'Models and Methodologies'.

2. Models and Methodologies

2.1 Introduction

The title 'Uses of Wodan: The Development of His Cult and of Medieval Literary Responses to it' points towards several of the major areas of methodological difficulty in the study of pre-Christian deities, and especially of pre-Christian Germanic deities. In general, scholarship in this area has not attempted to discuss methodology in any particularly systematic way; the methodologies employed by a particular scholar can often only be deduced from his or her work, rather than being set out explicitly as a part of that work. Previous scholarship has often focussed, moreover, either on the cult of Wodan or on his representations as a literary figure. Although it is possible to examine either of these phenomena in isolation, one of the fundamental bases of this work is the assumption that examining all the uses of Wodan together as a complex of inter-related cultural phenomena is crucially important to our overall understanding of the figure Wodan. There are certainly many discontinuities — as will become clear in the course of this thesis — not only in the evidence for such cultural phenomena, but also amongst the phenomena themselves. It is nevertheless important to try to appreciate how the figure or figures who develop from Wodan function as parts of a whole phenomenon, since this greatly improves our chances of correctly identifying the sequences and patterns of development and evidence which are to be found in our material.

A revision of some of the basic assumptions on which most studies of pre-Christian religion among the Germani have been based is also in order, for all too often they are simply not plausible. Scholars have been far too ready to assume, for instance, that the Germanic theophoric names of the days of the week were loan-translated into the Germanic languages

at an early date. Yet there is no reason to suppose that this is the case, and a number of good reasons for supposing that the borrowing in fact took place in a learned christian context (see section 3.4, below).

Scholars have also tended to focus on evidence which is familiar in form and therefore easy to understand. This has caused undue weight to be attached to historiography, and many scholars are still prepared to accept Tacitus's portrait of Germanic society and religion in the *Germania* as accurate, despite strong arguments for the unreliability of Tacitus.¹ Carole M. Cusack, in her recent study of conversion, notes these difficulties with Tacitus's evidence, but nevertheless argues that Tacitus's *Germania* provides evidence for cults of Wodan, Thonar, Tiw and Njǫrðr, and for a form of 'king-cult'.² This is hardly satisfactory; if Tacitus's evidence is problematic, then at least some attempt to read past the distortions in this evidence is required if the evidence is to be used. The fact that historiography is familiar in form and easy to understand does not necessarily mean that it is easy to interpret, and scholars need to accept that simply acknowledging that this evidence is problematic and then using it anyway is hardly a viable methodology; noting the problems does not remove them. Let us use historiography as what it is; evidence for how historians viewed, depicted and re-invented Germanic pre-christian religion. For actual evidence of cult, and for a model of Germanic heathen cult against which to evaluate historiographical evidence, we must turn to evidence which relates more directly and in a more straightforward manner to such cult. The Romano-Germanic votive inscriptions to Matrons, found principally along the Roman side of the Rhine, although also elsewhere in the Roman Empire, provide just such evidence, and are considered later in this chapter as a means of building a working model of Germanic pre-christian religions and religious practices.

An over-reliance on historiographical texts for evidence of pre-christian religions has gone together with a tendency to view all evidence for figures arising from such religions as

¹ Rosemary Woolf, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord in the *Germania* and in the *Battle of Maldon*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 5 (1976), 63-81 (pp. 64-65).

² Carole M. Cusack, *The Rise of Christianity in Northern Europe, 300-1000* (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 19 and 35-37 (p. 36).

providing direct evidence for religious beliefs and practices. This has been most obvious in work dealing with Old Norse literary evidence for heathen deities and cult practices. In recent years, however, the weakness of this approach has been recognised and studies of heathen religions have dwindled considerably as a result. Richard North, however, has recently argued that this is in fact in danger of becoming a restrictive ‘orthodoxy’ which is preventing useful work simply because the subject is difficult to approach, and because previous work has often proved fanciful.³ In relation to the problem of discussing pre-Christian religion on the basis of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Old Icelandic texts, he has argued that ‘Icelandic evidence even as late as the fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók* is admissible, if it can be argued that the tradition expressed is more likely to be indigenous than borrowed from outside Scandinavia’⁴. This methodological basis has allowed North to create a sophisticated model of heathen cult in early Anglo-Saxon England based largely upon thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelandic texts, which is ingenious but implausible, based, as it is, upon the untenable assumptions that Scandinavian and English heathenisms were very similar, and that indigenous Scandinavian traditions have necessarily survived several centuries without alteration.

The current work will therefore subscribe to the premise that all evidence should be understood within the cultural and historical context in which it appears. Although we may suppose that at least some of the Eddaic poems preserve older elements, their preservation in a thirteenth-century manuscript indicates that we should begin by examining how they fit within their wider thirteenth-century context.⁵ In some cases it may be possible to identify

³ North, p. x.

⁴ North, pp. 93-94.

⁵ Against this view, Bjarne Fidjestøl argues that it is useful and possible (although difficult) to attempt datings of Eddaic verse; he praises Ashley Amos’s restraint in not attempting to date the possible oral origins of Old English verse, but suggests that ‘given that the written history of Old Norse poetry is much shorter than that of Old English poetry, applying this sagacious restraint to the dating of Eddic poetry would amount to backing away from the task’ (Bjarne Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, ed. by Odd Einar Haugen, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 41 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1999), p. 202; see also Ashley Crandell Amos,

and date early material preserved in late manuscripts with some degree of confidence (particularly in the case of skaldic verse), and in these cases it may also prove fruitful to examine how that material fits within the contexts of its original composition. Townend points out the need for such contextualisation, given that ‘skaldic praise-poetry is, in literary terms, a genre that has not survived its contexts at all well, as so much of its meaning appears to be contingent on the environment of original production and reception’, and he also argues that, in the case of skaldic verse, we can place some reliance on dating of composition, since our assumptions as to the accurate transmission and editorial reassembling of such skaldic verse are ‘reasonable and generally accepted’.⁶ This is as true, in fact, of mythological skaldic verse as of praise-poetry, but one should note that both these forms of skaldic verse can usefully be examined within the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century contexts in which they were preserved; the fact that Snorri may misinterpret skaldic verse of the ninth and tenth centuries does not render it pointless to examine his interpretation; for some attempts to do just that, see sections 5.2 and 5.3, below. For most other forms of evidence, moreover, it is not possible to date original composition reliably; even when this is possible it still remains desirable to question the circumstances of preservation of the material as much as the circumstances of composition. While this does reduce what we can determine about pre- and non-Christian cult, it places the findings that are produced on a firmer basis, and also increases our understanding of the various ways in which Christian authors and audiences used and understood pre- and non-Christian religion and religious figures.

Bearing in mind these basic premises and assumptions, this chapter will examine a number of problematic types of evidence, namely iconographical, toponymic and philological. These types of evidence are potentially useful but difficult to interpret satisfactorily, and their specific application to an examination of the cult and literary reflexes of Wodan will therefore

Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Literary Texts, Medieval Academy Books, 90 (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1980)).

⁶ Matthew Townend, ‘Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: Skaldic Praise-Poetry at the Court of Cnut’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), 145-79 (pp. 147-48).

be considered. The second major section of the chapter is devoted to outlining a working model of heathen cults and societies within which to evaluate the more specific evidence for the cults and literary developments of Wodan, Woden and Óðinn discussed in subsequent chapters.

2.2 Approaches and Methodologies

2.2.1 Iconography

Two major sources of iconography relating to Wodan have been identified, namely the bracteates and the Wodan/monster sceattas. In both cases, there is little reason to suppose that Wodan is, in fact, depicted on the artefacts in question; indeed, in the case of the bracteates there are good reasons for supposing that their iconography was understood in terms of Roman socio-religious models (see section 2.3.2, below). This section considers the bracteates and the sceattas as a case study, and outlines the methodological implications of this reassessment of the iconographic evidence provided by such artefacts.

A number of scholars have claimed that at least some of the extant bracteates depict heathen mythological figures or scenes. The most important of these is undoubtedly Karl Hauck, whose extremely lengthy series of articles and monographs ‘Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten’ attempts to explain almost every known bracteate design in such terms.⁷ It is

⁷ Hauck’s writings on the subject are too extensive to list, and the present author has examined a representative sample, for details of which see the bibliography. An almost complete list of Hauck’s writings is available in the bibliography of Märta Gaimster’s *Vendel Period Bracteates on Gotland: On the Significance of Germanic Art*, Acta Archaeologica Lundensia, series in octavo 27 (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998), pp. 288-90. Hauck himself provides a readily-accessible summary of his mythological identifications, and his arguments for these identifications, in his entry ‘Brakteaten’ in the *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. by Johannes Hoops, vols 1- , 2nd edn (Berlin:

particularly important that one should review his work when dealing with the cult of Wodan, since he identifies depictions of Wodan on the majority of bracteates. The catalogue of gold bracteates — *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit: Ikonographischer Katalog* — which Hauck has prepared in collaboration with several other scholars, including Morten Axboe, is rather more conservative in terming this figure the ‘Er-gott’, but Hauck’s sole-authored work usually identifies the figure as Wodan.

What, then, are the bases of Hauck’s identifications? The identification of Wodan, Baldr and Loki on the so-called Drei-Götter bracteates rests entirely on a comparison with Snorri’s account of Baldr’s death.⁸ If the bracteates and Snorri’s account were more nearly contemporaneous, and if the bracteate design were not so clearly based on *solidi* depicting winged Victory crowning the emperor, this identification would not be entirely implausible. The existence of one such bracteate on which the central figure (Baldr) appears to have a spear or arrow embedded in his or her chest does little to strengthen the case, since the detail is unique to this bracteate, but central to the story as told in the Edda. If the story were depicted on the bracteates, one might, therefore, expect this detail to appear on most, if not all, of these bracteates.

The identification of the profile head or human figure of the C-bracteates as Woden is based on the *Second Merseburg Charm*.⁹ Hauck argues that the animal beneath the head on these bracteates can be identified with the lamed horse of this charm, while the head itself represents Wodan healing the animal. Even if one discounts the chronological gap between

Walter de Gruyter, 1973-); see this entry for a discussion of the identifications mentioned in this section. For photographs and drawings of almost all of the extant bracteates, together with commentaries, see Karl Hauck, and others, *Die Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit: Ikonographischer Katalog*, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 24, ed. by H. Belting and others, 7 vols (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1985-1989). Consider also similar claims by Lotte Hedeager, for instance, in her ‘Myth and Art: A Passport to Political Authority in Scandinavia during the Migration Period’, in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 10: *Papers from the 47th Sachsensymposium, York, September 1996*, ed. by Tania Dickinson and David Griffiths (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1999), pp. 151-56.

⁸ See Gaimster, pp. 30-32.

⁹ See Gaimster, pp. 44-48, and the *Second Merseburg Charm*, in *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, ed. by Wilhelm Braune, 13th edn, rev. by Karl Helm (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1958), p. 86.

the bracteates and the charm, this hardly seems plausible. The animal often looks fairly horse-like, and sometimes the head becomes an entire or partial figure riding the horse. There are, however, C-bracteates on which the animal does not look at all horse-like, as it is often shown with toes or claws.¹⁰ Even if it can be definitely established that a horse is always the intended animal, a man on or with a horse is hardly sufficiently distinctive for us to identify him as Wodan. It would, moreover, seem to be the case that the motif with just a head precedes the version with a rider (which is relatively rare).¹¹ That the head could, in some cases, be re-interpreted as a rider suggests that the story of the *Second Merseburg Charm* did not underlie the motif, since such an iconographic context would make the development of the head into a complete rider a misinterpretation; a head alone could signify Wodan healing a horse, but a man riding a horse cannot also be healing that horse. Since one motif (the rider) develops from the other (the head), we should expect them to depict the same element (whether riding or healing) of the Merseburg narrative, but they cannot be doing this. This sequence of iconographic development clearly does not support Hauck's contention that Roman models were re-imagined in terms of heathen mythological scenes; the development is much more reminiscent of a gradual loss of understanding of the Roman models, or, more interestingly, of a gradual ornamentation and elaboration of those models in accordance with Germanic decorative tastes.

The fundamental difficulty with the Hauckian position is that its identification of depictions of heathen mythological figures rests primarily on texts, using a method which Hauck has dubbed 'Kontext-Ikonographie'.¹² This method is crucially flawed. A much safer

¹⁰ See, for instance, *Die Goldbrakteaten*, II, 99-100; 261-62 (nos 78, 79 and 200.1).

¹¹ See Morten Axboe and Anne Kromann, 'DN ODINN P F AUC?: Germanic "Imperial Portraits" on Scandinavian Gold Bracteates', in *Ancient Portraiture: Image and Message*, ed. by Tobias Fischer-Hansen and others, *Acta Hyperborea*, 4 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1992), pp. 271-305 (p. 281 and fig. 14, p. 284); Kromann points out that a Roman reverse type showing a horseman may have been the original model, but prefers the suggestion that the folds of the Emperor's *paludamentum* were elaborated into the animal. This would also account for the fact that by no means all of these animals appear horselike.

¹² For a typical example of this method, attempting to explain Migration Age bracteate iconography by drawing on much later texts including the *Second Merseburg Charm* (see section 4.3.1) and the

methodology would first identify depictions which must necessarily have some supernatural element or elements. Only by scrupulously examining the iconology alone can one formulate a clear picture of what that iconology depicts; the context can then be examined to attempt to broaden the picture thus obtained. An extensive examination by the present author of Hauck's catalogue of Migration Age bracteates has not revealed a single bracteate satisfying the criterion of necessarily depicting a supernatural figure or scene.

A very considerable proportion of the known bracteates, however, do depict figures or scenes which are strikingly similar to those found on Roman medallions. This is not entirely surprising, for Hauck himself admits that Roman medallions provided the original models for the bracteates.¹³ Hauck's contention is that, despite this Roman origin, the iconography of the bracteates represents a radical re-use and re-interpretation of the Roman iconography in order to represent heathen mythological scenes and figures. As section 2.3.2 below will show, such a process is highly unlikely to have occurred; the development of the major strands of bracteate iconography can far more readily be understood within a model of adoption and comprehension of the original Roman socio-religious significance of the bracteates within *Germania Libera*.

In 1870, Dirks, writing in the *Revue de la Numismatique Belge*, noted that in 1863 'en décrivant la trouvaille de Terwispele, [...] nous avons demandé si la tête en face des pièces de cette trouvaille ne pouvait pas indiquer le fameux héros-dieu Wodan ou Odin'¹⁴. The 'pièces' in question were sceattas, and, in his article in 1870, Dirks attempted a classification of this coinage into four principal groups, one of which he named the 'Wodan-monstre' group, following his identification of the coins in this group as possessing the face of Wodan on one

Prose Edda (see sections 5.2 and 5.3), see Karl Hauck, 'Fünens besonderer Anteil an den Bildinhalten der völkerwanderungszeitlichen Brakteaten (Zur Ikonologie der Goldbrakteaten, XLIX)', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 26 (1992), 106-48 (pp. 111-27).

¹³ Hauck, 'Fünens besonderer Anteil', pp. 111-14.

¹⁴ J. Dirks, 'Les Anglo-Saxons et Leurs Petits Deniers Dits Sceattas: Essai Historique et Numismatique', *Revue de la Numismatique Belge*, 5th series, 2 (1870), 81-128; 269-320; 387-409; 521-41 (p. 397).

side, and a monster on the other.¹⁵ In this article, moreover, he went well beyond the mere speculation of his earlier article, arguing that ‘Wodan ou Odin était la souche, le héros déifié sous la protection duquel la monnaie, en acceptant son buste, était placée’¹⁶. There is nothing to substantiate Dirks’s identification of Wodan, or his suggestion that a currency could be specially protected by Wodan; sceattas of this type were, however, subsequently referred to as Wodan/monster sceattas, simply as a convenient label. In time, however, the origins of this label were entirely forgotten, and scholars began to treat the identification of this bearded face as that of Wodan as proven to be accurate. No one thought to check whether anyone had ever managed to prove that this was indeed Wodan. The power of tradition alone had turned a speculation into a closed case.

Even more clearly than in the case of the bracteates, this iconographic interpretation is without basis. A bearded face could be intended to be almost anyone, and there is little reason to suppose that Wodan is any more likely to be the figure depicted than is, say, Þonar, or a god whose name is unknown to us, or, indeed, a human figure of authority. In fact, given the use of portraits of human rulers on the mediterranean coinages which provided the models for early Germanic coinages, it seems likely that a human ruler is depicted on the sceattas.

2.2.2 Toponymy

Place-names are perhaps the most problematic sort of evidence, or potential evidence, for heathen cults. Part of the difficulty with place-names arises from the fact that scholars tend to treat place-names as a homogenous body of evidence which is either highly significant or scarcely significant at all. There are those who accept, for instance, that theophoric place-names demonstrate the presence in an area of a cult of the deity whose name is referenced in

¹⁵ For this classification, see Dirks, p. 271.

¹⁶ Dirks, p. 398.

the place-name. This has, historically, been a common tendency in scholarship relating to early medieval Scandinavia, perhaps because evidence other than that provided by archaeology and toponymy is scarce for this period in Scandinavia.¹⁷ Such an approach has continued in use in some quarters until more recently.¹⁸ Then again, there are those who do not accept such an understanding of theophoric place-names. A dialogue between these polar opposites is difficult to find, as is a recognition of the complexity and individuality of place-names. Although paucity of other evidence in Scandinavia has produced greater interest in theophoric place-names than is common elsewhere in the Germanic area, in England place-name scholars have been content to accept that theophoric place-names probably indicate

¹⁷ See, for instance, Magnus Olsen, *Farms and Fanes of Ancient Norway: The Place-Names of a Country Discussed in their Bearings on Social and Religious History*, trans. by Th. Gleditsch, Instituttet for Sammenlignende Kulturforskning, Serie A: Forelesninger, 9 (Oslo: Aschehoug; Leipzig: Harrassowitz; Paris: Champion; London: Williams & Norgate; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), which counts over six hundred 'heathen places of worship testified to by place-names' (pp. 267-68). Olsen provides a district-by-district discussion of these place-names in his *Minner om Guderne og Deres Dyrkelse i Norske Stedsnavn* (Kristiania: Steensball, 1923 [offprint from P. A. Munch, *Norrøne Gude- og Heltesagn*]), and suggests that place-names containing the elements *aker*, *vang* and *vin* indicate sites for open-air ritual practices which were replaced around 100 CE by temple-based worship, reflected in place-names containing the element *hof* (pp. 35-37). Besides such grand surveys there also exists a strand of scholarship which uses the toponymy of relatively small areas as a key to reconstructing the religious organisation of the district in pre-Christian times; a typical example is the discussion of the place-names of Varend in Elias Wessén, 'Schwedische Ortsnamen und altnordische Mythologie', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica: Tidsskrift for Nordisk Sprogforskning*, 4 (1929-30), 97-115 (97-100).

¹⁸ See, for instance, the extensive use of toponymic evidence in Odd Nordland, 'Valhall and Helgafell: Syncretistic Traits of the Old Norse Religion', in *Syncretism: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Cultural Contact, Meeting of Religions, Syncretism Held at Åbo on the 8th-10th of September, 1966*, ed. by Sven S. Hartman, Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 3 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969), pp. 66-99; also Kr. Hald, 'The Cult of Odin in Danish Place-Names', in *Early English and Norse Studies: Presented to Hugh Smith in Honour of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. by Arthur Browne and Peter Foote (London: Methuen, 1963), pp. 99-109. John Kousgård Sørensen points out difficulties such as our ignorance of the extent of loss of pre-Christian place-names in the course of conversion, but accepts implicitly that theophoric place-names are pre-Christian in origin and cultic in nature ('The Change of Religion and the Names', in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Encounters Between Religions in Old Nordic Times and on Cultic Place-Names Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 19th-21st of August 1987*, ed. by Tore Ahlbäck, Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 13 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), pp. 394-403 (pp. 397-402)).

cult, on the reassuringly non-committal basis that there are so few theophoric place-names that they prove very little anyway.¹⁹

A way through this difficulty may be to understand place-names as texts. We recognise that early medieval texts are complex witnesses reflecting the concerns, interests and biases not only of their authors, but also of their copyists and audiences. The same is true of place-names, although we do not understand the processes of their preservation and transmission as well as we do those of literary texts. In particular, place-names rely to a much greater extent on oral transmission than do many texts. Nevertheless, if we attempt to approach place-names as texts, we may be able to discern more regional and chronological patterning than we might have expected possible, and we may be able to use them in a more useful way than simply treating them all as equally useful or useless as evidence for heathen cult.

At the same time, we must recognise that place-names, unlike literary texts, are inextricably linked with particular landscapes, and we should therefore be following Margaret Gelling's lead in thinking more about how place-names interact with landscapes.²⁰ If the place-name is a text, its landscape constitutes a crucial part of the extra-textual context within which that text operates. Although the audiences and users of a place-name no doubt differed across time and space, the landscape attached to that place-name tends to remain more constant, even if that landscape was read in different ways by different people at different times and places. With this in mind, let us consider how, if at all, English place-names provide evidence for heathen cult.

¹⁹ North, pp. 79-80; E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 71-72; Kenneth Cameron, *English Place-Names*, 3rd edn (London: Batsford, 1977), pp. 119-20; Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*, 2nd edn (Chichester: Phillimore, 1988), pp. 158-61 (although Gelling does note of such place-names that 'their significance is far from exhausted' (p. 161)).

²⁰ For an example of her attempts to read place-names within their landscapes, see Margaret Gelling, 'Further Thoughts on Pagan Place-Names', in *Otium et Negotium: Studies in Onomatology and Library Science Presented to Olof von Feilitzen*, ed. by Folke Sandgren, Acta Bibliothecae Regiae Stockholmiensis, 16 (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1973), pp. 109-28.

In the late Anglo-Saxon period people lived with the perceived traces of non-Christians on the landscape. Numerous Anglo-Saxon charters have lists of bounds which include ‘ðone hæþenan byrgels’ (‘the heathen burial’).²¹ As Reynolds has pointed out, such burials may not have been pre-Christian burials, but burials of criminals and other people who were buried outside consecrated ground;²² clearly, if this is correct, the term ‘hæþen’ need not mean simply ‘pre-Christian’, but can refer to a variety of non-Christian states and positions. Being able to use an Anglo-Saxon charter successfully requires a way of reading the landscape, and, crucially, it requires that this way of reading the landscape be a shared understanding, common to all who use and write charters. The ‘heathen’ burial is, then, an immediately recognisable landscape element; it is a standard reference point that many individuals can recognise. Such labelling of the site as heathen, moreover, is necessarily a Christian reading of the landscape; it is from a Christian Anglo-Saxon perspective that such burials are constructed as explicitly heathen.

What, then, of place-names which are thought to provide evidence of heathen cult? Can we see in such place-names evidence for the way that heathens read landscapes in cult terms, or for the way that Christians read landscapes for the traces of non-Christians (whether heathens or those excluded from the majority Christian society, such as criminals and individuals who can otherwise be constructed as non-Christian)? In Anglo-Saxon England we have evidence for theophoric place-names, and for place-names which refer to a cult site; Harrow on the Hill, for instance, contains the element *bearg*, which refers to some sort of space for the enactment of ritual,²³ perhaps a temple, but we have little reason to suppose that buildings were the normal ritual spaces of heathen Anglo-Saxon England. The distribution of sites with names involving the elements *bearg* and *weob* (which also refers to a

²¹ Fifty-one are listed in Andrew Reynolds, ‘Burials, Boundaries and Charters in Anglo-Saxon England: A Reassessment’, in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. by Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds, The Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series, 17 (London: The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), pp. 171-94 (pp. 190-93).

²² Reynolds, pp. 175-79.

²³ Cameron, *English Place-Names*, p. 120.

shrine of some sort) is, as Wilson has pointed out, complementary.²⁴ The *weoh* sites are typically to be found near important routeways, mostly Roman roads but also pre-Roman routes, while the *hearg* sites normally occur on high ground. A complementary distribution such as this tends to suggest that *hearg* and *weoh* sites date to around the same time, and were known to the same groups — otherwise we might expect more geographical overlap between these sites — and it may also indicate that they fulfilled different religious functions, although how they differed is unclear. One admits, of course, the possibility that the complementary distribution of such sites is a historical accident relating to the survival of place-names, or, indeed, to different religious circumstances at different times; on the whole, however, the claim for contemporaneity of these sites seems preferable. In this distribution, then, we can glimpse how heathen Anglo-Saxons read some landscapes in religious terms. Wilson has suggested, on the basis of the landscape contexts of these two sorts of site, that *hearg* sites were set up, and exclusively used, by specific tribal groupings, while *weoh* sites were intended for the use of anyone passing by.²⁵ This suggestion is supported, Wilson argues, by some *weoh* names whose first element is a personal name, such as Cusanweoh, ‘Cusa’s shrine’ and Patchway, ‘Paecel’s shrine’, and by some *hearg* names whose first element is a tribal name, such as ‘Besingahearh’ (‘temple of the Besings’) and ‘Gumeninga hergae’ (‘temples of the Gumenings’).²⁶ This evidence perhaps indicates, however, that Wilson’s reading of the relationships between these names and their landscape should be modified slightly. While these *hearg* names support Wilson’s position, the personal nature of these *weoh* names does not clearly suggest public availability of the shrines. We should consider, rather, that the siting of *weoh* names by routeways could be for reasons other than their accessibility to passing devotees. If *weohs* were personal shrines, then they may well have been very close to the living quarters of their proprietor, and may even have been part of the same building.

²⁴ Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, pp. 6–11.

²⁵ Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, p. 10.

²⁶ Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, p. 7. See also Cameron, *English Place-Names*, p. 120, which notes Peper Harrow as meaning ‘Pippa’s heathen temple’; this suggests that ‘hearg’-sites need not always be tribal, but could be personal sites.

Such a proprietor would have practical, quotidian reasons for wanting to be close to routes of communication, such as a need to transport or receive goods. It is possible, then, that *weobs* were even more exclusive than *heargs*, being used only by the proprietor and their family. Their relationship with the surrounding landscape, however, indicates a reading of landscapes by heathens, but not necessarily a religious reading; their choice of site may have had little to do with religious concern.

Given this evidence for the importance of considering heathen cult sites within the context of their surrounding landscape, one might try to assess the theophoric place-names of Anglo-Saxon England in this light. When we examine some of the landscapes associated with these names we are presented with a picture which seems to indicate that these names may originally have represented not heathen readings of the landscape, but christian readings of landscapes which, like the heathen burial, were recognised as being non-christian. Unlike the heathen burial, however, the non-christian status of such landscapes seems to have depended more on a recognition that they were ancient but man-made (and therefore pre-christian), rather than on an understanding of the sites as related to individuals who were perceived as non-christian.

There tends to be an assumption that combinations of the name of a deity with a word for a natural or man-made feature (other than a temple or shrine) represent evidence for the reading of landscapes by heathens. This may take the form of dedication of a landscape feature to a deity, and perhaps the use of that feature as a focus for religious rituals. Or it can be thought that man-made features were perceived as having been made by gods. Thus Wilson suggests that ‘a mound, if particularly large and pre-Saxon, might have been regarded as mysterious and impressive, and its construction ascribed to that god’²⁷. Thus the name of a feature such as Wansdyke — an extensive linear earthwork in the south-west of England, whose name derives from Old English ‘Wodnes dic’ (Woden’s ditch) — is to be thought of as a heathen reading of the landscape as relating to Woden in some way.

²⁷ Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, p. 13.

It seems at least as probable, however, that such toponyms constitute evidence for readings, by christian Anglo-Saxons, of landscapes which they perceived to be heathen. Just as the heathen burial as a landscape category or feature was instantly recognisable even in late Anglo-Saxon England, so too names such as 'Wodnes dic' were clearly readily analysable as relating to Woden. At the same time, the deity Woden is especially commonly used in names for man-made landscape features, such as barrows and linear earthworks. This calls to mind the poetic designation of Roman remains in Anglo-Saxon England as 'enta geweorc' ('the handiwork of giants').²⁸ Strangely, this is often viewed as evidence for ideas of supernatural builders, and the association of Woden with earthworks is also viewed in this light.²⁹ There is no reason to suppose, however, that the Anglo-Saxons were unaware of the human origins of such monuments; they were not ignorant of the earlier Roman occupation of Britain, and their ancestors had lived in and around Romano-British towns when they were still occupied.³⁰ 'Enta geweorc' can perfectly well refer figuratively to earlier peoples as 'giants'. Such peoples would be understood to have been non-christian, and Woden could well be used in a figurative or symbolic manner to indicate the non-christian character of these landscapes. It is tempting to suppose, then, that at least some of the theophoric names referencing Woden are not heathen inventions, but indicate christian readings of landscapes as being heathen in origin.

This is confirmed by comparison with evidence from outside England. In Scandinavia, in contrast to England, Óðinn appears in place-names with a suffix which clearly

²⁸ As, for instance, in *Maxims II*, in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. by Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, 6 (London: Routledge, 1942), pp. 55-57 (p. 55), and in *The Ruin*, in *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, ed. by Bernard J. Muir, 2 vols (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 1, 360-61 (p. 360).

²⁹ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 149; Meaney, 'Woden in England', pp. 107-08.

³⁰ As Butler points out, 'in the early fifth century the Roman armies were withdrawn, but evidence from cemeteries at Aldborough, Catterick and around York shows that Saxon *foederati* were settled around these towns' (L.A.S. Butler, 'Dark Age Archaeology', in *Leeds and its Region*, ed. by M. W. Beresford and G. R. J. Jones (Leeds: British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1967), pp. 97-100 (p. 97)).

refers to a cult site, such as *-vi* (cognate with Old English *weob*).³¹ Scandinavia also evidences a much greater variety of deities in its theophoric place-names; in England only Tiw, Thunor and Woden are certainly present.³²

One might wish to modify slightly the view that Woden- place-names in England may reflect christian readings of landscapes as being non-christian, in view of the importance of Woden in Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies (see sections 3.5 and 4.2, below). This role for Woden presents him as a pre-christian king, but strips him of divinity; he is an important and prestigious ancestor, but only a human king, not a god. That he should be associated with barrows and earthworks, which are potent symbols of former power and prestige, is hardly surprising. This association, then, does not simply identify a landscape as heathen in origin, and then attach a heathen deity to it, but recognises a landscape as heathen and attempts to claim it as part of a heathen but prestigious past. Just as Woden is reclaimed and re-used for christian ends, so recognisably heathen landscapes can be re-read as part of a past which is prestigious despite being non-christian.

A consideration of place-names and their landscapes indicates, then, that we have to be careful about the idea of 'heathen place-names'; identifying theophoric names as straightforward indicators of heathen cult is not without its pitfalls. At the same time, one should recognise that if place-names function as texts, they can therefore be read and re-read by different audiences in different ways. While there are good reasons to think that some christian Anglo-Saxons read theophoric place-names in historical and political terms, this is not to deny the possibility that some such names may have existed in pre-christian times, and have been read in different ways in those times. As with other texts with an apparently lengthy, but irrecoverable, transmission history, however, we may be well advised to consider these place-names in relation to their known and recoverable audiences, rather than in relation to posited but unknowable earlier audiences.

³¹ Hald lists several of these (pp. 99-101).

³² Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 158; Olsen, in *Farms and Fanes*, identifies a much greater variety of deities.

If we want to go any way towards reconstructing pre-Christian Germanic religions, we need to build initial models according to evidence that can be safely attributed to heathens. In looking at theophoric place-names, we are, in reality, not much better off than in looking at Old Norse mythography. Yet there are more useful forms of evidence for the general scale and nature of some Germanic heathenisms, such as the inscriptions to matrons discussed in section 2.3.1, below.

There is, then, a need to recognise that place-names do not operate in a simple way; they do not simply reflect a single act of naming, but a succession of uses and re-uses of a name. Some place-names can probably be used as evidence for heathen cult, but we should recognise that many place-names that have been used in this way could reflect very different readings of the landscape. Crucially, we should not attempt our own readings of place-names out of context; by careful consideration of the landscapes, and social and political contexts, which attach to place-names, we may be able to make more productive use of this evidence, but not necessarily use as evidence for heathen cult.

2.2.3 Philology

The etymology of the name Wodan has provoked a lot of rather inconclusive scholarly attention.³³ It is usually thought to be related to Old English *wōd* ('mad') and Old Norse *ôðr* ('mad'), or to the distinct Old Norse word *ôðr* ('poetry'), and it is generally assumed that the Scandinavian name Óðinn is a straightforward cognate of the West Germanic name Wodan. This is perhaps not the case, however.

The Old English form Woden cannot be related to Old Norse *ôðr* ('poetry'), which appears in Old English as *wōð*. If Woden was etymologically related to *wōð*, we would expect not Woden, but *Woðen. Old English *wōð* must have developed from Primitive Germanic *wōþaz as follows:

³³ For a summary, see Helm, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 1, 260-64.

[No Verner's Law] [loss of -z]

wōþaz → wōþz → wōþ [note that ⟨þ⟩ and ⟨ð⟩ are usually interchangeable in Old English orthography]

Old English *wōd*, in contrast, could have developed in two ways from Primitive Germanic:

[ð becomes d] [loss of -z]

wōðaz → wōdz → wōd

[loss of -z]

wōdaz → wōd

The Old Norse form *óðr*, however, demonstrates that the former is the correct development, since Primitive Germanic *wōdaz would produce Old Norse *ódr (and in any case, Primitive Germanic *wōdaz could not have existed, since /d/ existed only initially and in the sequence /nd/ in Primitive Germanic).³⁴ The form *wōðaz, however, would regularly develop as follows:

[loss of w-] [-z becomes -r]

wōðaz → oðz → oðr

Wodan, then, develops from Primitive Germanic *wōðaz, meaning something like 'mad, inspired, raging'. That Óðinn develops from this root, however, seems unlikely. Early Scandinavian runic inscriptions represent *wōðaz as <wod(z)>,³⁵ making a clear distinction between the phonemes /ð/ and /þ/, the former being represented by <d> ([d] and [ð] are allophones of /ð/ at this period) and the latter by <þ>. It is striking that Óðinn never appears with <d> in any Scandinavian runic inscription, although the name Loðinn does appear once, in a late medieval inscription, as <loden>.³⁶ It is also striking that Óðinn is associated with poetry from very early in our Scandinavian evidence for him (see section 5.2, below). These

³⁴ A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959, repr. 1997), p. 164 (no. 398.3).

³⁵ Elmer H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions*, Series Sprachstrukturen, Reihe A, Historische Sprachstrukturen, 3 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1975), pp. 31 and 44-46 (nos 6, from Sweden, c. 200AD, and 27, from Norway, c. 400AD).

³⁶ *Samnordisk Runtextdatabas*, N 69.

two facts, taken together, seem to suggest that the name Óðinn actually develops not from *wōðaz, ‘mad’, but from *wōþaz, ‘poetry’. This would therefore mean that the continental Wodan and English Woden were, initially at least, a deity distinct from the Scandinavian Óðinn. Although the two deities (Wodan/Woden and Óðinn) have very similar names, and come to be conflated in christian thought, they could originally have been separate deities.

Nielsen argues that the Ribe inscription (on which see section 5.6, below) illustrates the sound change mentioned above, and outlined in the table below, by which the allophones [d] and [ð] of the Primitive Germanic phoneme */d/ split, as part of the changes leading to Proto-Scandinavian.³⁷ The former became the Proto-Scandinavian phoneme */d/, while the latter became an allophone of Proto-Scandinavian */þ/, as follows:

Primitive Germanic	Phonemes	*/þ/		*/d/	
	Runes	þ		d	
	Allophones	[þ]	[ð]	[d]	
		↓	↓	↓	
Proto- Scandinavian	Allophones	[þ]	[ð]	[d]	
	Runes		þ	τ	
	Phonemes		*/þ/	*/d/	

Nielsen argues that the þ of uþin is derived from Primitive Germanic */d/ ([ð], which appears as <d> in Old English), while those in uipR and þAIMA are derived from Primitive Germanic */þ/ (which gives <þ> or <ð> in Old English).³⁸ There can be little doubt that Nielsen is correct that this sound change had taken place, or was taking place, when the Ribe inscription was written, since Primitive Germanic */d/ ([d]) is represented in this inscription by τ in tuirk- (= Old Icelandic *dvergr*, ‘dwarf’). The suggestion that Proto-Scandinavian */þ/ from Primitive Germanic */d/ is represented here in addition to Proto-Scandinavian */þ/ from Primitive Germanic */þ/ is, however, less certain. Since the runic script of the Ribe

³⁷ Hans Frede Nielsen, *The Early Runic Language of Scandinavia: Studies in Germanic Dialect Geography* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 2000), pp. 145-46.

³⁸ Nielsen, *The Early Runic Language*, p. 146.

inscription makes no distinction between Proto-Scandinavian */þ/ from Primitive Germanic */d/ and from Primitive Germanic */p/, Nielsen's argument that **uþin** contains Proto-Scandinavian */þ/ from Primitive Germanic */d/ rests solely on the assumption that **uþin** is cognate with Old English *Woden*, or the form **wodan** from the Nordendorf brooch (on which see section 3.6.1, below). As we have seen above, these forms must derive their /d/ from Primitive Germanic */d/. If we had a Scandinavian inscription from before the sound change outlined above, we should expect to see the form **udin**, if Nielsen is correct that the name **uþin** is the same as *Wodan*. We do not have such an inscription, however, so we cannot be certain that **uþin** is the same as *Wodan*. In fact, as outlined above, **uþin** could just as easily have developed from Primitive Germanic *wōþaz, which gives Old Icelandic *óðr* and Old English *wōð*, both meaning 'poetry'.

That just such a development from *wōþaz is somewhat likelier than development from *wōðaz can, furthermore, be evidenced from the Ribe inscription. This inscription represents a transitional form of futhark somewhere between the early Germanic 24-character futhark and the later Scandinavian 16-character futhark,³⁹ most of the characters in the inscription belong to the 16-character futhark, but the inscription still preserves the older runes **a**, **g** and **ᚱ**. Another inscription (in this case from Gotland) which can probably be dated to the eighth century — as can the Ribe inscription (see section 5.6, below)⁴⁰ — reads 'iu þin uᚱ rak'.⁴¹ In this inscription, the older **a** and **d** runes appear. Another Gotlandic inscription of this period preserves the older **g** rune.⁴² Clearly, this period in Denmark and on Gotland saw a transitional phase in which rune-carvers were aware of elements of the older 24-character futhark as well as the newer 16-character futhark. The fact that the carver of inscription G 40 used the old **d** rune suggests that the carver of the Ribe inscription could probably also have used this rune if he or she felt the need to distinguish the sound [d] from

³⁹ On the development of the older and younger futharks see Moltke, pp. 24-30.

⁴⁰ Nielsen, *The Early Runic Language*, p. 146, dates the Ribe inscription to around 725 CE on dendrochronological grounds.

⁴¹ *Samnordisk Runtextdatabas*, G 40.

⁴² *Samnordisk Runtextdatabas*, G 157.

[t], or the sound [ð] from [þ]. We can be certain that the carver did not feel the need to distinguish [d] from [t], because he or she uses t to represent [d] in *tuirk-* ('dwarf-'). The carver could very easily, then, have used d to indicate the sound [ð], and the fact that he or she does not could, then, be seen as an indication that this sound is not present in the words being written.

It is quite possible, then, that Wodan and Óðinn are not cognate deities, or were not understood as such in the eighth century. They were, however, clearly understood to be cognate in later literatures, as, for instance, in the works of Ælfric, Wulfstan and Æþelweard, or, later still, in those of Snorri Sturluson (see sections 4.2 and 5.1, below). Allowing for the fact that there may well not have been a nearly pan-Germanic deity *Woðanaz in the primitive Germanic period, we must still consider the possible dating evidence for Wodan and Óðinn provided by the existence of cognates for the former throughout the so-called West Germanic languages, and for the latter throughout the so-called North Germanic languages.

The medieval West Germanic languages, with a few exceptions (notably Gothic), all exhibit forms of the name Wodan. Old English has the form 'Woden', Old Saxon 'Uuoden', Old High German 'Uuotan' and Langobardic 'Guodan'. Equally, cognates of Óðinn appear in all the North Germanic dialects (e.g. Old Danish 'Uþin', Old Icelandic 'Óðinn'). It could perhaps be argued that these dialects could only possess these differing forms of the name if they received the name — through processes of regular phonological changes — from primitive Germanic, or from the proto-languages of the West and North Germanic dialects respectively. If this were the case, then one would, of course, have to accept that Wodan and Óðinn had existed either before primitive Germanic began to split into the dialects which formed the medieval Germanic languages, or at least before the West and North Germanic languages began to develop significant dialectal differences. This would, then, argue for the considerable antiquity of the cults of Wodan and Óðinn.

This need hardly be the case, however. Speakers of mutually intelligible dialects are usually capable of translating some or all of the phonemes of the other dialect into the etymologically equivalent phonemes in their own dialect. Thus a speaker of modern Standard English recognises their /aʊ/ (as in 'down') as the Cockney speaker's /a:/. One can match up numerous phonemic systems with one's own, moreover; the same speaker will not only be able to connect his or her phonemes with Cockney phonemes, but also with West Country phonemes (/əʊ/) and Scots phonemes (/u:/).⁴³ Still more interestingly, one can even do this, to a more limited extent, with other languages as well as other dialects. Thus English schoolchildren learning French recognise that they can sometimes create a correct French word merely by translating the phonemes of an English word. For instance, English and French share a word 'attention', whose phonemes transfer between the languages as follows:

Letter(s)	English phoneme(s)		French phoneme
<a>	/a/	→	/a/
<tt>	/t/	→	/t/
<en>	/e/ + /n/	→	/ɛ̃/
<ti>	/ʃ/	→	/sj/
<on>	/ə/ + /n/	→	/ɔ̃/

They can perform this translation of phonemes despite the fact that the English and French phonemic systems do not correspond as readily as do those of different English dialects; as far as the children are concerned, they are doing nothing more complex than saying an English word with a French accent.

⁴³ Matthew Townend makes precisely this point in discussing Viking settlers' treatment of pre-existing Old English place-names in the Danelaw (Matthew Townend, 'Viking Age England as a Bilingual Society', in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. by Dawn M. Hadley and Julian D. Richards, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 89-105 (p. 99)). I am very grateful indeed to Professor Katie Wales for her patient help with the phonetic transcriptions here and in the following paragraphs, and for the example of the word 'plastic', below.

Clearly, the correspondences between the phonemic systems of two English dialects are essentially due to the fact that the dialects have a common ancestor. If a word is invented today in London English, however, Glaswegians who hear and use the word will not imitate the exact sound of the word in London English; to take an example from around the beginning of the twentieth century, the word 'plastic' would be spoken, at that time, by a speaker of upper class London English, as (/plastɪk/), whose phonemes their putative Glaswegian interlocutor would automatically translate to produce /plastik/. In fact, then, newly-invented words can appear in different but related dialects in forms which suggest that those words have undergone the sound changes leading to the differentiation of the dialects, when this has in fact not happened.

Given the relatively high levels of linguistic influence and interchange among early Germanic dialects, as well as the quite ready mutual intelligibility of at least some of these languages in the early medieval period, we need hardly doubt that the names Wodan and Óðinn could have developed quite late, and simply have undergone translation of phonemes to produce the forms they assume in the various Germanic languages.⁴⁴ It also follows from this that we cannot determine in which dialect these names first developed — if they did indeed develop late on — or use linguistic criteria for dating or localising cults of these deities.

It would seem, then, that we would be unwise to assume from the outset that Wodan was a deity of considerable antiquity in Germania; it is linguistically perfectly possible that his name spread throughout Germania within the early medieval period. At the same time, we should also be wary of assuming that Wodan and Óðinn are straightforward direct cognates. Certainly they were equated by christian authors, but this need not indicate a connection actually present in pre-christian times. Again, it seems that supposed linguistic evidence for

⁴⁴ On the mutual intelligibility of early medieval Germanic dialects, see Townend, p. 90; *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon 'Genesis B' and the Old Saxon Vatican 'Genesis'*, ed. by A. N. Doane (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 49; William G. Moulton, 'Mutual Intelligibility among Speakers of Early Germanic Dialects', in *Germania*, ed. by Calder and Christy, pp. 9-28.

the antiquity and ubiquity of Wodan and his cult in Germania is not as strong as has often been supposed.

2.3 Modelling Heathen Cults and Societies

Thomas DuBois, as mentioned above (see section 1.9), presents a model of heathen cult based essentially on a comparative-anthropological reading of textual sources. This is unsatisfactory in more than one way. The method employed by DuBois posits necessary parallelisms in all religious cults, regardless of the cultural and chronological frameworks in which these cults exist.⁴⁵ This is a common enough objection to comparative-anthropological approaches to historical cultural phenomena. One should also recognise, moreover, that his attempt to read Old Norse literary texts as if they are the notebooks of anthropologists, minutely and accurately describing the actions performed by individuals and groups for ritual purposes, is highly problematic.⁴⁶ Old Norse literary texts are not even eye-witness accounts of heathen ritual activities, let alone detailed and accurate accounts written with an awareness of — and an attempt to eschew — cultural biases and colouring.

It would seem prudent, then, not to attempt to build working models of heathen cults on the basis of literary texts written by those outside the social framework of the cults themselves. This discussion, will, therefore, propose a model based on an examination of texts which are themselves the result of cult activity, namely votive inscriptions.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, his efforts to define religion (DuBois, pp. 30-32).

⁴⁶ Consider, for example, his reading of an account of a divinatory ritual in *Eiríks saga rauða* (DuBois, pp. 123-25).

2.3.1 Patterns of Germanic Pre-Christian Religion

A crucial basis for any consideration of the cult of Wodan must, then, be a plausible model of the overall socio-religious contexts in which the cult was likely to have developed and been practised. In the case of Germanic pre-Christian religion, we can have little idea about cult prior to the written records of classical times, since any earlier evidence is necessarily iconographic or archaeological, and therefore very difficult to interpret without clearer supporting material, as discussed above. From the first through to the fifth centuries CE, however, we have far more evidence than is often assumed.

The Roman Empire contains a very large number of votive stones to deities with Germanic names. Most of these are found along the Roman-German border, as well as in Upper Italy and Eastern Gaul, but they also occur in smaller numbers elsewhere in Britain, Gaul, and even Spain. The vast majority of these stones are to deities identified as ‘matrones’ or sometimes as ‘matres’ or ‘matrae’.⁴⁷ On the Lower Rhine, the cult of such ‘matrones’ seems to have flourished around the beginning of the third century CE, while inscriptions to ‘matrones’ are known dating from the first to the fifth centuries CE.⁴⁸ Some of these figures have clearly Germanic names, some have clearly Celtic names, and some have names whose origin is uncertain. The dedicators of the stones are also mixed, some having clearly Germanic or clearly Celtic names, whilst others have Roman names, or names of uncertain origin. While some of the dedicators are female, most are male; some were clearly Germanic warriors in Roman service, while some with ostensibly Roman names may also have been Germanic individuals.⁴⁹ Roman socio-religious organisation was male-oriented, and we have a tendency to see Germanic society through Roman eyes. The fact that Germanic men fighting abroad typically seem to have set up votive stones to female deities or ancestor-

⁴⁷ Siegfried Gutenbrunner, *Die germanischen Götternamen der antiken Inschriften*, Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde, 24 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1936), pp. 200-37; Simek, pp. 205-06.

⁴⁸ Simek, p. 25 and p. 204.

⁴⁹ Gutenbrunner, pp. 200-37.

figures, however, would seem to suggest that Germanic socio-religious organisation at this time was more female-centred than one might otherwise think.

One might also note that these 'matrones' tend to be quite tightly localised. The names given in these votive texts often refer to natural features or localities (for instance, the 'Ambiorenese' were probably, on the basis of their name, deities local to the Rhine).⁵⁰ The texts are at the same time, moreover, inextricably linked to the artefacts on which they are found, and the geographical distribution of these votive stones often indicates a very specific locality for a given group of matrons, such as the *Veteranehae/Veterahenae*, who are largely restricted to a very small area in and around Embken.⁵¹

Simek argues that the Matron-cult is Gallic in origin, spreading from the Gauls to Germanic individuals on the Lower Rhine.⁵² This does not seem likely, for a number of reasons. Firstly, as Simek himself notes, the Matron-cult centres on the Lower Rhine and Eastern Gaul; if the cult was a Gaulish cult in origin, we might expect a more even distribution of the cult across Gaul. The actual distribution suggests that, within the Roman Empire, the cult spread outwards from the Lower Rhine. Such a spread suggests not that Germanic groups and individuals were receiving a Gaulish religious practice, but that Germanic groups and individuals, at a major point of contact with the Roman Empire, passed on one of their own religious practices to the Gaulish inhabitants of the frontier region.

Secondly, although a number of Germanic Matron-names seem to relate to the locality in which most inscriptions to them are found (presumably a centre of their cult), a number seem to relate to places distant from their extant cult centre or find-site.⁵³ This again suggests that the Germanic Matron-cult was not a development beginning on the

⁵⁰ Simek, p. 14.

⁵¹ Gutenbrunner, pp. 235-36.

⁵² Simek, p. 205.

⁵³ Matrons whose names appear to be related to the locality in which the majority of inscriptions to them are found include the *Albiahenae* (see Simek, p. 6), the *Ambiorenese* (see Simek, p. 14), the *Iulineihiae* (see Simek, p. 177), and the *Renahenae* (see Simek, p. 263). Matrons referenced on inscriptions found at a considerable distance from the main centres of their cult or votive stone deposition include the *Almaviahenae* (see Simek, p. 10) and the *Anesiaminehae* (see Simek, p. 16).

Lower Rhine, but a more widespread Germanic cult whose contact with, and influence on, the Roman Empire and the Gauls occurred on the Lower Rhine.

Thirdly, a number of Matron-names clearly refer to tribes from *Germania Libera*. The *Frisavae*, although evidenced in an inscription from Wissen, near Xanten in Germany, are clearly deities of one of the Frisian tribes of the Roman periphery, the *Frisiavi* or *Frisaevones*,⁵⁴ likewise, the *Suebae*, evidenced twice on inscriptions from Cologne, and once on an inscription from Deutz, clearly relate to the *Suebi*.⁵⁵ This tribe supplied soldiers for the Roman army, including a not inconsiderable number of high-ranking officers (see section 2.3.2, below), but remained largely outside the Roman Empire in the late classical period. This indicates once more that the Germanic Matron-cult was known outside the areas from which votive inscriptions survive, and particularly in *Germania Libera*.

A similar picture emerges if one examines the Germanic gods and goddesses evidenced in Latin votive inscriptions. Inscriptions from Britain show Frisians, *Suebi* and an individual with a Celtic name fulfilling vows to Germanic goddesses.⁵⁶ Again, these cults seem to be Germanic in origin, with the presence of Germani within the Roman Empire allowing them to spread to non-Germanic individuals.

One should also note the gynocentricity of this evidence. Three Germanic gods occur in Latin votive inscriptions, compared to over thirty goddesses. The Germanic Matrons (assuming that they are not goddesses, but perhaps a slightly less important order of supernatural authority figure) number well over a hundred.⁵⁷ The Germanic gods, moreover, occur in just four inscriptions. Even if we include inscriptions to Mars and Mercurius with Germanic epithets (*Mars Thingsus*, *Mercurius Channin(i)us*, *Mercurius Cimbrianus*; the other 'Mercurius+epithet' combinations noted by Simek are either clearly Celtic or Roman, or too corrupt to be read convincingly), the number of Germanic gods is only increased to six, and the number of inscriptions to these gods to eleven. When one considers that many of

⁵⁴ See Simek, p. 94.

⁵⁵ See Simek, p. 302.

⁵⁶ See Simek, pp. 5-6, p. 19, p. 100.

⁵⁷ Simek, p. 207.

the goddesses and Matrons appear in more than one inscription, and that some appear in very large numbers of inscriptions, it becomes clear that Germanic religious life in the first to fifth centuries CE was very much centred on female figures of religious authority.

This is confirmed by classical writers, for Tacitus in his *Historiae* records the extremely important role played by a seeress called Veleda in the Batavian uprising of 69 CE, and suggests that seeresses were even considered goddesses among some Germani.⁵⁸ That Veleda was as important as Tacitus claims is confirmed by the fact that Papinius Statius also mentions her as a prisoner in 77 CE.⁵⁹ Tacitus makes a similar point in his *Germania*, referring again to Veleda, and also to a woman named Aurinia:

vidimus sub divo Vespasiano Veledam diu apud plerosque numinis loco habitam; sed et olim Auriniam et complures alias venerati sunt, non adulatione nec tamquam facerent deas⁶⁰

Although Tacitus here points out that Aurinia and her fellows are worshipped but not as deities, this nevertheless suggests that women were extremely important in the socio-religious life of at least some Germanic tribes. This is confirmed, moreover, by Cassius Dio, who refers to a seeress of the Semnones called Ganna, who lived sometime around the end of the first century CE, and who was received by Domitian on a visit to Rome.⁶¹ Again, Ganna was clearly a very important individual in her society and its religious practices.

It is striking, then, that Germanic individuals in the Roman Empire (often soldiers) typically made vows to Matrons and goddesses. The socio-religious lives of these individuals, and of many Germanic groups and individuals within *Germania Libera*, seem to have been highly gynocentric. Nor should we be surprised at warriors engaging in gynocentric cult, for a number of goddesses recorded in Romano-Germanic inscriptions have names which appear to

⁵⁸ *Cornelii Taciti Historiarum Libri*, ed. by C. D. Fisher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911; repr. 1956), book 4, chapters 61 and 65; book 5, chapters 22 and 24.

⁵⁹ *P. Papini Stati Silvae*, ed. by E. Courtney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 23 (book 1, chapter 4, line 90).

⁶⁰ *Cornelii Taciti Opera Minora*, ed. by Henricus Furneaux and J. G. C. Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900; repr. 1958), chapter 8, section 3.

⁶¹ *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum Quae Supersunt*, ed. by Ursulus Philippus Boissevain, 4 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1955), III, 180 (book 67, chapter 5).

relate to war,⁶² and Tacitus records in his *Annales* a Frisian goddess called Baduhenna, the first element of whose name is probably cognate with Old English *beadu* ('battle'), strongly suggesting that this figure is concerned in some way with martial pursuits.⁶³ Furthermore, although the christianisation of the Roman Empire — and of Latin — causes votive inscriptions to non-christian deities to peter out in the fifth century CE, the Germanic Matron-cult, existing, as it did, across much of the Germanic area, did not. Bede, writing early in the eighth century CE, records the heathen Anglo-Saxon festival of modranect:

Incipiebant autem annum ab octauo kalendarum Ianuarium die, ubi nunc natalem domini celebramus. Et ipsam noctem nunc nobis sacrosanctam, tunc gentili uocabulo Modranect, id est matrum noctem, appellabant, ob causam, ut suspicamur, ceremoniarum quas in ea peruigiles agebant⁶⁴

They used, however, to count the beginning of the year from the eighth day of the kalends of January, when we now celebrate the birthday of the Lord. And that same night which is now holy for us, they used then to call by the pagan name Modranect — which means 'night of the mothers' — because, we suspect, of the rites which they used to perform during the course of that night.

It is very tempting to see a connection between 'Modranect' and the matron cult. One can at least say that Bede thought it probable that female figures of veneration, identified as mothers, were very important in the socio-religious life and calendar of heathen Anglo-Saxons. A number of scholars have gone further than this, however, and accepted that this passage refers to an Anglo-Saxon Matron-cult descended from the continental Germanic Matron-cult.⁶⁵ They are probably right to do so.

⁶² For example, Hariasa, Harimella and Vihansa (Simek, pp. 131, 132 and 361). It has also been suggested that the name of the Frisian goddess Nehalennia (the remains of whose cult centre on Walcheren and Noord-Beveland) is related to Latin *necare*, 'to kill' (Simek, pp. 228-29).

⁶³ *Cornelii Taciti Annalium ab Excessu Divi Augusti Libri*, ed. by C. D. Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906; repr. 1956), book 4, chapter 73. See also Simek p. 26.

⁶⁴ Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. by Ch. W. Jones, in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera*, 8 vols, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 123 B (Turnholt: Brepols, 1977), vi.2, 330 (chapter 15). My translation.

⁶⁵ Audrey L. Meaney, 'Bede and Anglo-Saxon Paganism', *Parergon*, n.s. 3 (1985), 1-29 (pp. 5-6); North, p. 227.

The model within which we have to place Wodan, is, then, one in which cults were often highly localised in time and place, and usually gynocentric, although male deities did exist as well. The tribes of Germania Libera may have had common 'great gods', but, if so, there is remarkably little evidence for them prior to the seventh century CE. There is, in contrast, abundant evidence for localised cults of Matrons and goddesses, and some evidence that such cults continued into the sixth and seventh centuries. The importance of women even in the cult of a seemingly male-oriented great god such as Wodan is perhaps evidenced, moreover, in the central rôle of women in the Langobard ethnogenesis (particularly in the account given in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* and the *Historia Langobardorum*; see section 3.6.2, below).

It is possible, moreover, to corroborate this gynocentric model of early Germanic religious life on the basis of archaeology. In recent years, the archaeology of early medieval settlements has become a particular focus for research. In Denmark, the interest in settlement archaeology has led to the identification of a number of apparently high-status centres, thought to be associated with royal power.⁶⁶ These centres provide evidence for the origins and development of the system of kingship in early medieval Denmark. There also appears to be a geographical correlation between such centres and finds of bracteate hoards.⁶⁷ It has been argued, on iconographic grounds, that the majority of bracteates depict the deity Wodan (see section 2.2.1, above). The considerable difficulties with such an interpretation of their iconography have been discussed above, in section 2.2.1, and the possibility of understanding bracteate production and use in terms of external social, political and religious influences on areas of Germania is considered below in section 2.3.2. Of particular interest here, however, is the correlation between bracteate hoards and royal centres, which has been thought to indicate that Wodan was of particular importance to emergent royalty in

⁶⁶ Charlotte Fabech, 'Society and Landscape: From Collective Manifestations to Ceremonies of a New Ruling Class', in *Iconologia Sacra: Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung in der Religions- und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas : Festschrift für Karl Hauck zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. by Hagen Keller and Nikolaus Staubach, *Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung*, 23 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 132-43 (p. 133).

Denmark, perhaps as a legitimating ancestor.⁶⁸ The presence of Woden in so many Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies might be seen as corroborating such a view (on such genealogies see sections 3.5 and 4.2, below).

Charlotte Behr has attempted to identify a similar early royal centre in Kent.⁶⁹ She follows earlier scholarship regarding the iconographic significance of the bracteates, stating that they are 'clearly linked to the cult of Woden'⁷⁰. She adds the evidence of the place-name 'Woodnesborough' to the case for Woden as a royal patron- or ancestor-deity, stating that the name necessarily 'indicates the veneration of the god Woden'⁷¹. This statement is surely simplistic at best; as has been argued above, in section 2.2.2, place-name evidence is extremely difficult to date, and we can rarely have any idea whether a theophoric name such as this was instituted by heathens because they worshipped in the place, or by christians because Woden was an extremely important royal ancestor figure in Anglo-Saxon England, as the extant royal genealogies clearly show.⁷² Nor are these the only possible reasons why we might find a place-name referencing Woden. The case for Woodnesborough as a site at which Woden was worshipped clearly falls far short of proof.

The new element which Behr brings to her identification of an early royal centre — and it is this element which is of particular interest here — is her emphasis on the importance of women in the socio-religious life of the centre.⁷³ The fact that bracteates found in hoards and graves are almost always found in female contexts is not often mentioned by those who wish to see them as manifestations of the cult of Woden.⁷⁴ Behr, however,

⁶⁷ Fabech, 'Society and Landscape', p. 133.

⁶⁸ Axboe and Kromann, pp. 287-300.

⁶⁹ Charlotte Behr, 'The Origins of Kingship in Early Medieval Kent', *Early Medieval Europe*, 9 (2000), 25-52.

⁷⁰ Behr, p. 50.

⁷¹ Behr, p. 43.

⁷² See, for instance, Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection'; *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. by A. Campbell (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), p. 7, p. 9, pp. 12-13, p. 18, p. 25 and p. 33.

⁷³ Behr, pp. 47-52.

⁷⁴ But see Gaimster, pp. 215-16. Bente Magnus also implausibly suggests a depiction of Woden on another object usually found in female graves (although in this case found in a bog), a relief brooch from Ekeby, in Uppland, Sweden (Bente Magnus, 'The Firebed of the Serpent: Myth and Religion

argues that ‘the find circumstances of the Kentish bracteates in the richest graves in particularly wealthy cemeteries of eastern Kent, some with royal connections, suggest that women of the highest rank in early Anglo-Saxon society in Kent played an ostentatious role in the religious and ideological legitimization of early Kentish kingship’⁷⁵. This is a very interesting suggestion, but the supposed connection between the bracteates and Wodan does little to explain the importance of women in the development of early Kentish kingship. As we shall see in section 2.3.2, the socio-political importance of the bracteates, and any religious significance they may have possessed, was fundamentally related to their *Romanitas*. The connection noted by Behr between women, bracteates, and socio-religious power, then, can be better understood as indicating once again the existence of gynocentric areas of early Anglo-Saxon society, entirely consonant with the model derived from the Matron-cult, and from late classical and early medieval authors.

2.3.2 Syncretism and Exoticism in Germania: Patterns of Religious, Cultural and Literary Exchange

Cultural expression — whether it is religious, political, iconographical or textual — can only function within a social network of interconnected people. Indeed, such expression can be seen as constructing its own network of cultural interactions, mediated through the expression itself, and forming a subset of the larger social network within which it originated. This clearly has some important implications for any study of religious expression and literary representations of religious expression.

To take an example from the earliest period covered in the present work, the finds inside Germania of Roman medallions, and of statuettes of deities and mythological figures,

in the Migration Period Mirrored through Some Golden Objects’, in *The Transformation of the Roman World AD 400-900*, ed. by Leslie Webster and Michelle Brown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 194-202 (p. 201 and plate 58)).

⁷⁵ Behr, p. 52.

testify to the existence of Germanic audiences for Roman pagan religious expression.⁷⁶ What is far from clear, however, is the route or routes by which such Roman pagan iconography made its way into Germania. We are also presented with problems in identifying the audiences precisely; we may suspect that they are all high status, but we could perhaps explore other possibilities — perhaps there were individuals and groups inside Germania who were in fact Roman pagans, although not necessarily of high status within their own society. This raises the question of how the Germanic audiences understood and used Roman pagan artefacts, and, for that matter, how they may have understood and used Roman paganism. Crucial to any attempt to answer these questions is a good model of how Roman paganism and its material manifestations made their way into communities within Germania; that is, we need to develop a sense of the dynamics of the social networks operating in Germania, and across its frontiers with the Roman empire.

At the later end of our period, the relationships between Old Icelandic literature and its intra- and extra-Scandinavian sources present numerous problems of interpretation. The nature of connections between Iceland and the outside world are the subject of considerable argument, and it often seems to be assumed that Icelandic literature was affected by other literatures and cultures only as a result of very special conditions. A consideration of the social, cultural and political networks obtaining around the North Sea throughout the medieval period would, however, perhaps suggest that Iceland was very much more open to external influence than has generally been assumed.

Much of the work that has been done on Romano-Germanic interaction has focussed on interaction at and across frontiers. Lee has recently produced a monograph entitled *Information and Frontiers*, which specifically studies the flow of information across the

⁷⁶ A catalogue of the Roman pagan statuettes found on both sides of the *limes* in the modern Netherlands is A. N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta, W. J. T. Peters and W. A. van Es, *Roman Bronze Statuettes from the Netherlands*, Scripta Archaeologica Groningana, 1-2, 2 vols (Groningen: Wolters, 1967). See also the exhibition catalogue *Kings of the North Sea, AD 250-850*, ed. by Evert Kramer, Ingrid Stoumann and Andrew Greg (Newcastle: Tyne and Wear Museums, 2000), p. 155 (nos 136 and 137). On medallion-finds in Germania, see below.

Romano-Germanic border.⁷⁷ He builds a theoretical model for information exchange based upon population density; the higher the density in a given area, the faster information will travel across that area.⁷⁸ This model works well for frontier regions, where relatively small distances are involved. In both the examples mentioned above, however, much higher levels of spatial separation are the norm. In considering such sparse cultural networks, a different approach to network structure may prove useful.

Whilst it is obvious that information in the medieval period could only travel as fast as the fastest means of transport available, it is not so clear how information travelled from the Roman empire across Germania, or around the North Sea. In the latter case, the presence of the North Sea, while it enabled faster connections over long distances than land would have done, precludes any connections other than long-distance ones. In the case of information exchange between the Roman Empire and continental Germania, however, we might wonder whether information travelled in small stages, from village to village,⁷⁹ or if there were long-distance connections between the Roman empire and areas deep inside Germania? We do know of long distance connections, such as those created by trading links between northern Germania and the Roman empire,⁸⁰ and, as will be discussed below, those created through Germanic military service in the Roman legions. Such connections would have had a considerable impact on the understanding of Roman cultural and religious models within Germania.

⁷⁷ A. D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers: Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁷⁸ Lee, pp. 149-61.

⁷⁹ This seems to be the model implicit in Bjørn Myhre's discussion of Romano-Germanic long-distance interactions in 'Germanic Kingdoms Bordering on Two Empires', in *Kings of the North Sea*, ed. by Kramer, Stoumann and Greg, pp. 41-54 (pp. 41-42).

⁸⁰ The considerable importance of long-distance trading links and infrastructure to the lower Vistula area is considered in Przemyslaw Urbanczyk, 'The Lower Vistula Area as a "Region of Power" and its Continental Contacts', in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Mayke de Jong and Frans Theuvs with Carine van Rhijn, *The Transformation of the Roman World*, 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 509-32.

Watts has recently re-examined what may be termed the 'small world phenomenon'.⁸¹ This is the phenomenon by which everyone in the world is supposedly connected through just six other people. People tend to be clustered quite tightly in terms of who they have contact with; each person will have a relatively small group of friends and acquaintances, which may be defined by, for instance, their social status, their employment, or their religious beliefs. Many of the people within that group will know each other, but few will know people outside the group. In theory then, the world could be structured into clusters of people who have little or no contact with those outside their cluster. In practice, however, a relatively small number of contacts reaching outside a cluster will cause its members to become far better connected with the members of other clusters than one might have expected; in fact, the average number of steps connecting any given member of a cluster to a member of another cluster can fall to almost the number found in a world without any clustering at all. Yet the world remains very clustered, despite the shortness of the paths linking people to others outside their cluster.

This clearly has relevance to the problems which recur in this thesis, of communication and flow of information and influences. Here we will concentrate on early Germanic connections with the Roman empire, as a case study which is applicable also in later periods and other areas in the Middle Ages. We have every reason to believe that Germania was highly clustered in the early medieval period. It seems highly probable that it consisted of a large number of relatively small tribes, often competing, perhaps occasionally at peace with each other, and sometimes very poorly connected on the local scale with neighbouring tribes, due to low population density.

This situation is reflected in the religious practices of the Germani, discussed above, which seem to have varied widely according to locality. The Roman empire, on the other hand, seems to have been very unclustered, particularly in the religious sphere; public cults of

⁸¹ Duncan J. Watts, *Small Worlds: The Dynamics of Networks between Order and Randomness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 4.

the emperor and the great gods were available to everyone throughout the empire through public sacrifices.

The existence of even a small number of links between a Germanic tribe and the Roman empire could, then, create a situation in which the members of that tribal grouping might be better connected with the Roman empire than with neighbouring tribes. Still more startlingly, the average number of individuals connecting any member of that tribe to a Roman citizen might be very few indeed; perhaps around five. For instance, we might expect a Germanic individual of no particular importance to know the head of their household, who might then know the head of their sub-group of the tribe, who might then know whoever was in overall control of the tribe. If the tribal leader received a Roman ambassador, therefore, the ambassador would not directly meet the individual with whom we started, but information from the ambassador could reach this individual through only three intermediaries.

The same conditions, moreover, apply in later periods as well. Icelandic links with mainland Scandinavia, and with England, create conditions in which the highly-clustered society of Iceland enjoyed contacts with the outside world through a small but significant number of important individuals. The tenth century was important in terms of North Sea cultural networks, not only in terms of the spread of Viking settlement, but also in terms of what one might term skaldic mobility; the movement of skalds throughout the northern North Sea area, both with patrons and as part of the process of seeking a patron. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries see not only a continuation of the skaldic network (although more confined to Scandinavia in this period), but also the connection of Iceland with sources of literary authority in England, as well as in mainland Scandinavia. The English bias of such connections is indicated in Snorri's adoption of English royal genealogical material in his treatment of Óðinn's sons.⁸²

⁸² See Anthony Faulkes, 'The Genealogies and Regnal Lists in a Manuscript in Resen's Library', in *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni, 20. júlí 1977*, ed. by Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Arna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1977), pp. 177-90.

An understanding of the dynamics of sparse, highly-clustered networks with a few effective long-distance connections is, then, extremely useful in considering the levels, prevalence and speed of cultural interchange within medieval Europe. This clearly has important implications for any examination of pre-Christian religions in Germania. The availability of external religious models within Germanic societies must have depended to a large extent on the existence or absence of socio-political or economic networks with these characteristics. At the same time, literary and artistic exchange and influence can also be approached from this perspective. Bearing in mind, therefore, that this understanding of medieval cultural networks is more widely applicable, an outline of the light that this can throw on the cultural and religious circumstances of the development and use of bracteates will now be attempted.

It has been shown above, in section 2.2.1, that the iconography of the bracteates is, in itself, not compatible with the identification of these artefacts as usually or always related to the cult of Wodan. Not only is there no evidence that Wodan is depicted on the bracteates, there is also considerable evidence that the fifth- and sixth-century bracteates were understood in terms of their Roman models. There have been almost ten times as many finds of Roman coins and medallions (Roman in the sense that they originate in the Roman empire, not specifically in Rome rather than Constantinople) in Denmark, Norway and Sweden as of bracteates. While around 900 bracteates are known, about 9000 coins and medallions have been found.⁸³ A useful summary is to be found in Axboe and Kromann's article 'DN ODINN P F AUC', whence the following table:⁸⁴

⁸³ Axboe and Kromann, pp. 276-79.

⁸⁴ Axboe and Kromann, p. 285.

	Norway	Jutland	Funen	Zealand	Bornholm	Gotland	Øland	Main Sweden	TOTAL
Denarii c. 60-230	c.10	c.500	c.280	c.500	c.1200	c.4600	c.150	c.900	7040
Aurei/Solidi c. 270-395	4	3	c.80	5				2	96
Medallion 4th C.	2	2	2	1					7
Medallion imitation	8	1	1					5	15
Siliquae 4th C.	3	6	c.300	9				318	
Solidi 5th-6th C.	1	c.10	c.15	5	c.150	c.260	c.310	c.145	865

Kromann traces the iconography of certain frequent bracteate motifs back to medallions, and, in one case, to *solidi*. Kromann suggests that the coins and medallions ‘were probably more or less reserved for the upper classes’⁸⁵, and also states that ‘most of them were transformed into jewellery’⁸⁶. The way that Kromann presents the uses of the coins and medallions — and, indeed, her failure to signal the clear difference between coins and medallions — is, however, oversimplified and misleading. All but two of her iconographic links are between bracteates and medallions, and it is therefore important to be clear about how medallions in particular were used, both by Romans and by Germanic individuals, and how they reached Germania. The table above clearly shows that the influx of medallions into Germania was tiny, both absolutely and in comparison to the arrival of coins. Even the *aurei* and *solidi* of the third and fourth centuries show a large number arriving on Funen, although few compared to the arrivals of *denarii* and fifth- and sixth-century *solidi*. This, however, is not surprising when one considers the overall size of production of medallions. According to

⁸⁵ Axboe and Kromann, p. 286.

⁸⁶ Axboe and Kromann, p. 286.

Toynbee, these were pieces intended for special occasions, and relatively few were minted.⁸⁷ Toynbee points to Tiberius II's gift of 'aurei' (interpreting these as medallions) to Chilperic in the sixth century, and suggests that such a gift was not without earlier precedent: 'from what we know of Rome's dealings with the northern tribesmen during the third and fourth centuries it is clear that she had many occasions for bestowing on barbarian princes gifts of a complimentary, remuneratory and even propitiatory character'⁸⁸. In Toynbee's view, then, Roman medallions reached Germania as diplomatic gifts. This would seem to be confirmed by the rarity of medallions in Germania.⁸⁹

Another possibility should, however, be considered, especially as it has some bearing on how aware the Germanic recipients were of the iconographic significance of the medallions. This possibility is that the medallions reached Germania in the hands of Germanic warriors who received them in the course of imperial military service. Rausing has examined the finds of certain Roman military decorations — particularly *phalerae*, and the more problematic *patellae* and *corniculi* — in Germania, and suggests a model in which Germanic warriors may often have served in Roman auxiliary units, thereby gaining Roman citizenship (which was hereditary) and consequently establishing family traditions of service in the ordinary legions.⁹⁰ Those serving in the legions were, of course, eligible to receive military decorations. Rausing does not examine medallions, presumably because these cannot readily be classed as military decorations in the modern sense. Indeed, medallions were not given only to military men.⁹¹ Toynbee does point out, however, that many medallions refer to the army in their inscriptions, and that they are often found in higher concentrations

⁸⁷ Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, Numismatic Studies, 5 (New York: The American Numismatic Society, 1986), pp. 73-111.

⁸⁸ Toynbee, p. 118.

⁸⁹ Walter Pohl points out the importance of Roman influence and interchange with Germanic elites, and the impressive finds of Roman and Romanate treasures at barbarian sites such as Szilágy-Somlyó in Romania, in 'The Barbarian Successor States', in *Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. by Webster and Brown, pp. 33-47 (p. 34 and plate 7).

⁹⁰ Gad Rausing, 'Barbarian Mercenaries or Roman Citizens?', *Fornvännen*, 82 (1987), 126-31.

⁹¹ See Toynbee, pp. 116-17.

around places of considerable military importance.⁹² Medallions evidently are not military decorations, but they were particularly frequently given to members of the military. Given that military decorations such as *phalerae* occur in Germania, very probably as the result of their being given to a Germanic warrior who had achieved a relatively exalted position in imperial military service, one should at least consider the possibility that such persons might equally have received medallions.⁹³

If the finds of medallions within Germania are to be ascribed to legionary service rather than diplomatic links, however (not forgetting that a mixture of the two is equally possible), this has implications for how these Germanic recipients understood the medallions. Rausing points out that ‘in the Roman army, not only did every soldier in the legions and in the *auxilii* have to be able to speak Latin, he also had to be able to read it and, if an officer, to write it’⁹⁴. Given that the period of service was over twenty years, we may expect that any Germanic legionary receiving a medallion would, by the end of his period of service, be well able to read its inscription and well aware of the (often partly religious) significance of the motifs on the medallions. It seems likely, given this understanding of the Roman cultural contexts of medallions, that the use of the medallions as jewellery was simply copied from their Roman use as such,⁹⁵ and, more importantly, that they were used in full cognizance of the religious elements in their iconography. This is not to say that a returning Germanic legionary would necessarily have ‘converted’ to Roman religion, or even that he would equate Roman deities with heathen deities, but he would very probably have recognised that there was some religious significance in the iconography of his medallion.

An examination of the evidence for particular Germanic individuals in Roman military service during the fourth century, when the medallions reached Scandinavia, reinforces this position. A very useful prosopography of the known Germanic individuals in

⁹² Toynbee, pp. 113 and 117 respectively.

⁹³ Rausing, p. 127.

⁹⁴ Rausing, p. 130.

Roman military service during the fourth century is given by Waas in his *Germanen im Römischen Dienst im 4. Jh. n. Chr.*⁹⁶ This contains sixty-one individuals in total, of whom only four are known to have been in Roman service before 350. The following timeline, based on the data in Waas's study, shows the tribal origins of these individuals (insofar as they can be determined) against the date at which they are first evidenced in Roman service (in the cases where a precise date is known):

Date:	Gmc.	WGmc.	EGmc.	Frank	Goth	Alamann	Uncertain
350/1	2			2		2	
352/3				1			
354/5	3			6	1	1	
356/7	1					1	1
358/9	2		1			1	
360/1	4	1					
362/3	2						
364/5		1					
366/7	3						
368/9							
370/1							
372/3						3	
374/5	1			1	1		
376/7			1	1			
378/9				1	1		
380/1				1			
382/3	1			1			
384/5			1				
386/7	1						
388/9				1			
390/1	1						
392/3							
394/5							1
396/7							

⁹⁵ See Toynbee, pp. 118-21; even if one prefers Toynbee's view that the medallions entered Germania as diplomatic gifts, the way that they were used may well have been conditioned by how the Romans used them.

⁹⁶ Manfred Waas, *Germanen im römischen Dienst im 4. Jh. n. Chr.*, Habelts Dissertationsdrucke: Reihe alte Geschichte, 3 (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1965), pp. 81-134.

398/9							
400							
Total:	21	2	3	15	3	8	2

This table gives an idea of the relative importance of different Germanic tribes in the Roman military. Clearly the Franks and the Alamanni played an important role in the second half of the fourth century,⁹⁷ while East Germanic tribes are also relatively well represented. The table, however, clearly does not provide a complete picture. The largest single grouping in the table is of individuals who are thought to have been of Germanic origin, but whose tribal origin is unknown. It is striking that some individuals can be identified as being of West Germanic or East Germanic extraction, but no individuals can be identified as being North Germanic. This might be thought to bear out Rausing's suggestion that it might not be possible to distinguish Romanised forms of North Germanic names from other Germanic names. The fact that some names can be identified as being West Germanic and East Germanic, however, suggests that this is not the case. It seems very possible, nevertheless, that East Germanic and North Germanic names could readily be confused at this time; certainly, North and East Germanic dialects share a number of features against West Germanic dialects,⁹⁸ and may, therefore, be more closely related to each other than either is to West Germanic. The migration of the Goths to the Black Sea area was, in linguistic terms, a relatively recent event, in the fourth century. Moreover, the amber routes from the Baltic to the Black Sea and eastern Mediterranean provided a direct link between the North and East Germanic areas, which effectively by-passed the West Germanic tribes. In fact, the similarities between Gothic and the North Germanic dialects have led some scholars to prefer

⁹⁷ On which see Max Martin, 'Alemannen im römischen Heer – eine verpaßte Integration und ihre Folgen', in *Die Franken und die Alemannen bis zur "Schlacht bei Zülpich" (496/97)*, ed. by Dieter Geuenich (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 407-22. Also Stroheker's articles 'Zur Rolle der Heermeister fränkischer Abstammung im späten vierten Jahrhundert' and 'Alemannen im römischen Reichsdienst', in Karl Friedrich Stroheker, *Germanentum und Spätantike*, ed. by Olof Gigon, Die Bibliothek der alten Welt (Zürich: Artemis, 1965), pp. 9-29 and 30-53.

⁹⁸ E. Prokosch, *A Comparative Germanic Grammar* (Philadelphia: Linguistic Society of America, 1939), p. 30.

to view the largest dialect groupings within Germanic as Northeast Germanic (comprising East Germanic, North Germanic, and, according to some, Anglo-Saxon) and South Germanic (comprising most of the dialects normally referred to as West Germanic).⁹⁹

There is, then, the possibility that some, or even all, of the names which Waas could only identify as East Germanic are, in fact, the names of Scandinavians. More than a third of the individuals Waas identifies, furthermore, cannot be classified more specifically than as probably being of Germanic extraction. Some of these may be Scandinavian. One cannot deny the importance of the Franks and Alamanni, but one would expect that the tribal origins of members of tribes bordering on the Empire would be more likely to be known to Roman historians, and, therefore, more likely to be known to us. Of course, the fact that their lands bordered on the Empire might well have resulted in a larger number of Franks and Alamanni than members of other tribes entering Roman service. The considerable proportion of the known individuals whose tribal origin is not known, however, is very likely to include at least some Scandinavians.

It is also worth considering the size of the sample with which we are dealing. These sixty-one individuals are mostly known to us only because they achieved high ranks — usually exceptionally high ranks; several were *magistri militum* — in the Roman military.¹⁰⁰ From the career of Vitalianus, which appears to have begun in 363, we can see that it was not impossible for these individuals to rise from very lowly positions; Vitalianus began his Roman military career in the ranks of the *auxilii*.¹⁰¹ A far greater number, however, must have remained in the ranks or become relatively unimportant officers; it is usually only the generals of whom we hear, men like Buthericus who was *magister militum* in Illyrica, or Nectaridus,

⁹⁹ Winfred P. Lehmann, 'The Grouping of the Germanic Languages', in *Ancient Indo-European Dialects: Proceedings of the Conference on Indo-European Linguistics Held at the University of California, Los Angeles, April 25-27, 1963*, ed. by Henrik Birnbaum and Jaan Puhvel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 13-27.

¹⁰⁰ On this point see also the chronological tables of 'generalissimos' in John Michael O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire* (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1983), pp. 230-31.

¹⁰¹ Waas, pp. 133-34.

who was Count of the Saxon Shore in Britain.¹⁰² In some sense, these are the individuals of most interest to us in examining the importance of bracteates, for it is to such men that medallions are most likely to have been given, and it is such men who would have had the most cause and opportunity to assimilate to Roman social and religious practices. Such men were also often powerful and influential in their homeland; Vadamarius, for instance, was an Alamannic king.¹⁰³

It is important to remember, then, that these sixty-one individuals are almost certainly the tiny visible part of a very much larger number of Germanic warriors in Roman military service in the fourth century; indeed, many Romanised Germani will have left no trace, either because of destruction of archaeological evidence, or through failure to generate documentation during their lives, or, often enough, because they adopted Roman names which conceal their origins from modern scholars.¹⁰⁴ It is likely that at least some of this probably very large, but hidden, number of individuals were Scandinavians. The fact that some individuals in Roman service were, or became, Germanic kings also suggests that medallions very probably did arrive in Scandinavia as both military rewards and, at the same time, diplomatic gifts. In these circumstances, we have to think in terms of the iconographic (and, therefore, religious) content of medallions being well understood by their Scandinavian owners. We may also suppose that they were widely recognised as a badge of distinction — perhaps, given the frequency of bracteates in female graves, one worn as much, if not more, by the wives of the owners than by the owners themselves (not surprisingly, given the evidence for gynocentric social patterns discussed in section 2.3.1, above). In dealing with the bracteates, one must work from the undoubted fact that they are modelled mainly on Roman medallions. The other evidence for Germanic military service under the Romans suggests that medallions in Scandinavia were probably understood in terms of a socio-military

¹⁰² Waas, pp. 94-95 and p. 117.

¹⁰³ Waas, pp. 128-30.

¹⁰⁴ Noy's list of Germanic immigrants to Rome who are evidenced in inscriptions amply demonstrates that Germani in contact with Rome frequently (in fact, far more often than not) took Roman names;

significance which recognised their Roman origin and significance. If they were understood to hold a religious significance, it is probable that that significance was understood as relating them to Roman pagan religion, not autochthonous heathenism. This suggests that we may well have underestimated the extent to which Roman religion was practised in Germania, and the extent to which Germanic heathenisms absorbed elements of Roman religion in the late classical and early medieval periods.¹⁰⁵

The archaeology of the bracteates provides further evidence that Roman paganism, rather than heathen cult, was understood in Germania as the religious context of the bracteates. Gaimster provides a useful summary of the find contexts of medallion imitations and bracteates.¹⁰⁶ Seventeen of the latter were known to her in 1998, although the present author counts nineteen medallion imitations in the catalogue of bracteates, *Goldbrakteaten der Völkerwanderungszeit*. Of the seventeen known to Gaimster, ten were from graves, while the rest were stray finds.¹⁰⁷ Of the ten graves, one was clearly female and five contained weapons (and two of the latter could be dated on archaeological grounds to around 400 CE).¹⁰⁸ On these grounds Gaimster states that heathen mythology's 'early association with the warrior-cult is testified in the Scandinavian medallion-imitations, which are well represented in a male context'¹⁰⁹. This position is, however, plainly not substantiated by the evidence which Gaimster presents. Over half of the medallion imitations to which she refers cannot be associated with either sex. Certainly, the seven stray finds provide no clues as to their owners' sexes, and there remain four medallion imitations from graves which Gaimster does not state

this list includes around a hundred individuals, of whom only a handful have clearly Germanic names (David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: Duckworth, 2000), pp. 303-06).

¹⁰⁵ Wallace-Hadrill suggests a species of *interpretatio Germanica*, in which 'some Franks had found the Romano-Celtic gods so like their own that they had accepted Roman-Celtic names for their own gods while keeping their attributes' (J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983; repr. 1985), p. 18).

¹⁰⁶ Gaimster, p. 215.

¹⁰⁷ Gaimster, p. 215.

¹⁰⁸ Gaimster, p. 215.

¹⁰⁹ Gaimster, p. 215.

to provide any evidence for the gender of the occupant. Given, then, that at least one medallion imitation can be associated with a female grave, while the majority cannot be associated with either gender, it seems rash to assume that they were particularly associated with male-oriented warrior-cult.

The bracteates, according to Gaimster, are very clearly associated with women. She notes that over seventy burials containing bracteates are known, of which only four are male.¹¹⁰ In hoards bracteates are often found with beads and brooches, although they do also occur occasionally with finds such as sword sheath mounts; there are, moreover, some necklaces containing bracteates.¹¹¹ These uses are all very much in line with the ways that medallions were used within the Roman Empire. According to Toynbee, medallions were very frequently used as jewellery, being set in frames and provided with a hanging loop, or pierced for suspension.¹¹² Toynbee also notes that medallions were sometimes pierced through the centre and hammered up round the edges, apparently for the purpose of fixing them 'securely in some such object as a box or vessel, or in a piece of armor — a scabbard, corslet or the like'¹¹³. Again, we can see that Germanic practice with regard to medallions, medallion-imitations and bracteates accorded closely with Roman practice with regard to medallions. It is possible that the predominance of female graves among the graves containing bracteates has something to do with the fact that they were most frequently used as jewellery to be hung about the person, presumably on a cord or chain around the neck. It is hard to know which items of jewellery would have been considered masculine, and which feminine, by early Germanic peoples, but we have little evidence for the uses of necklaces by men, and so we may suppose it unlikely that men would have worn bracteates on necklaces. This would appear to be confirmed by the fact that, according to Lamm and Axboe, the bracteates from

¹¹⁰ Gaimster, p. 215.

¹¹¹ Gaimster, p. 215.

¹¹² Toynbee, pp. 118-19.

¹¹³ Toynbee, p. 120.

male graves appear to have been used specifically as Charon's Obol.¹¹⁴ This ties in well with the evidence for Roman military service as a major influence on Germania in the fourth century. It also provides a starting point for examining the possibility that returning Germanic legionaries brought back not only Roman medallions, but also at least some Roman pagan observances. The following table of finds of Charon's Obols in Germania is based on the list given in Lamm and Axboe's article.¹¹⁵ 'M', 'F' and 'U' indicate graves of males, females and individuals of unknown gender respectively. The column headed 'Notes' provides Lamm and Axboe's comments on the archaeological context of the find.

¹¹⁴ Jan Peder Lamm and Morten Axboe, 'Neues zu Brakteaten und Anhängern in Schweden', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 23 (1989), 453-77 (pp. 466-71).

¹¹⁵ Lamm and Axboe, pp. 466-71.

Find Site	M	F	U	Type of Obol	Notes
Salands, Kirchspiel Linde, Gotland	*			Classed as a bracteate, but looks more like a rough imitation of a coin (cannot identify the type of coin at present)	'Der kleine 'Brakteat' lag unmittelbar am Schädel in einem beraubten völkerwanderungszeitlichen Männergrab mit Waffenbeigabe' (p. 466)
Kälder, Kirchspiel Linde, Gotland	*			Coin- or Medallion-imitation	'Aus einem doppelten Männergrab mit Waffenbeigaben der jüngeren Kaiserzeit; die Medaillonimitation lag im Mund des westlich Bestatteten' (p. 467)
Högom, Medelpad, Sweden			*	Gold disc	'In diesem reichen Kammergrab mit Waffen, Gläsern, Bronzegefäßen und vielen anderen Beigaben lag am Kopf des Toten eine münzähnliche, schlichte Goldscheibe' (p. 469)
Hågerup, Fünen, Denmark			*	Dinar	'aus der jüngeren Kaiserzeit, mit einem Denar im Mund des Toten' (p. 469)
Hol, Kirchspiel Hustad, Trøndelag			*	Piece of gold	'In einem Steinkistengrab [...] lag ein Goldstück [...] dicht beim Schädel, "ohne Zweifel in den Mund des Toten gelegt"' (p. 469)
Søtvet, Telemark			*	Piece of gold	'ein flachgehämmertes Goldstück von 0,20 gr. mit Perlen und zwei Goldbrakteaten zusammen gefunden, wahrscheinlich ebenfalls nahe dem Schädel' (pp. 469-70)
Gile, Toten, Oppland			*	Silver disc	'In einem kaiserzeitlichen Waffengrab [...] wurde eine runde, durchlochte Silberscheibe zwischen den Zähnen des Skeletts gefunden' (p. 470)
Berlin-Britz	*			Gold bracteate	'im Mund der Toten gefunden wurde' and hanging-loop broken off (p. 470)
Obermöllern Grave IV			*	B-bracteate	'a u f dem Mund der Toten liegend gefunden wurde' and hanging-loop broken off (p. 470)

The list given in the table above only includes examples where the piece was found in the corpse's mouth, or very close to it; Lamm and Axboe list many more finds, mostly of pieces

without any hanging loop or piercing, and some found in cremation burials. In these cases, one can by no means be certain that the pieces were intended as Charon's Obols.

Lamm and Axboe may be wrong to suggest that most bracteates, coin- and medallion-imitations, and metal discs, which are not pierced and do not possess a hanging-loop, are Charon's Obols; one must still recognise the possibility that they constitute some other species of grave goods. They may have had an unconnected function within funereal rites, or they may even have been intended simply to indicate the status of the individual in the grave. Lamm and Axboe do, however, present around ten clear cases of the Charon's Obol phenomenon. On the basis of these, one must agree with them 'daß die mediterrane Sitte, den Toten im Mund Fährgeld für die letzte Reise mitzugeben, in Skandinavien in der jüngeren Kaiserzeit und in der Völkerwanderungszeit bekannt war'¹¹⁶. If Lamm and Axboe are right to identify many unclear finds as Charon's Obols, then we are dealing with a widespread phenomenon. Lamm and Axboe list several from England and two from Germany.¹¹⁷ The value of this evidence is questionable, but the table above does include two other finds from Germany, those from Berlin-Britz and Obermöllern. This suggests that Charon's Obol may have been fairly widespread, geographically, in the Germanic area. It does not, however, seem to have been demographically widespread; even if one accepts all of Lamm and Axboe's examples, and assumes a fifty percent rate of loss, the number of these objects is very small. It seems likely that the practice was largely restricted to relatively wealthy individuals, since they would have been able to afford the custom.

The most curious aspect of this practice, however, is the fact that genuine Roman coins are never used.¹¹⁸ The custom seems to fit well with the evidence for Germanic warriors serving in the Roman Army. Auxiliary units would generally have consisted almost entirely of warriors from a particular area, and might well, therefore, have used only their native burial rites when burying dead comrades. Germanic warriors who became legionaries, however, would have had ample opportunity for becoming acquainted with Roman burial

¹¹⁶ Lamm and Axboe, p. 471.

¹¹⁷ Lamm and Axboe, p. 468.

customs. These warriors — and particularly those who became officers — might well have brought back Charon's Obol to Germania, if they returned there after their service. They are also likely to have been wealthy in comparison to their neighbours, on their return. Their wealth, however, must have consisted largely of Roman coins and medallions; the lack of any signs of the use of such artefacts as Charon's Obols is, then, rather surprising.

The gold bracteates may indicate where the solution to the problem lies. The production of bracteates in the fifth and sixth centuries seems likely to have been stimulated by the end of the influx of *solidi* and medallions into Funen and surrounding areas. Roman coins continued to enter Scandinavia, but the focus of activity was further east, around Gotland, Öland and mainland Sweden (see table above). With the end of this external supply, it became necessary to start manufacturing imitations of Roman coins and medallions in situ. Clearly, there was considerable demand for *solidi* and medallions. Given that the bracteates which sought to satisfy that demand almost always had hanging-loops, it seems probable that the demand was based upon a use of *solidi* and medallions to indicate prestige; they were probably worn to show that the wearer was of a high social status. Their rarity must also have increased their value, and this rarity probably increased steadily after the supply from outside ceased. This perhaps explains the fact that genuine Roman coins were not used as Charon's Obol in Funen and the surrounding area; they were simply too rare and valuable to be used in this way. Such an interpretation would also fit with the fact that by no means all of the Germanic Charon's Obols are bracteates; as the table above shows, medallion-imitations, and gold and silver discs and pieces are also used. If the models for the bracteates were too valuable to be used for this purpose, one might expect that bracteates too would only rarely be used in this way.

The problems with this explanation are twofold. Firstly, it plainly does little to explain the situation outside Funen and the surrounding area. Secondly, bracteates do frequently appear in graves, as has been mentioned above. The second objection is perhaps not a strong objection, however, since bracteates are very considerably more numerous than

¹¹⁸ Lamm and Axboe, p. 469.

genuine *solidi* and medallions, and may not, therefore, have been nearly as valuable as the genuine articles. One cannot, after all, place too much reliance on a sample of only around ten Charon's Obols. In such a small number, the distribution of different artefacts used as Charon's Obol may be misleading. Nevertheless, the bracteates — which are, after all, largely a phenomenon of a few separate, highly-clustered localities — do clearly seem to fit best within a model of transference of Roman customs, and perhaps even Roman religion, to northern Germania in the Migration Age.

In examining the bracteates, then, it is crucial that we recognise that they arose out of a very strong connection between Scandinavia and the Roman Empire, and one which allowed the Scandinavians ample opportunity for developing a Roman understanding of the Roman artefacts which we find in Scandinavia. The development of the bracteates clearly shows a gradual move away from this understanding, but the bracteates which Hauckian scholars have attempted to relate to Wodan are often very close to Roman models, and, crucially, to a Roman understanding of their significance. For now, it remains safest to acknowledge that these bracteates are unlikely to have been understood as depictions of a Germanic heathen deity, since they were almost certainly understood as Roman medallions; the deity, if deity there was, was the Emperor.

The evidence for Germanic warriors serving in the Roman army, and for Germanic uses of Graeco-Roman religious practices, such as Charon's Obol, clearly fits well within the larger context of a 'small world' model of early Germanic society. In this case, as in later religious and literary developments, we would do well to keep in mind the 'small world' characteristics of medieval social networks, which clearly allow for far greater mobility of religious and cultural expression than has generally been assumed in studying pre-Christian Germanic religions and their literary reflexes.

2.4 Conclusion

A number of important basic assumptions and methods have been established in this chapter. In any examination of pre-Christian Germanic religions it is necessary to allow for the fact that much about these religions is irrecoverable. The extant evidence probably refers to only a tiny fraction of the deities worshipped by Germani in the late classical and early medieval periods. At the same time, the evidence that we possess does seem to indicate a general pattern of localised, gynocentric cults with tribal or regional centres. We can tell little more than this about such cults, but the strength of the evidence for them clearly indicates that we must reassess our understanding of the Germanic 'great gods' as relatively small parts of a much larger and more various range of recipients of cult. The strength of the evidence for Wodan and Óðinn, in particular, is substantially reduced when seen within this context.

It is also clear that exotic influences on Germanic pre-Christian religion were considerable, and the possibility of mediterranean — and, indeed, Celtic, Slavic and Balto-Finnic — elements making their way into Germanic pre-Christian religious practices is a very real one. In considering both the cults of Wodan and Óðinn, and their literary reflexes, the importance of such exotic features must be examined; DuBois has done much to point out possible Sámi and/or Balto-Finnic influence on the figure Óðinn,¹¹⁹ and this thesis will deal with some heretofore unnoticed or underestimated mediterranean influences on Wodan and Óðinn.

The problematic evidence provided by toponymy, iconography and philology has been accorded greater weight than it should have been in many previous studies. As has been shown above, such evidence requires very careful handling, and may reflect not pre-Christian cult, but its later reflexes, or even social or political practices rather than religion. This thesis

¹¹⁹ DuBois, pp. 134-37.

will assume that such evidence requires appropriate contextualisation, whether within the social, political, or literary surroundings of the era of its production, or within the landscape to which it attaches, as in the case of place-names. At the same time, iconography must be read within such contexts only when the context can be established by a reading based on the image alone; in other words, the image must be sufficiently clear and distinctive to allow us to determine its context by examining the image itself, rather than by allowing a predetermined context to influence our understanding of what is actually depicted by the image. A double process of non-contextual reading leading to contextual reading is therefore necessary in dealing with iconographic evidence.

Finally, the most crucial assumption — and it is a plausible assumption — set out in this chapter is that Wodan and Óðinn need not be linguistic cognates, and, indeed, need not be cognate figures at all. There is no reason to assume, as many scholars do, that Wodan was a deity culted amongst the majority of Germanic tribes in the primitive Germanic period, and whose name therefore reflects the sound-changes which differentiate the early medieval Germanic dialects, and in particular the North and West Germanic dialect families. In fact, it seems quite likely that Wodan and Óðinn either arose independently of one another, or at least developed quite rapidly in very different directions, as the evidence for their cults, considered in subsequent chapters, seems to indicate. The idea of a pan-Germanic Wodan-Óðinn is, as we shall see, probably a creation of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian christian literatures, and of the efforts of modern scholars in the interpretation of these literatures.

3. Classicising the Heathen: The Invention of Wodan in Eighth-Century Intellectual Milieux

3.1 Introduction

It has been suggested above that Wodan may be a figure largely constructed in christian contexts, and not necessarily an important pre-christian deity, as is usually assumed. Just as it is necessary to question previous assumptions, however, it is also impossible to proceed without some assumptions. A number of methodological assumptions have therefore been put forward, which attempt to place the evidence for Wodan within appropriate and plausible contexts. As part of this process, a basic model of the nature and structure of late classical and early medieval heathen cults has been developed, within which the cult of Wodan may be more usefully contextualised. Armed with these tools, let us now turn to the evidence for Wodan, and consider the ways in which he was portrayed and constructed in eighth-century literature, when he first attracts (comparatively) extensive textual notice. This will, in turn, lead us back to the seventh-century literary sources of these eighth-century depictions, and, ultimately, through reading past the distortions inherent in these christian literary sources, to an understanding of what can be known of the cult of Wodan.

3.2 *Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam*: Paulus Diaconus and the Heathen Antique

Paulus Diaconus has the unusual distinction of being the earliest author to mention Wodan in more than one of his extant works. In his *Historia Langobardorum*, Paulus recounts a version of the narrative of the Langobard ethnogenesis which appears in two

earlier, seventh-century versions in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* and in Fredegar's *Chronicon*. Paulus also mentions Wodan in a verse epistle addressed to Charlemagne, in which he appears to attribute the worship of Wodan to the Danish king Sigifrid. These uses of Wodan could hardly seem more divergent. The former, in straightforward prose, presents Wodan as part of the past, as a deity of Paulus's own people, the Langobards, and as a human being. The latter, in ornate verse, portrays Wodan as belonging to the present, as being worshipped by the distant Danes, and simply as a deity. This appearance of divergence and contradiction is, however, illusory. The apparent differences in these uses of Wodan are, in fact, simply different aspects of a classicising re-imagination and re-use of Wodan, which exists alongside an idea of Wodan as an archetypal, representative heathen deity.

In book one, chapter eight of his *Historia Langobardorum*, Paulus gives the following version of the ethnogenesis of the Langobardi:

Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam: quod accedentes Wandali ad Godan victoriam de Winnilis postulaverint, illeque respondit, se illis victoriam daturum quos primum oriente sole conspexisset. Tunc accessisse Gambara ad Fream, uxorem Godan, et Winnilis victoriam postulasse, Freaque consilium dedisse, ut Winnilorum mulieres solutos crines erga faciem ad barbae similitudinem conponerent maneque primo cum viris adessent seseque Godan videndas pariter e regione, qua ille per fenestram orientem versus erat solitus aspicere, conlocarent. Atque ita factum fuisse. Quas cum Godan oriente sole conspiceret, dixisse: 'Qui sunt isti longibarbi?' Tunc Frea subiunxisset, ut quibus nomen tribuerat victoriam condonaret. Sicque Winnilis Godan victoriam concessisset. Haec risui digna sunt et pro nihilo habenda. Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur.¹

At this point antiquity recounts a preposterous tale, that the Vandals, approaching Wodan, demanded victory over the Winnili, and he replied that he would give victory to whomever he saw first at sunrise. Then Gambara approached Frea, the wife of Wodan, and demanded victory for the Winnili, and Frea advised that the women of the Winnili should arrange their loosened hair in front of their faces to look like beards, and should stand together with their men, in the morning, and should place themselves in the area on which Wodan was accustomed to look through his east window. And so it was done.

¹ *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, Saec. VI-IX*, ed. by G. Waitz, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Hannover: Hahn, 1878), p. 52 (book 1, chapter 8). My translation.

When Wodan saw them at sunrise, he said: 'Who are these long-beards?' Then Frea added that he should grant victory to those to whom he had given a name. And so Wodan granted victory to the Winnili. These claims are worthy of scorn and should be accounted worthless. For victory is not ascribed to the power of humans, but rather is bestowed from heaven.

Paulus appears to have known and used both the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* and Fredegar's *Chronicon* in writing his *Historia Langobardorum*. He often contradicts Fredegar, however, and in this case his narrative seems to be modelled on the version given in the *Origo*, rather than on the *Chronicon*'s version. These two seventh-century versions of the narrative will be dealt with in due course (section 3.6.2, below), but at present we are concerned with how and why Paulus makes use of his sources in his presentation of the narrative.

Paulus follows fairly closely the narrative as given in the *Origo*, but he does make some significant additions to the narrative. Firstly, Paulus frames the story with sceptical comments: 'Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam'; 'Haec risui digna sunt et pro nihilo habenda. Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur'.² As we can see, Paulus implicitly understands Wodan euhemeristically, presenting his supposed bestowal of victory as ridiculous because humans cannot bestow victory; only God can. What is more interesting, however, is that Paulus frames his version of the narrative in a manner which draws attention not only to the fact that the story belongs to the past, but also to the fact that Paulus receives this mythological narrative from antiquity. We know that Paulus had written sources for the narrative, but he names instead 'antiquitas' itself as his source. He also leaves the christian god out of his condemnation at the end of the narrative, carefully presenting victory as granted 'de caelo', in a manner which could as well appear in Virgil as in a christian historical work. Secondly, Paulus adds a scholarly discussion of the etymology of the name Langobard, and of the development of Wodan as a religious figure, in the chapter immediately following that in which the ethnogenesis appears:

Certum tamen est, Langobardos ab intactae ferro barbae longitudine, cum primis Winnili dicti fuerint, ita postmodum appellatos. Nam iuxta illorum

² *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, p. 52 (book 1, chapter 8).

linguam 'lang' longam, 'bart' barbam significat. Wotan sane, quem adiecta littera Godan dixerunt, ipse est qui apud Romanos Mercurius dicitur et ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur; qui non circa haec tempora, sed longe antequam, nec in Germania, sed in Graecia fuisse perhibetur.³

It is certain, however, that the Langobards, having originally been called Winnili, were afterwards named in this manner due to the length of their beards, untouched by iron. For according to their language 'lang' means long and 'bart' means beard. Wodan indeed, whom, with an added letter, they called Godan, is the self-same individual who is called Mercurius among the Romans and is worshipped by all the peoples of Germania as a god; he is reported to have lived, not around these times, nor in Germania, but long before, in Greece.

This not only serves to point up Paulus's distrust of the Langobard ethnogenesis narrative, but also reinforces his presentation of the narrative, and of Wodan, as belonging to a classical (although not Roman) past; that is, to antiquity. This chapter echoes and amplifies Isidore's etymology of the name 'Langobard' in his *Etymologiae*: 'Langobardos vulgo fertur nominatos prolixa barba et numquam tonsa' ('it is said that they are named Langobards by the people because of their lengthy and never-shorn beard').⁴ It is possible that the identification of Mercurius's place of origin derives from the same source, although Isidore does not present Mercurius in an explicitly euhemeristic manner, nor does he depict Mercurius as being specifically Greek rather than Graeco-Roman.⁵ Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* might be thought to provide a more plausible source, since Cicero's enumeration of five different Mercurii, each with different parents, clearly suggests a euhemeristic understanding of Mercurius, even if that was not Cicero's intention. On the other hand, Cicero also fails to connect Mercurius explicitly with Greece.⁶ It is also quite possible that *De Natura Deorum* was not available to Paulus, since traces of the use of this work in the eighth century are at

³ *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, pp. 52-53 (book 1, chapter 9). My translation.

⁴ *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. by W. M. Lindsay, *Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*, 2 vols (London and New York: Clarendon Press, 1911), 1, book 9, chapter 2, section 95. My translation.

⁵ See *Etymologiarum Libri*, ed. by Lindsay.

best scanty.⁷ The most obvious source for this detail is Martin of Braga's *De Correctione Rusticorum*, which states that Mars, Mercurius, Jovis, Venus and Saturnus 'fuerunt homines pessimi et scelerati in gente Graecorum' ('were the most evil and wicked men amongst the race of the Greeks').⁸ It seems probable that Paulus drew his translation of the name elements of 'Langobard' from personal knowledge, and his observation on the Langobard pronunciation of Wodan's name probably stems from the same source. It is difficult to be certain, in the mass of manuscript variants, what the original reading for this should be, but the Monumenta Germaniae Historica edition states that 'e codicum vetustiorum lectione patet, primam vocabuli Wotan sive Uotan litteram cum sequenti conjunctam vocalis vim habere', and this seems most likely to be true.⁹

The *Etymologiae* was an important source of knowledge about classical pagan mythology in the early medieval West, and the use of this text, and the equation of Wodan with Mercurius, contribute to the creation of a sense that, for Paulus and the Frankish circles in which he worked, Wodan forms part of a mythological past which is not dissimilar from the mythological past of the classical authors. The equation of Wodan with Mercurius, which appears also in Anglo-Saxon England, in the *Corpus Glossary*, (on which see section 3.4, below) in the late eighth or early ninth century, does not derive from Isidore, but probably reflects Paulus's knowledge of Jonas of Bobbio's seventh-century *Vita Sancti Columbani*, in which an equation is made between Wodan and a figure called Mercurius (see section 3.6.3, below).

Paulus's use of Wodan in the *Historia Langobardorum* is not, however, simply a presentation of Wodan as part of a heathen classical tradition. Paulus also emphasises that

⁶ See *De Natura Deorum*, ed. by O. Plasberg and W. Ax, M. Tulli Ciceronis Scripta quae Manserunt Omnia, 45, 2nd edn (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1980), p. 140 (book 3, chapter 22).

⁷ See *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Natura Deorum Liber Primus*, ed. by Arthur Stanley Pease (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 57-58.

⁸ *De Correctione Rusticorum*, in *Martini Episcopi Bracarenensis Opera Omnia*, ed. by Claude W. Barlow, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, 12 (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 189 (section 8). Martin probably took this information from Caesarius of Arles (*Martini Episcopi Bracarenensis Opera*, ed. by Barlow, p. 164). My translation.

⁹ *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, p. 53, n. 1.

Wodan is a false god, incapable of granting victory — ‘Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur’ — and, most importantly, he states that Wodan ‘ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur’.¹⁰ This is an extremely important statement, for it is the earliest extant claim that Wodan is a pan-Germanic deity. Or at least, so it appears. On closer examination, however, one finds that it is not entirely straightforward to determine what Paulus means when he claims that Wodan is culted as a deity by all the peoples of Germania. Firstly, we should note that he does not consider Wodan and Mercurius to be separate, so he could be referring to culting Mercurius as well as to culting Wodan. Secondly, we may have a rather broader definition of the geographical limits of Germania than did Paulus; we tend to think of Germania as including all the areas predominantly inhabited by Germani, thus including England and Scandinavia. Paulus, on the other hand, may well have thought of England and the Scandinavian peninsular as being separate from Germania; he may, therefore, have meant only the peoples of continental Germania.

The problem is compounded when one examines Paulus’s reference to Wodan in a verse epistle to Charlemagne. Paulus was a member of the court circle — mostly composed of scholars — surrounding Charlemagne, and as such he took part in the lively and learned correspondence amongst members of this circle. Some of this correspondence survives, including a number of letters written in Latin verse, some by Paulus, and some by other members of the court circle. This poem referencing Wodan is one such letter from Paulus Diaconus, apparently addressing itself to Charlemagne.¹¹ Although addressing Charlemagne, however, it clearly responds to a verse epistle attributed to Petrus Diaconus.¹² Neff explains

¹⁰ *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, pp. 52-53 (book 1, chapters 8-9).

¹¹ Edited in *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, ed. by Ernest Dümmler, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, *Poetarum Latinorum Medii Aevi*, 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), pp. 51-52.

¹² Petrus’s verse is edited in *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, ed. by Dümmler, pp. 50-51. Neff places the composition of these poems around 783, on the basis of the reference to Sigfrid, which he relates to an embassy from Sigfrid to Charlemagne in 782:

Im Jahre 782, Mitte Juli, schickte Sigfrid eine Gesandtschaft zu Karl nach Lippspringe, [...] Wenn er in unserem Gedicht erwähnt ist, so mag die im Jahre 782 bei Karl erschienene

this as a commission from Charlemagne for Petrus, seeing Paulus's piece as answering '[...] das von Petrus im Auftrage Karls gegebene Rätsel'¹³. The piece can essentially be viewed, then, as part of a learned courtly dialogue, at least in part playful.

In this verse epistle, Paulus writes of the Danish king Sigifrid that he 'adveniat manibus post terga revinctis, / Nec illi auxilio Thonar et Waten erunt' ('should come with his hands bound behind his back, nor will Þonar and Wodan help him').¹⁴ Although Paulus no doubt genuinely believed that Wodan was a pan-Germanic deity, he does not seem to have known about the Danish Óðinn, for he here ascribes to the Danish king Sigifrid a belief in 'Waten'. Neff suggests that this form of the name Wodan, and the form 'Thonar' for Þonar, are not the correct Danish forms, but reflect his knowledge of the forms used by the neighbouring Saxons:

Paulus übertrug jedenfalls aus Unkenntnis der nordischen Götter Thôor und Odhin die Namen der bei den Sachsen verehrten und ihm bekannten auf die Dänen.¹⁵

Gesandtschaft die Veranlassung gegeben haben und man kann mit Recht folgern, daß die Entstehung des Gedichtes zeitlich diesem Ereignis nahe liegt und jedenfalls ins Jahr 783 fällt.
(*Die Gedichte des Paulus Diaconus: Kritische und Erklärende Ausgabe*, ed. by Karl Neff, Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters, 3.4 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1908), p. 100, note to line 17)

This dating would fit well with the dating of Paulus's time at Charlemagne's court, but Neff himself points out that Sigifrid '[...] blieb auch im Jahre 789 noch Heide, wie aus einem Briefe Alkvins ersichtlich ist: M. G. Epp. IV 31, 15 *mandat mihi per litteras .. si spes ulla sit de Danorum conversione*' (p. 100, note to lines 18-20). The passage of Alcuin's letter Neff quotes does not explicitly state that Sigifrid was heathen at this time, but the crucial importance of royal conversions in establishing Germanic nations as christian strongly suggests that we must understand this passage as referring to the king as much as to the people (see Richard Fletcher's discussion of 'The New Constantines' (chapter 4), in *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: Holt, 1997), pp. 97-129 [originally published in the United Kingdom as *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity, 371-1386 AD* (London: Harper Collins, 1997)]). While the occasion of an embassy might seem likely to evoke such a response among the versifiers of the court, we cannot establish with certainty that these poems were written so close to the date of the embassy; it seems best simply to state the strong probability that they were written sometime in the 780s.

¹³ *Die Gedichte des Paulus Diaconus*, ed. by Neff, p. 105 (note to lines 47-49).

¹⁴ *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, ed. by Duemmler, p. 52. My translation.

¹⁵ *Die Gedichte des Paulus Diaconus*, ed. by Neff, p. 104 (note to lines 35-36).

Neff is undoubtedly correct that Paulus's forms are not the correct Danish forms. The form 'Waten' is quite unlike the Danish form 'uþin' which appears already in the Ribe inscription of around 725 CE (on which see section 5.6, below). On the other hand, Neff can hardly be correct that Paulus was using Saxon forms of the names, for 'Waten' is certainly not a normal Old Saxon form of the name Wodan (for a probably Old Saxon form, see the Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli*, discussed in section 3.3, below). Paulus's comments on, and spellings (insofar as they can be reconstructed) of the name Wodan in his *Historia Langobardorum* suggest that he thought of the god as both a specifically Langobard deity, 'Godan', and as a more generally worshipped Germanic deity, 'Wotan': 'Wotan sane, quem adiecta littera Godan dixerunt, [...] ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur'¹⁶. For the latter he seems to use a name showing *o*-vocalism in the first syllable, an unvoiced or fortis medial stop and perhaps *a*-vocalism in the second syllable, although in some dialects one might expect schwa in an unstressed syllable. This form 'Waten', then, could easily be due to a scribal miscopying of a spelling reflecting these phonic characteristics. His probable use of 't' rather than 'd', suggesting an unvoiced or fortis stop, reflects High German sound changes. This strongly suggests that Paulus was not using a form of the name appropriate to the Danes, or even to the neighbouring Saxons; indeed, Paulus may well not have known these forms, and may not have had any evidence for Wodan being worshipped by these peoples. If Paulus knew about Óðinn and therefore believed that the cult of Wodan was present in Denmark, and was thus universal in Germania, he would have given a more nearly correct version of the name Óðinn in his poem. The fact that he does not do so suggests that he ascribes belief in Wodan to Sigifrid not because he knew that Sigifrid did believe in Wodan (or rather, in Óðinn), but because he believed that Wodan, as a universal Germanic deity, must be culted by Sigifrid. Paulus's claim for a pan-Germanic cult of Wodan may, then, be based on the ubiquity of Wodan in Paulus's own, southern Germanic, context; even if Wodan were culted

¹⁶ *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, p. 53 (book 1, chapter 9).

only among the Alamanni and Langobards, this would, from a Langobard perspective such as Paulus's, seem to be a very widespread cult.¹⁷

The idea that the *Historia Langobardorum* and Paulus's verse epistle provide evidence for Wodan being culted over a wide area of Germania, by a wide variety of tribal groupings, is, therefore, probably incorrect. Indeed, the idea that Paulus's verse epistle provides clear evidence for Óðinn being culted in Denmark is also highly problematic; although we know from the Ribe inscription that Óðinn was already culted in Denmark in the early eighth century, Paulus's verse epistle does not seem to indicate that Paulus knew by report that this was the case; rather it seems to indicate that Paulus viewed Wodan, not necessarily correctly, as a typical and ubiquitous heathen deity. Indeed, the pairing of Þonar and Wodan in Paulus's epistle strongly suggests that Paulus is characterising Sigifrid as a heathen by the use of two archetypal heathen deities, who are archetypal at least partly because they are the Germanic equivalents (in Paulus's cultural sphere) for the archetypal pagan Roman deities of the Bible. Jovis and Mercurius, the equivalents of Þonar and Wodan, are the only Roman pagan deities who appear in christian scripture; *Actus Apostolorum* portrays pagans as believing — due to Paul's miraculous healing of a congenitally lame man — that Paul and Barnabas are Jovis and Mercurius:

[Paulus] dixit magna voce surge super pedes tuos rectus et exilivit et ambulabat
 turbae autem com vidissent quod fecerat Paulus levaverunt vocem suam
 lycaonice dicentes dii similes facti hominibus descenderunt ad nos
 et vocabant Barnaban Iovem Paulum vero Mercurium quoniam ipse erat dux
 verbi
 sacerdos quoque Iovis qui erat ante civitatem tauros et coronas ante ianuas
 adferens cum populis volebat sacrificare¹⁸

¹⁷ If Wallace-Hadrill is correct in his argument that at least some of the pre-christian Franks worshipped Wodan, then this would increase the impression of universality of the cult in the Frankish orbit (*The Frankish Church*, pp. 20-22). His arguments are not particularly convincing, however, and, even if they were, the more nearly-contemporary pagans of the Suebic Frankish peripheries would no doubt have been more important in informing eighth-century Frankish models of heathenism.

Paulus said in a loud voice, 'stand up straight on your feet', and he got up and walked. But the crowds, then they had seen what Paulus had done, lifted up their voice, saying in Lycaonian, 'gods in the forms of men have come down to us'. And they called Barnabas Jovis and Paulus, indeed, they called Mercurius, because he was the leader of the word. Also the priest of Jovis who was at the front of the town, bringing bulls and crowns outside the doors, wanted to sacrifice with the populace.

This passage links Jovis and Mercurius very specifically with sacrifice, and certainly resonates with the item in the *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum* 'De sacris Mercurii vel Jovis';¹⁹ as we will see below, the *Indiculus* and the Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli*, which appears in the same manuscript, do seem to make use of these archetypal deities (see section 3.3, below).

Mercurius also appears in scripture in *Proverbia*, which refers to the ancient Graeco-Roman custom of throwing stones from the road onto piles of stones at crossroads, in honour of Mercurius: 'sicut qui mittit lapidem in acervum Mercurii ita qui tribuit insipienti honorem' ('anyone who honours a fool is just like someone who throws a stone onto Mercurius's pile').²⁰ It is striking, then, that Paulus should choose Þonar and Wodan as typical deities to whom Sigifrid might look for help. Paulus's reference to Thunor and Wodan clearly reflects his ideas as to the deities most important to the Danish king, but these ideas were probably conditioned by the importance of Wodan among the Langobards, and the importance of Jovis and Mercurius as christian archetypes of pagan deities, rather than by actual knowledge of Danish heathen cults. At the same time, Paulus is drawing on a christian tradition about classical deities, again presenting Wodan as in some way functioning as a Germanic classical deity.

This impression is reinforced by Paulus's use of the phrase 'manibus post terga revinctis' (line 35) at this crucial point. Duemmler correctly notes that this echoes a very

¹⁸ Acts 14. 9-12, in *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. by Robertus Weber and others, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969), II, 1722. My translation.

¹⁹ See the transcription of the *Indiculus* in Konrad Haderlein, 'Celtic Roots: Vernacular Terminology and Pagan Ritual in Carlomann's *Draft Capitulary* of A.D. 743, *Codex Vat. Pal. Lat. 577*', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 18 (1992), 1-30 (pp. 29-30).

similar phrase in Virgil's *Aeneid* book 2, line 57.²¹ Given this classical inspiration for the bonds, and the mention of Þonar as well as Wodan, there seems no reason to suspect that Paulus had in mind a specific mythological attribute of Woden as a bond-loosening deity. It is more interesting, and certainly more fruitful, to remark that even here in his verse, full of echoes of classical texts, Paulus draws in heathen gods in a passing reference very similar to the passing references of classical verse to pagan gods.²² This demonstrates not just an interest in classical literature, but, more importantly, an engagement with the paganism of classical literature here just as in the *Historia Langobardorum*.

It is appropriate, then, that Paulus Diaconus should be the earliest author to mention Wodan in more than one extant work, for he clearly had a vigorous and productive personal idea of Wodan. He uses Wodan in contrasting ways which nevertheless spring from a basic understanding of Wodan as an important universal deity. As we have seen, Paulus's assessment of Wodan's cult was probably skewed, resting principally upon the importance of this cult among the Langobards. The literary figure Wodan, however, is not so tribally- and geographically-confined, but makes his way outwards from the Frankish intellectual circles in which Paulus worked, appearing (in circumstances perhaps rather less exalted) in contiguous Germanic areas, such as Kent and the Saxon periphery of Francia.

3.3 *Thunaer ende Wuoden ende Saxnote: Imagining the Saxons in Frankish Circles*

It seems probable, then, that Paulus Diaconus was prepared to use Wodan as an archetypal, representative heathen deity, regardless of the specific deity or deities (of whom

²⁰ Proverbs 26. 8, in *Biblia Sacra*, ed. by Weber, II, 980. My translation.

²¹ *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, ed. by Duemmler, p. 52 (note 2).

²² For a useful summary of the classical interests of the scholars of Charlemagne's court see F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry: From the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. 154-201.

Paulus was probably unaware in any case) actually worshipped by the heathens he happened to be writing about. He also seems to have seen and used Wodan as a figure of classical Germanic status, and in this he seems to have been working within the wider classicising tradition of the Carolingian court-circle. In the light of this, we should perhaps reassess our understanding of some of the other supposed evidence for a cult of Wodan in the eighth century. The Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli* has often been thought to provide useful evidence for cult. This *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli* — one of the formulae used in baptising catechumens — is found on folio 6^v of Vatican Library manuscript Codex Palatinus Latinus 577, and reads as follows:²³

Forsaichistu diobolae.
et respondeat. ec forsacho diabolae
 end allum diobolgelde
respondeat. end ec fsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum thunaer ende
 uuoden ende saxnote ende allvm them unholdum the hira genotas sint²⁴

Do you renounce the devil?

And let him/her reply: I renounce the devil.

And all idols?

Let him/her reply: And I renounce all the devil's works and words, Ðonar and Wodan and Saxnot, and all those scoundrels who are their companions.

On linguistic grounds it has been supposed that the language of this formula is early Old Saxon, although this assessment is not always accepted;²⁵ Krogh, for instance, has argued that a reassessment of the dialect of this text is necessary.²⁶ Unfortunately, as Krogh himself points out, there is insufficient Low German linguistic material of a similar date, and in a wide enough variety of dialects, to allow us to construct a reliable linguistic context within

²³ See *Old Saxon Texts*, ed. by J. H. Gallée (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1894), p. 245.

²⁴ *Kleinere altsächsische Sprachdenkmäler: Mit Anmerkungen und Glossar*, ed. by Elis Wadstein, *Niederdeutsche Denkmäler*, 6 (Norden: Diederich Soltan, 1899), p. 1. My translation.

²⁵ For an identification of the text as Old Saxon see *Old-Saxon Texts*, ed. by J. H. Gallée (Leiden: Brill, 1894), pp. 246-47.

²⁶ Steffen Krogh, "Zur Sprache des "Sächsischen Taufgelöbnisses"", *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, 124 (1995), 143-50.

which to locate this text.²⁷ Given the use of the name Saxnot in the text, however, it seems probable that the text was intended for Saxons, and that the language is therefore Old Saxon, or a dialect believed to be easily intelligible to Saxons.

The text is noticeably lacking in features showing High German influence, such as the digraph <uo> for Primitive Germanic long /o/ (the <uu> sequence in 'Uuôden' is best considered as a semi-vowel represented by <uu> with <o> representing the long /o/; the forms 'uercum' and 'uordum' clearly show that the writer of this formula was using <uu> as a semi-vowel, since <ue> would be an unprecedented vowel spelling, and <uo> would be inappropriate in 'uordum', which has short /o/ rather than long /o/). The form 'hira' for the genitive plural personal pronoun is unusual, 'ira' and 'iro' being the usual forms of the *Heliand* manuscripts.²⁸ The forms without initial <h> probably show High German influence, while the form with initial <h> is in line with Old English usage, and probably reflects the original Old Saxon form. It is interesting that this formula clearly does not conform to the relatively regular spelling system evidenced in the *Heliand*, the language of which is now often thought to be a grapholect created in Frankish circles for aristocratic Saxon audiences.²⁹ The spelling of this text, in contrast, appears decidedly erratic and lacking in internal consistency. The forms <the> and <them> appear in the *Heliand*, but the various forms of the word 'and' ('end', 'ende', 'and') found in this text are not known in the *Heliand*, which consistently uses <endi>.³⁰ The form <ec> corresponds to <ic> in the *Heliand*, and, very distinctively, the *Heliand* often gives the dative plural ending of nouns as <-un>, not <-um>.³¹ The use of <-ch-> is also not the normal usage of the *Heliand*. Given the nature of the *Heliand* grapholect,

²⁷ Krogh, pp. 146-49.

²⁸ See *Heliand*, ed. by Eduard Sievers, Germanistische Handbibliothek, 4 (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1878), *passim*.

²⁹ See, for instance, *The Saxon Genesis*, ed. by Doane, pp. 43-47; the argument for a grapholect was proposed in Erik Rooth, 'Über die Heliandsprache', in *Fragen und Forschungen im Bereich und Umkreis der germanischen Philologie: Festgabe für Theodor Frings zum 70. Geburtstag*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für deutsche Sprache und Literatur, 8 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1956), pp. 40-79.

³⁰ *Heliand*, ed. by Sievers, *passim*.

³¹ *Heliand*, ed. by Sievers, *passim*.

this tends to confirm the impression that Old High German did not substantially influence the writer of the *Abrenuntiatio*. These considerations suggest that this text is an early Old Saxon text, probably of the eighth or ninth century, but do not allow us to place it more precisely.

The manuscript confirms and narrows this dating; save for the last item, it is written in one hand, which, according to Gallée, can be dated to the second half of the eighth century.³² Dierkens argues quite convincingly that the manuscript was probably written around 800 CE at Fulda or Mainz.³³ The manuscript contains a variety of ecclesiastical texts, including some relating to eighth-century church councils, and several relating to pastoral care. The *Abrenuntiatio* itself has been thought to accord well with the contents of the following folio (7^r), namely a Creed and the *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum*; Gallée believes that not only these texts, but the entire contents of the manuscript, form a unitary whole, compiled as a handbook for the Fulda mission to the Saxons, from 772 to 779.³⁴ He believes that the main manuscript hand corroborates this view, being, in his view, certainly of Fulda provenance.³⁵ This view is, however, rejected outright by Boudriot, who argues that the *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum*, for one, is not associated with the conversion of the Saxons:

Es ist ganz deutlich, daß der *Indiculus* nicht ein Instrument der Sachsenbekehrung ist [...], sondern ein Werkzeug der bonifatianisch-fränkischen Kirchenreform. Das Bild, welches man aus dem *Indiculus* erhält, ist das gleiche wie aus der Korrespondenz des Bonifatius mit den damaligen Päpsten: das eines verwilderten gallisch-fränkischen Christentums, in dem auch die Priester reichlich dem Aberglauben aller Art, gelegentlich sogar dem Götzendienst huldigten.³⁶

³² *Old Saxon Texts*, ed. by Gallée, p. 245.

³³ Alain Dierkens, 'Superstitions, christianisme et paganisme à la fin de l'époque mérovingienne: A propos de l'*Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*', in *Magie, Sorcellerie, Parapsychologie*, ed. by Hervé Hasquin, Laïcité Série 'Recherches', 5 (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, [no date]), pp. 9-26 (p. 12).

³⁴ *Old Saxon Texts*, ed. by Gallée, p. 245.

³⁵ *Old Saxon Texts*, ed. by Gallée, p. 246.

³⁶ Boudriot, *Die altgermanische Religion*, p. 18.

The contents of the *Indiculus* certainly bear out Boudriot's interpretation better than that of Gallée. Dierkens has recently advanced from Boudriot's position, arguing that the *Indiculus* is closely linked with the three related sets of acts of church councils (Concilium Germanicum, Council of Estinnes and Council of Soissons) which precede it in the manuscript, and which all reveal a concern with the practice of correct christianity, or, as the Council of Soissons puts it, 'ut populus christianus paganus non fiant'³⁷. Dierkens is no doubt correct in agreeing with Boudriot that the articles of the *Indiculus* mostly 'révèlent la vivacité de coutumes que l'Eglise ne pourra jamais extirper et qui, relevant d'une <<religion populaire>> intemporelle, seront tolérées par l'Eglise comme pratiques <<folkloriques>>', with the important proviso that these church councils do not seem to indicate toleration by 'l'Eglise', even if an individual ecclesiastic or community might be tolerant.³⁸ Unfortunately, Dierkens also agrees with Boudriot in assuming that some articles of the *Indiculus* reflect continuance of pre-christian Germanic religious practice in christian or semi-christian contexts, suggesting that Mercurius and Jovis in article 8 of the *Indiculus* may be intended to refer to Wodan and Þonar.³⁹ There is absolutely no evidence for this identification, and there are good reasons to suppose that such an equivalence is not intended. Given that the names Wodan and Þonar are used immediately prior to the *Indiculus* (in the *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli*) in the manuscript, and given that non-Latin words for non-christian practices are used in several of the *Indiculus*'s articles, it would seem unlikely that Latin names would be used to refer to these Germanic deities; the Germanic names would be far more likely. This manuscript reveals at several points, moreover, a concern with addressing unchristian practices in the vernacular of their practitioners. The Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli* is itself evidence of such a concern, whilst a canon requiring priests to use the vernacular in baptismal *abrenuntiatio*-formulae (quoted below) also reflects this concern. It would be strange if, given

³⁷ *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, ed. by Alfredus Boretius, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Legum Sectio II, Capitularia Regum Francorum, I (Hannover: Hahn, 1883), p. 30 (article 6). Dierkens, 'Superstitions, christianisme et paganisme' (see above).

³⁸ Dierkens, p. 25.

³⁹ Dierkens, p. 19.

this concern, the names Jovis and Mercurius in the *Indiculus* were not the vernacular names used by those at whose unchristian practices the *Indiculus* is directed. This suggestion is strengthened by Haderlein's convincing argument that the practices to which the *Indiculus* refers — particularly those given vernacular names — are of Celtic rather than Germanic origin.

The *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum*, and the associated Concilia, have, then, nothing to do with the Saxons. The Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli*, however, was almost certainly intended for use with Saxons, since, as mentioned above, it supposes its intended recipients to be worshippers of Saxnot, a deity whose name means 'companion of the Saxons', and who would clearly have been imagined by Germanic Christians as being closely associated with the Saxons. Although the *Indiculus* is connected with the Concilia in the manuscript, then, the *Abrenuntiatio* may have little to do with any of them.

A closer examination of the language of the *Abrenuntiatio* confirms this suggestion. The variation between 'end', 'ende' and 'and' in this formula could be thought to be the result either of textual corruption, or of a lack of certainty on the part of whoever first wrote down the formula about exactly how to represent the language in writing. The latter might seem more likely than the former, however, since there is no loss of sense in this text, as one might expect in a case of textual corruption. Although Haderlein argues fairly convincingly that the *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum* shows substantial textual corruption, the preservation of sense in the *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli* suggests either a very careful manuscript transmission, or even that the extant manuscript is the original manuscript of this text.⁴⁰ The spelling variations in this formula might be thought to militate against this view, but these spelling variations are, in fact, considerably more regular than they might at first appear. The vowel which appears most frequently in the first syllable of the word 'and' is <e>. The one instance of <a> occurs immediately after a syllable whose vowel is <u> ('uercum and'), while the instances of 'end' and 'ende' are either initial or following front vowels (<e> and <ae>). A preceding <u> also seems to affect a following vowel in <diabol->, which appears as <diabol-

>, with <-a-> as in its Latin source, following <o>, but as <diobol-> following <u> ('forsaichistu' and 'allum'). It would seem, therefore, that the sound represented by <u>, in the immediately preceding syllable, could, in the dialect of this text, cause a following back vowel to be pronounced closer to the sound represented by <u>. The writer's attempts to represent these variations in pronunciation appear erratic to modern readers, who are used to standardised spelling systems which often do not closely reflect the pronunciation of their language. Similarly, the choice between 'end' and 'ende' appears to be conditioned by whether the following syllable contains a front vowel ('end ec'; in which case no final <-e> is required) or a back vowel ('ende uuoden ende saxnote ende allvm'; in which case the final <-e> perhaps smoothes the transition between front and back vowels in speech). The difference between the second syllables of 'forsacho' and 'forsaichistu' also seems to result from the influence of the following vowel; 'forsacho' seems to show the normal second syllable vowel, with <ai> arising in 'forsaichistu' due to an assimilation to the following <i>, not unlike *i*-mutation. It would seem, then, that the writer of this formula was making a careful attempt to record in writing a language for which he or she did not have a spelling system; the writer therefore spells the words as they sound in their phonological context in this formula, rather than attempting to standardise the spelling of each word on one of the possible spellings. This also suggests that the writer was not writing a language he or she knew well, since fluent speakers of a language will recognise words and their relationships to each other, and thus tend not to notice fine distinctions of phonology between etymologically-related words, as the writer of this formula has in 'forsacho'/'forsaichistu'. This supports Haderlein's claim that this formula shows the writer's lack of familiarity with the language he or she was attempting to write: 'his are not the firm phonetic habits of a native speaker'⁴¹. Haderlein's choice of the term 'phonetic' is, however, unfortunate, for it is precisely the writer's phonetic, rather than phonemic, approach to the source language which is reflected in the apparently erratic spelling of the *Abrenuntiatio*: his or hers are not the firm phonemic habits of a native speaker,

⁴⁰ Haderlein, pp. 9-20.

⁴¹ Haderlein, p. 8.

but the firm phonetic habits of someone deeply concerned with accurately representing an unfamiliar language.

The formula itself suggests an additional reason for the writer's careful recording of sounds, for it provides stage directions (for example '*et respondeat* ') that clearly indicate that the formula was intended to be spoken; it would be important, therefore, that the spelling should give an accurate guide to how to pronounce the formula. This would be particularly important, moreover, if the formula was to be administered by a priest (perhaps even the writer himself) who was unfamiliar with the language of his interlocutor; unfamiliar, that is, with the language represented in the formula. The title of the formula given in the manuscript, '*Interrogationes et responsiones baptismales*'⁴², also indicates that the formula was to be used by priests in dealing with their flock; a similar formula, also with Latin stage directions, exists in a probably Frankish dialect,⁴³ and, indeed, later in *Palatinus Latinus 577* there appears a canon which states:⁴⁴

Nullus sit presbyter qui in ipsa lingua, qua nati sunt, baptizandos, abrenuntiationes vel confessiones aperte interrogare non studeat, ut intelligant quibus abrenuntiant, vel quae confitentur; et qui taliter agere dedignatur, secedat de parochia.⁴⁵

May there be no priest who does not take care to conduct the renunciations or confessions of those to be baptised clearly and in the same language into which they were born, so that they may understand what they are renouncing, or what they are confessing; and whoever refuses to act in this manner, let him retire from his parish.

⁴² Dierkens, p. 12.

⁴³ *Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler*, ed. by Elias von Steinmeyer (Berlin: Weidmann, 1916), p. 23.

⁴⁴ On the character of this manuscript and the canons and other materials contained therein, see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789-895*, Royal Historical Society Studies in History (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), pp. 33-34.

⁴⁵ *Patrologia Latina*, volume 89, columns 822D-823A

(<http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk/pld/fulltext?action=byoffset&warn=N&offset=92331586&div=5&file=../session/1039107506_27323> [accessed 5 December 2002]). My translation.

The Old Saxon (if it is indeed Old Saxon) *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli* clearly represents a response to canons such as this. This suggests that the writer was, as one might expect, a cleric, and one concerned with the reinforcement, and perhaps the extension, of Christianity.

The *Abrenuntiatio* is, then, a text which reflects the concerns of the *Indiculus* and the Concilia and which responds to these texts. This does much to explain the coexistence of these texts in Vatican manuscript Palatinus Latinus 577. It is also clear, however, that the *Abrenuntiatio* has nothing to do with the *Indiculus* and the Concilia at the stage of composition; the latter were composed in 743-744, in response to poor observance of christian behaviour in Francia and its dependencies, whereas this copy of the *Abrenuntiatio* is probably, given the accuracy of its reproduction of a highly idiosyncratic spelling system, the original copy of the text. It seems probable that the writer of this manuscript copied the text directly into the manuscript from an oral source such as an interpreter or a priest who was already using the formula but had not written it down. It is also possible that the writer was the individual already using the formula, although this seems less likely as such an individual would be less likely to record the formula in a phonetic rather than a phonemic manner. It is difficult, then, to determine exactly when and in what context the text was composed, but we would probably be correct to suppose that it was intended to be used in baptising Saxons. Given the references to Þonar, Wodan and Saxnot in the formula, moreover, it seems likely that the formula was originally intended for use with Saxons whom its author perceived to be pagan (not that this author necessarily perceived paganism as we do; as the quotation from the Council of Soissons given above shows, eighth-century ecclesiastics could understand poorly-behaved Christians as 'pagan').

While the attempts of the writer of Codex Palatinus Latinus 577 to represent the vernacular of his or her target audience may have been scrupulous, however, there is some reason to doubt that he or she made any serious attempt to include in the formula the non-Christian deities who actually were worshipped by this audience (if this audience were actually non-Christians at all, rather than simply bad Christians or semi-Christians). As discussed above, in relation to Paulus Diaconus's use of Þonar and Wodan, Jovis and Mercurius were

the archetypal pagan deities for early christian authors (section 3.2). Not surprisingly, then, it is this pair who go on to become the prototypical pagan deities for the christian Franks and Anglo-Saxons. Thus the *Indiculus Superstitionum et Paganiarum*, as mentioned above, refers specifically to the worship of Jovis and Mercurius, and, given that Jovis and Mercurius form the most immediately recognisable representatives of paganism for the Christians of the West in the eighth century, the use of Þonar and Wodan in the Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli* can very plausibly be understood as a learned but misguided attempt by the writer to provide a vernacular *abrenuntiatio*-formula for heathens or semi-christians, just as the canon which appears later in Codex Palatinus Latinus 577 instructs (see above). The choice of Þonar and Wodan could reflect his or her knowledge of the learned equation of Þonar with Jovis and Wodan with Mercurius which circulated in Francia and England in the eighth century, as well as knowledge of the use of Jovis and Mercurius as prototypical pagan deities. It seems likely that he or she also possessed the understanding — evidenced in the writings of Paulus Diaconus (see section 3.2, above) — that Mercurius and Jovis were universal pagan deities (although known to Germani by different names). If the writer did possess any real knowledge of the specific religious affiliations and observances of those for whom the formula was intended, this is probably indicated by his or her addition of Saxnot to the formula. Saxnot's relevance to the Saxons, which is made obvious to us (and no doubt also to the writer of the *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli*) by his name, renders it likely, as discussed above, that the writer did intend this text for use with Saxons; it also makes it plausible that the Saxons did, in fact, worship a deity or ancestor figure known as Saxnot prior to their conversion. This would fit well with the model of localised and ethne-specific cults proposed in section 2.3.1, above. One should stress, however, that this suggestion is based not on the *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli*, which only reveals the ideas of a christian writer about his or her audience (who may not even have been heathen by the time he or she was writing), but only on the preservation of the name Saxnot and the name's evident connection with the Saxons. Þonar and Wodan, moreover, need not have been worshipped by the Saxons at all, as these deities form part of a learned Frankish idea of heathenism which probably came into being before this formula was

written, in the context of Langobard and — as we shall see — Alamannic heathenisms and semi-heathenisms.

The learned conception of Wodan as a universal Germanic deity, equivalent to the Roman Mercurius, circulated, then, not only within Carolingian court-circles, but also across the Frankish area more widely. Nor is he confined to the Continent in this stage of his development, for he also appears, around this time, in the *Corpus Glossary*, which may be seen as an English reflex of this continental scholarly tradition.

3.4 *Mercurium Woden: The Corpus Glossary and Frankish-Kentish Classicism*

The *Corpus Glossary* is a large, alphabetical glossary of the late eighth or early ninth century.⁴⁶ The glossary is mostly Latin-Latin, but there are a considerable number of lemmata glossed in Old English, one of these pairs of lemma and gloss reading ‘*Mercurium woden*’⁴⁷. In terms of textual tradition, the glossary appears to be a much-extended version of the *Épinal-Erfurt Glossary*. This constitutes the earliest extant equation of Woden with Mercurius in England, and appears to have been written around the time of Paulus Diaconus’s death. At the time of his death, Paulus had not completed his *Historia Langobardorum*, which, like the *Épinal-Erfurt Glossary* (and, following it, the *Corpus Glossary*), shows the influence of Isidore’s *Etymologiae* (see section 3.2, above).⁴⁸ Herren finds in the *Épinal-Erfurt Glossary* and the *Corpus Glossary* evidence of a ‘mini-renaissance’ in studies of pagan, Graeco-Roman mythology in England — in Kent and Wessex in particular

⁴⁶ See Michael W. Herren, ‘The Transmission and Reception of Graeco-Roman Mythology in Anglo-Saxon England 670-800’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 27 (1998), 87-103 (p. 103).

⁴⁷ *An Eighth Century Latin—Anglo-Saxon Glossary*, ed. by J. H. Hessels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890), headword M197.

⁴⁸ *Old English Glosses in the Épinal Erfurt Glossary*, ed. by J. D. Pheifer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. liv; Herren, ‘The Transmission and Reception of Graeco-Roman Mythology’, pp. 90-91.

— around the beginning of the eighth century.⁴⁹ The *Corpus Glossary*, however, is generally dated to the end of the eighth century, and therefore cannot be seen as having been copied as part of this development, although its antecedents may have been compiled in the context of this mini-renaissance.

The precise origins and significance of the *Corpus Glossary*'s use of this equation are difficult to ascertain. Herren's thesis assumes that the alphabetical glossaries with which he deals were compiled, or at least modified, in response to immediate pedagogical requirements. The mythological comparisons of this group of glossaries were written in order to help students understand mythological references in both pagan and christian Latin texts. This seems a very plausible assumption, and fits with the idea that in general alphabetical glossaries were intended to answer a need for general works of reference in order to help with the translation of various Latin texts. The widespread use of marginal and interlinear glossing, however, as well as of *glossae collectae*, should perhaps caution us against assuming that alphabetical glossaries were intended to help with standard curriculum texts. It seems more likely that they were intended to aid more advanced students or scholars with texts which were not regularly studied. In either case, the assumption is that Old English glosses in alphabetical glossaries were intended to translate and explain their Latin lemmata.

The difficulty with glossaries, however, is that one cannot rule out the possibility of mechanical copying. It is possible, therefore, that the use of the Woden-Mercurius equation in the *Corpus Glossary* is due to mechanical copying of an exemplar produced much earlier in the eighth century, in the context of Herren's mini-renaissance; if this were the case, then the equation need not — despite its appearance in this glossary — have been in common scholarly use in Anglo-Saxon England around the end of the eighth century. Paulus Diaconus's use of the equation in his *Historia Langobardorum*, however, seems to reflect a scholarly notion common in Frankish circles, and we should probably understand the use of the equation in the *Corpus Glossary* as very much part of a living scholarly tradition which was available both in Francia and in Kent. The influence of Francia on Kent renders this

⁴⁹ Herren, 'The Transmission and Reception of Graeco-Roman Mythology', p. 103.

connection very probable.⁵⁰ The equation of Wodan with Mercurius may, then, have been nothing more than a scholarly commonplace in late eighth-century English and Frankish scholarly circles, reflecting the re-use of Wodan as a classical Germanic mythological figure, mirroring the mythological figures of Latin classical literature. The *Corpus Glossary*, like the *Historia Langobardorum*, indicates not that eighth-century authors saw Wodan as being in some way similar to Mercurius in his mythological characteristics, but rather that eighth-century authors saw, in a pre-existing equation of Wodan with Mercurius, a focus for creating a classical past of their own, a past at once prestigious and unmistakably Germanic.

It is in this context, moreover, that we should probably place the development of the Germanic vernacular names for the days of the week. These loan-translations of the Latin names of the days of the week have been thought by many scholars to provide evidence for the existence of a pan-Germanic cult of Wodan as early as the fourth century CE.⁵¹ The problem with this, however, lies in the dating of these names, so it will be useful here to sketch briefly the development of the Latin names and their Germanic counterparts.

The seven-day planetary week was borrowed by the Romans from eastern traditions. According to Cassius Dio, writing early in the third century CE, the tradition had been begun by the Egyptians, and was commonly used by the Romans in his day, although it was, according to him, a relatively recent adoption.⁵² Bickerman sees the planetary week as entering the West in the time of Augustus, and receiving official recognition under Constantine, but suggests (following Celsus) that it originated in Persian tradition.⁵³ Stern prefers the Egyptian origin, in particular 'qu'elle est née dans les milieux syncrétistes de

⁵⁰ See Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 5, 95 and 106-07. The importance of ties between southern English kingdoms and Francia prior to the eighth century is discussed in Vera I. Evison, *The Fifth-Century Invasions South of the Thames* (London: Athlone, 1965), and in Ian Wood, 'The Franks and Sutton Hoo', in *People and Places in Northern Europe 500-1500: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. by Ian Wood and Niels Lund (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), pp. 1-14.

⁵¹ Helm, for instance, in his *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, sees the loan-translation of the names as taking place prior to the Anglo-Saxon migration (II.2, 231-32).

⁵² *Cassii Dionis Historiarum Quae Supersunt*, ed. by Boissevain, I, 405-06 (book 37, chapters 18-19).

⁵³ E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 61.

l'Égypte hellénisée, dans le cours des deux derniers siècles av. J.-C.'⁵⁴. This is not implausible, although, as Stern himself notes, the planetary week's 'témoignages les plus anciens viennent de l'Occident et ne remontent pas avant le dernier siècle av. J.-C.', suggesting that Italy was perhaps influenced by the planetary week prior to Greece.⁵⁵

The planetary week must have been known to, and used by, Germani who served in the Roman army, or who lived or spent substantial periods in the Roman Empire (on whom, see section 2.3.2, above). From whenever this system became common within the Empire (certainly by Cassius Dio's day, and probably somewhat before then), such individuals would have used the system in their daily lives. Most importantly, however, they are unlikely simply to have forgotten and abandoned the system if they returned to their homes in Germania. We do not know if any Germanic groups had a week-system before the introduction of the seven-day week (a planetary week in most areas, but a numbered week among the Goths), but it seems that any prior systems were thoroughly eclipsed by the seven-day week by the time of our earliest written sources for the Germanic use of the seven-day week.

One might tend to assume that the loan-translation of the day-names into 'Tiw's day', 'Wodan's day', and so on, took place as part of the initial process of reception of the seven-day week. This does not seem likely, however; in borrowing a foreign chronological system, one is liable to use the foreign terminology, at least initially. The exigencies of trade and military service require that speakers of different languages use common names for important lexical elements such as the days of the week; a Germanic trader is scarcely likely to have wanted to translate 'Martis dies' into something more appropriate to his own religious affiliations, rather he would have wanted to learn the Latin name so that he could make practical use of it in his dealings with Romans. This is borne out by the Bavarian form 'Eritag' for 'Tuesday'; here we have a planetary day-name — based not on Latin 'Martis dies',

⁵⁴ Henri Stern, *Le Calendrier de 354: Étude sur son texte et ses illustrations*, Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth: Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, 55 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1953), p. 50.

⁵⁵ Stern, p. 50.

but on Greek “Ἄρεως ‘ἡμέρα’ — which has not undergone loan-translation.⁵⁶ As one might expect from the evidence for Germanic interactions with the pre-Christian Mediterranean (see section 2.3.2, above), this suggests that the processes of reception of the planetary week in Germania were various and localised, and did not necessarily involve immediate loan-translations of the day-names. We might also reasonably doubt the existence of universal ‘great gods’ among the Germani around the first centuries BCE and CE; the model for late classical and early medieval heathenisms proposed in section 2.3.1 would support this. The relative uniformity of the gods referenced in the Germanic calqued day-names is, then, a considerable problem if we wish to suppose that the loan-translations of the day-names were a development of sometime in the first century BCE through to the fifth century CE. This uniformity, and the familiar deities referenced, would, however, fit very well with the development of the loan-translations in Christian Germanic contexts sometime in the seventh or eighth centuries CE. The day-names are essentially a catalogue of the heathen deities familiar to Carolingian and early Anglo-Saxon intellectual circles; Paulus Diaconus, for instance, mentions Wodan, Frea and Þonar — only Tiwaz is missing.

Although it is possible, then, that the names of the days of the week were calqued in Germanic languages as early as the first century BCE, as a result of trade and military contacts, this does not seem likely. It seems considerably more plausible that these calques were created in a scholarly context in which the equation of Graeco-Roman deities with heathen deities was of particular interest. Eighth-century scholarly circles in Francia and in England provide, as the foregoing discussion suggests, the most plausible context for this creation of the day-name calques.

The scholarly understanding of Wodan around the late eighth and early ninth centuries is not the only view of Wodan available at this time. Although this Frankish idea of Wodan — whose seventh-century sources will be considered in due course — was clearly important, and was available at least by the early ninth century in England, there was a rather

⁵⁶ See Helm, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II.2, 238.

different use of Wodan (or rather, Woden) known to English circles. This was Woden's use as a royal ancestor-figure in Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies and regnal lists. This tradition has its origins at latest in the early eighth century, when the first extant reference to Woden as a royal ancestor appears in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

3.5 *Uoden, de cuius stirpe multarum prouinciarum regium genus originem duxit: Bede and the Use of Woden in Anglo-Saxon Genealogies*

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* is the earliest of the eighth-century literary sources for Wodan. Bede mentions Woden as the progenitor of the royal house of Kent:

Duces fuisse perhibentur eorum primi duo fratres Hengist et Horsa; e quibus Horsa postea occisus in bello a Brettonibus, hactenus in orientalibus Cantiae partibus monumentum habet suo nomine insigne. Erant autem filii Uictgils, cuius pater Uitta, cuius pater Uecta, cuius pater Uoden, de cuius stirpe multarum prouinciarum regium genus originem duxit.⁵⁷

Their first leaders are said to have been two brothers, Hengest and Horsa; of whom Horsa was afterwards killed in battle by the Britons, and has a monument in his name in the eastern parts of Kent to this very day. Now they were sons of Wihtgils, whose father was Witta, whose father was Wecta, whose father was Woden, from whose stock the royal family of many provinces has traced its origin.

Bede, who died in 735, seems to have completed his *Historia Ecclesiastica* in 731 or 732.⁵⁸ Kenneth Harrison has argued that Bede's failure to mention that Woden was a

⁵⁷ *Venerabilis Baedae: Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum: Historiam Abbatum: Epistolam ad Ecgberctum una cum Historia Abbatum Auctore Anonymo*, ed. by Charles Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 1, 31-32 (book 1, chapter 15). My translation.

⁵⁸ On the date of Bede's death see Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History: AD 550-800: Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 242. Bede himself claims to have completed the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in 731: 'Hic est

heathen deity provides evidence for the view that Woden was in fact a historical ancestral figure, who only later came to be seen as a deity.⁵⁹ Leaving aside the fallacy of supposing that a deity could not also be thought of as an ancestor, the extant references to Wodan simply do not bear out Harrison's position; as discussed above, Wodan is clearly understood (rightly or wrongly) as a 'great god' in the works of other eighth-century writers. Jonas of Bobbio's seventh-century *Vita Sancti Columbani*, moreover, explicitly describes Wodan as a deity (this text is discussed in section 3.6.3, below). Eric John has suggested, on similar grounds, that Bede's genealogy tracing the Woden-descent of Hengest and Horsa is effectively an interpolation, having been foisted on Bede (he believes) by a Kentish nobleman who was too important for Bede to refuse.⁶⁰ He interprets Bede's silence on the divinity of Woden as an indication that Bede did not want to mention Woden at all, since he knew that he was a heathen god. There are some obvious problems with this. Bede does mention other heathen deities — for instance Eostre and Hreda in *De Temporum Ratione* — and there is no evidence that Bede did know of Woden's status, although one might think it highly probable that he did.⁶¹

John is right, nevertheless, to note that the passage given above does not fit well with Bede's account of King Æthelberht of Kent's genealogy in book two, chapter five:⁶²

Erat autem idem Aedilberct filius Irminrici, cujus pater Octa, cujus pater Oeric cognomento Oisc, a quo reges Cantuariorum solent Oiscingas cognominare. Cujus pater Hengist, qui cum filio suo Oisc invitatus a Uurtigerno Britanniam primus intrauit, ut supra retulimus.⁶³

inpraesentiarum uniuersae status Britanniae, [...] dominicae autem incarnationis anno DCCXXXI' (*Venerabilis Baedae: Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, ed. by Plummer, I, 351 (book 5, chapter 23)).

⁵⁹ 'Woden', in *Famulus Christi*, ed. by Bonner, pp. 351-56.

⁶⁰ Eric John, 'The Point of Woden', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 5 (1992), 127-34 (pp. 129-30).

⁶¹ On Hreda and Eostre see *Beda's Venerabilis Opera: Pars VI, Opera Didascalica*, 2, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 123 B (Turnholt: Brepols, 1977), p. 331 (*De Temporum Ratione*, 15).

⁶² John, p. 129.

⁶³ *Venerabilis Baedae: Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, ed. by Plummer, I, 90 (book 2, chapter 5). My translation.

However that same Æthelberht was the son of Eormenric, whose father was Oeric, surnamed Oisc, after whom the kings Kent are accustomed to style themselves Oiscings. Whose [i.e. Oeric's] father was Hengest, who first entered Britain at Vortigern's invitation with his son Oisc, as we described above.

John sees this as evidence for the previous passage not being Bede's own work: 'He must have known the contents [of the earlier passage] but in II,5 he deliberately ends the genealogy with Hengest'⁶⁴. This argument ignores the fact that the passage in Book 2, chapter 5 clearly refers to the previous passage — 'ut supra retulimus' — rather than trying to ignore or gloss over it; the reader is, in fact, encouraged to connect the two passages, and to use Hengest as a hinge-figure to link up the two halves of the genealogy. Yet, as John correctly notes, Bede does state that contemporary Kentish royalty referred to themselves as Oiscingas, 'descendants of Oisc'. Given Bede's attempt to connect the two halves of the genealogy, however, we should understand this not as Bede deliberately contradicting the earlier portion of the genealogy, which he wished to suppress, but simply as a statement of how Kentish royalty referred to themselves in Bede's day. If anything, it is not Bede's Woden-Hengest genealogy which we should assign to a Kentish source, but his Hengest-Aedilberct genealogy.

This presents a considerable difficulty for the assumption — made by many scholars, including Eric John — that Woden was a royal ancestor in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England, whose divinity conferred special authority and prestige on those claiming descent from him. If the royal house of Kent referred to themselves as Oiscingas in the early eighth century, this suggests that they were looking to a figure named Oisc as their ultimate ancestor, the source of their royal status and authority.

What, then, has Woden to do with Oisc? Bede's genealogy of King Æthelberht, tracing his ancestry back to Oisc, makes good internal sense. If one considers the Woden-Hengest genealogy, however, it becomes apparent that this genealogy is less straightforward; Oisc, in fact, may have very little to do with Woden. A careful consideration of the Woden-

⁶⁴ John, p. 129.

Hengest genealogy may, then, provide us with some indication of how and why Woden comes to feature in Bede's Kentish genealogy.

The complete sequence of Bede's Woden-Hengest genealogy is: Voden > Vecta > Vitta > Victgils > Hengest. The name Vecta is identical with the name Bede gives (in the same chapter as his Hengest-genealogy) to the Isle of Wight.⁶⁵ This might lead one to suspect that Vecta gave his name to the Isle of Wight, but for the fact that the Isle of Wight was already called Vecta by Eutropius, writing in the second half of the fourth century.⁶⁶ Clearly, Vecta's name was created from that of the Isle of Wight, not vice versa. That the name Vecta is based on a Latin place-name rather than being a real early Anglo-Saxon name may also render us suspicious of Vitta, which does not appear in this form in all manuscripts of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.⁶⁷ One might easily dismiss this as scribal error, but one should perhaps consider the alternative possibility that Vitta is in fact a post-Bedan insertion which was added to the genealogy in order to create two name-pairs which exhibit the two-stress alliterating pattern found in Old English poetry: Voden and Vecta, Vitta and Victgils. The similarity of the names Vecta and Vitta, and the absence of the latter in some manuscripts of Bede, may, in fact, be a symptom of Vitta having been invented in post-Bedan tradition on the model of Vecta. That the addition, if we accept that there was one, was not made by Bede can be evidenced from the fact that Bede's Latin genealogy includes 'cuius pater' between each name, which would break the rhythm. The use of alliterative half-lines in Latin would also be unlikely in any case. As Chambers has remarked, however, the West Saxon royal genealogy from Cerdic to Woden forms regular Old English verse.⁶⁸ Chambers argues that the genealogy is constructed in this way because such verse genealogies would be easier to remember in pre-literate societies. This is true, but we should bear in mind that the pre-existence of genealogies which were in verse, or were verse-like, would tend to influence

⁶⁵ *Venerabilis Baedae: Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, ed. by Plummer, 1, 31 (book 1, chapter 15).

⁶⁶ *Eutropii Breviarum ab Urbe Condita*, ed. by Carolus Santini, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig: Teubner, 1979), p. 47 (book 7, chapter 19).

⁶⁷ *Venerabilis Baedae: Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, ed. by Plummer, 1, 31 (book 1, chapter 15).

the way that later genealogies were compiled or composed, even if they were compiled or composed in a literate context. Bede's two Kentish genealogies are a perfect case in point, for both could form verse-like genealogies in Old English:

Aedilberct	Irminricing	Irminric	Octing	Octa	Oiscing
Victgils	Vitting	Vitta	Vecting	Vecta	Vodning

If, as seems likely, the Oisc-genealogy was in existence prior to the compilation of the Woden-genealogy, then we have here a clear example of the influence of the verse-like traditional genealogy on the compilation of genealogies in literate contexts. It is, then, quite possible — even probable — that Vitta is a post-Bedan insertion into this genealogy.

The picture which begins to emerge is, as one might expect, of a legendary genealogy. More specifically, the genealogy seems to reflect legends about origins. This may seem obvious, but one should note the plural, for we are dealing here not only with Hengest as an originator figure for the Anglo-Saxons, the first and original Anglo-Saxon, but also with Vecta as a figure probably involved in a lost aetiological narrative for the name of the Isle of Wight. An example of a very similar narrative, creating an Anglo-Saxon incomer with a similar name to explain a pre-Anglo-Saxon place-name, can be seen in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s explanation of the name Portsmouth.⁶⁹ At the same time, we should also consider Woden as a figure whom Bede very explicitly connects with origins; he is 'Uoden, de cuius stirpe multarum prouinciarum regium genus originem duxit' ('Woden, from whose stock the royal house of many provinces has drawn its origin'; my translation).

It would seem, therefore, that this genealogy constitutes a constructed response to a desire for origins; regional origins in the case of Vecta, whose presence may reflect Kentish claims on the Isle of Wight, and wider English origins (Hengest), and continental origins (Woden). Bede's Woden-Hengest genealogy is essentially an attempt to genealogise several origin myths. Hengest, the first Saxon arrival in England — and therefore in some sense the

⁶⁸ R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 316-17.

⁶⁹ *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. by John Earle and Charles Plummer, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892-1899), I, 14-15.

original Anglo-Saxon — is re-imagined as a royal ancestor, although he may not originally have been thought of as anything other than the first Saxon to arrive in Britain. It is hardly surprising, indeed, that most if not all Anglo-Saxon royal houses would wish to be associated with the archetypal Anglo-Saxon. This use of Hengest within genealogies probably first developed in a southern context, given the connection of Vecta to the Isle of Wight, and in all likelihood a Kentish context, given the fact that Bede's version of the tradition, the earliest extant version, is Kentish.

One might wonder, then, how Woden comes to form part of this genealogical conflation of origin myths. As indicated above, Woden's function within this tradition is as a figure predating the *adventus Saxonum*, and therefore relating to the continental Germanic area. Just as Paulus Diaconus later in the eighth century uses Wodan as a figure of antiquity, so Bede here presents Woden as belonging to the past. Bede differs from Paulus, however, in using Woden not as a Germanic version of a classical deity, but as a fully-euhemerised figure, imagined simply as a man, with no suggestion of divinity. At the same time, Bede's Woden is continental; he belongs not only to the past, but also to another place. Similar genealogical traditions concerning Wodan did not exist on the continent, and the attempt by Hauck (and, following him, John) to find evidence for traditions of Wodan-descent in Gothic, Saxon and Langobard ethnogeneses tracing descent from figures named Gaut, or compounds of –Gaut,⁷⁰ does not address the simple but insuperable difficulty that Gaut may simply mean 'man',⁷¹ and may, therefore, have been used, possibly independently, in numerous contexts as an appropriate name for a legendary progenitor.⁷² It would also be decidedly strange to find Wodan featured in two distinct rôles, with two distinct names, in the Langobard ethnic

⁷⁰ Karl Hauck, 'The Literature of House and Kindred Associated with Medieval Noble Families, Illustrated from Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Satires on the Nobility', in *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. by Timothy Reuter, *Europe in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies*, 14 (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 61-85 (pp. 68-69). John, 'The Point of Woden', p. 128.

⁷¹ Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. by Thomas J. Dunlap, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 21.

⁷² Indeed, Wolfram rejects the supposed equivalence of Wodan and Gaut, arguing that 'the Gothic Gaut and Odin-Woden were different gods' (p. 111).

history, once as Gaut the royal ancestor and once as Wodan the tutelary deity. This strongly suggests that this genealogical use of Woden is peculiarly English, and is, moreover, a use of Woden as a figure characteristically both continental and ancient, that is, pre-Christian. Bede, then, has completely euhemerised Woden as part of a Christian re-imagining of the pre-Christian past which is specifically focussed on the (contemporary) continental Saxons — or ‘Saxones Antiqui’ (‘Old Saxons’), as Bede calls them⁷³ — as non-Christians and as ancestors, and on their supposed connection with Wodan. As we have seen in relation to Paulus Diaconus’s uses of Wodan, and the Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli*, such a use of Wodan need not be based on anything more than a scholarly idea of Wodan as one of the typical heathen deities (see sections 3.2 and 3.3, above). Indeed, it seems scarcely credible that Bede could fail to comment on Woden’s status as a heathen deity if he was indeed the object of significant cult in heathen England. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Bede is in fact concerned rather with an act of imagining the old Saxons — who are at once his ancestors and the contemporary continental Saxons — as deriving their origins, rather like the Langobards, from the paradigmatic heathen deity, Wodan. Bede’s Woden — and, indeed, Woden as he appears in subsequent Anglo-Saxon regnal lists and royal genealogies — is, in fact, firmly rooted in continental Christian understandings of Woden, and need not owe anything to English heathen cult.

The evidence of Bede, then, suggests not only that Woden was not well-known as a deity in Anglo-Saxon England, but also that the figure Woden could, in Bede’s day, be used as a royal ancestor figure. Bede does not attempt to place Woden within a learned framework; he does not equate Woden with Mercurius (nor would one expect him to do so, since he does not present Woden as a deity). Of course, Bede does not equate any heathen deity he mentions with a classical equivalent, although clearly there was already in early eighth-century

⁷³ He calls them this in the specific context of discussing the *adventus Saxonum* in book one, chapter fifteen (*Venerabilis Baedae: Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, ed. by Plummer, I, 31), as well as in discussing missionary activity among the continental Saxons in book five, chapters ten and eleven (*Venerabilis Baedae: Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, ed. by Plummer, I, 299 and 302); the connection of the continental

Anglo-Saxon England — particularly in Kent — some interest in the classical authors and their mythological figures.⁷⁴ The interest in classical mythology in early eighth-century Kent is perhaps important for understanding the development of Woden as an ancestor figure in Kent, for it shows an interest in the past and in origins which might well motivate the use, as an ancestor, of a figure who was a heathen deity elsewhere. In the context of the Anglo-Saxons' interest in their continental origins (fostered not only by Bede's treatment of the subject in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but also by Kent's strong links with the continent, particularly with Francia), one might see this as the adoption by Christians of a deity who probably was not worshipped by their ancestors, but who was thought by the Franks — and, indeed, by Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics in Francia — to be worshipped by their 'contemporary ancestors', the Old Saxons. This adoption, and the associated insertion of Woden into a royal genealogy, at once proves the non-divinity of Woden, since he is supposed to have been a human being, and at the same time appropriates the authority inherent in him as a figure of antiquity.

The eighth century uses Wodan in differing but interconnected ways. The Frankish-centred tradition of Wodan as a great god contrasts with the English use of Woden as a royal ancestor. Yet the English tradition is dependent on the continental tradition, despite its refusal to portray Woden as a deity. These traditions also share, in different ways, a desire to relate Wodan to the past, to use him as a figure who, in various ways, provides authority or legitimation, whether in terms of ethnicity or royalty, or through the construction of a form of Germanic classical heritage. Clearly, modern scholars have been too ready to accept such evidence as relating in a direct and simple way to heathen cult. The eighth-century uses of Wodan are not simple reflections of his importance and use within pre-Christian cults and

Saxons with heathenism and with the ancestry of the Anglo-Saxons could hardly be expressed more clearly.

⁷⁴ On this see Herren, 'The Transmission and Reception of Graeco-Roman Mythology', who points out that, despite the Southumbrian interest in classical mythology, 'Bede, working in Northumbria, was unimpressed by all this' (p. 103).

societies, but are necessarily shaped by the concerns and interests of eighth-century authors and their intended audiences. With this in mind, an examination of the pre-eighth-century evidence for Wodan may help to establish not only something of the actual development of the cult of Wodan, but also how the cult, and the seventh-century sources for it, influenced eighth-century christian authors, and how they misunderstood or misrepresented this cult; in short, how Wodan was re-invented in the eighth century.

3.6 *Vodano nomine*: Columbanus, the Suebi, and the Cult of Wodan

The eighth-century evidence for a cult of Wodan is by no means as straightforward as it might at first be thought to be, and it seems that the picture of a widespread eighth-century cult of Wodan on the Continent and in Anglo-Saxon England may be a false one. Paulus Diaconus uses Wodan as a paradigmatic heathen deity, whose worship can be ascribed to anyone known to be heathen, without regard to their actual religious convictions. At the same time, he appropriates Wodan as a Germanic classical deity who can fulfil in Paulus's own writings the rôles fulfilled by Jovis or Mars or Mercurius in classical texts. Bede undertakes a similar re-appropriation of Wodan as part of an ancient — pre-christian and continental — Anglo-Saxon past. Even the Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli* does not relate as simply as one might suppose to the practicalities of converting Continental Saxons; once again, this text demonstrates the power of the Frankish and Anglo-Saxon paradigm of heathen cult centering around a pan-Germanic Wodan (and Þonar), but we might very reasonably doubt that it gives a reliable indication of the deities culted by the Continental Saxons in the eighth century.

If eighth-century authors constructed Wodan as a great god, a figure of antiquity and object of pan-Germanic heathen religious cult, the question remains: whence did they derive their idea of Wodan? Were they wrong to view Wodan in this way? What was their — and our — evidence for the actual cult of Wodan? The evidence was, and is, decidedly scarce. As

we shall see, moreover, the evidence seems to have been radically misinterpreted by the eighth-century authors whose reading of the evidence did so much to shape subsequent readings of the evidence, both in the medieval period and up to the present day.

3.6.1 Logapore Wodan: The Nordendorf Brooch and Alamannic Cult

The earliest pieces of documentary evidence for the existence of Wodan date to the seventh century CE. These are a reference, in Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Sancti Columbani*, to Suebi worshipping Wodan, a runic inscription on a brooch found near Nordendorf, and two versions of the Langobard ethnogenesis found in Fredegar's *Chronicon* and the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*. As mentioned above (section 3.2), Paulus Diaconus used both the *Chronicon* and the *Origo Gentis* in composing his *Historia Langobardorum*. He was also no doubt aware of the *Vita Columbani*, which provided him with the equation of Wodan with Mercurius. The one source which we have and which Paulus did not is the inscription on the Nordendorf brooch, and it is this source which probably provides the earliest reference to Wodan.

Krause dates the inscription on the Nordendorf brooch to the beginning of the seventh century.⁷⁵ The inscription reads 'logapore wodan wigiponar awaleubwiniᵛ', and is, according to Krause, in an Alamannic dialect.⁷⁶ Not all scholars would agree with Krause's identification of the dialect, however; Helm, for instance, has suggested that the name Wodan should not show <d> in an Alamannic dialect, but <t>.⁷⁷ It is clear, nevertheless, that the brooch was owned at some point by a Germanic individual, and it is not improbable that it was also buried with a Germanic individual. Clearly, the runic inscription on the brooch was intended for a Germanic speaking owner, or was at least made by a Germanic speaker

⁷⁵ *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, ed. by Wolfgang Krause, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, series 3, 65, 2 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), I, 294 (no. 151). See also illustration 1 below, based on Krause's photograph (II, plate 65).

⁷⁶ *Die Runeninschriften*, ed. by Krause, I, 292.

⁷⁷ Helm, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II.2, 277.

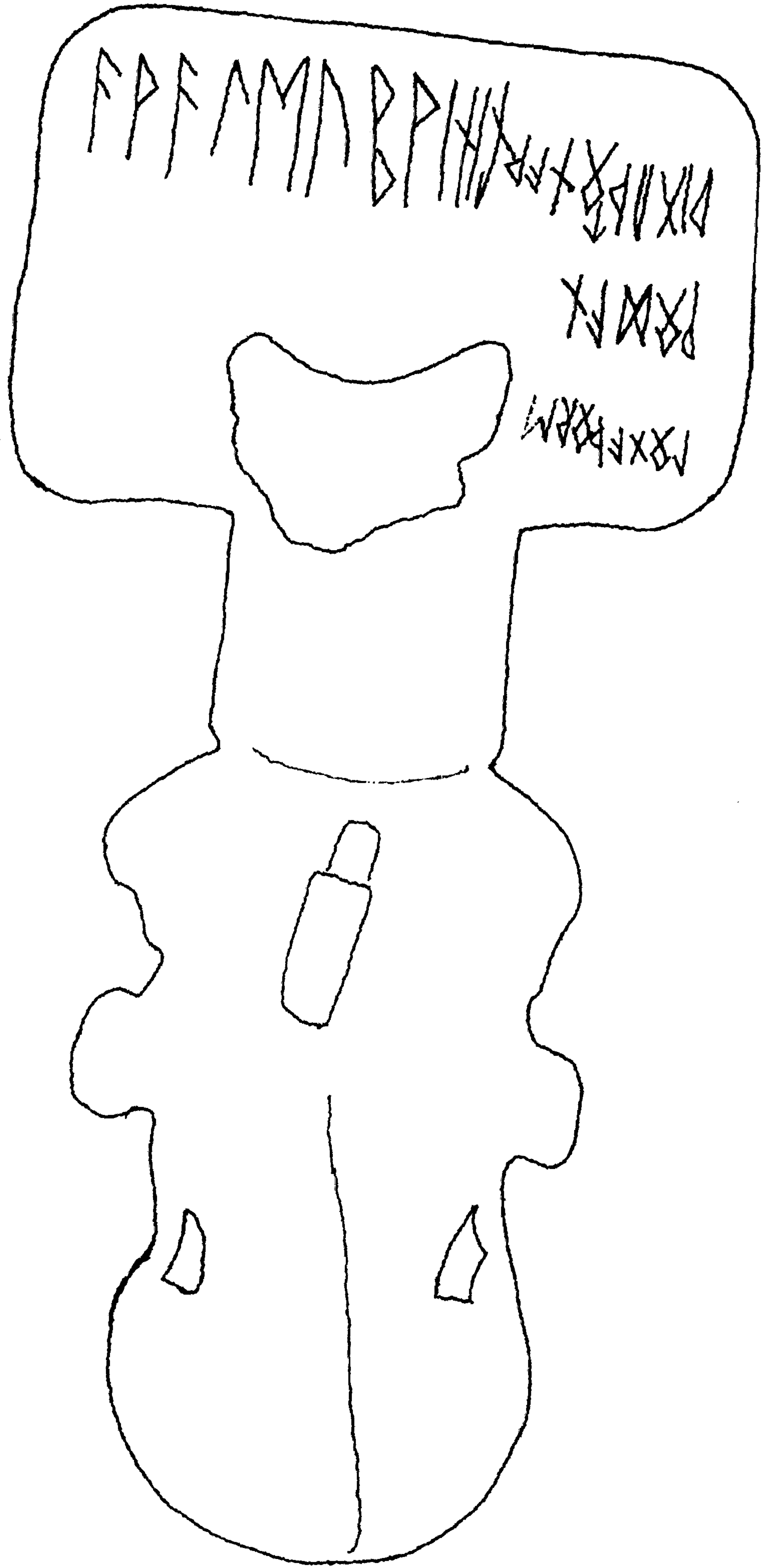


Figure 1 – Nordendorf brooch

who also possessed runic literacy. Given the location of Nordendorf it seems more probable than not that the brooch was owned by an Alamann, despite Helm's misgivings (our knowledge of early Alamannic dialects is, after all, very limited). It is also probable that the individual or individuals involved in the creation and use of the inscription were heathens, as we shall see.

Krause divides the inscriptions into two sections, A and B, the former constituting the first three lines of the inscription, the latter the fourth line. This is a reasonable division, since the fourth line is written the other way up in relation to the other three, in a strikingly different style, and even collides with the third line of section A. It seems quite clear that B is a separate inscription, which, to judge from the way that it collides with section A, was scratched later than section A (although a close examination of the artefact itself would be necessary to settle this point definitely). It is odd, then, that in his interpretation of the text, Krause seems to connect the two sections, rendering them as an invocation of Wodan, Thunor (and perhaps Logathore) by Awa and Leubwini: 'Logathore ("Ränkeschmied"), Wodan, Weihe-Donar! B. Awa (und) Leubwini (wünschen Glück, oder: schenken)'⁷⁸. It does not, however, seem likely that A and B were both scratched at the same time, as a single inscription. While this suggests strongly that Awa and Leubwini were not originally intended to figure in the inscription, one might also note that the presence of two names suggests that a simple declaration of ownership was not the purpose of the later inscription. The possibility remains, then, that the later inscription was intended to connect the names it contains with the deity-names on the brooch.

Krause also notes another feature of the brooch which might be significant in any examination of the cult of Wodan; namely the possible presence of a Germanic trinity: 'Man beachte, daß in dem Abschnitt A für die Nennung jedes der drei Götter eine eigene Zeile benutzt wurde'⁷⁹. This he connects with the three gods of the Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio*

⁷⁸ *Die Runeninschriften*, ed. by Krause, I, 294.

⁷⁹ *Die Runeninschriften*, ed. by Krause, I, 294.

Diaboli (on which see section 3.3, above).⁸⁰ Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae* also mentions a cult grouping of three particularly important gods,⁸¹ but the identification of a species of Germanic heathen trinity either here or in the Old Saxon *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli* seems unjustified. The discussion of the *Abrenuntiatio* above shows that this formula probably reflects christian assumptions about Saxon pre-christian cult (see section 3.3, above). Equally, in the case of the Nordendorf inscription, Krause's argument for a trinity based on a planned layout of a new line for each divine name must be rejected, since **logaþore** runs right up to a raised area on the brooch (part of the fastening mechanism), necessitating a new line for **wodan**, while **wigibonar** is written in a different style again from that used for the previous two lines. The o-runes of **logaþore** and **wodan** show a marked tendency towards continuation of the upper limbs beyond the point where they meet the lower limbs, while that in **wigibonar** does not. The w- and þ-runes of the first two lines, moreover, have rounded pockets, and that of the w-rune in **wodan** is high up on the stem, in contrast to **wigibonar**, which shows angular pockets in both þ and w, and a pocket running from the top to the bottom of the stem of the latter. For these reasons, it seems more likely that the brooch actually contains not two, but three separate stages of inscription, one naming Thunor, one Awa and Leubwini, and one giving the word or name **logaþore** followed by the name of Wodan. It has been suggested that **logaþore** is a form of the name *Lóðurr*, a deity known from much later Norse mythographic sources.⁸² The main difficulty with this suggestion is that the development of the forms *Lóðurr* and **logaþore** from a single root cannot be supported by any known linguistic developments among the early Germanic dialects. As Düwel points out, 'eine Anknüpfung an den nord. Götternamen *Lóðurr* < **Logborr*, von dem wir kaum mehr als den Namen wissen, bleibt hypothetisch'⁸³. Another possible interpretation is that **logaþore** is an epithet meaning 'schemer, cunning one' or

⁸⁰ *Die Runeninschriften*, ed. by Krause, I, 294.

⁸¹ *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Waitz, Schmeidler, Bresslau and Pertz, p. 470 (book 4, chapter 26).

⁸² *Die Runeninschriften*, ed. by Krause, I, 294.

⁸³ Klaus Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 1st edn Sammlung Metzler (Stuttgart: Metzler, [1968]), p. 40.

perhaps even 'wizard', which is here being applied to Wodan. This view is based on the appearance of the Old English word *logeþer* or *logþor* in the *Cleopatra Glossary* and in the *Harley Glossary* as an equivalent for *marsius* (*Cleopatra*) and *cacomicanus* (*Cleopatra* and *Harley*).⁸⁴ This is linguistically more plausible, although the infrequency of the word, and its appearance only in Old English,⁸⁵ do leave room for doubts about its precise meaning in continental Germanic dialects. It seems likely, however, that it does here imply that the writer of the inscription saw Wodan as possessing some specialised power or expertise, although he or she may not have seen this as being magical in character.

Klaus Düwel, however, has argued that *logaþore* is a pejorative term, and that the inscription in fact represents a sort of epigraphic *abrenuntiatio*-formula which identifies Wodan and Þonar as deceivers.⁸⁶ This is certainly an interesting and plausible suggestion, but, if correct, it does not necessarily follow, as Düwel has suggested, that the inscription is 'nicht mehr ein Zeugnis für [...] einen heidnischen Götterglauben der Alamannen'⁸⁷. The position of the inscription on the back of the brooch, where it would not be seen when the brooch was worn, is a common feature of runic inscriptions of this date in the southern Germanic area,⁸⁸ and it has been plausibly suggested that this may reflect the use of runes for

⁸⁴ See the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, <<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/cgi/o/oec-idx?type=bigger&byte=36297700&q1=logēT&q2=&q3=>> (*Cleopatra*, 'marsius') [accessed 26 November 2002]; <<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/cgi/o/oec-idx?type=bigger&byte=36057679&q1=logT&q2=&q3=>> (*Cleopatra*, 'cacomicanus') [accessed 27 November 2002]; <<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/cgi/o/oec-idx?type=bigger&byte=36678133&q1=logēT&q2=&q3=>> (*Harley*, 'cacomicanus') [accessed 27 November 2002].

⁸⁵ See Düwel, *Runenkunde*, p. 40.

⁸⁶ See Klaus Düwel, 'Runen und Interpretatio Christiana: zur religionsgeschichtlichen Stellung der Bügelfibel von Nordendorf I', in *Tradition als historische Kraft*, ed. by N. Kamp and J. Wollasch (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), pp. 78-86. Düwel replies to criticisms of his original article in 'Runeninschriften als Quellen der germanischen Religionsgeschichte', *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 5 (1992), 336-64 (pp. 356-59), and repeats the claim in 'Frühe Schriftkultur bei den Barbaren: Germanische Runen, lateinische Inschriften', in *Die Alamannen*, ed. by Karlheinz Fuchs and others (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2001), pp. 491-98 (pp. 494-95).

⁸⁷ Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 2nd edn, Sammlung Metzler (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1983), p. 128; quoted in Düwel, 'Runeninschriften als Quellen', p. 359.

⁸⁸ Düwel, 'Frühe Schriftkultur', p. 491.

inscriptions of a private or personal nature; given that female graves are far more likely than male graves to contain runic inscriptions, it has also been argued that runes may have held some domestic significance.⁸⁹ The placement of the inscription on the back of this brooch may, then, indicate personal worship, propitiation or dedication, rather than denigration, as the motive for the inscription. Denigration remains a possibility, nevertheless, but the domestic or private character of the inscription is hardly consonant with the very public nature of an *abrenuntiatio*-formula. It seems more plausible that the inscription represents a personal response — whether positive or negative — to non-christian cults with which the brooch's owner had a personal connection. Düwel could be correct, therefore, in reading the inscription as an attack on Wodan and Þonar, but it seems unlikely that he is right to reject the inscription as evidence that these deities were worshipped among the Alamanni.

The Nordendorf inscription clearly does not provide much information, in itself, about the cult of Wodan among the Alamanni. If Düwel is right, it suggests that the cult of Wodan was already losing adherents in the early seventh century. This is hardly certain, however. We can at least state with reasonable likelihood that Wodan was worshipped by some Alamanni in the region just north of the western end of the Danube around the beginning of the seventh century CE. It remains to consider the evidence of the Langobard ethnogenesis and of the *Vita Sancti Columbani*, which, as we shall see, may provide us with a wider context within which to understand the Nordendorf inscription.

⁸⁹ See Giorgio Ausenda, 'Current Issues and Future Directions in the Study of the Merovingian Period', in *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. by Ian Wood, *Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology*, 3 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), pp. 371-453 (p. 420).

3.6.2 *Quem fanaticè nominant Wodano*: The Langobard Ethnogenesis as Evidence for Cult

We now come to the Langobard ethnogenesis. Already in the seventh century this appears in two texts, the anonymous *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*,⁹⁰ and the Frankish history known as the *Chronicon*, and attributed to Fredegar.⁹¹ A version of the narrative also appears in Paulus Diaconus's *Historia Langobardorum*, which was written in the eighth century (on which see section 3.2, above). The version found in Fredegar's *Chronicon* is as follows:

Langobardorum gens, priusquam hoc nomen adsumerit, exientes de Scathanavia, que est inter Danuvium et mare Ocianum, cum uxores et liberis Danuvium transmeant. Cum a Chunis Danuvium transeuntes fussent conperti, eis bellum conarint inferre, interrogati a Chuni, que gens eorum terminos introire praesumerit. At ille mulieris eorum praecipunt comam capitis ad maxillas et mentum legarint, quo pocius virorum habitum simulantes plurima multitudine hostium ostenderint, eo quod erant mulierum coma circa maxillas et mentum ad instar barbae valde longa. Fertur desuper uterque falangiae vox dixisse: 'Haec sunt Langobardi', quod ab his gentibus fertur eorum deo fuisse locutum, quem fanaticè nominant Wodano. Tunc

⁹⁰ The *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* is extant in three manuscripts. The Maritensis manuscript dates to the tenth century, the Mutinensis manuscript to the end of the tenth century, and the Cavensis manuscript to the beginning of the eleventh century; the text itself, however, appears to have been composed sometime during the second half of the seventh century (*Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, p. 1).

⁹¹ According to Ian Wood, the *Chronicon* appears to have been completed in 659 or shortly thereafter, and may be the work of a monk from within the Columbanian monastic tradition; certainly, this individual knew Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Sancti Columbani* at a remarkably early date (Ian N. Wood, 'Fredegar's Fables', *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für österreichischen Geschichtsforschung*, 32 (1994), 359-66 (p. 360)).

Langobardi clamassent: 'Qui instituerat nomen, concidere victoriam'. Hoc prilio Chunus superant, partem Pannoniae invadunt⁹²

The race of the Langobards, before it took up that name, leaving Scandinavia (which is between the Danube and the Ocean), crossed the Danube with their wives and children. When the Huns learnt that they were crossing the Danube in order to wage war on them, the Huns asked what people dared to enter their borders. But he advised their women to fix the hair of their heads to their cheeks and chins, by which stratagem, simulating the appearance of more men, they might appear more numerous to the host of enemies, because the women's hair around their cheeks and chins appeared to be very long beards. It is reported that a voice from above on each side of the troop said: 'These are the Langobards', which was said by these peoples to have been their god speaking, whom they fanatically name Wodan. Then the Langobards shouted: 'Let him who appointed the name grant us victory'. In this battle they overran the Hun and invaded the area of Pannonia.

This seventh century version of the Langobard origin myth is very different from the versions given in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* and Paulus Diaconus's *Historia Langobardorum*. The versions given by Paulus and the *Origo* are not identical, but they are sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same tradition. The version given in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* is as follows:

Tunc Ambri et Assi, hoc est duces Wandalorum, rogaverunt Godan, ut daret eis super Winniles victoriam. Respondit Godan dicens: 'Quos sol surgente antea videro, ipsis dabo victoriam'. Eo tempore Gambara cum duobus filiis suis, id est Ybor et Agio, qui principes erant super Winniles, rogaverunt Fream, [uxorem Godam], ut ad Winniles esset propitia. Tunc Frea dedit consilium, ut sol surgente venirent Winniles et mulieres eorum crines solutae circa faciem in similitudinem barbae et cum viris suis venirent. Tunc luciscente sol dum surgeret, giravit Frea, uxor Godan, lectum ubi recumbebat vir eius, et fecit faciem eius contra orientem, et excitavit eum. Et ille aspiciens vidit Winniles et mulieres ipsorum habentes crines solutas circa faciem; et ait: 'Qui sunt isti longibarbae?' Et dixit Frea ad Godan: 'Sicut dedisti nomen, da illis et victoriam'. Et dedit eis victoriam, ut ubi visum esset vindicarent se et victoriam haberent. Ab illo tempore Winnilis Langobardi vocati sunt.⁹³

⁹² *Fredegarii et Aliorum Chronica. Vitae Sanctorum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum, 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1888), p. 110 (book 3, chapter 65). My translation.

⁹³ *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, pp. 2-3. My translation.

Then Ambri and Assi, the leaders of the Vandals, asked Wodan to give them victory over the Winnili. Wodan replied, saying: 'whosoever I see first at sunrise I will give the victory'. At the same time Gambara, with her two sons, that is, Ybor and Agio, who were the chiefs of the Winnili, asked Frea, the wife of Wodan, to be favourable to the Winnili. Then Frea gave counsel that the Winnili should come, at sunrise, and their women, with their loosened hair around their faces in the likeness of beards, should come with the men. Then, at sunrise, Frea, the wife of Wodan, turned around the bed in which her husband was lying, and caused his face to be towards the east, and she woke him up. And he, looking out, saw the Winnili and their women with their loosened hair around their faces; and he said: 'Who are these long-beards?' And Frea said to Wodan: 'As you have given them a name, give them also the victory'. And he gave them the victory, so that where their troop was seen, they defended themselves and had victory. From that time on, the Winnili have been called Langobards.

Paulus Diaconus's version can clearly be seen to derive largely from this, or a very similar, version of the narrative:

Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam: quod accedentes Wandali ad Godan victoriam de Winnilis postulaverint, illeque respondit, se illis victoriam daturum quos primum oriente sole conspexisset. Tunc accessisse Gambara ad Fream, uxorem Godan, et Winnilis victoriam postulasse, Freaque consilium dedisse, ut Winnilorum mulieres solutos crines erga faciem ad barbae similitudinem conponerent maneque primo cum viris adessent seseque Godan videndas pariter e regione, qua ille per fenestram orientem versus erat solitus aspicere, conlocarent. Atque ita factum fuisse. Quas cum Godan oriente sole conspiceret, dixisse: 'Qui sunt isti longibarbi'? Tunc Frea subiunxisse, ut quibus nomen tribuerat victoriam condonaret. Sicque Winnilis Godan victoriam concessisse. Haec risui digna sunt et pro nihilo habenda. Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur.⁹⁴

Paulus appears to have known and used both the *Origo* and Fredegar's *Chronicon*. He often contradicts Fredegar, however, and here we can see that he has preferred the version given in the *Origo*. The version of the myth given in the *Chronicon* is, in fact, logically more satisfactory than the other versions. Fredegar clearly identifies the fake beards as what they must be — a military stratagem. In the other versions, their military purpose has been lost,

and, as a consequence, they seem awkwardly inserted into the narrative merely to provide the name Langobard; Wodan would still have seen the Winnili first even if they had not had their women impersonating men. Fredegar's version, in which the use of a purely military stratagem happens to excite Wodan's attention, makes better sense. The difficulty lies in deciding why it makes better sense. It is possible that this version is closer to the original form of the myth (which we must suppose to have made some sense). It is equally possible, however, that Fredegar knew the myth in a confused form, and attempted to rationalise the narrative sequence. The latter explanation would not account for the fact that Fredegar's version gives the Huns as the enemy of the Winnili/Langobards, while Paulus and the *Origo* identify them as Vandals. It is difficult to see how this could be a rationalisation on Fredegar's part. This suggests that the *Chronicon* more or less faithfully reproduces an unknown (possibly oral) source for this narrative; it is also possible that this represents an earlier form of the Langobard origin myth than that given by Paulus and the *Origo*. The latter sources could, however, merely represent a garbled version of a separate early form of the myth.

In these circumstances, dating the origin of the Langobard ethnogenesis becomes problematic. The *Chronicon*'s statement that the Langobards were attempting to cross the Danube at the time of their battle with the Huns would place the origin of the narrative to sometime after the Langobards migrated south from the upper reaches of the River Elbe and crossed the Danube, and, of course, to the period in which the Huns were active around the western reaches of the Danube.⁹⁵ The Vandals as enemies (as in the *Origo Gentis*

⁹⁴ *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, pp. 52-53 (book 1, chapter 8). See translation in section 3.2.

⁹⁵ The Langobard migration from the Elbe occurred sometime after the third century CE, when the Langobards are mentioned by Ptolemy as inhabiting the region around the northern reaches of the Elbe (*Claudii Ptolemæi Geographia*, ed. by Carolus Müllerus, 2 vols (Paris: Didot, 1883), 1, 258-59 (book 2, chapter 11, section 8)). The *Chronicon*'s description of their original homeland as being between the Danube and the Ocean fits well with this, although it names this region Scandinavia. The Huns were active around the stretch of the Danube contiguous with Pannonia in the early- to mid-fifth century (E. A. Thompson, *The Huns*, rev. by Peter Heather, *The Peoples of Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 30).

Langobardorum and the *Historia Langobardorum*), however, would indicate an earlier dating, at a more northerly point in the Langobards' movement southwards.

Both of these datings are perfectly possible, and there is little to choose between them. In the light of the Nordendorf inscription, it is very interesting to find that Wodan is associated with the Langobards as well as the Alamanni, since the Alamanni are, by the seventh century, otherwise known as the Suebi, and the Langobards are identified by Strabo as one of the Suebic tribes.⁹⁶ It is certainly suggestive, moreover, that the *Chronicon* associates Wodan's dramatic onomastic and military aid to the Langobards with the region of the western end of the Danube, which is the same region in which the Nordendorf brooch was buried (see above). It is possible that the cult of Wodan, and the associated ethnogenesis, arose before the Langobards' migration from the Elbe, and that this cult was practised not only among the Langobards in this region, but also more widely among the Suebi in the area. Equally, it is possible that the ethnogenesis, and perhaps also the cult of Wodan, arose among the Langobards and Suebi in the area around the western end of the Danube, sometime in the fifth to seventh centuries CE. The lack of any evidence for the existence of Wodan earlier than the seventh century or outside the Danube region does not support the second possibility, for the evidence for Wodan in the seventh century around the Danube is so scarce that it is quite conceivable that all evidence from an earlier time, and from around the Elbe, has perished.

What, then, does the Langobard ethnogenesis tell us about Wodan? Wodan is certainly portrayed as a god associated with the bestowal — or at least with the achievement — of military victory, and he is clearly connected with the Langobards. The episode as told

⁹⁶ As Quast points out, 'Nach wiederholten Kämpfen gegen die Goten in den Jahren 466-470 wurden die Sueben vernichtend geschlagen. Im Jahre 470 waren sie mit den Alamannen verbündet. Während Sueben und Alamannen in den Schriftquellen bis zum Ende des 5. Jh. stets als eigenständige Stämme genannt werden – die Donausueben 477 das letzte Mal explizit – werden mit Beginn des 6. Jh. die Begriffe Alamanni und Suebi für dasselbe Volk gebraucht' (Dieter Quast, 'Vom Einzelgrab zum Friedhof: Beginn der Reihengräbersitte im 5. Jahrhundert', in *Die Alamannen*, ed. by Fuchs, pp. 171-90 (p. 183)). See *The Geography of Strabo*, ed. and trans. by Horace Leonard Jones, The Loeb Classical Library, 8 vols (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam, 1917-1932), III, 156 (book 7, chapter 1, section 3).

in the *Historia Langobardorum* and the *Origo* could well be thought to relate to this tribe's original reception of the cult of Wodan, but the version given in the *Chronicon* does not seem to reflect such a religious development. The narrative which appears in the *Chronicon*, in fact, does not involve Wodan to nearly the same degree as that given in the *Origo* and the *Historia Langobardorum*. The *Chronicon's* statement that the Langobards 'fanatice nominant Wodano', however, does suggest that Wodan is to be understood as being — or at least, having been — of considerable importance to the Langobards as an ethnic deity.

As suggested above, this centrality of Wodan in Langobard pre-Christian society was very probably a key factor in the development of Paulus Diaconus's idea of Wodan as a major Germanic deity (see section 3.2). Taken together with the evidence of the Nordendorf brooch, the Langobard ethnogenesis clearly suggests a cult of some importance amongst the Suebic tribes, and since such tribes were, by Paulus's day, identifying themselves as 'all men', the Alamanni, it is perhaps not surprising that Frankish circles, looking out at this tribal grouping of the Frankish periphery, took their heathen deities to be characteristic of all non-Christian Germani. There is no reason for us to do likewise, however; the fact that what little seventh-century evidence for Wodan exists all converges on the Langobards and Alamanni seems likely to indicate that Wodan was specific to these related tribes. Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Sancti Columbani*, moreover, not only reinforces this position, but also offers an indication of how the eighth-century equation of Wodan with Mercurius arose, and how Wodan was re-imagined from a local, tribal recipient of cult to the Christian Frankish archetypal heathen deity.

3.6.3 Identifying Mercurius: The *Vita Sancti Columbani* and the Cult of Wodan

The *Vita Sancti Columbani* — written by Jonas of Bobbio, a native of Susa, who entered the monastery of Bobbio around 617, a relatively short time after its foundation by Columbanus — might be thought particularly interesting because it seems to contain the earliest extant description of a ritual used in the worship of Wodan:⁹⁷

Sunt etenim inibi vicinae nationes Suaeavorum. Quo cum moraretur et inter habitatores loci illius progredere, repperit eos sacrificium profanum litare velle, vasque magnum, quem vulgo cupam vocant, qui XX modia amplius minusve capiebat, cervisa plenum in medio positum. Ad quem vir Dei accessit sciscitaturque, quid de illo fieri vellint. Illi aiunt se Deo suo Vodano nomine, quem Mercurium, ut alii aiunt, autumant, velle litare. Ille pestiferum opus audiens vas insufflat, miroque modo vas cum fragore dissolvitur et per frustra dividitur, visque rapida cum ligore cervisae prorumpit; manifesteque datur intellegi diabolium in eo vase fuisse occultatum, qui per profanum ligorem caperet animas sacrificantium⁹⁸

For there are Suebic tribes in that locality. While he stays there and goes about among the inhabitants of that place, he finds that they want to perform a profane sacrifice, and a large vessel — which is called a cup in the vernacular and contained around twenty *modia* [a *modium* is an ancient corn measure; the fluid capacity of this vessel is substantial] — was placed in the middle, full of beer. At which the man of God went up and asked what they might want to be done about that. They say that they want to sacrifice to their god, called Wodan, whom, as others say, they call Mercurius. He, hearing this appalling design, blew on the vessel, and, in a wondrous manner, the vessel broke up and was split irrecoverably, and the force in the flowing liquid of the beer broke through it; and he was clearly given to understand that a devil had been

⁹⁷ On Jonas's life see *Jonas de Bobbio, Vie de Saint Columban et de Ses Disciples*, trans. by Adalbert de Vogüé and Pierre Sangiani, *Vie Monastique*, 19 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1988), pp. 19-20.

⁹⁸ *Passiones Vitaeque Sanctorum Merovingicarum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum*, 4 (Hannover: Hahn, 1902), p. 102. My translation.

hidden in that vessel, who, by means of the profane liquid, would steal the souls of those sacrificing.

Nor is this passage interesting only as a description of a ritual; it may also be the earliest extant source which equates Wodan with Mercury. It is not universally agreed, however, that this equation is to be traced back to Jonas. According to Krusch's edition, the phrase 'quem Mercurium, ut alii aiunt, autumant' is omitted in manuscript A₃ (Codex Mettensis n. 523, a manuscript of the eleventh century).⁹⁹ De Vogüé and Sangiani suggest that 'ces mots semblent être une glose inspirée de PAUL DIACRE, Hist. Lang. I, 9'¹⁰⁰. If this is the case, it merely shifts the problem of the origin of the equation of Wodan with Mercury into the eighth century and the *Historia Langobardorum*. In some respects, this seems a plausible position to take, since the *Corpus Glossary* is also eighth-century, and also makes this equation, suggesting that the eighth-century English and Frankish revival of interest in Graeco-Roman pagan mythology, argued above to be a plausible cultural context for the development of the names of the days of the week, may, as part of that development, underlie the development of this and other equations of Germanic and Graeco-Roman deities (see section 3.4, above). This view is unlikely to be correct, however, since the numerous manuscripts of the *Vita Columbani* almost all include the equation, and although none of these manuscripts predates the ninth century,¹⁰¹ the early separation of manuscript families of this text makes it likely that a phrase so uniformly-witnessed is original, or entered very early on in the manuscript transmission.¹⁰² At the same time, it would be strange if eighth-century scholars of Graeco-Roman mythology chose, on mythographical grounds, to equate Wodan with Mercury; other equations, such as the equation of Þonar with Jovis, make good sense in terms of the mythological attributes (in this case, thunder-wielding) of the deities equated

⁹⁹ *Passiones*, ed. by Krusch, pp. 102 and 42.

¹⁰⁰ *Vie de Saint Columban*, trans. by de Vogüé and Sangiani, p. 159 (note 9).

¹⁰¹ *Passiones*, ed. by Krusch, pp. 36-45. Rohr has pointed out that Krusch's dating is, for at least one manuscript, somewhat too late (Christian Rohr, 'Hagiographie als historische Quelle: Ereignisgeschichte und Wunderberichte in der *Vita Columbani* des Jonas von Bobbio', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 103 (1995), 229-64 (pp. 243-44)).

with one another. This is not the case with Wodan, however, who, as we have seen, seems to be related with victory in battle in the Langobard ethnogenesis, and, indeed, through his name, which seems to present him as the controller of anger or fury. These are not the attributes proper to Mercurius, nor would eighth-century scholars have supposed they were; it seems probable, therefore, that the equation did appear in the *Vita Sancti Columbani* from the start; eighth-century scholars were perhaps merely following the lead of this influential seventh-century text.

A careful consideration of exactly what the *Vita Columbani* states at this point confirms this position. The crucial sentence is: 'Illi aiunt se Deo suo Vodano nomine, quem Mercurium, ut alii aiunt, autumant, velle litare'. De Vogüé and Sangiani seem to take this phrase to mean something like 'They say that they want to sacrifice to their god, called Wodan, whom others, as they say, call Mercurius'. This is a strained reading of the sentence, taking 'alii' as the subject of both 'aiunt' and 'autumant'; this involves understanding 'ut alii aiunt' not as a self-contained adverbial phrase (as one would expect it to be), but as introducing a new subject for the relative clause introduced by 'quem'. The sentence can be read much more naturally as 'They say that they want to sacrifice to their god, called Wodan, whom, as others say, they call Mercurius'. De Vogüé and Sangiani, in other words, understand the sentence as claiming that the Suebi have a deity called Wodan, whom other people refer to as Mercurius. It seems much more likely, however, that the sentence is stating that the Suebi have a deity called Wodan (Jonas knows this to be the case), whom they also call Mercurius (Jonas has this from sources, 'alii'). It is possible that Jonas intends a distinction between his own correct understanding that the Suebi have a deity called Wodan, and the incorrect understanding of others that the Suebi call this deity Mercurius. This is unlikely, however, since Jonas could easily have claimed that what 'alii aiunt' was incorrect, but does not do so; the most straightforward reading of this passage is that Jonas understood the Suebi to have a deity whom they called both Wodan and Mercurius.

¹⁰² On the considerable variation between manuscripts of the *Vita* in different families see Rohr, p. 244.

The phrase ‘ut alii aiunt’, then, may refer to oral or written transmission. The use of ‘alii’ suggests that other writers were intended, since were the transmission oral, one would expect either the names of individuals or something along the lines of ‘ut homines aiunt’. It is just possible that Jonas had Tacitus in mind, who claims of the Germani that ‘Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt [...] pars Sueborum et Isidi sacrificat’ (‘they worship Mercurius most greatly of the gods [...] some of the Suebi also sacrifice to Isis’), but we have no evidence that Jonas knew Tacitus’s *Germania*, which was little-known in the Middle Ages.¹⁰³ This passage from the *Germania* gives, moreover, no clue as to why Jonas should understand Tacitus’s Mercurius as being Wodan. This is probably not, therefore, one of Jonas’s sources, and no other texts are extant which could have served as Jonas’s source in this matter.

In the absence of such texts, it is difficult to determine why Jonas ascribes to the Suebi the use of Mercurius as an alternative name for Wodan. Herren has discussed the Irish interest in classical Latin literature, which may also have influenced the monasteries set up by Saint Columbanus.¹⁰⁴ The importance of the classics at Bobbio has, moreover, long been noted.¹⁰⁵ This interest would clearly provide a favourable environment for the development of a learned equation between a heathen deity and a Roman pagan deity, but it is hard to see how Mercurius might have appeared to Jonas to be an appropriate equivalent for Wodan. If Wodan did not differ significantly between the Langobards and the Alamanni in the seventh century, then the presentation of Wodan in the Langobard ethnogenesis, as recorded in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* and in Fredegar’s *Chronicon*, would seem to indicate that Wodan was a deity concerned with war and tribal identity. This would hardly make Mercurius, as mentioned above, an obvious choice for an equivalent for Wodan.

There do, however, exist some indications of the nature of Wodan’s connection with Mercurius — although not the Mercurius one might expect — in the seventh century. The

¹⁰³ *Cornelii Taciti Opera Minora, Germania*, chapter 9, sections 1-2. My translation.

¹⁰⁴ Michael W. Herren, ‘Literary and Glossarial Evidence for the Study of Classical Mythology in Ireland A.D. 600-800’, in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Learning and Literature Presented to Joseph Donovan Pheifer*, ed. by Helen Conrad-O’Brian, Anne Marie D’Arcy and John Scattergood (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), pp. 49-67.

patron of the heathen Langobards in battle, in the Langobard ethnogenesis, is Wodan. After their conversion, however, such a patron would no longer be appropriate, and it is to Saint Mercurius that the Langobard upper echelons appear to turn for a patron saint; and a patron saint, moreover, of a distinctly martial character. It would seem decidedly strange that an Egyptian martial saint — known but little in the Occident, and then almost exclusively in a short episode in the *Vita Sancti Basilii* rather than his own *Vita* — should become a focus of Langobard aristocratic cult. This is not simply learned whimsy on the part of some Langobard scholar, choosing a saint whose name connected him with Wodan. Paulus Diaconus, for instance, demonstrates a very hostile attitude to the story of Wodan's granting of victory, which indicates that such a choice would be unlikely among Langobard Christians. The clear importance of Saint Mercurius to the Langobard nobility is amply demonstrated, moreover, in the translation of his relics and the literary output associated with it.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the influence of this saint is apparent in one of the Langobard battles described by Paulus Diaconus, when they claim to have *cynocephali* fighting for them, just as Saint Mercurius himself is accompanied into battle by his two companion *cynocephali* in some eastern versions of his *Vita*.¹⁰⁷ Friedman has already noted this narrative in the *Historia Langobardorum* as 'a variant form of Mercurius' dog-headed helpers', but fails to make the connection between this narrative and Saint Mercurius's special rôle in some Langobard circles.¹⁰⁸

It would not, then, seem entirely fanciful to suggest that Wodan's rôle as tutelary deity of the heathen Langobards (or at least their nobility) came to be filled, subsequent to conversion to christianity, by Saint Mercurius. This might have depended simply upon a learned equation of Wodan with the pagan deity Mercurius; certainly one could conceive of a

¹⁰⁵ *Passiones*, ed. by Krusch, p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum* notes that 'translationes s. Mercurii plures exstant narrationes' (p. 573), of which it prints an example on pp. 576-80. In addition to his activities in the translation itself, moreover, Arechis may also have had a hand in the composition of a *Passio Sancti Mercurii* (*Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum*, p. 574).

¹⁰⁷ See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 71-72.

situation in which acceptance of christianity was strengthened by the provision of a patron saint who — as the namesake of his Roman counterpart Mercurius — provided a good substitute for Wodan. Not only is this unlikely because of the relative incompatibility of Wodan with the god Mercurius, it also seems overly simplistic, for two reasons. Firstly, Jonas of Bobbio seems to be claiming that, at least according to some of his sources, the Suebi (otherwise known as Alamanni; see section 3.6.2, above) called Wodan by the name Mercurius. This indicates that the equation of Wodan and Mercurius (whether saint or deity) was known to heathens or semi-christians as well as learned christians. Secondly, the *cynocephali* who are a hallmark of Saint Mercurius are depicted on a sword-sheath and a stamped metal sheet (not unlike the one which forms part of the sword sheath), usually identified as Alamannic work of the seventh century, found at Gutenstein (Baden, Germany) and Obrigheim (Pfalz, Germany).¹⁰⁹ The Langobards and Alamanni of the seventh century appear to share not only the deity Wodan, but also an identification of that deity with a figure called Mercurius, and a connection of battle with *cynocephali*. This connection is also, as mentioned above, present in the legend of Saint Mercurius. It would not seem entirely implausible, then, that the Mercurius-figure identified with Wodan by heathen or semi-christian Suebi was not Mercurius the Roman pagan deity, but Saint Mercurius.

It may be, therefore, that the efforts at accommodation of missionaries and christianisers among the Langobards and Alamanni created a popular equation among these peoples of Wodan with Saint Mercurius. Indeed, Saint Mercurius, as a martial saint, clearly makes a better fit for the Langobards' battle-deciding Wodan than does the messenger-god Mercurius. One could go further, and speculate that Saint Mercurius could actually have been the source of the deity Wodan; this saint was capable of deciding the outcomes of battles, he would have become available to the Alamanni and Langobards at around the time when Wodan would have arisen if we see him as dating to after the migration from the Elbe

¹⁰⁸ Friedman, p. 72.

¹⁰⁹ For a photograph of a replica of the Gutenstein sheath, see Dieter Quast, 'Opferplätze und heidnische Götter: Vorchristlicher Kult', in *Die Alamannen*, ed. by Fuchs and others, pp. 433-40 (p. 437). For drawings of both the Obrigheim and Gutenstein finds, see Gaimster, p. 18 (figs 13 and 14).

(see above), and his power to control and unleash the savagery of his companion *cynocephali* would have justified the bestowal on him of the epithet 'controller of the frenzy', Wodan.

This possibility fits well with the idea, expressed by Quast, that these Alamannic-Langobard *cynocephali* are related to the cult of Wodan:

Die >>Wolfskrieger<< werden in der nordischen Literatur als >>Ulfhednar<< (Wolfshäuter) bezeichnet und im Zusammenhang mit den bis heute sprichwörtlichen >>Berserker<< (Bärenhäutern) genannt. [...] Ihren Ursprung haben Berserker und Ulfhednar in den Odin geweihten kultischen Kriegerbünden. Sie werden in den Quellen als Odins Männer oder Krieger bezeichnet.¹¹⁰

This idea stems from the work of Höfler,¹¹¹ and reaches its conclusion from very unsound bases; we might very reasonably doubt, for instance, that a simple, pre-Christian connection exists between the *cynocephali* of the Alamannic-Langobard Wodan and the *ulfheðnar* of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*. It seems, nevertheless, that poor methods have here produced a final result which has some validity, at least in that Wodan can plausibly be associated with dog-headed men in his Langobard-Alamannic cult. Höfler would no doubt have been horrified, however, to find that this association may indicate that Wodan developed from an Egyptian martial saint. Such a conclusion is, of course, speculative, but it is no less plausible than many common assumptions about the cult of Wodan.

Apart from this surprising indication that the equation of Mercurius with Wodan has its roots not in early classical scholarship, but in a practical and appropriate connection of Wodan with Saint Mercurius, Jonas tells us little enough about Wodan. There is no suggestion of Wodan as a human ancestor here, and the beer-sacrifice described bears small resemblance to the human sacrifices of later sources (on which, see section 1.1). A certain amount of caution is required, however, in seeking to associate the beer ritual with Wodan. The *Vita Vedastis*, probably also by Jonas, describes a rather similar miraculous disruption of a very similar *gentilis ritus*, although in this case carried out by a mixed group of Christian and heathen Franks:

¹¹⁰ Quast, 'Opferplätze', in *Die Alamannen*, ed. by Fuchs and others, pp. 437-38.

domum introiens, [Vedastis] conspicit gentile ritu vasa plena cervisae domi adstare. Quod ille sciscitans, quid sibi vasa in medio domi posita vellent, inquirerit, responsum est, se alia christianis, alia vero paganis opposita ac gentile ritu sacrificata. Cumque ita sibi denuntiatur fuisset, omnia vasa de industria signo crucis sacrauit, ac omnipotentis Dei nomen invocato, cum fidei adminiculum, caelitem auxiliante dono, benedixit. Cumque benedictionem cum crucis signo super vasa, quae gentili fuerant ritu sacrificata, premisisset, mox soluta legaminibus, cunctum cervisae ligorem quem capiebant in pavementum deiecerunt.¹¹²

entering the house, Vedastis saw that a vessel full of beer was standing in the house according to pagan ritual. When he asked why they might want a vessel placed in the middle of the house for themselves, it was replied that the vessel was placed before some who were christian and others, indeed, who were pagan, and this vessel was sacrificed according to the pagan ritual. And when he was informed thus, he busily hallowed the vessel with the sign of the cross, and blessed it, calling on the name of omnipotent God with the support of faith and the aiding gift of heaven. And when he had spoken forth the blessing, with the sign of the cross over the vessel, which had been sacrificed according to the pagan ritual, immediately the vessel loosened in its fixings, and poured forth all the liquid of beer which it contained onto the floor.

It is possible, then, that the beer ritual is not a ritual genuinely used in the worship of Wodan, but a general-purpose heathen ritual used by Jonas to add colour, whether or not it was appropriate. One could also argue, however, that Jonas was aware of a genuine ritual used in the worship of Wodan. He may then have used the ritual indiscriminately in his writings, whenever a heathen ritual was called for, or he may have used it only in two cases where he was aware that Wodan was the deity being worshipped. These are not the only possibilities, moreover, for we need not assume that a given sort of sacrifice was only appropriate to one heathen deity; a beer sacrifice may have been used in the worship of a variety of heathen deities. The variety of possible interpretations of this sacrifice should caution us against assuming too readily that it was a genuine custom of the worship of Wodan. What we can

¹¹¹ Höfler, pp. 55-68.

¹¹² Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Vedastis*, in *Passiones Vitaeque Sanctorum Aevi Merovingici et Antiquorum Aliquot*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum Rerum*

say is that there is no obvious literary source for this custom outside of Jonas's writings, and that this suggests that the custom may well be a genuine non-Christian religious practice, although not certainly one connected with Wodan, and not even certainly Germanic. In this connection one should note the finds of extremely large Rhenish-ware drinking vessels from Roman population centres in Gaul, dating to around the fourth century CE; Symonds plausibly suggests that these may have been used as ritual vessels, and, if so, they would have formed part of Roman or Gallo-Roman pagan religious practice.¹¹³ It is possible, although it cannot be proved, that Jonas was aware of a pagan religious ceremony, which he used as a model for his descriptions of heathen religious rites.

The eighth-century uses of Wodan, then, may owe much to the *Vita Sancti Columbani*, the Langobard ethnogenesis, and, indeed, the seventh-century cult of Wodan among the Alamanni and Langobards. The *Vita Sancti Columbani*, reflecting the confusion and manoeuvring of a liminal heathen-Christian area, seems to have brought the equation of Wodan and Mercurius into the literary world of eighth-century Francia. The equation was immediately misunderstood, however, and re-used as part of a strong classicising tendency. At the same time, the cult of Wodan had, by the eighth century, assumed enough distance and unimportance for Wodan to start to be re-used and re-imagined for Christian purposes, from providing a Germanic classical heritage, to creating a figure of the continental past and royal prestige.

This is probably in part because the cult seems to have been quite limited in geographical terms; all the evidence relates to a relatively small region around the western end of the Danube. Nordendorf, Bregenz, and the Danube frontier with Pannonia, which plays a part in one of the versions of the Langobard ethnogenesis, all fall within this region. It is this region which was a key area of habitation for the Alamanni up to their incorporation within

Merovingicarum, 3 (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), pp. 399-427 (pp. 410-11). My translation. On the authorship of the *Vita Vedastis*, see p. 399.

¹¹³ See R. P. Symonds, *Rhenish Wares: Fine Dark Coloured Pottery from Gaul and Germany*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Monograph 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1992), p. 70.

the Frankish empire, and it was here that the Langobards found themselves around the fifth century CE, perhaps the date when they took up the cult of Wodan, and certainly a period when they would have been particularly concerned with the issue of tribal identity, having migrated from the Elbe. It is hardly, surprising, then, that it is this period and this region which should be associated in the seventh century — at least in some quarters — with their ethnogenesis, and, of course, with the cult which was still present in the region, if not strongly. There may never have been much of it, but here is where the cult of Wodan was practised.

3.7 Conclusion

It is, in fact, in the imaginations of christian writers of the seventh century and especially the eighth century that Wodan chiefly existed. Our understanding of the cult of Wodan in this period has been guided very much by the writings of eighth-century commentators, whose use of the meagre seventh-century sources available to them was, as we have seen, enthusiastic but misleading. From Columbanus's encounter with a Suebic rite in honour of Wodan, and the confused and confusing versions of an old Langobard aetiological narrative, Frankish and English scholars of the eighth century created a portrait of a great god, worshipped across Germania, equivalent to the Roman Mercurius. If such a god really existed, however, he has left no trace. What clear indications we have of a cult of Wodan show no more than a localised cult, proper to the Alamanni and Langobards, still practised around the western end of the Danube in the early seventh century, where it attracted only enough attention from the missionaries of the period to be mentioned in passing in the *Vita Sancti Columbani*.

This is, after all, exactly the sort of cult that we should expect for a heathen deity. As section 2.3.1 argues, it seems likely that the vast majority of heathen cults were highly localised, specific to regions or peoples or both. In some cases cults may even have been

specific to a family. The evidence for a cult of Wodan is, then, entirely consistent with such a model. Here we have a cult which is very probably specific to the Alamanni and the Langobards. The cult was probably not linked to a region by any religious considerations, but it seems to have belonged particularly to the region just north of the Alps, around the western end of the Danube.

This is by no means the only interpretation possible of this evidence, but it is at least as probable as — and in the present author's view, more probable than — an interpretation based on accepting that eighth-century authors such as Bede and Paulus Diaconus wrote about Wodan from a position of greater knowledge than do modern scholars, and that they simply attempted to record as accurately as possible what they knew about Wodan. If we accept — and by and large, we do — that these authors shaped and interpreted and presented what they knew to serve their own ends, then this is no less true of their uses of Wodan than of their uses of any other figure of the past.

4. Ancestors and Authority Figures: The Woden-Óðinn Complex in Late Anglo-Saxon England

4.1 Introduction

The eighth-century intellectual elite, from Bede through to the scholars of Charlemagne's court, had, as we have seen, a profound effect on christian literary depictions and understandings of Wodan. Anglo-Saxon authors of the ninth to eleventh centuries drew heavily on Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and on the cultural and textual models of Charlemagne's circle.¹ Not surprisingly, then, Bede's use of a Kentish royal genealogy stemming from Woden led to Woden becoming one of the key figures in Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies. It cannot be proved absolutely that the *Historia Ecclesiastica* played such a central rôle in this development, but it is certainly far more likely than not. The alternative view is that Bede was simply reflecting a widespread tradition which would have been important in later Anglo-Saxon discourse anyway. This seems unlikely, since it fails to account for Bede's non-Kentish genealogical materials. Bede gives a brief Northumbrian genealogy, which makes no mention of Woden, and thus suggests that Woden may not have been an ubiquitous royal ancestor in Bede's day. This suggestion is, furthermore, strongly corroborated by Bede's references to names for royal houses formed on the suffix *-ing*, such as the Oiscingas and the Wuffingas.² Such names very probably reflect an understanding of royal origins which is antecedent to the idea of descent from Woden. As has been pointed out in section 3.5, Bede gives an uneasy composite genealogy, recognising the claim of Oisc to

¹ See, for example, Janet L. Nelson, "... sicut olim gens Francorum ... nunc gens Anglorum": Fulk's Letter to Alfred Revisited', in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Jane Roberts and Janet L. Nelson with Malcolm Godden (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 135-44.

be head of the Oiscing dynasty, as well as Woden's claim. If East Anglia was ruled by kings called Wuffingas in the eighth century, however, it seems likely that dynasties generally recognised unique local progenitors (such as Oisc and Wuffa) at this time; the use of Woden as a master-progenitor must be a later development.

This genealogical tradition is witnessed even by an insular source from outside England, the *Historia Brittonum*, and the Anglo-Saxon genealogical tradition continued into the thirteenth century, when contemporary manuscript illustrations of Woden and his sons attest the continuing currency of the tradition.³ At this time it also influenced Snorri Sturluson's idea of Óðinn as a king who migrated from Asia (see section 5.1, below). This chapter will, however, confine itself to a discussion of the dissemination and transmission of this tradition in Anglo-Saxon England.

Nor is this by any means the only use of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England. Scandinavian settlement in the northeastern areas of England in the later Anglo-Saxon period led to an increased awareness among Anglo-Saxon writers of the Scandinavian figure Óðinn, who, although probably not actually a reflex of Wodan, was considered as such by English authors. As we shall see in this chapter, the interplay of genealogical traditions — in which Woden had become a figure of royal authority and prestige — combined with the understanding of the Scandinavian Óðinn as a heathen deity, created a complex set of responses among a group of authors who were often interconnected personally, and familiar with each other's work. The problem of mediating between a figure of prestige and one of evil who are, in the understanding of Anglo-Saxon authors, essentially identical in origin caused these authors to attempt to re-create Óðinn and Woden as separate textual entities.

This variety of uses of Óðinn and Woden, and the contradictions inherent in it, presented Anglo-Saxon authors — and, indeed, the modern scholar — with a bewilderingly

² *Venerabilis Baedae: Historiam Ecclesiasticam*, ed. by Plummer, 1, 90 (book 2, chapter 5; Oiscingas) and 116 (book 2, chapter 15; Wuffingas).

³ *Nennius: 'British History' and 'The Welsh Annals'*, ed. and trans. by John Morris, *History from the Sources* (London: Phillimore; Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1980), p. 67 (chapter 31). Joan

multiplicitous figure. Cicero faced a similar problem in his *De Natura Deorum*, dealing with the extraordinary and sometimes contradictory exploits and attributes of the Graeco-Roman pantheon; his solution was to treat problematic deities, such as Mercurius, as several separate figures conflated in popular discourse.⁴ Cicero invented, then, what we may term a Mercurius complex, a set of interrelated figures developed from, and representing aspects of, a figure otherwise perceived as unitary. We might well identify a rather different sort of Mercurius complex in Anglo-Saxon England, where Mercurius appears in different contexts as a pagan deity, an antediluvian giant, and as a figure of medical magical authority and significance. In this last manifestation, moreover, he perhaps helps to create the magico-medical use of Woden in the *Nine Herbs Charm* (see section 4.3.2, below). Woden and Óðinn are perceived to be identical by Anglo-Saxon authors, and yet these same authors use and re-imagine these figures in very different ways, essentially re-creating a figure (whom they understand as being unitary) as a complex of connected figures. In this sense, then, we can talk of a Woden-Óðinn complex in late Anglo-Saxon literary culture.

This Woden-Óðinn complex is also reflected, and perhaps rejected, in a unique presentation of Woden as connected with idols, which occurs in *Maxims I(B)* (see section 4.4, below). To some extent this may reflect a different literary sphere or audience, especially since this is one of only two references to Woden in Old English verse. The other reference certainly belongs in a somewhat different context from the prose material which appears to have circulated in learned and, crucially, very high status ecclesiastical and aristocratic circles. This reference occurs in the *Nine Herbs Charm*, and can be seen, therefore, as representing a magical use of Woden which may depend ultimately on an understanding of him as a heathen deity. One could, however, argue that this charm occurs in a learned context (though of indeterminate status), and it is entirely possible that Woden's use here depends, as suggested above, more upon a traditional equation with Mercurius — who appears in some contexts in

Turville-Petre, 'Illustrations of Woden and his sons in English genealogical manuscripts', *Notes and Queries*, 233, n.s. 35 (1988), 158-59.

⁴ *De Natura Deorum*, ed. by Plasberg and Ax, p. 140 (book 3, chapter 22).

Anglo-Saxon England as a medical figure — than upon his being thought to be a heathen deity.

Clearly, this complexity and variety in the uses of Woden and Óðinn in Anglo-Saxon England presents some problems of organisation for any discussion of the Woden-Óðinn complex. The witnesses to these traditions present both lines of connection and of discontinuity between the various representations of Woden and Óðinn. The discussion which follows is, then, arranged as a series of more or less discrete essays on different uses of these figures: the presentation of Óðinn as a heathen deity, his equation with Mercurius, and the contrasting moves to dissociate Woden from Óðinn and to Scandinavicise Woden; the development of a magico-medical function for Woden; and the synthesising use of Woden in *Maxims I(B)*, which draws in aspects of most of the other uses apparent in Anglo-Saxon England, and thus leads into a final examination of the connections and disjunctions apparent within the Woden-Óðinn complex as a whole.

4.2 *Óðon geháten oðrum naman on Denisc: Late Anglo-Saxon Uses of Óðinn*

The origins of the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies and regnal lists in — or at least from within a very similar cultural context to — Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* have been considered above (section 3.5). As has been shown, such genealogies use Woden as a source of authority and legitimacy, but they do so not by appealing to Woden's status as a heathen deity; rather they invoke him as a figure of antiquity who connects the Anglo-Saxons with their continental origins — a sort of Germanic classical originator. It is precisely by the weakness of Woden's cult as a heathen deity that this is made possible; certainly Woden's status as a man euhemerised into a god is a necessary part of his positioning within the classical model, but at the same time this positioning could not have been undertaken in a context in which Woden's status as a recipient of cult was still strong. It is clearly significant, then, that Woden is used as a royal ancestor in England, where he was probably little culted,

if at all, and is not used in this way among the Alamanni and the Langobards, who seem to have culted him as a tribally important deity. In late Anglo-Saxon England, moreover, the influence of Danish heathenism appears to have impacted on the use of Woden in genealogical texts. The West Saxon nobleman Æthelweard made a Latin translation, his *Chronicon*, of a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in the late tenth century.⁵ Naturally, he translated the genealogies present in his source, but, in doing so, he made some curious alterations to his source.

Bældæg, who appears as one of Woden's sons in the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, is not cognate with the Scandinavian deity Baldr, despite their similar-sounding names. If the Anglo-Saxon figure were cognate with Baldr — which would constitute evidence for a lengthy tradition, as well as an Anglo-Saxon reflex of Baldr — we should expect *Bealdor, but this never occurs. The only instance where Baldr is more closely approximated is in Æthelweard's *Chronicon*, which gives 'Balder'⁶. It is interesting, in this connection, that Æthelweard also twice switches Woden's son and grandson in his version of the Hengest and Horsa genealogy, and gives the grandson's name as 'Vuithar' and 'Wither', forms which are considerably closer to the Old Icelandic Víðarr (one of Óðinn's sons) than the more usual form Witta.⁷ This would suggest that Æthelweard was aware of Scandinavian traditions and sought to harmonise the Anglo-Saxon genealogies with them. The suggestion is supported, moreover, by the fact — pointed out by Meaney — that although Æthelweard 'uses the form *Woddan* once in his *Chronicon*, elsewhere he has invariably the compromise form *Wothen*'⁸.

This is a particularly strange reshaping of the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogical tradition, especially when one considers it within the context of the vernacular literary treatments of Óðinn in Æthelweard's day. *De Falsis Deis*, in its versions by Ælfric and

⁵ The *Chronicon* has been edited by Campbell, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*. On the identity of Æthelweard, see *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. by Campbell, p. xiii.

⁶ *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. by Campbell, p. 33 (book 3, chapter 4).

⁷ *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. by Campbell, pp. 9 and 18 (book 1, chapter 4 and book 2, chapter 2).

Wulfstan, as well as the anonymous homily known as Napier 42, evidence a circle of literary interest in Óðinn (and his equation with Mercurius), in which Æthelweard probably played a part. Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis* provides perhaps the earliest extant text produced within this circle, although, as we shall see (section 4.2.1, below), Ælfric may well have been following a northern example. It will be convenient, however, to consider this text first.

Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis* contains a lengthy passage dealing with the Roman pagan deity Mercurius, and making an equation between him and the Danish Óðinn:

Sum man wæs gehaten Mercurius on lífe,
 se wæs swiðe facenfull and swicol on dædum,
 and lufode eac stala and leasbregdnyssa.
 Þone macodan þa hæþenan him to mæran gode,
 and æt wega gelætum him lac offrodan,
 and to heagum beorgum him brohtan onsæg[ed]nysse.
 Ðes god wæs [a]rwyrðe betwyx eallum hæþenum,
 and he is Óðon geháten oðrum naman on Denisc.
 Nu secgað þa Deniscan on heora gedwylde
 þæt se Iouis wære, þe hi Þór hátað,
 Mercuries sunu, þe hi Oðon hatað;
 ac hi nabbað na riht, for þam þe we rædað on bocum,
 ge on hæþenum ge on Cristenum, þæt se hetola Iouis
 to soðan wære Saturnes sunu,
 and þa béc ne magon beon awægede
 þe þa ealdan hæðenan be him awriton þuss;
 and eac on martira þrowungum we gemetað swa awriten.⁹

A certain man was called Mercurius in life, who was very sinful and deceitful in his actions, and who loved theft and treachery. The heathens made him into a famous god, and presented him with gifts at crossroads and brought sacrifices to him on high hills. This god was honoured among all heathens, and he is called by another name, Óðinn, in Danish. Now the Danes say in their confusion that Jovis, whom they call Þórr, was the son of Mercurius, whom they call Óðinn; but they are wrong, because we read in books (both heathen and christian ones), that the loathsome Jovis was in fact Saturn's son, and the books cannot be discounted which the ancient pagans wrote about

⁸ Meaney, 'Woden in England', p. 110.

⁹ *De Falsis Deis* in *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. by John C. Pope, Early English Text Society, o.s. 259 and 260, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), II, 684-85 (lines 133-49). My translation.

them; and also in the passions of martyrs we encounter the same thing written.

In discussing the presentation of Óðinn in this text, it will be necessary to consider the contexts of production and reception of the text in Anglo-Saxon England. It will be useful, therefore, briefly to sketch the writing and revision of the text, and to consider its possible intended uses and audiences. According to Clemoes, Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis* was originally composed sometime between 992 and 1002.¹⁰ Pope notes that lines 141-49 were added at a later date.¹¹ Clemoes ascribes this revision to an authorial re-issue of the text sometime after 1006, and notes that it was from this expanded text that Wulfstan worked when he wrote his *De Falsis Deis*.¹² He notes that this re-issue 'prompts the question whether Ælfric himself issued a set of his homilies for unspecified occasions and pieces on general themes, revising some for the purpose', but concludes that there is no evidence that he did.¹³

On the basis of manuscript evidence, Clemoes suggests that the original issue of *De Falsis Deis* was as an appendix to the *Lives of Saints*, with which it belonged, as they were 'all narrative pieces intended not for reading as part of the liturgy, but for pious reading at any time'¹⁴. *De Falsis Deis* and various other discursive pieces (for instance the non-Ælfrician *De XII Abusivis*) appear to have been included with the *Lives of Saints* on the basis that they too were intended for non-liturgical reading.¹⁵ According to Gatch, Æthelweard (probably the same Æthelweard who wrote the *Chronicon*) and his son Æthelmær

are known to have commissioned the *Lives of Saints*, an augmented Catholic Homilies I, presumably also a version or copy of Catholic Homilies II, and portions of Genesis. Such a library — and one can be reasonably certain that these great lords had other books — would go a long way towards enabling

¹⁰ P. A. M. Clemoes, 'The Chronology of Ælfric's Works' in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in some Aspects of their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. by Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1959), pp. 212-47 (p. 244).

¹¹ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, I, 147 and II, 673-74.

¹² Clemoes, pp. 245 and 239 (note 2).

¹³ Clemoes, p. 239.

¹⁴ Clemoes, p. 220.

¹⁵ Clemoes, pp. 220-21.

Æthelweard and his son to follow in their own devotions the observances of monks¹⁶

The original version of *De Falsis Deis*, then, appears to have been intended primarily as a text for more or less private pious reading rather than instruction of the laity. It may have been read aloud to small groups, but it seems unlikely that it was intended for general consumption. It is particularly interesting that this text, which deals with Scandinavian heathen deities and completely ignores the fact that they once had equivalents in Anglo-Saxon England, should have formed an appendix to a collection of texts intended for Æthelweard. Ælfric's striking failure to mention the English equivalents for the Scandinavian deities with which he deals is doubly striking in the context of Æthelweard's Scandinavisation of Anglo-Saxon royal genealogical materials, as discussed above. The fact that Ælfric confines his discussion to the Danish heathen gods, and makes no mention of their Anglo-Saxon equivalents, is seen by Pope as being due to deliberate reticence.¹⁷ This may be correct, although it is difficult to discern a reason for such reticence. It is possible that Woden's prominent place in royal genealogies in Anglo-Saxon England lies behind Ælfric's silence, but the fact that he does not mention the names of any of the Anglo-Saxon heathen gods suggests that a more general wish to avoid discussion of the heathen past of the English is the reason. It would also be strange if Ælfric were more sensitive about the political aspects of Woden's use in royal genealogies than Æthelweard, since the latter was one of the most important noblemen of his day.

Æthelweard's position is, in fact, a rather strange one. As an ealdorman he was a figure of considerable political power, but at the same time, as suggested above, he seems to have taken a rather greater interest in the monastic lifestyle than was common in a nobleman — even a major ecclesiastical patron — of his day.¹⁸ The unusual Latinity of the *Chronicon* has also been remarked as reflecting a similar contradiction; while scholars such as Campbell

¹⁶ Milton McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 48-49.

¹⁷ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, II, 716.

¹⁸ *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. by Campbell, pp. xiii-xv.

and Winterbottom have seen Æthelweard's Latin as a form of hermeneutic Latin, and as a highly personal response to this wider trend towards involved syntax and florid lexis, Angelika Lutz has recently argued that Æthelweard's vocabulary and syntax also reflect an interest in Old English poetry, and an attempt to colour the *Chronicon* with a vernacular poetic style.¹⁹ This accommodation of the contradictory within Æthelweard's life and work could account for his willingness to Scandinavise the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies where Ælfric prefers to keep Woden and Óðinn clearly separated. On the other hand, Frank's plausible claim for Anglo-Saxon attempts, in the ninth and tenth centuries, to construct Scandinavian dynastic links through the addition of Scandinavian figures to their royal genealogies and regnal lists, may furnish a more plausible explanation.²⁰ Æthelweard's Scandinavising tendency, seen in this light, does not reflect a lack of political sensitivity on his part, but the extension of a long-standing Scandinavising tendency within English genealogical traditions.

Perhaps, then, Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis* reflects a sensitivity which is more religious than political. At the same time, the re-writing of *De Falsis Deis* noted by Pope (see above) indicates that Ælfric's response to Óðinn and his equation with Mercurius developed over time. The earliest version of *De Falsis Deis* merely equates Mercurius with the Danish 'Oðon', taking most of the details about the deity from Ælfric's main source, Martin of Braga's *De Correctione Rusticorum*.²¹ The statement that heathens 'to heagum beorgum him brohtan onsæg[ed]nysse'²², however, does not perfectly match this source, which does not connect Mercurius specifically with offerings on mountains, but reports that the demons who were the pagan gods urged men 'ut in excelsis montibus et in silvis frondosis sacrificia sibi offerent' ('that they should offer sacrifices to them on high mountains and in leafy woods').²³

¹⁹ Campbell, pp. xlv-xlix; M. Winterbottom, 'The Style of Aethelweard', *Medium Ævum*, 36 (1967), 109-18; Angelika Lutz, 'Æthelweard's *Chronicon* and Old English Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 29 (2000), 177-214.

²⁰ Roberta Frank, 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', in *The Dating of 'Beowulf'*, ed. by Colin Chase (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 123-39 (pp. 126-29).

²¹ See *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, II, 684. *De Correctione Rusticorum* is edited in *Martini Episcopi Bracarenensis Opera*, ed. by Barlow, pp. 183-203.

²² *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, II, 684 (line 138).

²³ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, II, 716. My translation.

It has been argued that, prompted by the general reference to mountain offerings in Martin, Ælfric included this as a feature of the worship of Óðinn of which he had heard, probably from Danish practices.²⁴ If, however, one excludes from consideration the passage which was added later, lines 141-49, the mention of 'Oðon' becomes a mere equation of him with Mercurius at the end of the passage on Mercurius. This demonstrates Ælfric's knowledge of traditions equating Woden with Mercurius, which one might not have expected to have survived, given that the eighth-century *Corpus Glossary* is the only English instance of this equation before Ælfric, despite all the references to Woden in the Anglo-Saxon genealogical materials. It does not, however, demonstrate that Ælfric was thinking of Mercurius throughout the passage as being the same god as 'Oðon'; if that were the case, one might rather expect the equation to be stated at the outset. It is by no means impossible that Ælfric was referring to a practice involved in the Danish cult of Óðinn, but given that his first version of *De Falsis Deis* does not seem to show any particular concern with Woden — merely mentioning his equation with Mercurius at the end of the passage — and the fact that all the other details he gives are related to the cult of Mercurius (as portrayed by Martin), rather than to that of Woden, it seems far more probable that Ælfric based the reference to offerings on mountains upon *De Correctione Rusticorum* rather than upon Danish practices of which he may or may not have been aware.

The later addition to this passage expands upon the equation between Mercurius and Woden, and compares the Graeco-Roman divine family-tree with the Danish one. This must reflect some knowledge on Ælfric's part of Danish mythology, although it need not indicate that this mythology has an early origin.

4.2.1 Wulfstan and His Circle

²⁴ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, II, 715-16.

Ælfric's use of Óðinn in *De Falsis Deis*, however, is not an isolated phenomenon.

Wulfstan, as noted above, re-wrote the final, extended version of Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis* in his own style, rendering the passage under discussion as follows:

Sum man eac wæs gehaten Mercurius on life, se wæs swyðe facenfull 7 ðeah full snotorwyrde swicol on dædum 7 on leasbregdum. Ðone macedon þa hæðenan be heora getæle eac heom to mæran gode, 7 æt wega gelætum him lac offrodon oft 7 gelome þurh deofles lare, 7 to heagum beorgum him brohton oft mistlice loflac. Ðes gedwolgod wæs arwurðe eac betwux eallum hæðenum on þam dagum, 7 he is Oðon gehaten oðrum naman on Denisce wisan. Nu secgað sume þa Denisce men on heora gedwylde þæt se Iouis wære þe hy Þor hatað, Mercuries sunu, þe hi Oðon namiað, ac hi nabbað na riht, forðan þe we rædað on bocum, ge on hæþenum ge on Cristenum, þæt se hetula Iouis to soðan is Saturnes sunu.²⁵

There was also a certain man called Mercury in life, who was very crafty and, although very clever in speech, deceitful in his actions and in trickeries. Him also the heathen made for themselves a great god according to their reckoning, and over and over again, through the teaching of the devil, offered him sacrifices at crossroads and often brought him various sacrifices of praise on the high hills. This false god also was venerated among all the heathen in those days, and in the Danish manner he is called by the other name Odin. Now some of those Danish men say in their error that Jove, whom they call Thor, was the son of Mercury, whom they name Odin; but they are not right because we read in books, both pagan and Christian, that the malignant Jove is in fact Saturn's son.²⁶

One might suppose that Wulfstan simply copied Ælfric in equating Mercurius and Óðinn in this passage. This is true in that Wulfstan clearly followed Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis* in making this equation. It seems possible, however, that within Wulfstan's circle — and before he produced his version of *De Falsis Deis* — this equation was not only known, but even familiar enough for Þórr and Óðinn to be used as unexplained equivalents in translating Latin texts mentioning Jupiter and Mercurius. The evidence for this is to be found in the homily commonly known as Napier 42. This homily consists largely of a translation of Adso's *De*

²⁵ *De Falsis Deis* in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. by Dorothy Bethurum, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 223.

Antichristo, which, echoing psalm 95:5 (see section 4.4, below in reference to *Maxims I(B)* and this psalm), mentions ‘omnes deos gentium, Herculem uidelicet, Apollinem, Iouem, Mercurium, quos pagani deos esse estimant’ (‘all the gods of the [pagan] peoples, that is to say, Hercules, Apollo, Jovis and Mercurius, whom the pagans thought to be gods’).²⁷ Napier 42 translates this list of classical pagan deities as ‘ealle, þa ðe hæðene men cwædon, þæt godas beon sceoldan on hæðene wisan; swylc swa wæs Erculus se ent and Apollinis, þe hi mærne god leton; þor eac and Owðen, þe hæðene men herjað swiðe’ (‘all those whom heathen men stated to be gods, in the heathen manner; such as was Hercules the *ent* and Apollo, whom they held to be a famous god; also Þórr and Óðinn, whom heathen men praise very greatly’).²⁸

The translator appears to have been interested in Graeco-Roman mythology, since he or she does not merely translate *Adso*, but provides the extra information that Hercules was an ‘ent’.²⁹ This same interest is reflected in his or her translations of Jovis and Mercurius as Þórr and Óðinn. That he or she could do so without any explanation, and without signalling that Þórr and Óðinn were not the names in his or her original, is very interesting. This could be because these equations were a commonplace of late Anglo-Saxon Latinity, perhaps as a result of the use of mythologically-rich glossaries such as the *Corpus Glossary* in the teaching and learning of Latin (see section 3.4, above, on the *Corpus Glossary*). The early glossaries,

²⁶ *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, ed. and trans. by Michael Swanton, The Everyman Library (London: Dent; Vermont: Tuttle, 1975; repr. 1993), pp. 186-87.

²⁷ *Adso Dervensis: De Ortu et Tempore Antichristi*, ed. by D. Verhelst, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, 45 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), p. 27. My translation.

²⁸ *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*, ed. by Arthur Napier, *Sammlung englischer Denkmäler in kritischen Ausgaben*, 4 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883), p. 197. My translation.

²⁹ One might object that calling Hercules a ‘giant’ shows ignorance or confused recollection of Graeco-Roman mythology, since Hercules was known as a giant-killer. The modern English term ‘giant’, however, is probably not a precise translation of ‘ent’. The use of the Old English phrase ‘enta geweorc’, and similar phrases, to describe Roman buildings and similar constructions has been thought to sit uncomfortably with the evidence of Germanic auxiliaries stationed in Britain, and the early Anglo-Saxon use of Roman constructions (see section 2.2.2, above). As suggested above, however, the difficulty is removed if one thinks of the term ‘ent’ as a more precise term than simply

with their mythological equations, probably owe their survival to their continuing utility through a large part of the Anglo-Saxon period. One can, at least, reasonably suppose that their use in the Anglo-Saxon curriculum was not limited to the generation of their production, and that such glossaries were used by the majority of those learning to read Latin to an advanced level in later Anglo-Saxon England. The importance of such glossaries in the Anglo-Saxon curriculum may, moreover, even have been somewhat underestimated, since Latin-Old English glossaries might be of limited utility in the early Anglo-Norman period, and might, therefore, be likely to have been lost or destroyed at that time. Other Old English texts — such as, for instance, the Old English translation of Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* — have fared better, apparently because post-Conquest ecclesiastics in some areas still saw a use for them, perhaps as materials for preaching to Anglophone audiences.³⁰

That a few basic equations of heathen and classical deities were relatively common in late Anglo-Saxon scholarly discourse is supported by the use of heathen deities as straight translations for classical pagan deities in the Old English *Martyrology*, in which Þunor and Tiw are used as equivalents for Jove and Mars.³¹ The origin of this text appears to be considerably earlier than Wulfstan and his circle, and helps to establish the currency of these equations in some quarters prior to the tenth century.³² The translation, moreover, although occurring in only one of the manuscripts of the *Martyrology*, is probably original. The relevant passages occur only in manuscripts B and C. The former has the readings 'þone Syxtum nedde Decius se casere Tiges deofolgyldre' ('the emperor Decius compelled Syxtus to worship Tiw's idol') and 'het Nacetius, Romeburge gerefa, hi lædan to Þures deofulgeldum, ond het hi þæt weorðian' ('Nicetius, the reeve of Rome, ordered that they be taken to the

'giant', having the force 'mighty man of a former period'. This would also seem to be the meaning here.

³⁰ Wendy Collier, 'The Tremulous Worcester Hand and Gregory's *Pastoral Care*', in *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Mary Swan and Elaine M. Treharne, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 30 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 195-208 (pp. 206-07).

³¹ See *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. by Günter Kotzor, Abhandlungen der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, n.s. 88, nos 1 and 2, 2 vols (München: bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), II, 172, 204-05, 422, 423.

³² *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, I, 143.

idols of Þórr, and he ordered that they worship them').³³ Contrastingly, in C 'Tiges deofolgyld' is replaced by 'þæt he gelyfde on hys deofolgyld' ('to believe in his idol'), and 'Þures' is replaced by 'hys'.³⁴ For the scribe of manuscript B to have replaced something along the lines of the C readings with the names of Þunor and Tiw would have required him or her to return to the sources of the martyrology.³⁵ It seems far more likely that the scribe of C, or of its exemplar, substituted these readings for translations which he or she felt to be either meaningless or offensive. According to Ker, manuscript C (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, manuscript 196) is written in one or perhaps two Exeter hands, and probably formed part of Leofric's donation to Exeter.³⁶ It seems unlikely in the extreme that these alterations were motivated by distaste, since the entries hardly present Þunor and Tiw in a positive light, and neither Ælfric nor Wulfstan shows any reluctance to name heathen deities in the process of condemning them; quite the opposite. Did the scribe of the Exeter manuscript of the *Martyrology* find the names incomprehensible? Probably not, and even if he or she did, he or she would undoubtedly still have recognised them as names (of false gods) and would therefore have left them. The very act of substituting grammatically and contextually appropriate alternatives shows some measure of understanding of these names. Perhaps, then, we should consider a third possibility, that the scribe replaced the names for scholarly reasons, because he or she recognised that Tiw and Þunor were not Roman deities and therefore would not have been worshipped by a Roman emperor. Were this the case, it would reflect a scholarly interest in Roman pagan deities, at Exeter in the tenth century, not dissimilar from that evidenced elsewhere by Ælfric, Wulfstan and his circle.

The continuing use of Latin-Old English glossaries may account for the ready substitution of Germanic for Graeco-Roman deities in translation, as in the Old English *Martyrology*, or, indeed, in Napier 42. In the case of Napier 42, however, it does not explain

³³ *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, II, 172 and 205. My translations.

³⁴ *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, II, 172 and 205 respectively. My translation. On the spelling of 'þures', see Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, p. 190 (section 474.3).

³⁵ On the sources of the *Martyrology*, see *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, II, 337 and 351.

the translator's use of the Scandinavian rather than the English names. Ælfric's use of Scandinavian rather than English names has been seen, as discussed above, as being due to a deliberate desire to avoid mention of the gods of the heathen Anglo-Saxons.³⁷ One might, however, object that Danish heathenism was actually likely to be far better known to Ælfric and his audience than was the English variety, for the former was distant at most a few hundred miles, the latter a few hundred years. This consideration applies all the more forcefully to the author of Napier 42, if we accept Hollis's convincing argument that he was closely connected with Wulfstan.³⁸

According to Hollis, Wulfstan clearly used Napier 42 as a source in the production of his homily 5.³⁹ Bethurum believes, however, that Wulfstan had himself already used Adso's *De Antichristo* as an outline for the preparation of his homily 1a.⁴⁰ A comparison of the first part of 1a with Adso does not show striking similarities between the two, although it is apparent that 1a follows an outline not unlike that found in Adso:⁴¹

Wulfstan:

Omnis qui secundum cristiane
professionis rectitudinem aut non uiuit
aut aliter docet quam oportet,
Anticristus est, quia secundum
interpretationem sui nominis apellatur.
Anticristus enim contrarius Cristi
dicitur.

Adso:

scilicet, quia Christo in cunctis contrarius erit
et Christo *contraria faciet*. (p. 22)

Multi ætiam tempora Anticristi non
uidebunt, sed tamen in membris eius
multi inueniuntur,

Hic itaque Antichristus multos habet sue
malignitatis ministros, (p. 22)

sicut in euangelio legitur: Surgent enim Deinde per uniuersum orbem nuncios mittet

³⁶ N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 75-76.

³⁷ See *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, II, 716.

³⁸ Stephanie Hollis, 'Napier XLII and Wulfstan's Homily V', *Notes and Queries*, 240, n.s. 42 (1995), 423-26 (pp. 425-26).

³⁹ Hollis, pp. 424-25. Numbering following *The Homilies of Wulfstan*.

⁴⁰ *Homilies of Wulfstan*, pp. 282-84.

⁴¹ Page references are to Verhelst's edition of *De Antichristo* and Bethurum's edition of Wulfstan's homily 1a.

pseudocristi et pseudoprophete, et dabunt signa magna, ita ut in errorem mittantur si fieri potest etiam electi.

Intelligite ergo, quasi dubitando dixit, si fieri potest, non quod Dominus aliquid dubitet, qui nouit preterita et futura, sed si electi sunt fieri non potest. Si autem fieri potest, electi non sunt.

Dicit ergo si fieri potest, quia trepidabunt propter multitudinem signorum; sed tamen quia non cadunt, dicuntur electi.

Erit enim tunc tribulatio et angustia qualis non fuit a die quo gentes esse ceperunt usque ad tempus illud. Et nisi breuiati fuerint dies illi, non poterit salua esse omnis caro; sed propter electos breuiabuntur dies illi, ne inducantur in errorem. (p. 113)

et praedicatores suos. Predicatio autem eius et potestas tenebit *a mare usque ad mare, ab oriente usque ad occidentem*, ab aquilone usque ad septentrionem. *Faciet quoque signa multa, miracula magna et inaudita. Faciet ignem de celo terribiliter uenire, arbores subito florere et arescere, mare turbari et subito tranquillari, naturas in diuersis figuris mutari, aquarum cursus et ordinem conuerti, aera uentis et commotionibus multimodis agitari et cetera innumerabilia et stupenda, mortuos etiam in conspectu hominum suscitari, ita ut in errorem inducanur, si fieri potest, etiam electi.* (pp. 24-25)

According to Bethurum, 'This is the only passage in the first part of the homily that has no parallel in Adso' (p. 283).

Nam quando tanta ac talia signa uiderint etiam illi, qui perfecti et *electi Dei* sunt, dubitabunt, (p. 25)

erit talis tribulatio, qualis non fuit super terram ex tempore, quo gentes esse ceperunt usque ad tempus illud. [...] Tunc breuiabuntur dies propter electos. Nisi enim Dominus abbreviasset dies, non fuisset salua omnis caro. (p. 25)

The other verbal parallels suggested by Bethurum for this section of 1a seem to be a great deal closer, however, than do the passages from Adso.⁴² If Wulfstan did follow Adso's outline, he seems to have had little inclination to borrow Adso's wording, despite borrowing much of his wording from Augustine, Gregory and Isidore, as well as the Vulgate.⁴³

⁴² *Homilies of Wulfstan*, p. 283.

⁴³ *Homilies of Wulfstan*, pp. 282-83.

It is possible, then, that Wulfstan's use of, and acquaintance with, Adso's *De Anticristo* was chiefly through a copy of the translation in Napier 42 (whether that in the extant manuscript, or in a manuscript no longer extant). Whoever produced Napier 42 perhaps assumed that his or her audience (in the first instance, it would appear, Wulfstan and his circle) would be immediately familiar with the equation of heathen Scandinavian deities and classical pagan deities, and would not, therefore, need it to be spelt out for them that Óðinn and Þórr were being used here as equivalents for Mercurius and Jovis. Another possibility is that the author of Napier 42 simply chose to replace Mercurius and Jovis with deities who might be more immediately relevant to an audience in close proximity to Danish heathenism in the Danelaw. The manuscript layout of this passage in Napier 42, moreover, seems to indicate that these names of non-Christian deities were particularly important at least to the scribe of the extant manuscript, who punctuated the passages so as to highlight the names of Þórr and Óðinn: 'Swylc swa wæs erculus se ent. 7 apollinis þe hi mærne god leton: þor eac 7 owðen. þe hæðene men heriað swiðe.'⁴⁴ While a simple point suffices to break up the clauses in such a way as to aid reading, the scribe exceptionally introduces Þórr and Óðinn with a two-stroke point, thus highlighting these particular figures.

There is no suggestion that Napier 42 predates Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis*, but it almost certainly predates Wulfstan's version thereof. Evidently Wulfstan followed Ælfric closely, but the evidence of Napier 42 suggests that the equations given by Ælfric were well known in Wulfstan's more northerly circle soon after the publication of the *Lives of Saints*. Given the uniform use of the Scandinavian gods in this group of texts, and the familiarity suggested by Napier 42, it may well be that Ælfric was following the lead of Wulfstan's circle in making his equations. The suggestion is supported by Ælfric's own use of this equation in his life of St Martin in *Lives of Saints*, where he repeats the information which he gives in *De Falsis Deis*:

Mid þusend searo-cræftum wolde se swicola deofol

⁴⁴ *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts in Microfiche Facsimile*, VIII: *Wulfstan Texts and Other Homiletic Materials*, descriptions by Jonathan Wilcox, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 219 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), MS 1, slide 1, p. 33.

þone halgan wer on sume wisan beswican .
 and hine ge-sewen-licne on manegum scin-hiwum
 þam halgan æteowde . on þæra hæþenra goda hiwe .
 hwilon on ioues hiwe . þe is ge-haten þór .
 hwilon on mercuries . þe men hatað oþon .
 hwilon on ueneris þære fulan gyden .
 þe men hatað fricg . and on manegum oþrum hiwum⁴⁵

With a thousand wily arts did the treacherous devil
 strive in some way to deceive the holy man,
 and he showed himself visible in divers phantasms
 to the saint, in the appearance of the gods of the heathen;
 sometimes in Jove's form, who is called Thor,
 sometimes in Mercury's who is called Odin,
 sometimes in that of Venus, the foul goddess,
 whom men call Fricg; and into many other shapes.

That Ælfric felt it necessary to repeat this information suggests that he thought that these equations were not widely known. Another possibility is that Ælfric was particularly interested in exhibiting his learning by equating classical and Scandinavian deities; this would account for his translation of the names Jovis, Mercurius and Venus, but not Minerva — for whose name no vernacular equivalent seems to have existed — from his source, Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Sancti Martini*.⁴⁶ The author of Napier 42, by contrast, seems to assume that at least his immediate circle would be extremely familiar with these equations. It seems likely, then, that Ælfric received his equations of classical with Scandinavian deities from northern England, but this cannot be definitely proved.

⁴⁵ *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat, Early English Text Society, o.s. 76, 82, 94 and 114, 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1881, 1900), II, 264 (no. 31, lines 710-17). Skeat's translation (p. 265).

⁴⁶ *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. by Skeat, II, 452.

4.2.2 After Ælfric: Danish Deities in Post-Ælfrician Literary Culture

The interest in Óðinn displayed by Ælfric, and by Wulfstan and his circle, did not simply disappear with the publication of their work. A brief consideration of the dissemination and treatment of Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis* subsequent to the publication of the *Lives of Saints* reveals that this tradition continued to attract considerable interest. Pope identifies seven manuscripts as containing material from Ælfric's *De Falsis Deis*, in addition to the manuscript containing Wulfstan's reworking of the text:⁴⁷

Pope/Clemons Siglum	Ker Number	Manuscript
R	41A	Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, manuscript 178
C	57	Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, manuscript 303
L	18	University Library, Cambridge, manuscript Ii.I.33
W	162	British Library manuscript Cotton Julius E.vii
S	333	Bodleian Library manuscript Hatton 116
G	209	British Library manuscript Cotton Vespasian D.xiv
Xk	66, art. a	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, manuscript Lat. 7585
T(114 & 113)	331	Bodleian Library manuscripts Hatton 114 and 113 (Wulfstan)

Pope's manuscript W appears to preserve the closest extant version of the *Lives of Saints* to that in which Ælfric issued them, with an appendix containing, among other things, *De Falsis Deis*.⁴⁸ The same pieces as those found in manuscript W, but unordered, occur in manuscript L. These manuscripts were probably primarily intended, like the *Lives of Saints* itself, for pious reading. Manuscript S consists mainly of saints' lives from *Catholic Homilies I*,

⁴⁷ See *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, II, 667-68.

⁴⁸ Clemons, p. 220.

and may have been compiled for a similar purpose.⁴⁹ Manuscript G is of little interest in examining the transmission of Ælfric's description of the pagan classical gods, since it contains only the story of Daniel from *De Falsis Deis*, which is used as an ending for a homily from *Catholic Homilies* II.⁵⁰ According to Pope, this manuscript constitutes 'a miscellany of theological pieces', and, as such, it may well also be intended for devotional reading, rather than public preaching.⁵¹

The intended use of *De Falsis Deis* in manuscripts C and R, however, is less clear. In manuscript C there are two sections, one drawn largely from *Lives of Saints*, the other, arranged according to the liturgical year, from *Catholic Homilies* I and II.⁵² A similar arrangement of two sections, one miscellaneous, one following the liturgical year, is to be found in manuscript R, in which an Old English colophon specifically states that the homilies in the first section may be delivered at any time, but those in the second section only on the specified days.⁵³ These two manuscripts, then, suggest a tendency for *De Falsis Deis* to be used as a sermon, or as material towards sermons.

From the point of view of determining how Ælfric impacted on Anglo-Saxon knowledge of, and interest in, pagan and heathen myth, manuscript Xk is by far the most interesting. This does not even approximate a full text of *De Falsis Deis*, and is not a straight quotation of part of the text. The manuscript is a copy of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, written partly in a continental Caroline minuscule of the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century, and partly in an English Caroline minuscule of the end of the tenth century.⁵⁴ On the blank last leaf of this manuscript an English hand of the eleventh century has added a

⁴⁹ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, I, 68.

⁵⁰ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, I, 25.

⁵¹ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, I, 24. See also Mary Swan, 'Ælfric as Source: The Exploitation of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* from the Late Tenth to Twelfth Centuries' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1993), pp. 144-47.

⁵² *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, I, 18-19.

⁵³ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, I, 63.

⁵⁴ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, I, 88.

brief description of the pagan classical gods, which is heavily dependent upon that of Ælfric in *De Falsis Deis*.⁵⁵

That Ælfric should have been used in this way seems to suggest that the equations which he drew were not common currency in all quarters in late Anglo-Saxon England, for the author of this note is specifically interested in pulling out these equations from Ælfric's work, suggesting that they were in some way noteworthy and unusual. At the same time, the note seems to engage with the section 'De Diis Gentium' in the *Etymologiae*, and indicates a particular interest in Ælfric's equation of classical pagan deities with heathen deities.⁵⁶ Isidore was an important source of knowledge of classical mythology in Anglo-Saxon England,⁵⁷ but here the interest is clearly focussed not simply on classical deities — for Ælfric mentions Apollo elsewhere in *De Falsis Deis* — but specifically on their Scandinavian equivalents. As with the Exeter manuscript of the Old English *Martyrology*, discussed above, which specifically engages with — and rejects — the heathen classicism of its source, so here we see evidence for another eleventh-century individual engaging with the heathen classicism of their sources, in this case the work of Ælfric and Wulfstan's circle. Coming at this late date, with the Danish heathenism of the Danelaw long since dissipated, we might see this as a precursor of the more plainly antiquarian uses of heathenism which begin to develop in the legendary histories of the twelfth century onwards (see section 5.1, below).

⁵⁵ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Pope, 1, 88.

⁵⁶ *Isidori Hispalensis Etymologiarum Libri*, ed. by Lindsay, 1, book 8, chapter 11.

⁵⁷ See Herren, 'The Transmission and Reception of Graeco-Roman Mythology', pp. 90-91.

forms showing unshifted /d/ and /g/ but /t/ shifted to /z/.⁶⁰ The <uo> spellings suggest the influence of Frankish orthography, which is to be expected in texts of this date in Middle German dialects.⁶¹ To say that the dialect possibly originates from Fulda is, however, misleading at best; all we can safely say is that the dialect originates from quite a large region, of which Fulda was a major centre of manuscript production. The dialect cannot be localised to Fulda, although there is a higher chance of any given manuscript containing texts in such a dialect having been produced at Fulda than anywhere else in the region; we should not forget that here we are dealing with a probability calculated not on the basis of the dialect, but on the basis of the fact that it has been recorded in a manuscript. Bischoff claims, moreover, that the script of the charm 'nicht dem bekannten Fuldaer Typ entspricht'⁶². On the other hand, Bischoff identifies the ninth-century script of the bulk of this manuscript as 'eine präziöse Spätform, die wir nur aus Fulda kennen', which does present us with the question of whither and how the manuscript might have travelled in the course of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, if it did not remain at or near Fulda.⁶³

The charms are, as mentioned above, a later addition to the manuscript, which was originally written in the ninth century; the ninth-century section includes a copy of the Frankish *Abrenuntiatio Diaboli*,⁶⁴ and is, according to Bostock, theological in character.⁶⁵ The use of such a list of names of heathen deities is hardly what one might expect in a charm which was in all probability written down by a Christian, but we have at least one other instance of the use of clearly heathen charm elements by a Christian, in the *Nine Herbs Charm*. The latter is clearly intended as a performance text; its place in the *Lacnunga* can

⁶⁰ Bostock, p. 16.

⁶¹ See also J. Sidney Groseclose and Brian O. Murdoch, *Die althochdeutschen poetischen Denkmäler* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976), p. 50, who identify the dialect of the charms more specifically as 'East Frankish'.

⁶² Bernhard Bischoff, 'Paläographische Fragen deutscher Denkmäler der Karolingerzeit', in *Mittelalterliche Studien: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte*, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1966-1981), III (1981), pp. 73-III (86). Originally published in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 5 (1971), 101-34.

⁶³ Bischoff, p. 86.

⁶⁴ Edited in *Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler*, ed. by Steinmeyer, p. 23.

leave little doubt that it was intended to be recited (by a Christian) as part of his or her medical practice (see section 4.3.2, below). The intention of the person who wrote down the *Second Merseburg Charm* is less clear. It is at least conceivable that the charm may have been preserved for its antiquarian or admonitory value, but in either case one might expect that some commentary would have been included with it. While such possibilities cannot be wholly discounted, then, it seems more likely than not that the charm was written down so that it could be remembered and recited.

The exact meaning of the charm is difficult to determine. The basic translation presents few difficulties:

Phol and Woden went to the forest.
 Then for Balder's (or 'the lord's') horse its foot became sprained (ie. "Then the foot of Balder's horse became sprained").
 Then Sinthgunt sang [a charm], Sunna her sister,
 then Frija sang [a charm], Volla her sister,
 then Woden sang [a charm], as he knew well how to do.
 Thus for bone-sprain, thus for blood-sprain, thus for limb-sprain:
 bone to bone, blood to blood,
 limb to limb, thus may they be glued together.

There is, however, considerable room for doubt as to the number of deities mentioned and, indeed, which deities are referred to in the charm. The name Phol is extremely mysterious and occurs nowhere else. It has attracted a considerable variety of interpretations, ranging from the identification of the name as a version of the christian Saint Paul, the classical Apollo, a form of Baldr, the masculine counterpart of Volla, to explanations which do not regard it as a name at all.⁶⁶ None of these seems entirely satisfactory, and, indeed, there are few basic facts upon which to base any interpretation. 'Phol' ought presumably to alliterate with 'vuorun', which, it has often been thought, would rule out the possibility that it is a form of Paul or Apollo. This is based, however, on the early development of Latin or Greek /p/ when borrowed into the Germanic languages, and does not take account of the High German Sound Shift, which would eventually produce /pf/ in place of such an initial stop.

⁶⁵ Bostock, p. 99.

This affricate is frequently written <ph> in Old High German texts, and may have been, at least at some stages in its development, capable of alliterating with 'vuorun'. The fact that the <h> of 'Phol' was written in after the text was written, above the line, might suggest that the corrector was concerned that 'Pol' should alliterate with 'vuorun', and therefore altered it.

This could have been done without any regard for meaning, possibly by a corrector who did not understand the term 'Pol'. It is, however, also possible that the corrector was correcting a term he or she understood perfectly well; if so, the use of the digraph <ph> here provides evidence for rather than against interpretations involving Greek or Latin borrowings beginning with /p/. One must also assume that such borrowings were early, otherwise the likelihood must be that the corrector was correcting for meter more than for meaning.

The second line also presents a problem, since it is not clear if Baldr is referred to by 'balderes', or if this is simply the word meaning 'lord', cognate with Old English 'bealdor'.⁶⁷ If the latter were the case, this would be the only example of this word in an Old High German dialect, but the same would be true of Baldr. In the absence of any other evidence, the proper name is more likely than the noun. It is highly unlikely that a noun meaning 'lord' would only appear once in the entire corpus of Old High German, but it is not surprising to find a proper name appearing only once. The name Sinthgunt, after all, appears here and nowhere else.

The third difficulty with the interpretation of the charm lies in determining whether Sinthgunt, Sunna, Friia and Uolla are all to be understood as chanting charms, or only Sinthgunt and Friia. The charm text (the order of which has been followed in the translation above, in order to illustrate this point) does not make clear whether the half-lines 'Sunna era suister' and 'Volla era suister' are adjectival phrases qualifying Sinthgunt and Friia, or stand alone as separate entries in the list of charm-working deities. This has also led to

⁶⁶ See Bostock, pp. 23-26.

⁶⁷ On this problem, see D. H. Green, *The Carolingian Lord: Semantic Studies on Four Old High German Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 14-17.

considerable speculation as to whether these are four different goddesses, or two aspects each of two, or even Friia with three of her hypostases.⁶⁸

In this charm, then, we see Wodan in a situation which we have no real reason to regard as having formed part of a pre-Christian mythological narrative; the story is at least as likely to have been created to fulfil the needs of the charm. Both this and the *Nine Herbs Charm* involve a narrative of which Woden/Wodan seems to be the principal character, but in neither case is there any reason to suppose that the narrative is not specifically intended for the charm. It is possible that these charm narratives were based upon mythological narrative, but it seems equally plausible to suggest that narratives were created specifically for magical purposes which stand outside the ordinary sphere of myth. In terms of Wodan and his attributes, both these charms seem to reflect magico-medical attributes for Wodan; the narrative may be tailored to the ailment, but the choice of deities — and particularly of Wodan — must be conditioned by the attributes (whether literary or mythological) of Wodan. There can be little doubt that a conception of Wodan as a healing god is at work behind these charms.

The dating of this attribute is, however, more difficult. Both these charms involving a narrative about Wodan were written down at quite a late date, and there is no way of determining when they achieved their current form. Concerning the magic formula of the *Second Merseburg Charm*, Bostock points out that ‘there are parallels in the Indian languages which are so close that no doubt is possible that this part at least is extremely ancient’⁶⁹. This, however, is not evidence for the dating of the narrative section of the charm, which could easily have been a later addition. One might note that the other (much earlier recorded) charm mentioning Óðinn, that inscribed on the skull-fragment from Ribe (on which see section 5.6, below), is not a narrative charm, and is a great deal simpler in character and structure (although, according to Nielsen, it is in verse).⁷⁰ This would suggest that the

⁶⁸ For a useful summary see Bostock, p. 22.

⁶⁹ Bostock, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Niels Åge Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter: Et Udvalgt Med Kommentarer* (Copenhagen: Hernov, 1983), p. 56.

narrative sections of these manuscript charms are probably later additions to formulae which may have been very early in composition, although it is at least as likely that the apparent universality of such formulae is a function not of their antiquity but of their simplicity and common aims.

It would appear, then, that this charm's use of Wodan reflects an association of Wodan with healing which is not evidenced before the tenth century; it is possible that the association is older, but there is no evidence for this, and we should perhaps place Wodan the healing deity within the framework of a later, literary tradition within which he forms part of a Northwestern European complex of Mercurius figures, among whom the healing attributes of Hermes become quite generally spread. In this respect, as we shall see, the charm fits well with the presentation of Woden in the *Nine Herbs Charm*, which is also evidenced in the late tenth or early eleventh century.

Also related to the problem of literary or traditional origins for this charm narrative is the possible presence of Baldr. The lack of evidence for Baldr outside Old Norse literature tends to suggest that Baldr was a special development in late Scandinavian heathenism, from around the ninth to tenth centuries onwards, or even a purely literary development in christian contexts, although given the slender evidence even for Wodan himself, especially on the Continent, we can hardly be certain that this is evidence of a lack of Baldr. It is, however, interesting to note in this connection that Æthelweard appears to have borrowed Baldr as a replacement for the unrelated Anglo-Saxon figure Bældæg (see section 4.2, above). This would seem to suggest that, if Baldr is in this charm at all, he provides further evidence for the late, literary character of the text.

The idea that this charm may be essentially written in character is clearly difficult, for this would tend to imply that it was not merely written down by a Christian, but actually compiled by a Christian. While this may seem difficult to accept, especially given the strictures of many of the better-known Germanic churchmen, perhaps we should not be too ready to assume that those whose writings we know well reflected the attitudes of all those who were able to write. This is not to say that there were educated men who were not

Christians in Germany and England around the tenth and eleventh centuries, but rather that, in a society where medicine and magic formed a continuum, the potential sin of compiling or using a charm involving heathen deities might have been disregarded by some on the grounds of its perceived efficacy.⁷¹ It seems probable, then, that this charm really reflects the development of Wodan as a literary, rather than a religious, figure, although this development may also involve an understanding of his name as possessing some sort of magical efficacy or connotations.

4.3.2 *The Nine Herbs Charm*

The *Second Merseburg Charm* is interestingly paralleled by an Old English charm, generally referred to as the *Nine Herbs Charm*. The similarities visible between the two may well, however, reflect the universality of charm formulae rather than a more specific connection between the two texts. The *Nine Herbs Charm* is an unusual Anglo-Saxon charm, since it is one of the relatively small number of such charms which are in Old English verse. The charm is also unusually long, and involves a number of narrative sections, as well as commands directed at the herbs referred to in the (editorial) title; we might characterise this charm as a complex *historiola*. One of the narrative sections describes Woden killing a snake and extracting promises from disease factors not to behave in a harmful manner. This is then immediately followed by a description of 'witiz drihten' creating helpful herbs:

⁷¹ This is not, however, to dismiss all medicine among the Germanic peoples at this time as entirely based on superstition. This view, which used to be the normal view of Anglo-Saxon medicine, for instance, has rightly been discredited in recent years. The work of Cameron, in particular, has done much to dispel the over-emphasis on superstition found in earlier scholarship; see M. L. Cameron, 'Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Magic', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 17 (1998), 191-215, and also M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). In this connection one might also note the juxtaposition of prognostic materials (which are also magical in character and viewed with disapproval by the Church) with homiletic materials in some Anglo-Saxon manuscripts; see Roy Michael Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon

+wyrm com / snican, toslat he nan.
 ða zenam woden VIII wuldortanas,
 sloh ða þa næddran þæt heo on VIII tofleah.
 þær zeændode æppel 7 attor,
 þæt heo næfre ne wolde on hus buzan.
 +fille 7 finule, fela mihtizu twa,
 þa wyrte zesceop witig drihten, /
 haliz on heofonum þa he honzode,
 sette 7 sænde on VII worulde, /
 earmum 7 eadizum, eallum to bote.⁷²

A snake came crawling, he tore no one. Then Woden took up nine glory-twigs, and struck the snake so that it flew into nine pieces. There apple and poison swore that it would never return into the house. Chervil and fennel, the greatly-powerful pair; the wise lord, holy in the heavens, made those herbs when he was hanging, he established them and sent them into the seven worlds, to help everyone, both the wretched and the blessed.

This passage seems to contrast the potentially harmful ‘æppel 7 attor’ and the beneficial ‘fille 7 finule’; it can also be seen as creating an opposition between Woden — who destroys harmful agents or receives their promises not to act harmfully — and the ‘witig drihten’ who creates agents which are actively helpful. The phrase ‘witig drihten’ could be used to refer to Woden, but given the structure of opposition, and the tradition of opposing Woden the false creator and God the true creator (expressed in *Maxims I(B)*, see section 4.4, below), it seems probable that the ‘witig drihten’ is, in fact, the christian god.

This Old English charm occurs in British Library manuscript Harley 585, in a collection of medical recipes and charms known as the *Lacnunga*. According to Grattan and Singer, the manuscript dates to about the year 1000.⁷³ There can be little doubt that the manuscript was written by a Christian, and it is also clear from the above passage that the charm, if it was heathen in origin, was christianised before it became part of the *Lacnunga*.

Prognostics in Context: A Survey and Handlist of Manuscripts’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), 181-230.

⁷² J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text ‘Lacnunga’* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 152-54. My translation.

⁷³ Grattan and Singer, pp. 208-09.

It has been seen with the *Second Merseburg Charm*, however, that it is not necessarily reasonable to assume that manuscript charms involving the names of heathen deities must be survivals of old, heathen charms which have, unusually, been written down. It is not impossible that Christians engaged more closely with these charms than simply in copying them. The presence of this charm in an Anglo-Saxon medical manuscript of around the year 1000 makes it possible that at least one christian Anglo-Saxon actually used the charm. It may also demonstrate that such charms were felt to be effective. It is, moreover, clear that this charm as it appears in the manuscript was not simply copied down by a Christian, but actually in some degree (if not wholly) compiled by a Christian, for it includes at least one reference to Christ: 'crist stod ofer adle ænzancund[e]' ('Christ stood above any form of sickness').⁷⁴

The possibility remains that the narrative itself is an old, heathen element in the charm. The oath-swearing which completes the narrative, however, leads straight into the passage on the (presumably christian) lord creating chervil and fennel, and the seven worlds, which Grattan and Singer connect with the seven spheres found in classical cosmology.⁷⁵ It seems far more likely, in the light of this transition, that the narrative passage of this charm has at least undergone some christian recomposition, and indeed it is perfectly probable that it is originally a christian composition. In fact, the use of Woden in this charm may not be entirely dissimilar to the use of Woden in the genealogical materials, in that here too Woden's power rests not on his status as a heathen deity, but on his positioning as an Anglo-Saxon link to antiquity, and, in this case, classical traditions. The link here is quite specific, moreover, and depends not on the reinterpretation of Woden himself, but on his equation with Mercurius. Mercurius was clearly recognised in late Anglo-Saxon England as having been a medical deity; he appears alongside Galen and Hippocrates in the Old English *Life of Saint Pantaleon*, as well as featuring twice in the Old English version of the *Herbarium of*

⁷⁴ Grattan and Singer, p. 156.

⁷⁵ Grattan and Singer, p. 155 (note 2).

Pseudo-Apuleius, in one instance as the provider of a protective herb to Ulysses.⁷⁶ In the *Nine Herbs Charm*, therefore, it seems likely that Woden is functioning as an equivalent for Mercurius as a figure of magico-medical power and resonance, and particularly as an equivalent for Mercurius as the provider of protective or healing herbs.⁷⁷ The appeal is, of course, to the power of the christian god to heal, but a reference to a healer of authority (albeit only human authority) is still a useful and valid part of the formula. In some sense, then, this would not be so far from the use made of Woden in the Anglo-Saxon genealogical materials, in that both they and the *Nine Herbs Charm* use his name, rather than the deity himself, as a political or magical figurehead. The use of Woden here, however, also rests upon a literary tradition linking him with Mercurius/Hermes as a healing deity and his Mediterranean reflexes and associated figures.

This charm is, then, most important as evidence of the literary development of Woden, but may also bear some relevance to the peculiarly Anglo-Saxon use of Woden as a literary figure of power, whether political or medical. This may account, at least in part, for the apparent willingness of a christian Anglo-Saxon to use Woden's name as part of his or her medical practice. The euhemeristic view of Woden which takes hold in England allows him to enter the narrative of such a charm merely in the capacity of a distinguished man of old. This seems, on the whole, the most reasonable way of looking at this charm; the attempts to connect it with *Hávamál* or with the casting of lots described by Tacitus hardly seem convincing.⁷⁸ That this charm was a practical text is not to be disputed, but it should in

⁷⁶ This passage in the *Life of Saint Pantaleon* is available through the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* <<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/cgi/o/oc/oc-idx?type=bigger&byte=7994410&q1=gallige&q2=&q3=>> [accessed 2 December 2002]; *The Old English 'Herbarium' and 'Medicina de Quadrupedibus'*, ed. by Hubert Jan de Vriend, Early English Text Society, o.s. 286 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 94-95 and 114-15.

⁷⁷ We should note that Woden and Mercurius are not alone in fulfilling such a rôle; Saint Veronica, for one, also seems to be used in this way (see Mary Swan, 'Remembering Veronica in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts*, ed. by Elaine Treharne (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002), pp. 919-39 (especially pp. 34-36).

⁷⁸ On the former, see North, p. 87; on the latter, see Grattan and Singer p. 54.

all probability be understood as essentially part of a literary, christian tradition relating to Woden, and most probably relating to him as a Mercurius figure.

4.4 *Woden worhte weos*: Woden as False Creator

Modern critics have not always been kind to *Maxims I*, a poem, or group of poems, which is extant in the Exeter Book. In the introduction to their edition of that manuscript, Krapp and Dobbie characterised *Maxims I* as follows: “The entire text gives the impression of a mass of unrelated materials gathered from a number of sources, and assembled by the compiler more or less mechanically, with no attempt at selection or logical arrangement”⁷⁹. This view has, of course, inspired many to try and find order in the poems.⁸⁰ While there is a certain internal order to these poems, however, their orderliness — and the ends which it serves — can only be fully understood if one considers not only the structuring of the poems themselves, but also their positioning within Anglo-Saxon literary traditions.

At this point, it will be useful to outline what can be determined about the composition and history of reception of this text. In his new edition, Muir places the writing of the Exeter Book around 965-975, probably at Crediton or Exeter.⁸¹ Of at least equal interest must be the provenance and dating of the composition of *Maxims I* itself. Krapp and Dobbie find no distinctively Anglian features in the poem, and so accept the view that the poem was probably of West-Saxon origin, composed at any time from the eighth century through to the writing of the manuscript.⁸² The dating and localising of Old English verse on the basis of dialect and other linguistic characteristics is now recognised to be fraught with

⁷⁹ *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, 3 (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), pp. xlvi-xlvii.

⁸⁰ For a useful summary of these efforts, and yet another, see the chapter on ‘The Old English *Maxims*’, in Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 156-83.

⁸¹ *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, 1, 1-3.

⁸² *The Exeter Book*, p. xlvi.

difficulties, and we would perhaps be wise not to rely too heavily on the text being of West-Saxon origin, just as we cannot establish a reliable date for the composition of the poem.⁸³

Maxims I is, as stated above, sometimes treated as one poem, and Krapp and Dobbie state that ‘it is impossible to tell with any certainty whether the three sectional divisions indicated in the manuscript were intended by the scribe to be taken as three parts of a single poem, or as three separate poems’⁸⁴. Muir, however, believes that the sectional divisions do indicate three separate poems.⁸⁵ On the basis of the manuscript division indicators as he describes them, in these and the immediately surrounding poems, one must agree with this view.⁸⁶ The poem which chiefly concerns us here is, then, not *Maxims I*, but *Maxims I(B)*. The A and C poems lie outside the scope of this thesis, but it will be valuable to point out the coherence of the B poem here.

Firstly, one should consider the manuscript context of this poem. It comes in a sequence of wisdom poems: *The Fates of Mortals*, *Maxims I(A)*, *Maxims I(B)*, *Maxims I(C)*, *The Order of the World* and *The Riming Poem*. That *The Fates of Mortals* and *The Order of the World* have unifying themes is clear enough. One might, however, equally well describe the first five lines of *Maxims I(B)* as dealing with the order of the world:

Forst sceal freosan, fyr wudu meltan,
 eorþe growan, is brycgian,
 wæter helm wegan, wundrum lucan
 eorþan ciþas. An sceal inbindan
 forstes fetre felamehtig god⁸⁷

Frost must needs freeze, fire crumble wood, earth burgeon, ice build bridges — and the water support a canopy — and miraculously lock away earth’s seeds. One alone, the God of powers manifold, shall unbind the frost’s fetters.⁸⁸

⁸³ See the summary of dating methods and their difficulties in Amos, pp. 167-70.

⁸⁴ *The Exeter Book*, p. xlvi.

⁸⁵ *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, II, 530.

⁸⁶ *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, notes to I, 247-64.

⁸⁷ *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, I, 254 (lines 1-5).

⁸⁸ *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Anthology of Old English Poems in Prose Translation*, trans. by S. A. J. Bradley, Everyman Classics (London: Dent, 1982), p. 348.

The first three and a half lines of this passage describe winter, a time when snow and ice cover the earth, and people build fires to keep warm. In line 5, the repetition of the word 'frost' points up the fact that God's power to dispel winter affects all the symptoms of winter mentioned in the previous four lines. So far, the poem has built up a brief picture of the natural world (and particularly of winter) which leads its audience up to the creator of this natural order. The alliterating 'An' in line four emphasises God's unique power over the phenomena which have gone before, and seems to be the culmination of the semantic and syntactical progress of the preceding lines. In essence, the poem begins with God as creator and controller of the world.

From here, the poem follows the suggestion of God's power to dispel winter, and moves on to summer. Having passed through the seasons, the poem moves from the large-scale order of the natural world to the smaller scale of the ordered human society. God's order appears no less in human society than it does in nature. This section starts with the king, and moves down through nobles to the various lower echelons of society, the Frisian, the merchant, and, finally, past the infirm to those who are outcasts from society, the murderers. This leads into the need for good conduct, and, from human conduct, the progress from God's artifice to the artifice of humans is completed. The manufactures of humans and their proper users are enumerated, and the poem returns to the ultimate artificer of all that the poem has set out; finally, the poem recapitulates its opening, explicitly referring to God, and specifically to God the creator:

Scyld sceal cempan, sceaft reafere,
 sceal bryde beag, bec leornere,
 husl halgum men, hæþnum synne.
 Woden worhte weos; wuldor alwalda
 rume roderas — þæt is rice god,
 sylf soðcýning, sawla nergend,
 se us eal forgeaf þæt we on lifgaf,
 ond eft æt þam ende eallum wealdeð
 monna cynne. Þæt is meotud sylfa.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, I, 256 (lines 59-67).

A shield necessarily goes with a soldier, an arrow with a poacher; a ring necessarily goes with a bride, books with a student, the eucharist with a holy man, and with a heathen sins. Woden fashioned idols; the Ruler of all fashioned heaven and the spacious skies. He is the mighty God, the very King of truth, the Saviour of souls, who gave us all that we live on and who at the end will again dispose over all mankind. He is himself the ordaining Lord.⁹⁰

How might an Anglo-Saxon audience have understood such a poem? The answer, of course, depends upon exactly which Anglo-Saxon audience one is talking about. A literate Anglo-Saxon audience is the easiest sort of audience for us to approach, for we simply have no idea what ideas and narratives were available in oral form only in Anglo-Saxon England. Given that we know that *Maxims I(B)* was available in an ecclesiastical — and therefore literate — context in the late tenth and early eleventh century, when it was copied into the Exeter Book, and when the Exeter Book was in use, it is not unjustified to consider how the poem may have been understood in such a chronological and social context. There is an interesting parallel for this poem in *Beowulf*, a poem which is also extant in a manuscript of around the year 1000:⁹¹

Sægde se þe cuþe
frumsceaft fira feorran reccan,
cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worh[te],
wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð,
gesette sigehreþig sunnan ond monan
leoman to leohte landbuendum,
ond gefræt Wade foldan sceatas
leomum ond leafum; lif eac gesceop

⁹⁰ *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. by Bradley, p. 349.

⁹¹ For the date of the writing of the *Beowulf*-manuscript, see Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts*, p. 281 (no. 216); see also Kiernan's arguments for dating the manuscript — and, indeed, the composition of the poem — to the eleventh century in Kevin S. Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1981; repr. 1984), and in Kevin S. Kiernan, 'The Eleventh-Century Origin of *Beowulf* and the *Beowulf* Manuscript', in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. by Chase, pp. 9-22. Newton does not find Kiernan's understanding of folio 179^f as a palimpsest due to revision by scribe B to be convincing (Sam Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 8-9).

cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.⁹²

He who was skilled in recounting the creation of men in time distant declared that the Almighty made the earth, a plain radiant to look upon which water encircles; he, taking delight in his achievement, established the sun and the moon, those luminaries, as light for those living in the world; he embellished the earth's surfaces with branches and with leaves; life too he created in each of those species which go their vital ways.⁹³

This passage provides us with an encapsulated poem which presents a figure of authority recounting how God created earth and sky, and how he provided for human beings. The figure of authority is lacking in *Maxims I(B)*, but the key themes of the created world (particularly represented by earth and sky), and of God's power over, and provision for, human beings, are the same.

A passage which is strikingly reminiscent of this section in *Beowulf* occurs in the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. Here Bede recounts the story of Cædmon, who receives the gift of versifying from an angel who instructs him, in the Old English translation, 'Sing me frumsceaft'⁹⁴. The word 'frumsceaft' for 'creation' is used to introduce the encapsulated poem in *Beowulf* as well. As Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe notes, 'in the Old English Bede, Caedmon's *Hymn* is part of the main text; in manuscripts of Bede's Latin text it is found (if at all) as a marginal gloss to Bede's Latin paraphrase of the *Hymn*'⁹⁵. Although Bede himself, then, seems to have paraphrased in Latin the poem with which Cædmon responded to the angelic command, the Old English translation records Cædmon's song about the creation in Old English verse within its text, and this poem is now normally referred to as the West Saxon version of *Cædmon's Hymn*:

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard,

⁹² *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by Fr. Klaeber, 3 edn (Boston: Heath, 1950; first published 1922), pp. 4-5 (lines 90-98).

⁹³ *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. by Bradley, p. 414.

⁹⁴ *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Miller, 2 vols, Early English Text Society, o.s. 95, 96 (vol I), 110, 111 (vol II) (London: Early English Text Society, 1890-1898), I, 344 (book 4, chapter 25).

⁹⁵ Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 25-26.

meotodes meahte ȝ his modgeþanc,
 weorc wuldorfæder, swa he wundra gehwæs,
 ece Drihten, or onstealde.
 he ærest sceop eorðan bearnum
 heofon to hrofe halig scyppend;
 þa middangeard moncynnes weard,
 ece Drihten, æfter teode
 firum foldan, frea ælmihtig.⁹⁶

Now we must laud the heaven-kingdom's Keeper, the Ordainer's might and his mind's intent, the work of the Father of glory: in that he, the Lord everlasting, appointed of each wondrous thing the beginning; he, holy Creator, at the first created heaven for a roof to the children of men; he, mankind's Keeper, Lord everlasting, almighty Ruler, afterwards fashioned for mortals the middle-earth, the world.⁹⁷

Clearly, the key features of these two creation-songs, *Cædmon's Hymn* and the *Beowulf* passage, seem to be an emphasis on the heavens and the earth as the twin central aspects of the creation, and a concern with God's relationship to humans; God is presented as creating the world specifically for the benefit of humankind. These key features also appear in *Maxims I(B)*, whose final lines perfectly sum up the main points of the poem, namely that God made the skies, the 'rume roderas', and the earth 'þe we on lifgað' ('on which we live'), and that he completely controls humankind and is the Creator of everything: 'Þæt is meotud sylfa' ('he is the creator himself').

Scholars have, then, been rather distracted by the context of *Maxims I(B)*. In the manuscript context of a large miscellany of Old English verse, and lacking the explicit framing of the creation-songs in the Old English Bede and in *Beowulf*, it has not been noticed that *Maxims I(B)* is itself basically a creation-song. This is not to say that Anglo-

⁹⁶ *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 1, 344 (book 4, chapter 25).

⁹⁷ *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. by Bradley, p. 4; one must note, however, that Bradley translates the Northumbrian version of the *Hymn*, found in some Latin manuscripts of Bede, and that this version differs slightly in wording from the West Saxon version given above. In particular, note that 'eorðan' in line 5 is not the Northumbrian reading, and we should therefore replace Bradley's 'children of men' with 'children of the earth' (or understand 'eorðan' as an object parallel with 'heofon' in line 6; 'he first created the earth [and] heaven for a roof for his children').

Saxons of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries would necessarily have thought in terms of a genre of creation-songs; nor, indeed, should we necessarily suppose that they thought in terms of genres in the modern sense. What we can say, however, is that *Cædmon's Hymn*, one of the canonical items of Old English poetry (both for us and for the late Anglo-Saxons), would have provided a reading context for *Maxims I(B)*, and that the latter poem presents very similar themes to the former. For a late tenth- or early eleventh-century audience, then, *Maxims I(B)* would be instantly recognisable as forming part of a tradition of verse about the order and wonder of God's creation.

At the same time, these texts celebrating (and perhaps even reinforcing) the order of the natural world should be seen alongside Old English prognostic texts. Liuzza points out that such texts relate not to 'the orderly world of Æthelwold's Benedictine Reform movement', but to 'the private world of monastic preoccupation with times and seasons'.⁹⁸ This observation points up the possibility of there being quite various ecclesiastical milieux in which Woden might be found, from the possibly stricter milieux associated with the Benedictine Reform, to circles in which prognostics and charms (both classes of effective, if morally dubious, magical texts) could be tolerated. In a sense, this point can also be related in a wider sense to the way in which such texts approach the natural world; rather than describing or reinforcing the order of the world, prognostic texts attempt to use and read the structure of the world and of time to their users' own advantage.

In *Maxims I(B)*, therefore, drawing on these twin contexts of texts concerned with ordering or reading the created world, it is extremely interesting that Woden features as a direct contrast to God at precisely the point that the poem returns from describing human artifice to describing God's artifice, the creation. Not only does this euhemerise Woden, making him seem merely human by contrasting him with God, but it also points up his position as a heathen deity, and especially as a false creator. This curiously ambiguous presentation of Woden is highly unusual in late Anglo-Saxon England, and seems to draw

⁹⁸ Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics', p. 210.

together elements of several of the various different (and usually separate) uses and re-imaginings of Woden which have been discussed above.

The euhemerisation of Woden, presenting him as a human king, is evidenced as early as the eighth century, in Bede (see section 3.5, above). The tradition became ever stronger, moreover, and had become widespread by the late Anglo-Saxon period, both in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and in copies of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (see sections 3.5 and 4.2, above). Place-names have been thought to present Woden as a supernatural builder, because his name is frequently linked to earthworks, but we should consider the possibility that such place-names were understood in the late Anglo-Saxon period as relating to Woden as a human king of the distant past who built such monuments (see section 2.2.2, above). The statement that 'Woden worhte weos' ('Woden built idols/temples'), therefore, can be seen as working along similar lines, presenting Woden as a heathen king of the past, rather than a heathen deity, and, more specifically, presenting him as a heathen king associated with building and artifice. In the *Nine Herbs Charm*, in contrast, Woden operates as a figure of ill-defined magical authority, perhaps borrowing some of the medical associations of his supposed Roman counterpart Mercurius (see section 4.3.2, above).

We should also remark, however, that Psalms 95:5 ('omnes enim dii populorum sculptilia Dominus autem caelos fecit'; 'for all the gods of the [pagan] peoples are statues, but the lord made the heavens') has often been identified as a source for line 62 ('Woden worhte weos; wuldor alwalda') of *Maxims I(B)*.⁹⁹ It is this same verse which is echoed (as mentioned in section 4.2.1, above) in the passage of Adso's *De Antichristo* which attracted the translation of Mercurius and Jovis by Óðinn and Þórr in Napier 42. These two vernacular responses to the verse, in *Maxims I(B)* and Napier 42, are revealing in differing considerably from one another. Where the author of Napier 42 turns immediately to Scandinavian deities, the author of *Maxims I(B)* prefers Woden, the English figure who functions not simply as a deity, but also in the more various ways outlined above. Once again, *Maxims I(B)* can be seen as focussing on the complexity of Woden, not taking the obvious synecdochic route of

choosing Scandinavian deities to represent ‘omnes [...] dii populorum’. Instead, *Maxims I(B)* uses Woden, associating him with idols and thus gesturing towards both euhemerisation and demonisation; Woden is here a human figure of the past, but is also associated — through his manufacture of idols — with the demons who inhabit the idols of euhemerised humans in numerous saints’ lives circulating in Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁰⁰

The presentation of Woden in *Maxims I(B)*, then, seems to draw in elements of a wide variety of re-imaginings of the deity. He is at once human, but emphatically heathen, and possessed of an apparently false creative power, which is contrasted with God’s true creative power. Both magic and artifice seem to be combined in this creative power. Late Anglo-Saxon England can be seen as developing various ‘ideas of Woden’, but we should recognise that this complex of portrayals operates as part of a fluctuating and malleable conception of a single figure. In *Maxims I(B)*, Woden occupies an extraordinary middle space, not quite characterised as a heathen deity, nor yet as a royal ancestor or a magico-medical sympathetic figure, but depicted as relating in some way to all of these characterisations. The poem draws on aspects of various, usually mutually exclusive, conceptions of this figure, and while late Anglo-Saxon re-imaginings of Woden tend to complicate or gloss over his status as a pre-Christian deity, *Maxims I(B)* attempts the highly unusual, and difficult, task of presenting Woden emphatically as a heathen deity, yet not a deity.

⁹⁹ *Biblia Sacra*, ed. by Weber and others, I, 891 (*Psalmi*, 95:5). My translation.

¹⁰⁰ On the inhabitation of idols by demons in Anglo-Saxon hagiography see Philip A. Shaw, ‘Miracle as Magic: Hagiographic Sources for a Group of Norse Mythographic Motifs?’, in *Germania Latin V: Miracles and the Miraculous in Medieval Latin and Germanic Literature* (forthcoming).

4.5 Conclusion

The uses of Woden in late Anglo-Saxon literary discourse are, then, still more various than the uses of Wodan in Frankish and English circles in the seventh and eighth centuries. In part, this may reflect a relatively wide variety of socio-literary milieux in which Woden was available in Anglo-Saxon England, from the ecclesiastical and royal elites through to ecclesiastics who may have been more learned than socially prestigious. Equally, this multiplicity reflects the distance of English authors from the cult of Wodan, allowing them considerable freedom to elaborate and develop their portrayals of Woden in different directions. An interest in classical learning clearly plays a rôle in these developments as well, although not — as in an earlier period — to the exclusion of placing Woden within vernacular traditions and contexts, as, for instance, in *Maxims I(B)*.

This interest in different traditions within which to locate and understand Woden is also reflected, moreover, in the development of an interest in the Scandinavian deity Óðinn. English authors at this period understand Óðinn as being a straightforward Scandinavian equivalent for Woden. This is not entirely surprising, since, as discussed in section 2.2.3, speakers of closely-related dialects readily perform a mental translation between the phonemes of their own dialect and those of the other dialect; Old English speakers in the Danelaw would, then, quite naturally recognise Óðinn as equivalent to Woden, since the two would sound as though they were perfect cognates. As we have seen, however, we need not assume that they were straightforward cognates; our understanding of them as cognates has been shaped particularly strongly by these very English authors.

The English uses of Óðinn, however, help to develop what has been termed above a Woden-Óðinn complex. English authors consider Óðinn and Woden to be identical in origin (rightly or wrongly), but nevertheless take advantage of the existence of these alternative names as a means of presenting Woden and Óðinn as separate figures. The

complex extends beyond such a simple distinction, however, allowing the development of very different uses of Woden and Óðinn within different cultural spheres.

These English developments do not simply disappear with the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. As mentioned above, post-Conquest manuscripts include illustrations of the top layer (Woden and his sons) of some of the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies (see section 4.1, above). Woden also appears in more literary contexts, as both a deity and a figure of English antiquity in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* and the texts based on it (on which, see section 5.1, below), as well as in a more straightforwardly reprehensible guise as a heathen god in Jocelyn's *Vita Sancti Kentigerni*.¹⁰¹

In late Anglo-Saxon England we see the point of junction at which Woden and Óðinn become inextricably linked. At the same time, this is a context which proves fruitful also for the skaldic conception of Óðinn, on which much of the later Scandinavian mythography draws. This later Scandinavian mythography, furthermore, can also usefully be considered in relation to the post-Conquest uses of Woden with which it is simultaneous. From the junction of Anglo-Danish England, then, we now proceed to the literary and religious uses of Óðinn in Scandinavian cultures and societies.

¹⁰¹ *Acta Sanctorum: January*, II, ed. by Joannes Bollandus and others (Brussels: Greuse, 1863), p. 102, column 1 (chapter 6).

5. Drinking in the Past: Snorri, Saxo and the Invention of Óðinn

5.1 Introduction

It has been argued above that the cult of Wodan was relatively limited in geographical and chronological extent, and that modern scholars' understanding of this cult has been strongly shaped — and distorted — by the understandings and uses of Wodan evidenced amongst eighth-century scholars. In fact, the works of eighth-century scholars recreate Wodan as a major deity, who was then re-imagined and re-used in still more various ways, particularly in Anglo-Saxon England. Despite the *Second Merseburg Charm's* tantalising suggestion of similar traditions on the Continent, it is chiefly in England that we have evidence for Woden taking on a variety of rôles in christian literary culture (see chapter 4, above). These traditions did not wholly disappear with the Norman conquest, moreover, for Woden continues to appear in literature and iconography in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, albeit with some anti-Anglo-Saxon shifts in his portrayal.

What, then, of Óðinn? As discussed above (section 2.2.3), he need not be a direct cognate of Wodan, as has usually been assumed; indeed, even if he is a direct cognate in origin, his development on the Continent differs considerably from that in Scandinavia, as will become clear in this chapter. Late Anglo-Saxon England shows the earliest clear evidence of interchange and influence between Woden and Óðinn. As has been shown above, eighth-century authors do not clearly show knowledge of Óðinn, and were probably largely, if not wholly, ignorant of this Scandinavian deity. Outside Scandinavia, it is in late Anglo-Saxon England, and in post-Conquest England, then, that Óðinn and Woden are associated with each other. In Anglo-Saxon England, in particular, there seems to be at once a recognition of the identity of the two figures, and an attempt to portray them as distinct from

one another. After the Norman conquest, however, the identity of Woden and Óðinn does not present the same ideological problems, and both figures — now more interchangeable — take on a quality of exoticism which borrows from and makes use of the genres of legendary history and historical romance which developed through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

It is in this context, then, that we should begin to examine the literary portrayal and development of Óðinn in Scandinavia. Since the modern scholarly idea of the cult and mythology of Óðinn has been heavily informed by the mythography of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries — in particular Snorri's *Edda*, Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* and the Codex Regius manuscript of the *Poetic Edda* — it will be convenient to begin, as with the chapter on the invention of Wodan, not at the beginning, but at the end, with the late mythography. This seems doubly appropriate at this point, because the uses of Woden in post-Conquest England mentioned at the end of the previous chapter provide a strong indication of the literary contexts and influences which guided and informed the work of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century mythographers. Far from considering the earliest (eighth-century) evidence for the cult of Wodan either as a context for twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scandinavian mythography, or, worse still, in the context of Scandinavian mythography, it is precisely the twelfth- and thirteenth-century genres of legendary history and historical romance which provide the proper historical and literary context for such Scandinavian mythography of the same period.

Our mythographic inheritance from twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scandinavia is, as has been discussed above, one of the banes of scholarship relating to pre- and non-Christian Germanic religion. If we abandon the fruitless effort to understand this material as evidence for such religion, and instead consider it as evidence for how twelfth- and thirteenth-century audiences themselves understood and interpreted such religion, however, this material becomes a rich and fascinating source. Saxo Grammaticus's monumental, and often difficult, *Gesta Danorum* begins, around the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a mythographical literature which finds its culmination in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, and

which echoes on after Snorri's day in the saga-literature of Iceland.¹ Saxo, however, did not set out to write a mythographical work. The *Gesta Danorum* is first and foremost a national history of Denmark. The twelfth century saw vigorous efforts to create a new English identity by means of historical works reaching back to history so ancient that they necessarily contained much legendary material. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie*, in particular, became extremely popular in England (and, indeed, further afield, especially in Flanders, Normandy and Champagne).² Geoffrey's work was translated and versified into Latin, French and English, and was edited in Latin as well.³ England, then, possessed a very vigorous interest in writing and reading national history. Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* should be seen in this context, as an attempt to provide a national history which creates a Danish identity, as well as supporting the idea of Denmark as a nation;⁴ indeed, it is probable that

¹ The Icelandic sagas, which are outside the scope of this thesis, are the object of doctoral research by Annette Lassen, who is researching Óðinn's portrayal in this literature in the Arnamagnæan Institute at the University of Copenhagen. She outlined her proposed research and gave some preliminary conclusions in a paper entitled 'Óðinn's Faces: A Study of the Description of the God According to Age and Genre', delivered at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 9-12 July 2001.

² Julia C. Crick, *The 'Historia Regum Britannie' of Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985-1991), iv: *Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (1991), pp. 196-217.

³ The Latin verse version of the *Historia Regum Britannie*, a product of Brittany, is edited and discussed by Neil Wright: *The 'Historia Regum Britannie' of Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985-1991), v: *Gesta Regum Britannie*, ed. and trans. by Neil Wright (1991). The French verse version is Wace's *Roman de Brut*, of which a new edition and translation has recently been published: *Wace's 'Roman de Brut': A History of the British*, ed. and trans. by Judith Weiss, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999). Lazamon's *Brut* is a Middle English re-working of the *Historia Regum Britannie* which is largely dependent on Wace, but does show some direct familiarity with Geoffrey's text as well. The standard edition of the *Brut* is *Lazamon: 'Brut'*, ed. by G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie, Early English Text Society, 250 and 277 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963-1978). An edited version of the *Historia Regum Britannie* began to circulate relatively soon after Geoffrey's text was available, and is now referred to as the First Variant Version, also edited and discussed by Neil Wright: *The 'Historia Regum Britannie' of Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985-1991), ii: *The First Variant Version: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Neil Wright (1988).

⁴ Blatt suggests that Saxo's work should be seen in the context of the *Historia Regum Britannie* and similar texts (Franz Blatt, 'Saxo, en Repræsentant for det 12. Århundredes Renæssance', in *Saxostudier*, ed. by Ivan Boserup, *Opuscula Græcolatina*, 2 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 1975), pp. 11-19 (p. 13)).

Saxo, who very probably studied in France, was able to consult the *Historia Regum Britannie* in one of its French recensions.⁵

Snorri appears to have been working in a very different framework. The Codex Regius and the *Prose Edda* can both be seen as (more or less) successful attempts to synthesise the mythological information provided by verse, probably available in an oral form in Iceland at this time. Snorri's *Prose Edda* also deals with the issue of understanding skaldic verse which was, by Snorri's day, obscure, and both Snorri and the compiler of the Codex Regius provide prose explanations of the mythology of difficult Eddaic poems.⁶ The tradition of national history in which Saxo was working gave Snorri (from English historical works) Anglo-Saxon genealogical material,⁷ but Snorri's concern was primarily with mythology, viewing poetics as providing a means to the decoding (often, as we shall see, the incorrect decoding) of poetic mythological references.

Both Saxo and Snorri, however, share a historico-mythological framework which derived ultimately from Vergil's *Aeneid*, and which was popularised in the *Historia Regum Britannie*, amongst other works. This framework saw the Near East — often, but not always, Troy (Saxo, for instance, traces the Æsir to Constantinople) — as the source of western European civilisation. This idea of a link with the past, variously represented in writings from late antiquity onwards, underwent a renewed growth in importance in England and on the Continent in the high to late middle ages, and it seems clear that this idea was available in Iceland and Denmark, to Snorri and Saxo, just as it was elsewhere in Western Europe. The importance of such an idea of connection with the past also led to an antiquarian impulse, a desire for information about, and portrayals of, the cultures of the past. This impulse was expressed in many ways, particularly in the details of historical writing. Thus Geoffrey of

⁵ On Saxo's education and its French influences see Karsten Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet: Studies in the Verse Passages of the 'Gesta Danorum'*, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici*, supplementum 14 (Rome: Bretschneider, 1987), pp. 13-18.

⁶ *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), 1, 5. Hereafter referenced as *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Faulkes.

Monmouth himself makes a point of recording significant snatches of ‘Saxon’ language, such as the word ‘ciulle, quas longas naues dicimus’ (Old English *ceol*), and the phrase ‘Nime oure saxas!’, ‘take up your knives’, used by Hengest to order the murder of the British chieftains.⁸ Both these examples occur previously, in the *Historia Brittonum*, but Geoffrey does not simply repeat them; he also glosses them, thus emphasising their antiquity and linguistic interest.⁹ One particular area of interest for eleventh- to thirteenth-century antiquarians was that of the pre-Christian rituals and religious practices of the past. Here Geoffrey of Monmouth is particularly interesting, and entirely independent of previous sources, as far as we can tell. He records — again with snatches of ‘Saxon’ language — an elaborate drinking ritual performed by Hengest’s daughter Renwein:

Accedens deinde propius regi flexis genibus dixit: ‘Lauerd King, Waesseil!’ At ille, uisa facie puelle, ammiratus est tantum eius decorem et incaluit. Denique interrogauit interpretem suum quid dixerat puella et quid ei respondere debeat. Cui interpres dixit: ‘Uocauit te dominum regem et uocabulo salutationis honorauit. Quod autem respondere debes, est “Drincheil”’¹⁰

Then, approaching nearer to the king, on bended knees, she said: ‘Lord king, Wassail!’ But he, having seen the girl’s face, marvelled at her beauty exceedingly and grew hot with desire. At last he asked his interpreter what the girl had said and what he ought to say to her in response. The interpreter said to him: ‘She called you lord king and honoured you with a greeting. What you ought to say in response is “Drinkhail!”’.

This is, of course, rather reminiscent of the drink-distribution scenes of, for instance, *Beowulf*, and, as we shall see, the distribution of drink is not simply an interesting archaic practice, but more specifically a recurrent theme of the mythography of Óðinn, and, therefore, of this chapter also. Geoffrey also mentions quite a number of pre-Christian deities,

⁷ Anthony Faulkes, ‘Descent from the Gods’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 11 (1982 [for 1978-79]), 92-125 (p. 99). Faulkes discusses the availability and use of English genealogical material in Scandinavia in more detail in ‘The Genealogies and Regnal Lists’ (see section 2.3.2).

⁸ *The ‘Historia Regum Britannie’ of Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985-1991), 1: *Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*, ed. by Neil Wright (1985), p. 65 (Chapter 98) and p. 70 (Chapter 104) respectively.

⁹ See *Nennius*, ed. and trans. by Morris, pp. 67, 73 (chapters 31 and 46).

¹⁰ *The ‘Historia Regum Britannie’*, 1: *Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*, p. 67 (Chapter 100).

and his references to such deities appear to have been of special interest to some of his audience, such as the author of the First Variant Version of the *Historia Regum Britannie*, who augments and clarifies a number of Geoffrey's references to pre-Christian religion.¹¹ For instance, in chapter 98 of the *Historia*, the First Variant redactor replaces Geoffrey's deities 'qui mundum istum gubernant' ('who control this world') with deities 'quos coluerunt patres nostri' ('whom our forefathers worshipped'), thus emphasising the positioning of these deities within the past, rather than their supernatural power.¹² At the same time, this alteration also presents these deities as belonging to the redactor's (or at least to the narrative voice's), and to the audience's, own forebears; it is unusual and striking indeed, for a Latin history, composed in an Anglo-Norman milieu, to claim Saxon ancestry on the audience's behalf. Clearly, we have here a significant engagement with pre-Christian religion and its cultural and historical contexts.

This interest in the religions of the past may in part reflect the contemporary literary interest in the spread of Islam within Europe, evidenced by Geoffrey himself, as well as by the dissemination pattern of works such as the *Chanson de Roland*, which appears to have been particularly frequently copied in the thirteenth century.¹³ A literary creation of a religious other in the form of Muslims can be seen in such texts,¹⁴ which prompts authors also to question the non-Christian religions of their forefathers. At the same time, twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scandinavia possessed an extra stimulus for the examination of non-Christian religions, past and present, in the form of the Baltic crusades.¹⁵ In Denmark and

¹¹ Wright notes a number of cases (*The 'Historia Regum Britannie', II: The First Variant Version*, pp. xliv-xlv, xlvi, l-liv and lxxv).

¹² *The 'Historia Regum Britannie', I: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*, p. 65 and *The 'Historia Regum Britannie', II: The First Variant Version*, p. 88. My translations.

¹³ *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. by Cesare Segre, Documenti di Filologia, 16 (Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1971), pp. xxxvii-xlvii.

¹⁴ On such literary creations, see R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 28-33.

¹⁵ For a discussion of Peter von Dusburg's literary response, in his *Chronicon Terrae Prussiae*, to his encounter with Baltic paganisms, see Vera I. Matuzova, 'Mental Frontiers: Prussians as Seen by Peter von Dusburg', in *Crusade and Conversion on the Baltic Frontier 1150-1500*, ed. by Alan V. Murray (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 253-59.

Iceland, perhaps unsurprisingly, we find a concern with pre-Christian religion and mythology very similar to that evidenced elsewhere in Europe. Snorri brings this interest to its apotheosis in his *Prose Edda*, which attempts to rationalise heathen deities into a cosmological and mythological system which draws on both Christian and classical pagan influences (one might compare Ælfric's much earlier effort to harmonise heathen and classical pagan deities, on which see section 4.2, above). The seeds of this approach are, however, visible to some extent in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, while the Codex Regius, the main manuscript of the *Poetic Edda*, appears to be an attempt in the direction which Snorri more fully explores, providing brief prose explanations and introductions alongside the poems it records.

The sheer extent of the mythographical works of Saxo, Snorri and the Codex Regius precludes a complete examination, in the current study, of every aspect of Óðinn in these works. In any case, some motifs associated with Óðinn in these texts must remain obscure. A full-length consideration lies outside the scope of this thesis, moreover, since, as has been shown in the preceding chapters, Óðinn is substantially distinct from Wodan/Woden. This chapter will, therefore, discuss the most important aspects of Óðinn as portrayed in the works of Saxo and Snorri, and consider how these may relate to early skaldic conceptions of Óðinn, which perhaps occupy an unusual liminal position between Christianity and heathenism. This will lead back to a consideration of what can be determined about the nature, development and extent of the cult of Óðinn in Scandinavia.

5.2 *Fagnafundr Friggjar niðja*: Óðinn's Central Rôle in Skaldic Verse

Óðinn is a crucial figure in skaldic verse, and, importantly, a crucial figure in skaldic verse's self-construction as a socio-literary phenomenon. Already in the poetry of Bragi Boddason, Óðinn appears, in a *lausavísa*, in a characteristic skaldic guise — namely as the patron deity of skalds and skaldic verse:

Skáld kalla mik,
 skapsmið Viðurs,
 Gauts gjafrotuð,
 grepp óhneppan,
 Yggs ǫlbera,
 óðs skap-Móða,
 hagsmið bragar.
 Hvat er skáld nema þat?¹⁶

They call me a skald, Viðurr's fashioning-smith, Gautr's gift-getter, a prolific poet, Yggr's beer-carrier, poetry's fashioning-Móði, the skilful-smith of poetry. What is a skald if not that?

This verse is recorded by Snorri Sturluson in his *Skáldskaparmál*. Unlike most of the pieces of verse used by Snorri as examples in *Skáldskaparmál*, this piece comes with a small amount of contextualising material. Snorri recounts that 'Þetta kvað Bragi hinn gamli þá er han ók um skóg nokkvorn síð um kveld, þá stefjaði tröllkona á hann ok spurði hverr þar fór' ('Bragi the old said this when he was travelling around some forest late at night, when a troll-woman accosted him with a verse and asked who was travelling there').¹⁷ There then follows a verse in very similar form to that above, but purportedly spoken by the troll-woman, and beginning 'Tröll kalla mik' ('they call me a troll'), and ending 'Hvat er tröll nema þat?' ('what is a troll if not that?').¹⁸ This verse identifies Óðinn not by the name Óðinn, but by three by-names, Viðurr, Gautr and Yggr. The runic inscription on the skull fragment from Ribe may show the earliest evidence for the existence of by-names for Óðinn, as discussed below (section 5.6). The by-names from Ribe, **Ulfur** and High-Týr, are not, however, otherwise attested in pre-eleventh-century sources. That by-names were used by skalds from the ninth

¹⁶ *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Faulkes, I, 83 (verse 300b); see also *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, 2 vols (IA, IB, IIA, IIB) (Copenhagen and Kristiania: Nordisk Forlag, 1912-1915), IA, 5, and *Den Norsk-Islandska Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Ernst A. Kock, 2 vols (Lund: Gleerup, 1946-1949), I, 3. My translation. As Faulkes points out, Móði is a son of Þórr, rather than another by-name for Óðinn (*Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Faulkes, II, 492).

¹⁷ *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Faulkes, I, 83. My translation.

¹⁸ *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Faulkes, I, 83 (verse 300a). My translation.

century onwards, nevertheless, need hardly be doubted. A useful annotated list of by-names for Óðinn in skaldic verse is provided by de Vries, and a frequency count of ninth- and tenth-century by-names given in this list yields the following results:¹⁹

Name	Frequency
Báleygr	1
Fjǫlnir	4
Gautr	18
Grímnir	3
Hangatýr	1
Hárbarðr	1
Hóar/Hárr	6
Hroptr	7
Jálfaðr	1
Jálkr	3
Jólnir	2
Njótr	4
Ofnir	1
Rognir	7
Sváfnir	1
Sveigðir	1
Svǫlnir	5
Þriði	4
Þrór	2
Þróttr	5
Þundr	7
Viðrir	8
Viðurr	7
Vǫfuðr	2
Yggr	14
Total:	115

As the frequency count shows, Viðurr, Gautr and Yggr are simplex by-names which are common in ninth- and tenth-century skaldic verse. The list given by de Vries shows that

¹⁹ In J. de Vries, *De Skaldenkenningen met Mythologischen Inhoud*, *Nederlandsche Bijdragen op het Gebied van Germaansche Philologie en Linguistiek*, 4 (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1934), pp.

they remain quite common in later skaldic verse as well.²⁰ That they appear relatively frequently suggests that they were among the earliest by-names for Óðinn; that they are simplexes, rather than compound forms, strengthens this suggestion, since one might expect compound forms to develop later. Gautr and its cognates also seem likely to have been available as names for a legendary or mythological figure over most of the Germanic area by the ninth century, since the cognate Geat/Geot appears in Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies for Lindsey and East Anglia, and Gapt appears at the head of the genealogy of the Gothic Amal dynasty in Jordanes's *De Origine Actibusque Getarum*.²¹ The contents of this verse are, then, plausibly early, although they could perfectly well be much later, given the continuing popularity of these by-names.

Of particular interest is Bragi's use of the phrase 'Yggs ǫlbera', which we may translate as 'the beer-carrier/beer-server of Yggr'. The beer referred to need not be beer as we understand it, but certainly some sort of alcoholic drink — Christine Fell, in her examination of words denoting alcoholic drinks in Old English and Old Norse, accepts that Old Norse *ǫl* and Old English *ealu* both referred to malt-based drinks, although we should perhaps be cautious about assuming that they were always used in such a strict sense in verse.²² Yggr, as discussed above, is a by-name of Óðinn. Bragi is describing the skald as the beer-carrier of Óðinn, that is, the person who carries beer for Óðinn; since the skald transmits or carries poetry, we may understand the skald's poetry as beer for Óðinn. Essentially this sets up a metaphor in which poetry can be described as an alcoholic drink which is somehow related to Óðinn. This clearly suggests the contemporary existence of a

36-50.

²⁰ *De Skaldenkenningen*, pp. 36-50. One should note, however, that de Vries's claims — based on a statistical analysis of the kennings he lists — for a late twelfth-century revival of the use of heathen mythology in Old Norse literatures have been convincingly shown to be unfounded (Fidjestøl, pp. 270-93).

²¹ For the Anglo-Saxon genealogies see Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection', pp. 31, 34. For the Gothic genealogy see *Jordanis De Origine Actibusque Getarum*, ed. by Francesco Giunta and Antonino Grillone, *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia*, 117 (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano, 1991), p. 36 (Chapter 14).

²² Christine E. Fell, 'Old English *Beor*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 8 for 1975 (1976), 76-95 (pp. 84-89).

mythological narrative along the lines of the Mead of Poetry narrative found earlier in *Skáldskaparmál*. There are difficulties with this, however. Firstly, this single kenning can tell us little about the narrative; all it evidences is an association of Óðinn with poetry as alcoholic drink — we cannot take this as evidence that Óðinn was thought to have stolen this drink and made it available to men. Secondly, we cannot be entirely sure that the verse is genuine, or that it is correctly preserved in *Skáldskaparmál*. Kock amends ‘Yggs ǫlbera’ to ‘Yggs ǫlbrugga’, on the grounds that each line of the verse displays internal assonance (‘skal-’/‘kal-’, ‘smið’/‘Við-’, etc), except for this one; the emendation creates a similar assonance on ‘Ygg-’/‘brugg-’.²³ This is an attractive argument, and if Kock is right, then Snorri’s elaborate narrative of the Mead of Poetry episode collapses, for the brewers of the Mead in this narrative are dwarves, not the skalds themselves, who merely transmit poetry. Kock’s emendation is confirmed, moreover, by Haraldr harðráði’s verse on his *íþróttir*, in which he states: ‘Íþrottir kank átta: / Yggs fetk líð at smíða’ (‘Eight arts I know; / To brew the drink of Ygg’).²⁴ Here we have confirmation that skalds could indeed imagine themselves as the brewers of poetry, which suggests that Snorri’s narrative of supernatural brewers of poetry is perhaps rather fanciful. As we shall see, moreover, there are other, still more compelling reasons for distrusting Snorri’s reading of skaldic verse in this matter.

The manuscript variants and meter of this verse do not provide any reason to suppose that the verse has suffered in the course of its oral transmission, assuming that it has indeed undergone a lengthy process of oral transmission; these manuscript variants, moreover, suggest only the errors of a brief, if not always careful, written transmission.²⁵ This does not necessarily indicate that the verse did not survive a lengthy oral transmission prior to being written down; we simply cannot tell. The question of whether or not the verse is genuine is more problematic. As discussed above, there is nothing in the verse which necessarily dates it

²³ Ernst A. Kock, *Notationes Norrænæ: Anteckningar till Edda och Skaldediktning*, 5 vols (Lund: Gleerup and Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1923-1944), II, part 7, p. 8 (paragraph 1005C).

²⁴ *Den Norsk-Isländska Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, I, 166; translation by R. I. Page, in *Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, Memorials and Myths* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 168.

²⁵ *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, IA, 5.

to later than Bragi's time; at the same time, there is no evidence that shows irrefutably that it was composed in the ninth century. We may, of course, doubt Snorri's explanatory narrative placing the two verses as a dialogue between Bragi and a troll-woman, but this in itself is not evidence for the verses not being a genuine product of the ninth century. Acknowledging that this difficulty remains, we may profitably consider how Snorri presents the Mead of Poetry narrative, and how this may, or may not, relate to the mythological witnesses of skaldic verse.

The Mead of Poetry episode as recounted by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* is an elaborate narrative involving a fairly large cast of mythological characters. Frank has demonstrated convincingly that many of this cast are the result of Snorri misunderstanding the skaldic poetry about which he was writing; she shows, for instance, that Snorri's Kvasir need not be an otherwise unrecorded deity, but simply a word denoting the crushed fruit or pulses used in brewing (related to Danish *kvas* 'crushed fruit').²⁶ Frank suggests that many of the skaldic kennings relating to the Mead of Poetry follow a simple pattern in which poetry can be referred to as 'liquid of Óðinn (or of dwarves or giants)', and, therefore, 'that the poetry-kennings of the early skalds had as their base a single concept — that of verse as an intoxicating drink'²⁷. While both suggestions are broadly true, they give the impression that Snorri's mythographic efforts have created the entire Mead of Poetry narrative from nothing more than an extended group of metaphors. They also ignore any connection of this liquid with Óðinn in the early skaldic verse, as in Bragi's verse quoted above. This is misleading. Egill Skallagrímsson's mid-tenth-century *Sonatorrek* opens with the following stanza:²⁸

Mjök erum tregt
tungu at hrœra,

²⁶ Roberta Frank, 'Snorri and the Mead of Poetry', in *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 155-70 (pp. 159-60).

²⁷ Frank, 'Snorri and the Mead of Poetry', pp. 169-70; see also pp. 162-68.

²⁸ Jónsson, in *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, suggests 960 as a date for *Sonatorrek* (IA, 40); Vigfusson and Powell date Egill's composition of *Sonatorrek* somewhat later, to between 975 and 980 (*Corpus Poeticum Boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue*, ed. and trans. by Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), I, book 4, 276).

loptvega
ljóðpundara.
Esa vænligt
of Viðurs þýfi
né hógdrœgt
ór hugar fylgsni.²⁹

It is very hard for me to stir with my tongue the air-path of the burden of poetry. There is little hope for Viðurr's plunder, nor can it easily be drawn from the depths of my mind.

Egill here refers to poetry as 'Viðurs þýfi' ('Viðurr's [i.e. Óðinn's] plunder'), and in the next stanza he calls it the 'fagnafundr / Friggjar niðja / ár borinn / ór Jötunheimum' ('the happy discovery of the kinsman of Frigg [i.e. Óðinn], carried off from Jötunheim in the past').³⁰ Both kennings appear to reference Óðinn — once as 'Friggjar niðja' ('the kinsman of Frigg'), and once by the by-name *Viðurr* — but in fact the reading 'Friggjar' does not, according to Jónsson, appear in any of the manuscripts of *Sonatorrek*: the manuscript reading is 'þriggia'.³¹ For metrical reasons, the emendation is necessary, and, in the context, almost certainly correct. It is worth remarking, however, that the verses of *Sonatorrek* were presumably understood in the forms in which they appeared in manuscripts in the later Middle Ages, and that the relevance of this kenning to Óðinn may have been lost to some or even many readers of the time.

If *Sonatorrek* is genuine, nevertheless, these stanzas clearly indicate that a narrative involving Óðinn stealing the Mead of Poetry from giants was known in skaldic circles by at latest sometime in the second half of the tenth century.³² This interpretation is supported by

²⁹ *Den Norsk-Islandske Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, I, 21 (stanza 1). My translation.

³⁰ *Den Norsk-Islandske Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, I, 21 (stanza 2). My translation.

³¹ *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Jónsson, IA, 40.

³² The genuineness of *Sonatorrek* has been questioned (Bjarni Einarsson, 'Skáldið í Reykjaholti', in *Eyvindarbók: Festskrift til Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen 4. mai 1992*, ed. by Finn Hødnebo and others (Oslo: Institutt for nordistikk og litteraturvitenskap, 1992), pp. 34-40). Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, in his 'Religious Ideas in *Sonatorrek*' (*Saga-Book*, 25 (1999), 159-78), accepts that Egill's authorship cannot absolutely be proved, but the poem nevertheless was probably composed sometime in the second half of the tenth century. This is not an unreasonable position to take, and serves our purposes here as well as it serves those of Aðalsteinsson.

Frank's analysis of many 'poetry'-kennings as taking the form 'liquid of Óðinn/dwarves/giants' (see above); such a group of kennings could not have arisen without the existence of a myth connecting Óðinn and giants to poetry. Frank is right to claim that some kennings have been interpreted in an unjustifiably mythological light by Snorri, but this cannot be true of kennings where something is characterised by its relationship to Óðinn. In such cases, the kenning could not exist without a myth — or at least a mythological attribute — by which it could be interpreted. It simply would not make sense, for instance, to refer to poetry as 'Óðinn's ale' if there was no mythological link — however slight — between Óðinn and poetry; this would be much the same as calling the sea 'the wolf's road' rather than 'the whale's road'. Clearly, kennings do require the existence of some natural or mythological context (i.e. whales, but not wolves, travel by sea; Óðinn, but not Þórr, is somehow related to poetry) if they are to be understood by their audiences.³³

The status of such a myth is, however, more difficult to establish. The success of the kenning depended upon its audience knowing a myth with reference to which they could understand the kenning. This myth need not, however, have been a myth of central religious importance; it could have been simply an aetiology appended to a deity. Nor need it have been part of an early, native mythology; in the case of 'poetry'-kennings in skaldic verse we might reasonably suspect that the underlying myth was itself a creation of skaldic poets. We can reconstruct from *Sonatorrek* a myth in which some giants owned poetry, and Óðinn stole it from them. This presents a fairly straightforward explanation for the 'poetry' = 'liquid of Óðinn/giants' kennings. One need only assume that poetry was owned in the form of some sort of liquid in this myth.

An interesting parallel for this narrative of theft of liquid from enemies is presented by Scyld Scefing in *Beowulf*, who 'sceapena þreatum, / monegum mægþum meodoseþla ofteah'

³³ As Bjarne Fidjestøl has rightly noted, de Vries makes a similar assumption, in *De Skaldenkenningen*, of mythological context for kennings, assuming that 'a brief mention of some aspect of mythology in a kenning must presuppose a more general and widespread knowledge of the underlying myth, without which the kenning would not be comprehensible' (Fidjestøl, p. 270).

(‘took away the mead-benches from the hosts of enemies, the many races’).³⁴ In this statement, ‘ofteah’ is often interpreted simply as ‘deprived’. This gives the impression that Scyld is thought of as simply having destroyed the mead-benches, but this does not seem likely; ‘ofteah’ has a more specific implication, that Scyld carried off his enemies’ mead-benches. Mead-benches are not the same as mead, of course, but the fact that Scyld plunders his enemies’ mead-benches is sufficiently striking that it deserves our attention. It is extremely strange that the *Beowulf*-poet should choose mead-benches in this context; they hardly constitute an obvious target for plunder. It would presumably have been more financially rewarding, and not metrically problematic, if Scyld ‘monegum mægþum maðma ofteah’ (‘carried off treasures from the many races’). It seems likely, then, that the *Beowulf*-poet felt that mead-benches were not simply furniture; they had some greater significance.

In the context of *Beowulf*, this significance would appear to be related to the social rituals surrounding drinking. Wrenn and Bolton include a note for this passage stating that ‘the mead-bench is a symbol of the independence of the Germanic chieftain: to be free and respected he must have a hall from whose high bench he could distribute treasure and mead to his retainers’³⁵. This statement accepts the importance of drinking and drink-giving, but it suggests that drink and treasure are important in exactly the same ways. This need hardly be the case, however: the special emphasis on drink — and the lack of any mention of treasure — in this passage in *Beowulf* indicates that this understanding of the lord-retainer distribution rituals presented in *Beowulf* is too simplistic. An analysis of the rôle of drinking and drink-distribution in the courtly milieu depicted in *Beowulf* strongly reinforces this suggestion that activities centering on drinking are extremely important to the social fabric of these milieux; perhaps even more important than the distribution of treasure.

With this in mind, let us turn to the various vignettes presented in *Beowulf* of the socio-military drinking rituals of the heroic court. A brief analysis of the structure of one

³⁴ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 1 (lines 4-5). My translation.

³⁵ *Beowulf: With the Finnesburg Fragment*, ed. by C. L. Wrenn and W. F. Bolton, Exeter Medieval English Texts and Studies, 4th (revised) edn (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1988; repr. 1992), p. 98.

such vignette — Beowulf's first feast in Heorot — helps to establish the case for the centrality of drink-distribution. Beowulf arrives at Heorot, and is granted an audience with Hroþgar.³⁶ The audience finishes with Hroþgar instructing Beowulf 'site nu to symle' ('sit now at the feast').³⁷ We may take this as marking the opening of the feast episode. The immediate concern of the poet is with seating arrangements:

Ða wæs Geatmægum geador ætsomne
 on beorsele benc gerymed;
 þær swiðferhþe sittan eodon,
 þryðum dealle.³⁸

Then a bench was made ready for the Geatish men together in the beer-hall;
 there the courageous men went to sit, proud in their strength.

This is certainly a logical next step, but hardly a necessary one; it would be obvious enough to any audience that the Geats were provided with seating. Again, the *Beowulf*-poet appears to find something particularly significant about benches on which one sits to drink; the audience is reminded specifically that these benches are 'on beorsele'. The feast episode then progresses into the flyting between Unferð and Beowulf.³⁹ This is a lengthy, and apparently important, part of the feast episode, but it need not concern us here. With the flyting complete, a brief general description of merrymaking is provided: 'Ðær wæs hæleþa hleahtor, hlyn swynsode, / word wæron wynsume.' ('there was there the laughter of warriors, the noise grew, words were joyful').⁴⁰ At this point, Wealhþeow appears, and a passage ensues in which she distributes drink.⁴¹ This culminates with her providing drink to Beowulf, and Beowulf making a boast to accompany his reception of the cup. The passage is not solely concerned with Beowulf, however; around a third of it is devoted to Wealhþeow's distribution of drink to everyone else in the hall, starting with Hroþgar — 'þa freolic wif ful

³⁶ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, pp. 13-15, (lines 320-98).

³⁷ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 15 (line 489). My translation.

³⁸ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 19 (lines 491-94). My translation.

³⁹ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, pp. 19-23 (lines 499-610).

⁴⁰ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 23 (lines 611-12). My translation.

⁴¹ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, pp. 23-24 (lines 612-41).

gesealde / ærest East-Dena eþelwearde;’ (‘then the noble woman first gave the cup to the land-protector of the East-Danes’)⁴² — and moving on to the *duguð* and *geogoð* in turn: ‘Ymbeode þa ides Helminga / duguþe ond geogoþe dæl æghwylcne, / sincfato sealde’ (‘then the lady of the Helmings went round each section of the tried and the younger warriors, gave them the treasure-cup’).⁴³ There is a strong emphasis on social inclusivity (albeit limited to male aristocrats of greater or lesser importance) here; the *Beowulf*-poet stresses that Wealhþeow goes around ‘dæl æghwylcne’ (‘each part’) of the *duguð* and *geogoð*. At the same time, Wealhþeow clearly follows a system of social status, giving drink first to the king, and then to the more senior retainers, followed by the junior retainers, in order of social precedence. Clearly, drink distribution is to be understood as being of considerable social importance in the society depicted in *Beowulf*.

This drink-distributing passage ends when Wealhþeow goes to sit with Hroþgar (p. 24, 640-641), and the passage is then framed with another brief description of merrymaking, which leads immediately into Hroþgar’s desire to go to bed, which ends the feast, and the feast episode:

þa wæs eft swa ær	inne on healle
þryðword sprecen,	ðeod on sælum,
sigefolca sweg,	oþ þæt semninga
sunu Healfdenes	secean wolde
æfen-ræste ⁴⁴	

Then there was afterwards, as before, noble-speech spoken in the hall, the people in joys, the noise of the victory-peoples, until presently the son of Healfdene wanted to go to his evening-rest.

This framing of the drink-distribution between two cursory descriptions of merrymaking is very interesting. It highlights the *Beowulf*-poet’s special interest in the distribution of drink,

⁴² *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 24 (lines 615-16). My translation.

⁴³ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, pp. 24 (lines 620-22). On the considerable importance of the female rôle in drink-distribution in Germanic and Celtic cultures, see the detailed study by Michael J. Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 24-25 (lines 642-46). My translation.

and suggests that this interest far outweighed any interest he or she might have had in depicting feasting and merrymaking in general. The framing device also makes it clear that the drink-distribution actually interrupts the merrymaking; it is not part of the merrymaking, but a separate, privileged activity which takes precedence over merrymaking. The impression is heightened by the statement which returns the narrative from drink-distribution to merrymaking: 'Ða wæs eft swa ær [...] þryðword sprecen'⁴⁵. This strongly suggests that the drink-distribution passage is to be understood as a hiatus in the merrymaking, a time when general conversation is suspended while the solemn act of drink-distribution, with its accompanying boasts (lines 631-38) and prayers (lines 625-28), is carried out.

The maintenance of the *comitatus* in *Beowulf* depends, in part, on the proper observance of such rituals in which the leader dispenses to his retinue; clearly, the distribution of drink plays a crucial rôle, and can probably be seen, in *Beowulf*, as being just as important as treasure, if not more important; treasure is distributed in recognition of particular acts, such as killing Grendel, but the distribution of drink is an essential part of the everyday social maintenance of the *comitatus*. The removal of enemies' mead-benches, seen in this context, takes on a new significance. The mead-benches are a crucial part of the mead-dispensing ritual; seating arrangements matter in the world of *Beowulf*, as we are reminded the moment Hroþgar invites Beowulf to feast with him (see above). Scyld's plundering of his enemies' mead-benches can be seen, then, as undermining the socio-military fabric, and the networks of social obligation and exchange, of those enemy tribes; by depriving them of one of the crucial elements in the mead-dispensing ritual, Scyld reduces their ability to maintain the necessary rituals of the *comitatus*.

The same purpose could, of course, have been achieved by plundering one's enemies' mead. This may, therefore, help to explain the origins of Óðinn's theft of liquid from giants. This liquid was equated with poetry by skalds. If Óðinn was imagined as attempting to cause the breakdown of the *comitatus*-rituals of the giants, stealing their drink would be an obvious way for him to do this. In the skaldic context, moreover, poetry functioned as another of the

⁴⁵ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 24 (lines 642-43).

items necessary for lord-retainer transactions, although in this case the dispensing was generally from retainer to lord. This dual significance to Óðinn's theft suggests, then, that this myth may have arisen not only in the context of a *comitatus* or even court lifestyle, but also in the context of skaldic circles.

It is possible that an older mythological narrative underlies the form suggested in *Sonatorrek*. This older narrative might be supposed to predate the composition of skaldic verse, and to comprise a myth in which Óðinn simply steals the giants' mead. This would lack, however, the explanatory character of most early myths; it could not explain the origin of any particular institution, tribe, place-name or natural phenomenon. Nor is this the only problem with such a suggestion. The dating of *Beowulf* is an ongoing debate; what is clear, however, is that the *Beowulf*-poet's knowledge of (or desire to depict, by modern standards, accurately) Migration Age culture was limited. He or she seems to have been content to fill in many details from later Anglo-Saxon culture, as, for instance, in the case of Scyld's sea-burial; Owen noted the problem that Scyld's ship would, in all probability, have returned on the next tide, while, much more recently, Newton has archaeological reasons for doubting the authenticity of these funereal arrangements, arguing that 'mound-inhumation in ship-funeral ceremonies may have been the norm rather than the exception'⁴⁶. We should probably, then, see the *Beowulf*-poet's development of the theme of drinking as an important socio-military ritual of the court, as a reflection of practices known and understood as socially important in some contexts (although not necessarily followed), in Anglo-Saxon England. There is no reason to suppose that such practices date to the Migration Age, or to an Ur-Germanic ideal of the *comitatus* lifestyle. Fell points out that 'the strongly emotive terminology of *medu* is very closely linked with the loyalties and patterns of the heroic code, a code which looks much more to an ideal past than an actual present'⁴⁷. That drinking rituals related to *medu* are reflected in *Beowulf*— which must at least have been read or heard, and understood, around the end of tenth or beginning of the eleventh century, when the

⁴⁶ See Gale R. Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1981), p. 97; Newton, *The Origins of 'Beowulf'*, p. 47.

manuscript, London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, was written — and in skaldic verse of the tenth century, suggests that such rituals may well have been associated, at least in literary discourse, with exactly those developments of dedicated court circles with which skaldic verse seems intimately bound up (on the date of the *Beowulf*-manuscript, see section 4.4). Such court circles develop not only in Scandinavia, but also in Anglo-Scandinavian England, where a mixed court culture with elements of the older, more established English courts, as well as the Scandinavian courts with their skalds, arises. Indeed, Roberta Frank has argued convincingly for a shared tenth-century context for *Beowulf* and tenth-century skaldic verse, pointing out congruences of legendary personnel (such as Sigemund/Sigmundr, who is eclipsed by Sigurðr in later Scandinavian literature) and common specialised terminology (lofgeornost/lofgjarn, Scylding/Skjöldung).⁴⁸ In particular, she claims that Old English royal genealogies contain a common Anglo-Danish stratum of composition, probably developing sometime in the tenth century:

What little Old English and Old Norse evidence there is suggests that the Scyldings and their legends may have been an Anglo-Danish innovation. By acquiring a founder named Scyld, the West-Saxons strengthened their position in the Danelaw. By calling a Norse king Scylding, a skald confirmed his patron's English heritage. The *Beowulf* poet's incentive for composing an epic about sixth-century Scyldings may have had something to do with the fact that, by the 890s at least, Heremod, Scyld, Healfdene, and the rest, were taken to be the common ancestors both of the Anglo-Saxon royal family and of the Danish immigrants.⁴⁹

Frank sees this as evidence for dating the composition of *Beowulf* to the tenth century, and her argument is quite convincing. Although Lapidge, for one, is trying to shift the dating of the composition of *Beowulf* back into the eighth century,⁵⁰ the fact that *Beowulf*

⁴⁷ 'Beor in Old English', p. 80.

⁴⁸ Frank, 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', pp. 135 and 126-29.

⁴⁹ Frank, 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', p. 129.

⁵⁰ Michael Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 29 (2000), 5-41. Lapidge earlier argued for an eighth- to ninth-century date and West Saxon (perhaps near Malmesbury) provenance for *Beowulf*, in 'Beowulf, Aldhelm, the *Liber Monstrorum* and Wessex', *Studi Medievali*, 3rd series, 23:1 (1982), 151-92, but the place-name evidence he adduces in support of his case could equally well indicate an area of dissemination of the text rather than the area of its composition.

could represent social patterns known or desired by an eighth-century poet does not mean that the same social patterns were not known to the English in the tenth and eleventh centuries; indeed, an illustration on folio 10^v of the mid-eleventh-century Tiberius Psalter (British Library MS Cotton Tiberius C. vi) shows Christ being tempted by Satan not simply with treasure, but with a treasure characterised by several very conspicuous drinking-vessels.⁵¹ On the whole, the present author is inclined to accept Frank's view on the dating of *Beowulf*. Even if one did not accept her evidence as relevant to dating, however, her analysis of the shared context for *Beowulf* and tenth-century skaldic verse certainly confirms the identification of the drinking rituals of *Beowulf* as operating within much the same context as does the Mead of Poetry episode in early skaldic verse.

We are brought back once more to the lord-retainer circles in which skaldic verse was fostered. These circles provide the perfect situation for the development of the myth of Óðinn's theft of the poetry-liquid from the giants. They were benefiting from (and participating in) the development of a new form of highly self-reflexive poetry. This self-reflexive impulse must surely have included a desire to explain the origins of this form of poetry, and, just as divine origins are posited for the lords for whom the poetry was composed (see, for instance, the genealogy of the Háleyg jarls in *Háleygjatal*), so it would have been desirable to establish that the origins of skaldic poetry were divine.⁵² These early skaldic circles also belong to a period in which the image of Viking plundering raids loomed large in the Anglo-Scandinavian orbit; perhaps precisely the sort of raids which the *Beowulf*-poet imagined Scyld Scefing as undertaking when he 'monegum mægpum meodoseþla ofteah'⁵³.

Whitelock's claim that *Beowulf* could not have been composed in the ninth or early tenth centuries because an English audience of this period would not have wanted to hear

Storms has also recently advocated a seventh-century, East Anglian origin for the poem (G. Storms, 'How Did the *Dene* and the *Geatas* Get into *Beowulf*?', *English Studies*, 80 (1999), 46-49).

⁵¹ See C. R. Dodwell, *The Pictorial Arts of the West 800-1200*, Pelican History of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 117 (illustration 105).

⁵² For *Háleygjatal* see *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Jónsson, 1A, 68-71 and *Den Norsk-Islandske Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, 1, 37-39.

⁵³ *Beowulf*, ed. by Klaeber, p. 1, (line 5).

poems which described favourably the Danes — the very people who were terrorising them — is, then, perhaps not as strong as it might be.⁵⁴ The Anglo-Danish interchange of the period of Danish settlement in England (as opposed to raiding) provides an ideal context for the development of an idealised version of Viking raiding activity which may not have been peculiar to the Danes in England, but actually Anglo-Danish in its scope. It is, moreover, just such a cultural context which fostered skaldic verse in England, and we should hardly be surprised, therefore, to find the central skaldic myth imagined in a form which shows clear parallels with Danish raids.

5.3 *Hókon fór með heiðin goð*: External Influences and the Creation of Heathenism in Skaldic Verse

The term *heiðinn* appears relatively rarely in early skaldic verse. In verse composed by heathen poets this is exactly the situation which one might expect; ‘heathen’ was a christian coinage used to refer to non-Christians, while heathens themselves no doubt had their own ways of referring to their religious practices (which were not, in any case, geographically uniform, and would, therefore, have required different terminology in different areas). Nevertheless, the term *heiðinn* does appear in *Hákonarmál*, Eyvindr skaldaspillir’s commemorative verse for Hákon the Good (Aðalsteinsfostri), dating probably to sometime in the 960s or early 970s;⁵⁵ the final stanza of the poem talks of ‘the heathen gods’: ‘Hókon / fór með heiðin goð’ (‘Hákon departed to the heathen gods’).⁵⁶ This is symptomatic of the problematic nature of the poem as a self-consciously heathen (or rather, heathenate) memorial-poem for a christian king. A similar problem arises with *Eiríksmál*, although here

⁵⁴ Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of ‘Beowulf’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951; repr. 1967), pp. 24-25.

⁵⁵ On the date of *Hákonarmál*, see *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Jónsson, which suggests a date of 961 (IA, 64); Vigfusson and Powell in the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* prefer a later date, based on placing Hákon’s death around 970 (I, 262 (book 4)).

⁵⁶ *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, I, 37 (Stanza 21). My translation.

there is no specific self-characterisation of the poem as *heiðinn*. Vigfusson and Powell claim that ‘the poem is [...] curious as a pure heathen dirge on a baptized king, composed by order of a Christian queen’⁵⁷. This understanding of the poem as a ‘pure heathen dirge’ is the real source of Vigfusson and Powell’s puzzlement. This poem, like its later imitation, *Hákonarmál*, is not, essentially, a heathen poem, but a heathenate poem, reflecting and contextualised by a liminal heathen-christian courtly poetic milieu.

In *Hákonarmál*, then, we have a poem which depicts a christian king being received into a heathen afterlife, thus presenting itself as a heathen poem and yet giving away that it is not simply a heathen poem, both by the fact that it commemorates a Christian, and by its use of the term *heiðinn*, which reveals a poet writing from a christian point of view, seeing all non-christian Scandinavian religious expression as simply *heiðinn*. For all the deliberate lack of any christian elements in the poem, *Hákonarmál* is not simply a heathen poet’s commemorative poem, but reflects a liminal heathen-christian compositional context. We would probably be justified in seeing *Eiríksmál*, the model for *Hákonarmál*, as having been composed in a similar context.

From as early as the mid-tenth century, then, skaldic verse appears to have occupied an unusual and privileged position as a form of art which was able to bridge the divide between christian and heathen contexts. This is perhaps not especially surprising. Skaldic verse was, at this time, popular in Scandinavian royal and aristocratic contexts — it constituted, essentially, the courtly literature of Scandinavia. This was, moreover, a period of considerable Anglo-Danish contacts in the Danelaw, as well as being a period of activity in the spread of Christianity into Scandinavia itself, with the conversion of the Danes and Norwegians taking place over the course of the second half of the tenth century.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, 1, 260 (book 4).

⁵⁸ The importance of interchange within the Danelaw is discussed in relation to stone sculpture and mythology in Richard N. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London: Collins, 1980), pp. 101-42, and by John Lindow, ‘Norse Mythology and Northumbria: Methodological Notes’, in *Anglo-Scandinavian England: Norse-English Relations in the Period before the Conquest*, ed. by John D. Niles and Mark Amodio, Old English Colloquium Series, 4 (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 25-40; see also John McKinnell, ‘Norse Mythology and Northumbria: A Response’, in the

Skaldic verse of this period represents, then, both a response to Christianity and a re-creation of heathenism from a christian point of view. Naturally the skaldic deity Óðinn features heavily in the mythological system which results, since his importance in skaldic circles was well-established from the ninth century onwards, through his pivotal role in the Mead of Poetry narrative (see section 5.2, above). A well-known example of a tension between a court's christianity and the heathenism implicit in the craft of a skald is the account, in *Hallfreðar saga*, of Hallfreðr (vandræðaskáld) Óttarsson's complaint, in the form of a *lausavísa*, to his patron Óláfr Tryggvason:⁵⁹

Öll hefr ætt til hylli
 Óðins skipat ljóðum:
 algilda mank aldar
 iðju várna niðja.
 Enn trauðr — þvít vel Viðris
 vald hugnaðisk skaldi —
 legg ek á frumver Friggjar
 fjón, þvít Kristi þjónum.⁶⁰

All our race has made poems in praise of Óðinn; I remember the highly valued practice of people, my ancestors; and, reluctant, I turn my hatred on the first husband of Frigg because I serve Christ, for the rule of Óðinn pleased the poet well.

same volume, pp. 41-52. On Anglo-Danish skaldic milieu and mythology see Roberta Frank's articles, 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*' (cited above), and 'Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?', in *Anglo-Scandinavian England*, pp. 53-68; in the same volume see also John D. Niles, 'Skaldic Technique in *Brunanburh*', pp. 69-78. On the conversion of Scandinavia and Scandinavians see Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, pp. 369-416. For a convenient summary of the evidence of runic inscriptions for the progress and process of conversion in Scandinavia, see Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 147-52. Although contacts with England, and English influence, appear to have been important in the conversion of several areas in Scandinavia, DuBois argues that Snorri's narrative of the christianisation of Óláfr Tryggvason implausibly emphasises the English rôle in this christianisation over that of the East (DuBois, pp. 175-79). On the importance of English activity in the christianisation of Scandinavia, see Lesley Abrams, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 24 (1995), 213-49.

⁵⁹ For the episode in context, see *Hallfreðar Saga*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), pp. 45-50.

⁶⁰ *Den Norsk-Islandska Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, 1, 86. Translation from E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 72.

This verse may be a later invention, rather than a genuine late-tenth-century composition, but it certainly represents a plausible response to the problems of the users of a mythologically-rich poetics in social contexts whose mythological underpinnings were shifting. We may be reasonably sure, moreover, that *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* are genuine compositions of the second half of the tenth century, and it is precisely this same problem of a recontextualised poetic tradition which is reflected in these poems.

This alteration to the context of skaldic verse, however, can also be seen as fitting within a wider reshaping, under christian influence, of the mythology surrounding skaldic verse. The concept of Valhøll can be read as a late heathen response to christian eschatology and concepts of the afterlife; Christianity believes in an afterlife of pleasure for the worthy, as well as an apocalypse in which an army from heaven fights a great dragon: ‘et factum est proelium in cælo Michaël et angeli ejus præliabantur cum dracone et draco pugnabat et angeli ejus’ (‘and a battle was fought in heaven; Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought them’).⁶¹ This eschatological framework is paralleled in Valhøll, where the worthy enjoy pleasure before fighting eschatological beasts such as Fenriswolf and the world-serpent at Ragnarøk. This is not a novel position to take; Vigfusson and Powell, in an era eager to believe that Scandinavian mythology was untainted by christian influences, nevertheless accept that ‘in the Walhall system one can clearly see the effect upon the Northman of [...] the Christian religion’⁶². Later scholars have also often pointed out Valhøll as an example of syncretism with Christianity in Scandinavian heathenism:

It is clear that in many parts of Scandinavia there was a long period, in some places as much as two hundred years, in which the old and new religions overlapped. Pagan beliefs and rituals must have been affected by contact with Christianity. It is likely, for example, that the concept of Valhalla, first evidenced in the mid-tenth century, was shaped under Christian influence.⁶³

⁶¹ *Biblia Sacra*, ed. by Weber and others, II, 1893 (*Apocalypse* 12:7). My translation.

⁶² *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, cv.

⁶³ Birgit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500*, The Nordic Series, 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 104.

At the same time, one might equally view the similarities between christian and skaldic eschatology as resulting from an early christian re-creation of heathenism as possessing a mythological and cosmological scheme which mirrors that of Christianity. Klaus von See, for instance, has suggested that ‘das Sonatorrek zeigt verschiedene synkretistische Züge’, but he also sees evidence in *Sonatorrek* for literary borrowing from Old English religious lexis: ‘Die Wendung *hefja upp (í goðheim)*, “emporheben (ins Götter- oder Gottesreich)” stammt vielleicht aus angelsächsischer christlicher Dichtung (vgl. Crist 651: *He wæs upp hafæn engla fæðmum*)’.⁶⁴ The ambiguity of these two possible interpretations is characteristic of the transitional quality of tenth-century skaldic verse, and the mythological scheme which it erects around the figure of Óðinn.

In considering how skaldic verse does, or does not, attempt to create a heathen poetical and mythological response to the mythology and eschatology of Christianity, we are brought back again to the question of Snorri’s preservation and use of skaldic verse. In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri presents an overall mythological narrative which offers a heathen eschatological history which appears to combine christian and classical elements. To a large extent, however, this may reflect Snorri’s attempts to rationalise his material according to models with which he was familiar. Clearly, there is the possibility that the relatively rich mythology associated with Óðinn in skaldic circles represents in large part a response to the pressures of Christianity on late heathenism, but we must also bear in mind that Snorri’s uses of skaldic verse often attribute more complex and mythologically-rich significances to verses than they actually originally possessed. Snorri’s treatment of the Mead of Poetry narrative is one such case.

⁶⁴ Klaus von See, ‘Christliche Skaldendichtung’, in *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung: Aufsätze zur skandinavischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. by Klaus von See, Skandinavistische Arbeiten, 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1981), pp. 389-405 (p. 401) (originally published in *Studien zur christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen, 1000-1200*, ed. by Wolfgang Lange, Palaestra, 222 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958)).

Another case is his treatment of the roof of Valhöll. In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri claims ‘at Valhöll var skjöldum þökð’ (‘that Valhöll was roofed with shields’), on the basis of the following piece of skaldic verse:

Á baki létu blíkja,
barðir váru grjóti,
Sváfnis salnæfrar
seggir hyggjandi.⁶⁵

On their backs they let shine — they were bombarded with stones —
Svafnir’s [Odin’s] hall-shingles [shields], those sensible men.

Snorri attributes this verse to Þjóðólfr inn hvinverski, but scholars generally accept that it in fact belongs to Þorbjörn hornklofi’s *Haraldskvæði*.⁶⁶ According to de Vries’s list of by-names, this is the only instance of Sváfnir in skaldic verse.⁶⁷ We are therefore reliant on Snorri’s word that Sváfnir is indeed Óðinn. It is certainly possible that Sváfnir is a dwarf or giant name, but it does not seem implausible that it should be a by-name of Óðinn. The compound *salnæfrar* is of particular interest, however, for a close examination of this word suggests that Snorri may once again have over-interpreted a skaldic source. Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie gloss *næfr* as ‘the bark of the birch, used for roofing’. Many of the compounds of *næfr*, however, suggest that birch bark was used as a covering for people as well as roofs. Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie list *næfra-maðr*, ‘a nickname of an outlaw clad in n[æfr]’ and *næfra-stúka* ‘a sleeve of n[æfr]’⁶⁸. They also list the poetic phrase *bildar næfr* (‘bark of battle’ = ‘armour’ – my translation).⁶⁹ This is a logical extension of the idea that birch bark might be used as a covering for the human body. This idea might be thought to apply to

⁶⁵ *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Prologue and ‘Gylfaginning’*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1988; repr. 2000), p. 7. Hereafter referenced as *Prologue and ‘Gylfaginning’*, ed. by Faulkes. Translation from *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*, trans. by Anthony Faulkes, Everyman Classics (London: Dent, 1987), p. 78.

⁶⁶ *Prologue and ‘Gylfaginning’*, ed. by Faulkes, p. 57; *Den Norsk-Islandske Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, I, 15 (stanza 11); *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Jónsson, IA, 24.

⁶⁷ *De Skaldenkenningen*, pp. 36–50.

⁶⁸ Richard Cleasby, Gudbrand Vigfusson and William A. Craigie, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), sub *næfr*.

⁶⁹ Cleasby, Vigfusson and Craigie, sub *næfr*.

shields as well as to body armour. We might, then, interpret 'Sváfnis salnæfrar' as 'Sváfnir's hall-armour' or 'Sváfnir's hall-shields', or, more generally, as 'Sváfnir's hall-covering'.

Whichever interpretation one follows, the overall significance of the phrase must remain 'shields', or perhaps 'armour'. The various possible interpretations do, however, suggest that, even if Sváfnir is Óðinn, the poet need not have had in mind a picture of Valhøll roofed with shields. If we interpret *næfr* as 'covering', it need not be the hall which is covered; it is possible that the covering is worn by the occupants of the hall. It might perhaps make more sense to see the occupants of Valhøll as bearing shields or wearing armour, than to see the hall itself as doing so. This interpretation is supported by the claim in *Skáldskaparmál* that 'skjaldborgin er kǫlluð hǫll' ('a shield-wall is called a hall'), which suggests that a shield wall is implied in the verse from *Haraldskvæði*.⁷⁰ Snorri's depiction of Valaskjálf also appears to confirm that he has misinterpreted this verse:

Þar er enn mikill staðr er Valaskjálf heitir. Þann stað á Óðinn. Þann gerðu guðin ok þokðu skíru silfri, ok þar er Hliðskjálfín í þessum sal, þat háseti er svá heitir. Ok þá er Alfǫðr sitr í því sæti þá sér hann of allan heim.⁷¹

There is also a great place called Valaskjálf. Óðinn owns that place. The gods made it and roofed it with pure silver, and there in this hall is Hliðskjálf, the high-seat which is thus named. And when Alfǫðr [i.e. Óðinn] sits in that seat, he sees over the whole world.

The first element of the form Valaskjálf is unlikely to be *valr* ('the slain') as in Valhøll, but the evident similarity of the two names could suggest that an original form *Valskjálf ('seat of the slain'), developed a parasite-vowel to produce Valaskjálf. In this case, it would really be the same name as Valhøll; the former would be 'seat of the slain', the latter 'hall of the slain'. Snorri may, then, have been aware of what are, in fact, two alternative names for Óðinn's one hall in skaldic verse; unsurprisingly, perhaps, he misinterpreted them as referring to two distinct places. The roofing material for Valaskjálf, however, is silver not shields, suggesting that at least one of these did not appear in skaldic tradition. We might suspect, moreover,

⁷⁰ *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Faulkes, I, 67. My translation.

⁷¹ *Prologue and 'Gylfaginning'*, ed. by Faulkes, p. 20. My translation.

that Snorri has actually been influenced in his depiction of Valaskjálf by descriptions of paradise as being built from various precious metals and jewels.⁷² If this is the case, then it seems unlikely that either silver or shields were thought of as the roofing material of Óðinn's hall in skaldic tradition.

It does seem possible, however, that the idea of Valhøll arose originally as a kenning for a shield-wall. If Snorri is right that such a military formation 'er kǫlluð hǫll',⁷³ it could surely be called a hall of the slain, or a slaughter-hall. Elaboration and misunderstanding of this metaphor would then have caused the shield-wall to become an afterlife destination, presided over by Óðinn. This might, moreover, have nothing to do with an idea of Óðinn as a war-god, and much to do with the importance of poetry — Óðinn's special preserve — as a means of immortalisation; to have an afterlife is to be famous after one's death, and to be famous after one's death requires that one dies heroically in battle, and that one has a poem (e.g. *Eiríksmál*, *Hákonarmál*) composed in one's praise. Óðinn, then, would be the crucial deity in insuring the afterlife of dead heroes, and particularly of those who died in battle; this metaphorical afterlife may then have been reimagined or misunderstood as a literal afterlife (under christian influence), and Óðinn's association, in this capacity, with dead warriors could have led to his being presented as a war-god.

This view is confirmed, moreover, by the fact that highly-localised (even family-specific) afterlife destinations appear frequently in Norse mythography. As discussed above, in section 1.9, DuBois points out evidence for both centralised and local afterlife destinations, but is not prepared to suggest that one type is more likely than the other to have been the norm in pre-christian Nordic religions.⁷⁴ Nordland takes a bolder line, arguing that localised destinations were originally more prevalent in Norway, reflecting a syncretistic religious practice of Scandinavian and Finnish populations in this area, which was gradually eroded by

⁷² Compare *Revelations*, 21:10-21. For a re-use of this material in a late medieval literary context see the description of the New Jerusalem in *Pearl*, fitt 17, in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: 'Pearl', 'Cleanness', 'Patience', 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'*, ed. by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (London: Arnold, 1978), pp. 100-03.

⁷³ *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Faulkes, 1, 67.

incoming Óðinnic cult, which Nordland sees as centering on the idea of Valhǫll.⁷⁵ While the evidence is not really sufficient to support the full weight of Nordland's argument, he is right to point out that a centralised afterlife destination or destinations need hardly have been the usual or majority belief in early medieval Scandinavia; the evidence for the more localised form of eternal rest is consonant with the model of pre-Christian religion advanced in section 2.3.1, and is at least sufficient to indicate that the development of Valhǫll may well have been a more-or-less literary process not necessarily reflecting the mythological views of most heathen Scandinavians.

5.4 Ásgard and Troy: Re-inventing Óðinn as a Classical Hero

Saxo Grammaticus was a Dane of noble stock, apparently one of Bishop Absalon of Roskilde's followers, who had been well-educated.⁷⁶ Over a lengthy period spanning the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, he composed his *Gesta Danorum*, a huge history of Denmark and the Danes from the legendary past through to the present. Of particular interest here are the first nine books of the *Gesta Danorum*, which deal with Denmark's legendary kings of the distant past. These books reflect the importance of Óðinn in skaldic milieu, for just as Óðinn became the central mythological figure of the skaldic memorialisation process — which was intended for court audiences — so Saxo's history presents Óðinn as the tutelary deity or helper of the legendary Danish kings. Where skaldic verse functions through references to a body of achronous mythology which was presumably available orally to the skalds' audiences, the *Gesta Danorum* instead attempts to incorporate such mythology into a continuous historical narrative. The results are not always entirely satisfactory, as, for instance, in the case of the exile of Óðinn, which appears twice in the *Gesta Danorum* (see section 5.4.2, below). Saxo's attempt to fit mythological narratives —

⁷⁴ DuBois, pp. 74-81.

⁷⁵ Nordland, 'Valhall and Helgafell', pp. 66-99.

which were, in all probability, originally imagined as occurring outside human chronology — into a historical narrative framework naturally creates problems and inconsistencies, since mythology and historiography do not function in the same ways.

To some extent Saxo can be seen as following the historiographical trends of his time. In western Europe the large-scale national history, working from the legendary origins of a nation through to the recent past, had become very popular and important (although not for the first time, as Paulus Diaconus's *Historia Langobardorum*, for instance, shows). Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* is perhaps the most famous example, but it is not the only one by any means.⁷⁷ To some extent Saxo is following this trend. Indeed, as discussed above, the *Historia Regum Britannie* shows considerable interest in the pre-Christian deities of Britain, and Saxo can be seen as following this pattern. Saxo certainly does follow a pattern similar to other such national histories in creating for his nation an eastern mediterranean origin (just as Britain is founded by Trojans, so Denmark owes its nationhood to Óðinn, the great king from Constantinople; a different attempt to provide the same sort of tradition is made in the Prologue to the *Prose Edda*, where a Trojan origin for Óðinn is suggested).⁷⁸ Saxo's use of Óðinn, however, goes far beyond the use of non-Christian deities in the *Historia Regum Britannie*, especially in the case of Óðinn. The *Gesta Danorum*, in fact, really seems to use Óðinn, in its first nine books, as a hero. Although each of the Danish kings is a hero, Óðinn provides a unifying hero-figure who runs through these books in a way that mortal kings cannot. Saxo claims, of course, that Óðinn was a human being, following the usual euhemeristic reading of him. Yet he provides Óðinn with an implied lifespan of hundreds of years. As we shall see, Saxo's Óðinn combines the heathen mythology available to Saxo with a euhemeristic understanding of Óðinn and with classical ideas about the behaviour of deities and heroes. Saxo's composite figure, Óðinn the hero, is, moreover,

⁷⁶ Friis-Jensen, pp. 13-18.

⁷⁷ Blatt, for instance, suggests Otto of Freising's *Historia de Duabus Civitatibus*, and the *Gesta Friderici*, as contributing to this historiographical background to Saxo's work (Blatt, p. 13).

⁷⁸ On the Trojan origin in the *Prose Edda* see Faulkes, 'Descent from the Gods', pp. 110-24. *Prologue and 'Gylfaginning'*, ed. by Faulkes, pp. 4-6.

the first evidence for, and perhaps the source of, many of the peculiarities of Óðinn in later Scandinavian traditions.

One of the most crucial elements of Saxo's depiction of Óðinn is that Óðinn often appears in person to humans. The euhemeristic reading of Wodan had first arisen in the eighth century in Carolingian and English intellectual circles, and Paulus Diaconus, as we have seen, portrayed the supplications of the Vandals and the Langobards to Wodan and Frea in terms of humans talking to other humans (see section 3.2, above). Since Paulus believed Wodan to have been a real human being of the distant past, he could hardly have portrayed this exchange in any other way. Likewise, Saxo reads Óðinn as a human being who had been mistaken for a god: 'Tanto quondam errore mortalium ludificabantur ingenia' ('Men's intelligence was once made ridiculous by gullibility of this kind').⁷⁹ We should, then, perhaps not be surprised that Saxo portrays Óðinn as appearing to, and dealing with, humans in person; this is, moreover, a common classical motif, and one which, as we shall see, Saxo seems to have known from classical texts. This motif in the *Gesta Danorum*, however, does not seem to be merely an euhemeristic rationalisation of mythological narratives in which mortals appeal to Óðinn. In fact, Saxo goes far beyond mere rationalisation, of the sort carried out by Paulus Diaconus, for he portrays Óðinn as appearing in person on battlefields, for instance in his killing of Harald Hyldetan.

In Book 7 of the *Gesta Danorum*, Óðinn is stated to have disguised himself as Bruni, a confidant of Harald Hyldetan's, after Bruni had drowned in a river:

Eodem tempore Bruno quidam omnium Haraldii consiliorum unice particeps ac conscius habebatur. Huic ipse et Ringo, quociens secretiore nuncio opus habebant, mandata credere consueverant. Quem familiaritatis gradum educationis et crepundiorum consorcione adeptus fuerat. Quo fluminis cuiusdam aquis inter assiduos profectuum labores absumpto, Othinus, eius nomine et habitu subornatus, insidiosae legationis cura arctissimam regum concordiam labefactavit, tantaque inimicicias serentis fallacia fuit, ut amicicia

⁷⁹ *Saxonis Grammatici Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Alfred Holder (Strassburg: Trübner, 1886), p. 25 (book 1). Translation from *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes*, ed. by Hilda Ellis Davidson and trans. by Peter Fisher, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer; Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), 1, 26. Hereafter referenced as *The History of the Danes*.

ac necessitudine uinctis mutuuum odii rigorem ingeneraret, quod absque bello saciari non posse uideretur.⁸⁰

At that time there was a certain Bruni, whom Harald made the one close confidant of all his plans. If ever he and Ring needed to exchange messages of a more secret nature, they would commit their instructions to this man. Bruni had gained this degree of intimacy because they had been brought up together from the time they had shaken the same rattles. However, amidst the toils of his constant journeyings he was drowned in the waters of a river. Odin, assuming the disguise of his name and clothing, carried out a deceitful embassy whereby he undermined the kings' close bond and sowed such strife through his deep artifices that between those who were joined in friendliness and kinship he generated a hardened dislike, which, it seems, could not be satisfied without warfare.

This disguise is portrayed as a longstanding arrangement, for Óðinn determines the outcome of the hostilities, which he himself instigated, between Harald and Ring, not in an abstract manner as Óðinn, but by physically killing Harald, whilst disguised as Bruni:

At Bruno, nihil obsecrantis precibus motus, repente excussum curru regem arietauit in terram, ereptamque cadenti clauam in ipsius caput detorsit, proprioque eum gestamine interfecit.⁸¹

But Bruni was completely unmoved by the suppliant's prayers; he suddenly jerked the king from the chariot, dashed him to the ground, snatched his mace as he fell and, whirling it at his head, dispatched him with his own weapon.

As in Saxo's version of *Bjarkamál* (on which see below), Óðinn actually appears in battle in person, and a hero recognising him is an important feature of the narrative:

Ad quod silente Brunone, subiit regem, Othynum hunc esse, olimque familiare sibi numen impresenciarum dande uel subtrahende opis gracia uersiformi corporis habitu tegi.⁸²

When Bruni stayed silent, it entered the king's mind that here was Odin, a deity once his friend and now disguised under this change of shape in order to grant or withhold his help.

⁸⁰ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 255. Translation from *The History of the Danes*, 1, 232; 'habitu' could more plausibly, in this context, be translated as 'appearance'.

⁸¹ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 263 (book 8). Translation from *The History of the Danes*, 1, 243.

⁸² *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 263 (book 8). Translation from *The History of the Danes*, 1, 243.

This topos of recognising a god when he or she physically interferes in human affairs is common enough in later Scandinavian literature, particularly with regard to Óðinn. In sagas, as in the prose and verse Eddas, Óðinn often appears in disguise to test a hero or to herald his death. It does not, however, play any part in the skaldic verse, although Óðinn is frequently associated with battle in skaldic verse. The motif is also lacking in the earlier evidence for Wodan. This suggests that we have to look for the genesis of this motif in Scandinavian tradition only shortly before Saxo's time; in fact, it is possible — perhaps even likely — that the motif originates with Saxo or within his immediate circle. This motif may well depend upon a mediterranean pagan motif, which also occurs sometimes in early christian contexts. As noted above (section 3.2), in *Actus Apostolorum*, Paul and Barnabas are mistaken for Zeus and Hermes appearing to men physically and in person: 'turbæ autem cum vidissent quod fecerat Paulus levaverunt vocem suam lycaonice dicentes dii similes facti hominibus descenderunt ad nos' ('but when the crowds had seen what Paulus had done they raised up their voice, crying in Lycaonian, "gods disguised as mortals have come down to visit us").⁸³ This narrative can be seen as a reflex of a motif of considerable antiquity. Frequently in classical literature, even as far back as Homer, the gods appear to men in human form. These appearances occur in a variety of contexts. The feature of disguise, which is often an element of the Scandinavian motif, is also common in the classical motif. The appearance of a deity in battle is less common, but still occurs on a number of occasions in classical tradition as in Scandinavian tradition. Likewise, the appearance of a deity in classical literature — particularly when the deity appears in disguise — is often for the purpose of testing an individual, just as in Óðinn's visits to mortals in Scandinavian literature.

A particularly interesting example of Óðinn's personal appearance on the battlefield occurs in book 2 of the *Gesta Danorum*, where Saxo renders a dialogue between Biarco and Ruta in verse, giving the following rationale for the decision to use verse:

⁸³ *Biblia Sacra*, ed. by Weber and others, II, 1722 (*Actus Apostolorum*, 14:10). My translation. For a discussion of this passage see Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London: Penguin, 1988), pp. 99-101.

Hanc maxime exhortacionum seriem idcirco metrica ratione compegerim,
quod earundem sententiarum intellectus Danici cuiusdam carminis
compendio digestus a compluribus antiquitatis peritis memoriter usurpatur⁸⁴

I have particularly composed this set of admonitory speeches in metre because
the same thoughts, arranged within the compass of a Danish poem, are
recited from memory by many who are conversant with ancient deeds.

It is not entirely clear that 'Danici' here implies that this verse was in the Old Danish
language, rather than in another Scandinavian dialect.⁸⁵ What seems quite clear, however, is
that Saxo is claiming an oral tradition for the verse which he has translated. Our concern
here is particularly with the following lines, near the end of the verse passage:

[Biarco:]

Et nunc ille ubi sit, qui uulgo dicitur Othin
Armipotens, uno semper contentus oculo?
Dic michi, Ruta, precor, usquam si conspicias illum?

Ad hec Ruta:

Adde oculum propius et nostras prospice chelas,
Ante sacraturus uictrici lumina signo,
Si uis presentem tuto cognoscere Martem.

Tum Biarco:

Si potero horrendum Frigge spectare maritum,
Quantumcunque albo clypeo sit tectus, et altum
Flectat equum, Lethra nequaquam sospes abibit;
Fas est belligerum bello prosternere diuum.⁸⁶

[Biarki:]

But now, where is the one whom the people call Odin,
powerful in arms, content with a single eye?
Tell me, Ruta, is there anywhere you can spy him?

Ruta replied:

Bring your gaze nearer and look through my arm akimbo.
You must first hallow your eyes with the sign of victory

⁸⁴ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 67. Translation from *The History of the Danes*, 1, 63.

⁸⁵ See Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, p. 21.

⁸⁶ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 66. Translation from *The History of the Danes*, 1, 63.

to recognise the war-god safely face-to-face.

Then Biarki:

If I should set eyes on the fearsome husband of Frigg,
though he is protected by his white shield, and manoeuvres
his tall horse, he shall not go unhurt from Leire;
it is right to lay low the warrior god in battle.

This is an extremely odd passage. Saxo equates Óðinn with Mars, which is very much in line with his general presentation of Óðinn as a belligerent king of former times. Insofar as Saxo portrays Óðinn as a deity, indeed, he portrays him principally as associated with war; the association with poetry which characterises Óðinn in skaldic verse does not appear. Likewise, Óðinn's association with wisdom, which seems very important in Eddaic verse, as well as in later Scandinavian evidence, does not appear in the *Gesta Danorum*, except, perhaps, in Óðinn's ingenious animation of a statue of himself.⁸⁷

The oddities do not end there, however. Saxo includes a peculiar magical rigmarole which seems to involve viewing Óðinn through someone else's crooked arms. Perhaps the oddest element of this passage is Biarco's obscure vow concerning Óðinn. The meaning of this vow is not entirely clear, but it seems likely on syntactical and contextual grounds (and on the basis of the other witnesses to the *Bjarkamál* tradition; see below) that the vow is a threat to attempt to destroy Óðinn. Why this should be 'fas' in battle is not at all clear. It also seems unlikely that one would be able to destroy a deity. Even Saxo's human Óðinn can hardly have been vulnerable in battle, since he is capable of favouring Harald Hyldetan 'ut integritatis eius habitus ferro quassari non posset' ('[so] that no sword could impair his safety').⁸⁸

The difficulties with which one is faced in dealing with this passage are augmented by the nature of the text. This text is Saxo's Latin version of an earlier vernacular text. It is not clear how much older than Saxo the vernacular text is, but Saxo's own statement of the provenance of his source attributes considerable age to that source. It is difficult to tell, then,

⁸⁷ Book 1; on this episode see Shaw, 'Miracle as Magic'.

⁸⁸ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 247 (book 7). Translation in *The History of the Danes*, 1, 225.

exactly when the source was composed, and how long it remained relevant and comprehensible as a text grounded in well-known mythology. It is also unclear how well it was preserved and transmitted, particularly in its final transmission to Saxo. We cannot, moreover, be sure that Saxo understood the text perfectly. What we can be sure of is that Saxo translated his source with considerable freedom, and a strong tendency to classicize.⁸⁹

Possessing only one eye is a common Scandinavian characteristic of Óðinn, appearing in early skaldic verse (for instance Þórbjörn hornklofi's late ninth-century *Haraldskvæði* refers to him as 'eineygja / Friggjar faðmbyggvi', 'the one-eyed sharer of Frigg's embrace')⁹⁰ and throughout Norse literature from that time on. This might be thought to confirm that Saxo had a genuine Norse poetic source, although this detail appears to be very widespread and very common. Thus it may have been known to Saxo independently of the presumed source for his *Bjarkamál*. Wherever he gained the detail, however, Saxo stamps it with his classical learning, wittily connecting the rascally Óðinn, 'uno semper contentus ocello' ('always satisfied with a single eye'), with the larcenous dinner-guest described by Martial as 'uno contentum lumine' ('satisfied with a single eye').⁹¹ At the same time, it seems possible that Saxo — who translates Óðinn as Mars in the dialogue quoted above — was also influenced by two references to 'caeco Marte' ('blind Mars') in Virgil's *Aeneid*; it is just possible, in fact, that Óðinn's visual impairment in the *Gesta Danorum* rests, at least partially, on classical literature.⁹²

Heusler and Ranisch identify a *lausavísa* which occurs in *Laufáss Edda* as a fragment of a Norse *Bjarkamál* which corresponds to Biarco's threat against Óðinn.⁹³ This stanza is

⁸⁹ See Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, pp. 83-98.

⁹⁰ *Den Norsk-Islandska Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, 1, 15 (stanza 12). My translation.

⁹¹ *M. Val. Martialis Epigrammata*, ed. by W. M. Lindsay, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929; repr. 1959), book 8, no. 59, line 1. My translation.

⁹² *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. by R. A. B. Mynors, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 137 (book 2, line 335), 322 (book 9, line 518). My translation.

⁹³ *Eddica Minora: Dichtungen eddischer Art aus den Fornaldarsögur und anderen Prosawerken*, ed. by Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974

very similar to the version of Biarco's threat which appears in *Hrólfs saga kraka*,⁹⁴ suggesting that the identification of this stanza as part of a *Bjarkamál* is reasonably convincing. Both these versions appear to share a common tradition of Biarco threatening to strangle Óðinn. Perhaps Saxo suppressed this image as undignified; Friis-Jensen's argument that Saxo was attempting to present the *Bjarkamál* as a Latin epic might support this suggestion.⁹⁵ Even if Saxo's source had a different form of the threat from that which is preserved in the later Norse texts, however, it seems likely that Saxo understood and intended a threat.

The Norse versions of this scene do not, however, preserve any equivalent for Ruta's role and the technique of looking through her crooked arms in order to see Óðinn safely. The fragments contained in the prose *Edda* do not include anything corresponding to this (although, of course, the original poem could have done) while *Hrólfs saga kraka* has nothing comparable. Friis-Jensen argues that Ruta's role here is based upon the role of Venus in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*, when she reveals to Aeneas that several Olympian deities are helping to destroy Troy.⁹⁶ This argument is plausible, and again suggests that Saxo's source may have been considerably closer to the Norse *Bjarkamál* fragment than might at first appear.

What is not clear, however, is how Saxo arrived at Ruta's curious instruction to Biarco: 'Adde oculum propius et nostras prospice chelas, / Ante sacraturus uictrici lumina signo'. This apparently magical method of seeing Óðinn, or making it safe to see Óðinn, is entirely unlike Venus's method of revealing the gods in the passage of the *Aeneid* to which Friis-Jensen refers.⁹⁷ No obvious parallels suggest themselves. We may suspect that Saxo's source differed considerably from the tradition represented by *Hrólfs saga kraka* and the *Bjarkamál* fragment, but if we accept Friis-Jensen's argument that Saxo was deliberately recasting his source as a Vergilian epic, this seems less likely. The evidence that Saxo himself was the inventor of this narrative detail is perhaps reinforced by his use of the rare word

[facsimile reprint of first edition, Dortmund: Franz Wilhelm Ruhfus, 1903]), p. 32; on the manuscript witnesses for the stanza, see p. xxiv.

⁹⁴ See Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, p. 97.

⁹⁵ See Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, pp. 71-101.

⁹⁶ See Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, pp. 97-98.

chelae. Various sources for this word have been suggested. Elton and Powell suggest Vergil's *Georgics*, book 1, line 33 'where the *chelae* are the claws of the Scorpion in the Zodiac, and are in the next line called *brachia*'⁹⁸. Friis-Jensen suggests 'that Saxo, deliberately or subconsciously, has chosen the extremely rare (Greek) word for the arms at v. 281, *chelae*, on account of his interest in weighing imagery: *Chelae* is a name for the constellation *Libra*, and means 'the arms of the balance'; according to *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* the only instance of the meaning 'human arms' is in a poem in Martianus Capella'⁹⁹. According to Lewis and Short, *chelae* denotes not the arms of the balance, but the arms of the constellation Scorpio; since these extend into *Libra*, the word can be used metonymically for *Libra*.¹⁰⁰ Friis-Jensen's weighing imagery might still lie behind Saxo's use of *chelae*, since the word can refer to *Libra*, the scales. The recognition that the arms (and not just the claws) of Scorpio, the scorpion, are the arms indicated by *chelae*, however, suggests that Saxo also used the word specifically to indicate crooked arms. We may interpret the use of *chelae* in Ruta's speech as a visual cue, indicating precisely how she is holding her arms; the image of the scorpion suggests that she is to be pictured holding them curved inwards on either side of her head, as a scorpion does. The astrological flavour of the word also serves to heighten the sense that she is using a magical method to reveal Óðinn, or to protect Biarco whilst he views Óðinn.

That Saxo has created his own idiosyncratic — and highly Latinate — version of the traditional scene is also reinforced by his use of the word 'fas' in Biarco's threat. The vernacular witnesses to *Bjarkamál* do not portray Biarco's threat as based upon any sense of right, but as a threat of revenge for Óðinn's support for the opposing forces. Saxo has chosen

⁹⁷ See Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, p. 97.

⁹⁸ *The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus*, trans. by Oliver Elton and with an introduction by Frederick York Powell (London: David Nutt, 1894), p. 80 (note 1).

⁹⁹ Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, p. 213, note 280. Of course, Martianus Capella's work was of considerable importance in the twelfth-century renaissance (see, for instance, Blatt, p. 19), and was clearly known to Saxo, as Inge Skovgaard-Petersen points out in 'The Way to Byzantium: A Study in the First Three Books of Saxo's *History of Denmark*', in *Saxo Grammaticus*, ed. by Friis-Jensen, pp. 121-33 (p. 129). Friis-Jensen may be right, nevertheless, to identify an interest in weighing imagery in this line.

'fas', a word redolent of classical Roman attitudes about what is fitting and right, to translate, in all probability, a passage which deals with the imperative of revenge. In this, Saxo may express an attitude of his time; loyalty to one's lord taken to the extreme of dying with him is the theme of the *Bjarkamál*, and Saxo adds to that extreme the attempt to avenge one's lord even by attempting to kill a deity. Saxo does not, however, present these imperatives within the framework of an exchange of gifts and loyalty between lord and retainers, rather he elevates these imperatives into the grand moral duties of the classical world. In doing so, he also re-imagines Óðinn in the mould of the classical Mars, who appears in person on battlefields, and can even occasionally be wounded by mortal warriors. As noted above, Saxo even calls Óðinn Mars, despite the well-evidenced tendencies of previous classicising authors to equate Wodan or Óðinn with Mercury (see sections 3.2, 3.4 and 4.2).

It is, of course, impossible to date the composition of *Bjarkamál*, since the poem does not exist; it is a hypothetical poem based upon Saxo's translation, a few pieces of a Norse version preserved in the prose *Edda*, and the version of the story preserved in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.¹⁰¹ We have seen that the Norse versions of the story seem to belong to a single tradition, which may differ somewhat from that recorded by Saxo. If we focus on attempting to date Saxo's source, since this version of *Bjarkamál* predates all the extant versions, we have a *terminus ante quem* in our dating of the composition of the *Gesta Danorum*. This version of *Bjarkamál* cannot have been composed later than the early thirteenth century. Our only evidence for a more precise dating, however, is Saxo's statement of the poem's age (see above), and the contents of Saxo's version of the poem.

Both these forms of evidence have their problems. Even if we accept Saxo's indication that the poem is of considerable age, we need not suppose that it reached the form in which Saxo knew it until very recently, if it was orally transmitted. We have also seen that there is a strong probability that Saxo was very free with his material. Some scholars have, nevertheless, attempted to date Saxo's source on the basis of its content. Rosemary Woolf has argued that

¹⁰⁰ See Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879; repr. 1933), sub *chele*.

the specific motif of men dying with their lord in *Bjarkamál* is highly distinctive, and shared with the Old English *Battle of Maldon*.¹⁰² On this basis, Saxo's source might be supposed to date to before the composition of the *Battle of Maldon*, in the tenth century. It is not clear from this supposed parallel, however, which poem should be considered the earlier (even if one considers the parallel sufficiently convincing). Woolf argues that the ideal of men dying with their lord was not a commonplace of early Germanic heroic literature. If this is the case, perhaps we should see the *Battle of Maldon* — a very non-traditional heroic poem — as the poem in which the innovation is introduced; *Bjarkamál*, being a version of a story which seems likely to have had a long tradition, is unlikely to have introduced such an innovation. Frank's response to Woolf's article reads the *Battle of Maldon* in just this way, as an innovative poem which 'peers, not backwards through the mists to Germania, but just around the corner, to an eleventh-century Europe in which the profession of warrior was a way of achieving religious perfection and a martyr's crown'¹⁰³.

While Woolf has suggested a relatively early date for Saxo's source, Klaus von See argues that that the source should be dated to the twelfth century. In his article '*Húskarla hvøt*. Nochmals zum Alter der *Bjarkamál*' he advances arguments for his dating based upon the contents of the poem and upon the title *Húskarla hvøt*.¹⁰⁴ Such arguments based upon a title which may have been added to the poem at a later date are not particularly persuasive. Von See's arguments based upon the poem's contents are, however, potentially more convincing. He points out that Óðinn's personal appearance on the battlefield is not known in other sources before the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁵ The dialogue form of the poem he also identifies as typical of younger heroic verse, rather than earlier examples of the genre.¹⁰⁶ On

¹⁰¹ See *Fornaldar Sögur*, ed. by Jónsson, I, 98-104 (chapters 50-52).

¹⁰² Woolf, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord', 63-81.

¹⁰³ Roberta Frank, 'The Ideal of Men Dying with their Lord: Anachronism or *Nouvelle Vague*?', in *People and Places*, ed. by Wood and Lund, pp. 95-106 (p. 106).

¹⁰⁴ Klaus von See, '*Húskarla hvøt*. Nochmals zum Alter der *Bjarkamál*', in *Speculum Norroenum*, ed. by Dronke and others, pp. 421-31. Roberta Frank provides a useful summary of the debate on this point, and upholds von See's view, in 'The Ideal of Men Dying With their Lord', pp. 97-98.

¹⁰⁵ See, '*Húskarla hvøt*', p. 423.

¹⁰⁶ See, '*Húskarla hvøt*', pp. 423-24.

balance, we should probably see Saxo's source as a product of a christian court concerned with an idea of historical national identity which uses Óðinn as a symbol of a past which is heathen and yet noble, and, crucially, capable of providing exempla for the conduct of retainers. These concerns are very much the concerns of Saxo as well, but he modifies his portrait of Óðinn in accordance with what he perceives to be classical ideals, attempting to create a past for the Danes which is at once based upon Scandinavian traditions, and linked in to the Roman empire.

Von See's point that Óðinn is not portrayed in other sources before the thirteenth century as appearing in person on the battlefield can perhaps lead us to a wider conclusion than merely that the *Bjarkamál* did not significantly predate the composition of the *Gesta Danorum*. If we accept that this is a viable dating criterion — and it seems to be so — then the *Bjarkamál* is almost certainly the earliest extant example of the motif of Óðinn appearing in person on battlefields. Since Óðinn goes on to appear in person on a battlefield upon a number of other occasions in the *Gesta Danorum*, it seems likely that we are seeing the earliest stages of the development of this motif in the *Bjarkamál* and *Gesta Danorum*. Although the motif seems to have appeared first in the *Bjarkamál*, its reminiscence of classical literature, in which pagan deities frequently appear in person, particularly on battlefields (for example, in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*), would no doubt have appealed to Saxo, with his formidable Latin learning. More specifically, Saxo's description of Óðinn as *armipotens* calls to mind an occasion in the *Aeneid* when Mars, also described as *armipotens*, makes what can be read as an appearance on the battlefield: 'Hic Mars armipotens animum uirisque Latinis / addidit et stimulos acris sub pectore uertit' ('Here Mars, powerful in arms, added spirit and force to the Latins and turned around the spurred-on battle-lines beneath his chest').¹⁰⁷ It is not surprising, then, that the motif should go on to appear, now in a more clearly classical form, elsewhere in the *Gesta Danorum*, as, for instance, in book 8, when Óðinn, disguised as Bruni, kills Harald Hyldetan in person (see above). It is possible that Saxo is simply reflecting a motif which was developing during his lifetime in vernacular oral

literature concerned with the legendary past. Whether classical models may have inspired such oral literature is hard to determine, but it is certainly possible that they did. It does seem likely, however, given Saxo's fondness for the motif, that in fact the *Bjarkamál* was essentially innovative and unusual in using this motif, and that it was the *Gesta Danorum*, as much as the *Bjarkamál*, which served to popularise this idea of Óðinn appearing in person, which became so much a feature of the later Icelandic mythography. The use of this idea in *Völsunga saga*, as well as in, for instance, *Grímnismál* and *Reginismál* in the *Poetic Edda*, must also have played an important rôle in its dissemination in Iceland.¹⁰⁸

The classicising treatment of Óðinn in the *Gesta Danorum* is also evidenced in his association with the wedge troop formation, which he teaches to certain Danish kings in a manner perhaps not entirely unlike the provision of guidance to heroes by deities in classical literature. One might, however, also note that the Langobard ethnogenesis presents Frea as advising the Winnili to adopt a military tactic which could be seen as involving a troop formation (see section 3.6.2, above). The wedge formation motif found in the *Gesta Danorum*, however, probably reflects more Saxo's presentation of Óðinn as a mediterranean figure with traits, as a deity, in which he parallels Mars. In book 1 of the *Gesta Danorum*, Hading is hailed, whilst sailing past, by an old man, who gives him advice on how to draw up his troops for battle:

Quem excepturus Hadingus, dum classe Noruagiam preteriret, animaduertit in littore senem crebro amicali motu appellendi nauigii monitus afferentem. Quem, repugnantibus sociis, damnosumque profectionis diuerticulum affirmantibus, naue susceptum centuriandi exercitus auctorem habuit, in ordinanda agminum ratione curiosius attendere solitum, ut prima per dyadem phalanx, ac per tetradem secunda constaret, tertia uero octoadis adiectione

¹⁰⁷ Mynors, p. 329 (book 9, lines 717-18). My translation.

¹⁰⁸ *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, Germanische Bibliothek, vierte Reihe, Texte, 3rd edn, 2 vols (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1962-1968), 1, 58-68 (*Grímnismál*) and 172-79 (*Reginismál*; see especially p. 178). See, for instance, *Die Völsungasaga nach Bugges Text*, ed. by Wilhelm Ranisch, 2nd edn (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1908), pp. 26-28.

succresceret, semperque priorem insequens duplicitatis augmento
transcenderet.¹⁰⁹

While coasting Norway with his fleet in an effort to intercept him, Hading noticed an old man on the shore waving his mantle to and fro to indicate that he wished him to put in to land. Though his fellow-sailors grumbled that this deviation from their route would be disastrous, he took him aboard and found in him the man to supervise the disposition of his troops. He had this careful system for the arrangement of his columns: in the first row he would put two men, four in the second, then increase the third to eight, and step up each succeeding rank by doubling the numbers of the one in front.

As Fisher and Davidson note, this incident is similar in a number of details to an incident in *Reginsmál*.¹¹⁰ In *Reginsmál* stanzas 16-25, a man who calls himself Hnikarr asks to come aboard the ship of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. Once aboard the ship, he tells Sigurðr about several battle omens, and then instructs him as follows:

þeir sigr hafa, er síá kunno,
hiqrleics hvatir, eða hamalt fylkia.¹¹¹

those who know how to look properly get the victory, those who urge sword-play and know how to draw up an army or a wedge-shaped column.

The same narrative appears in chapter 17 of *Völsunga Saga*.¹¹² It seems that 'hamalt fylkia' is some sort of troop formation, although whether it is a wedge formation or not remains open to question. Hnikarr is a by-name of Óðinn, and that Óðinn is intended in the *Gesta Danorum* is confirmed by the fact that Óðinn gives Harald Hyldetan the same advice in book 7 of the *Gesta Danorum*. The episode with Hading is particularly interesting, however, because of the similarities with *Reginsmál* and *Völsunga Saga* (which probably made use of *Reginsmál*). It is not possible to say which of the two versions of the narrative has priority, since we cannot date *Reginsmál* with any certainty. Saxo's narrative is simpler than those in

¹⁰⁹ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 32. Translation from *The History of the Danes*, I, 31.

¹¹⁰ *The History of the Danes*, II, 36 (note 61).

¹¹¹ *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, ed. by Neckel and Kuhn, I, 179. Translation from *The Poetic Edda*, trans. by Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; repr. 1999), p. 155.

¹¹² *Die Völsungasaga*, ed. by Ranisch, pp. 26-28.

the Old Norse texts, but this could be either because he gives a simpler, earlier version of the narrative, or because he felt the need to simplify an unnecessarily complicated story. The latter perhaps seems less likely; Saxo adds to his sources freely, and does not seem to shrink from complicated narratives. Perhaps, then, we should assign priority to Saxo. Against this, however, one might note that Saxo's description of Hading's battle with the Biarmians (which emerges abruptly from the instructions on drawing up troops), perhaps echoes the *Reginsmál* version of the narrative, in which Hnikarr's presence on board causes a storm to abate. In Saxo's battle with the Biarmians, they attack Hading using a rainstorm, which the old man repels with one of his own. The similarity is not sufficient for a strong case, but it emphasises the difficulties involved in attempting a history of the motif.

Despite these difficulties, we should probably see the motifs as related. There seems no reason to place the origins of the motif of Óðinn advising the use of a wedge-shaped battle formation long before Saxo's time. The motif does not appear outside Scandinavia, and while the names of the formation may appear in skaldic verse, they do not seem to be associated particularly with Óðinn (beyond the natural association of battle, and therefore battle formations, with Óðinn).

While it is not possible to determine whence Saxo received this motif, the fact that he re-used it in book 7 suggests that he considered it important. Saxo deals with a number of heroes who are personally sponsored by Óðinn, such as Starkaðr and, of course, Hading and Harald Hyldetan. Hading and Harald Hyldetan are Danish royalty, and, this being the case, Saxo's interest in their military tactics need not surprise us. As the son of a courtier, with a concern for Danish royal power, Saxo was no doubt concerned that the Danish crown should be militarily effective, and naturally he reflects this concern in his historiography.¹¹³ That Óðinn should provide the knowledge of tactics does not merely reflect his importance as a character in Saxo's history, and it need not simply follow a source; Saxo places Óðinn within

¹¹³ On Saxo's position with regard to the Danish monarchy, see Friis-Jensen, who sums it up as follows: 'The discontinuance of the family tradition, Saxo argues, is not a breach of loyalty towards the King, because he continues by fighting for his king with intellectual weapons, i.e. writing his patriotic history' (p. 13).

the context of Byzantium, the capital of the Roman Empire in Saxo's day, and just as he Romanises his poetic sources into miniaturised Vergilian epics (see above), so he Romanises Óðinn. Hilda Ellis Davidson and Peter Fisher suggest that 'Saxo's interest in the wedge formation may have been strengthened by the fact that the forces of Aeneas adopt this way of fighting in book 12 of the *Aeneid*'¹¹⁴. For Saxo, then, the wedge formation was a Roman formation; although he may have had a Scandinavian source for the narrative of Óðinn teaching the formation to Hading, he certainly would have considered the formation to have been a Roman invention. The importance which Saxo attaches to this motif is, then, a reflection of a conception of Óðinn as a conduit for a Roman battle formation which links Danish history into Roman civilisation.

5.4.1 Óðinn's By-Names in the *Gesta Danorum*

The *Gesta Danorum* refers to Óðinn by two of his by-names, Hroptr (Rostarus/Rosterus) and Yggr (Uggerus).¹¹⁵ Both of these by-names are well-attested in early skaldic verse, and we need not be surprised that they were known to Saxo. What is harder to establish, however, is why Saxo used these by-names; did he use them because they were already attached to the source narratives for the episodes in which he uses them? Or did he choose to use the by-names himself, because he wanted to create some particular effect, or provide some special resonance, in these episodes? In the case of Hroptr, there is no reason to suppose that the by-name was specifically connected with the episodes in which the name appears in the *Gesta Danorum*. It is of course possible, however, that Saxo had poetic sources for these episodes, in which case the verses might well use Hroptr simply as a variation for Óðinn, without any special significance attaching to the use of that by-name in particular.

¹¹⁴ *The History of the Danes*, II, 37.

¹¹⁵ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, pp. 79 (book 3; Rosterus), 304 (book 9; Rostarus) and 158 (book 5; Uggerus).

In the case of Yggr, nevertheless, it is possible that the name relates to his function in book 5 of the *Gesta Danorum* as a prophet. Yggr appears in the name Yggdrasill, which means 'steed of Yggr' although it refers, in Snorri's mythography at least, to the world-tree.¹¹⁶ In Eddaic mythography in general, Yggdrasill appears to be connected with Óðinn's pursuit of wisdom, which might imply a connection between the by-name Yggr and the pursuit of wisdom and prophecy. That the idea of Óðinn's steed existed already in the Viking Age seems quite likely; Viking Age picture stones such as that from Tjängvide (Gotland) depict eight-legged horses which can probably be understood to be Sleipnir, although Turville-Petre has wisely urged caution in making such an interpretation.¹¹⁷ The connection of the steed with Óðinn's pursuit of wisdom and knowledge of the future, and the equation or association of the steed with the world-tree, cannot be proved to have existed at this date, however.

Some scholars would argue that the complex of narratives involving Óðinn's steed or the world-tree (or both) represents the shamanic journey, whose purpose may be to achieve wisdom or prophecy.¹¹⁸ It is very difficult to prove this, however, and Óðinn's journeys in search of wisdom in any case often bear considerable resemblances to similar journeys in mediterranean literary traditions. Thus Óðinn's ride to consult a dead seeress in *Baldrs Draumar* is very similar to journeys to Hades to consult the dead which occur in classical

¹¹⁶ *Prologue and 'Gylfaginning'*, ed. by Faulkes, p. 17.

¹¹⁷ Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, p. 57. For a photograph of the Tjängvide stone, see *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, II: *Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, ed. by Richard N. Bailey and Rosemary Cramp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), illustration 693. The present author has argued elsewhere that the motif of the eight-legged horse may have existed in contexts quite separate from Óðinn/Woden in early medieval English folklore ('Spiders, Snakes and Shamans: The Eight-Legged Horse in Anglo-Saxon Magic', conference paper delivered at *Saints and Serpents: Magic and the Natural World in Western Iconography and Literature*, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Leeds, 26 June 2002).

¹¹⁸ See, for instance, Motz, pp. 82-87. Other elements of the mythology surrounding Óðinn have also been argued to indicate shamanic practices, as in Ström's claim that the behaviour of the berserker is due to a state of shamanic ecstasy (Åke V. Ström, 'Berserker und Erzbischof: Bedeutung und Entwicklung des altnordischen Berserkerbegriffes', in *Religious Ecstasy: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Religious Ecstasy Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 26th-28th of August 1981*, ed. by Nils G. Holm (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1982), pp. 178-85).

literature from the *Odyssey* through to the *Aeneid*; an example which Saxo probably knew is Aeneas's reception of wisdom from Anchises in book 6 of the *Aeneid*. One might note in this connection that Saxo includes, in book 8 of the *Gesta Danorum*, some journeys to Biarmaland which have been thought to have been modelled in parts on Vergil's description of Aeneas's journey to the underworld.¹¹⁹ Likewise, Óðinn's visit to Vafþrúðnir, described in *Vafþrúðnismál*, in order to have a wisdom contest, bears some resemblance to the Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus traditions in Old English literature.¹²⁰ These traditions had mediterranean roots, but they have reflexes in Scandinavia as well as in England. Saxo stands in an excellent position, at the end of the twelfth-century renaissance, to act as a conduit for mediterranean motifs into Scandinavian literary discourse. Moreover, Saxo himself is known to have had a thorough classical education, by the standards of his day (which were high), and he can often be demonstrated to be classicising his material (see above).¹²¹

In addition to Yggr and Hroptr, Óðinn uses the name Vecha in book 3, when he disguises himself as a female physician in order to rape Rinda. Vecha is otherwise unknown as a by-name of Óðinn, however. According to Hilda Ellis Davidson and Peter Fisher, 'Vecha is from ON *vitki* (prophet or wizard)'¹²². This etymology should be considered as tentative. It fits well with Saxo's conception of Óðinn, however, and this fact — coupled with the lack of any other evidence for a by-name Vecha — suggests that Saxo may have invented the name. The name would perhaps be appropriate for Óðinn as presented in Eddaic mythography (but

¹¹⁹ See *History of the Danes*, II, 142. Hading's journey to the edge of the underworld in book one of the *Gesta Danorum* has also been linked with the *Aeneid* by Anker Teilgaard Laugesen in a discussion of Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, 'Gesta Danorum's Genremæssige Placering', in *Saxostudier*, pp. 20-27 (discussion pp. 27-29; see p. 28).

¹²⁰ On these traditions see *The 'Prose Solomon and Saturn' and 'Adrian and Ritheus'*, ed. by James E. Cross and Thomas D. Hill, McMaster Old English Studies and Texts, 1 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982) and *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. by Robert J. Menner, The Modern Language Association of America Monograph Series, 13 (New York: The Modern Language Association of America; London: Oxford University Press, 1941); note in particular the parallels with *Vafþrúðnismál* noted by Menner, pp. 58, 65.

¹²¹ On the high level of Danish Latinity, see Friis-Jensen, p. 14.

¹²² *The History of the Danes*, II, 57.

certainly not as he is presented in skaldic verse), and could therefore have existed before Saxo used it. The *Gesta Danorum*, however, often constitutes the earliest evidence for traits and motifs which are otherwise only associated with Óðinn in Eddaic mythography. This would, then, suggest that Saxo was pivotal in the creation of several Eddaic traditions.

5.4.2 Óðinn's Exiles in the *Gesta Danorum*

Óðinn is twice described as going into exile in the *Gesta Danorum*. In book one he goes into voluntary exile following Frigg's infidelity and her attempts to recycle his statue into jewellery.¹²³ In book three he is forced into exile by the other gods because of their disapproval of his behaviour in raping Rinda.¹²⁴ It is not that they disapprove of the rape, rather they disapprove 'quod scenicis artibus et muliebris officii suscepcione teterrimum diui nominis opprobrium edidisset' ('because, through adopting actors' tricks and women's duties he had brought the foulest of slurs on their reputation').¹²⁵ These reasons clearly relate to Óðinn's use of disguise in raping Rinda, and specifically to his use of female disguise. This use of female disguise can plausibly be identified as *seiðr*, and a Scandinavian tradition of the rape of Rinda using *seiðr* can be argued — on the basis of Kormákr Ögmundarson's reference, in his *Sigurðardrápa*, to 'Seið Yggr til Rindar' — to have existed for a considerable time before Saxo wrote his version of the story.¹²⁶

There is a clear similarity between the two exiles in the *Gesta Danorum*. In both cases, Óðinn is replaced by a magician, who flees upon his return to some part of Denmark, and is there killed by the inhabitants of the region. In book 1 the magician is Mithothyn, and in book 3 the magician is called Ollerus, apparently the name of the Scandinavian deity Ullr. Hilda Ellis Davidson and Peter Fisher argue that 'Saxo's insistence that he [Ollerus] was

¹²³ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 25.

¹²⁴ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 81.

¹²⁵ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 81. Translation from *The History of the Danes*, 1, 78.

¹²⁶ *Den Norsk-Isländska Skaldediktningen*, rev. by Kock, p. 42 (stanza 3).

called by Odin's name implies that he is referring here to the story of Mithothyn¹²⁷. This does not seem likely, however. Although Saxo clearly fits a usurper or impostor into both narratives, the different causes for the exiles clearly suggest that two different narratives are intended.

The usurper figure is a necessary character in many classical exile narratives; in the *Odyssey* the suitors usurp Odysseus's home, and attempt to usurp his wife as well, while Jason in the *Argonautika* is the prototypical victim of usurpation by a wicked uncle. A direct source need not necessarily be sought here; it is likely that Saxo, presented with the idea of exile of a figure who is to some extent a hero in the *Gesta Danorum*, would immediately have thought in terms of his replacement by a usurper. Moreover, as mentioned above, it seems likely that the narrative of the rape of Rinda depended upon a relatively longstanding tradition, and it also seems likely that this tradition included the exile of Óðinn, since this is closely linked to his use of *seiðr*. Given the existence of this tradition, it seems unlikely that Saxo would have retold the story, with a totally different impetus for the exile, in book 1.

One is left, then, with the question of the origin of the tradition of Frigg's infidelity and statue-breaking in book one.¹²⁸ I have argued elsewhere that the motif of the talking statue in this narrative is based upon late heathen traditions which developed from hagiographic motifs of animation of idols.¹²⁹ Why this motif should be associated with Frigg in this way is not entirely clear. It is interesting, however, that Frigg is presented as tricking her husband even as early as the seventh century, when the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* portrays her tricking him so that he grants victory to the Langobards rather than the Vandals, as he intended (see section 3.6.2, above).

¹²⁷ *The History of the Danes*, II, 57.

¹²⁸ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 25.

¹²⁹ Shaw, 'Miracle as Magic'.

5.4.3 Óðinn as Physician in the *Gesta Danorum*

Óðinn appears more than once as a healer in the *Gesta Danorum*. As described above, in the narrative of his rape of Rinda in book three he disguises himself as a female physician called Vecha, and finally succeeds in raping Rinda.¹³⁰ Saxo does not, however, explicitly state that Óðinn heals anyone in this episode. In book nine, in contrast, a huge old man called Rostarus cures Sivard of a wound in return for a promise that he will dedicate the souls of all those he kills in battle to him.¹³¹ Rostarus is probably Óðinn under the by-name Hroptr, since he also appears in book three, in the Rinda episode, disguised as a smith called Rosterus.¹³² The by-name Hroptr is not particularly common, but does occur several times in skaldic verse of the late tenth or early eleventh century. There is no connection of Hroptr with metal-working or healing in the skaldic verse, however. Saxo's use of the by-name need not, then, depend upon pre-existing versions of these stories, although a narrative of Óðinn's rape of Rinda may have existed already in the second half of the tenth century (see above).

This does not, however, prove that the by-name Hroptr was associated with the rape of Rinda in a version of the narrative known to Saxo. Clearly, Saxo must have known the name from some source as a by-name of Óðinn, but given the occurrences of the name in skaldic verse, we need not be surprised that Saxo had come across it. The existence of such by-names would no doubt have supported Saxo's vision of Óðinn as interfering in mortal affairs in disguise (see section 5.4, above), and would also have provided him with some ready-made names for Óðinn to use when in disguise. The female disguise which Kormákr describes as *seiðr*, however, must have existed in pre-Saxo versions of the rape of Rinda. This could also be seen as a source for Saxo's motif of Óðinn disguising himself, but it is entirely possible that the other disguises which Óðinn uses in the Rinda episode were additions made by Saxo. It is also the case that many of the other instances of Óðinn appearing in disguise in

¹³⁰ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 80.

¹³¹ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 304.

¹³² *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 79.

the *Gesta Danorum* conform to classical models (see above), while *seiðr* represents a heathen tradition whose aim is probably not disguise (although Saxo may have interpreted it as such) but the exercise of magical power by means of transvestism.

To return to Rostarus's healing of Sivard, Saxo does not provide a specific mechanism for this healing, merely stating that 'senex atrectate tabis liuorem repentino manus auxilio dispulit, subitamque uulneri cicatricem intendit' ('the old man, touching the discoloured point of infection, cleared it away with a quick manipulation of his hand and promptly stretched a scar across the wound').¹³³ The implication is clearly that Rostarus uses magic in the healing process, but there is no special magical process by which the healing is accomplished. Traditions associating Óðinn with healing are not confined to Scandinavia. Anglo-Saxon England and the continent also appear to have had traditions making this association, since Woden appears in the *Nine Herbs Charm*, healing snake-bite, and in the *Second Merseburg Charm*, healing a lamed horse (see section 4.3, above). That these are reflexes of a single tradition is possible, but perhaps not likely; Woden's rôle varies considerably, and his use in these extra-Scandinavian charms probably reflects the association of the Roman deity Mercurius with healing. The healing in Saxo is of a very different nature; here Óðinn is actually disguising himself as a physician, and curing patients in person. The description of Óðinn healing Sivard lacks any distinctive details which might suggest something about the origin of the story. Saxo probably knew the story as an oral tradition, and seems to have included it as an interesting anecdote which he did not reshape. This is, however, simply speculation.

5.5 From Skalds to Saxo and Snorri

It would be unfair to dismiss Saxo Grammaticus and Snorri Sturluson as fantasists; these were learned men, attempting to understand their own history and the pre-Christian

mythologies of their forefathers. At the same time, we should not forget that they were Europeans. Their scholarship was rooted in a European tradition of scholarship, and was fed by one of the renewals of interest in, and use of, classical literature and history which periodically well up in European cultures throughout the Middle Ages. Snorri and Saxo did attempt honestly to understand and truthfully to represent their past, but they did so through the lens of twelfth- and thirteenth-century scholarship, and the effects can clearly be discerned in their work.¹³⁴

At the same time, however, we can, with care, read past the distortions. Saxo and Snorri drink in the past with more zeal than care, but we have the opportunity to attempt — hopefully with more success than Sinfjötli — to strain out Saxo and Snorri's additions to the past, as we drink it. Appropriately enough, the case study above deals with the problem of drinking in the mythology of Óðinn, and suggests that, in at least this act of drinking in the past, Snorri provides us with some indication of the importance, in the pre-Christian past, of drinking. This insight would not be possible, nevertheless, if Snorri did not preserve skaldic verse of the pre-Christian period, for it is only through questioning the disjunctions and inconsistencies between Snorri's account and his skaldic sources that we can accurately gauge the extent and nature of Snorri's distortions.

The uses of Óðinn in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scandinavian mythography are, of course, interesting in themselves, and reveal an exuberant development of Óðinn as a figure associated with the heathen past. Just as Woden is re-used for political ends in Anglo-Saxon England, there may well be political motives behind the Icelandic uses of heathenism, and, as suggested above, behind Saxo's portrayal of Óðinn. These phenomena differ markedly from the Anglo-Saxon re-creation of Woden, in that their effectiveness relies on the status of Óðinn as a heathen deity, whereas the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies present Woden as

¹³³ *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by Holder, p. 304. Translation from *The History of the Danes*, I, 283.

¹³⁴ The classicising tendencies of Saxo's work have been noted before by Friis-Jensen, not only in her monograph on Saxo, but also in Karsten Friis-Jensen, 'The Lay of Ingellus and its Classical Models', in *Saxo Grammaticus*, ed. by Friis-Jensen, pp. 65-77. At the same time, we should not deny that Saxo

simply human. Having examined christian Scandinavian responses to Óðinn, however, and the difficult terrain of liminal and syncretistic heathen-christian contexts for Scandinavian literature, we should now turn our attention to what little non-literary evidence there is which unequivocally relates to the cult of Óðinn.

5.6 Ulfur auk uþin auk hutiur: Traces of the Cult of Óðinn

The earliest certain and datable evidence for Óðinn in Scandinavia is an eighth-century runic inscription found at Ribe in Denmark, which reads as follows:

ulfuraukupinaukhutiur | hiAlbburis | uþR |
þAIMAUIARKIAUKTUIR | kuniG [perforation] buur¹³⁵

This runic inscription appears on a more or less rectangular fragment from the top of a human skull, measuring approximately 6 by 8.5 centimetres. Moltke identifies the inscription, on the basis of the rune-forms it uses, as belonging to the period of transition from the older to the younger futhark, which he places between 650 CE and the ninth century.¹³⁶ On archaeological grounds he narrows the dating down to the eighth century, certainly no later than 800 CE.¹³⁷ Stoklund dates the fragment more precisely, on the basis of dendrochronological analysis of wooden artefacts found in the same layers of the Ribe

did use native Scandinavian sources, as Bjarni Guðnason has demonstrated in ‘The Icelandic Sources of Saxo Grammaticus’, in *Saxo Grammaticus*, ed. by Friis-Jensen, pp. 79-93.

¹³⁵ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, p. 151. In this transcription, G, H and M represent the graphs of the older futhark, while A represents the new graph in the younger futhark. See figure 2, below, for a drawing of the artefact, taken from Marie Stoklund, ‘The Ribe Cranium Inscription and the Scandinavian Transition to the Younger Reduced Futhark’, in *Frisian Runes and Neighbouring Traditions: Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Frisian Runes at the Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, 26-29 January 1994*, ed. by Tineke Looijenga and Arend Quak, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, 45 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 199-209 (p. 201).

¹³⁶ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, pp. 150-51.

¹³⁷ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, p. 347.

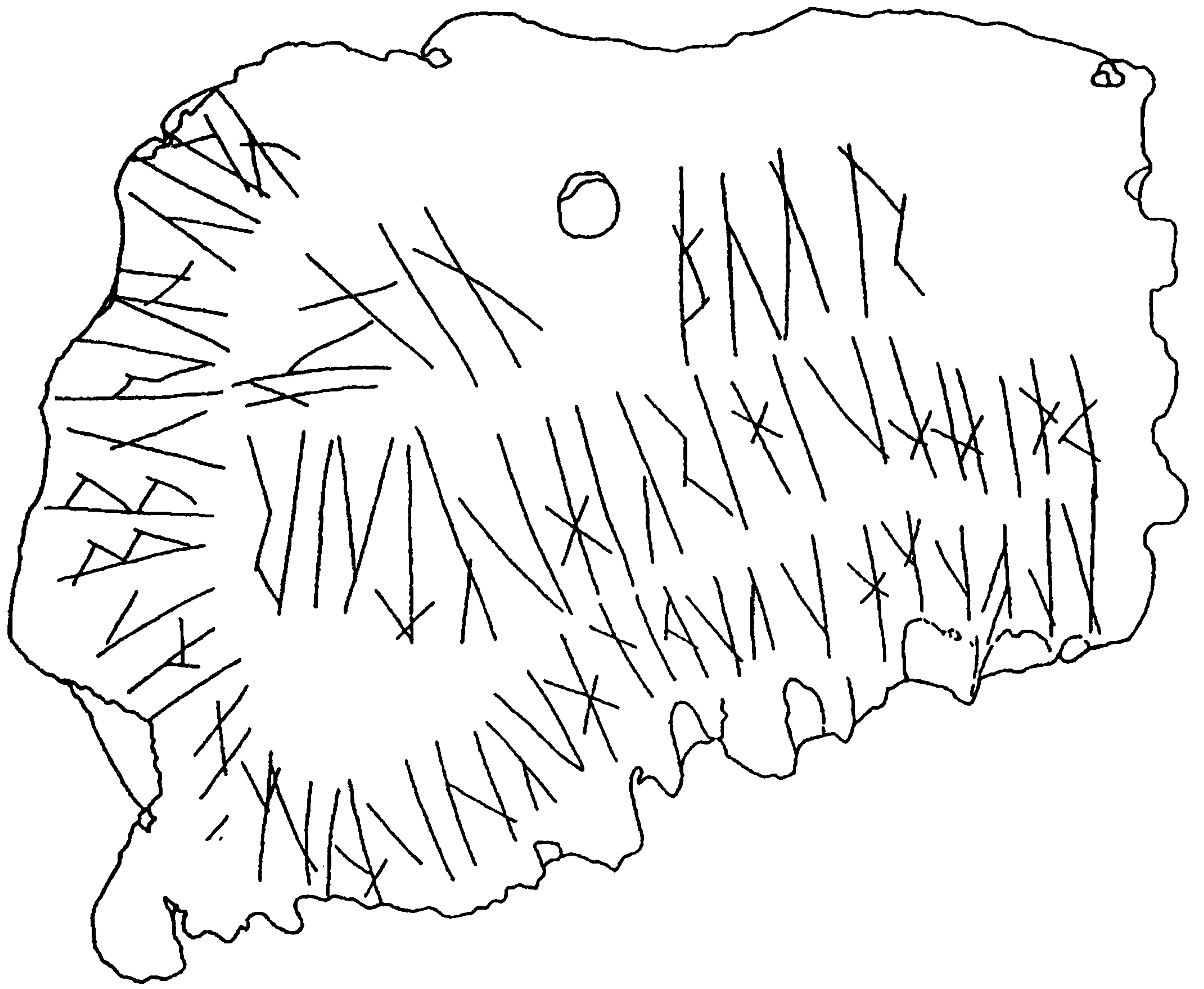


Figure 2 – Ribe skull fragment

excavations as the skull fragment, to the 720s.¹³⁸ Moltke also notes that the fragment was from '[...] an old skull the writer availed himself of — not the skull of someone just knocked on the head for the purpose'¹³⁹. To this one might add that the fragment does not appear, from the photograph given by Moltke, to have been carefully or neatly prepared for the inscription.¹⁴⁰ The serration visible in two of the edges of the fragment may result from cutting the fragment out of a more complete skull by a series of blows with a more or less round-headed instrument; without close examination of the actual fragment it is hardly possible to be certain. The other edges do not show any possible signs of working in the photograph, although again this can only be definitely confirmed by examination of the fragment itself. Moltke notes that the (clearly human-made) perforation in the fragment was made from the inside,¹⁴¹ and it appears that the inscription was made after the hole, since the inscription straddles the hole with no sign of letters having been lost. The inscription is in a species of false boustrophedon which, in the first line, follows the edge of the fragment. This strongly suggests that the inscription was produced after any cutting of the fragment (including boring the hole) was done. It is odd, then, that the primary orientation of the inscription indicates that the horizontal edge of the fragment further from the perforation is the upper edge of the fragment. It is in the nature of false boustrophedon that part of any inscription arranged in this manner must be upside down from the point of view of the reader when he or she starts reading, but it is normally not the part of the inscription at which the reader is to start reading. It seems odd, then, that here the location of the perforation would cause the first words the reader is to read to be upside down, if the fragment were hung up using the perforation. Marie Stoklund argues that the lack of signs of wear on the fragment indicate that it was never carried on a string through the perforation, and this presumably

¹³⁸ Marie Stoklund, 'The Ribe Cranium Inscription and the Scandinavian Transition to the Younger Reduced Futhark', in *Frisian Runes and Neighbouring Traditions: Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Frisian Runes at the Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, 26-29 January 1994*, ed. by Tineke Looijenga and Arend Quak, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, 45 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 199-209 (p. 199). Nielsen supports a similar dating in *The Early Runic Language*, p. 146.

¹³⁹ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, p. 346.

¹⁴⁰ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, p. 346.

could be seen to preclude other means of hanging using the perforation as well;¹⁴² one should note, however, that a lack of wear indicates not a total lack of use of the perforation in this manner, but only very little use of the perforation. The direction of the writing is, however, perfectly clear, and demonstrates that the inscription should be read as in the transcription given above.

Determining the word-breaking and basic content of the first section presents no real difficulties. It consists of three names linked by the preposition 'Auk': 'ulfur auk upin auk hutiuR'. The middle name is clearly that of Óðinn.¹⁴³ It is more difficult to determine, however, the significance of the other names. It is possible that they are both proper names referring to two other deities. Nielsen points out, however, that 'HUTIUR' is probably best understood as "Højtyr", den høje gud', a name which 'nok være et tilnavn til Odin', while 'ulfur' is probably related to the word *ulv*, 'wolf'.¹⁴⁴ He sees this animal as a symbol relating to the cult of Óðinn, and therefore gives the interpretation that 'har vi nok her igen et tilnavn til Odin'¹⁴⁵. This is quite a persuasive view. Our knowledge of the existence of by-names of Óðinn is not entirely dependent on late Old Icelandic material, since skaldic poetry (some of which is not a great deal younger than this inscription) provides evidence of their existence (see section 5.2, above). It is not implausible, then, to suggest that by-names for Óðinn existed among the Danes at this time, nor is the suggestion (insecurely) based upon literary evidence of several centuries later. This particular view would also account for the difficult sequence 'hiAlbburis', which could be divided 'hiAlbbur is' or 'hiAlb buris', the former showing an anachronistic plural form of the verb 'to help', the latter giving apparently a singular imperative form.¹⁴⁶ Were one to accept the latter reading, the fact that all three names would refer to one deity might help to account for the puzzling use of a singular imperative with three subjects. It is also possible, however, that the three names constitute a

¹⁴¹ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, p. 161 (note 3).

¹⁴² Stoklund, p. 204.

¹⁴³ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, pp. 151-52.

¹⁴⁴ Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁴⁵ Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter*, p. 54.

separate section, and that this sequence can therefore be interpreted as a noun 'hiAlb', 'help', followed by either an objective genitive 'buris', 'for Bur' (according to Moltke) or a dative and the third person singular of the verb to be, 'buri(i)s', 'there is (help) for Bur' (according to Nielsen).¹⁴⁷ The latter suggestion would appear to be supported by both photographs of the artefact published by Moltke and Nielsen, on which there appear to be two consecutive i-runes in 'buris' (ie. 'buriis').¹⁴⁸ It is not possible to be certain from the photographs, however, that the second i-rune is not a mark unrelated to the runic inscription; as Stoklund points out, moreover, the photograph given by Moltke has 'retouched runes' and is therefore problematic (based on examination of the artefact itself, she reads 'ii').¹⁴⁹

The next three words are quite straightforward: 'uiþR þAIMA uiArki', which we may preliminarily translate as 'against the pain'. At this point, Moltke states that 'the rest of the inscription must be counted as unsolved'¹⁵⁰. Nielsen, however, points out that 'þAIMA' appears to be a plural form while 'uiArki' appears to be in the singular.¹⁵¹ He therefore reads the g-rune of 'kuniG' as a badly-formed u-rune, which would then form part of another dative singular, ending in /-iu/. The sequence 'tuirkuniu' is, then, in Nielsen's view, a compound word, with the first element 'dwarf', and the second element 'sword', which he relates to the form *unnr* which is found in skaldic verse.¹⁵² Stoklund, in contrast, reads this problematic rune not as g or u, but as n, and translates the resultant 'tuirk unin' as 'the dwarf [is] conquered'.¹⁵³ The final word 'buur', which comes after the hole, Nielsen takes to be the name of the patient and carver, Bur: '*Bur*, der var en traditionsbærer, som kendte det nye 16-

¹⁴⁶ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, pp. 152-53.

¹⁴⁷ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, p. 153; Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter*, p. 54.

¹⁴⁸ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, p. 346; Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter*, p. 55.

¹⁴⁹ Stoklund, pp. 202-03.

¹⁵⁰ Moltke, *Runes and Their Origin*, p. 152.

¹⁵¹ Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter*, p. 54.

¹⁵² Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter*, p. 54.

¹⁵³ Stoklund, pp. 202 and 205.

tegnsalfabet og kunne digte vers, har lavet en amulet, som han selv har båret hængende'¹⁵⁴.

One might therefore translate the inscription as a whole along these lines:

Wolf and Odin and High-Tyr is a help for Bur against these [things: against] pain and [against] dwarf-sword¹⁵⁵. [Signed] Bur.

One need hardly accept this interpretation as definitive, but it makes good sense of the inscription and does not seem linguistically impossible; nevertheless, Stoklund's interpretation, which would replace the 'dwarf-sword' with 'the dwarf is conquered' is at least equally plausible. In either case, the indication that this text is a charm seems to be confirmed by the nature of the artefact, for it seems to be meant (whether or not it did in fact do so) to hang on something or someone, but is clearly not a decorative piece. It seems safe to say that the text may be plausibly interpreted as a charm.

This charm bears little resemblance, however, to later manuscript charms which invoke Wodan, such as the *Second Merseburg Charm* and the *Nine Herbs Charm*, both of which were at least written down later (see section 4.3, above). One might note, however, that this charm seems to be intended to be efficacious as a writing, whereas the other two are presumably intended as memory aids, the text being efficacious in being spoken, rather than in being written down. The power inherent in the text on the Ribe skull-fragment is passed on to the artefact as a whole, which then exerts this power in and of itself. The manuscript charms, in contrast, are effective only when recited; their power is realised solely through performance. The manuscript charms are longer and more complex, both involving an element of narrative as well as of magical formula. The Ribe charm, if we are to believe Nielsen, simply states that the divine person or persons are helpful to the patient against pain and 'dwarf-sword'; certainly, it seems highly unlikely that the charm has any narrative element.

The charm provides evidence of an association of Óðinn with healing, just as the other charms link Wodan/Woden with healing, but Óðinn may not here be appealed to as a

¹⁵⁴ Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter*, p. 58.

¹⁵⁵ Dwarf-sword is presumably a stitch or some similar shooting pain.

specifically healing god. The occurrences of Wodan/Woden in healing charms, are, however, more frequent than those of other Germanic deities, although the value of this evidence is mitigated by its sparseness, and this does seem to be a strictly christian development (see previous chapter). Of potentially greater interest is the use of three divine names which perhaps all refer to Óðinn. It is, of course, possible that High-Tyr is used to refer to Tyr, but the existence of a Germanic deity Ulfurr is not otherwise attested. It is certainly the simplest explanation of the etymology of the name to regard it as related to 'wolf', whether it is a by-name for Óðinn or the name of a separate deity. In either case, it is extremely interesting to find so early a connection between Óðinn and the wolf, since this connection is otherwise not known before the Old Norse literary sources. For once, it may be possible to establish clearly a relatively old tradition behind some of the Old Norse evidence, which also connects Óðinn with the wolf.¹⁵⁶

5.7 Conclusion

Safe evidence for the cult of Óðinn is, then, almost as scarce as that for the cult of Wodan. These two sets of evidence, nevertheless, present rather different pictures. Wodan appears as a deity particularly associated with the Alamanni and the Langobards, capable of granting victory in battle, and very possibly associated with special courage and ferocity in battle, but not associated with poetry or wisdom. Óðinn, on the other hand, appears in a protective, perhaps medical, function, but foremost as the skaldic deity, intimately associated with poetry. The skaldic use of Óðinn, moreover, involves a strong element of engagement with Christianity, both in terms of a mythological response to the cosmological teachings of Christianity, and in the creation of an acceptable range of uses of Óðinn, and his associated mythology, within christian contexts. This is, in a sense, similar to the uses of Woden in

¹⁵⁶ For instance, *ulfheðnar* appear first in Thórbjörn Hornklofi's late ninth-century *Haraldskvæði*; one should point out, of course, that the inspiration for *ulfheðnar* may have been the association of

Anglo-Saxon England, in that these too seek to render Woden acceptable to Christians. At the same time, however, the skaldic liminal heathen-Christian uses of Óðinn differ from Anglo-Saxon uses of Woden in seeking to draw upon Óðinn as a self-evidently religious figure, and within a rich mythological context at least partially inherited from heathenism.

It is hard, then, to see any reason to consider Wodan and Óðinn as being direct cognates. Although it is possible that they are, and that they underwent processes of widely divergent development prior to their appearance in the historical record, this does not seem likely. The lack of clear similarities between Óðinn and Wodan in their earliest appearances militates against such a view. At the same time, Wodan's earliest discernible attributes clearly connect him with an etymology from *wod ('madness, furor'), while those of Óðinn fit readily with an etymology from *woþ ('poetry'). This is consonant with an understanding of the two deities as non-cognates. There is, however, considerable evidence for literary equations of Óðinn and Wodan/Woden, which created the conditions in which the two came, by the tenth century if not before, to be portrayed similarly, and seen as being essentially the same figure. We might, furthermore, speculate that some by-names of Óðinn were formed by a similar process (in early skaldic contexts) of incorporation of locality- or group-specific deities who are now not otherwise evidenced.¹⁵⁷

The Scandinavian deity Óðinn is first evidenced in Denmark in the eighth century. How long he had existed prior to this is unclear. What is clear, however, is that Óðinn's importance in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century mythography which has attracted so much scholarly attention is largely due to his centrality to the practice of skaldic verse. In the ninth century, if not before, Óðinn came to be very closely associated with the practice of poetry, and with the functions of memorialisation which verse could fulfil within the context of a warrior aristocracy. The association of Óðinn with riddling, trickery and arcane wisdom perhaps reflects the difficulties which twelfth- and thirteenth-century authors had in

cynocephali with Wodan in his Suebic/Langobardic cult (see section 3.6.3, above).

understanding the allusive and obscure verses of the early skalds. The portrayal of Óðinn within extant early skaldic verse itself, in contrast, concentrates on his functions relating specifically to skaldic verse and its cultural milieu, giving little indication that he was viewed as particularly concerned with wisdom or arcane matters in the ninth and tenth centuries.

With the historiographical and antiquarian impulses of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, Óðinn took on new life. His prominence within the skaldic tradition, which spanned late heathen and christian culture in a more or less unbroken manner, placed him in a good position to take on a prominent rôle within the Scandinavian mythography of these centuries. Snorri took from England not the equation of Woden with Mercurius, demoting him to the level of a messenger-god, but the use of Woden as a royal ancestor, strengthening Snorri's interpretation of Óðinn as a royal deity, the king of the gods, who was in reality, in his euhemeristic reading, a human king.

The attempt to classicise Óðinn in Scandinavian mythography clearly has parallels in the classicising uses of Wodan in the eighth century, but there are also differences between these two treatments of pre-christian deities. Saxo and Snorri, crucially, have a genuine native classical tradition, in the shape of skaldic verse, from which and within which they can draw and situate their idea of Óðinn; Paulus Diaconus in the eighth century, in contrast, attempted to use Wodan to create a non-existent classical Langobard culture. Paulus focussed not on Wodan himself, so much as on the idea of a former greatness for the Langobards, which served a contemporary function. Saxo and Snorri, on the other hand, had a record of the past, in the form of skaldic verse, from which they attempted, not always successfully, to reconstruct the past, and particularly the mythology and legendary history of the past. These authors all constructed the past in one way or another, but in some cases they reconstructed it, and in some — whatever their intentions, and no matter how they perceived their enterprise — they invented it.

¹⁵⁷ Turville-Petre explains Jǫrmunr and Hroptr as possibly being the names of now-forgotten separate deities (*Scaldic Poetry*, p. xliv).

6. Conclusion: Reading and Writing Wodan

We began the discussion of previous scholarship on Wodan by remarking on his versatility. Perhaps now we are better-placed to evaluate the reasons for this. It has been shown that Wodan need not be identical with Óðinn; indeed, I have argued that Wodan and Óðinn may very well have been separate deities in origin, although they were conflated (not necessarily deliberately) by christian writers as early as the eighth century. The influence of the figure Óðinn on the uses and understandings of Wodan in the ninth to eleventh centuries, particularly in England, is another reason for the variety of guises in which Woden can appear.

The vagaries of the historical development of Wodan's and Óðinn's cults are not, however, the only factor in understanding how and why Wodan was so widely and so multifariously used and re-imagined in southern Germania. The reception and use of classical deities in Irish, Frankish and Anglo-Saxon circles created a context within which heathen deities such as Wodan could be re-used by christians as part of a learned classical heritage. Moreover, the availability of Wodan as a culted but declining deity on the Frankish periphery allowed for the development of an idea of a classical past specific to Germanic tribes. Paulus Diaconus's *Historia Langobardorum* perhaps most clearly expresses this vernacularised classicism, but the roots of this tradition are present already in Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Sancti Columbani* and in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

A slightly different form of classicism also impacted on Wodan, particularly in Anglo-Saxon England. Although he could function as a Germanic classical deity, he could also be used as an equivalent for Mercurius, and was therefore able to assume rôles proper to Mercurius, as in the *Nine Herbs Charm*. At the same time, just as Woden could be understood as an euhemerised deity capable of functioning as a figure of a Germanic classical period, so he also continued to be seen as a non-christian deity, the antithesis *par excellence* of the christian god, as in *Maxims I(B)*.

Wodan appears to have arisen as a deity of the Alamanni and Langobards in the region of the western Danube, or perhaps further north around the northern stretches of the Elbe. It is hard to date the development. The more northerly stage would be the

earlier of the two, as these tribes moved south through the Migration Age; somewhere in the third to sixth centuries CE is the only safe dating that can be given. There is no reason to suppose that the cult spread significantly from the Alamanni and Langobards to other groupings before the seventh century, and, with the conversion of these tribes to Christianity, the cult died out. This cult, like the vast majority of heathen cults, was highly localised in ethnic and geographical terms. Through Columbanus's chance encounter with a rite in Wodan's honour (or at least through the narrative of this encounter, whether the encounter itself occurred or not), and through the strange story of how the Langobards got their name, Wodan became far more important to Christians throughout southern Germania than he ever had been to the majority of their heathen ancestors.

Óðinn, in contrast, appears to have followed a very different trajectory. Our first evidence for Óðinn dates to the eighth century, and we can have no certain dating for his origin, although the eighth century itself is perhaps not implausible, if Óðinn was in origin the tutelary deity of skaldic verse. All we can be certain of is that he is first evidenced in the eighth century, and then accrues higher and higher densities of evidence through the ninth and tenth centuries. Much of this evidence is skaldic verse, and it seems to show a deity who is specifically the tutelary deity of skalds and their verse. Perhaps Óðinn had existed for a long time prior to this, and was simply co-opted by the skalds for their own purposes; this is possible, but perhaps not plausible, for early skaldic verse gives little indication of extra-poetical functions for Óðinn, and the coincidence of the development of skaldic verse with the early evidence for Óðinn is at least suggestive of a contemporaneous and interdependent development of both skaldic verse and Óðinn himself. At any rate, Óðinn was, as far as our evidence allows, the patron deity of skaldic verse in the ninth and tenth centuries CE. No doubt his name was understood in early skaldic circles as referring to poetry. His cult does not seem to have undergone the same process of destruction and re-imagination which affected that of Wodan. On the contrary, although the cult of Óðinn seems to have existed largely within skaldic circles which were, naturally, aristocratic or royal, and therefore most exposed to missionary efforts, the cult of Óðinn appears in many ways to have functioned as a response to Christianity.

Ultimately, the cult of Óðinn gave way to that of Christ, but the skaldic cult seems for a while to have offered a plausible alternative to Christianity.

The continuing use of skaldic verse in christian contexts entailed a continuing use of Óðinn in such contexts. In some ways this mirrors the Germanic classicism of the eighth-century uses of Wodan; certainly, Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* presents skaldic verse and skaldic mythology very much as a species of vernacular classical heritage, just as Saxo's elaboration of vernacular verse in translation places this verse within Roman classical traditions. The continuing composition of skaldic verse at christian courts, however, possibly ought not to be seen as a scholarly exercise or a form of classicism; here we see skaldic verse being used as part of a living tradition of courtly discourse. In this context, the heathen mythology of the verses was gradually lost and replaced by christian elements. The importance of Óðinn in skaldic cosmography did not vanish overnight, nevertheless, as one sees in *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, both composed as postmortem praise-poetry for christian kings, and both portraying those kings as journeying to an afterlife in Valhöll.

In Anglo-Saxon England, above all, the rich conjunction of English and Danish cultures — and particularly the conjunction of Woden and Óðinn — created a climate in which both deities (and, indeed, the Roman deity Mercurius) could be equated and could influence each other. This has tended to give modern scholars the impression that Woden and Óðinn shared a common origin, when they need not have done so. They did, however, influence each other heavily in christian thought and literature, and they certainly underwent conflation the one with the other in Anglo-Saxon England. At the same time, one must recognise that they were not always conflated or equated in Anglo-Danish spheres; in some circles there appear to have been attempts to depict the two figures as distinct from each other, probably for political reasons.

The picture that emerges of the developments and uses of Wodan (and Óðinn) in the Middle Ages is, then, a complex one. Although our understanding of the cult of Wodan, or of any other heathen deity, is necessarily skewed by the limitations of our evidence, we can go some way towards reconstructing the historical outlines of the cult. This reconstruction itself suggests that Wodan was already in the eighth century CE the beneficiary of historical misprision based on skewed evidence. The importance of Óðinn,

however, seems more grounded in his considerable status within skaldic discourse. The ways in which these two cult figures are adopted, re-used and re-imagined by christian writers and artists is, ultimately, not only better-evidenced than their cults, but also, I would suggest, of greater interest.

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Arrangement of the Bibliography

This bibliography is not arranged according to the customary division of primary and secondary materials. Since the sources used include texts preserved in manuscripts and also artefacts (both with and without textual inscriptions), it has been felt desirable to provide separate sections for the former ('Manuscript Sources') and the latter ('Artefacts'). The section entitled 'Artefacts' is intended to list only materials which function primarily as editions of the artefacts in question; materials which do not fall within this category appear in 'Studies', with the other secondary materials.

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