

# ‘The flowing-haired friend of the fire of altars’

MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS

*ABSTRACT: There are very few sources, other than material remains and spatial arrangements revealed by archaeological excavation, that can give modern researchers access to the thought-world of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. Some skaldic poetry presumed to have been composed before the Conversion may offer a window onto this thought-world. This article investigates how a single kenning from a stanza composed by the tenth-century Icelander Egill Skallagrímsson conceptualised the relationship between the dominant Viking-Age deity Óðinn and the conduct of religious ritual.*

*RESUME: Der findes meget få kilder, bortset fra materiel kultur og spatiale organiseringer afdækket gennem arkæologiske udgravning, der kan give moderne forskere adgang til førkristen nordisk religions tankeverden. Nogle skjaldedigte, som antages at være komponeret før konverteringen til Kristendom, kan give et indblik i denne tankeverden. Denne artikel undersøger hvordan en enkelt kenning fra en strofe komponeret af islændingen Egill Skallagrímsson i det tiende århundrede konceptualiserer forholdet mellem den dominerende vikingetidsguddom, Óðinn, og udførelsen af religiøse ritualer*

*KEYWORDS: Pre-Christian Nordic religion; Scandinavia; Óðinn; ritual; skaldic poetry; archaeology*

There is a kenning for the god Óðinn in a stanza attributed to the tenth-century Icelander Egill Skallagrímsson that describes him as *fallhaddr vinr fúrs stalla* ‘the flowing-haired friend of the fire of altars’. Rudolf Meissner (1921, 252) observed in his *Die Kenningar der Skalden* that this is the only kenning in the Old Norse skaldic corpus to refer to Óðinn *mit Bezug auf den Opferdienst* ‘with reference to the service of sacrifice’. While the pre-Christian gods as a group (*høpt, bōnd, æsir*) are mentioned in several places in the skaldic corpus from the tenth century as being active in promoting the rites of sacrifice in their honour and the cults involved at their worshippers’ sanctuaries, this ken-

ning is the only reference in skaldic poetry that specifically associates Óðinn with sacrifice. The purpose of this contribution in honour of Jens Peter Schjødt, who has done so much to illuminate the significance of sacrifice and other rituals in pre-Christian Scandinavian myth and religion, is to evaluate the evidence of this kenning within the larger context of skaldic poetry as a source for our knowledge of early Nordic religion.

The kenning in question occurs in a single, introductory stanza of a poem Egill is said to have composed after having received the present of an ornate shield sent to him from Norway by Þorsteinn Þóruson, the son of his friend Arinbjörn's sister.<sup>1</sup> Only this stanza of what one assumes was a longer poem is preserved in a single medieval manuscript, *Möðruvallabók* (fol 96ra), written between 1330-70. The other two main versions of *Egils saga* have not recorded it. In the prose text of the saga (Sigurður Nordal 1933, 275) the narrator tells that the poem had the name *Berudrápa* 'Drápa about a shield'. The first *helmingr* of the stanza begins with the poet's call for the audience's attention, which is a conventional way of opening a formal skaldic poem (cf. Wood 1960):

Heyri fúrs<sup>2</sup> á forsa  
fallhadds vinar stalla,  
hyggi, þegn, til þagnar  
þinn lýðr, konungs, mína.

Heyri, þegn konungs, á mína forsa fallhadds vinar  
fúrs stalla; hyggi lýðr þinn til þagnar.

Listen, retainer of the king [= Þorsteinn Þóruson], to  
my waterfalls of the flowing-haired friend of the fire  
of altars [VOTIVE RITE > HEATHEN GOD = Óðinn  
> POEM]; may your retinue concentrate on silence.<sup>3</sup>

The kenning in question forms a subordinate part of a kenning for poetry or, in this case, a single poem, and this second poetry-kenning clinches the identification of the referent of the first kenning as the god Óðinn, rather than any other *vinr* 'friend' of the fire of altars. The speaker's 'waterfalls' are his poetry, alluding to the role Óðinn played

<sup>1</sup> There are only two extensive examples of the shield poem in the skaldic corpus, the *Ragnarsdrápa* 'Drápa about Ragnarr' of Bragi Boddason and the *Haustlǫng* 'Autumn Long' of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, both among the earliest known skaldic poems and recorded only in manuscripts of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (Faulkes 1998, I, 22-4, 30-33, 50-1, 72-3). Shield poems provide verbal word-pictures of visual images depicted on prestigious decorated shields, usually given as gifts from a noble patron to his skald (cf. Clunies Ross 2007).

<sup>2</sup> *Fúrs* 'of the fire', from *fúrr* m. 'fire', is an emendation of the ms.'s 'feyr's', which is not an Old Norse word. This emendation is discussed further below.

<sup>3</sup> The text and translation of the stanza (Egill *Berdr* 1<sup>v</sup> (Eg 128)) is from my forthcoming edition (Clunies Ross forthcoming) of the poetry of Egill Skallagrímsson in Volume V of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Clunies Ross et al. 2007-). All citations of skaldic poetry and sigla that refer to them are made in conformity with the practice of this edition, abbreviated *SkP*. The sigla, as with the reference given above, provide the abbreviated names of poet and poem, the stanza number and the volume number (superscript) of *SkP*. In many cases I have given the prose order rather than the poetic text of the words in skaldic quotations to make their general sense easier to understand.

in making the mythical mead of poetry available to select human poets after he had stolen it in liquid form from the giant Suttungr and his daughter Gunnlǫð and taken it to Ásgarðr for the benefit of the gods and men.<sup>4</sup> Thus the primary kenning of this *helm-ingr* belongs among a large number of conventional periphrases for poetry, most of them conceptualised as the drink or liquid or theft of Óðinn (cf. Meissner 1921, 427-30). If this were not so, there would be considerable doubt about the identity of the referent of the subordinate kenning, 'the flowing-haired friend of the fire of altars', as it is without precedent.

Before proceeding with this analysis, it is necessary to say something about the potential strength of evidence from early skaldic poetry for our knowledge of Scandinavian pre-Christian religions. The most thorough recent evaluation is an article by Edith Marold (1992), 'Die Skaldendichtung als Quelle der Religionsgeschichte'. As she argues, skaldic poetry which is held to have been composed in the period before c. 1030 is the only textual source material, outside some runic inscriptions, that has any claim to having been created by those who still adhered to the old customs and beliefs, even though the evidence their poetry provides has to be considered potentially at risk of contamination by Christian ideas that had already reached communities in Scandinavia from other parts of Christendom by the tenth century and even though the prose texts in which their poetry is preserved are indubitably the products of Christian authors. In addition, given the allusive and conventionalised nature of the skaldic kenning system, in which references to the old religion, like that considered here, are often embedded, the information provided by kennings is both indirect and secondary when it comes to evaluating evidence for Old Norse myths and cults (cf. Marold 1992, 689). Nevertheless, it is both unique and important.

Skaldic poetry composed for Norwegian rulers of the tenth and early eleventh centuries provides indirect evidence that the pre-Christian gods were thought to be attentive to the sacrifices that humans, led by their rulers, had provided for them in the shrines they had built in their honour. Further, they were thought to suffer under the adverse conditions introduced by rulers who had given up their old beliefs and actively promoted the new religion of Christianity, often by destroying the sacred places of the pagan gods.<sup>5</sup> The evidence for this state of affairs comes particularly from the poetry composed for the jarls of Hlaðir, Sigurðr jarl Hákonarson (d. 962) and his son Hákon jarl Sigurðarson (r. c. 970-95), both known to favour the old religion, and from the poetry composed for King Hákon inn góði 'the Good' Haraldsson (r. c. 934-c. 61) and King Haraldr gráfeldr 'Grey-cloak' Eiríksson (r. c. 961-70). The evidence of such

<sup>4</sup> See the account of the mead-myth and its transfer to human poets in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (Faulkes 1998, I, 3-5) and the extensive analysis of the myth by Schjødt (2008, 134-72). A comparable poetry-kenning that employs the image of poetry as Óðinn's waterfalls is *Korm* 42/5-6' *bjóðr forsa niðs Bestlu* 'the giver of the waterfalls of the son of Bestla <giantess> [= Óðinn > POETRY > POET].

<sup>5</sup> See, among other texts, *Eskál Vell* 8, 14/1-4, 8 and 15; *Korm* *Sigdr* 6<sup>m</sup>. *Vellekla* 15/1, 2, 4 expresses the idea of the gods' return to their shrines once they have been welcomed back particularly strongly: *Ok her þarfir ásmegir hverfa til blóta* 'And the sons of the Æsir, beneficial to the people, turn to the sacrifices'.

poems as Einarr skálaglamm ‘Tinkle-scales’ Helgason’s *Vellekla* ‘Lack of Gold’ and Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s *Hákonarmál* ‘Words about Hákon’, together with Kormákr Ögmundarson’s *Sigurðardrápa* ‘Drápa about Sigurðr’, cumulatively indicate that the cult houses and shrines of the old religion were, in the words of Olof Sundqvist (2015), ‘an arena for higher powers’. However, the deities who manifested themselves in that arena were, for the most part, unidentified as individual gods, but represented as a collective, with the exception of Þórr, whose individualised association with ritual arenas seems particularly strong.<sup>6</sup>

The kenning *fallhaddr vinr fúrs stalla* ‘the flowing-haired friend of the fire of altars’ presents a number of problems of interpretation. The first of these requires us to consider the phrase *fúrr stalla* ‘the fire of altars’ and its likely meaning. It was noted above (footnote 1) that *fúrs*, genitive singular of the masculine noun *fúrr* ‘fire’, is an emendation of the only manuscript’s ‘feyr’s’, which is not a known Old Norse word. Although this emendation is minor from a palaeographical point of view, not all editors have adopted it.<sup>7</sup> Finnur Jónsson, for example, in his standard edition (1912-15, BI, 42), has emended the manuscript’s ‘feyr’s’ to *fuss* ‘eager, keen’ and construed this adjective with *þegn konungs* ‘retainer of the king’ in lines 3-4 as a reference to Þorsteinn Þóruson. This leaves him with the Óðinn-kenning *fallhaddr vinr stalla*, translated as *den langhårede alterven* ‘the long-haired altar-friend’. While one can never be certain of a reading produced through emendation, even of a minor kind, the change from ‘feyr’s’ to *fúrs* makes good sense in conjunction with the genitive plural of the noun *stallr*, literally ‘support, platform’.

Although relatively common in its literal sense in skaldic poetry, *stallr* is uncommon there in the sense of ‘altar’, which it arguably has here. The only other clear instance in poetry of *stallr* in that sense occurs in a stanza by Þorvaldr inn víðförlri ‘the Wide-travelling’ Koðránsson, an Icelander associated with the period of conversion to Christianity. The stanza is recorded in both *Kristni saga* and *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla* and is generally dated to c. 981-5.<sup>8</sup> In a pre-Christian religious context *stallr* seems to have had the specific sense of ‘[wooden] support for an image of a deity’. Such images are

<sup>6</sup> For example, Þórr is mentioned specifically, along with the other deities as a group in *Eskál Vell* 14/1-4: *Inn svinni lét senn öll of herjuð lönd hofs Einriða ok vé banda, kunn herjum, sǫnn mǫnnum* ‘The wise one soon made all the harried lands of the temple of Einriði =< Þórr> and the sanctuaries of the gods, famous among the peoples, lawful for men’. As Marold (1992, 698) has noted, the frequent references to the gods as a collective in early skaldic poetry is in contrast to the role they play as individual patrons of specific characters in Icelandic saga literature.

<sup>7</sup> It was first proposed by Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1903, 109-10) and was adopted by Sigurður Nordal in his edition of *Egils saga* (1933, 178 n.).

<sup>8</sup> See the forthcoming edition of the stanza (Þvíðf Lv 1<sup>IV</sup>) by Diana Whaley (Whaley forthcoming a) in *SkP* IV. The stanza is said to have been occasioned by Þorvaldr’s and Bishop Friðrekr’s hostile encounter with a pagan woman and her son, the latter of whom mocked the missionaries. The woman is said to have shrieked at Þorvaldr *of heiðnum stalli* ‘across the heathen altar’ (Þvíðf Lv 1/8<sup>IV</sup>).

mentioned in several prose texts as occupying positions in the sanctuaries of pre-Christian cult houses (*hof*) or sanctuaries (*vé*). Small anthropomorphic images, presumed to represent deities, have been found by archaeologists in or near excavations of Iron-Age and Viking-Age halls and cult houses.<sup>9</sup> The compound *véstallr* ‘the altar of the sanctuary’, which occurs in an early tenth-century ruler-kenning (*vörðr véstalls* ‘guardian of the altar of the sanctuary’ in Þjóðólfr of Hvinir’s *Ynglingatal* 11/3<sup>1</sup>), implies that a *stallr* was an important and distinguishable part of a Scandinavian *vé*. Other textual and archaeological sources indicate that the use of fire for ritual purposes and for the sacrificial cooking of slaughtered animals took place in the vicinity of the *stallr*, whether that was indoors in a hall or cult house or outdoors in the open air (cf. Sundqvist 2015, 332-7).

To return then to the *fúrr stalla* ‘the fire of altars’ of *Berudrápa*: should this phrase be understood as an allusion to the whole business of sacrifice (*blót*), as Rudolf Meissner’s reference to the *Opferdienst* implies, and therefore constitute a kenning, or is it a descriptive phrase for the fire at or near the altar, referring to an important aspect of what went on at a pre-Christian *stallr*, in which case the phrase would be a literal description but not a kenning? My own interpretation, following Meissner and Sigurður Nordal (1933, 276 n.), is that *fúrr stalla* is a kenning for the sacrificial aspect of *blót*. However, it remains possible that the phrase is not a kenning and that the whole phrase *fallhaddr vinr fúrs stalla* ‘the flowing-haired friend of the fire of altars’ is a simple Óðinn-kenning, referring to that god’s favourable disposition towards those who perform sacrifices in his honour.

What, then, are the implications of calling Óðinn a *vinr* ‘friend’ of the rite of sacrifice or of those who order or perform it? In skaldic poetry from the tenth and early eleventh centuries *vinr* may refer to a man who is of equal or higher status to the speaker or narrator, as in Egill’s several references to his *vinr*, the *hersir* Arinbjörn Þórisson.<sup>10</sup> Equally, *vinr* may be used of a political ally (Sigv Aust 21/6<sup>1</sup> *baztan vin* ‘the best friend’) and occurs several times in kennings to refer to an Old Norse god in terms of his relationship with another god, as in Þjóð *Haustr* 4/4<sup>III</sup> *vin hrafnásar* ‘the friend of the raven-god [= Óðinn > = Loki] and ÚlfrU *Húsdr* 3/2 *vinr banda* ‘the friend of the gods [= Þórr]’, the latter in the context of that god’s struggle with the World Serpent,

<sup>9</sup> See, among other evidence, Andersson *et al.* 2004. Most descriptions of such images in Old Norse texts are from prose sources, many of them quite late (Sundqvist 2015, 307-13), and cannot be fully trusted to give an account of how religious ritual was conducted in the tenth century. Most references to images of the pagan gods (*skurðgoð*, *trégoð*) are to descriptions of their destruction by Christians in the course of their desecration of pagan temples. They are rare in poetry except in *fornaldarsögur*; see *Qrv* 59-70<sup>VIII</sup>. Cf. also *Frið* 28/5<sup>VIII</sup> and Note there, together with the accompanying prose text of *Friðþjófs saga* (no earlier than the end of the thirteenth century) for a description of a *disarblót* at a sanctuary dedicated to the god Baldr, when two men and their wives are engaged in *blót* and the women are heating icons of Baldr in the sanctuary fire. This scene gives an idea of how late medieval Icelanders imagined pagan cults.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Egill Lv 36/4<sup>V</sup> (*Eg* 65) *getk aldri betra vin* ‘I shall never get a better friend’; Egill *Arkv* 15/5<sup>V</sup> (*Eg* 111) *vinar míns* ‘of my friend’.

Miðgarðsormr. It would seem that in early skaldic poetry the use of *vinr* in the context of a relationship to a person or activity implies a sense of positivity and even egalitarianism between the parties involved.<sup>11</sup>

A *vinr*-kenning with such implications involving Óðinn is not only unusual because there are no others in the skaldic corpus linking this god to sacrifice, except for Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's equivocal demotion of the god Óðinn to the status of a priest, *goði hrafnblóts* 'the priest of the raven-sacrifice',<sup>12</sup> but also because one of Óðinn's most frequently mentioned traits in both Old Norse poetry and prose is his fickle and deceptive behaviour towards his protegés. He is the god who cannot be trusted, and this trait is so frequently mentioned that it is unlikely to be the result of Christian influence (cf. Marold 1992, 696-7). The clue to understanding the *vinr*-kenning of *Berudrápa* is surely the special relationship that both Egill's poetry and *Egils saga* claim existed between Egill and Óðinn and, in particular, the description of their relationship in stanzas 22-3 (Eg 93-4<sup>v</sup>) of *Sonatorrek* 'Hard Loss of Sons'.

These stanzas come towards the end of *Sonatorrek*, a lament for the deaths of two of Egill's sons and a statement of his own sense of loss and abandonment by society and even by his patron, Óðinn:<sup>13</sup>

Áttak gótt  
við geira dróttin;  
gørðumk trygg  
at trúa hõnum,  
áðr vinátt  
vagna rún\*i  
sigrhöfundr  
of sleit við mik.

Áttak gótt við dróttin geira; gørðumk trygg at trúa hõnum,  
áðr rún\*i vagna, sigrhöfundr, of sleit vinátt við mik.

I was on good terms with the lord of spears [= Óðinn]; I came to feel safe to trust him, before the friend of wagons [= Óðinn], the victory-judge [= Óðinn], broke friendship with me.

Blótka því  
bróður Vílis  
goð\*jaðar  
at gjarn séak.  
Þó hefr Míms vinr  
mér of fengnar  
þölvu þætr,  
ef it betra telk.

Blótka bróður Vílis, goð\*jaðar því at séak gjarn. Þó hefr vinr Míms mér þætr þölvu of fengnar, ef telk it betra.

I do not sacrifice to the brother of Vílir <god> [= Óðinn], the god-defence [= Óðinn] because I am eager to do so. Yet Mímr's <mythical being's> friend [= Óðinn] has provided for me compensation for woes if I count the better [side].

<sup>11</sup> A similar semantic field has been argued for the cognates of *vinr* in other Germanic languages, such as Old Saxon and Old High German *wini* and Old English *wine* (Green 1965, 108-11).

<sup>12</sup> See *Hallfr* 11/1-2<sup>v</sup>: *hæfum nafni goða hrafnblóts* 'we are [I am] neutral towards the name of the priest of the raven-sacrifice' and Diana Whaley's Notes to her edition of this stanza in *SkP* V (Whaley, forthcoming b).

<sup>13</sup> *Sonatorrek* may not have been included in the earliest versions of *Egils saga*. Only the first stanza is cited in the A-text (*Möðruvallabók*) and B-text, the whole poem being recorded only in versions of the C-text from the seventeenth century. A small number of stanzas are cited in *Snorra Edda*. The text here is taken from my forthcoming edition of the poetry of Egill in *SkP* V (Clunies Ross, forthcoming).

These two stanzas encapsulate the complex relationship that the saga of Egill, backed up by the poetry attributed to him, presents between this Icelandic poet and the god of poetry himself. They mention first the feeling of trust in Óðinn that he had previously experienced, followed by the perception that in the later part of his life the god had broken friendship with him (*of sleit vinátt við mik*).<sup>14</sup> Stanza 23 mentions Egill's reluctance to sacrifice (it gives no reason for this, though it is presumably from a feeling that he had not had much return for his devotion), and then looks to the compensation that Óðinn's gift of poetry has afforded him.

The presence of a poetry-kenning invoking its special deity as the friend of sacrifice is not surprising in a poem attributed to Egill, in spite of the kenning's unique character. Devotion to Óðinn as his special god distinguishes Egill from most contemporary Icelanders who are the subjects of sagas,<sup>15</sup> even among the professional skalds who are the subjects of the *skáldasögur*, with the exception of Hallfreðr Óttarsson, whose so-called conversion verses (*Hallfr 9-13<sup>v</sup>*) tell of the poet's struggle to free himself from the influence of the old gods and Óðinn in particular. Even here, however, Hallfreðr mentions the other deities who must be renounced by Christian converts, although he draws attention to the special significance Óðinn had for poets (*Hallfr 10/1-2<sup>v</sup>*): *Öll ætt aldar hefr skipat ljóðum til hylli Óðins* 'The whole family of mankind has composed poems to [win] Óðinn's favour'.

An aspect of the kenning *fallhaddr vinr fúrs stalla* that has not yet been discussed is the qualifying adjective *fallhaddr*, a *hapax legomenon*, translated here as 'flowing-haired', although a more literal translation is 'falling-hair[ed]'. Finnur Jónsson, as mentioned above, rendered it 'long-haired'. The god Óðinn is sometimes represented as having a long beard, but never elsewhere as having a long or flowing head of hair. Both in eddic poetry and in *þulur* (lists of poetic synonyms), the Óðinn-names Hárbarðr 'Hoary-beard', Langbarðr 'Long-beard', Síðskeggr 'Long-beard' and Síðgrani 'Long-whisker', have been recorded.<sup>16</sup> All these Óðinn-names refer to facial hair, which is a distinguishing secondary sexual characteristic of men, but the noun *haddr* 'head [of hair]' by contrast usually refers to women's hair.<sup>17</sup> It is tempting to connect Óðinn's representation in *Berudrápa* as *fallhaddr* to the name of the Danish king

<sup>14</sup> The word *vinátt* 'friendship' is an emendation, based on the elsewhere attested noun *vinátta* 'friendship' (so Jón Helgason 1962, 37 n.), for manuscript forms that do not produce sense.

<sup>15</sup> Freyr and Þórr appear as the most common patrons of characters in sagas of Icelanders; on the former, see Meulengracht Sørensen 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Hárbarðr is given in *Grímnismál* 49/10 as one of two names for Óðinn that was in use among the gods. It is also listed in *Þul Óðins* 3/5<sup>III</sup>. *Alvíssmál* 6/3 records the name Síðgrani, while Langbarðr occurs in *Þul Óðins* 7/6<sup>III</sup> and Síðskeggr in *Þul Óðins* 6/6<sup>III</sup>. All citations from eddic poetry are from the edition of Neckel, rev. Kuhn 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Guðrúnarkviða* I 15/3 *haddr losnaði* 'her hair broke free', *Gestumbl Heiðr* 21/4<sup>VIII</sup> (*Heiðr* 68) *hadda bleika* 'pale hair' (of the waves imagined as women). *Haddr* may possibly be used of an old man's hair in a kenning in Anon (*Eb*) 2/4<sup>v</sup> (*Eb* 36), but see the Note to lines 3-4 in Judy Quinn's forthcoming edition of the poetry in *Eyrbyggja saga* in *SkP* V for a different interpretation.

Haddingus, who has been shown by several scholars, including particularly Jens Peter Schjødt (2008, 271-82), to be the protagonist of Odinic narratives of an initiatory kind.<sup>18</sup> In that connection it is possible to see the epithet *fallhaddr* as an allusion to Óðinn's capacity for numinous knowledge, most frequently acquired through his practice of the form of sorcery named *seiðr* (Schjødt 2008, 206-17). The *locus classicus* for the association between *seiðr* and the supposed feminisation of its male practitioners, Óðinn and Loki, is stanzas 22-3 of the eddic poem *Lokasenna*, in which each god accuses the other of disgraceful gender-bending behaviour on account of their practice of *seiðr* (*Lokasenna* 23/8, 24/6 *args aðal* 'the essence of an effeminate').

A single, introductory stanza of an otherwise lost *drápa* in a single mid-fourteenth century manuscript witness is not the firmest of grounds upon which to base the interpretation of a skaldic kenning that is unusual in several key respects, and yet I think it can be shown that the argument of this article is plausible on account of its careful adduction of supportive primary sources. Whether a whole shield-poem named *Berudrápa* ever actually existed, as the text of *Egils saga* claims, we cannot know, and the possibility of its existence may perhaps be doubted because the saga author claims not one, but two shield poems among the achievements of the later part of Egill's life. The second of these, although the first to be mentioned in the saga (Sigurður Nordal 1933, 272-3), is conventionally called *Skjaldardrápa* 'Drápa about a Shield' (its title is not given in the saga) and is again recorded only in *Möðruvallabók* and again only by means of its opening stanza. The saga author embeds both these skaldic fragments in elaborate justificatory narratives. *Skjaldardrápa* is a composition provoked by a visit another poet, Einarr skálaglamm Helgason, makes to Egill's home, during which he passes on to him an ornate shield Hákon jarl Sigurðarson is said to have given him as a reward for composing the ironically titled poem *Vellekla* 'Lack of Gold'. The shield that inspired *Berudrápa* was a gift from the sister's son of Egill's friend Arinbjörn who was grateful to Egill for taking on a dangerous mission to collect royal tribute in Värmland (*Egils saga* chapters 70-6, Sigurður Nordal 1933, 219-40) which would otherwise probably have led to his death.

The saga author's attribution to Egill at this relatively late point in the saga of two shield-poems (at least in the A-redaction version of *Möðruvallabók*) has the effect of raising his profile as a skald in the courtly encomiastic tradition of earlier Norwegian poets such as Bragi Boddason and Þjóðólfr of Hvinir. In the late tenth century the composition of shield poems must have been almost a dying art, although the practice of

<sup>18</sup> Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum* i. 6.1-8.27, Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015, I, 42-77) is the main source for narratives about Haddingus, which have been the subject of a great deal of scholarly literature (see Simek 1993, 127-8 for a summary). An Old Norse variant of the Latinised name Haddingus occurs in allusions to two brothers, named Haddingjar (cf. *Hyndluljóð* 23/4), about whom little detail is known in Old Norse sources. Figures of this name have been associated with the names of early Germanic royal houses, and the custom of wearing long hair among the Frankish kings referred to as the *reges criniti* 'the long-haired kings'. The symbolic and religious significance of this custom has been debated (Wallace-Hadrill 1962, 148-63; Goosmann 2012), but there is no doubt that the practice existed and was a distinguishing mark of royal elites.



reciting poems describing images evidently still survived in Iceland until at least the turn of the eleventh century, witness Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* 'Drápa about a House' (c. 978), which is mentioned in *Laxdæla saga* and partially recorded by Snorri Sturluson in his *Edda*.<sup>19</sup> A kenning such as the one that is the subject of this article is a most suitably elaborate ornament for a poem belonging to what is probably the most elevated genre of early skaldic encomium, whether or not there was more to *Berudrápa* than just the one stanza that has been recorded.

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