

Structures for the Transfer of Power in Ibn Fadlān's Account of the Rus

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ABSTRACT: *In Ibn Fadlān's account of the Rus funeral, the Indo-European symbolic triad can be recognised in the sacrifice of three pairs of creatures and in the three pairs of men positioned at the neck, arms, and feet of the woman being sacrificed in the tent on board the ship. I suggest looking at the people in the tent as a set of those who are losing power which is about to be transferred to the new king. The deaths of the six creatures in pairs and the dog mentioned along with them can be interpreted as the deaths by proxy of the six men and the senior woman in the tent. The death of the young slave woman is the death by proxy of the queen, and also has a non-human counterpart in the hen killed by the young woman. When the dead man is included, there are nine people in the tent. According to the Indo-European model I have proposed, these could be the important people in the society who corresponded to nine of the ten gods in the pantheon, and both gods and humans can be regarded as enacting roles in a drama. The unrepresented tenth god would be the god of death, and the inauguration of the new king who lights the funeral pyre would apparently have included the sacrifice of a young man or his proxy corresponding to this god.*

RESUME: *I Ibn Fadlāns beretning om en Rūs-begravelse kan den indoeuropæiske triade ses i ofringen af tre par dyr og i de tre par mænd, der står ved halsen, armene og fødderne af den kvinde, der bliver ofret i teltet ombord på skibet. Mit forslag er, at personerne i teltet ses som dem, der mister den magt, som er i færd med at blive overført til den nye konge. De seks dyr, der bliver dræbt, samt den hund, der nævnes sammen med dem, kan opfattes som stedfortrædere for de seks mænd samt den ældre kvinde i teltet, der alle sammen 'dør'. Den unge trælkvindes død kan ses som substitut for dronningens død, og også denne død har en ikke-menneskelig pendant i den høne, som den unge kvinde dræber. Inkluderes den afdøde mand, er der ni personer i teltet. Ifølge den indoeuropæiske model, som jeg har fremsat, kunne disse være de vigtige personer i samfundet, som er modstykke til ni af panteonets ti guder, og både guder og mennesker kan*

ses som aktører i dramaet. Den ikke-repræsenterede tiende gud er dødsguden, og indsættelsen af den nye konge, som antænder ligbålet, ville have involveret ofringen af en ung mand eller hans stedfortræder som pendant til denne gud.

KEYWORDS: *Indo-European pantheon; Scandinavian royal power; dramatic roles of gods and humans; sacrifice by proxy; mythological triad; Turkic funerals.*

The Rus described in the *Risāla* (Journey) written in Arabic by Ahmad ibn Fadlān in 921–922 AD were a people living on the Volga River near what is now Kazan in the state of Tatarstan in Russia who were probably mainly Scandinavian (Hraundal 2014, 65–66). Ibn Fadlān's account of a Rus funeral has already been much discussed from a variety of points of view. In this study the emphasis is placed on the concept of the transfer of power when a king has died. It relates well to a formulation expressed in this context by Władysław Duczko (2004, 142):

The funeral was an event which consisted of various steps belonging to a process of transferring the dead from the community of living to the community of the deceased. The circumstances around this transfer had as much to do with the dead man's social position in life as with the new situation his departure created in the community: An important link in the network of relationships had disappeared and left an empty place in a current hierarchy, therefore it was necessary to make all needed arrangements that could secure succession. [...] The burial was also an occasion for the employment of rituals that activated relationships between the community and the supernatural world.

Jens Peter Schjødt (2007) is among the scholars who have illuminated the Rus rituals from the Scandinavian perspective, and Thorir Jonsson Hraundal (2013, 110–122; 2014, 85–91) has shown that the rituals contained Turkic elements and has argued that they are best understood as hybrids. I explore various facets that can be interpreted in an Indo-European context but can also be illuminated by reference to Turkic practices.

The interregnum

Ibn Fadlān speaks of the rites attending the death of a great man.¹ This man is central to the Scandinavian community that mourns and commemorates him with elaborate rites, and it seems appropriate to call him a king. From the point of view of the Arab visitor from Baghdad, the scale might not have seemed adequate to call him a king, but from the Scandinavian point of view size would not necessarily have been a determining factor. We seem here to be treating a totality of the kind that Frands Herschend located in present-day Denmark when he said (2009: 101):

Despite their being small-scale, Udby-Skovgårde and probably Brøndsager as well were small lands, 'nano-kingdoms', with a people and an elite as well as a ruler, a 'nano-king' with no less than a universal ideological foundation and cosmological role.

¹ There are translations given in the full Arabic context in Montgomery 2017, 35–38, 58–61, and Lunde and Stone 2012, 49–54.

A king could be the king of a people rather than of a delimited territory, and the dead man can be regarded as having been the king of a group of Scandinavians settled on the Volga. A recent study has demonstrated that the Rus as a whole were governed by kings, and not by rulers with the lesser titles of princes or dukes, and the same study mentions that the title 'king' (Old Norse *konungr*, Irish *ri*) was appropriate to rulers of relatively small populations who might co-exist with larger scale over-kings (Raffensperger 2017, 32–35, 40).

The naming of the dead man as a king permits the definition of the period following his death as an interregnum. The degree of ritual attached to the funeral is appropriate to transition from one reign to the next and is best understood in terms of succession with a sharp division between an order that is being put behind the society and a new order that is being begun. The previous reign ends with the death of the king. This is followed by an interregnum of ten days, and the intense communal ritual activity on the tenth day marks a disengagement from the old order and an engagement with the new.

During the interval, the body lay in a burial chamber which was supplied with food and drink, and it was taken out on the tenth day and cremated after preliminary ceremonies had taken place beside and on a ship that had been hauled up on top of a wooden construction. Duczko considers the activities during the interval (2004, 144):

But what was actually going on during the days of preparations for the final fire? There were certainly several issues that had to be solved at once. Most important was to determine the new status of the family members, the choice of the next head of the family, and division of the possessions of the dead man among those who had the right of inheritance.

Two thirds of the wealth of the deceased were devoted to the provision of the rich clothing in which he would be dressed before cremation and of the drink to be consumed by the whole assembly, and one third was allotted to those who had 'the right of inheritance', as Duczko says. This group, called the dead man's household, may possibly consist of the same people as those who are described as being present in actuality or by proxy in the tent or wooden cabin on board the funeral ship just before the cremation.

The erasure of the former king and his court

The funeral, with its ten-day preparation when the body lay in the chamber, the activities when the body lay in the tent on the ship, and the final cremation, was a complex in three stages. From the point of view of the transfer of power, it is useful to look first at the account of a Rus funeral by Ibn Rusta in his *Kitab al-A'laq an-Nafisah* (The Book of Precious Jewels) dated to shortly after 903 AD (Hraundal 2013, 92), which may be thought of as a record of a one-stage activity which was capable of expansion into a preliminary temporary chamber burial, a sacrifice within the enclosed space of the tent, and a cremation which finalised the funeral statement. In the Ibn Rusta case, the

funeral is finalised when sacrifice has taken place within the burial chamber (Lunde and Stone 2012, 127):

When a leading man dies, they dig a hole as big as a house in which they bury him dressed in his clothes and wearing his gold bracelet, accompanying the corpse with food, jars of wine and coins. They bury his favourite woman with him while she is still alive, shutting her inside the tomb and there she dies.

Interpreting this burial as a royal one, it can be said that the king and queen lie together in the tomb after the king has died from an unspecified cause and the queen has been sacrificed in the chamber.

When the young woman is sacrificed in the tent in the Ibn Fadlān account, the tent operates as an enclosed space like the burial chamber and is taken here to correspond to it. A difference from the Ibn Rusta case is that those present in the tent include a limited set of people in addition to the king (as corpse) and the young woman representing the queen (before and after her sacrifice). These people, who were clearly close to the king and can be called his court, are not sacrificed in fact but can be seen to be sacrificed by proxy through equivalence with the sacrificed creatures whose bodies are thrown into the ship before it is set on fire.

The set of people in addition to the corpse includes two women – the middle-aged woman who sacrifices and the young woman who is sacrificed. There are also six men positioned at the neck, hands and feet of the victim and I am interpreting these positions as connected to the strongly marked Indo-European conceptual triple division of the vertical body into head, upper body and lower body with divisions at the neck and waist (see, e.g., Lincoln 1986, 160–61). When this key element of Indo-European bodylore is kept in mind, the men can be seen to form two hierarchical triads to the right and left of the victim with a pair at the top, a pair in the middle, and a pair at the bottom.

Eight people accompany the dead king in the tent and eight creatures are sacrificed before the cremation. As Neil Price observes (2010, 135):

[T]he different creatures are chosen with care, and have a part to enact before they are killed – witness the horses being run until blown and lathered. It appears significant how many animals there are, of different species, entering the scene at specific points in a clear sequence.

The first creature sacrificed is a dog and the last is a hen. In the case of the hen, a strong connection is made with the young woman since the hen is brought to her to kill and she cuts off its head. There is no such explicit connection between the dog and the senior woman but it can be noted that a woman at the stern in a Viking boat grave at Kaupang in Norway (Ka 294–297) is linked to the dismembered body of a dog (Price 2010, 127–30). She is also associated with an iron staff and Price notes that “it is of a

kind identified by several scholars as a tool of the *völur* and other female magic-workers who feature extensively in the Old Norse poetic and prose sources”.²

Between the dog and hen in the sequence is a series of three pairs of creatures forming a triad consisting of two horses, two cows, and a cock and hen. This triad can be understood as a hierarchical one potentially operating at two levels – the value of the creatures and their height, the tallest being the most highly valued. The three pairs are identical in the first two cases and have a gender divide in the third. When aligning this set with the set of men in the tent, there is a probable connection of the male (the cock) with the right side and the female (the hen) with the left.

This sacrifice appears to be an example of the Indo-European triple sacrifice which could involve different animals but was characterised as a set of three symbolising totality (Puhvel 1978, 356–57, 360–62; Watkins 1995, 197–213). One example is the Roman *suovetaurilia*, that consists, as its name indicates, of a pig, a sheep, and a bull in ascending order. In an Iranian case, the values are in descending order and a hero in the *Avesta* is said to offer to a goddess a sacrifice of stallions, cattle, and sheep.

As regards the two horses, there was more to the ceremony than simply killing them. They were first galloped until they sweated. A side-light on this feature is offered by the comparison made by Hraundal with the funeral of a khan in the *Travels* of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in connection with the four horses that were to be impaled round the burial mound.³ The location of the funeral was Beijing and the date was 1346 AD. After the burial mound had been completed, ‘they brought four horses and made them run at the grave until they collapsed’ (Gibb and Beckingham 1994, 908). The practice of riding horses at a gallop until they die of exhaustion is discussed by Carole Ferret (2014, 243–45) who shows that, in the traditional horse-racing continuing in Central Asia up to the present day, it is not unexpected for a hard-ridden horse to drop dead at the finishing line. She mentions Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s account in her historical survey and concludes that such races were originally designed to exhaust the horses intended to accompany the deceased and that running a horse to death was one of the methods for effecting a bloodless sacrifice. The exhausting of the horses appears to be a Turkic custom which has been partially incorporated into the Ibn Fadlān funeral where the horses do not die in this way but are cut to pieces.

A sacrificial custom that is more central to the present study can usefully be looked at in connection both with this Turkic case in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and an Indo-European case mentioned by Hraundal (2013, 115) – the account of the burial of a Scythian king in Herodotus. Herodotus has (4.71.4–5, tr. Godley 1920–25, 2, 268–71):

Then, having laid the body on a couch in the tomb, they plant spears on each side of the

² Price 2010, 130; see further Price 2019, ch. 3 “Seiðr” and the section “Spinning seiðr” in ch. 8. Morten Warmind (1995, 133) notes in connection with the woman’s two daughters mentioned by Ibn Fadlān that “ritual abilities were thought to run in families in Scandinavia, and we may assume that a daughter will at some point take the mother’s place”.

³ Hraundal 2013, 118, with a reference at n. 78 to Defrémery and Sanguinetti 1853–58, IV.301, where the text is given in Arabic with a French translation. For context, see <https://orias.berkeley.edu/resources-teachers/travels-ibn-battuta> (last accessed 16-9-2020).

body and lay wooden planks across them, which they then roof over with braided osiers; in the open space which is left in the tomb they bury one of the king's concubines, his cupbearer, his cook, his groom, his squire, and his messenger, after strangling them, besides horses, and first-fruits of everything else, and golden cups; for the Scythians do not use silver or bronze. Having done this, they all build a great barrow of earth, vying eagerly with one another to make this as great as possible.

Askold Ivantchik has studied the account by Herodotus and has shown that it corresponds to actual Scythian practice. His description of one of the burials runs as follows (2011, 87):

The central grave of Chertomlyk contained the burial of a king and seven accompanying persons, including that of a woman of high social rank, probably the queen, and at least two burials of warriors of high rank. Four more burials were located outside the central grave: those of two equestrians or grooms accompanying the horses' burial, the grave of a cupbearer surrounded by numerous amphorae, and another grave, of a warrior with a spear. Thus, the king buried in Chertomlyk was accompanied by at least eleven persons. The "specialization" of four of them can be established: his wife or a concubine, two equestrians, and the cupbearer.

The five retainers in Herodotus can be compared in a general way with the six mamluks (male freed slaves) in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's description of the burial of a khan who had been killed when leading a rebellion. While the Herodotus account speaks of one of the dead man's concubines, this account speaks of four concubines (Gibb and Beckingham 1994, 908):

They dug for the Qān a big *nā'ūs*, which is an underground chamber, spread with the finest carpets. The Qān and his weapons were placed in it with the gold and silver vessels from his palace. Four slave-girls and six of his favourite mamluks with jars of drink were placed with them. The gateway to the house was built up and earth was piled over it all till it made a big hill.

This burial did not take place in isolation since the bodies of "about a hundred of [the Qān's] uncle's sons, his relatives and his favourites" were brought to the capital for burial after the rebellion, and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa notes (Gibb and Beckingham 1994, 909):

The aforesaid relatives of the Qān were placed in *nā'ūses* with their weapons and their household vessels. Over the graves of the great men among them, of whom there were ten, they impaled three horses for each grave. Over the rest they impaled one horse for each.

In the case of ten special individuals the tomb is marked by three sacrificed horses and these ten tombs evidently house the remains of ten key people among the khan's followers.

The recurrence of the number ten is suggestive. The ten leading figures can be put in correspondence with the ten sacrificed members of the king's household and can be seen as possibly reflecting a situation where the members of the king's household, or people who are presented as members of it on ritual occasions, are simultaneously

those who have offices of control over the people under the khan. In this case, different people are involved and the khan is accompanied in death by ten key members of the court and ten tribal leaders but, in a small-scale society, the supporters who were leaders of groups within the society could also have been the king's servants in ceremonial contexts.

One result of a practice like this, involving the death of a limited group of people surrounding the former monarch, is that a successor would have a fresh start without any overlap of personnel. Timothy Taylor takes note of a similar situation when he considers the transfer of power in his discussion of Scythian burial practices.⁴

The restatement of the dead king's superior social position at his funeral also makes a statement on behalf of his successor. People do not bury themselves, and there is *realpolitik* behind the rites. The funeral provides an ideal opportunity for the incumbent to assert his new powers. As part of the reverential funerary rights of the man he replaces, the new king can, with complete legitimacy, conduct a lethal purge of suspected rivals.

Taylor indicates that the new ruler could exercise choice in the elimination of undesired people but, in a totalised system, there would be no choices to be made. People in particular roles would automatically die with the king, leaving a clear field for the successor.

The Rus funeral as we have it described by Ibn Fādlān, although horrific in its depiction of the death of the slave woman, can be seen as a softening of a situation where all of the people in the tent on board the ship were immolated. The events of the funeral ritual erase these eight people from full social existence in the roles they had held, and all their offices are open to be filled by the equivalent members of the court of the successor. There is a strong suggestion that even the death of the slave woman is one of two alternative treatments of the sacrificial theme open to the society since she, like the other living people in the tent, has an equivalent animal/bird sacrifice. The actual death of the slave woman has the appearance of a duplicate ritual; structurally it could have been replaced by that of the hen she kills. It appears that the sacrificial sequence could have been carried out in the same shape with eight human sacrifices or with none at all. In the intermediate situation of partial human sacrifice, it is clearly the queen who is the preferred victim.

The nine people in the tent (including the dead man) are erased from the scene of political action and will be replaced by nine different people including the new king. Two linked ceremonies are required; one is a closing ritual and the other an opening ritual. Ibn Fādlān informs us mainly about the closing ritual but has a hint of an opening ritual in the lighting of new fire by the nearest male relative of the deceased. It is suggested here, as discussed below, that the inauguration, which he does not treat, might have involved an additional human victim.

⁴ Taylor 2002, 129; see pp. 86-118, 170-92 for discussion of Ibn Fādlān's account of the funeral.

The stage and the actors

Neil Price (2008, 2010, 2012) has spoken of the events at burials and cremations as dramatic actions and of the people concerned as characters in a drama. I believe this view can have far-reaching consequences for an understanding of a situation where political power, organisation of society, and cult were closely interrelated.

Recent work has indicated that there is no need to distinguish among ship, hall, and cult building except for the fact that ship and hall could serve multiple purposes including that of cult building, while the cult building would be dedicated solely to ritual activities (see Herschend 1997, 49–55; 2001, 68–94; Sundqvist 2011, 167–77). The spatial areas are isomorphic and ritual activities could take place in a flexible way within them. The ritual spaces are apparently to be understood also as reflecting the cosmos and so people representing gods are seen to be actors within them (Gunnell 2005, esp. 18–24, 28 n. 16). Even more fundamentally, it can perhaps be said that there is a spatial area or stage where both gods and humans are envisaged as enacting the roles they have in common.

As regards the tent on board the ship, this can be equated with the ship itself. Centrally placed are the young woman victim and the older woman who stabs her. They are flanked on either side by sets of three men in a hierarchical relationship from the head to the feet of the victim who symbolically retain that relationship when the young woman is placed beside the king before they and the older woman leave the tent.

right	centre		left
1 man	king		1 man
2 man			2 man
3 man	junior woman	senior woman	3 man

Table 1 The positions of the characters in the tent, with three pairs of men in hierarchical order to either side and the dead king accompanied by two women in the centre

It can be argued that at both the divine and the human levels there were ten central roles (the ‘speaking parts’ in a play, as it were) and that they carry the main message, however many ‘extras’ are also present in support. This is what makes it essential to attempt to identify the ten roles. It is not a very big cast and it should be possible to suggest which gods fill the roles and begin to see how they could be reflected at the

human level. Naturally, there will be some initial uncertainty about this since the free narratives in which the gods have largely been presented do not have the limits of dramatic or ritual structures.

Structural questions, where they have been posed at all, have often taken the form of endorsing or rejecting Dumézil's theory of the three functions of the sacred, physical force, and fertility and prosperity (Littleton 1982) or, in Kim McCone's formulation, the mental, the martial, and the material (McCone 1990, 128). However, the triad of the functions does not rest on the insecure foundation of the social groups of priests, warriors, and cultivators, initially posited by Dumézil, which would not have been present at the period of Indo-European unity when the structure was laid down, but has as principal components the attributes of the male life-stages of 1. old men (wisdom and magical power), 2. young men (courage and fury), and 3. mature married men (fertility and wealth) and the attributes of the vertical human body: 1. head, 2. body above the waist, and 3. body below the waist. In the framework that I have put forward, the Dumézilian triad of the functions is held to form only a part of a more complex whole embodied in a tenfold pantheon which includes not only two sets of the functional triad but also four trifunctional royal figures – the king along with his queen, the contemporary representative of his ancestress, and his presumed rival for the kingship (Lyle 2006, 2012, 2013).

This scheme can be understood as fully present within the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family. The difficulty in perceiving it arises largely from a shift in the relationships of the gods as presented in the literature from one that can coherently be juxtaposed with the schemes in the comparable cultures. The basic Indo-European scheme is evolutionary with the initial cosmic gods giving rise to the young gods who co-exist with them but become dominant over them, primarily through the actions of the most powerful of the young gods. In the Old Norse context, the most powerful of the young gods is Þórr and, in the comparative perspective, this figure is the king of the gods. The shift I mentioned is the transfer of his royal power to one of the old gods, Óðinn. To unravel the connections among the gods, it is necessary to take account of two layers: the one presented in the literary works centred on those of Snorri Sturluson, where Óðinn is indubitably the king, and an earlier layer where Óðinn would have been a powerful god but where kingship would have lain with the next generation in the figure of Þórr. It is the shadowy but firmly outlined base pantheon that seems to be a good match with the Ibn Fadlān account.

I have discussed the proposed Scandinavian tenfold pantheon elsewhere (e.g. Lyle 2012, 75–81; 2019; 2021) but will give a brief sketch here of how it can be arrived at. I take it that the earlier part of the theogony consists of the triad of Vé, Óðinn, and Víli and their mother, Bestla. Since divine beings may have multiple names, it can be suggested that the names Tyr and Njörðr are alternatives for Vé and Víli, and that the social aspect of the primal female is embodied in Frigg. The young goddess, who would be queen in the posited earlier layer, is Freyja and, as noted above, the young god who would be king in this layer is Þórr. Other young gods who can be given places in the system as shown in Table 2 are Heimdallr, Ullr and Freyr.

right	centre		left
1 Heimdallr	Þorr		1 Vé
2 Ullr			2 Óðinn
3 Freyr	Freyja	Frigg	3 Víli

Table 2 Nine of the ten gods in the proposed pantheon presented in the same way as the people in the tent in Table 1.

In the ritual space of the hall at a feast, the king sits between the high-seat pillars, which may be positioned at the centre of one of the sides of the hall or transversely. In either case, orientation is taken from the king and those nearest to him are most highly honoured. Sundqvist describes the layout in this way (2011, 190):

The symbolic and ritual centre of the hall was the high seat. It was intended for the owner of the hall: the king or chieftain. One of the best descriptions of the interior of a Viking Age hall is in *Fagrskinna* (ca. 1220). According to this Kings’ Saga it was an ancient custom in Norway, Denmark and Svetjúd that banquet halls (*veizlustofur*) were erected at royal farms. In these buildings the king’s high seat (*háseti*, *Qndvegi*) was in the middle of the long bench facing south.

During rituals, the king sat in the high seat while other men sat on long benches according to rank with those of highest rank nearer the king and those of lower rank nearer the doors at the gables. Speaking in terms of a single line, the implication of the present view of the placement of people within the ritual space is that the three retainers who flanked the king on either side would be in a different category from those who were still being honoured but were placed in positions further from the king (Table 3).

right			centre	left		
3 man	2 man	1 man	king	1 man	2 man	3 man

Table 3 The king seated between the high-seat pillars in a hall with three retainers to either side seated in hierarchical order with the highest valued next the king.

If the gods were represented in a cult place in a linear arrangement like this, the old gods would be at the left of Þorr and the young gods at his right. The dominant figure among the old gods is Oðinn and the dominant figure among the young gods is Freyr, and it can be suggested that the occurrence in Adam of Bremen’s account of the Uppsala temple of a statue of Þorr flanked by statues of Oðinn and Freyr is an abbreviated form of this (Table 4). The latter two gods are clearly described as relating to war (second function) and fertility (third function).⁵ Gunnell (2005, 22) has already taken the step of suggesting the identification of the human *goði* in the hall with Þorr in the Uppsala temple.

right	centre	left
Freyr	Þorr	Oðinn

Table 4 Þorr placed centrally with Oðinn and Freyr at either side as in Adam of Bremen’s account of their statues, with Oðinn shown as the second-function representative of the old gods on the left and Freyr as the third-function representative of the young gods on the right.

The sacrifice of the human equivalent of the tenth member of the pantheon seems to be a necessary part of the inauguration, whether it is carried out in actuality or through a substitute or symbol. This member forms the connection with the world of the dead throughout the king’s reign and corresponds to the god of death. He is not part of the closing sacrifice but is replaced when a new male is sacrificed at the inauguration. There is nothing of this in the Rus account, but it seems to be a necessary corollary of it if it is posited that the total pantheon is a tenfold one and that each of its members has a human equivalent. It offers an explanation of why it is that one of the gods, Baldr, is primarily known for his dying and sits “in the seat of honour” among the dead (Faulkes 1995, 50).

Conclusion

If the cremation described by Ibn Fadlān had been part of the archaeological record, it could have retained traces of the sacrifice of a young woman, perhaps with the sacrificial knife still in place, and of a jumble of animal and bird bones from the eight non-human victims that were thrown onto the ship. It is the ordering of these victims in relation to the positioning and actions of the people in the tent that allows the building of a detailed theory of the structures for the transfer of power.

When the ceremony is concluded all nine of those who were in the tent are dead or have entered a state of quasi-death. The focus now is on the successor who lights the

⁵ Adam of Bremen (ed. B. Schmeidler), IV 26–27, discussed in this ritual context in Sundqvist 2011, 168–69, 199.

funeral pyre. Around him will be established a fresh group of eight people representing the gods surrounding the king. It seems too that the inaugural procedure will include the sacrifice of that member of the society who will symbolically represent the king of the dead throughout the coming reign.

One of Schjødt's valuable contributions to scholarship is his advocacy of the concept of the model that allows a total pattern to be posited even when parts of a jigsaw are not readily apparent.⁶ The model proposed here is of nine roles among the living population that correspond to nine roles in a pantheon and a single role of a sacrificed male that corresponds to the tenth member of the pantheon. The point of a model is that its potential as an accurate representation can be explored heuristically without commitment. If it is accurate, supporting evidence will accumulate and, if this does not happen, the model can be jettisoned in favour of a more accurate one. The 'stage' has already been put in place through the scholarly work on multifunctional and dedicated buildings, and some 'actors' have been placed on it. Setting the whole tenfold pantheon and the corresponding set of humans there would require some major adjustments to the understanding of Scandinavian mythology in the light of this interpretation of Ibn Fadlān's account but it seems to offer the possibility of reading across between the literary and archaeological records in a fruitful way.

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⁶ Expressed for example at Schjødt 2012, 62–63, and 2013, 36–39; it has been explored also, following Schjødt, in Lyle 2017, 343–44.

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