

## ECHOES OF SKALDIC MUSIC IN SAXO

BY

LOUIS CHRISTENSEN

This study is an examination of how the role of skald, viewed as ethnic „singer of tales“,<sup>1</sup> has impacted the chronicles of Saxo Grammaticus written a few years after 1200 A.D. It is based on the author's „Reassessment of the Music in Norse Times“<sup>2</sup> which proposes that the early skald be viewed as musician-shaman-historian-poet-entertainer-educator, matching the ethnic model known throughout the world in pre-literary societies.<sup>3</sup> The proposition is based on viewing Norse culture as pre-European, in which European is understood as the Christian Carolingian culture originating with the advent of the 9th century rather than as geography.

Of the sixteen books in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* it is the contents of the ten books that form Part One, and in particular the first eight covering the pre-Christian era, that would have been transmitted by skalds as the preservers of cultural lore by oral performance. Herein is contained the information that forms the focal point of the present investigation. The books reveal differences from the rest of the chronicles in Part Two, but they also have lost the impact of the performing skald's greatest power – their authentic language. Saxo writes in Latin and his poetry uses the structures of its classical forms. The expressive power

<sup>1</sup> The title of the book by Albert Lord: *The Singer of Tales*, N.Y. 1965, detailing a study in vocal tradition among southern slavs in the Balkan peninsula.

<sup>2</sup> A paper presented at the SASS (Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies) conference in 1995 at Washington State University.

<sup>3</sup> See ethnomusicological surveys like William Malm: *Music Cultures of the Pacific, the Near East, and Asia*, 3rd ed., New Jersey 1996; C.M. Bowra: *Primitive Song*, New York 1962; and Allan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, Northwestern University Press 1964.

of Saxo's highly praised Latin style is directed towards learned contemporaries in Christian Europe, but printing and translation during the Renaissance and in every succeeding century have given Denmark's history and lore back to the Danish people.

Even though in language, and style Saxo is far removed from most of the purposes and accomplishments of the skalds, echoes of their word-music can be found in his writing and these tend toward the image of the skald as masterful performing story teller.<sup>4</sup> Spirited translations during the nineteenth century have recast the Latin poetic stanzas back into forms similar to those used by the Norse skalds. To this day these powerful stories in prose and verse are a part of Danish culture by maintaining a contemporary presence of the ideals and attitudes of its Norse foundations.

The translation used for this study is the one by Frederik Winkel Horn with illustrations by Louis Moe, a few of which have been included in the present study.<sup>5</sup> In the text, all book numbers (in Roman numerals) with their page numbers refer to this edition. For probing Saxo's Latin original, both the editions by P.E. Müller-J.M. Velschow and Jørgen Olrik-H. Ræder have been used.<sup>6</sup> All translations into English are by the author unless otherwise noted. Square brackets contain clarifying or explanatory notes by the author while round parentheses are used for added information.

<sup>4</sup> See Merriam (fn. 3), Chapter X, p. 187ff, and James Anderson Winn: *Unsuspected Eloquence*, New Haven and London 1981, „The Poet as Singer,” p. 1 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Saxo Grammaticus: *Danmarks Krønike*, Fr. Winkel Horn, translator with illustrations by Louis Moe, 1898. Reedited and expanded with a preface by Palle Lauring, Copenhagen 1994, with facsimiles.

<sup>6</sup> *Saxonis Grammatici Historia Danica*, ed. by Petrus Erasmus Müller and Joannis Matthias Velschow, Copenhagen 1839. *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, Tomus I, ed. by J. Olrik and H. Ræder; Tomus II „Indicem Verborum” [Dictionary], ed. by Franz Blatt, Copenhagen 1931-1957.

In *Tekstkritiske Bemærkninger til Sakses Gesta Danorum* [Textcritical Annotations to Saxo's G.D.], Særtryk af Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie, 1930 [reprint of Yearbook for Nordic Research and History], Copenhagen 1932, Jørgen Olrik provides a brief overview [in Danish] of the edition history of *Gesta Danorum* since Christiern Pedersøn's original printing in Paris in 1514. The rest of the book lists the philological corrections in Olrik's Latin edition of 1931. None of these impact the focus of the present study. The same author's prolog to the Latin edition of 1931 is a more detailed version of the same subject in both Latin and Danish.

*Saxo and Norse Antiquity*

In his prologue to *Gesta Danorum*, The Heroic Deeds of the Danes, Saxo explains in the third paragraph that his source of knowledge about Denmark's past is based on the work of the composers of the singing recitations called „kvad“ – the skalds:

„And here it should be recalled that the Danes of old who had performed heroic deeds so prized honor and fame that they not just described their excellent accomplishments in decorative words like the Romans in a sort of *ars poetica*, but also made the great deeds of the ancestors known in songs in their mother tongue which they made to be engraved in rock and stones with the letters in use at that time [i.e. runes]. These [historical] traces of theirs I have followed as documents from antiquity, I have diligently endeavored to follow the thread in my version [of their account], have told verses as verses, and my account rests on them so that I am not offering something new and self-invented, but rather lore that originates in antiquity, because in this work one should not expect loose talk which pleases in appearance, but reliable information about antiquity. How many history books might we not guess that people who were of such mind would have produced if they had mastered Latin, so that they would have had an outlet for their desire to write since they, though not proficient in the Roman language, were so bent on preserving the memory of their accomplishments that they used rock and stones as books?“

These words are remarkable as much for what they say as for what they imply. In order to establish credibility in his learned 13th century readership Saxo must build his chronicle on a foundation of written sources as documentation. Hence the metaphor of „rock and stones as books.“ But he wants to make it clear to the latinists that his written sources are better than those of classical writers whom he alleges use ornateness as a substitute for substance. Against this he maintains that recited songs [kvad] chiseled in a permanent material are like documents from antiquity.

The *Kvad*-songs are the heart of the matter, but Saxo spends no time on their composers, technique or performance. Fashioning *kvad* is the craft and art of the skald but in Saxo's presentation it is the engraver of runes (a runemaster)<sup>7</sup> and those of his contemporaries who are

<sup>7</sup> See N.F.S. Grundtvig's translation: *Danmarks Krønike af Saxe Runemester*, Copenhagen 1855 (originally 1818), [Denmark's Chronicle by Saxo the Runemaster].

knowledgeable about Danish antiquity that serve the historian's purpose. There is, however, a glitch in this. *Futhark*, the runic alphabet, is used for monumentality and magic and although a few stones carry poetic stanzas it is literally and figuratively lapidary in style.<sup>8</sup> Within the inventory of runic inscriptions that have been preserved there is nothing like a multi-stanza narrative. Saxo's immersion in the „Roman language“ and its learned literacy apparently separates him from an understanding of the techniques by which oral tradition strives for constancy or they might by his time have eroded towards the simpler ballad-like folk-rhymes.

Next Saxo discusses the Icelandic literary collections and story tellers as sources for his work:

„Nor should I by-pass the endeavors of the Icelanders in silence. As the infertility of their ancestral soil prevents them from devoting themselves to extravagance, they have always led lives of moderation and have made it a habit to use all of their time collecting and disseminating knowledge of the great deeds of other peoples and thus compensate for their poverty by the gifts of the mind. They take pleasure in knowing the accomplishments of all peoples and in handing them forward to future generations and they do not consider telling about other peoples a less honorable act than to perform them themselves. Their treasure chambers which are filled with priceless testimonies about the events of the past I have searched carefully [*ransaget* – ransacked] and no small part of the present work has been put together by me with their tales as a model, because I have not considered it below my dignity to use them as sources of information when I knew how knowledgeable they were in matters concerning antiquity.“

Saxo's attitude towards his highly literate colleagues in Iceland is ambivalent. He downplays the Icelandic culture itself but builds up the knowledge of the cultured Icelanders about foreign cultures, thereby enhancing their value as a source for his own work. He has ransacked their book treasures, but he does not tell us whether he has done this on location, which is hard to imagine, or whether his work has been done from copies or by word of mouth.<sup>9</sup> In either case it is not clear

<sup>8</sup> In his *Saxo as a Latin Poet*, Roma 1987, Karsten Friis-Jensen offers on p. 19 the following interpretation of the passage: „like the Romans the ancient Danes composed both heroic poetry (more generally) and inscribed commemorative verse on stone.“

<sup>9</sup> In Axel Olrik: *Saksnes Oldhistorie – Norrøne Sagaer og Danske Sagn*, Copenhagen 1894,

how one would go about this. But he goes further than that when he states that their writings have served him as models, and yet, he counteracts this admiration for them by patronizing them, stating that „it is not below my dignity to use them as sources.“

That the sagas have served as models becomes clear at a glance because in both sagas and the chronicle, prose texts are interspersed with verses. In the Icelandic, the narrative is interrupted by *lausavisur*, or single verses. In Saxo's chronicle the text is also sprinkled with verses but in the translations single verses are almost non-existent and instead they come in groupings of typically 2 or 3 or 4 and in some cases more. These are again sometimes chained by antiphonal song-conversations into longer eposes.

While a few Danish skalds are named in Saxo's text, Icelandic skalds are not mentioned and in either case oral tradition is ignored although the *kvad* were not composed to become literature but originated in and were destined for oral performance. A careful search of the Icelandic book treasures ab. year 1200 would unquestionably have yielded more than the 200 names of skalds that are known to us.<sup>10</sup> But although the skalds are fundamental to preserving the great deeds of the past only the *prima facie* written word or stories told directly to him matters to our venerable *grammaticus*.

#### *The Verses in Saxo's Denmark's Chronicle*

Of the 280 verses in Part One of Fr. Winkel Horn's translation of Saxo's account of Danish history the majority are in groups of 2, 3, 4, or 5 by any one singer.<sup>11</sup> The notable exception is the legendary warrior and skald, Stærkodder, who in a series of four songs recites 65 stanzas (VI) and in the later account of his death, another 24 (VIII). The tendency is to chain these groups together into larger units telling

(*Saxo's History of Antiquity – Norse Sagas and Danish Legends*), p. 187ff, the role of Arnold the Icelander [Arnoldus Thylensis] (XIV, p. 211) is discussed in depth as less of a skald but more of a storyteller [Saxo: „skilled in historical narration“]. In the vernacular he is called a *sagamand* and a likely source of Norse history and lore. In the introduction to his Saxo translation, on p. 3, Jørgen Olrik mentions that during the 1190's several Icelanders were in attendance at the archbishop's court in Lund providing a rich source of historical knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> Lee M. Hollander: *The Skalds*, University of Michigan Press 1968, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> See chart of the verses in the appendix.

extended stories. Duets are common such as Gram and Graa (I); Svanhilde and Regner (II); Grep and Erik (V); Erik and Olimar (V); Hagbard and Signe (VII); and in the Bjarke Epos (II) some exchanges between Bjarke and Hjalte are of 10 and 12 verses.

There are only three single verses that occur in very special situations and only one is a verse in the Latin original. The first is a verse consisting of a list of names, the second is a winning contest entry, and the third of just 4 lines is the last of all verses and the only one in Book IX and in the original it is prose.

Books III and IV contain no verses. The chapters relate some of the most memorable stories in Saxo such as the death of Odin's son Balder, the story of Amlet that has been made world famous by Shakespeare, and King Vermund and his introverted son Uffe who rose to the challenge of defending Denmark in a duel against two Saxons.

All attempts to explain the absence of verses in these books must remain speculation, but it is worth noting a remark by Saxo at the end of the Bjarke epos. He writes that „this story I have told in verses especially for the reason that a Danish song-epic of the same contents still lives in the memory of many who are knowledgeable about the events of antiquity (II, p. 59).“ This remark seems to indicate that two hundred years after the official christianizing of Denmark which spelled the beginning of the end of royal patronage for the skalds, their skaldic verses and stories were still being passed on either in isolated manors or among the common people in the process of „kulturversänkerung“, the descent through the social strata of practises erstwhile the prerogative of the rulers. In this same vein, the story of Hagbard and Signe which earlier belonged in the castles and manors of monarch and nobles, became a medieval folksong about Saxo's time.

The translator, Winkel Horn, says about the verses in his preface (p. xvii): „Nowadays, though it pains our hearts to see a host of verses from antiquity which we would have treasured in their original form, recomposed in finely crafted Latin which disfigures its style and tone, we ought not hold against him, rather we must be gratified that he has preserved as much for us as he has. This translator has, with regard to the verses, seen it as his task to get behind Saxo's reworkings of the ancient epics which were available to him and to reshape them in a form [like Edda poems] which comes as close as possible to the original.“

A comparison between the verse techniques of Saxo, Fr. Winkel Horn, Axel Olrik, and Jørgen Olrik can be served by the stanzas that

communicate a tender exchange between Hagbard and Signe about their consummated love and the almost certain doom it causes (VII, p. 282) since Hagbard also has felled her brothers:

	SAXO:	Translation (literal):
8 -- -UU-U-	Si captum genitor tuus	If caught by your father
8 -- -UU-U-	Me tristi dederit neci	He will prepare me a sad death.
8 -- -UU-U-	Numquid conjugii fidem	Are you going to take marriage vows with another
8 -- -UU-U-	Tanti foederis immemor	Forgetful of a committment as strong as ours
8 -- -UU-U-	Post factum repetes meum	After I am gone?
8 -- -UU-U-	Nam sisors ea cesserit	For as chance might have it
8 -- -UU-U-	Haud spero veniae locum	I can hardly hope for any sort of pardon
8 -- -UU-U-	Nec parens miserebitur	Nor can there be parental mercy
8 -- -UU-U-	Ulturus sobolem parens	When he as a father is honor- bound to avenge his sons.

	WINKEL HORN (1898):	Translation (literal):
4 -U-U	Fagre Mø, som	Fair maiden whom
4 -U-U	fro jeg favner	I blissfully embrace
4 -U-U	og som under	and who favors
4 -U-U	mig din Ælskov	me with your love
4 -U-U	vil du aldrig	will you never
4 -U-U	Vennen svigte	desert your friend
4 -U-U	aldrig elske	never love
3 -U-	anden Mand?	another man?
4 -U-U	Om din Fader	If your father
4 -U-U	nu mig fanger	now captures me
4 -U-U	vil med Hagbard	he will with Hagbard
4 -U-U	grumt han handle.	grimly deal.
4 -U-U	Flux mit Liv jeg	Immediately my life I
4 -U-U	da maa lade	then must let
3 -U-	mangt han har	he has much
5 U-U-U	paa mig at hævne.	to take revenge on me for.

		AXEL OLRİK (1898):	Translation (literal)
4	-U-U	Sig mig Signe	Tell me Signe
4	-UU-	solklare Dis [mø, gudinde]	sunbright goddess
8	-U-U-U-U	medens vi er sammen begge	while we are together
5	U-U-U	i Brudenatten	in the bridalnight
5	-U-U-	uden Frænders Råd	without the aid of friends
5	U-U-U	mod Faders Vilje	against paternal will
3	-U-	Hamunds Søn	the son of Hamund
5	-U-UU	med den højborne	with the highborn
8	-U-U-U-U	om jeg fangen af din Fader	if I, caught by your father
4	-UU-	føres til Død	is led to my death
5	U-U-U	og Sigar hævner	and Sigar takes revenge
5	-UU-U	Sønnernes Bane	for the fate of the sons
6	-U-U-U	når mit Liv er ledet	when my life is over
5	U-U-U	hvad Lod da kårer?	what fate is decreed?
6	-U-U-U	vil min Glædes Viv da	will my joy's wife then
7	-UU-U-U	Godvilje lade kende?	show her good will?
		JØRGEN OLRİK (1912):	Translation (literal)
8	---UU-U-	Fik din Fader mig fanget her,	If your father caught me here
8	---UU-U-	vist han voldte mig Ulivssaar;	surely he would cause for me a fatal wound;
8	---UU-U-	lysted dig da naar jeg var død,	would you then when I was dead
8	---UU-U-	fluks at svigte din svorne Tro,	soon break your sworn word,
8	---UU-U-	fæste dig til en anden Svend?	and give it to another knight?
8	---UU-U-	Er min Lykke saa arg og ond,	Is my fate so vile and evil
8	---UU-U-	ej om Naade jeg gør mig Haab.	I have no hope of mercy.
8	---UU-U-	Faders Hævn kender ej til Ynk,	A father's revenge knows no sympathy,
8	---UU-U-	Sønners Bane maa bøde haardt.	death of sons must be dealt with severely.
8	---UU-U-	Voldt jeg har dine Brødres Død,	I have caused the death of your brothers,
8	---UU-U-	vejet dem paa den vaade Val;	weighed them on the wet field of combat;
8	---UU-U-	nu jeg uden din Faders Ja,	now I, without the consent of your father,
8	---UU-U-	deler djærv med hans Datter Seng	boldly share bed with his daughter,
8	---UU-U-	ret som aldrig i mindste Maal,	even though I have never in the least measure,
8	---UU-U-	mod hans Ønske jeg ypped Id.	acted against his wishes.
8	---UU-U-	Sig mig da min væne Dis:	Tell me then, fair goddess:
8	---UU-U-	Hvortil stander vel helst din Hu,	what do you have in mind,
8	---UU-U-	naar du favner ej mer din Ven?	when you no more embrace your friend?



Saxo's verses come in strict 8-syllable lines according to the classical meter which is used in this poem only.<sup>12</sup> While Saxo ponders the father's wrath and the doom it spells for the lovers, Winkel Horn reshapes the meaning so that he emphasizes the love theme and only after that comes around to the threatening end. Jørgen Olrik follows not only Saxo's meter but by-and-large also the thread of the story.

Winkel Horn's skaldic imitation is rhythmically strictly trochaic with the slightest of variances and attain to a loftiness of sound achieved by the alliteration (shown in bold print) in the manner of the early skaldic models.<sup>13</sup> The Axel Olrik reconstruction employs a freer version of Old Norse meter.

What then is the evidence that connects Saxo with the ancient skaldic verses, whether West Norse (Norwegian, Icelandic) or East Norse (Swedish and Danish)? The Danish scholar, Axel Olrik (1864-1917), maintained that the place of origin and place of transmission of the verses into writing can be ascertained through the language characteristics of the prose text which surrounds them.<sup>14</sup> He gives as an example the story of the Bråvalla battle which Saxo says „was first described in Danish verses by Stærkodder.“ In this case Saxo did not tell „verses as verses“ as promised in the preface but gave the account in prose, likely because it is highly enumerative of participants on both sides. The prose in form and style is thoroughly West Norse. Using the same principles Olrik concludes that the longer verse eposes such as those of Bjarke and Ingild are of Danish origin. This research using the techniques of comparative literature creates a credible source procedure with visiting „sagamen“ providing the West-Norse stories and local knowledgeable practitioners providing both narrations and the recited song-poems called *kvad*.<sup>15</sup>

In the messages of the verses skalds are not mentioned, the sole

<sup>12</sup> *Glyconic* meter. See Friis-Jensen (fn. 8), p. 189. The last syllable, here shown as a full accent, is a half accent in this meter.

<sup>13</sup> cf. Old Norse terminology for the old meters, *fornyrðislag* [old lore meter] and *ljóðaháttir* [song meter]. See f.ex. E.V.Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, London, 1927, p. 294. The *ljóð* in song meter is of interest as modern Swedish has retained that meaning in *låt*.

<sup>14</sup> Axel Olrik (fn. 9), p. 269.

<sup>15</sup> Besides Arnoldus mentioned earlier, the list of participants in the Bråvalla battle includes Erik, another sagaman and an Icelandic skald, Behrgar (VIII, p. 311).

exception being Stærkodder. In the Ingild epos the legendary skald sings (VI, p. 255):<sup>16</sup>

Hører jeg	<i>If I hear</i>
om herlig stordåd	<i>the skald sing loudly</i>
skjalden højt	<i>in the hall</i>
i hallen kvæde,	<i>about magnificent deeds</i>

It is from phrases such as these that we derive the image of the court singer fashioning the precious reputation of his patron. This is entertainment at the highest social level and for high stakes. It revolves around power, the power of accomplishment and the power of the word. Patron and artist are locked in this dual dynamic of temporal power and the creation of a word monument that lasts through the ages.

Stærkodder became old, Odin had granted him three lifetimes, and he had to find a way to avoid dying dishonorably, which means in his bed – „in the straw“ as the saying went. He found a man by the name of Had whose father Stærkodder had killed and whose duty, therefore, it was to revenge him. Thus two honors would be served in one deed.

Had tells him to hand his famous sword over to him. Stærkodder replies (VIII, p. 322):

Skam dig, at du	<i>Shame on you</i>
håned skjalden	<i>for taunting the skald</i>
som bør højt	<i>who should be held</i>
i ære holdes!	<i>in the highest esteem!</i>
Smukt en gammel	<i>A fine act, indeed,</i>
helt at smæde	<i>to dishonor an old</i>
som har ros og	<i>hero who has deserved</i>
ry fortjent.	<i>praise and splendid renown.</i>

So powerful is the role of skald that to challenge it is self-defeating. Stærkodder combines in his person both the powers of sword and word and his final song is a review of his many great deeds. It ends with Had fulfilling Stærkodder's wish for his life to end by the sword.

In the story about Gram's son Hading (I, p. 17), the art and craft of

<sup>16</sup> Both this passage and the following will be discussed in greater detail in the sections „Saxo's Latin terminology“ and „The tribute to the Odin skald.“



Stærkodder leaves the royal compound

the skald plays a part. After having lost a battle, Hading is visited by a „one-eyed old man“ which is a *kenning*- or poetic simile – for the head god, Odin.<sup>17</sup> Odin acts in the role of soothsayer and predicts generally good fortune for Hading but not without dangers. In four verses Odin predicts Hading’s capture by enemies, instructs him about how to escape, and promises a little magic help of his own.

<sup>17</sup>  *kennings* form a significant part of skaldic craft.

Kort dem tiden	<i>Entertain them</i>
med kvad og sagn	<i>with song and tale</i>
til mætte af mjød	<i>till sated with wine and food</i>
og mad de døse –	<i>they become drowsy –</i>

This is another colorful image of life in antiquity, the party at which the skald entertains both as a word-musician and *raconteur* while the audience wears down from overdoing both eating and drinking. This account has the extra edge that it is sung by „the first skald,“ Odin, who according to Norse mythology – spoke in verses.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Skalds in the Prose Text*

The importance of the function of the skald in Danish antiquity is clearly set forth by the story of Hjarni skald who became king, no less, by virtue of composing a memorial apotheosis in the form of a one-verse song on the occasion of the death of the renowned King Frode (VI, p. 207).

SAXO:	Winkel Horn	English (literal translation)
Frothonem Dani, quem longum vivere vellent per sua defunctum rura tulere diu.	Længe førte de Frode om land da drotten dyre i døden var dånet.	Frode, for whom the Danes wished a long life was on his death carried around the land.
Principes hoc summi tumulatum cespite corpus	Langt liv ønskede hans landsmænd Frode	The great leader's body a turf-covered burial mound over it
Aethere subliquido nude recondit humus.	her gjemmer graven bag grønsvær den gjæve.	under a lucid sky is concealed by plain earth.

Saxo's commentary is worth noting:

„After he had sung this stanza the Danes rewarded the skald with the royal crown and thus gave Denmark in return for an epitaph, granted the entire far-flung realm as remuneration for putting a few letters together. For such a bargain did he receive the great prize. The extraordinarily high wage for a little song even exceeded the famous

<sup>18</sup> Snorri Sturluson: *Heimskringla* Part Two, Sagas of the Norse Kings, translated by Samuel Laing, London 1961, „The Ynglinga Saga,“ Chapter VI, p. 1: [Odin] „spoke everything in rhyme, such as now composed, which we call skaldcraft.“

poet salary granted by Caesar, the divine Julius settled for granting a city to the one who had described and praised his victories in conquests over the entire earth, but here the excessive generosity of the citizenry bestowed an entire realm on a peasant; yes, not even Africanus could match the Danes in gladhanding, when he rewarded the one who had memorialized his accomplishments, since he only matched the weight in gold of the diligently crafted book, but here a few artless verses provided a peasant with the royal scepter."

A pretty artful reaction that compares Denmark to the Roman Empire at its height and finds the former outdoing the latter. It could almost lead one to think that it is subtly addressed to his patron anticipating what the completed chronicle would do for Denmark's reputation!

The Erik songs bear witness to the importance given to „well-spokenness“, the ability to outwit someone in words. Erik engages in a „speech-battle“ in a verse exchange, and wins. The king draws an armband off his arm and gives it to him as the traditional prize for skaldic achievement (V, p. 156). Later Erik is in a word game. Saxo calls the language skills of the skald for word-skill (*ordsnildhed*), and Erik is so confident that his life becomes the prize in a duel in which the word skills were used for a contest in coarseness. The translator can not bring himself to rendering Saxo's verses exactly but improvises that she [Erik's opponent – and a high-born lady!] „composed in verse form so base and shameful a question that it can not be repeated before polite ears“ (V, p. 160).<sup>19</sup> But Erik's skill was up to the challenge! Forensic ability is also reported in lengthy prose and Erik was also in this field able to entirely change the outcome of a dire situation by rhetorical persuasion alone.

Stærkodder has a history that sets him apart from others. We are told (VI, p. 225) that his talent for skaldcraft was granted by Odin himself and his skill in the songs has already been discussed. Saxo reports that in a certain situation he composed a song on the spur of

<sup>19</sup> Palle Lauring (fn. 5) makes no mention of this omission by the translator, but refers (p. ix) to Sejer Schousbølle's 18th century translator's omission of the verses on the grounds that „neither virtuous nor pure eyes would want to read them.“ Lauring comments: „Det er ellers svært at finde noget uhøvisk i Saxo“ [it is otherwise difficult to find anything indecent in Saxo]. See p. 132-133 in *Saxo Grammaticus, The History of the Danes, Books I-IX*, edited by Hilda Ellis Davidson, translated by Peter Fisher, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge 1998.

the moment (*på stående fod* – on standing foot!). The ability to improvise is also implied in the word duels of Erik mentioned above. While Stærkodder was a kind of superman figure in Danish antiquity, he could not attain to royalty, but instead he became the conscience of rulers upholding the ancient virtues in deed, speech, dress, diet, and more. But Saxo reports (VII, p. 268) that „Halfdan, who was ruler of two realms adorned the repute he had won with three-fold honor: he was well-spoken, skilled in composing in the manner inherited from the forefathers, and excelled no less in all manners of combat exercises than in bringing to bear his royal power and authority.“ The ideal ruler, in other words, needs rhetorical and creative powers, not just physical superiority, in order to understand, maintain, and project the royal mantle of the Danish crown.

The skald was also the king's partner in upholding the power of religion. This was brought to the fore in Stærkodder's courageous criticism of King Ingild's decadence as well as his ability to sway him by powerful words toward the traditional values and proper conduct.

The traditional reward of skalds, as mentioned, was a ring from the arm of the patron which apparently had a religious, as well as, a mercenary dimension. In the Bjarke epos (II) we hear twice of „red rings.“ The first time they are given as rewards to the skald/warriors Hjalte and Bjarke and the second time the two reminisce about the battle with Rørik who was described as honorless and instead of arming warriors for battle „merely rattled with red rings.“ Many sources refer to 'reddening' of something to signify that it has been colored with blood, be it runes or swords, but in Saxo's Latin the word 'red' does not appear and the translator must refer to the gold poetically as red.<sup>20</sup>

The skald position and craft is more complicated than the image of the court skalds composing song poetry as glorification for their powerful patrons. They were the upholders of tradition and, if need be, they could use their skills to shame the ruler into changing errant behavior or promoting a certain course of action. That is the mark of the professional. The noble amateur with just an urge to show off his skills and forgetting to match the song to the situation would pay the price. Saxo tells in the story of Canute the Great (X) who, as a Christian king, invited family and friends to a Christmas party in Roskilde.

<sup>20</sup> Francois-Xavier Dillmann: „Les runes dans la littérature norroise“, *Proxima Thulé*, vol. 2, Paris 1996, p. 67-68.

The guests included a former enemy, Ulf, whom he had forgiven. But the latter, „after he had drunk away his senses,“ started to sing his own praises and especially detailed a defeat that he had brought upon the king. That song of derision was too much for Canute and he ordered his guard to kill the perpetrator. This story is from near the end of the Norse era and Canute can be seen as a ruler on the crossroads at the end of a great tradition and at the beginning of the new Christian one.

Saxo begins his history of the Danes with King Dan as progenitor and says that we know about these beginnings from the Danish skalds of old (I, p. 8). During the early centuries that passed between Dan and Canute, the skald's role included other forms of power than that of the word. As in other pre-literary societies, the keeper and guardian of history and tradition also supervised its perpetuation by all means such as proper rites, magic symbols, and circumspect predictions.

#### *Saxo and Runes*

The runes were a gift from Odin. The adjective 'godgiven' is engraved on a runestone as early as 600 A.D. (Noleby stone)<sup>21</sup> and is echoed in the poetic Edda's *Hávamál*, i.e. the speeches of the High One (Odin), which vouchsafes for the common origin of runes and skaldcraft in terms of Old Norse culture.<sup>22</sup>

The power of runes lies in the interwoven meanings of the individual symbols with their overall message. The individual rune signifies not only a letter but also a symbolic identity that usually begins with the sound of the letter. For example the 'a' rune  $\text{ᚦ}$  stands for *As*, or god, while the 't' rune  $\text{ᚠ}$  stands for the god name, *Týr*.<sup>23</sup> The magic use of individual signs is shown by their repetition outside of verbal context, or in magic combinations without verbal meaning. In forming words, runes build a web of powerful meanings made up of the base magic of individual signs with their messages in combinations. This echoes the intertwined structures of the alliterative and metric orders of the skaldic verses at the height of their development. It is also the fundamental pattern of structural thought among the Norse peoples whether in the self-gripping decorative animal designs in the visual

<sup>21</sup> Sven B.J. Jansson: *Runinskrifter i Sverige*, 3rd printing, Stockholm 1984, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Jansson (fn. 21), p. 138. The word 'skald' appears as a title followed by a name on three runestones in Sweden.

<sup>23</sup> Jansson (fn. 21), p. 14.



Rune master at work.

arts or in the social structures with local and regional *things*, and more. But perhaps the biggest magic of all in a pre-literate society was the power of runes to create permanence in an otherwise fluid and impermanent world. That is why runestones are so very important and why so many have survived.<sup>24</sup> Their messages are usually monumental in nature, a name of a deceased person with the name of the rune-master, but there are also examples of poetic verses on the stones. The

<sup>24</sup> Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke: *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*, 2 vols., Copenhagen 1942. Ab. 600 have been preserved on Danish territory, 3500 in Sweden (Jansson, fn. 21).



Eggjum stone is an example, and so much the more remarkable because it is dated as early as the 600's A.D.<sup>25</sup>

There are references to runes in six of the first nine books.

In Book I Saxo has Hartgrepe, daughter of a giant, carving „bitter runes“ [*ramme runer* – harsh or ill-boding] in wood which is placed underneath the tongue of a dead man who subsequently sings three verses „with a terrible voice“ (I, p. 16). A little later (I, p. 20) when Hading has called for help from his „protective spirits“ his opponent sings: „Your song shall be to no avail, you troll, even if you have carved runes on it.“ In Book III we are introduced to Oller, a chieftain who was elevated to divine rank, even given the name of Odin. He was „so skilled in sorcery that he, when he needed to cross the sea, instead of a ship used a bone on which magic songs were carved and that he in this way progressed as fast as if he had been rowing.“ These three examples illustrate the magic powers of runes.

In Book (III, p. 96) Amlet's stepfather, Feng, has a letter to the English king carved on a piece of wood „which in the old days was a very common method for writing a letter.“ Here Saxo seems to confirm what runologists suspect, namely that wood was the most common medium for rune writing, but that, because of its relative impermanence, all but a few of them are lost. To this day the Danish word for letter is *bogstav* – staff of beech (hardwood) – but the messages are likely to be much the same as those carved in stone – brief and unadorned.<sup>26</sup> But Saxo's literary bias shows when he talks about letters as literary works on the order of epistles.

In Book VI runes have been carved on a belt carried by one of three swans who sings three verses. When concluded, the belt is dropped and the reader receives an interpretation of the song on it.

Two of the great hero names in Saxo's account of old Danish history are Harald Hildetand (Book VII, p. 296) and Ragnar Lodbrog (Book IX, p. 366). The former has runes carved in a cliff as testimony to his father's deeds, and the latter has them carved in order to memorialize his own.

Saxo's few references to the use of runes indicate a possible evolution in the position of the skald from purveyor of magic (Book I) as

<sup>25</sup> Lis Jacobsen: *Eggjum Stenen*, Copenhagen, 1931. See also Jansson (fn. 21), „Runpoesi“, p. 136ff.

<sup>26</sup> *Ordbog over det Danske Sprog* [Dictionary of the Danish Language], column 946, explains the etymology as „symbols cut into beechwood boards.“

the Odin skald, to messages (Book IV and VI) as the Brage skald, and to monuments (Books VII and IX) as the court skald.

The practises of carving runes on staves of wood, on objects such as metal swords and on leather belts correspond also to archeological finds. The greatest glory of runes, however, is on stones that have achieved the „magic“ of sending messages to all succeeding generations. The most magnificent examples are the royal stones at Jelling, the royal stronghold in Jutland in the 10th century – literally cornerstones in Denmark’s cultural history.

### *Skalds and Proverbs*

In pre-literary ethnic cultures much of the teaching is accomplished by proverbs. They have to be short, packed with useful meaning, and easy to memorize. The latter requirement gives them the form of alliteration or rhyme so that they are often fun to just sound out, even if the meaning were not immediately understood. They can be as short as „Haste makes Waste“ or become longer sayings like: „It is an ill wind that blows no one some good.“

Saxo’s writing abounds with proverbs of different kinds reflecting their vital role in the past and their staying power through the ages.

In the verse duel between Erik and Grep (V, p. 150), Erik, the eventual winner, chains together proverbs:

For sandhed jeg agter	<i>For truth I rely</i>
de gamle ord:	<i>on the old words:</i>
Fals sin herre	<i>Falsehood cuts</i>
slår på hals.	<i>the throat of its master.</i>
Ulven er nær	<i>The wolf is near</i>
hvor dens øren ses;	<i>where you see its ears;</i>
ingen tror	<i>No one believes</i>
troløs mand.	<i>a faithless man.</i>

In the story of King Hading (I, p. 28) Saxo relates in the manner of a quotation a prose speech which could as well have been in verse. Hading has given his own daughter, Ulfhild, to a peasant, Guthorm, in marriage. As Hading is aging she tries to persuade her husband, after first ridiculing his low birth, to kill her father so that she can become queen. The long speech is sprinkled with many proverbs such as: „The acclaim achieved by deed is more becoming than that achieved by



HILD · GÅLDRE · OVER · DE · FALDNE · KÆMPER

Hild sings incantations over the fallen warriors.

birth;“ „Old man walks the shores of the grave;“ „Everyone is his own best friend – that is the law of nature;“ „Wits conquer all;“ „Nothing covers treachery better than friendship;“ and more. The peasant husband is persuaded by proverbs and the story leaves the impression that this is the form of wisdom by which ordinary people can be reached, because that is the way they were taught.

Sometimes the wisdom of the Poetic Edda, f. ex. *Hávamál* appears in the verses such as Signe’s praise of Hagbard (VII, p. 280): *aldrig rustur hettens ry* – never rusts the fame of the hero.

The teaching of both human and divine wisdom by proverbs and sayings must have been part of the duties of the ancient Odin-skalds.

### *Skalds as Shamans*

In the simpler ethnic cultures the shaman is the possessor and practitioner of the songs that can achieve successful intercession with the unseen powers of the environment.

In Book I (p. 28) Saxo tells how: „Hading’s deceased queen appeared one night before him in a dream and sang: Do you know well, that you fathered a wild beast? It will wreak havoc on many a wolf. And soon thereafter she sang further: Dangerous bird you have reared, Hading, a hideous owl in swan’s clothing. In the morning when the king awoke, he told his dream to a dream interpreter, and the latter found the beast to be the king’s son who would cause great harm on his friends, and the owl in swan’s clothing as his daughter who had designs on her father’s life. And as he predicted, so it happened...“

This passage contains many of the elements of the witchcraft that permeates Saxo’s Part One. Soothsayers, dream analysts, fortune tellers, Norse gods – all appear to have a perfect success rate.

Many predictions and magic doings were achieved by songs – witchcraft songs (*galdresange*) by skilled people as in the story of two missing children (VII, p. 263) in which King Frode: „went to a woman who was knowledgeable in sorcery and asked where they were hidden. So powerful were her *galdresange* that she could see things at long distances, see a thing and draw it out no matter how well it was hidden.“ But sorcery songs were not just sung by witches but by also warriors (VII, p. 292) about whom it was said that they could „deafen swords with witchcraft songs.“

*Skaldic Performance*

There is only one passage in which the translator uses the term 'oral tradition' [*mundtlig overlevering*]. It is at the beginning of Book VIII, p. 309 about the events leading to the Bråvalla battle.

Both the story of the ultimate battle and its description in Latin are pivotal events and will be pursued in depth later in the text. It is the absorption and transfer of oral tradition into a literary one to which we, as readers, become participants. Saxo is here as elsewhere (II, p. 59), obliquely paying tribute to the „traditions of the ancestors in the mother tongue,“ because without *its* success in bringing it forward to his time he would have nothing to rescue. Saxo is faced with a series of dilemmas: as a man of the Christian church he is describing with pride the great deeds of the pre-Christian Danes some of whom were out-and-out enemies of it; he is describing the traditional values of the old religion even though they clash more often than not with his; he is rescuing ancient Danish verses by destroying them in Latin; and he is down-playing oral transmission while elevating it to history. All of these dilemmas are personified in Stærkodder whom Odin himself had granted the talent for skaldcraft (VI, p. 225).

But by Saxo's time oral performance had lost both its Odin and royal patronage and was either barely alive among nobles or had sunk into the lower social strata of the *folk* culture finding a role to play among the illiterate. In this new performance environment the various metric and rhyme techniques for keeping the stories constant had lost their urgency, perhaps even disappeared. But the 280 stanzas of the translation and the wide-ranging and dramatic stories are echoes of oral performance by the „singers of tales.“

Apparently the model of a prose story interspersed with verses, *prosimumetrum*, is a universal one, but in Old Norse it is the basic structure.<sup>27</sup> *Prosimumetrum* is also common in Saxo's writing as the verse chart shows. It also indicates oral performance since using a reading voice for any length of time is a time-tested method for inducing drowsiness in listeners – while the voice modulations of the *raconteur* addressing a sizeable audience creates vivid images and imitations of sounds and actions and, when entrusted to a professional, can become intense and

<sup>27</sup> See Friis-Jensen (fn. 8), p. 29 and p. 39.

memorable.<sup>28</sup> With this goes singing for heightened expression of emotions. Speech and song are part of the same „communication personality“ that has syllabic stresses dominated by consonants for rhythm, melodic voice inflections for tonal design, and vowel dominated rhymes for harmony.<sup>29</sup> Speech has the same sound resources as song but has great freedom in building longer spans of meaning in linear logic. Singing fixes the rhythms, inflection designs, and rhymes in patterns that tend toward intense emotional impact on the listeners and its mnemonic techniques insure stability of the central idea and message.<sup>30</sup>

Winkel Horn places sagas and songs together in two places, I, p. 17 in verse and I, p. 29 in prose. In both cases the scene is a dinner banquet in the hall of nobles. The interrelationship between speech and song is clarified in the love story of Hagbard and Signe when it is said about the latter that „not satisfied with praising him in ordinary speech she sang this song“ [*kvad denne vise*]. Saxo's Latin terminology will be discussed in a later section but in the present context it must be mentioned that he consistently uses the word *carmen* which means 'song' and is translated 'kvad.'

The wide variety of standardized song types: bewitching songs (VII, p. 263), songs of praise (VI, p. 207), songs of derision (VI, p. 252), and others, testify to oral performance as do the prose stories with supernatural beings (VIII, p. 377ff.), superheroics by both men and women (VII, p. 278), eroticism (II, p. 38), ribald humor (VII, p. 280), etc. – a veritable *raconteur's* dream competing with the offerings on modern television. But true to the skald's social function there is a didactic purpose behind the entertainment. The skald has many roles to fill in early Norse society including those of teacher and guardian of the religion and ethos.

Skaldic word competition implies a demand for improvised performance skills, in the stories often for very high stakes. The verse duel in Erik's epos (V, p. 149ff.) is such an example and the memorial

<sup>28</sup> Here lies the importance of Saxo's introductions to the verses (*inquits*) and the list of performance voice-qualities in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* in the Prose Edda. See p. 52-53.

<sup>29</sup> See Winn (fn. 4), Chapter I.

<sup>30</sup> See two contemporary studies on the issue of stability: Albert Lord (fn. 1), Chapter V, „Songs and the Song“; and Svend Nielsen: *Stability in Musical Improvisation – a repertoire of Icelandic epic songs (rímur)*. Copenhagen 1982, p. 120.

stanza for Frode that elevated the peasant skald Hjarne to king skald Hjarne (VI, p. 207) implies not only competition but convincing oral performance.

The following passage in the *Orkney Saga* about Earl Rognvald who wrote this stanza about himself brings up the question of whether skalds accompanied their songs with stringed instruments:<sup>31</sup>

Game of tables I am good at playing,  
 Of accomplishments I know nine,  
 I'm not likely to forget the runes,  
 I occupy myself with book and smithing,  
 I can slide on skis,  
 I can throw a spear and I can row well enough,  
 I am skilled at both harp playing and poetry.

(translated by Ingrid de Geer)

In the Milman Perry/Albert Lord study of South Slavic „singers of tales“ carried out in the 1920's and early 30's the learning process of the singers includes accompaniment on the one-stringed *gusle* producing five tones. This skill did not appear to be much of a challenge to the apprentice and could explain why the literary sources ignore it.<sup>32</sup> Musical archeology has provided us with a reconstructed lyre based on finds of stringed instrument bridges in amber and antler, as well as on fragments of the wooden structure.<sup>33</sup> Musical iconography also places stringed instruments in the Norse Era. A wood carving on a door post of a Norwegian stave church (wood architecture) from ab. 1200 A.D. depicts the Volsung Gunnar from Norse mythology in a snake pit with his hands tied behind his back placating the venomous reptiles by playing the lyre with his toes!<sup>34</sup> The case for the accompaniment by a stringed instrument, however, is strengthened by its virtually universal presence in the hands of singers in ethnic cultures around the world

<sup>31</sup> See Ingrid De Geer: *Earl, Saint, Bishop, Skald – and Music*, Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University, 1985, p. 220ff.

<sup>32</sup> Lord (fn. 1), p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Cajsa Lund: *The Sounds of Prehistoric Scandinavia*, Booklet accompanying Recording, Musica Sveciae MS 101, Stockholm 1984, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> Nils Grinde: *Norsk Musikkhistorie*, 3rd. ed., Oslo 1981, p. 16 and p. 17. English translation by Halverson and Saeteren, University of Nebraska Press, 1996.

in roles similar to that of the skald, as well as in classical antiquity be it, Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, etc.

In the Norse tradition, instruments were not competitors or substitutes for the voice, they were „sound tools.“ In European musical thought, as well, many centuries of vocal chant and a magnificent era of vocal polyphony preceded the kind of co-equal genre of instrumental music of which we now stand in awe. But these accomplishments are not relevant to the role of music in a pre-literary society where the all-important musical mission is spirited communication.

### *Saxo's Latin Terminology*

Samplings of Saxo's Latin have been examined concerning the verses that form the heart of the matter in skaldic oral tradition. These show his use of classical poetic meters as consistent with the word rhythms of the Latin language. They also show that the translator, Fr. Winkel Horn, in recasting the verses into Danish with Old Norse meters and rhymes went beyond translation and „recomposed“ and interpreted them. The purpose was to create a grandiloquent language sprinkled with colloquialisms that especially Danes could appreciate. Winkel Horn succeeded in evoking the „sagatone“ which bequithes to readers in the 20th century and beyond an Old Norse setting from a specifically Danish perspective.<sup>35</sup>

The language of Winkel Horn's translation is in itself a form of „literary skaldic“ accomplishment building on 19th century Danish authorship which has become a factor in Danish culture for the poetic loftiness of the language in the verses. Saxo's own language is different. In form he wishes to elevate his language to compete with Roman models, but he is action oriented and his narrative often avails itself of coarse humor and awkward erotic situations.

For an inquiry into the skalds as musicians, the translation, unconcerned with the ephemeral nuances of meaning that indicate the nature of the performance, represents another veil to look beyond. It makes a look into Saxo's own terminology necessary in order to examine whether the „skaldic echoes“ perceived in the modern text actually exist in the medieval one.

<sup>35</sup> A term from a poem by Kai Hoffman called *Den Danske Sang* (The Danish Song, 1924). In the same poem the poet refers to The Bjarkepos [Bjarkemål]. See f.ex. *Folkehøjskolens Sangbog* [The Folk High School Song Book].



Saxo's preface stakes out the general terminology when he discusses his sources:...'majorum acta patrii sermonis CARMINIBUS VULGATA LINGUAE suae literis saxis ac rupibus insculpenda curasse' = „they [the skalds] made the great deeds of the ancestors known in SONGS IN THE MOTHER TONGUE which they had carved into rocks and cliffs with letters in their use.“

This documentation begets the remarkable metaphor: 'CODICUM usum a cautibus mutuantes' = „using rocks as exchangeable with BOOKS.“ He also says that he is careful to render 'metra metris' = „verses as verses.“

Most verses are introduced as 'carmen' = „song.“ But *carmen* should not be understood as a „singing song“ with tones necessarily on a musical scale, which is the European concept based on chants preserved from antiquity. Rather it is a form of verbal declamation or utterance with a higher tonal inflectional content than functional speech communication. Latin dictionaries add to the basic meaning of song synonyms such as: 'lyric poetry,' 'incantation,' 'charm,' 'formula,' a.o., in the process covering several of the classes of songs belonging to the role of the most ancient skalds. For an example of verses introduced as 'carmen' we can choose the following (I, p. 22): 'sine auctore tale castris CARMEN INSONUIT' = „a voice of unknown origin RESOUNDED in the camp with this SONG.“ A variety of other expressions are found all referring to the flow of the meaning and its manner of inflection in performance: 'aggredior' = „to address;“ 'compello' = „to call to account;“ 'orsa' = utterance;“ 'erumpere' = „to give vent to;“ 'hac voce detexit' = „finished in this voice;“ etc. The emphasis on the song as 'utterance' is clarified by the prose lines immediately following the song in which the continuation often is: „with these words“ using variations of 'dicere' = „to say.“ In duets, exchanges between two characters, no description of the delivery is added, simply indicating: „to which Gro,“ „to that Besse,“ „then Gro,“ „Besse counters thus,“ etc.

In Hartgrepe's alluring song (I, p. 15) Saxo carefully describes the difference between speech and declaimed song: 'nec SIMPLICI VERBUM exhortatione contenta, CARMINIS quoque modo SIC ORSA' = „not content to praise him in SIMPLE WORDS, she also EXPRESSED HERSELF IN SONG“.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> In the love duet between Hagbard and Signe (VII, p. 286) the identical idea is expressed with the word 'concentu' replacing 'carminis' for the possible purpose of expressing unison singing by a number of people.

The word 'canere' is used in (VI, p. 255) 'cum regum tituli CANUNTUR' = „when the renowned king IS SUNG to.“ To vouch for the tonal content of 'canere' is the description of the signals that started the great Bråvalla battle (VIII, p. 312): 'deinde, CANENTIBUS LITUIS, summa utrinque vi conseritur bellum' = „thereupon, to the SINGING TONES OF THE SIGNAL TRUMPETS, the fighting was begun with the greatest effort from both sides“.<sup>37</sup>

The terms 'poema' and 'poeta' are used sparingly. Two consecutive songs in Book I (p. 37 and p. 38) are introduced respectively as follows: 'tali POEMATIS SONO vetuit' = „she forbade them by SOUNDING THIS POEM,“ and 'TALE DICTIS POEMA subjunxit' = „he connected this POEM with him.“

It is said about Halfdan (VII, p. 268) that he 'erat enim condendorum patrio POEMATUM PERITIA' = „in fact, was duly SKILLED IN POETRY according to the customs of the fatherland.“ About Hjarne, the skald who became king, Saxo says: 'Hiarnus, DANICAE admodum POESIS peritus' = „Hjarne who was very skilled in DANISH POETRY.“ Immediately following the verse he continues: 'quo CARMINE EDITO' = „when he had EXPRESSED this SONG“.

Saxo does not use the word *rune* as shown in the quotation from the preface earlier, but 'magicae' appears. Several of these usages come together in the verses at I, p. 16: 'CARMINIBUS LIGNO INSCULPTIS, iisdemque linguae defunctis per Hadingum suppositis, hac VOCE eum HORRENDUM auribus carmen edere coegit' = „she had magic SONGS CARVED ON A PIECE OF WOOD and had Hading place it under the tongue of the corpse, which as a result gave forth this song with a HORRIBLE VOICE:

'Sequitur CARMEN MAGICE editum' = „here follows the MAGIC SONG given forth.“

The magic songs that blunted the swords of the enemies (VII, p. 292) are called 'hebetandi carminibus' and a man by the name of Odd (V, p. 144) was so skilled in sorcery that by 'vi CARMINUM hostilem HEBETAVIT ASPECTUM' = „the power of his magic SONGS BLINDED the enemy.“

<sup>37</sup> 'Lituus' is a Roman trumpet. The translation into 'lur' is problematic because it confuses the younger Iron Age instrument with the ancient Bronze Age horns. In saga language the term 'lur' means a wooden trumpet (f.ex. found together with the Oseberg viking ship) which is still in use as a folk instrument in the upper Scandinavian peninsula.

The main thrust of the present study is to examine Saxo's history for traces of music before general literacy and Christianity were established in Denmark. It would, therefore, be instructive to compare the music terminology of Part One – as a skaldic era – with the terminology of Part Two as the era leading up to the author's own time in which the cultural changes are taking effect.

There is an extraordinary passage (XIV, p. 280) describing the election of Bishop Absalon, Saxo's patron, as the successor of Archbishop Eskil in Lund. It is told so vividly that the reader begins to wonder whether Saxo himself might have witnessed these events. The interaction between main characters and groups of clerics and ordinary people has all the earmarks of Grand Opera. At its height the retiring archbishop, believing that Absalon has accepted the unanimous election, places his hand on him and 'ut mos est, concinere exorsi, celebrum electionis concordiam decoro PSALLENADIO officio prosequuntur' = „as is the custom, adjusting to the moment, the unanimous and solemn election was properly attended by the SINGING OF THE RITUAL HYMN.“ The description continues: „The people would not leave the singing to the monks, but under clapping and dancing SANG IN UNISON – 'CONCENTUM' – a sacred OLD SONG – 'sacro CANTILENA'- competing with the beautiful VOICES OF THE CLERICS – 'CLERICUM VOCIBUS' – singing SONGS OF PRAISE – 'HONORIFICAE MODULATIONIS.' Things were getting out of hand as Absalon resisted the forcible attempts to seat him in the archbishop's throne and there was 'strepitu CANTUS exaudire non patiebatur' – „such a noise that one could not hear THE CHANT.“

Absalon is earlier (XIV, p. 170) in the company of a fellow bishop who is trying to send him a message in song. The singer thereafter sang 'MELOS, quod in divinis natalis pervigilio rite' – „the SONG which is sung in the rite of the Christmas vigil“ and asks Absalon to listen carefully to 'quae CANERENTUR' = „that which IS BEING SUNG.“

Canute VI is the last king whose reign is covered by Saxo's chronicle. In one of his wars he is about to burn a town of the Wends in what is now north Germany, but the clerics come to him in procession on bare feet and plead that if he burns the town the churches will burn with it. The king spares the town and the monks leave while singing a 'SACRO CONCENTUS' = „A SACRED CHORAL CHANT.“

There are also secular singers in Part Two who sing songs intended as warnings or as reminders of the not always honorable past of the leaders. More than one is German and must be considered *minnesin-*

gers, travelling noble artists like the better known French *troubadours*. The term for the singer is 'CANTOR' and he sings 'CARMEN' – a story telling song, but also the term 'CANTILENA' or old song is used.

These samplings of the terminology in Part Two of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* show that Christian singing has brought with it the terminology that is familiar to students of medieval music history such as 'CANTUS' for Christian chant, 'CANTORI' for their singers who join in 'CONCENTUM' or unison choir. We also hear of monks celebrating the prayer services at certain times of the day as in (XIV, p. 98) in which a bishop 'PER MATUTINUM EJUS OFFICIUM' = „in the morning is performing his rite,“ i.e. is singing *matins*. The lay singer 'CANTOR,' is an individual performer and it is clear that a song telling a story whether pre-christian in Part One or of the author's own time in Part Two is 'CARMEN' - a song and that the term 'CANERE' - singing can be used about both. Melodiousness on a musical scale is called 'CANTILENA,' 'MODULATIONE,' or 'MELOS' – the word 'melody' originating from the latter.

In Part One the terminology for melodiousness is absent, but on the other hand the terms in both eras leave little doubt that singing and versified story telling also belong in both. The degree of melodiousness in performance will be difficult to establish, but a thorough review of ethnic singers around the world at the same stage of cultural development as the Old Norse, studies in linguistics, and child development might narrow the subject considerably.

The key person is the skald. In the verse (VI, p. 255) partly quoted above,

'unde cum regum tituli canuntur'  
*Whence, as the renowned king is sung to*  
 'et ducum vates memorant triumphos'  
*and the skald leads in commemorating his triumphs etc.*

we meet the term 'VATES' for skald in the ancient sense of multi-rolled shaman or bard rather than as a court skald or 'POETA.' The term is used in three other places: III, p. 81; V, p. 185, both translated as 'soothsayers'; and at VIII, p. 322 which will be discussed in the section on the Stærkodder tribute.

*Saxo's Latin Verses and the Vernacular*

Saxo repeatedly refers to vernacular poetic tradition as the source of his knowledge of lore-history. The original version of the *kvad*-songs is lost except for traces in Icelandic sources, so attempts have been made to reconstruct them despite the overwhelming difficulties facing such a task. These attempts based on far-ranging comparisons in Old Norse literature serve at the very least to draw some contours about the elusive figure of the ancient Danish skalds, and at their best to suggest the unquestionable grandeur of their best efforts.

Another path to illumination is to achieve a better grasp of that which we *do* possess, i.e. Saxo's Latin poetry in order to know which part of it is indebted to his models, classical Roman or contemporary Latin authorship, and which parts reveal his technique in rendering the alliterative word power of the oral vernacular tradition into the ornate metrics of classical literary tradition.

In his *Saxo as a Latin Poet*, Karsten Friis-Jensen exhaustively accounts for stylistic models poem by poem and for the great variety of meters that he masters. About half the lines are in his favorite *hexameters*. The case is built, successfully it seems to me, for Saxo as a contemporary master in the 12th century revival and rejuvenation of the Roman language, both „Gold“ – and „Silver Ages“ of Latin, by people for whom, in some cases, this was not their mother tongue. It is important to replace the image of the Danish monk who after studies abroad comes home to latinize his country's history, with the truer notion of a virtuoso author-poet who is challenging his models, antique or contemporary, in expressivity.<sup>38</sup> So much more precious is the Angers fragment found in the late 19th century in France which is thought to be from Saxo's working manuscript, including verse lines and emendations.

There is also evidence to suggest that Saxo, as a scholar of his time, employed symbolic substructures borrowed from the liberal arts and sciences in order to achieve a universality of meaning in the Platonic

<sup>38</sup> For an investigation of Saxo as artist, balanced between technique and interpretation, see Ludovica Koch: „Introduktion til Saxo,“ translated from Italian into Danish by Birgitte Regner, p. 35-79 in *Nordiske myter i italiensk belysning*, Copenhagen 1994, „Introduktion til Saxo“ [in Danish].

Specimen p̄terebat tanta q; ad oib; eiu;  
 expimenta fuere ut ab ip̄o ceteri danor re  
 ges communi q̄dā uocabulo scoldungi ui  
 cuparentur. Precurrebat igitur sciold<sup>9</sup>  
 uirū complementū animi macuritate  
 conflictus q; gessit quoz eum uix specta  
 torem etas eē paciebatur. In quo annor uir  
 tuus q; p̄cur su ob aliudā saxonum regis fi  
 liam quā summe pulcritudinis inuicu postu  
 labat cum scato allmannie latrapa ei  
 dem puelle compeccitoe teutonū danor  
 q; exercitu inspectante expuacacione di  
 micauit interfecto q; eo omnem allemā  
 mannoz gentem p̄uide ac ducis sui in  
 teritu debellatam tributa lege choer  
 dundare debē testat. Omniumq; alienū ex fisco suo soluebat q̄  
 si ea alioz regū fortitudine munificencia ac liberalitate cecebat.

*no. 67*  
*hāc etas sta. clarillimis indolis*  
*expimatis. t. animi uigore.*  
*ecia fulgore suo finiamos*  
*occupauit.*  
*† q̄ uir spectator ob ceniadine ce potatu*  
*(spectator obcenerit ce potat.)*  
*† hic n̄ armis m̄*  
*ecia parte cari*  
*te q̄ spicuis fut ex*  
*tit. Sicut impias*  
*ges abrogant q̄*  
*tares talit. q̄ q̄*  
*em dand parte stat*  
*† q̄m*  
*† p̄cabat*  
*† eandem nuptiar.*  
*† diligētia p̄licet. S.*  
*† itaq; i q̄m p̄m*  
*p̄bitate amissim re*  
*tuce recuperat. Pri*  
*recidendū manu*  
*homū legē euit ed*  
*sui que tunc libat*  
*donauit clandestin*  
*insidus perit. Dro*  
*n solum domestis & au*  
*dis colebat. S. ecia*  
*lit ex hoste q̄m a*  
*mare soluit. t. dicit*  
*pecunia ad mu*  
*† tributa penhione ydomu.*  
*† q̄m ad ducē*

One of the pages in the Angers fragment which has verse lines. They correspond to the lines from 1, 14, 5 to 1, 14, 35 in the Olrik-Ræder edition. It is thought to be a working document because of the additions to the text in smaller writing.

sense, „hidden persuaders“ of numbers and proportion that can lend his work validity for all ages.<sup>39</sup>

In order to come as close as possible to Saxo's vernacular models there are a number of techniques that can be applied. The first of these is the specific parallelism of an existing story or poem in Old-Norse or Anglo-Saxon literature that can be identified with specific verse lines or passages in *Gesta Danorum*. The most spectacular are some lines from the Old Norse fragment *Bjarkamál en fornu*<sup>40</sup> and a Norse parallel in Snorri's *Edda* to the verse dialogue between Hading and Regnilde (I, p. 26).<sup>41</sup> But there are also more theoretical parallels such as the introductory formulas (*inquits*) to a verse performance discussed earlier as well as out and out traces of alliteration in the Latin.<sup>42</sup> There is also a structural parallelism in the prosimetra of Saxo and Old Norse. In both cases the poems antedate the prose introductions and elaborations. They form the backbone of the presentation, so-to-speak. It is often obvious that the prose is another way of relating the story of the poems and the narrative composition becomes „developing variations.“<sup>43</sup> This is the improvising narrator's technique of providing a setting for the stable or invariable dramatic moment of the song. For in the song is preserved the greatest intensity by characters expressing themselves always in direct speech. It is the counterpart of recitative and aria in opera.

By referring to the ethnic model, the evidence points to orally transmitted verses as essentially stable and timeless, breaking down only when „tainted“ by transmission to or confrontation by writing.

<sup>39</sup> Kurt Johannesen: *Komposition och världsbild i Gesta Danorum*, Stockholm 1978. See f.ex. p. 23 and p. 59.

<sup>40</sup> Friis-Jensen (fn. 8), p. 152.

<sup>41</sup> Friis-Jensen (fn. 8), p. 158.

<sup>42</sup> Friis-Jensen (fn. 8), p. 161. Such Latin alliterations are also found in Sven Aggesen: „Danernes Historie,“ in *Krøniker fra Valdemarernes Tid* [Chronicles from the Era of the Waldemars], p. 23-84, translated by Jørgen Olrik, 1900. Jørgen Olrik writes in his notes (p. 27): „...her og der rummer den en sådan mængde bogstavrim, at det næppe kan bero på tilfældigheder“ [here and there it contains such a multitude of alliterations that it can hardly be co-incident].

<sup>43</sup> Friis-Jensen (fn. 8), p. 20.

*The Stability of Versified Enumeration*

The introduction to Book VIII, p. 309ff. which takes account of the participants and describes the events leading up to the Bråvalla battle has already been referred to in a number of places in the present article.<sup>44</sup> Here Saxo's text will be examined in greater detail.

„The Swedish war was first described in Danish verses by Stærkodder who himself was one of its primary figures, and its history has been preserved to a greater extent in oral tradition than in writing. Since I have taken on the task of presenting his account in Latin which he in the manner of the ancestors gave in the mother tongue...“

Here is the point of impact in which the author immediately informs us that he has his information from the ancient Danish verses of Stærkodder which either he, or a go-between, has transferred into writing.

Saxo goes on to explain that he will enumerate the foremost nobles on both sides of the conflict. The result is versified enumeration<sup>45</sup> which has stayed intact through the passing of centuries by means of alliteration and meters which not even translation into Latin could blur. The names, in their own right, form a language of totems which has survived expression in other languages because they, in their original form had to conform to the poetic techniques of the skald. In his thorough study of this subject, Axel Olrik arranges the two sources, Saxo and the Icelandic *Sögubrot of fornkonungum* (The Saga of the Ancient Kings), side by side, verse by verse in the attempt to restore the meaning and structure of the epos.<sup>46</sup>

For the purposes of the present study a small quotation (corresponding to strophes 18 and 19 in Olrik's restoration) can be used for illustration purposes:

„E Norvagia vero memorantur Thronder Thrønski, Thori Moricus, Rafn candidus, Hafvar, Biarni, Blihar cognomento Simus, Biorn e vico Soghni, Findar maritimo genitus sinu, Bersi quoque apud Falu oppi-

<sup>44</sup> See article „Bråvallakvadet“ (The Bråvalla Song), in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk Middelalder* vol. II, p. 295, Copenhagen 1957.

<sup>45</sup> Danish, *Remse*.

<sup>46</sup> Aksel Olrik: *Bråvallaslagets kæmperække, Tekst og oplysninger* (The Enumeration of Warriors in the Bråvalla Battle. Text and Notes), *Arkiv for Nordisk Filologi* 10 (ny följd 6), 1894, p. 223.



dum creatus, Sywardus verris caput, Ericus fabulator, Halsten Huiti, Rutar Rawi, Erlingar, cui colubra cognomentum erat."

From Norway is counted Thronð from Thrønd, Tøke from Møre, Ravn White, Hafvar, Bjarne, Blig Breaknose, Bjørn from Sogn, Find from Fjord district, Besse from Fjalar, Sigvar Boarshead, Erik the Performer of Sagas, Holmsten White, Rut the Doubter, Erling called the Snake.

If the quotation is arranged in half-lines a pattern appears which is close to the ancient skaldic meter of *fornyrðislag*:<sup>47</sup>

<i>Ex Norvagia</i>	<i>vero mænorantur</i>
=    ∪ = ∪	= ∪ - ∪ = ∪
<b>Thrønder Thrønski,</b>	<b>Thøri Møricus,</b>
=        ∪ = ∪	= ∪ = ∪∪
<i>Rafn candidus,</i>	<i>Hafra,</i>
= (∪) = ∪ ∪	= ∪
<b>Biarni, Blīhar</b>	<i>cognomento Simus,</i>
= ∪ = ∪	∪ ∪ = ∪ = ∪
<i>Biorn e vico</i>	<b>Søghni,</b>
=        ∪ = ∪	= ∪
<i>Fīndar maritīmo</i>	<i>genitus sāt,</i>
= ∪ - ∪ = ∪	= ∪ ∪ = ∪
<i>Bersi quoque apud Falu</i>	<i>oppidum creatus,</i>
= ∪ - ∪ - ∪ = ∪	= ∪∪ ∪ = ∪
<i>Sywardus verris caput,</i>	<b>Ericus fabulator,</b>
∪ = ∪ = ∪ - ∪	= ∪∪ = ∪ - ∪
<b>Halsten Hūiti,</b>	<b>Rutar Rawi,</b>
= ∪ = ∪	= ∪ = ∪
<i>Erlingar, cui colubra</i>	<i>cognomentum erat.</i>
= ∪ ∪ - ∪ = ∪	∪ ∪ = ∪ = ∪

The most distinctive enumeration is, of course, the genealogy of the Danish kings.<sup>48</sup> Their succession, great deeds, and reputation were recorded in the lost *Skjoldungasaga* [The Saga of the Descendants of

<sup>47</sup> **Bold print** indicates alliteration. Doubleline (=) indicates strong accent, single line (-) half accent, and (∪) unaccented syllables. Italics indicate vowel repetition, or internal rhyme.

<sup>48</sup> Danish - *kongerækken* - „the row of kings“ which well into the present century was the principal method of teaching Danish history in elementary school.

Skjold].<sup>49</sup> It is presumed that this saga was available to Saxo during his work on *Gesta Danorum*, as it is otherwise difficult to imagine that the result could be so cogent as it by and large is.

Book V is dominated by the Erik Epos and the accomplishments of King Frode who is often called *Fredegod* [the Peacemaker]. The story is packed with proverbs primarily voiced by Erik the Well-spoken (V, p.144)<sup>50</sup> and must have served as a textbook in debate methods, thought processes, and wisdom. The story of King Frode is elevated to political science as he not only expanded the sovereignty of his realm until it stretched from Russia to the Rhine, but at the same time his highest wish was to create a lasting peace, a kind of *pax danica*, by uniformity of jurisprudence within the entire kingdom with its far-flung borders.<sup>51</sup>

The great role of the skald Erik in all of these events is the model for the concept that the most successful government is achieved by a combination of courage and wisdom – king and adviser.<sup>52</sup> Saxo must have enjoyed relating this story which could just as well describe the contemporary relationship of Waldemar the Great and Absalon, or perhaps even Absalon and Saxo.

There is an unusual amount of direct speech, often in verbal duels or debate, and large parts of the book is devoted to warfare or its preparations. This is especially true of the decisive battle with the Huns which rivals the Brávalla battle in size. Many names are therefore mentioned often involving alliteration such as „Gest Blinde, the king of the Goths (p.188),“ „Skalk from Scania (p.188),“ „Heding and Hild, daughter of the minor Jute king Høgnes (p.185),“ „Revil and Mevil (p.185),“ „Jarnberaland and Jæmteland (p.187).“

In prose form Saxo has an enumeration of the twelve sons of Arngrim. The translator, Winkel Horn, who in his preface (p.xvii) states as

<sup>49</sup> All subsequent Danish monarchs are referred to as Skjoldunger.

<sup>50</sup> 'Disertus', *Olrik-Ræder* (fn. 6), Tomus I, p. 108-109.

<sup>51</sup> It has the effect of an echo of this story that the Danes who colonized a part of the Anglo-Saxon territory in England could be pacified if they were allowed to live under the governance of their own laws in the area which thereafter became known as „Danelaw.“

<sup>52</sup> In ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood's documentary film, *Atumpan* (master drum), from an Ashanti tribe in West-Africa, we are introduced to this relationship in which the council of elders is led by a „linguist“ who is in charge of ceremonies and rituals, conducts meetings, and is personal adviser to the king.

one of his goals to „get behind Saxo’s reworked ancient kvad-songs,“ could not resist the justifiable desire to render it in verse (V, p. 197). In the following both Winkel Horn’s verse and Saxo’s prose, arranged as a verse, are shown together. In the Latin, alliteration is shown in bold print and vowel repetitions, internal rhyme, in italics:

Winkel Horn:	Saxo:
Brand og Bjarre	<b>Br</b> ander, <i><b>Bi</b>arbi,</i>
Brodd, Hjarrande,	<b>Br</b> odder, <i><b>Hi</b>arrandi,</i>
Tand og Tyrving,	<b>T</b> ænder, <i><b>T</b>irvinger,</i>
to Haddinger,	<b>duo</b> <i><b>H</b>addingi,</i>
Hjørvard, Hjarvard,	<b>H</b> iorwarth, <i><b>Hi</b>arwarth,</i>
Hrane, Angantyr.	<b>R</b> ani, <i><b>Ang</b>antir.</i>

From out of two different books in Saxo’s great work sound the echoes of skaldic kvad-songs in versified enumerations with the system of rhyme and rhythm guaranteeing stability, even in Latin.

There is, however, another enumeration which lost its stability somewhere in the chain of oral performances. In Book VI Saxo is relating the story of twelve Norwegian brothers: „I shall relate some of their names, the others are forgotten with the passing of time: Gerbjørn, Gunbjørn, Arnbjørn, Stenbjørn, Esbjørn, Thorbjørn, and Bjørn (VI, p. 209).<sup>53</sup>

Five of the twelve names are forgotten. But it is not difficult to find the probable cause. The enumeration is a mechanical repetition which over time loses its integrity, erodes and is eventually lost. The effect of this failed enumeration is akin to a control group in scientific experiments for, by contrast, the mnemonic apparatus of skaldcraft has aptly demonstrated its ability to achieve stability.

In Axel Olrik’s study referred to above there is a dramatic demonstration of how songpoems as a source for enumerations of names can be restored. The list of names of the warrior-crew of the legendary ship *Ormen hin lange* (The Long Snake) belonging to renowned Norwegian King Olav Tryggvason has been preserved in Sagas. Olrik writes:

<sup>53</sup> The formation of noblemen’s names during the early Norse period by joining a variable „surname“ with a repeated „family name“ can be seen on runestones of the period. On the Stentoft and Bjørktoft stones (ab. A.D. 650 and ab. 675 respectively) the names are Herewulfr, Haparwulfr, and Hawulfr. See p. 41ff. in Niels Åge Nielsen, *Danske Runeindskrifter*, Copenhagen 1983.

„How could it have been handed on? In a loose oral rendition an enumeration such as this would have maintained stability only with the greatest of difficulty. To speculate about an early written source goes against what we otherwise know about Old Norse historical writing. There is then only one possibility left: the enumeration has been orally transmitted, but with a formal poetic system which protected it against corruption and disintegration“.<sup>54</sup>

### *The Power of the Theater*

The Latin selection from the preparations for the Bråvalla battle quoted earlier, was chosen because it included *Ericus fabulator*. *Fabula* is the Latin word for, among other things, 'dramatic poem,' 'drama' or 'play.' So by this descriptive word, an ear- and eyewitness communicates right through cultural schism and Latin that the performer of the old lore uses all means at his disposal, be it declamation with varying voice qualities, singing, gestures, dance, and more.<sup>55</sup>

Saxo connects 'fabula' and skaldic performance elsewhere in his writing. In Book I a royal murder is in the planning (*Olrik-Ræder* 1, 8, 25). As a part of the plot it is decided that the best moment to take the king by surprise is: 'cumque rex capitis cultui intentus fabulis mentem intulerit' – „when the king is busy adorning his head and has his attention on the song-story theatrical presentation.“

Earlier, King Hading has been lured on a sub-terranean adventure in which he witnesses two armies in full battle. He is explained that „the combattants are warriors who have died in war and now continue to act out how it all happened. They are imitating the great deeds they have done while they were alive as in a play.“ The impact of history on stage must be an anthropological axiom known from the earliest cultural records down to our own time.

We are also told about theater and rituals as parts of the annual sacrifices in Uppsala that included plays with dances, instrumental music, and actors ['mimos'] receiving applause (V, p. 227). Even

<sup>54</sup> Axel Olrik (fn. 9), p. 270.

<sup>55</sup> As a part of a section with the title *The Vergilian aspects of the Bjarkamál*, Karsten Friis-Jensen comments, p. 92, about dialog in direct speech through which the broad sweep of events is seen through the sense impressions of one or two people: „This narrative technique is related to the drama, or perhaps as an even better illustration, to the film.“

though Saxo seizes the opportunity to downgrade instrumentalists, dancers, and actors as an element of his own contemporary crusade against the immoral *gleemen*<sup>56</sup> who were social outcasts, the message reaches us loud and clear that theater was an institution in Old Norse culture used for both ritual and entertainment. The skald in solo performance had to compete with the over-powering effects of the large public performances by seeking higher levels of intensity in his own. It would be good to know what actually took place when Erik the Fabulator took the floor in his greatest moments of inspiration.

The attitude frame in which both Winkel Horn's and Jørgen Olrik's translations and the Saxo dictionary of Franz Blatt were compiled was firmly anchored in Icelandic literature as the foundation for the study of Old Norse culture, and even Saxo himself acknowledged that it was his model. The Icelandic skald and his medieval successor were by and large understood as literary story-tellers and this is the designation that Saxo gave to Arnoldus, who for a time was present at Absalon's court – a man with expertise as a narrator. Ericus fabulator, as indicated above, was also considered a story-teller and Blatt explains him as 'fabularum narrator' and 'fabula' the same as 'narratio', – i.e. a narrator of narrations.<sup>57</sup> The theatrical meaning of fabula appears to be overlooked and thereby the skald is rendered a somewhat bloodless reteller of tales in comparison with the creative act of the „singer of tales“ in which every performance is an event which has as its purpose to perpetuate the radiating life of the culture.<sup>58</sup>

#### *The Tribute to the Odin-skald*

Saxo undoubtedly sees himself as the literary „skald“ for his patron Absalon whose deeds receive more space in his Danish History than anyone else. Looking into the deep past he seems to find a special kinship with Stærkodder, Odin's skald who, like his own patron, is a

<sup>56</sup> See article 'minstrel' in *Harvard Dictionary of Music*.

<sup>57</sup> *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, Tomus II, Indicem verborum, see p. 315, articles 'fabulator' and 'fabula'.

<sup>58</sup> It is noteworthy that during the late stages of the Italian Renaissance towards the end of the 16th century the term 'favola pastorale' was used for a proto-operatic form which employed all the arts. See f.ex., Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization*, p. 332. Striggio's libretto to Monteverdi's opera *Orfeo* (1607) carried the title *La favola d'Orfeo*. See, f.ex., Claude Palisca *Baroque Music*, p. 40.



**SPRAMANDEN UGG FORLADER  
HUNNERLEIREN**

The soothsayer Ugg (one of Odin's many names) leaves the camp of the Huns.

symbol of faith and action. In Stærkodder's final epos he is taunted by Had who is going to pay his tribute to Stærkodder as a warrior by fulfilling the skald's wish to die by the sword in battle. This situation is dignified by the demands of tradition in the Odin sense, and to Had is therefore given the power to also pay his famous adversary the ultimate tribute in words:

Unde venis, patris solitus scriptare poesēs	<i>Where do you come from, you most characteristic of writers of your country's poetic arts -</i>
infirmo dubium suspendu stipite gressum?	<i>with feeble wavering steps propped up by a cane?</i>
Quove ruis, Danicae vates promptissime Musae?	<i>Where are you off to, you ablest skald of the Danish Muse?</i>

The term 'vates' is the crux of this investigation as Saxo's terminology establishes the role and image of the skald who is Odin's agent in upholding and regenerating the ancient values through music.<sup>59</sup>

This moment in *Gesta Danorum* defines Saxo's relationship with the skaldic arts of the past and his own with classical Roman poetry.<sup>60</sup> Saxo wrote about two hundred years after the skald ceased to have a functional role at the top strata of society as church people had become the chroniclers of history, and we may assume that he had been relegated to a lower status, perhaps to „wise-man“ or entertainer. By the time that Saxo intercepts the old songs only a few must be presumed to have survived and the ancient chain of Odin-skalds who ensured the cohesiveness of society through religion, laws, proverbial wisdom, inspiring deeds, entertainment, etc. have become nameless but personified in

<sup>59</sup> Dillmann (fn. 20), p. 86: „Divinité 'inspirée', comme l'indique clairement l'étymologie de son nom, que l'on rattache au latin *uates*; Odin était en effet le dieu de l'Écriture et la Poésie; etc.“ [As inspired divinity, as is clearly indicated by the etymology of the name which is associated with the latin 'vates', Odin was considered to be the god of Writing and Poetry, etc.]. In a footnote further references are listed which discuss the etymology of Odin's name relative to the term 'vates'.

<sup>60</sup> Karsten Friis-Jensen (fn. 8), focuses on this issue in a section „The Poet Singer in *Gesta Danorum*,“ p. 25-26 and in an analysis of Hjarne skald's position which follows, p. 26-28, he adds: „In a way Saxo appears to distance himself to a certain degree from Hjarne by means of his choice of words, in that he is not called *uates*...but someone skilled in Danish poetry.“

Stærkodder. To Saxo this is the legacy, possibly Europe's oldest unbroken culture, that he has been chosen to communicate to Romanesque Europe in a form that compares with the best expression in the literary arts of the time.

Here the expression „the most able skald of the Danish Muse“ shows that he is combining the 'vates' of oral tradition with the 'Musa' of the Greco-Roman tradition.

The expression 'patris solitus scriptare poeses' is firmly positioned in the literary mind-set. There is more 'Musa' than 'vates' in this moment of truth.

In the Müller/Velschow edition the passage prompts a footnote: *Nihil ex hoc loco elicere licet ad aetatem artis scriptoriae in septentrione accuratus constituendam, cum nesciamus, quænam verba carminis vernaculi Saxo hac paraphrasi exprimere voluerit. Hoc autem manet, Starcatherum hoc loco poetam salutari. – Nothing can be drawn from this passage which will determine precisely the age of the art of writing in the north because we do not know the words of vernacular poetry Saxo wanted to express with this paraphrase. What is indisputable, however, is that he salutes the poet Starcatherus in this place.*

The editors, in other words, regret that the verses do not contribute to determining the age of literary arts in the Nordic countries while no concern is shown for the techniques of oral transmission that brought them forward to us.

In the following the tribute passage is presented in the changing styles of the Saxo translations. The purpose of this is to examine whether the readers in the Danish versions have been given an opportunity to appreciate the artistic and philosophical depth and breadth of the original.

Anders Sørensen Vedel, 1575:

Hueden kommer du Danske Poet til oss?  
Est du nu vorden så magtesløs oc gammel/  
at du kant icke gaa vden staff?

*From where do you come to us, Danish poet?  
Have you become so feeble and old/  
that you can not walk without a cane?*

The two lines with the tribute are ignored and thereby he misses the



completion of „where do you come from – where are you off to.“ No speculation here about oral tradition! It is, however, notable that Anders Sørensen Vedel in his prologue [*Fortale*] pays homage to Saxo not solely as historian, but as a poet:

Thi Saxo er en Fader for alle Nordlendiske Historieskriffuere, som Homer er en Fader for alle andre Poeter. Huad disse tuende haffue kaartelige, det haffue de andre siden taget sig til en Grunduaal, hver til sin Bygning at braske oc bramme met.....*Because Saxo is a father for all Nordic historians just as Homer is a father for all other poets. What these two have originated, the others have since used as a foundation, on which to elaborately construct their own buildings.*

Laurids Lauridsen Thurah, 1721:<sup>61</sup>

Hvor kommer du nu fra? du Danske Skjaldrens Ære!  
Kand foden dig ej meer foruden krykker bære?  
O! Mage=løs Poët, hvor agter du nu paa?  
og kunde nok saa snart din Styrke dig forgaa?

*From where have you come just now? you, the pride of  
Danish skalds!  
Will your foot no longer carry you without crutches?  
O! poet without equal, where are you headed now?  
also your strength could wane at any time?*

Thurah's meter is the „energetic“ iambic Alexandrine meter of the French dramatic works of the time. Unlike the other translators Thurah's primary interest was in the verses and they were so admired in

<sup>61</sup> The translation of 1752 is generally credited to Sejer Schousbølle, but his role needs to be seen in a larger perspective. On the title page the publisher, A. H. Godiche, informs us that he has printed and financed the volume and where it can be purchased. The translator is not mentioned till p. 9 of the prologue as someone chosen by the publisher on the advice of learned professors who „is able and well practised in Latin.“ Sejer Schousbølle is called a studiosus [student] and his manuscript has been checked by others. In reciting the improvements of his edition in Danish compared to the first one of 1575 the translation of the verses is listed with veneration as an addition „for which we can thank the great poet, supremely learned, now late Bishop Lauritz Thurah.“ Then follows nearly a full-page quotation of Thurah's prologue to his verses published in 1721.

their own time that they were included in the Schousbølle translation of the prose thirty-one years after their publication. Perhaps it is Thurah's talent combination of poet and scholar that causes him to be the only translator to capture the sense of both the tribute and the philosophical questions.<sup>62</sup>

Grundtvig, 1815:

Person, som pleier van at rime selve Pokker  
 Et Øre af, alt paa dit Moders=Maal!  
 Poet fra Dannemark, hvis Læber gik som Klokker,  
 Som Kiep i Hjul, som Hammer og paa Staal!  
 Hvor langt gik du i Dag, det gad jeg gierne vide,  
 Thi du en smule gaaer saa til den ene Side,  
 At klog ei Pokker selv kan blive paa din Færd!  
 Hvor giælder Rejsen vel? er alt du Maalet nær?  
 Hvis ei, da maa jeg dig ret inderlig beklage,  
 Man rokter ikke langt, som du, i vore Dage,  
 Man vralter ikke vidt, selv med en Bog ved Siden,  
 Det samme tredde Been og brækkes let med Tiden!

*You there, who makes a habit of rhyming  
 an ear off the devil himself in your mother tongue!  
 Poet of Denmark whose lips rang like bells,  
 as a stick on the wheel spokes, like hammer on steel!  
 How far did you walk today, I wonder;  
 because you tilt a bit to one side  
 that not even the devil himself can understand your direction!  
 Whither goes your journey? are you close to your goal?  
 If not, I am sincerely sorry for you,  
 a rocking walk like yours will not get you far these days,  
 you do not waddle very far, even with a beechwood cane at*

<sup>62</sup> „For samtiden stod Thurah ikke blot som en anset bispeskikkelse og fremragende taler, men tillige som tidens ypperste danske digter.“ [For his own time Thurah loomed not just as prominent bishop and outstanding orator, but also as the finest poet of the era]. *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, Tredie udgave, Fjortende Bind, p. 576. [Danish Biographical Dictionary, vol. XIV, p. 576]. A detailed list of Thurah's works can be found in H. Ehrencron-Müller's *Forfatterlexikon* [Dictionary of Authors] Copenhagen 1924-1953, vol. VIII, p. 250-252.

*your side,  
that same third leg will also easily break in time!*

Grundtvig is really folksy here with expressions such as „rhyming an ear off the devil himself.“ „How far did you walk today?“ substitutes for the more philosophical „where did you come from?“ but he does have the continuation about the goal of his journey.

Fr. Winkel Horn, 1898:

Skal jeg så dig	<i>Shall I thus</i>
skue, Skjald	<i>behold you, skald,</i>
dig, som kvad	<i>you who sang</i>
om Kamp og Konger?	<i>about strife and kings?</i>
Sig mig, hveden	<i>Tell me from whence</i>
hid du vandred,	<i>you have wandered hither,</i>
hvorhen fører	<i>whereto leads</i>
dig din Vej?	<i>your path?</i>
Sært din Skæbne	<i>strangely your fate</i>
nu er skiftet;	<i>now has changed;</i>
hvor er Kampens	<i>where is the combat's</i>
kjendte Kræfter?	<i>legendary strength?</i>
Mat du vakler	<i>Feeble you rave</i>
hen ad Vejen,	<i>along your road</i>
støtter dig på	<i>supporting yourself</i>
tvende Stave.	<i>on two canes.</i>

Winkel Horn has succeeded, it seems to me, in giving the Danish words a dignified loftiness in their pseudo-Norse form while at the same time avoiding melodrama.

The tribute has all but disappeared. The title, *skjald*, is used retrospectively, almost nostalgically about past accomplishments. The „where from and where to“ seems matter-of-fact, not expecting an answer and more emphasis is placed on the enfeeblement of the warrior.

Jørgen Olrik, 1912:

Du som paa Danernes Maal saa mangfoldige Viser har kvædet,  
sig mig, hvad fører dig hid? hvi vakler du saa henad Vejen?  
Sagnrige Skjald paa vort fædrene Sprog, hvi saa hastigt paa Færde?

*You who have sung so many a song in the language of the Danes,  
tell me what brings you hither? why do you rave so along the road?  
Songladden skald in the language of our fathers, why in such a hurry?*

Jørgen Olrik's translation reflects a different approach to Saxo, a more objective approach that discards everything that can be considered „poeticizing“ or meta-poetic – poetry on poetry. He renders the verses in Saxo's own meters and chooses a vocabulary that is as close to contemporary usage as possible. The tribute is congratulatory in nature, no 'Musa' and no 'vates' in the sense of inspired creator. He does use *skjald*, meaning vernacular poet but not as divinely inspired Odinskald.

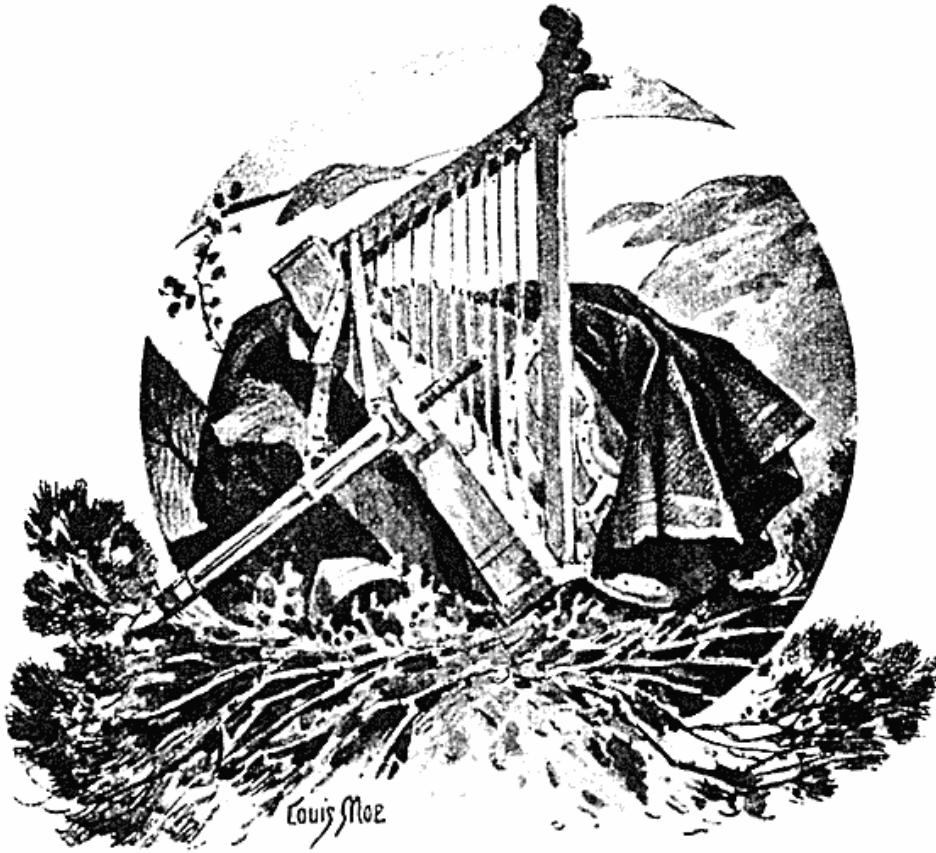
What was on Saxo's mind when at the precise place of his tribute to Stærkodder he frames it with the questions „where from“ and „where to?“ Are we listening to his thoughts on the waning moments of the ancient Danish oral tradition – a contemporary anguished flashback to a poignant passage in the story? The two questions are constructed with the formconsciousness of the classical poet. Is the literary poet conscious of taking the role of Had in the poetic sense of providing a *coup de grâce* to the oral lore by the inevitable commitment to writing?

The questions of „where from“ and „where to“ are shared by all who are concerned and seek knowledge about early lore history, whether among Norse peoples or anywhere in the world.

### *The Power of Music*

Music – poem/music – must be powerful stuff if „a peasant“ can become King of Denmark by putting together „a few artless verses.“ Hjarne's story (VI, p. 207) of quick rise to glory and equally quick fall from the same must have passed through the centuries promoted by the performers themselves. The reactions can be manifold because it has elements of wonderment, humor, self-projection, imagery, etc. Many ingredients in the story are of parable-like didactic value.

But the crux of the matter is put sharply into focus by Stærkodder at the height of his creative powers in the Ingild epos. Stærkodder has travelled from Uppsala to Lejre because he has learned that King Ingild is disgracing his heritage and his realm by a depraved court life. On arrival he is told to take a seat at the low end of the table instead



of one near the king to which he is entitled. His fury clearly shows and the queen tries to assuage it at first by giving a fine gift that is rejected and hurled back at her, then by having a flute player artfully entertain him.<sup>63</sup> The notion that instrumental playing can alter the mood of listeners is well-nigh universal from David's harp in the Bible, to Mephistopheles' violin playing, and in Saxo's own story in Book XII, p. 44 about the harp player at Erik Ejegod's court which resulted in the deaths of courtiers in remorse for which the king and his queen undertook a pilgrimage which changed the course of history.

But the flute playing has no effect on the skald. His fury is on the scale of upholding religion and the honor of the realm. He launches

<sup>63</sup> Saxo uses the term 'tibia' for flute. Tibia is the Roman translation of Greek 'aulos', oboe. See *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, article 'tibia.'

into a song that so strongly rebukes the king's behaviour and dereliction of duty that in the end the king takes action against the degenerates at court and rids himself of them by killing them right then and there. These actions now become the cause for a brilliant song of praise for the monarch who has restored honor to himself, the court, and the kingdom. It is hard to imagine a greater tribute to the power of skaldic music.

Many early operas from their beginnings in and around the year 1600 used the theme of Orfeus from Greek mythology who dares venture into the underworld in order to retrieve his beloved wife who was torn from him by death. Demi-god Orfeus relies on his outstanding harp-playing and singing to soothe the savage spirits of the kingdom of death as his means of accomplishing his goals. Music conquering death is convincing testimony to the power of music.

The Ingild epos can be considered pre-Christian Denmark's Orfeus story in which skaldic expressive power saves the fate of the nation. Stærkodder is, after all, also a demi-god guided by Odin as Orfeus is by Zeus and Apollo.

The skald takes his place among other legendary musicians, be they in highly developed societies like antique Greece or shamans in simpler societies.

### Conclusions

The purpose of the present investigation is to examine Saxo's writing for traces of the oral tradition that preceded his path-breaking *magnum opus*. The Icelanders have, through their creativity of both the climax of the old tradition and the transmission to the new in the same Norse language, provided the clearest record of these events for us. Saxo also acknowledges in his preface that he has consulted their literary treasure houses and used their works „as models.“ Besides the size and wide range of the West Norse literature, Snorri Sturluson, often referred to as the last skald, has left for posterity a manual for skaldic creativity – *Skáldskaparmál*.<sup>64</sup> In this we learn the rhyme patterns, the different types of metrical patterns, and a complete list of voice modulations for achieving a wide range of emotional effects in

<sup>64</sup> In Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, Arthur Gilchrist Broden, translator. The American Scandinavian Foundation, New York 1916.

performance.<sup>65</sup> What is revealed is the skaldic composition techniques at their most highly developed level – the word virtuosos who created ‘word murals’ or ‘word tapestries’ for insuring that the accomplishments of their mighty royal patrons would survive in the future and – as it were – into the new written tradition.

Both Sturluson and Saxo are on rescue missions: The Icelandic skald to deliver not only a written version of oral creations but even the instructions for how the practitioners kept the messages dependable by an elaborate performance art; Saxo to bring the entire Danish cultural tradition to European consciousness in the language of its learned society. Saxo does not pay any direct tribute to Danish oral tradition, rather he bemoans his country’s earlier poverty in Latin writers! He scours the work of Icelandic colleagues for references to Danish history and in a controversial manner elevates the messages on rune stones to a library. Saxo’s mindset is all caught up in the excitement of the Romanesque Renaissance. After centuries of dormancy, the expressivity of classical Rome has reached even a Nordic country and the educated and creative Dane is going to tell them that his ascending nation is promoting and living the true Christian faith built on a foundation of a history as old as that of Mediterranean antiquity. In order to accomplish this, however, he must describe the virtues of the pre-Christian past and in so doing becomes something of a „modern literary skald“ in his time and, in fact, the vanguard of the new Gothic era with its concerns for laic participation in building for the afterlife.

Here and there, however, Saxo must acknowledge that his sources are people who are knowledgeable about the lore of Danish antiquity.<sup>66</sup> That means people who are still skilled in the oral tradition and that ancient verses were still perpetuated among the populace, as he says is the case with the Stærkodder epos. In effect, Saxo can not accomplish his European purpose without availing himself of the rem-

<sup>65</sup> Sturluson (fn. 64), Chapter LXXII, p. 239. Some of these performance options listed are reminiscent of the *inquit* introductions to the songs in Saxo, to quote a few: ‘eloquence’; ‘magic spell’ [*galdr*]; ‘mocking’; ‘recital’ [*kveðandi*]; ‘tale’ [*saga*]; song [*sōngr*]; ‘resonance’, etc.

<sup>66</sup> Saxo’s predecessor by a couple of decades, Sven Aggesen, says that the writing of his Denmark’s Chronicle (finished shortly after 1185) is based exclusively on the direct words from old, experienced men after careful research. See Aggesen (fn. 42), p. 36.

nants of the local oral tradition. This also extends to reporting on the laws given by certain kings. These are known to have been presented at *things*, convened parliamentary sessions, to be committed to the memory of a „lawsayer,“ a skald in the role of a living law library. Another trace of the indirect importance of oral tradition in Saxo is the row of kings from Dan to his own times. It is a specialty of certain skalds to commit the chain of tribal and national rulers to the mnemonic apparatus for doing so – models of this is known from Homer to simple tribal social structures. The *Skjoldunga Saga* which belongs to this group is considered to have been available to Saxo, and the Icelandic *Ynglingatal* by Thjodolf of Hvin, traces the succession of kings back to Mälar days at the beginnings of Norse culture.

Behind the unlike missions of Sturluson and Saxo lies, however, a common purpose of insuring by the power of the pen that the character and deeds of Norse culture achieved by industry, ingenuity, solidarity, as well as by the sword, and perpetuated by oral tradition – not be lost.

The majority of the skaldic verses preserved as literature are those of the West Norse court skalds. It is *ipse facto* a library literature of poetic writing and its creators are, therefore, poets. But Snorri is here to remind us that we only possess a negative image of the actual skaldcraft – the performance. What we have left is in the same relationship to its performance as the musical notation is to a Baroque opera – we can never be totally sure that we know how it actually sounded.

Since the role performed by the skald is universal in pre-literary societies – whether viewed from social anthropology or ethno-musicology or other fields concerned with „origins,“ it would contribute to a clearer picture to build the image of the skald „up“ from ascendant cultural origins to join up with its retrospective literary flowering reported by medieval writers.<sup>67</sup> This we can accomplish by identifying the Odin-skald who projects the multiple roles of historian, entertainer, soothsayer, teacher, shaman, etc. that have been observed in the present analysis. A three-stage development of the role of skald can be envisioned: Odin skalds (ab. 400 – ab. 800) for fundamental lore; Brage<sup>68</sup> skalds (ab. 800 – ab. 1000) – for heroic eposes; and royal skalds (ab. 1000 – ab. 1100) – for court poetry. The West Norse literary

<sup>67</sup> Merriam (fn. 3), Chapter VII „Social Behavior: The Musician“ discusses this general issue, but it is obliquely a common theme throughout the book.

<sup>68</sup> After the Norse god of poetry.



treasures have given us the brilliant model of the *Hird* – or court-skald and the older Poetic Edda has a sampling of Brage-skald, possibly even some Odin-skald offerings.

Where shall we find traces of Odin skalds and Brage skalds and what will be the type of evidence we can expect? The premise behind the question is: similar social structure and economy – similar cultural manifestations. A particular group has a cultural identity that is unique, but cultures, when viewed in terms of levels of development, cluster themselves into categories with common traits, including those concerning the arts and their transmission in a pre-literary environment. A survey of music cultures around the world clearly lead to this conclusion. It establishes that the basic needs of human beings remain rather stable while they find their own individual survival successes by interacting with different environments on earth.

At a certain level of development – the tribal social organization in survival economies for example – a culture has a number of functions, we might say „job descriptions,“ that recur with reliable certainty: a shaman who knows the rites by which his group can intercede with higher powers in the environment for favorable outcomes of its activities; a „singer of tales“ who keeps the inherited lore constant by using mnemonic techniques such as rhymes and meters in performance; a „linguist“ who as chief adviser to the ruler keeps track of the tribal laws and protocol; a soothsayer who divines the future from experienced readings of nature’s language; artisans dedicated to producing sacred objects and designs; and more. Some of these roles may overlap in given tribes, but they are universal and continue in disguise in our modern society. Thanks to modern media we can by camera and microphone „visit“ with inaccessible cultural groups and experience by direct observation of tribal life the roles of the arts in it. It is apparent from such observations that the simpler the economy, the greater the need for the arts in order to keep the tribe together in a unifying effort for the purpose of survival. The arts form the „cultural glue“ – the mind and soul of the tribe.<sup>69</sup>

The formative age of Norse culture was the period 400 A.D. – 800

<sup>69</sup> A number of video documentaries let the viewer join into the life of tribes for an inside understanding of the role of the arts. Richard Attenborough’s *Behind the Mask* series has a segment, „The Tribal Eye,“ which offers a view into the life of the Dogon people in Mali. Ethno-musicologist Mantle Hood has produced *Atumpan* which pro-

A.D. Uppsala, today's *Gamla Uppsala* [Ancient Uppsala] held a very special position from the beginnings of this era. A number of sources testify to this. The Icelander, Thjodolf of Hvin who was court skald to King Harald the Fairhaired of Norway as mentioned earlier, recounts in the family history, *Ynglingatal*, the succession of kings all the way back to the Mälars culture in mid-Sweden as its origin. Another indication of the importance of Uppsala and Lake Mälars as a protected cultural womb is the sheer number of archeological sites along its shores from this time period.<sup>70</sup> The most obvious signs of power, however, are the royal burial mounds and the flat-top *thing* mound, the largest monuments from antiquity in all of the Nordic countries. In the shadow of these „Norse pyramids“ were the holy groves in which the pantheon of Nordic gods were worshipped and which were the sites of the annual bloody sacrifices of animals and humans called *blots*.<sup>71</sup>

This place, one might expect, would make the Christian Saxo's hair bristle, but Uppsala is, nevertheless, mentioned a number of times in his chronicle. In one place he mentions that Stärkodder was visiting there „at the time of the sacrifices, but he became disgusted with the feminine dances, the admiration showered on the players with their theatrical plays and the mellowing sound of the rattle-bells“ (V, p. 227). In another passage, King Halfdan „realizing that she [his wife] was infertile and as he was most desirous of heirs, went to Uppsala in order to achieve her fertility“ (VII, p. 294). In early Norse mythology the gods had a home here and the presence of Odin was especially important.

The social order was based on family clans living in relative isolation learning religion and wisdom by oral tradition. This situation matches quite well the need of the tribal roles described above and we can even assign the title of skald to the purveyors of culture with reasonable certainty because that designation is chiseled on contemporary rune stones.

vides a perspective on the importance of music in an Ashanti tribe in Ghana. National Geographic Society has produced a video on the waning moments of the Gagadju tribe as a part of Australian aborigine culture.

<sup>70</sup> A map of archeological excavation sites from this time period is displayed at the National Museum in Stockholm.

<sup>71</sup> Snorri (fn. 18), describes the importance of Gamla Uppsala in *Heimskringla*, „Ynglinga Saga,“ Chapters V, p. 9; XII, p. 14, and XXIX, p. 25.

The foregoing account of skaldic connections to Saxo's stories all have some bearing on this early period, but the sections about skalds as rune masters, teachers by proverbs, and shamans working magic, are especially relevant to the ethnic model. Saxo walks a fine line between relegating Odin to pure superstition on the one hand and yet, on the other hand, his code of conduct has guided the course of the ancient history of the Danes so that his presence walks in and out of the books of Part One, some times in full view in the story, and the next moment working his magic behind the scenes, speaking in verses. This is the Age of the Odin Skald.

The second period of the Norse Age ab. 800 A.D. – ab. 1000 A.D. breaks the boundaries of the intra-Scandinavian expansions and rivalries of the previous period and bursts on the international scene with seemingly unstoppable energy. The Norse come armed with superior weaponry, the fastest and most adaptable ships of their age, and a commitment to physical superiority climaxed by death in battle. The age of the Norsemen, generally known as the Viking Age, is a time when the Nordic peoples made their mark on the developing European Christian culture and conquered and settled in the areas closest to them in England, Ireland, Scotland, northern France and wherever the trade routes took them in Russia on their way to business connections in the Middle East.<sup>72</sup> Saxo mentions the Norse connections to the Byzantine emperor to the south east and also boasts (IX, p. 363) that a small band of Danes could stand up to the Holy Roman emperor to the south.

All institutions change with all these restless international contacts, including the language, the musical material of the skald, and with it the runic *futhark*. The role of the skald changed with the run-away speed of social development. While we may be sure that the old magic and wisdom roles continued, there were far more historical „great deeds“ to record in prose and verse and as the horizons of the social leaders, their primary audiences, expanded so did the sophistication of the singers. The function of the skald increasingly became an exhortation to push for more fearless heroism from the new ranks of recruits. The stories and eposes became long performances in the manner of operas with prose recitatives and aria *kvad* that upheld the past accomplishments as models to emulate.

<sup>72</sup> J. Brøndsted *The Vikings*, London 1965, chapters 3, 4, and 5 cover The Ninth, The Tenth, and The Eleventh centuries respectively and discuss these far-flung settlements and trade connections.

In the ethnic model this stage corresponds to the Milman Perry/Albert Lord study of the South Slavic „singers of tales“ which was the object of a modern scientific study just before literacy obliterated the need for the function in the 1930's. Until that time extended performances by the singers „were the chief entertainment of the male population in that region.“

The stories in Saxo are not only chosen to overawe, tantalize, create wonderment, frighten, and inspire, they are also didactic. It must always be kept in mind that the lore depended on oral performance and that men during the long winters were being prepared, charged up for great deeds of their own, as it were. Next summer season's opportunities for travels and raids could not come soon enough for the ones who caught fire. The key to the skald's success was getting the messages across by inspiring performances. The precious metal ring on the arms of the successful skalds was his visible credential in the service of both Odin and his patron, his word composing skills would have to do the rest by seeking new heights of intensity. This is the Brage Skald.<sup>73</sup>

Echoes of the Odin Skalds and the Brage Skalds are clearly heard in the writing of Saxo Grammaticus as observed, but there does not appear to have been a *Hird Skald* age (ab. 1000 A.D. – ab. 1100 A.D.) in Danish skaldic tradition comparable to the final flowering of the virtuoso composers of the loftiness of an Erik Skallagrimson and many other Icelandic skalds.<sup>74</sup> The apparent absence of court skalds in the West Norse sense in Danish literature has a possible explanation if a couple of premises are accepted. One: both Sven Aggesen and Saxo are high-born people for whom their sources, old men experienced in oral tradition, are much more likely to be individuals from their own ranks than village people in the sense of 19th century view of folk tradition. During the transition period the old and the new traditions co-existed and the old lore continued to be told among the nobles as more or less serious entertainment. Two: Denmark's geographical po-

<sup>73</sup> The most important toasts or vows in the halls of the rulers was the „Bragebeaker“ which had to be emptied in order to seal a solemnly made pronouncement. See „Ynglinga Saga,“ *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>74</sup> In *Forsøg på en Tvedeling af Kilderne til Saksens Oldhistorie* [An Attempt at a Dual Division of the Sources to Saxo's History of Antiquity] which is published together with *Saksens Oldhistorie* (fn. 9) [Saxo's History of Antiquity], Axel Olrik states p. 15 that „the Viking Era which in Norway and on Iceland educed both the florescence of skaldic poetry and sagas, does not appear to have had a similar effect in Denmark.“

sition as „South Norse“ involved her much more in European cultural and political affairs than was the case with the West Norse courts. The most visible symbols of this is Danish King Canute the Great's journey to Rome A.D. 1027 in order to attend the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope, and the establishment of an archbishopric in Lund A.D. 1089. From this perspective Saxo's verses represent a „court skaldic“ literature in one volume.<sup>75</sup>

Saxo has accepted the historical role assigned in the past to skalds – the preservation of knowledge about great deeds – and becomes in effect the last Danish skald. In a pre-literary culture the lore *is* the history – the agent that binds the culture together. In Saxo's time a new expansive Denmark was in the process of building a major treasure of stone churches around the entire country that still stands today. These churches testify to the success of Christian Denmark for which Saxo assumed the role of a kind of skald for the benefit of later generations. They serve us in their way much as the rune stones did him in his time by communicating the messages of centuries past. And as Saxo surely believed that his „God of the True Faith“ would look after Denmark in the future, he took pleasure in reporting (VIII, p. 332) that „Odin has always cared for Danes with a fatherly love.“ Here, as in many other places in his writing, Saxo seems to be seeking strength and inspiration from both backgrounds.

### *Afterwords*

The tide of information available to contemporary searchers for knowledge also changes the reference frames for judgements. During the last generation the definition of who a musician is has changed to include just about anybody whose performance outcome is sound – and, at least in a few cases, even that of silence. However, there is at least one bond between the musician of our time and that of the earliest cultures in mankind's deep past and that is the observation that human beings have always used the technology by which they made a living for instrumental music making from the bow and arrow to the computer.

<sup>75</sup> A similar observation allowing for circumstantial differences, is expressed by R. K. Gordon in his notes to „Beowulf“ on p. 1 of his selection and translation of *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, London 1926, as he writes: „A little later [after King Alfred], Old English poetry dealt almost entirely with Christian subjects, and the monk in his cell turned poet and replaced the minstrel in the hall.“

How can we establish a similar link to human origins through singing? As shown by many references in the present study, by familiarity with the ethnic model of the „singer of tales“ on a world wide basis which ethnomusicology has established as a musician. For the music of Nordic countries the outcome must be to accept the early skald, the Odinskald, as the grandfather of their music.

### *Saxo's Denmark's Chronicle*

The chart represents a listing of the 280 verses by Book and groupings with page numbers as they appear in the translation by Fr. Winkel Horn (orig. 1898), new edition 1994, in colum WH.

Each line corresponds to a poem as a group of verse lines in Saxo's Latin original except where prose is indicated.

Page numbers in columns MV and OR refer to editions by Müller-Velschow (1899) and Olrik-Ræder (1931) respectively.

For a complete account of Saxo's verse technique, see *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet* by Karsten Friis-Jensen, Appendix I: Conspectus metrorum, p. 181.

### Book I

Page no.s			Persons	54 Verses	Poems
WH	MV	OR			
10	27	14	Graa, Besse, Gram	10+3 verses	Prince Gram courts the Swedish princess
12	31	18	Besse	3 verses	Besse about Gram's slaying of the Swedish king
13	33	19	Gram	3 verses	Gram praising his own virtues
15	36	21	Hartgrepe	3 verses	Hartgrepe courts her fosterson
16	37	21	Hartgrepe	3 verses	Reassuring Hading
16	38	22	Dead Man	3 verses	„Bitter runes“ sorcery
17	40	23	„One-eyed man“	4 verses	Predictions and guidance
20	44	26	Asmund	4+2 verses	Asmund mourns his son
22	47	28	Voice in the night	3+2 verses	Soothsaying of unknown origin
23	53	29	Woman soothsayer	4 verses	Dire predictions
26	55	31	Hading and Ragnhild	3+2 v.×6 lines	Domestic dischord
27	57	33	Ragnhild	2 v.×4 lines	Hading's deceased wife in a dream

**Book II**

Page no.s	Persons	56 Verses	Poems
WH MV OR			
33 61 36	Frode	5 verses	Fiscal advice from a subject
37 68 39	Svanhilde and Regner	2+3 verses	Saving royal sons by sorcery
39 72 41	Svanhilde	3 verses	Magic and seduction
<b>THE BJARKE EPOS</b>			
55 90 53	Bjarke, Hjalte, and Rude	43 verses	The final battle for hero-king Rolf Krake

Book III . No verses

Book IV . No verses

**Book V**

Page no.s	Persons	22 Verses	Poems
WH MV OR			
149 198 112	Grep and Erik	11 verses	A duel in rhetoric
159 210 118	Gotvar and Erik	not translated	Bawdry verses
181 231 129	Erik and Olimar	2 verses	Erik scouting the strength of the Hun army
184 237 131	Erik	3 verses	Erik advises the king
192 245 136	Asmund	5 verses	Asmund tells of being buried alive
197 prose	Enumeration of names	1 v×6 lines	Listing of Arngrim's sons

**Book VI**

Page no.s	Persons	73 Verses	Poems
WH MV OR 207 258 143	Hjarne	1 verse	Danish crown won by a song-poem
216 266 147	Three Swans	2 verses	Magic songs
216 267 148	Fridlev	3+2 verses	Song of insult and gloating over victory
<b>THE INGILD EPOS</b>			
233 287 158	Stærkodder	19 verses	Taunting song
252 303 170	Stærkodder	13+20 verses	Reviling and persuasion
257 315 178	Stærkodder	13 verses	Song of praise

**Book VII**

Page no.s	Persons	45 Verses	Poems
WH MV OR 269 327 185	Halfdan	3 verses	King Halfdan sings of his plans
273 332 188	Ottar	3 verses	Ottar courting Sýrith
<b>THE HAGBARD AND SIGNE EPOS</b>			
279 339 193	Signe	4 verses	Song of praise
280 341 194	Hagbard	4 verses	Song to the maid attendants
282 342 195	Hagbard and Signe	7 verses	Love song
283 344 196	The Queen and Hagbard	4 verses	Hagbard captured
284 346 198	Hagbard	3 verses	Farewell song
292 356 204	Hildiger	7 verses	Mortally wounded singer
294 359 205	Halfdan and Gyriþe	3+2 verses	Furtive conversation
301 369 210	Gunne and Grim	3+2 verses	Father and son with their last breaths

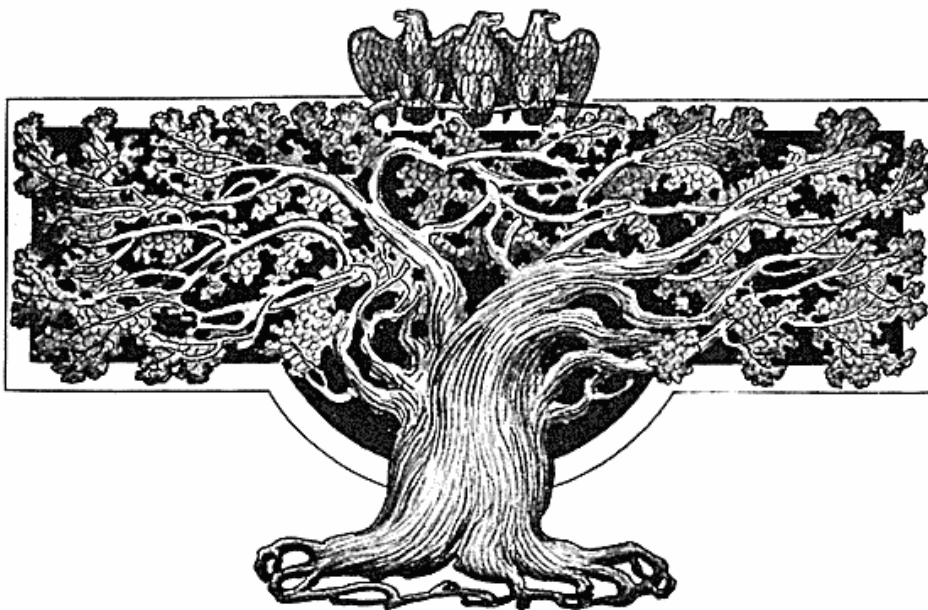


Book VIII . The Stärkodder Epos

Page no.s	Persons	29 Verses	Poems
WH MV OR 321 397 224	Stärkodder and Had	26 verses	The final challenge to the superwarrior and skald
323 405 228	Stärkodder	3 verses	The warrior's death

ook IX

Page no.s	Persons	1 Verse	Poems
WH MV OR 370 prose	Ragnar Lodbrog	1 verse, 4 lines	Death and Warning



## RESUME

LOUIS CHRISTENSEN: *Ekkoer af skjaldemusik hos Saxo. Et forsøg på at etablere den tidlige skjald, Odin-skjalden, som musiker.*

Artiklen er et forsøg på at anskue den tidlige skjald, Odinskjalden, som musiker. Udgangspunktet er den „etniske model“, en sammensætning af kulturelle roller i før-litterære samfund, der beskriver udøveren som en sanger, der genskaber sine sociale eller nationale gruppes mundtlige overleveringer ved hjælp af et poetisk system.

Mens selve skjaldens fremførelse, tidsmæssigt set, er flygtig, er dens virkninger langvarige. Derfor borger kulturgruppens historiske, homogene sammenhold.

Saxo skriver i sin fortale til Danmarks Krønike, at hans beskrivelse af forfædrenes bedrifter hovedsagelig hviler på deres sangkvad på modersmålet. Værket er derfor i høj grad et resultat af skjaldenes succes og indeholder mange spor – ekkoer – af deres forestillinger. Disse spor undersøges i Saxos vers og prosa med blikket rettet mod skjaldens mange og forskelligartede roller som kulturformidler: bl.a. runemester, spåmand, shaman, og teatralisk fortællekunstner. Saxos latinske terminologi vedrørende musiske emner, dens forhold til modersmålet og dettes verseteknik undersøges. Til slut belyses skjaldens magt som Odins højre hånd i forkyndelsen af den gamle religions livssyn gennem de udøvende kunstarter. Endelig fremhæves Saxos hyldest til Odinskjalden gennem skiftende tiders oversættelser og forståelse.

Som konklusion peges der på en udviklingslinie fra den nordiske grundkultur med en Odinskjald, der i ekspansionsperioden på højeste plan bliver til en Brageskjald, for til sidst i kulturkampperioden at blive til den virtuose hofskjald. Netop som tæppet går ned for skjaldens oprindelige formål og rolle, fremstår de to litterære skjalde, Sturluson og Saxo, fra hvem vi har hovedvægten af vor viden.

Saxo er talsmand for et nyt og spændende kapitel i Danmarks historie og formår at danne bro og at støtte sin beretning om sin samtids bedrifter på sin begejstring for grundkulturens. Artiklen slutter med at argumentere for at anse skjalden for den danske musiks egentlige ophav.