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‘[...]f Sueins .k.’: *Glælognskviða* and Its Contexts

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Pórarinn loftunga’s *Glælognskviða* (Sea-Calm Poem) was first performed in the early 1030s, some time between its subject, Óláfr Haraldsson’s, translation on 3 August 1031 and its addressee, Sveinn Álfifuson’s, hasty departure from Norway in 1034/5 (Magerøy, 1948: 43-4). Its nine verses are recorded in manuscripts of Snorri’s *Óláfs saga helga* (cf. Louis-Jensen, 1997, on these manuscripts and their interrelationships), where v. 1 is introduced as follows: *Pess getr Pórarinn loftunga í kvæði því, er hann orti um Svein Álfifuson, er kallat er Glælognskviða* (“Pórarinn loftunga tells of this in the poem which he composed for/about Sveinn Álfifuson, which is called *Glælognskviða*”).

This passage occurs near the top of fol. 1v of AM 47 fol, *Eirspennill*, written in Iceland in the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Although parts of the leaf are missing, the rubric is still partly visible: [...]f Sueins .k. This is the only medieval manuscript to preserve this wording. With missing letters supplied from the Kringla transcript (AM 35 fol, c. 1675-1700), it reads *[Upphaf]f Sveins konungs* (“beginning [of the saga] of King Sveinn”). In this branch of the transmission, then, *Óláfs saga helga* is interrupted by a saga of the Dane Sveinn Álfifuson, son of Knútr inn ríki and much-disliked ruler of Norway 1030-1034/5. The majority of *Óláfs saga helga* manuscripts do not go so far. There Sveinn’s name often receives a large decorated initial, as it does here, but the key word *Upphaf* is absent, relegating Sveinn from saga protagonist to a blip in the royal line from Óláfr Haraldsson to his son Magnús Ólafsson. But the unfortunate Sveinn not only ruled Norway under the shadow of his sainted predecessor; his only named skald composed a poem that is, although *um Svein Álfifuson*, about St Óláfr.

This context goes some way towards explaining Pórarinn’s surprising choice of the meter *kviðuhátr* (disputed; perhaps ‘poem’s meter’) for *Glælognskviða*. *Kviðuhátr*, a catalectic variant of *fornyrðislag*, is the meter of 14% of the lines in the encomiastic corpus.¹ And it was the skaldic medium of choice for praising one’s addressee by means of a poem about other people altogether, usually dead ones.² As Kari Gade has shown (2005), the metrical and syntactical constraints imposed by the brevity of this meter’s odd lines gave *kviðuhátr* verses their characteristic shape, that of a concatenated series of subordinate clauses with copious nominal variation.

¹ I am grateful to Tarrin Wills for this information.

² *Erfikvæði* in *dróttkvætt* address the immediate descendants, usually the sons or brothers, of the dead man. The usual explanation for Pórarinn’s choice of *kviðuhátr* is that its simplicity made the poem comprehensible to his young, English-speaking patron (Lindow, 2008: 112; Townend, 2005: 257).

vit setr til rik aymar i ronung en par. sige komur til hanis oðsind
ing knute kog pôðr hîs at hî skylde para sôðan inoðraka yð riku þur
til forða er inðe yar z hapa þar in; kog naðr yf noð. Sôðan poi súenjul
danníkar z hafde sôðan lôð muk, poi med hîm haralde. I z mart anarka in ri
kum þes geit þorarin loptungia i kirkde þer hîc um sôða af. Þer kallað er glælogns kunda. Þa ua
dillanist hue danner godo dygja pre in; dægði. þar yar jarl syrt at ophafri z hóð in er hîm
þyldre aðan drengi aðenr bæt. Sôðan poi sôði uðr z in; hîm alzga mðr hîs z yð hart kogre
kun a hîno logþgi hî v þa komun aðstani i vikina er ora yð skálastadom. Olafur kog pell
svei leti eði perðomr ryr en hî kom ið hauðs mðr i hund heit hîs yð þar til kog tekn sem i að
rô stafðum. Sv kog hafde ny log ið um marga hûnre z yð ept þeit sem log ið dannink
en sunn mycklo prekari. Engi mðr skylldi af. Þi para nema in; kog leypu en of. færa þa
felli ynd kog eignur hîs en hóð er manu yargi skylldi hapa ríri vegit. Þeit lausum eyri. Þeit
mðr yarð i utlengd z tænder ar yar hîm þa eignade kog arr. þan at sôlum skylldi hóð bon
di ja kog mæli mæltz af armi hueriðz lar af vira brevetom hî v kallað ymer raddi z sp
aði smoei z hinsreyja hîv rygnar to þeit var sin oreint sva unkit ar spent pengi um mefta
ring z lengsta. Bonde y skylldi at gora hîs þar aðl er kog yldi hapa at buhöðum sîmon
hî in skylldi gaea en lôð þemavz gaea fþær er v neð gamall yðr z þeit homloz eiga hîm
in era haf ræi skylldi giallda kog lôðuðu huðan sem hîrxi en hîero. v. ylkar. Skip hîr
er færi af. Þi beyt skylldi lâða kog rum. um puer skip made hîr er til illde færi sk
yldi danskar in hapa sva mikil metod mðr at enis þenka yriti skylldi rinda y neððin
yriti. En er þesi laga setting yar birt f alþyðu þa toku in þeg at veila huggi sîna up in
er z godo kirk sîm i milli mîto þua er z heþði vîr i mortextom yð olaf kog raku hînu
in þeind vîmatu z log ar karyðgum þes er þeit dæt vîd olaf kog z feldur hî. Þeit yðr
hend fríðe z rettar bæt en nu hafur þanad z þraðkan z þi m. for glæpi z mîðengskap. En
þeit að gott til mortadis la þa allir at ubehillige yar um ræðe baro in þo eðr trustil at
gora uppreist morti. Sv kog bar þi með til at meni hóðu gisslada knuti hî sono sîna
aða naðrande z þi in; at þa war effigí positioni til upprestar. Brat hóðu in amel
til. Sv kog mikat z kendo in mæst alþrîði allt hî er innot skapi þorti en þa vader san
V. En þan hóðu til ræða. ~~þeit~~ mæli af manngu inm til Olafur kog.
af manngu inm. Þi körar Olafur kör uðri mæð sândheilage ok. rætagmîr mar
gar yðri at helgi hî hóðu þa mang a heit til Olafur kog um þa laci er isti þorti skip
ta mæli pengu marg in af þeit aðerum bæt sunn heilfe bæt en sunn þum beina eða
aða. laci er nodsyn þorti til bæm

Along with (and to some extent determined by) this catenulate structure go commonalities in subject-matter and diction that arguably originate in a particular performance setting and social context, namely, the aristocratic funeral: so much so, I would suggest, that we are justified in seeing this poetry as a key medium of funeral memoria.³

Þjóðólfur of Hvin's ninth-century composition *Ynglingatal* (*Yt*) provided the template, as far as we can tell. Its final verse reveals that it was composed for Rognvaldr heiðumhæri, but it is *about* 28 notoriously deceased rulers, whose relationship to Rognvaldr is unclear. The *Háleygjatal* (*Hál*) of Eyvindr skáldaspillir ('skalds' de-spoiler'), composed in the late tenth century for Hákon jarl Sigurðarson, reckons its patron's lineage back to Óðinn and Skaði and takes the *kviðuhátr* memorial in the genealogical direction implied, but nowhere stated, in *Ynglingatal*. This pattern of imitating and outdoing, seen also in Eyvindr's *Hákonarmál* vis-à-vis the anonymous *Eiríksmál*, is likely to be the origin of Eyvindr's wry nickname. Finally Egill Skalla-Grímsson, in his *Sonatorrek* (*St*) and *Poem for Arinbjörn* (*Arbj*), gives the form a characteristic spin, praising his sons and his friend Arinbjörn in poems that are primarily about the poet himself and his quotidian and mythic adversaries. These are the only *kviðuhátr* poems that pre-date *Glælognsviða*, but it continued to be a viable medium for praise poetry, with Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonarkviða* (c. 1270) a fascinating late composition in the meter.

The commonality, and mediality, of these poems goes deeper than this, however. Shared characteristics – also shared by much of the later *kviðuhátr* poetry – include:

1. the poem is about the dead:
 - *Yt* (the kings), *Hál* (Hákon's ancestors), *St* (Egill's parents, brother and sons).⁴
2. it mentions particular landscapes (the place of death and/or burial of the poem's subjects):
 - *Yt*: á beði Skútu, v. 3, við Fýri, v. 6, í Limafirði, v. 12, at Uppsolum vv. 13 and 16, á Vendli, v. 15, á Lófundri, v. 17, etc.; *Hál*: Straumeyjarnes, v. 5, á Fjolum, v. 7, á Qglói, v. 9; *St*: á nesi, v. 25; *Arbj*: ?possibly í Fjorðum, v. 22.
3. it includes complex, unusual kennings, often involving *ofljóst* on personal names:
 - *Yt*: e.g. *slöngupþref verðar Sleipnis* ("flung grasper of the meal of Sleipnir" [HAY > PITCHFORK], v. 8, *mær bróður Býleists* ("maiden of the brother of Býleistr") [= Loki > = Hel (*hel* 'the underworld')], v. 23; *Hál*: e.g. *mogr Hallgarðs* [*hallr* 'stone' = *grjót* 'gravel', *Grjótgarðr* > Hákon Grjótgarðs-

³ Cf. already Wessén, 1915; Ohlmarks, 1944, argues similarly for the *erfikvæði* genre as a whole; objections to this in Fidejestøl, 1982; cf. also Harris, 2006. For a recent argument for funerary practices as embodied memoria, cf. Williams, 2010.

⁴ Arinbjörn is still alive at the point that *Arbj* is referred to in *Egils saga*, but the prose framing of *Egils saga*'s long poems is not above suspicion.

son], v. 8, *brúðr valtýs* (“bride of the slaughter-god”) [= Óðinn > = Jørð (*jørð* ‘land’)], v. 12; *Arbj*: e.g. *bjørn bjóða ótta birkis* (“bear of the table of the terror of the birch”) [FIRE > HEARTHSTONE (*arinn*), *Arinbjørn*], v. 16.⁵

4. it has a list- or chain-like (catenulate) structure:

- *Yt* lists 28 kings, the surviving verses of *Hál* seven, and both poems’ names end in *-tal* (‘list’); *St* mentions the deaths of two sons, father, mother and brother, using the verb *telja* (v. 5); *Arbj*, in a self-reflexive moment, observes that *valið liggja / tvén ok þréni / á tungu mér* (‘two or three [ideas] lie chosen on my tongue’), v. 15.

5. it mentions the afterlife (Óðinn; Valhöll) and female psychopomps (Hel, Hildr, Rán):

- Hel: *Yt* 7, 23, 24, *St* 25; Hildr: *Hál* 7; Rán: *St* 7-8; Óðinn: *Yt* 3, *Hál* 1-2, 6, 8, *St* 21-24, *Arbj* 6-7, 13; Valhöll: *Arbj* 14, *St* 10-11.

6. it mentions commemorative monuments of stone or wood:

- *Yt*: *sá frømuðr *reyrs Høgna vas of horfinn beinum foldar* (“that wielder of the reed of Høgni [WARRIOR] was surrounded by the bones of the earth [STONES]”, v. 19; *Hál*: *náreiðr vingameiðr drúpir á nesi* (“the corpse-bearing swaying tree droops on the headland”), *fjølkunnt Straumeyjarnes merkt steini of hrør fylkis* (“well-known Straumeyjarnes [is] marked by a stone over the ruler’s body”), v. 5; *St*: *mærðar timbr, málí laufgat* (“timbers of praise, adorned with the foliage of speech”), v. 5; *Arbj*: *mærðar efni, auðskæf ómunlokri* (“stuff of fame, easily shaped with the voice-plane”), v. 15, *lofkost* (“praise-cairn”), v. 25.

There is no space here for a full exploration of the links between these features and the archaeological evidence for Viking Age funeral practices, particularly as the latter are highly variable. Key points include, however: the importance of the gravesite as a locus of memory, sometimes over very long periods (cf. e.g. Hållans Stenholm, 2012; Klevnäs, 2016); the associations between stone and the world of the dead (cf. e.g. Kaliff, 1997; Aspeborg, 2005); the fragmentation of bodies in funeral rituals (cf. Lund, 2013), which finds parallels in the fragmentary rhetoric of the kenning, especially in *ofljóst*; the importance of lists (from the runic inscriptions of Rök and Högby to the husbands, daughters, sisters and brothers whose deaths are recalled by the mourners in *Guðrúnarkviða I*; cf. Harris, 2000); and the self-referential rhetoric of the conclusion, in which the skald compares his poetic memorial with the wooden or stone monuments of the gravesite.⁶ Bodies, landscapes and monuments are anchors for memory in these poems.

⁵ *St* lacks *ofljóst*, but the sequence of head-kennings in *St* 19: 6-7, *í jørðu grímu, rýnnis reið* ‘land of the face, chariot of thought’ is reminiscent of *Yt*’s chains of riddling kennings (note, though, the emendation of ms. *í aróar grímu*).

⁶ The saga topos of the audience recording these poems in runes, as in the prose frame of *Sonatorrek* (*Egils saga*, ch. 78), may be a reflex of this feature, cf. Clunies Ross in this volume.

Glælognsviða is the earliest poem to celebrate Óláfr's sanctity (cf. Lindow, 2008). By presenting him as *rex perpetuus Norvegiæ*, able to grant Sveinn rule over Norway (v. 9), it argues that the succession of Sveinn to the throne is legitimate (v. 2). The *kviðuhátr* tradition provided the skald with a powerful way of making this point. Stating the location of the grave (*i Prandheimi ... Pars Gleifr áðan byggði ... ok þar varð kykvasettr* ("in Trøndelag, where Óláfr previously dwelt, and there became enshrined alive"), vv. 2-3) and affirming that the deceased has departed to the afterlife (*hann hvarf til himinríkis* ("he departed to the heavenly kingdom"), v. 3) emphasizes the old king's departure and the legitimacy of the new one. Even the list motif is vestigially present in *Glælognsviða*, an indication of the abiding force of memorial tradition:

*Par vas jarl
fyrst at upphafi,
ok hvern maðr,
es honum fylgði,
annarr drengr
øðrum betri.* (v. 1)

There the jarl [= Haraldr Þorkelsson] was first and foremost, and every man who followed him, each warrior, [was] better than the next.

But Óláfr's sanctity compelled Þórarinn to an innovative re-purposing of the traditional medium of funeral *memoria*. The saintly king needs no psychopomps, but departs to heaven under his own power: *sonr Haralds hafði harðla ráðit sér til himinríkis* ("The son of Haraldr [= Óláfr] had powerfully taken himself to the heavenly kingdom", v. 4). Óláfr's corpse is uncorrupted, whole and beautiful (v. 5), unlike the disarticulated, fragmented dead body of pre-Christian funeral ritual (*køggla hrørs* ("limbs of the corpse"), St 4; the *ægir hjarna* ("sea of the brains") of King Aðils mixes with the mud of the grave, Yt 16). The repeated deictic *þar* in v. 3 refers to his shrine's place in the middle of Niðaróss (Trondheim), from where his successor Sveinn will *æ ævi sína ... byggðum ráða* ("always rule the settlements throughout his life") (v. 2); earlier *kviðuhátr* poetry emphasizes instead the peripheral location of its subjects' burial sites, often close to bodies of water. The postmortem activities of the pre-Christian dead among the living could cause anxiety (McKinnell, 2009, and cf. St v. 18), but St Óláfr is a "mediator" (*sættir*, v. 4) between God and man. The bulk of Þórarinn's poem is taken up with a sensual evocation of the miraculous new media of communication between heaven and earth that Christianity offered the believer – bells that ring by themselves (v. 6), candles (v. 7), *reginnagla móls bóka* ("the sacred nail of the language of books") (v. 9: the referent of this, the poem's only elaborate kenning, is disputed) – and the healing power of the heavenly grace that they mediate, manifest in the bodies of believers:

*Par kømr herr,
es heilagr es
konungr sjalfr,
krýpr at gangi.
En beiðendr
blindir sökja
þjóðir máls,
en þaðan heilir.* (v. 8)

A host comes there, where the holy king himself is, [and] bows down for access. And people, petitioners for speech [and] the blind, make their way [there], and [go] from there whole.

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