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NORSE GHOSTS

(A study in the *Draugr* and the *Haugbúi*)

BY N. K. CHADWICK

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THE peculiarity of Scandinavian and Icelandic ghosts lies in the fact that they are corporeal—not wraiths, disembodied spirits, but the incorporate spirits of the dead. They are animated corpses, solid bodies, generally mischievous, and greatly to be feared. Even Iceland, though a new colony, is ghost ridden. In stories relating to Scandinavia, the ghosts are generally men, and this is probably an original feature. But the *Islendinga Sögur* are composed largely in the spirit of historical novels, in which verisimilitude is sought rather than veracity, and the composers, realising well the literary value of their own supernatural traditions, have introduced features for which we look in vain in the stories relating to the Scandinavian peninsula. In stories relating to Norway, the ghosts are rarely found far from their burial places, the *haugar* (sing. *haugr*), " barrows ", containing a stone-built burial chamber roofed with wood, and covered with a great mound of earth. In Iceland, however, a ghost knows no territorial rights and limitations, and is free to wander where he will, either before or after burial.

One of the Icelandic sagas in which the supernatural has been exploited to most advantage by the composer is the *Eyrbyggja Saga*. In ch. 51 we read of the strange exploit of the woman Thorgunna, perhaps all the stranger in view of the fact that she was a Christian. She had laid it down in the terms of her will that her body was to be buried in a Christian churchyard, and after her death the funeral party set out with the body to the nearest Christian church, which was a two days' journey away. Being overtaken by night on the way, they begged hospitality from a farm; but the farmer's family were very unwilling to receive them, and positively refused to give them any food. To the horror of all, however, in the dead of night a noise was heard in the larder, and the dead woman was found, stark naked, and cooking supper for the party. They partook of the repast which she had so kindly provided for them, and after that the farmer's family spared no efforts for the comfort of their guests. Another story fraught with humour in the same saga (ch. 55) relates how the ghosts of a boat-load of drowned men insisted on taking their places at a feast, and seating themselves before the fire to get dry, wringing out their wet clothes, to the discomfort of the other guests. As they refused to withdraw, legal proceedings were instituted against them, and as sentence was passed on each ghost, he courteously withdrew, first making a speech for the defence before leaving, quite in the characteristic manner of an Icelandic legal pleading.

The most horrific of all Icelandic ghosts is that of the shepherd Glámr from Sylgsdalr in Sweden, who figures in *Grettissaga* (ch. 32f.), as coming to a farm in Iceland to work as a hireling. He is killed by supernatural

agency, but after his death he haunts the farm where he has worked, killing the servants and the live-stock. The hero, Grettir the Strong, undertakes to keep watch in the house, and when in the middle of the night Glámr stealthily enters the farm, Grettir closes with him, and a terrible wrestling match ensues. Grettir forces Glámr out backwards through the door, and throws him down on his back, falling on top of him himself. But as they crash to the ground the moon comes out, and Glámr rolls up his eyes, and the horror of that vision—the sudden flash of white moonlight on Glámr's rolling eye-balls—never leaves Grettir to the day of his death. Brave and cruel and ruthless though he is he never again dares to be alone in the dark. We shall see that this peculiarity of the moonlight on the eyes of the dead man, and the impression which it makes on the living, is characteristic of other *draugar* and *haugbúar*. It may be added that the nocturnal visits of Glámr, and Grettir's fight with him, have been frequently compared to the visits of Grendel to Heorot, and Beowulf's fight with him—a comparison which is strengthened by the visits of a terrible supernatural woman later in the story, and yet another fight with her. These analogies seem to me to be very relevant, and I have myself no doubt of an ultimate connection between the stories; but this is not the place in which to enter upon a detailed comparison. I should, however, like to ask philologists whether some connection between the names *Grendel* and *Grettir*[1] is not possible, even though in one story the name belongs to the hero, in the other to the monster.

These free-lance ghosts seem, on the whole, to be characteristic of Iceland rather than of Scandinavia, where the ghost rarely ventures far from the place of his interment. In Scandinavia, and in the older stories, the ghost is known as a *haugbúi* (pl. *búar*), or a *draugr* (pl. *draugar*), and he is, in fact, the animated corpse of the dead man living on in the barrow in which he has been enclosed. In a number of cases the *draugr* is said to build his own barrow, during his life-time, like the Pharaohs of Egypt, and he enters it while he is still alive. To mention a few instances only: In the *Hálfdanar Saga Eysteinssonar* (ch. 26) we hear of a certain Agnarr who is said to have built a great barrow during his lifetime in Hálogaland, and to have entered it while still alive with all his ship's crew and much wealth. We are told also, that his father Raknarr had done the same. In the *Hrómundar Saga Greipssonar*, (ch. 4f.), we read of the *draugr* Thráinn the Berserkr who had once been a great king in Valland (France), but who, when he grew too old to fight, had had himself shut up alive in his barrow with much treasure. This is perhaps the true death of a Scandinavian aristocrat of the old school, who gives himself to Óthinn rather than "die on straw". In the *Saga af Thorsteini Bæormagni*, (ch. 12), Jarl Agthi, the undesirable neighbour and ally of King Geirröthr, is also said to build a barrow for himself, and to enter it, "taking with him much wealth", including two famous horns, known as *Hvitingar*. He is seen walking abroad at a later time; but the Christian Thorsteinn,

[1] The name *Grettir* is rare. It is found among the ancestors of our hero, Grettir the Strong, and also as the name given to Helgi Thórisson by the Grímar; see below.

finding the barrow open, enters and steals the horns, and when Agthi re-enters his barrow, Thorsteinn springs forward and puts a cross on the door—a later Christian modification of the original heathen method of quieting the *draugr*.

No fully-developed saga literature has been preserved from Sweden, but from brief summary notices of Swedish tradition preserved in Icelandic sagas—derived from Scandinavian sources—it is to be supposed that similar stories were once current in Sweden also. A number of these stories of Swedish provenance are recorded in summary form by Snorri Sturluson[2] in his historical work known as the *Heimskringla*, and among them is the story of the prehistoric Swedish king Svegthir, whose procedure seems to me to be identical with that of Thráinn. Svegthir, however, is said to have made a preliminary journey to supernatural regions before his final disappearance. The story is as follows:

King Svegthir vows a vow to visit "Goth-heimr and Óthinn the Old" and he accordingly makes a journey "with twelve men" to "Turkland and Great Sweden", that is to say, Russia, which, according to Snorri, was known as "Great Sweden".[3] Here he is said to have met many of his kinsmen and friends, and to have been absent on this journey for five years before he returns and settles in Sweden. Some years later he again goes to seek Goth-heimr in eastern Sweden, in a place called *at steini*. One evening after drinking, and before retiring to rest, he and his men see a dwarf sitting under the "stone". The dwarf calls to Svegthir, bidding him enter if he wishes to find Óthinn. Svegthir runs in, and it shuts behind him straightway, and Svegthir never comes back.[4]

We seem to have here an instance of *euthanasia*, like that of Thráinn's. There can be little doubt that the "stone" is in reality a stone-built structure, as is indicated by its shutting behind him. The word *steinn* is sometimes used of a cell or monastery; but here it seems to be used of a barrow of the dead. We may compare the phrase used of Björn, the son of Ragnarr Lothbrók, who is known as "Björn *at haugi*", "Björn of the Barrow". King Svegthir seems to have entered a barrow, and probably his retinue with him, under the stimulus of an intoxicating drink, while still alive, and after the door has shut behind him he never returns. It is to be suspected that a similar practice underlies the strange story of his father Fjölnir, who in the preceding chapter is said to have similarly perished while "dead drunk", and passing at night from one apartment to another, during the course of which he fell into an enormous ale vat and was drowned. Saxo tells practically the same story of the death of Hundingus, (O. N. Hundingr) king of the Swedes, at the funeral of Haddingus (O. N. Haddingr).[5] This can, I think, be hardly anything but a skaldic joke at the expense of those who gave themselves to Othinn, under the stimulus of an intoxicating drink. The chief interest in the story of Svegthir, however, lies in the fact that he is said to have made a

[2] Snorri Sturluson was a famous Icelandic scholar, and a great authority on early Scandinavian history and mythology. He died ca. 1241.

[3] *Ynglinga Saga*, ch. 1.

[4] *Ynglinga Saga*, ch. 15.

[5] Book I, *ad. fin.*

preliminary journey to Goth-heimr and " Othinn the Old " in early life, before his final departure after his marriage and life in Sweden.

We have many other stories of brave and courageous men who go alive into the barrow. One of the most interesting, because on the verge of history, is that of King Herlaugr, which is related by Snorri in the " Saga of Harold the Fair-haired " (*Heimskringla*), (Ch. 8), who lived c. 850–930. According to this story, early in the reign of King Harold the Fair-haired, and before that king had succeeded in uniting all Norway under his own rule, there were two brothers, both kings in Naumudalr, and their names were Herlaugr and Hrollaugr. These two brothers spent three years building a great barrow or chambered cairn of stone and mortar, the interior chamber being of timber. It must have been at Namsos. Then when they heard of the victorious northward march of King Harold the Fair-haired, King Herlaugr collected a large quantity of food and drink into the barrow, and went into it alive with eleven men, after which he had the barrow covered up.

It is strongly to be suspected that the same form of ritual death lies behind the story of the death of a descendant of King Herlaugr in the time of King Óláfr Tryggvason (who died about the year 1000), though as Snorri tells the story the ritual is obscured, and it is possible that he was himself unaware of the significance of the details which he relates. The story, which Snorri gives in the " Saga of Olaf Tryggvason " (*Heimskringla*), (Ch. 55), relates to the death of Jarl Hákon of Hlathir[6] at the hand of his servant Karkr. The two have been interred by Hákon's wife Thóra in a *svínabaeli*. (lit. " a hogs' stye "), in order, so goes the story, to hide them from King Óláfr, who is searching for the Jarl. Karkr, however, cuts off the head of the Jarl, and then makes his escape, bearing with him the Jarl's head, which he presents to King Óláfr. The scene between the Jarl and Karkr in the *svínabaeli* is perhaps the most powerful and terrible in Norse literature, and the dialogue between the two men seems to make it clear that the Jarl lays weight on the fact that Karkr was born in the same hour as himself, and also that the Jarl himself had nothing to expect save death at his hands. Taking into consideration the other stories of living interment, and of the necessity for a companion in the barrow which is stressed in many such instances, it is reasonable to conjecture that the story refers to the same ritual as that of King Herlaugr, and that, on the victorious approach of King Oláfr Tryggvason, the great Jarl, who was now no longer young, withdrew alive into the barrow which had been prepared for him, as his ancestor King Herlaugr had done before him, taking with him the servant of identical age in lieu of a sworn brother, to administer the *coup de grâce*, after which the servant was free to leave the barrow, bearing the head of the Jarl with him, perhaps in proof of his act.

The curious and unexplained part in all this is that of the Jarl's wife Thóra, who has the *svínabaeli* constructed for him, and manages the entire incident herself, though we never hear of her again afterwards. Ought

[6] Jarl Hákon died in 995. For his ancestry, see the tract *Hversu Noregr Byggthist*, Ch. 13. (*Fornaldar Sögur Northrlanda*, vol. II).

she to have been buried herself with the Jarl, as an act of suttee? Is Karkr a substitute for her? Nothing of the kind is said of Herlaugr; but the eponymous king of Hálogaland, King of Helgi, who is presumably an ancestor also of Jarl Hákon, is said by Snorri Sturluson in his work devoted to early Norse poetic diction and legend known as the *Skaldskaparmál*, (Ch. 44), to have been buried with Thorgerthr Hölgabrúthr ("Helgie's bride"), or according to a natural variant form, Hörgabrúthr ("barrow bride"), in a great barrow. According to Snorri, Thorgerthr was Helgi's daughter,[7] but according to the Danish Historian Saxo Grammaticus, his wife,[8] while a certain Throgerthr Hölgabrúthr, a supernatural being, is also spoken of in the *Flateyjarbók* as Jarl Hákon's "best friend".[9] There are grounds for believing that Snorri, in representing Thóra as the Jarl's wife, is following an alternative tradition to that which relates to Thorgerthr, though it would take too long to enter into a discussion of the matter here. It must suffice to say that it is by no means out of the question that the Jarl's wife induces Karkr to pass a time with the Jarl in the barrow to act as a substitute for herself, and to deal with the Jarl in a manner which will preclude his emerging from his tomb at any later period—a thing regarded as highly undesirable, though by no means rare.

An interesting account (mythical) of the building of a barrow in Hálogaland is given by Snorri Sturluson in the *Skaldskaparmál*, (Ch. XLIV.). Here Helgi, the eponymous king of Hálogaland, is stated to have been the father of Thorgerthr Hölgabrúthr, as referred to above, and it is said that sacrifices were offered to them both and a cairn was raised over Helgi. It is not stated that he was dead. It is said that the cairn was made of alternate layers, one of gold and silver—"that was sacrificial money" (*that var blótféit*), and the other of earth and stones. We may compare the great barrow in Bjarmaland described in St. Olaf's Saga, (Ch. 143) (*Heimskringla*), which is said to have been composed of gold and silver and earth, all mixed together, or perhaps in layers, as here. The barrow contained a great image of Jómali, which is the Finnish word for a god; and on his lap was a bowl full of silver coins. The barrow of Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr was probably of similar construction, as we shall see (p. 58 below).

A characteristic of the *draugr*, or the *haugbúi*, "barrow dweller", as these Scandinavian ghosts, or rather animated corpses, are called, is that they frequently come out of their barrows, and walk, or even ride abroad, which is thought by the living to be an undesirable habit. This occurs most frequently in the evening; but it sometimes happens that a mist or temporary darkness heralds their approach even by day. They are sometimes seen by the living in what appears to be a kind of dream or trance; but it generally happens even so that they leave beside the living person some gift, by which, on awakening, the living person may be

[7] *Skaldskaparmál*, ch. 44.

[8] *Dan. Hist.*, Book III, p. 72 (ed. Holder; p. 87 in the English translation by O. Elton, London, 1894).

[9] *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar*, vol. I, ch. 326; cf. *ib.*, p. 234.

assured of the tangible nature of the visit. As an example of this, I may refer to Agnarr, the son of Reginmóthr the Evil, also said to be an uncle (father's brother) of the hero Gullthórir. Agnarr had gone into his barrow with all his ship's crew and much wealth, and he appears to Gullthórir as the latter is overtaken by sleep on the slope of the hill leading to his barrow, and after a long conversation, leaves tangible magical gifts beside him. Agnarr behaves as a friendly *haugbúi* to Gullthórir, but this is because Gullthórir is a nephew; and moreover he had intended to rifle Agnarr's barrow if he had not been generously treated. But Agnarr is said to guard his barrow with much *trollskap*, or evil magic, and to have been the death of many who have tried to come near his barrow to break in. And no-one knows whether he *tryllist*, (" behaves as a *troll* ") alive or dead. Can this be the Agnarr, son of Raknarr, referred to above as having built a big barrow for himself in Hálogaland, and as having entered it alive with his ship's crew ? Another *draugr* who emerges from his barrow and rides abroad in the evening is Helgi Hundingsbani; but he also is prevented from doing harm, as we shall see.

The object of the *haugbúi* in leaving his barrow is sometimes said to be to prey on men and cattle. They seem, in fact, to be very hungry creatures. Glámr carries off and tears up the shepherds on the farm which he molests, though it is not said that he actually eats them. Agnarr, however, in *Halfdanar Saga Eysteinssonar*, is said to *trylla á fénu*, " prey on cattle ", or " wealth " ; and Asuitus, (O. N. Asvitr) a *haugbúi* referred to by Saxo,[10] when his foster-brother Asmundus (O. N. Asmundr) is buried alive with him in Sweden, first devours his horse and dog, and then tears off the ear of his companion. Thráinn the *berserkr* has a great cauldron on the fire in his barrow when Hrómundr Greipsson breaks in. King Herlaugr, we have seen, took precautions against famine by taking much food and drink with him before having himself shut up in his barrow.

There seem to be two ways of preventing a ghost from leaving his barrow. One is for a living man to enter the barrow and fight with the *draugr* and cut off his head,[11] as we have just seen Karkr do, and as Hrómundr Greipsson treats Thráinn. Grettir treats a *draugr* known as Kárr the Old in the same way on the island of Haramsey off South Moeri in Norway.[12] This procedure is very widespread in the sagas, where it is generally represented as tomb robbing, because of the large amount of treasure which the *draugr* has with him in the barrow. This is the motive attributed to Grettir in robbing the barrow of Kárr the Old, and to Hrómundr Greipssen in the robbing of Thráinn's barrow; but decapitation takes place in both these instances.

There are, nevertheless, a number of instances of the *draugr* emerging from his barrow and giving up his treasures voluntarily to a member of

[10] *Dan. Hist.*, Book V, p. 161 f. (Elton's translation, p. 199 f.).

[11] It is a curious fact that the hero Starkathr, who is described in *Gautreks Saga*, ch. 7, as *endrbornn jötunn*, " a *jötunn* born again ", offers his head to his enemy to hew off in his old age, as befits a devotee of Óthinn. See Saxo, Book VIII, p. 269 ff.; Elton, p. 329.

[12] *Grettissaga*, ch. 18.

his own family in a later generation. Where a combat takes place between a *draugr* and the " robber " there are many indications that the combat is of ritual origin. Thus it seems clear that in some stories the living man who enters the tomb is a sworn brother, or foster-brother of the dead man, a kind of companion in arms or adventure of his life-time ; and failing such, a slave may take his place, provided that he is born in the same hour as the *draugr*. The custom is probably an old one, and may help to explain certain curious features in the genealogy of the early Swedish kings, preserved in the *Ynglinga Saga*, according to which a high proportion of the Swedish kings are said to have had two sons—and apparently two only—who died and were buried together—a possible reminiscence, somewhat obscured in literary tradition, of the ritual which we have been discussing. To this subject we shall return later.

The second way in which a ghost can be quieted is by suttee, whether actual or ritual. We know that according to tradition, the Swedes had a law that the queen must die with her husband. And a story is told of Sigrith the Proud insisting on a divorce from her husband, Eric the Victorious, on the ground of this law.[13] The existence of some such custom is made clear by the narrative of the Arabic writer, Ibn Miskawaih,[14] relating to the so-called raid of the Rus on the Caspian provinces early in the tenth century. Here we are told that :

" When one of them died, they buried with him his arms, clothes, and equipment, and his wife or some other of his women folk, and his slave if he happened to be attached to him ; this being their practice. After their power had come to an end, the Moslems disturbed their graves, and brought out a number of swords which are in great demand to this day for their sharpness and excellence."[15]

Rus is the name by which the Swedes were known in early Russia, and the Scandinavians who attacked the Caspian provinces would undoubtedly be largely Swedes, though there may well have been a considerable number of Norwegians, and more especially Hálogalanders in their company.

It would seem, however, that a man could also fulfil the same function for the *draugr* as his wife. We have just seen that according to Ib Miskawaih, a male favourite slave could be buried with his master, apparently instead of, or as a substitute for a wife. Saxo relates[16] a story of a certain Asmundus (O. N. Ásmundr), son of Alfus (Álfr), king of Hethmarchia (Heithmörk) who became foster-brother of Asuitus (Ásvítr), son of Biorno (Björn), who ruled in the neighbourhood of the Oslo Fjord, and who, on Ásvítr's death, was buried alive with him in the same barrow in fulfilment of a previous reciprocal promise made between them ; and we know that this particular story was recorded in more than one form. But the practice was not confined to this story. We have seen Karkr, the

[13] *Flateyjarbók*, I, ch. 63 (*Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason*).

[14] Said to have died A.D. 1043.

[15] *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, vol. V. (Translated by D. S. Margoliouth from the Arabic (Oxford, 1921), p. 140). For a fuller account of these Rus raids, see Chadwick, *The Beginnings of Russian History* (Cambridge, 1946), Appendix I.

[16] *Dan. Hist.*, Book VI, p. 161 f. (Elton's translation, p. 199 f.).

slave of Jarl Hákon, of whom the interesting detail is told that he was born in the same hour as his master, buried in the *svínahaeli* together with Hákon; and though the burial is represented in the story as a temporary exigency for both in intention, yet in fact Karkr performed the function of cutting off Hákon's head and emerging from the underground chamber with it, exactly as the hero treats the undesirable *draugr* in other stories. We shall see Hrani Vithförull, the foster-brother of Haraldr Grenski, entering the barrow of Haraldr's collateral ancestor, Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr, and beheading the *draugr*, and then emerging with the head in precisely the same way. We have already referred to the *Ynglinga Saga*, which relates in summary form the history of the early Swedish kings, and which contains in its early chapters a number of pairs of royal brothers who are said to die and be buried together. It is possible that the traditions reflect some custom of what we may describe as "male suttee", such as we have just considered.

It is interesting to find evidence in Norse literature which suggests that ritual suttee was substituted for this. In the poem in the *Elder Edda*, known as *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana* II, we are told in the prose passage inserted in the text after str. 37 that after the hero Helgi has been pierced in battle, and a barrow raised for him, he is seen at night by a handmaid riding to his barrow with many men. The girl goes to tell his valkyrie lover Sigrún, who immediately goes to the barrow, and passes the night with Helgi, spreading a bed for her lover as if he were alive, and placing herself in his arms. The meeting and dialogue of the lovers in the barrow, one living, the other dead, is a supreme flight of the Norse poetical imagination, the eerie horror of which is relieved by the unhesitating and romantic devotion of the valkyrie, and the poetical beauty of the words of the dead hero:

"Thou weepest cruel tears, thou gold adorned, sun bright lady of the south, ere thou goest to sleep; each of them falls bloody on my princely breast, cold, scorching and heavy with sorrow. But no one shall sing a song of mourning though he beholds wound on my breast, for kings' daughters have come as brides among the dead in the barrows."[17]

Next day, we are told, Sigrún again repairs to the barrow; but the *draugr* is now satisfied. The suttee has been performed, and Helgi has departed to Óthinn's halls, and no longer rides abroad. But there is a strong hint of real suttee in the prose passage which follows, in which we are told that Sigrún's life was shortened by grief and mourning; and this statement occurs immediately before a statement that Helgi and Sigrún are said to have been reborn as Helgi Haddingjaskati and Kára. There can, I think, be little doubt that the act of suttee, or its ritual substitution, by a night spent with the dead, is instrumental in bringing about metempsychosis, or "rebirth".

There are indeed, a number of passages in Old Norse literature in which the belief in rebirth is explicitly stated. We have already referred to the *jötunn* Starkathr Áludrengr, who is said to be *endrborinn* ("reborn") in his grandson, the great hero, also called Starkathr, a great devotee of

[17] *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana* II, strs. 43, 44.

Óthinn, who in old age begs his enemy to cut off his head—which, in fact, he does. The capacity to be reborn seems to be most frequently associated with valkyries. When Brynhildr is about to commit suttee in order to establish her claims to the affections of Sigurthr, Högni cries " Let no-one hinder her from her long journey (*á Helveg*), and may she never be reborn (*aptrborin*) ".

The most striking instances, however, are the prose passages attached to the Helgi poems in the *Elder Edda*, such as the one referred to above relating to Helgi Hundingsbani and the valkyrie Sigrún, who visits him at night in the barrow. Here we have three pairs reborn successively, and apparently each in a corresponding generation, and each pair marrying the same person. Thus the valkyrie Sváva is reborn as the valkyrie Sigrún, and her husband Helgi Hjörvarthsson is reborn as Helgi Hundingsbani, whom she again marries. Sigrún is again reborn (*endrborin*) as the valkyrie Kára, and Helgi Hundingsbani as Helgi Haddingjaskati, whom again she marries. It will be seen that Helgi retains his name in each rebirth, while the name of the valkyrie wife changes. Perhaps the most striking feature of the whole story is the fact that identical people remarry in each rebirth.

Perhaps the most specific association of rebirth with the *draugr* or *haugbúi* and the barrow is contained in the story of Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr —a story which is particularly interesting as comprising what practically amounts to the life history of a *draugr* in three acts. Óláfr of Geirstathir was the brother of King Hálfdan the Black, and uncle of King Harold the Fair-haired. His epithet *Geirstatha-Álfr*, means *álfr*, or " elf " of Geirstathir, a place on the Oslo Fjord where he was ultimately buried, and the *álfar*, " elves ", seem here, as elsewhere, to signify the souls of the unborn, or those awaiting rebirth.[18] The story, which is related in the *Flateyjarbók*,[19] relates that Óláfr built a great barrow for himself in response to a dream in which he was warned of a coming plague. He ordered each man of rank in his following to carry half a mark of silver into the mound[20]; and when the plague came, each of his followers who died was carried into the mound. Finally the king himself was placed in the mound with great wealth and it was then closed. Afterwards the plague abated, but a dearth followed, so they decided to sacrifice to King Óláfr for a period of fertility, and they called him Geirstatha-Álfr.

The story goes on to relate that one day Óláfr appeared in a dream to a man called Hrani, the foster-brother of Harold Grenski,[21] great grandson of Harold the Fair-haired, bidding him break into his barrow, and cut off

[18] It is interesting to note that the wife of Starkathr Áludrengr was called Álfhildr, the daughter of King Álfr of Álfheimar. Starkathr had carried her off as she was performing the *disa blót* (*Hervarar Saga*, ch. 1). This is the *jötunn Starkathr* who is said to have been reborn (as his grandson) the hero Starkathr. See above.

[19] *Óláfs Saga Helga*, *Flateyjarbók*, vol. II, p. 6 ff.

[20] The procedure probably refers to the structure of the mound, which was built up of a mixture of alternate layers of earth and silver, like the mounds of Helgi and Jómali referred to above.

[21] *Flateyjarbók*, vol. I, p. 1 ff.

the head of the *draugr*, and take his treasures, including a belt, a knife, a ring, and the sword Besing. This occurred after Harold's death. Hrani is to take the treasures, and place the belt round the waist of Asta, the wife of Harold Grenski, when she will be enabled to bear her child. All this Hrani faithfully carries out. The son thus born to Ásta is afterwards St. Olaf, and to this child the treasures of Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr are given, as instructed by him in the dream. What follows in the saga makes it clear that St. Olaf was regarded in popular opinion as Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr reborn, and the name of Óláfr (Olaf) given to him further supports this popular idea.[22] The story seems to imply that Hrani, the foster-brother of Harold, Ásta's husband, the man who enters the barrow and cuts off the head of the *draugr*, can act as a substitute for the dead man, that is to say, he functions as Ásta's husband; and so as a *psychopompos* for Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr, enabling him to be reborn by a woman without her having come into personal contact with the dead. In other words, the decapitation of the *draugr* by a living collateral descendant, or his official "double", is efficacious as a substitute for suttee, and an alternative to it. The living man, who has entered the barrow, has become a temporary companion of the *draugr*, thus becoming the champion and liberator of the wife of the dead man. The essential thing is that the living substitute of the dead man must enter his ancestral barrow and get his personal heirlooms or "insignia", perhaps as his external soul, perhaps merely as his symbols; and he must also cut off the head of his ancestor.

There are some further points which should not be lost sight of. The first is, that Hrani is the foster-brother of Harold Grenski, and of equal age with him, and it is for this reason that he has power to act on his behalf in the barrow. He is, in fact, his spiritual substitute. Harold, it will be remembered, is already dead when Hrani has his dream, and undertakes his mission. Hrani's function then must be looked upon as the technical function of the surviving foster-brother, and a substitute for that of the dead man himself.

The second point of importance is that Harold Grenski, who has been burnt in a house in Sweden, and for whom Hrani is acting, is himself a collateral descendant of Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr, being a great-grandson of Harold the Fair-haired. The robbing of Óláfr's barrow, therefore, resembles the robbing of Agnarr by Gullthórir, and the acquisition of the spirit or soul (*álfr*) of Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr by St. Olaf (via Hrani) is merely keeping it in the family—essentially metempsychosis of a typical kind, not of a sporadic character. In general it may be said that the life history of this *haugbúi* or *draugr* is of particular interest because this story combines all the elements of suttee, rebirth, and decapitation; and also the gifts of the personal insignia of the *draugr* to his reincarnation.

Great barrows such as those of King Helgi, the eponymous king of Hálogaland, of Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr, and of Herlaugr and Hrollaugr, kings of Naumudalr, were looked upon as sanctuaries. King Harold the Fair-haired is said to have died of sickness, and to have been buried *á*

[22] An interesting discussion of this story and its implications for Norse religion is given by Miss H. R. Ellis, *The Road to Hel* (Cambridge, 1943), p. 138 f.

haugum, " in the Barrows ", at Kormt Sound on the west coast of Norway, in the province of Rogaland. Snorri tells us[23] in an interesting note that on this spot a church was standing in his own day, and just to the west of the churchyard the barrow of King Harold the Fair-haired was still standing. It was a chambered cairn ; but the big stones which had formed the burial chamber in the centre were then standing in the churchyard. King Harold was evidently buried in a cemetery of some importance, and probably not new even then. It is interesting to find the Christian church on the site of the royal cemetery ; and it will be worth while to trace the traditions relating to the spot to see what kind of person may have been buried there before King Harold the Fair-haired.

First of all we learn from *Hálfs Saga* that a certain king called Ögvàldr had formerly died and been buried on this same spot. The story, which is related in ch. 2 of *Hálfs Saga*, relates that a certain king Ögvàldr, who ruled Rogaland, was killed by a viking called Hæklingr, and placed in a barrow on a headland, known later as Ögvàldsnes, which is on Kormt Isle, off the Rogaland coast. One day a certain Finn the Wealthy from Akranes, who is known elsewhere as a *landnáma-mathr*, or colonist of Iceland, lay opposite to Ögvàldsnes ready to make the voyage out to Iceland ; and he asked how long it was since King Ögvàldr fell. Upon this he heard a chant in the barrow, in which the occupant declared that long ago he had been a ruler of this dwelling (*thorp*),[24] at the time when Hæklingr came with a countless host. It is interesting to note that the verse recited by Ögvàldr in his barrow, which is quoted in the text of the *Hálfs Saga*, is found, with only slight variations, as the first verse of a poem chanted by a gigantic *trémathr* (lit. " a wooden man "), who is discovered on the island of Samsey by the retinue of a certain Ögmundr enn Danski in the closing chapter of the *Ragnars Saga Lothbrókar ok Sona Hans*. We are not told the name of the *trémathr* ; and nothing is known of Ögmundr enn Danski from other sources. It is just possible that the name has been transferred to him from the *trémathr* himself, and that it is a variant of Ögvàldr, since Ögvàldr recites the same poem. But the two are buried in different places, and the Samsey *trémathr* declares that he was slain by the sons of Ragnarr Lothbrók, an allusion which doubtless accounts for the inclusion of the incident in his saga. It should be added that it is not clear that the *trémathr* is associated with a barrow. He is merely discovered in a wood, overgrown with moss. But he, like Ögmundr, claims to have been formerly the ruler of the *thorp*, and the *thorp* may have been a barrow. This indeed appears to be the sense in which it is used in *Hávamál*, str. 50.

The story related in the *Hálfs Saga* of the death of King Ögvàldr is not the end of the royal cemetery of Ögvàldsnes by any means. We come upon it again unexpectedly in the reign of King Óláfr Tryggvason, who

[23] " Saga of Harold the Fair-haired " (*Heimshringla*), ch. 45.

[24] The word *thorp* seems to be generally used of a " hamlet " or " village ", but it is also used to gloss Latin *villa, vicus, castrum*. It is possible that it is used in our text in the sense of the Frisian *terpen*, mounds of the marshy Frisian and north-west German coasts, on which the villages were built to be above flood level.

died in the year 1000, some seventy years later than King Harold the Fair-haired. The incident is related in the "Saga of Olaf Tryggvason", (ch. 71) (*Heimskringla*), and we shall refer to it again later.

Among the most interesting, and at the same time the most puzzling, aspects of the *haugbúi* and the barrow are their constant association with *skaldskap* and music. The most striking and apparently inexplicable are the numerous instances in which the *haugbúi* recites what appear to be one or more disconnected strophes of skaldic poetry. It is not easy to guess the origin of these verses, or how they came to be associated with the *haugbúi*. Equally puzzling is the question of how they came to be preserved. That some of them are ancient and traditional there can be little doubt. This is suggested by the corrupt state of the text in some instances; and it would seem to be indicated by the fact that, again in some instances, verses which are very similar or almost identical are attributed to more than one *haugbúi*. The evidence of the texts suggests that either an ancient traditional type of *haugbúi* poem has existed and been transmitted orally, giving rise to slight variations; or else that identical strophes have been attributed to various *haugbúar*. The latter would seem to be the more probable explanation.

The clearest and fullest statement of the association of the *haugbúi* with poetry is perhaps to be found in *Thorleifs Háttr Jarlsskálds* contained in the *Flateyjarbók* (I, p. 207 ff.). In this instance, we are fortunate in knowing something of the life history of the *haugbúi*. He had been a skald at the courts of Jarl Hákon of Hlathir and King Sveinn of Denmark, and had earned the bitter enmity of Jarl Hákon, on whom he had composed magical verses which had injured his person and his health, exactly like the satires of the Irish *filid*. The Jarl, in revenge, is said to have enlisted the help of Thorgerthr Hörgabrúthr and her sister Irpa, to enable him to take vengeance on Thorleifr, and to this end he took a log of driftwood and constructed from it a wooden man with the power of movement. He then sent him out to Iceland to attack Thorleifr who had fled to escape vengeance. In the encounter between the two, Thorleifr was mortally wounded and buried in a barrow north of the "Hill of Laws" in Thingvellir.

The story goes on to relate that a man called Thorkell lived at Thingvellir who was rich in flocks, and his shepherd (*sauthamathr*), Hallbjörn, was in the habit of spending the night on the barrow and pasturing his flock in the neighbourhood. He was anxious to compose a panegyric on the occupant of the barrow (*haugbúi*), but being no poet he could never get further than the opening sentence: "Here lies a *skald*" ("poet"); but one night, after making his usual unsuccessful effort, he fell asleep, and then he saw the barrow open, and a tall man of good appearance emerged, and addressed him as follows:

"There you lie, Hallbjörn, struggling to compose a panegyric on me, which is beyond your powers. One of two things will happen, either you will surpass everyone in this art, which you will acquire from me,—and this is the most probable alternative; or else you need not struggle any longer with it. I am going to recite a verse to you now, and if you acquire

it, and remember it when you awaken, you will become a great skald and compose panegyrics for many chiefs, and become highly accomplished in this art."

Thereupon the *haugbúi* seized hold of the man's tongue, and recited a verse in which he extolled his own poetical gift and made scathing reference to his old enemy Jarl Hákon. He enjoined on Hallbjörn that he should inaugurate his poetical career by composing a panegyric on him when he awoke, taking great pains with the metre and the diction, and especially with the kennings. The production, in short, was to be a typical piece of skaldic panegyric verse. Then the *haugbúi* went back into the barrow which shut behind him. But Hallbjörn recalled the verse, and on his return home he told what had occurred, and composed a panegyric on the *haugbúi*, and became a great skald, composing panegyrics for many chiefs, by whom he was greatly honoured.

The story adds that Hallbjörn became the subject of a great story which circulated both in Iceland and abroad " though it is not written here ". We may compare what is said below of Grím and the *Hallmundarkvitha*. It is obvious that the account cannot be treated as serious history ; but it is, in general, consistent with other traditions relating to the association of poetry and poetical inspiration with the *haugbúi*, as we shall see. This being so, it is interesting to note the attitude of the shepherd as he lies on the barrow as on a bed, and also the necessity for actual contact of the living with the dead: It is not enough for the *haugbúi* to exert spiritual power from within the barrow. He comes out and touches the tongue of Hallbjörn as he recites to him the words of the poem with which he inspires him.

The belief that the dead in the barrow had the power to bestow the gift of speech or eloquence is brought out very clearly also in *Thorsteins Tháttr Uxafóts*.[25] Thorsteinn is said to have been the illegitimate son of Ivarr Ljómi, and his mother was Oddný, the sister of Thórkell Geitisson of Krossavik in Iceland ; but she was dumb. One day, when Thorsteinn was ten years of age, he was out on the mountain with Freysteinn the Fair, a thrall who had saved his life in infancy when Thorkell had sought his destruction. While Thorsteinn and Freysteinn are passing through a deep dale they are overtaken by darkness, and see before them a lofty barrow. Thorsteinn tells his companion that he has decided to pass the night lying upon it, and bids him not waken him whatever his behaviour may be. Then as he sleeps he behaves with great violence, contorting his body and writhing strangely, and the words of the Icelandic passage recall the description of the behaviour of Jarl Hákon in the *svinabaeli* when he was in hiding with Karkr from Óláfr Tryggvason. When Thorsteinn awakens, he tells how, in his sleep, he saw a tall man clad in red emerge from the barrow. The man informed him that his name was Brynjarr, and invited him in. Thorsteinn entered with him and found it occupied by Brynjarr and his brother Oddr, each attended by eleven followers, clad respectively in red and blue or black (*blá*). Brynjarr declared that his brother, who was stronger than himself, possessed gold which had the

[25] *Flateyjarbók*, vol. I. p. 249 ff.

power to bestow the gift of speech, and if placed under the root of the tongue of Thorsteinn's mother it would endow her with the power of speech.

Thereupon Oddr entered into a fierce combat with him, and Thorsteinn succeeded in overcoming Oddr who was slain with all his followers. Brynjarr gave Oddr's gold to Thorsteinn, bidding him place it under his mother's tongue, and begging him, as he dismissed him from the barrow, that if he should ever have a son he should give him Christian baptism and call him Brynjarr. When Thorsteinn awakens he finds the gold beside him, and when he returns home and places it under the root of his mother's tongue she receives the power of speech. Later in life he has a son whom he christens Brynjarr. The story is especially interesting for its testimony to the belief in metempsychosis, and is comparable to the story of the entry of Hrani into the barrow of Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr, and the subsequent birth of St. Olaf to Ásta when Hrani brings her the treasures of the *haugbúi*. For our present purpose, however, its chief interest lies in the power of the occupant of the barrow, or rather an article obtained from him, to bestow speech. In this case the eloquence is not bestowed directly on the visitor to the barrow, as in the case of Hallbjörn just cited, but on another person by the intermediary of the barrow visitor, as the influence of the *haugbúi* is exerted upon Ásta through the intermediary Hrani, her husband's foster-brother. It is interesting to note that Oddný, though unable to express herself in speech, is not illiterate. She can inscribe runes on a *kefli*. Finally we may emphasise the fact that Thorsteinn is said to be ten years of age when this supernatural experience comes upon him. It seems to be a kind of spiritual initiation into manhood, perhaps even fatherhood.

With the experience of Thorleifr Jarlsskald and Thorsteinn Uxafótr we may compare the account of Helgi Hjörvarthsson in the poem in the *Elder Edda* which bears his name. Helgi, the son of King Hjörvarthr and the *valkyrie* Sigrlinn, is said to be nameless and thögull (" lit. silent ", " speechless ") till one day as he is sitting on a burial mound[26] (*á haugi*) he sees nine valkyries, one of whom addresses him by the name of Helgi. The mantic vision,[27] and the naming which accompanies it, seem again to be a kind of initiation into manhood, a coming of age rite, as in the case of Thorsteinn Uxafótr; and this is also suggested by Helgi's reply, for he asks what gift she will bestow to accompany the name of Helgi,[28] adding that he will not accept it unless he has her as his bride. The passage suggests that the valkyrie bestows, not only a name, but also the gift of eloquence on Helgi. This would seem to be the implication of the text. *Thögull* probably refers to the absence of poetic eloquence, and it is possible that in the original version of the *Thorsteins Saga Uxafóts* this was the defect of speech attributed to Oddný, Thorsteinn's

[26] See A. Olrik, " At Sidde pa Höj ", *Danske Studier*, 1909, p. 1 ff.; cf. also M. Olsen, *Farms and Fanes of Ancient Norway* (Oslo, 1928), p. 310 ff.

[27] We may compare the story of the meeting of Pwyll with the lady on the white horse in the *Mabinogion*.

[28] It is the custom in the sagas for the person who names anyone to present him with a gift. Cf. *Hrólfs Saga Kraka*, ch. 28.

mother, though the writing of runes on the *kefli* perhaps suggests physical dumbness. In any case, the power of the barrow to bestow the gift of speech is strikingly attested in the two cases. It may be added that a certain Helgo (O. N. *Helgi*) is referred to by Saxo[29] as " of youthful age and afflicted with a faulty utterance ". Saxo is here probably translating the word *thögull*, and here also the reference is probably to lack of eloquence or polished speech, as the course of the story makes clear. There is no reference to a barrow in Saxo's story, but the Helgi in question is the same Helgi who, in *Skaldskaparmál*, ch. 44, is referred to as the father of Thorgerthr Hölgabrúthr, and who is mentioned because of his famous barrow. It is evident, therefore, that here also the barrow is somehow associated with the gift of speech, though Saxo has not realised the significance of the passage.

The gift of poetic inspiration and eloquence associated with the *haugbúi* and the barrow is closely connected with other supernatural gifts, such as the power of prophecy and second sight, or the power to beget offspring. These gifts, strangely enough, seem sometimes to go hand in hand with the poetry and eloquence. Thus in the case of Thorsteinn Uxafótr the implication would seem to be that Brynjarr, while bestowing on Thorsteinn the gold with its gift of speech, also bestows the son whom he shall bear in the future, and whom he is to call by Brynjarr's own name. The power granted by the long buried Óláfr Geirstatha-Álfr to Ásta to bear a son whom she is to call by his name has also been cited, though here Ásta's own husband, Harold Grenski, is recently dead, and the intermediary between the *haugbúi* and Ásta is Harold's foster-brother Hrani. In the story of King Rerir, the father of Völsungr in the *Völsunga Saga*, (ch. 2), King Rerir goes to sit on a barrow when he wishes to obtain the power to beget a son, and when the valkyrie Hljóth comes and drops an apple in his lap, the end which he desires comes about.

On the other hand the close connection of poetic inspiration and the mantic vision with the barrow is well illustrated by the stories of the two Thorleifr Spakis. The first occurs in ch. 7 of the " Saga of Hálfdan the Black " in the *Heimskringla*, where we read that King Hálfdan, the brother of the Geirstatha-Álfr just referred to, complains to Thorleifr Spaki the " Sage ", that he never has dreams. Thorleifr Spaki informs him that whenever he himself wishes to have dreams, he goes to sleep in a *svínabaeli*,[30] lit. a " hogs' stye ", and that then dreams are never lacking to him. King Hálfdan, we are told, followed this procedure with signal success. It is to be suspected that the word " hogs' stye " is used both here, and in the story of the death of Jarl Hákon, as a kenning or piece of figurative diction, for a barrow, such as that in which Freyr is said to have been buried in Upsala ; that is to say, " Frey's house ", Freyr being the

[29] Saxo, Book III, p. 72 ff. (Elton's translation, p. 83 ff.). Here Helgo becomes the bride of Thora (N. Thorgerthr), daughter of Cuso, (O. N. Gusi), king of the Finns and Bjarmar.

[30] The word seems to occur only here and in the story of the death of Jarl Hákon of Hlathir, who is said to be hidden in a *svinabaeli* from his enemy, Óláfr Tryggvason, by his wife Thora. See the " Saga of Olaf Tryggvason " (*Heimskringla*) ch. 53 ; cf. p. above.

"hog" or boar, par excellence.[31] This would seem to be borne out by the story of another Thorleifr Spaki, a descendant of the Thorleifr just referred to. The story[32] relates that when Óláfr Tryggvasan sent his Christian poet Hallfrethr to "put out the eye" of Thorleifr Spaki II, the latter was found seated on a barrow as his custom was, not far from his home, "as the men of old were wont to do". His attitude recalls that of the would-be poet Hallbjörn in *Thorleifs Háttr Jarlsskalds*, and also that of Thorsteinn Uxafótr, and it is to be suspected that the "eye" which the Christian king wished to put out was the mantic or prophetic eye of his (heathen) inner vision.[33] Whether we believe the story which makes Thorleifr Spaki II a descendant of Thorleifr Spaki I who had inherited his prophetic gifts, or whether we regard the later story as a literary variant of the first, it seems in either case to make it clear that contact with the barrow is an integral part of the technique.

Saxo relates[34] a very striking story of a certain Asmundus (Ásmundr) which is associated with an earlier (mythical) period, that of Frotho, king of Denmark and Eric, king of Sweden. In this story, as in that of Thorsteinn Uxafótr, the gift of poetry follows upon a visit to the interior of the barrow. Here, however, the poem is recited by the living man after he has emerged from the barrow. The story, which has been briefly referred to already, relates that Aswitus (Ásvítr), the young son of a certain Biorno (Björn), and his friend Asmundus (Ásmundr), son of Alf (Álfr), king of Heidmark, swore friendship together, vowing that whichever survived the other should be buried with him who died. Before long Ásvítr dies, and is buried, together with his horse and dog, in a barrow, and Ásmundr is voluntarily buried with him, food being put in for him to eat. About the same time King Eric of Sweden and his men chanced to pass by the barrow and broke into it, thinking to find treasure. One of them lowered himself into the chamber by means of a rope, whereupon Ásmundr cast him out and had himself drawn up; but when he reached the world outside Eric and his men were horrified to find his face streaming with blood. Ásvítr had come to life in the nights, and in the continuous struggles between the two, had wrenched off Ásmundr's ear, for he had consumed his horse and dog and then sought to devour Ásmundr. For us the interest in this story lies in the fact that immediately on emerging from the barrow, Ásmundr chants a poem in which he makes all these happenings known. A variant version of the story occurs also in *Egils Saga ok Ásmundar*, (ch. 6 ff.), but here there is no mention of the poem.

[31] It may perhaps be with some reminiscence of this epithet *svínabaeli* for a barrrow that Ragnarr Lothbrók declares in his death-song that the young pigs would squeal if they knew that the old boar was suffering (*Ragnars Saga Lothbrókar*, ch. 15).

[32] *Flateyjarbók* I, p. 330.

[33] In early Irish sagas the utterance of a prophecy or vision commonly opens with the word *adciu*, "I see" (i.e. with the eye of inner vision). When Medb, queen of Connacht, meets with Fedelm the prophetess and wishes to obtain information, she tells her to "look".

[34] Book V, p. 161 ff. (Elton, p. 199 ff.).

(*To be continued.*)