

The God-semantic Field in Old Norse Prose and Poetry

A Cognitive Philological Analysis

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Abstract

The thesis under the title “The God-semantic Field: A Cognitive Philological Analysis” analyses eight different lexemes that belong to the same semantic field – *god*. The research is a comparative and contrastive analysis of the lexemes within Old Norse prose and poetry according to their use and function within texts with Christian and non-Christian topic. The aim was to use a different approach in the analysis of the words in question in order to give a better structured semantic field according to the use of the words.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aim of the thesis

This thesis deals with philological analysis of a semantic field comprised of eight different lexemes that share one meaning in common – ‘god’. All of these words refer to a group of deities when in plural, or in reference to one deity when in singular. The semantic field is named *dyēus* in reference to the theory of the Proto-Indo-European deity which is an etymological ancestor of the supreme deities worshipped in different Indo-European cultures, such as Zeus. The deity is not directly attested, but is rather a reconstruction. The word is related to Proto-Indo-European **deiwos* which is in turn an etymological ancestor to Germanic Tiwaz or Norse Týr, Latin *deus*, and Indo-Iranian *deva*. The Old Norse *dyēus* semantic field thus consists of:

týr/tívar, goð/guð, røgn/regin,
ás/æsir, bønd, høpt,
dróttin, díar¹

Connected to the deity semantic field are other spheres important to the descendants of the Proto-Indo-European religion, such as sacrifice, sacredness and sanctification. In Old Norse these would be comprised of *sacrifice* field (*blót* and *húsl*), *sacredness* field (*heilagr* and *heill*) and *sanctification* field (*skírn* and *ausa vatni*)². Due to the limitations in terms of length, the thesis focuses only at the *dyēus* semantic field, but the relationship between these fields would make an interesting topic nonetheless.

Most of the lexemes forming Old Norse deity semantic field are etymologically unrelated, while others have the same origin, thus *týr* and *díar* most like originate from the same Proto-Indo-European **deiwos*. Some of the words’ primary meanings were not ‘god’ but have rather been used in reference to a deity or more of them through metaphorical extensions, such as association, or even according to an analogy of a similar word.

The motivation or force that triggers the semantic change can be linguistic or extra-linguistic. Extra-linguistic motivation is determined by the social nature of the language

¹ This sequence of the lexemes is arbitrary.

² cf. Carl Darling Buck *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages*, 1949 where he lists groups of synonyms related to Indo-European Languages. The terms for these fields mentioned above are my own.

which depends on the social, political, economic, technical etc. changes³. My focus lies on the influence Christianity had on the language and how that is being reflected in the *dyēus* semantic field.

1.2. Method

This thesis introduces a different method in the analysis of the Old Norse sources. Until now the words forming this field were observed only in isolation (e.g. Albert Morey Sturtevant (1916), Rudolf Simek (2010), Hermann Reichter (2002) etc.) and those analyses show these words had a certain function and meaning.

The analysis in this thesis begins with the dictionary entry and then focuses on the text to observe how the words were used. Each word is at first discussed separately. The analysis extends to how the words from the same semantic field interplay by comparing and contrasting them, instead of observing them as separated and unrelated lexical items which are seemingly not interacting with each other.

Observing the use of words in this way can draw us nearer to the understanding of the non-Christian world. It appears that there existed a desire to create something more than folklore, more organized and systematized, hence more dangerous to the new religion. It might sound contradictory, but it has often been the case that the bigger the antagonism between the two opposing traditions, bigger the threat which results in a stronger confrontation. Thus we find relation between the Christian and non-Christian tradition in the words *dróttinn* and *díar*. These words as used in reference to the Old Norse deities appear to be later inventions with their origins in the 12th or 13th century Scandinavia when Latin script and texts with Christian topics were flourishing.

1.3. The theory of the semantic fields

Semantic fields are sets of lexemes on the paradigmatic level that are grouped together on the basis of similar meaning. The theory of the semantic fields, as well as lexical fields, is based on Jost Trier's work⁴ of grouping the lexemes on the paradigmatic level.⁵ Different

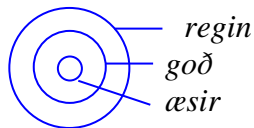
³ Trask, R.L. (1994). *Language Change*. London: Routledge. pg. 21-59

⁴ Trier, Jost (1931), *Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes*, Ph.D. diss. Bonn.

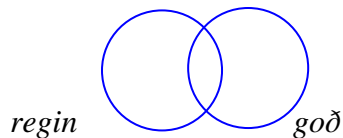
⁵ Lyons, John. (1977). *Semantics: Introduction: Some Basic Terms and Concepts*. Cambridge University Press. pg. 261

words can have related meanings and the *dyēus* semantic field presents exactly that. The meanings of these words overlap (as is sometimes the case with *regin* = *goð* = *tívar* = *æsir*), are inclusive (*regin* occasionally seems to be hierarchically above *goð* which is in turn above *æsir*, which is above the more specific *áss*), or even complement each other (neuter *goð* and masculine *guð* seem to stand in the opposition and one exists due to the existence of another):

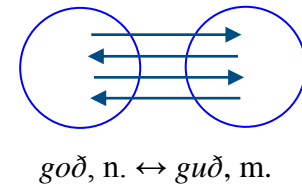
a) inclusive



b) overlapping



c) complementing



The aim is to form a semantic map comprising of all the lexemes according to contiguity at the end of the analysis. Such relations can be found between closely related meanings occupying a well-defined restrictive semantic domain and exhibiting certain well-marked contrasts.

It will further be shown that meaning of one lexeme can define the meaning of the other. For instance, the lexeme *goð* is being defined as referring to one clan of the gods, *Æsir*, when contrasted to *vanir*, or in its agreement with other lexemes as *regin* and *tívar* which in turn also compare to other lexemes as well. A change in reality affects the concepts and causes a change in lexical inventory and semantic field, and a logical outcome of one lexeme changing its meaning is the others following the same step, taking on the meaning that used to be occupied by the previously unchanged lexeme.⁶ However, even when trying to form firm boundaries between these lexemes in the *dyēus* semantic field, e.g. separating *Æsir* or any Old Norse deity from the Christian God, dichotomization is not absolutely possible since some lexemes have rather fluid semantic borders. Yet, the change is observable, e.g. due to the notion that the Christian God was masculine the neuter word *goð* changes to masculine *guð*.

1.5. Primary and secondary sources

The analysis encompasses Old Norse prose, eddic and skaldic poetry. The group of prose works consists of literary works such as kings' sagas, liturgical texts, saints' lives in

⁶Semantics. An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning. Volume 1. eds. Claudia Maienborn, Klaus von Heusinger, Paul Porter. Walter de Gruyter: Berlin pg. 472

translation and original Old Norse language, legal documents, etc. all accessed through the works listed in *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*. The online database *Skaldic Poetry Project* was accessed in reference to skaldic poetry and was used with the permission from Dr Tarrin Wills, one of the editors. Skaldic stanzas quoted are according to the Ernst A. Kock edition *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, vol. 1 and 2, while as a source for eddic poetry I have used Gísli Sigurðson's edition *Eddukvæði* (1999). The editions of Snorri Sturluson's work *Heimskringla* used is an edition from *Kulturformidlingen norrøne tekster og kvad*, edited by N. Linder og H. A. Haggson (1869-1872), and Snorri's *Edda* as edited by Anthony Faulkes (2005). The starting point in the analysis were dictionaries as Zoëga's *Old Icelandic-English Dictionary*, *Lexicon Poeticum*, Vladimir Orel's *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, Cleasby and Vigfússon's *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* and Fritzner's *Ordbog over det gamle norske Sprog*. These were consulted in order to start from the most commonly used meanings of the semantic field's constituents which were then observed in the text. The tool for the access to the eddic poetry was *A Concordance to Eddic Poetry* by Robert Kellogg.

1.4. Problems encountered in the research

When doing a cognitive philological analysis in the Old Norse sources the way this thesis does, we have to be aware of several issues that come up repeatedly. Firstly, the usual encounter we make with the Old Norse texts written in Latin script is usually through the editions with normalized spelling. Editions make our understanding of the text easier, but every kind of intervention to the original text changes the factual state of the language. Some of the examples of such intervention which reshapes our understanding of the Old Norse society of that period can be found in this research. It was occasionally difficult to distinguish the common noun *týr* and a theonym due to the editors who often capitalized the word regardless of the context, thus adding to the confusion. This intervention clearly shaped our understanding of the Old Norse myth by modelling another deity which might not have existed. Not to blame it all on the editors, the confusion between the common noun and the theonym is also found in Snorri's *Edda* who seem to understand the Old Norse myth in a different way.

Another example is the occasional mixed use of *goð* and *guð* in the same text but in a different manuscript. In one instance the confusion is made in a kenning where one of its

constituents was explained as *dolgband* and *dolgbrandr*, depending on the manuscript, possibly due to the misunderstanding of a scribe rewriting the text. This brings up yet another question – to what extent and how closely the hand writing the manuscript represents the reality of the language and its use in that period. In the analysis of the *dyēus* semantic field this can create a discrepancies in the understanding of the reality surrounding the language and text in question. The language analysis was also challenged by the high complexity of certain texts, especially skaldic poetry and highly metaphorical language used in skaldic poems.

Lastly, another issue at hand we have to continually bear in mind is that what we read today on the Old Norse non-Christian world and past is observed through the understanding of the period in which those texts were written down. This will be further developed in the next chapter since it is one of the crucial features of the primary sources used.

1.5. Division of the analysis

Thesis starts with an introductory chapter which states the difficulty in terms of the background to the texts that are preserved until today and from which we gather information on the Old Norse society of that period.

In the philological analysis each lexeme will be dealt with individually to a certain comparative level. The starting point to the analysis is the lexicographic definition of the word discussed and its etymology. The study then turns towards the use within written sources where the words are analysed according to their functions, use and meanings. The texts in focus are the normalized versions of texts written on a parchment and they encompass legal documents, laws, Homilies, prayers, Old Icelandic translations of religious prose, skaldic poetry, both with Christian and non-Christian topics, and eddic poetry. Skaldic poetry due to its highly metaphorical language is often, as stated before, difficult to analyze; hence different interpretations are not uncommon, as well as different transliterations by the scribes who possibly at certain occasions did not understand the text they were transcribing.

2. History in the Middle Ages: The treatment of the Old Norse non-Christian traditions and belief in the texts

One of the major issues when dealing with a historical text is to what extent one can observe a narrative, or literary structure of the text, as adequate means for the exploration of history. In the case of Old Norse texts, we are dealing with the Christian material that presents Old Norse belief as a system from a remote past, or better to say, a reconstructed past.⁷ The study of the pre-Christian society, belief and rituals, is primarily based on the same sources, on Snorri's *Edda* and *Heimskringla* or Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*. All that we have on the topic of Old Norse myth seems to have been written only after the 12th century, when Old Norse began being written down in the Latin script.

The problem with the sources we have on the Old Norse pre-Christian society and myth lies in the well-known fact that it passed over two centuries from the time of the official Christianization before anything on the past was written or has at least been preserved to this day. Christianity introduced Latin script as the primary one. Along with it came the idea of pragmatic writing and literacy, putting thus the writing into use within different spheres of society.

The laws were the first to be written down, followed by translations of the important Latin and Christian texts. Clunies Ross (1994:22-3) rightfully points out the problems with the oral forms, such as the fluidity of the discourse and instability of the content, unlike the written texts that are fixed and not as easily prone to change. Although it has been suggested that the Old Norse poetry, for instance, was more of a memorial type than improvisational (e.g. Harris, 1985:111-126 and Lönnroth, 1971), the pre-literate world is still a mystery and the texts most likely varied to a certain degree from one teller to another and from generation to generation. This lack of fixity of Old Norse oral culture, as suggested by Meulengracht Sørensen (1991:226-227), directly affects our own perception of the primary texts we use to study a myth. These myths and texts are of great use to us since they tell a significant story of the Old Norse society, yet they are by no means definite.

When dealing with such a delicate topic as the credibility of the sources for our knowledge of the Old Norse myth, another issue arises. The first Scandinavian mythographers

⁷ The Old Norse myth can hardly be addressed as a system or the Old Norse deities as forming a pantheon. This will further be seen in the analysis which shows the high inconsistency in the use of the terms from the *dyēus* semantic field within the Old Norse texts.

were often not only hands that wrote the words, but rather did they have their share in the myth creation. Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus both provide their own, Christian perspective on traditional Norse mythology. On the other hand, some scholars (e.g. Clunies Ross 1992, Krömmelbein 1992) address Snorri as a compiler, rather than an author in the medieval sense of the word.

Snorri most likely used different sources for his writings. Although one can say that he compiled what was then folklore into one place, he also had to make a coherent structure of it. Doubtlessly, it would be naïve to presume he was not influenced by the ideas of the world, thoughts on folklore and pre-Christian beliefs that were active in medieval Europe.

Both Saxo and Snorri wrote historical works that are today seen as of a great value, Saxo on the history of the Danish people, Snorri of Norway in his *Heimskringla*. Saxo finished his work around the year 1200, while *Heimskringla* is usually dated to ca. 1230, although that is still a matter of debate. Jørgensen (2010:78) in his article ‘Saxo og Snorre i Danmark og Norge’ states that both dating and the aim of their respective projects are about the same. The difference is however that *Gesta Danorum* was written in Latin, while Snorri wrote in his own mother tongue, Old Norse, making it less available to non-Old-Norse speakers, but at the same time more relevant for his language and culture. In the paper under the title ‘Saxo Grammaticus fortale og Snorre’ (2010), Friis-Jensen comments how Snorri’s choice of Old Norse influenced the way he wrote. Snorri saw eddic and skaldic poetry as important sources to the Scandinavian past and non-Christian Old Norse myth, as can be seen from the *Prologue* to *Heimskringla* where Snorri writes that skaldic poetry contains the least mistakes given that it is told in the proper way:

en kvæðin þikkja mér sízt ór stað foerð, ef þau eru rétt kveðin ok skynsamliga upp tekin.

This is the topos which he is led by in his writing and similar can be found in the language he uses. The use of the words that form the semantic field analysed in Snorri’s texts are usually mentioned and used only in reference to the skaldic poetry; in *Skáldskaparmál* he quotes skalds using the terms for deities, but in the course of his storytelling he does not use the same vocabulary himself. This indicates that Snorri in his texts gives his share in the appearance of how were the non-Christian deities named before this period. Through it he has not only reshaped the past for his contemporaries, but also for us. The Christian influence is also seen in his description of the origin of Old Norse non-Christian belief in the prologues to

Gylfaginning and *Heimskringla*.⁸ Snorri seems to portray Old Norse as on the same level and related to other great languages and cultures, as Old English (Geoffrey of Monmouth), Latin (Virgil) and Greek. This could therefore imply that Snorri's choice of language was of an ideological character as proposed by Meulengracht Sørensen (1989).

According to Friis-Jensen (2010), Snorri did not seem to use a completely different technical and poetical vocabulary for Christian and pre-Christian terms, but has rather adopted the "old forms" that originate from before Christianization, for Christian ones. This implies that, as Meulengracht Sørensen also pointed out, the words that were used by their forefathers in the pre-Christian times, were still in use in Snorri's time. Friis-Jensen's and Meulengracht Sørensen's conclusions can well be argued against since, despite Snorri's claim, there is still a lack of sources describing the society from before Christianity's official acceptance and the data often indicates the opposite from their claims.

The first works to be written down were not of pre-Christian character, but rather laws followed by liturgical texts. After the conversion, myth-kennings were for some time not used, and appear only later. This might indicate blocking of information on the Old Norse belief system in the early literate period, as proposed by Friis-Jensen and Meulengracht Sørensen. However, myth-kennings logically would not appear in laws or liturgical texts since they belong to poetic figures of speech and a particular text context. Hence, the lack of myth-kennings in the first decades of writing on a parchment does not necessarily imply information censorship, but possibly the late use of the myth-kennings.

There might have been a revival of the non-Christian myth, a form of a literary movement in the time of Snorri. On the other hand, it is also possible that these works functioned as a didactic mean and a method in reshaping of the memory of the society and instructions on how to write about pre-Christian tradition.

The main difference between Snorri and Saxo rises in their position regarding Old Norse gods and customs. Jón Helgason (1934) points out that, when comparing the two, Snorri seems as more objective. Friis-Jens also supports this claim:

Snorre bruger hele det nedarvede vokabular om hedenske guder og skikke med stor selvfølgelighed, og indskrænker sin stillinstagen til hedenskabet til de programmatiskke udtalelser i fortalerne. (106)

⁸ there is also a similar tendency found in *The First Grammatical Treatise*

However, he points out that the term “objective” should not be taken too lightly and that hereby what is meant is a reference to a writing technique. According to Meulengracht Sørensen Snorri was not discouraged by the “spirit of the time” during his writing career, but rather used the mother tongue, hence showing continuity despite change of religion:

Dermed bliver den sproglige udtryksform, som forfædrene brugte i førkristen tid [...] en uforandret del af Norgeshistorien. (Meulengracht Sørensen, 1989:269)

I disagree with both Meulengracht Sørensen and Friis-Jensen on the purpose of Snorri’s choice of language. I would not say Snorri’s aim was to show pride in using native language instead of Latin, but rather did he perceive language with a certain function and used it as a building block in the myth construction. The vocabulary used in the pre-Christian society has definitely changed when having encountered Christianity, date of which is unknown, being that prior to the official Christianization or later. Saxo, on the other hand, seems to belong to the classical Roman history writers and their followers in the period of the Middle Ages. The most popular genres in that time were of religious type, translations from Latin, saints’ lives, and Christian allegories. What was written in that period usually carried a message of Christian moral.

When comparing Snorri and Saxo’s writings, Meulengracht Sørensen concludes that Saxo describes Old Norse gods in the same way as medieval writers referred to Roman and Greek gods who are described as closer to human kind, with their flaws and cravings, demonic in nature and using magic. Due to this he argues that Saxo was rather a subjective author, unlike Snorri. In a deeper analysis of Snorri’s work, such as through his use of language, one can assume Snorri was very much influenced by his contemporary reasoning and took part in the creation of the Norse myth, or just by reading his prologue to *Gylfaginning*. Walter Baetke has argued (1950) that the basic idea behind Snorri’s work was to be found in the Bible itself, in *Romans 1:18-23*: “Pagans once knew God, who is visible for all to see, but they turned from him and worshipped instead idols of nature”, which for Snorri would have explained the very existence of the Old Norse belief. This notion leads to the conclusion that men could become pagan gods who demons could imitate, which Snorri explains in prologue to *Gylfaginning* and *Ynglinga saga*.

Saxo, unfortunately, does not name his sources of history, and from the text it is unclear what those sources might be. He, however, acknowledges the existence of Old Danish

rune-stones, poems and writings, but does not refer to them as his sources. It is peculiar that Saxo does not give a description of the Old Norse pantheon, but mentions giants, or at least men with huge strength, once inhabiting Jutland⁹.

However, beyond *Edda* and *Gesta Danorum*, there are no other great sources of myth, except quite covert and non-explicit skaldic and eddic poetry. Poetry often refers to myths in an incomprehensive way through kennings and other means. Consequently, every attempt to clarify the Old Norse myth is based on sources that are ambiguous or influenced by Christian society.

⁹ Giants are appearing in the Bible, Genesis 6:4. They were also called “sons of God”, reminiscing of *ása synir*, a phrase which according to its use refers directly to Æsir who are in turn often equalized to *regin*. The borderlines between Æsir and *jǫtnar* was often blurred, which will be discussed further in the analysis.

3. Dating of the primary sources

The hypotheses on the dating of the Old Icelandic literature have formed a long debate which is usually shifting between the scholars claiming that one should look for the origin of the eddic poetry in the periods prior to the 8th century, and those focusing on later periods. However, any endeavour to show the Old Norse literature as much older than from the period it was preserved in, will not bring firm proofs. Jón Helgasson rightfully commented: “the burden of the proof is incumbent on whoever is tempted to move the origin of the eddic poems too far away from the manuscripts” (1953:96).¹⁰

The usual approach to the myths within a text when writing them down was a brief mentioning or reference to a certain narrative, skald or skaldic and eddic poems¹¹. The stories were probably well known in a certain social circle and the poet most likely had in mind that the reader was acquainted with the storyline or myth and was therefore not explained. With this in mind, there are other questions arising. As it has already been pointed out, oral literature was prone to variation and Snorri while writing down the myths must have encountered the same. The myths that have been passed on to us might be the writers’ understanding of the myth, their reconstruction, or even invention.

On the other hand, when it comes to the earlier sources on the topic of Germanic rituals and traditions, we have most likely biased accounts of the Roman writers. Caesar seems to have drawn too quick a parallel with the Celts, while Tacitus observes them through the eyes of a society that declared all other nations as uncivilized. Other writers that have described the non-Christian Scandinavians were the Persian diplomat Ahmad ibn Fadlan who gives us possibly the most reliable description of the people and their beliefs, and Adam of Bremen. Between these two groups of sources, i.e. Ceaser and Tacitus on one hand, and Adam of Bremen, and ibn Fadlan on another, there is a span of almost a millennia. Since perception is shaped according to the culture and time one lives in, this big gap between the sources adds even more to the instability of the image of Old Norse or Germanic society and belief. The reliability of Adam of Bremen’s description of the temple at Uppsala and religious sacrifice of the non-Christian locals is still a matter of debate. There is no archaeological evidence that temple he writes about ever existed, and hence it is necessary to approach Adam of Bremen’s writing on the topic with a reserve.

¹⁰ translated by John Lindow, 2001:437

¹¹ Clunies Ross, 1994:28

The problem for this analysis is how and with what possible alternations a phrase within its context attained the form it has on a parchment as found in the primary sources. Skaldic poetry, although largely preserved on parchment, is difficult to assume to have been written down in the way it was composed. Eddic poetry presents also difficulties; it is assumed that the poems reached their final version only in the period they were written down, yet their basis still might be reaching into the pre-Christian period, some of them developing even from the West Germanic or Gothic prototypes. In spite of that, they cannot be immediately regarded as historically relevant sources, and yet it is difficult to dismiss them since they truly might have been based on pre-Christian myth sources that are today lost. The sources we deal with in order to get a better understanding of the past of the Old Norse society should not be taken too lightly since they also might be based on various influences. For instance, Peter Buchholz points out that those seemingly biographies of the kings' sagas were probably influenced by the contemporary hagiography (1968:131) and that one must be careful when observing historical works as these. It is therefore crucial to distinguish *history* from *past*, with history here representing the sources and what was written, including the reconstruction of the past according to those sources and material.¹² This reconstruction is not detached from the external influence of the period when it was written. The past, on the other hand, is for us unreachable, and our sources on the past are historical narratives. Thus the Old Norse written sources show us only how the past was understood at the time they were written, making the narrative of the past dependent on the narrative of the present. In comparison, the Russian scholar Mikail Steblin-Kamenskij (1973) argued that people in the Middle Ages did not distinguish historical truth from an image of the past as produced by a creative author. Lars Lönnroth (2008) also explains the general classification of sagas according to their fictionality where *konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur* were often classified as historiographies, while *fornaldarsögur* have been classified as fiction or entertainment. It seems Steblin-Kamenskij and Lönnroth agree on the same matter:

No clear distinction was originally made by the saga-writers between 'historiography' and 'fiction', although it became gradually accepted that a story did not necessarily have to be perfectly true in order to be entertaining. (Lönnroth, 2008:305)

¹² see Keller, 1989:3-25

Else Mundal (2012) investigates these claims, but objectively concludes that despite the authors' treating of sagas as presenting a historic truth it is still difficult to classify them as either fiction or historiography. It seems fictional literature and consciousness of fiction did develop in the Old Norse culture, however, only in a narrow sense, especially when taking into consideration that no author wrote a fictional saga from his own period.¹³

Historical narrative is written to represent the past and make connections with the present, by interpreting it according to the understanding of the time and past of that period and society, making history and time social and historical categories that are therefore subject to change. Sources are to be observed as patches from which the idea of the past can be made. Old Icelandic religious prose was mostly centered on foreign materials in the shape of historical writing. As John Lindow (2001:437) put it, "the hagiographies show confrontation between paganism and Christianity" representing the essential aim of the missionary work. An often quoted statement by Gabriel Turville-Petre's exemplifies how the hagiographies influenced the creation of the Icelandic native writing:

In a word, the learned literature did not teach the Icelanders what to think or what to say, but it taught them how to say it. (1953:142)

Before writing, history was part of people's memory and was continuously being reshaped according to the social changes. Human memory enhances certain things, while neglecting others, and changes through time. Maurice Halbwachs wrote on similar matter in his work describing how memory functions in an individual and in society, and what can be applied to an individual's memory change, can also be understood in the terms of this discussion:

We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and appearance they once had. (translated ed. 1992:47)

¹³ Mundal, 2012:194

Else Mundal (2010) elaborates on the milieu involved in creating Icelandic identity in the period after Christianization and discusses the identity and memory as being two connected concepts, one requiring the existence of another in order to exist, be created, or even reshaped.

Memory and past are often used to create an identity, similarly to what happened in Iceland where the production of sagas emerged in the 13th and 14th centuries. As it has already been mentioned, hagiographies were the first ones to be written, as a logical product of the process of Christianization, and only later we find sagas of kings, heroes and myths written down. Question is therefore whether the occurrences from the remote past, that is, remoted from the period of introduction of writing, recorded in texts, can be taken as an accurate account. This brings to two problems that need to be discussed; firstly, with the emerging of the Christian institutions, the society underwent reconstruction which was also done through writing. With the new religion, it was important to adjust the memory of the past as well as to create new ones or even adopt another kind of past (e.g. stories of saints from other lands) to their contemporary society and landscape. The texts as hagiographies were usually picturing the confrontation between the old and new belief, often in the shape of a saint converting the locals to Christianity who is in the end being challenged and requested to worship the old gods, but in the end shows the powerlessness of the old gods when confronting the Christian one. Another possibility is that these texts describing the pre-Christian belief served as an example on how to deal with such topics. In this aspect we can come back to Turville-Petre's quote above – the hagiographic material may also have showed the Icelanders how and what to say on the old gods. There are numerous examples in the hagiographies where old gods are shown as worthless (e.g. Klements saga, legends of St. Erasmus and St. Silvester etc.). In one such instance the sculpture of Þórr breaks, from which a dragon emerges. John Lindow (2001:440) compares this image to Níðhöggr from the pre-Christian Old Norse tradition who is released at the end of *Völuspá* marking the demise of the gods.

The old gods are often portrayed as demons in disguise of gods and often blasphemed in the texts. In *Klemens saga* Klement daunts fourteen of the Old Norse gods (quote, 66-67):

Af fiqlkyngi einni gerir hann slíkt allt ok eyflir hann blót ór ok allri dýrþ goða váttra, ok ósæmir hann svá in gofðu [goþ ór at] hann segir at Þórr sé eigi goþ, fulltrúi várr ok inn sterksti áss áræpisfullr, ok er nær hvars sem hann es blótinn. En þá ósæmþ ok óvirþing veitir hann Óþni órlausnafullum ok hvarfsemi at síá Clemens kallar hann fiánda ok óhreinan anda. En hann kveþr Freyiu portkonu

verit hafa, fœlir hann Frey, en hrœpir Heimdall, lastar hann Loka með slœgþ sína ok vélar ok kallar hann ok illan, hatar hann Hœni, bqlvar hann Baldri, tefr hann Tý, níþir hann Niqrþ, illan segir hann Ull, flimtir hann Frigg, en hann geyr Gefiun, sekia dœmir hann Sif.¹⁴

Another instance of insulting the old gods can be found in the same manuscript as the *Klements saga*, the life of St. Martin of Tours. He claims he is being visited by demons in the form of Óðinn, Þórr, sometimes Freyja. St. Martin recognizing the demons calls them names – “Þórr kalladi hann heimskan, en Óðinn deigan, en Freyju portkonu”.¹⁵

In *Ceciliu saga* Óðinn is given more nicknames, namely “hordomsmadr”, “manndrapsmadr”, “odadamadr”.¹⁶

Hagiographies are not the only texts where the old gods were diminished. Snorri’s *Gylfaginning* also presents gods as tricksters, false gods, demons. However, in his *Prologue* he claims his work is based on authorities such as skalds. Else Mundal (2012:171) proposes that Snorri believed his sources, evidence for it being his explanation on the authorities in the prologue to *Edda*. Lars Boje Mortensen (2012) shows that referring to authorities, elders or poets of old, was an influence arriving from the Continent where it was a common literary practice. Authors often referred to classical poets, or unnamed authoritative reliable men and therefore it is most likely that Snorri himself did not believe his sources as telling something more than a piece of enjoyable poetry.

To give more to the reality the Old Norse translations not only adapt the names of the gods representing the old pantheon, but also adjust the landscape and social conditions. In *Agatu saga meýjar*, the governor of Sicily is translated as “Sikleyjar jarl”. John Lindow (2001:447-448) considers the translation far from random. He analyses it as “Sikil-island”, from the word *siklingr* “prince”, and *jarl* as in reference to Hladir jarls, the ruling family from the area around Trondheim who were in a conflict with the Oslo ruling jarls, the missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason, and the saint and martyr to be, Óláfr Haraldsson.

Other ways to add to the objectivity and realism of the texts is the use of formulas as “It is said that...”, “Some have said that...” etc. Such formulations give an impression that the whole story came from trustworthy sources, witnesses and spokesmen. This can be considered as a literary strategy in creating and reshaping of memory, especially when taking into

¹⁴ Carron, 2005:44

¹⁵ Unger, 1874:146

¹⁶ Unger, 1877:287

consideration that the purpose of that period's texts was to be preached and to instruct as a didactic mean.

This process of reshaping the people's memory can possibly explain why the Christians, such as Snorri, take over the mission of writing down non-Christian tradition and belief. It seems there was a literary project at work of creating a culture that shares its history with the European. The stories were adapted to reflect the major works as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, which were considered to be the finest works at the time, another example being also from Snorri's time – Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. In the *Prologue* of the Prose Edda, the Old Norse gods are described as humans, warriors from Troy. According to Snorri's genealogy, Þórr is father to Vóden or Óðinn, who established his line in Saxland, or Germany. Similarly, *Historia Regum Britanniae* begins with Aeneas, who settled in Italy after having escaped from Troy, as was written in Virgil's poem *Aeneid*. Saxo Grammaticus had the same approach and based his *Gesta Danorum* on classical writings as *Aeneid*, Plato's and Cicero's works¹⁷, but also from his relative contemporaries as e.g. Geoffrey of Monmouth.

When observing the sources, equally important is the rhetoric, poetic, idiolectics etc. of the writer. All in all, the actual source is the language itself, yet it is still separate from the truth of the past. Language, memory and history are interdependent spheres, since all of them influence and create each other.

¹⁷ Fisher, Peter, trans. *Saxo Grammaticus The History of the Danes, Book I-IX. Volume I: Text*. Edited by Hilda Ellis Davidson. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979.
Davidson, Hilda Ellis. Introduction to *Saxo Grammaticus The History of the Danes, Book I-IX. Volume II: Commentary*. Edited by Hilda Ellis Davidson. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980.

4. Analysis of the semantic field: the lexemes in the god-semantic field

4.1. The lexeme *týr*

The word *týr* carries several meanings. It seems to have been very popular in the place names, and one is to conclude that *Týr* must have been an important deity. However, in the Old Norse prose, *Týr* is only mentioned as an equivalent to the Roman god Mars in translated works from Latin to Old Norse, as in *Klements saga*, *Breta saga* and *Rómverja saga*. There seems to be no mention of the deity named *Týr* in the Old Norse prose and poetry, except in Snorri's *Edda* where we find out more about him. The Old Norse society as presented by the Christian writers does not seem to have considered him as important as one might think.

The word *týr* relates to the Germanic deity *Tiwaz*. The word has developed from the Proto-Germanic **tīwaz*, which in turn is related to Latin *deus*, Greek *Zeus* and Proto-Indo-European *dyēus*. Zoëga defines the word as a masculine noun which is a name of a god within the Old Norse myth, but does not mention the vast use of *týr* and its plural form used as the appellatives; however, dictionaries do not comment on the singular common noun *týr* either, and it is therefore from here not clear if the noun could be used to denote some other deity than the one-handed Old Norse deity.

In the Old Norse society we find reflections of the Old Norse material, especially in Snorri's *Edda*, *Týr* is a sky god, a battle god and a peace-maker, which places him to the functions of a sovereign god and a god of war. These functions were proposed by Georges Dumezil (1958) and he suggests a tripartite division of the Proto-Indo-European society according to the function of each – the function of sovereignty, the military function and the function of productivity. Terje Leiren (1999) suggests that this division is reflected in the myths and function of the Old Norse gods as well.

Týr's attributes encompass several functions, similar to Óðinn, who is a supreme god, a god of victory, battle, magic, poetry, prophecy etc. The confusion of who *Týr* is and what kind of a deity he represents can also be seen in the Old Norse written sources. This confusion might indicate that his role and his place in the Old Norse myth had been misinterpreted by the medieval Christian writers.

According to Snorri's *Edda* and *Lokasenna*, he is a one-handed god who sacrificed his hand in order to bind Fenrir. He is also known as the *Ping* god, representing justice and peace.

This remnant can be seen in Modern German *Dienstag* for *tirsdag* or ‘Tuesday’, implementing one of the functions a *týr* could have. Despite *Týr* standing for peace in this case, we encounter a complete opposite in the translations of the Latin text where the Roman god of war, Mars, has often been translated as *Týr*. It can seem oxymoronic, yet it seems this idea goes back to the Roman period. An altar dedicated to *Deo Marti Thincso*, or “Mars of the Ping”, was found in Housesteads, thus correlating the deities as equivalents. In Old Icelandic translations from Latin *Mars* was rendered as *Týr*, as in *Klements saga* where the old gods are blasphemed (*Tefr hann Týr*). There are other indications the text was adjusted for Icelandic audience, such as a translation of planet Venus to *Friggjar stjarna* ‘Frigg’s star’, which was a common practice in addressing both pre-Christian myth and contemporary Icelandic society. The name of the god *Týr* also appears in *Breta saga* listed among other gods:

Konungr spurði hvat Mercurius væri. Jeingestr svarar þann kalla sumir Óðinn ok hafa varir forellrar mikin trunað a hanum haft sva ok a Þór ok Ty Frig ok Freyiv.¹⁸ (emphasis added)

In this example Mercury, the ancient Roman supreme deity, is translated as Óðinn who is accompanied by other deities known to a contemporary Icelandic reader. This equalization of the Roman pantheon with the Old Norse myth implies also the equalization of the fallacy of believing in those deities, as in the sagas mentioned.

Breta saga is a translation of the pseudo-historic *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. The word describes the history of the British kings who trace their origin to Troy. This story was also presented in Snorri’s *Prologue to Edda*; however, in *Gylfaginning*, *Týr* as a deity is mentioned only in one section:

Sá er enn Áss er *Týr* heitir. Hann er djarfastr ok bezt hugaðr ok hann ræðr mjök sigri í orrostum. Á hann er gott at heita hreystimönnum. Þat er orðtak at sá er “týhraustr” er um fram er aðra menn ok ekki sésk fyrir.¹⁹

Snorri continues to describe the deity and ends it with *Týr*’s death. The other instances of *týr* found in *Edda*, besides *Skáldskaparmál*, are only used as a base word within kennings and heitis, as in *Farmatýr*, *Hroptatýr*, *Veratýr* for Óðinn (1998:5).

¹⁸ Jónsson 1892-1896:269

¹⁹ Faulkes, 1998:25

In *Rómverja saga*, an early Icelandic translation compiled from a number of sources as *Bellum lugurthinum* and *Catilinae coniuratio* by Sallust and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the god Mars is translated as Týr:

Romulus ok Remus vóru tveir konungar í Itálialandi, ok er svá sagt at þeir væri synir Martis, er Rómverjar kǫlluðu orrostuguð en vér kǫllum Týr. Móðir þeira hét Ilia. Hon var konungs dóttir ok at langfeðgum komin frá Enea, mági Priami konungs í Trójuborg.²⁰ (emphasis added)

We find the same in *Páls saga postula*:

Þar hellt þa skola sa maðr, er Dionisius het, ok kallaðr ariopagita at kenningarnafni, ok kendr við garð þann, er stoð i hof Tyss, er blotaðr var til þess, at maðr hefði sigr i bardaugum, ok var þar saa lutr borgarinnar við kendr, er Dionisius var fæðingi, ok var þar sva mikil blot, at naliga i hverium garði stoðu hof, ok þeim guðunum garðarnir kendir, er þar voru blotuð i hofunum.²¹ (emphasis added)

Beside these examples, in prose the appellative *týr* appears only as a rune-name in *The First Grammatical Treatise* in *Codex Wormianus*²². Other meanings to the word *týr* are not mentioned in Old Norse prose and it seems that in that period the word was recognized as the proper noun exclusively. It appears neither as a common nor as a generic plural noun, which is not consistent with the use in poetry.

In skaldic poetry the word appears as a plural common noun and as singular in kennings and heitis. When forming heitis or kennings, it never refers to the god Týr. Due to the editors capitalizing almost every instance of the word *týr*, those kennings might seem to be referring back to the deity. This case also shows the instability of our sources when analysing Old Norse texts.

The word is used in kennings denoting chieftains or kings, as in *Vellekla* where king Hákon is referred to as *hertýr* and is also named *týr teinlautar* ‘god of sacrifice’. The word *týr* also often forms kennings for warriors which points to the word being semantically related to victory and leadership. Furthermore, the word has been reserved exclusively for the chieftains or leaders of higher status. This relates to Snorri’s depiction of Týr as the son of Óðinn, or

²⁰ Meissner, 1910:385

²¹ Unger, 1874:249

²² Magnússon Ólsen, 1884:7

rather lists a kenning for Týr as being *sonr Óðins*, in *Skáldskaparmál*. However, in *Nafnabulur* he is not mentioned under the list of Óðinn's sons, but is listed only among Æsir. Snorri names Týr *vigaguð* 'battle-god' (*Skáldskaparmál*, 9) as well, thus defining him as a deity related to war and battles besides being only the son of Óðinn.

The word *týr* was also used not only in the service of forming kennings for warriors, chieftains and kings, but also in the formation of compounds, where *týr* can represent any god, such as in the example we find in *Haustlǫng*, verses 2 and 6:

Segjǫndum fló sagna
snótar ulfr at móti
í gemlis ham gǫmlum
glammi ó fyr skǫmmu;
settisk ǫrn, þars æsir,
ár (Gefnar) mat bôru
(*vasa byrgi-Týr* bjarga
bleyði vændr) á seyði.

Ok slíðrliga síðan
svangr (vas þat fyr lǫngu)
át af eikirótum
okbjörn faðir Marnar,
áðr djúphugaðr dræpi
dolg ballastan vallar
hirði-Týr meðal herða
herfangs ofan stǫngu. (emphasis added)

The kenning *byrgi-Týr* in stanza 2, describes the giant Þjazi as 'fort-týr', while the one in the stanza 6, *hirði-týr* 'tending god', refers to Loki, who then hits Þjazi with a stave. Moreover, in the first stanza the collective *tíva* is used in reference to the three Æsir in question – Óðinn, Loki and Þórr. But as it can be seen from the examples above, Þjazi is also named *týr*. In another stanza of *Haustlǫng*, the kenning *reiði-Týr* is used to denote Þórr. Another kenning for Þórr *karms týr* 'god of the chariot' is found in *Þórsdrápa* 19. Yet by far the most of the kennings and heitis with *týr* as a constituent are in reference to Óðinn, such as *Hertýr* 'the army-god' (*Vellekla*, stanza 5), *Gautatýr* 'the god of the Geats' (*Hákonarmál*, 1), *Sigtýr*

‘victorious god’ (*Gráfeldardrápa*, 13) or *Valtýr* “god of the slaughtered” (*Háleygjatal*, 12) and *Farmatýr* ‘the god of burdens’ (*Háleygjatal*, 9), *Geirtýr* ‘spear-god’ (*Hákornarkviða*, 18) and *Bqðvar-Týr* ‘the god of battle’ (*Hákonarkviða*, 16). All these heitis are related to the warlike aspect of Óðinn which could show the relation between him and the deity Týr. Óðinn is also known as the god of sacrifice – in a sacrifice to himself he is said to have hanged nine days and nights from Yggdrasill and was pierced by his own spear in order to obtain the knowledge of the runes.²³ In *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga* he is said to have sacrificed his eye at the Mimir’s well to gain wisdom and knowledge of past, present and future. He is aware that in Ragnarqk he will lose his life, yet he still goes into the battle. Comparably, Týr is often said to be a god of sacrifice due to his willingness to help the gods in binding Fenrir, and is also said to die in Ragnarqk by being eaten by Garmr, similarly as Óðinn by Fenrir. This battle between Garmr and Týr is mentioned only in Snorri’s writings and does not appear in surviving poetry. Another interesting parallel is that both Garmr and Fenrir are monstrous and bound hounds and related to the realm Hel. This can lead to the conclusion that Garmr and Fenrir are one and the same. That Loki was Fenrir’s father is only mentioned in *Edda* and this might also be part of Snorri’s inventions indicating the writer’s involvement in the myth creation.

Looking at the data, it seems there was confusion about the one-handed *týr* named Týr that was present in the time of Snorri. It is not certain whether this confusion originates from before Snorri’s time or was it his own initiative.

In eddic poetry, we find *Týr* as the one-handed Old Norse deity, *týr* as a building block in kennings, and plural *tívar*. It appears as a possible theonym in *Lokasenna* in the introductory part (*Týr var þar, hann var einhendr*), and stanzas 38 and 40. Here, Loki mentions Týr’s sacrifice and from the context it is obvious that he refers to the deity that sacrificed his hand. In *Hymiskviða*, on the other hand, it seems unlikely that this is the same deity, although it is also referred to as Týr. In this poem, Týr says that his father Hymir, a giant, possesses a cauldron big enough for Ægir’s feast, unlike in Snorri’s *Edda* where he is said to be the son of Óðinn. Furthermore, he is addressed by Hymir’s wife as *sonr* and *áttniðr jqtna*. Marteinn H. Sigurðsson (2005:203) proposes that Þórr’s companion must be Loki rather than Týr, and that there was probably confusion among the editors who by believing *týr* to be a personal noun automatically capitalized it thus shaping our understanding of the characters in the poem.

²³ see *Rúnatal* in *Hávamál* stanzas 138-144

The plural collective noun is the most common form of *týr* in eddic poetry. In *Hávamal* stanza 159 the word *tívar* seems to be parallel with *goð* in plural, a term that involves all the gods, namely *Æsir* and *álfar* who are apparently here standing for *Vanir*:

Þat kann ek it fjögurtánda:
 ef ek skal fyrða liði
 telja tíva fyrir,
 ása ok alfa
 ek kann allra skil;
 fár kann ósnotr svá.

In *Vafþrúðnismál* the word *tívar* is also referred to as *alla goð*, while at another instance the plural *tívar* is paralleled to *regin*, as in *tíva rök* (*Vafþrúðnismál*, 38, 42) where the word *tívar* is used the same way as *regin*. The word's meaning is apparently related to victory or glory – it is often determined by adjectives as *mærir* ‘glorious, great’ (*Hymiskviða*, 4) or *ríkir* ‘mighty, powerful’ (*Þrymskviða* 14 and *Baldrs draumar* 1). It appears in the compound *sigtívar* ‘victorious gods’ which most likely refers to *Æsir*'s role as the ruling gods. In *Lokasenna* the gods present at *Ægir*'s feast are addressed as *sigtíva synir* in the first two stanzas; however, in the second stanza *Eldir* describes the *sigtíva synir* as *æsir* and *álfar*.

In eddic poetry certain gods are also attributed as *týr*, hence *Veratýr* ‘god of men’ in *Grímnismál* 3 refers to *Óðinn* as well as *Hroptatýr* in stanza 54, and in *Völuspá* 31 to *Baldr* as *blóðgum tívur*.

The word *tívar* in the eddic poetry is used in reference to victory and glory, and in reference to particular gods it carries the same implications. This can be seen in the use of *sigtívar* for *Æsir* and numerous heitis, as for *Óðinn* and *Baldr*. The word is also often used as synonymous to other plural neuter group nouns for gods, such as *regin* and *guð* which will be discussed further below. As a theonym it is possibly used in *Lokasenna*, while in the poem *Hymiskviða* it is doubtedly that the word was used in that way. The poem *Lokasenna* could have been therefore based on Snorri's *Edda*.

In prose the word *týr* is used in rendering the Roman god Mars from Latin and in Snorri's texts. The function of the word within skaldic poetry is a bit different than the one in eddic – in skaldic poetry it is primarily used in formation of heitis and kennings, while in eddic poetry it functions as a group noun. Those heitis are mostly used in reference to *Óðinn*, while kennings are used in denoting the immensity of the deity in question, or other creature,

as is the case with Þíazi in *Haustlǫng*, but also Loki and Þórr. The existence of the deity *Týr*, the one handed god of war, justice and peace as described by Snorri, is uncertain. There is a lack of evidence that there was a deity besides the regular, common meaning of the word *týr* ‘god’. In Snorri’s texts and *Lokasenna* it is observable that the word was used as more specialized, representing one particular deity instead of functioning as a common noun which might lead to the conclusion that there was a semantic change at hand. This should also be suspected because of the problem mentioned above, continual capitalization of the word *týr* by the editors. One of the possibilities could be that *Týr* is a deity branched out of Óðinn, as misinterpreted by Snorri from *Lokasenna*, or even that *Lokasenna* was written according to the Snorri’s story.

The function of the word as a common noun can still be found in kennings and heitis where it has been used for several male deities. As a plural noun it refers to all the gods, *æsir*, *ásynjur* and *álfir* which all together seem to be a part of *regin*.

Therefore the semantic representation for the word *týr* would look something like this:

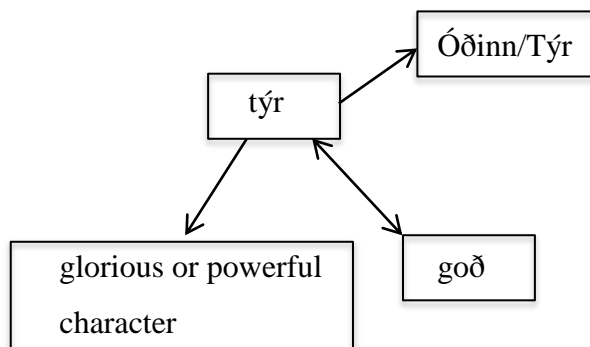


Fig.1 the word *týr* according to its function in the texts

The word *týr* was used to denote mostly Óðinn in the case of heitis. It is also semantically interchangeable with *goð*, but it could also refer to any powerful character, such as two instances in *Vellekla* and in *Haustlǫng* for Þíazi.

The plural noun is used somewhat differently:

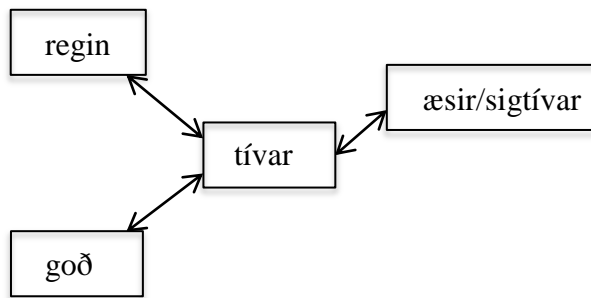


Fig.2 the plural *tívar* according to its function in the texts

The collective noun interchanges with *regin*, referring in those cases to all the gods, the same way as *goð*, but when used as *sigtívar* it usually refers to Æsir.

In some examples, there seems to be an overlap between Óðinn and Týr in their qualities and roles within the pantheon. Both sacrifice themselves, and are gods of battle, sky and fathers of all. Despite Óðinn is often addressed as the sky-god in the Old Norse prose and poetry, Týr is etymologically related to the original sky-god, Ved. *dyáuś*, Lat. *Dius Fidius*, Gr. *Zeús*, Hitt. *šiuš*. The sky-god is often addressed as ‘father’, ‘all-knowing’, ‘father of all’, cf. PIE **dyēws ph2tēr* ‘Sky Father’ > Lat. *Iuppiter*, Umbr. *Iupater*, Gr. *Zeùs patēr*, Skr. *Dyauś pitā*, Luv. *tātis tiwaz*, Latv. *Dievs debess tēvs*. However, among Old Norse deities, Óðinn is named *Álföðr*, unlike Týr. The deity *Týr* might also etymologically be related to *Tuisto* or *Tuisco*, which is mentioned in Tacitus’ *Germania* as the divine ancestor of the Germanic people, thus showing the correlation between him and Óðinn as all-fathers. In this respect, the relationship would look somewhat like this:

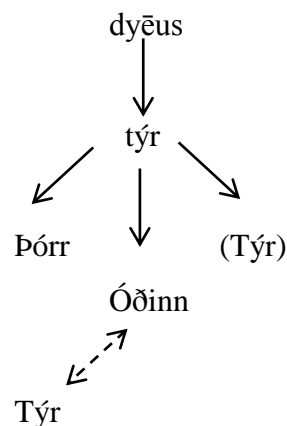


Fig.3 the division between the deities according to the use of the lexeme *týr*

Óðinn seems to have overtaken the role of *dyēus*, supreme god, making *Týr* as a deity superfluous, if *Týr* as a deity ever existed which is highly dubious. Remains of his role are, however, preserved in language, and the confusion between *týr* and *Týr* is obvious. Another problem we encounter when reading from the published editions of manuscripts is that this confusion is still present and often editors instantly capitalize the word *týr* where it might have been used as a common noun. *Týr* shares its role as the battle god with both Óðinn and Þórr, who obviously conquered *Týr* in popularity long before writing appeared in Old Norse society. Snorri also describes *Týr* as the son of Óðinn, same as Þórr. It is therefore quite possible that in the Old Norse myth there was no *Týr* or was even confused with Óðinn, considering they share certain traits, or even Þórr, as the son of Óðinn and battle god. Perhaps It seems that Snorri built a new myth and envisioned *Týr* as part of Óðinn. The word formed from the remnants of the development from Proto-Indo-European *dyēus* and is present in kennings, heitis and as a plural form.

4.2. Lexemes *goð* and *guð*

The nouns *goð* and *guð* appear in both neuter and masculine variety. According to Orel's *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* they have the same origin. Orel states that masculine variety of *goð* was a secondary form, which according to the data analysed can be confirmed – the entry *goð* in masculine appears in the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* only 5 times, while neuter 109 times; however, entry *guð* in masculine shows 300 tokens, compared to only 50 in neuter. This could imply a later development in the semantic background to the word and change from neuter to masculine form. The orthography follows the change of gender by changing the root vowel from *-o-* to *-u-*. These changes result in two words, neuter *goð* and masculine *guð* that are used differently. There are however exceptions, hence the word *guð* could also appear in neuter or the word *goð* can also be found in its masculine form. Both of them could therefore function in reference to both male and female deities, and both for non-Christian deities and the Christian God.

Zøega's *Old Icelandic dictionary* mentions only the neuter noun *goð*. Masculine, on the other hand, or the noun *guð*, is never mentioned. The neuter *goð* is according to this entry being used for both Christian and pre-Christian gods. According to the data as the word was used in both prose and poetry, this definition is true, but somewhat lacking.

Jan de Vries in *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1961) on the other hand does mention both genders, but distinguishes between the two orthographically, i.e. *guð* being masculine and *goð* neuter, both meaning “god” without further distinction between the two. This definition can give wrong implications and might lead one to conclude that one variety was used exclusively to address non-Christian gods, and another in reference to the Christian God.

That the neuter form of the word is etymologically older can be seen in other Germanic languages. For instance, in Gothic, as we find it in the translated Bible, the word *gub* is also a neuter noun, whereas languages which were carriers of the Christian religion in Scandinavia, such as Old English, Old Frisian, Old High German and Old Saxon, show an alteration in the language at an earlier stage by modifying the noun into masculine *god* or *got*. As it can be seen, only Gothic and Old Norse preserved the form in neuter in the period of introduction of Latin script, while other Teutonic languages change the gender into masculine form. In Old English the inflection is masculine, but in certain cases it retrieves its neuter form. For instance masculine plural nominative *godas* was often interchangeable with neuter

plural nominative *godu*. It is in Old Norse also obvious from the examples within poetry that the word *goð*, unlike *guð*, does not rhyme with other words. For that reason, we can assume that the word was originally with an *-o-* root vowel and probably neuter, but has however later been converted to the masculine and the root vowel has changed into *-u-*.

In Old Norse it often happens that masculine varieties of these two words are declined as what seems to be neuter, but have agreement within the sentence in masculine. This can indicate the gradual change from neuter to masculine, masculine in the end being the only form preserved today. However, it is also often the case that the words when in masculine can appear neuter, especially when in nominative singular. This is because the variety *goð* or *guð* occasionally would not take on a masculine singular nominative ending *-r*. This is often the case in reference to the Christian God where the word is without the ending *-r*, but is being modified by adjectives in masculine. Since this case is far more common with the word *guð* in reference to the Christian God, it indicates that the word *guð* in masculine indeed came through the influence of the new religion. D.H.Green (1998:14) offers a similar explanation to this problem of the double grammatical gender. He suggests that due to the Christian influence distinction had to be made between the Christian and pre-Christian god(s), hence neuter when addressing the pre-Christian gods, and masculine only in reference to the Christian god. This was however not as consistent as one might think.

To sum up, scholars propose different solutions as to the status of the words *guð* and *goð*:

a) with no distinction between form, only gender (D.H.Green):

1) *guð/ goð* n. “non-Christian god(s)” 2) *guð/goð* m. “Christian god”

b) distinction between the gender and form (Jan de Vries):

1) *goð*, m. 2) *guð*, n.

Another suggestion could also be a combination of the two, where

c) the orthographical difference carries a semantic distinction as well, i.e:

1) *goð* m./n. “non-Christian god” 2) *guð* m./n. “Christian god”

In the following I will discuss how these proposals function in the use of the words. The variation between the type of the text (prose or poetry, eddic or skaldic) and its topic (Christian or non-Christian topic) are also of importance in the analysis since they might influence the use within the text. Another problem arising in the analysis of the use of different forms of the word is their varying spelling, which can lead to the opposing

conclusions. Different scribes preferred one form of the word in contrast to another, even in the same text but different manuscripts.

4.2.1. Goð

The usual way to distinguish between the two genders is by the words' declension; however, when we encounter syncretism, or the same forms of nouns of different gender, one has to rely on the agreement with other parts of speech in the sentence. In strong masculine and neuter nouns those would be accusative singular, genitive plural, and dative plural. The most confusing part is that often the gender and the agreement are interchanged (i.e. a noun in what appears to be neuter with an adjective in masculine). Such examples can serve as an indication of the gradual change of the word from neuter to masculine or simply the interchangeability between the two genders.

The word *goð* according to the data acquired from the prose texts appears as neuter in different contexts of the texts. As a masculine singular it appears exclusively in Christian topics and in reference to the Christian god, such as in the Icelandic Homily book²⁴:

at þa *verþa* at fara til fundar við þa. En við *goþ* almátkan ef i allom *stöðom* ef *fen*. (13r)

En at nóne kallaþe *iefu*hótt. Heli. heli. lamazabathani. Þat ef *goþ* min *goþ* min. huí fyr lætr þu mic. (80r)

In this second example we encounter the very problem discussed at the beginning of this chapter – the adjective argument is in masculine while the head looks like it is in neuter. The noun in masculine would carry a characteristic nominative singular ending for strong masculine nouns, *-r*, yet there is a possibility that the word is indeed in masculine, but without the *-r* ending. This poses a problem for our understanding of the use of the word and its gender variations. It seems this variety of the word was often used in that way, i.e. masculine without the masculine ending *-r*.

The form *goð* was sometimes used in plural in reference to the Christian God, but not to denote plurality of gods within Christianity. It was rather used to address the tripartite

²⁴ de Leeuw van Weenen (1993)

Christian God, or the Holy Trinity. It appears in the *Silvesters saga*, preserved in Perg. 2 fol. from the 15th century:

Nu eru tveir *godar*, fader ok sonr, ok enn helgi andi enn þridi.²⁵

The neuter variety is used in more occasions and within different topics, unlike the masculine which in prose is practically reserved for the Christian deity, with few exceptions. It could be used as a common noun referring to an omnipotence not associated with any specific creed, but it could also be used as more specialized - to address the Christian god. In such cases it is difficult to distinguish whether we are dealing with masculine or neuter:

Ec em sa engell. es feórec beóner ýþrar *goþe*²⁶.

In this example we find dative which could be either neuter or masculine, despite editors of the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* define it as neuter.

The gender comes out more clearly in reference to non-Christian gods, including the Old Norse ones. Yet the synchronism makes it more difficult to observe the data and draw conclusions based on the gender of the noun and its use. When obvious, the neuter appears in reference to the Old Norse gods more often than the ones addressing the Christian God, although neuter plural in general occurs more often than singular in this meaning. Neuter functions as a plural group noun for the non-Christian gods. It has been suggested by Cleasby and Vigfússon that the plural here is in reference to majesty instead of totality. This suggestion might originate from the similar idea related to the plural in Torah when addressing God or YHWH with *Elohim*²⁷ which has an obvious plural ending. I doubt that this is the case with Old Norse *goð* since there are examples of singular noun when addressing a particular god, e.g. for Óðinn in *Gylfagining* (1998:8/33) and else in masculine. The neuter plural should be observed similarly to a collective noun which is, as many Germanic collectives, used to refer to groups that comprise of both males and females. Other nouns within this semantic field might emit a notion of majesty, victory or leadership, but are still used in reference to the manifold of gods. The context and referents show the many variables

²⁵ Unger, 1877:261

²⁶ Benediktsson, 1965:166

²⁷ Today appellative is capitalized and used as a personal noun. This idea probably springs out of the notion that there is only one god, .i.e. Yahweh, “the one that is”. The most common name for god in the Hebrew Bible is actually Elohim, noun with the plural ending, but grammatically used as singular. Some scholars propose the purpose of the plurality is in order to emphasize the majesty (Berkhof, Louis pp. 48), while others oppose it, suggesting that the plural can be understood as an abstract noun, such as is the case with *chayyim* “life”.

in the use, and some of these nouns could have been used in kennings denoting other creatures than deities.

Snorri uses both *goð* and *guð* in his *Edda*. In the *Prologue* he addresses *almáttigr guð*, the Christian God, who created the entire world, but also uses the same word, in masculine, to address Óðinn:

Þá spyr Gangleri: ‘Hvar er sá *guð*, eða hvat má hann, eða hvat hefir hann unnit framaverka?’ (*Gylfagining*, 8)

However, the use of the masculine form in this example might simply be an emphatic one, making a reference to the subject, Óðinn, who is masculine.

Gangleri further in the texts wants to know who the God is, indicating that Gangleri has heard of the Christian God. He repeatedly asks if the deity Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði talk about (e.g. about Ymir, Borr etc.) is the God, but they negate it every time. Anthony Faulkes in his translation of *Edda* (1995) comments that Óðinn used those three names when introducing himself to king Geirroð: "I call myself [...] Third, [...] High, [...] and] Just-as-high"²⁸. This might exactly be what Snorri had in mind, presenting a dialogue between a false god and a fooled king who then possibly spread the belief:

Eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á *heiðin goð* ok eigi á sannynði þessar sagnar annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar. (*Skáldskaparmál*, 5)

Snorri at the end of *Gylfagining* discloses the false god and shows it was all a trick of illusion. As in the example, the word *goð* when in plural is always in neuter, except when addressing Christian tripartite system as discussed above. Furthermore, neuter plural and singular, when the sentence requires it, are used with an article in reference to non-Christian gods, while the one addressing the Christian God is never used in such form:

Þat var snimma í ǫndverða bygð goðanna, þá er goðin hǫfðu sett Miðgarð ok gert Valhǫll. (*Gylfagining*, 34)

Berssi elskadi miog godin; hann var blotmad(ur) mikill og hafði mikin atrunad vid godin²⁹

²⁸ Óðinn names himself *Hár*, *Jafnhár*, and *Þriði* in *Grímnismál* as well

²⁹ Kálund, 1883:105

Another interesting point is that the collective *goð* in prose often appears with an article, unlike in poetry. Cleasby and Vigfússon note this distinction, but do not explain it. It is possible that this was done to conform to the rules of metrics.

The word *goð* in neuter plural is generally used denoting deities in general, but would occasionally be semantically referring to *Æsir*. In prose this occurs in the opposition of *Æsir* to *Vanir*, where *Æsir* were referred to as *goð* while *Vanir* simply as *vanir*:

Eigi er Njörðr Ása ættar. Hann var upp fœddr í Vanaheimum, en Vanir gísluðu hann goðunum ok tóku í mót at Ásagíslingu þann er Hoenir heitir. Hann varð at sætt með *goðunum* ok *Voñum*. (Gylfagining, 23)

This distinction between *goð* and *vanir* was in prose used only by Snorri. The opposition appears more often in eddic poetry, especially in *Alvíssmál* where the distinction is often *goð* – *vanir* – *álfar*. In *Voñuspá* the word *goð* appears only alongside *ginnheilög*, while in other cases the words *tívar* and *regin* are preferred. In the same poem, the word *goð* is also paralleled to *regin* - both *ginnheilög goð* and *regin* are used only when related to legislation or as creators, as in the following example where they are going to a council:

Þá gengu *regin öll*
á rökstóla,
ginnheilög goð (in several stanzas)

Besides these occasions, the word *goð* does not appear in *Voñuspá*. The word *goð* also will never appear alongside *rök*, unlike some other collectives. Thus, we encounter *ragna rök*, *regin rök* and even *tíva rök* in *Vafþrúðnismál* 42, but never *goða rök*.

In *Vafþrúðnismál* Óðinn claims to have learned from *regin*, but runes are defined as being *allra goða rúnum*, probably referring to Óðinn sharing them with the other gods. He asks who of *Æsir* shall inherit *eignum goða*, possibly indicating that the *regin* are not tied to the material world. In this poem, *regin* are the creators and teachers of Óðinn, while *goð* are the rulers. It seems that *regin* are occasionally inspired by the giants and remind of the Titans in the Greek mythology. This correlation between Titans and *regin* is represented in the Old Norse myth by the giant Ymir from whom everything originates. Often the difference between the giants and gods is blurred, even though these two races present the opposition – the giants represent a chaotic, more primitive and ancient hostile force, while the gods present

the order. But even the gods are affected by the powers of giants – Norns weave their destinies and the giants will lead to the destruction of the world, as well as they took part in creating it. The true meaning of *regin* poses a conundrum, yet in spite of all these assumptions it should also be noted that this might simply be a use of synonyms for the same notion as it is often the case with poetry.

In other poems *goð* is also often paralleled to *Æsir*. In *Grimnismál* Skaði is called *brúðr goða*, Heimdall as *vörðr goða* and Óðinn enumerates all of his names he is known for *með goðum*. In *Lokasenna* Loki greets the gods as *æsir*, *ásynjur* and *öll ginnheilög goð*. Here the *ginnheilög goð* could be some other deities than *æsir* and *ásynjur*, but further in the poem Njörðr is said to had been sent *at goðum* as a hostage, *goð* here being *Æsir*. The gods, or *goð*, are also at one point called *Hrofts megir* “Óðinn’s sons” (45). It seems that Óðinn represents *æsir*, which can be paralleled to Snorri’s *Gylfaginning* where Gangleri talks with one deity, Óðinn, who then retells the adventures of *Æsir*, but is misleading and fooling Gangleri. The word *goð* as used in the eddic poetry somewhat conforms to Snorri’s explanation of the Old Norse myth. Since Gangleri often wonders who is God in the Old Norse myth, there is a reminiscence of the Snorri’s *Prologue*:

En hverr myndi þá frá segja sonum þeira frá *guðs* stórmerkjum? Svá kom, at þeir týndu *guðs* nafni, ok víðast um veröldina fannst eigi sá maðr, er deili kunnir á skapara sínum. (3)

Gangleri is given a description of the Old Norse creators and rulers who seem to be the same as *goð* who are presented by Óðinn. The *ása synir* seem to be synonymous with *æsir*, while Óðinn is as their leader an *áss* and also addressed with masculine singular *goð*. To add to the confusion, in *Lokasenna* *Æsir* are also named *Hrofts megir*, which might lead to a conclusion that there is a division between Óðinn and *Æsir*:

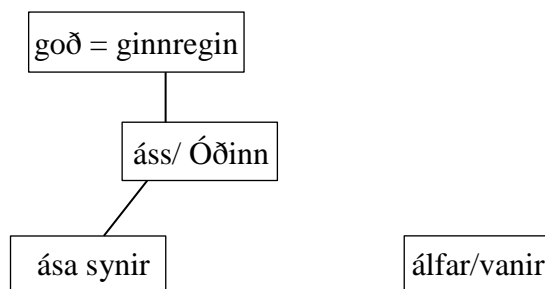


Fig. 4: hierarchical relations between Old Norse deities as read out of from eddic poetry

In skaldic poetry the word *goð* is also often paralleled to *regin*, as in *goð kynning* in *Ynglingatal* 20 which is semantically identical to *reginkunnr*. In *Vellekla* 31 several words from the semantic field analysed are used - jarl Hákon is called *áss hríðar Fróða* ‘god of battle’ and *ættrýri* who being guided by *goð* or *røgn* will be victorious:

Valföllum hlóð völlu,
 varð *ragna* konr gagni,
hríðar áss, at hrósa
 (hlaut Óðinn val) *Fróða*;
 hver sé if, nema jöfra
 ættrýri *goð* stýra?;
 rammaukin kveðk ríki
røgn Hôkonar magna. (emphasis added)

That the word *goð* was often identified as synonymous to *regin* in skaldic poetry can also be seen in *Haustlög* 7 where *regin öll* observe Loki in chains who is then called *Brísings goða girðipjófr*.

Only at one instance has the word been used in skaldic poetry in reference to the Christian God (*Hrynhenda*, 19), while in all the other cases the word occurs in plural. However, some other words from this semantic field are more commonly used when referring to Old Norse non-Christian gods than *goð*.

If we are to gather all these examples, it can be concluded that *goð* usually functions the same as *regin* and comprises of *æsir*/*Óðinn* and *vanir*, who in turn are often paralleled to *álfir*. The use varies; hence *regin* replaces *goð* when indicating majesty and grandness, as is the case with the phrase *ginnheilög goð* which is semantically close to *regin*, as seen in *Völuspá*. These two words could also indicate the existence of two races of deities – *goð* and *regin* – which will be discussed in the chapter on *regin*.

There is also an apparent difference in the use between the types of the texts. In prose we encounter both masculine and neuter. Masculine singular denotes only the Christian God and Óðinn, while masculine plural is reserved for the tripartite division of the Christian God. Neuter singular is in prose most often used as a common noun with a general meaning of ‘god’ unrelated to any deity, while plural is denoting Old Norse gods. Neuter singular seems to be used for the Christian God and Jesus as well, although this is difficult to ascertain

because of the non-existence of the masculine nominative singular ending *-r* when needed. In prose the word is usually neuter plural noun, while in skaldic poetry it occurs as singular within kennings and collectives, while in eddic poetry it appears to be used only as a plural noun. The word *god* seems to have its origins as a collective neuter, but more importantly is to see how it compares to the younger variety, *guð*.

4.2.2. Guð

The variety *guð* appears in both masculine and neuter; however, Cleasby and Vigfússon mention exclusively masculine form, enumerating then examples where *guð* is a reference to the Christian God. This does not mean that masculine is used only to refer to the Christian God, nor that neuter form does not exist. Both of the forms are mentioned in Fritzner's dictionary, but with no particular distinction between them. *Zoëga* defines *guð* as masculine for 'false god' and masculine and neuter as '(Christian) God'. The neuter rarely occurs in reference to the Christian God, and according to the data seems to be carrying a more general meaning. As a deity unassociated with any specific creed, neuter singular occurs also in reference to a god or gods of the Norse myth. Such instances usually appear in translations of texts from Latin to Old Icelandic as *Barlaams saga ok Jósafats*, *Alexanderssaga* and *Stjórn*, but also in other texts where *guð* is used in its primary, more general meaning, as in the example from *Óláfs saga helga*:

En ef ec scal a *gvð* nacqvát trva hvat er mer þa verra at ec trva a hvita Crist enn a *annat gvþ*.³⁰

Certainly, the most common use of neuter form of *guð* is for non-Christian gods, in both singular and plural:

Bloter oss oc tviðiat at vér scolom eigi blota heiðit *guð*.³¹

Þar bygðu *guðin* ok ættir þeira ok gerðusk þaðan af mǫrg tíðindi ok greinir bæði á jorðunni ok í lopti. (*Gylfagining*, 1998:13)

³⁰ Johnsen & Helgason, 1941:536

³¹ Keyser & Munch, 1846-1849:18

The word in this meaning usually takes on an article as a determiner, *guðin*, when referring to the non-Christian deities, but neuter in general does not appear in the reference to the Christian God and occurs to a far lesser extent than masculine *guð*, showing that the masculine variety was a dominant one. Neuter form still preserves its more general meaning and is most commonly occurring in its plural, although the change of the root vowel from -o- to -u- is observable; however, in other versions of the same text, the preserved root vowel -o- can still be seen.

The masculine form *guð* appears in prose more often than *goð* in general. It occurs mostly in the texts with Christian topic, thus this form might be a newer one in place of the original *goð*, along with a newer meaning, one that is brought by the Christian context and culture. The masculine *guð* can as its neuter counterpart refer to a deity in general, being used as a common noun, but it seems to appear most often when denoting the Christian god. The word then appears in singular:

Gvþ sitr ývir cherubim.³²

Éigom vér a éin guþ at trua faþor oc son ok en helga anda.³³

The examples in prose are numerous and the word appears in this meaning and form in different types of texts and topics, e.g. in translated Christian prose as *Barlaams saga*, *Katrínar saga*, short stories as *Finns þáttr*, diplomatic texts as *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, *Diplomatiuma Islendicum*, Icelandic stories of holy men as *Georgíuss saga*, laws as *Gulapingslög*, kings' sagas as *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, compilations, translations and edited sagas such as *Karlamagnúss saga* etc. In several instances the masculine *guð* is used in reference to non-Christian deities such as in this example from *Georgíuss saga*:

Hvn svarar og sagdez trua æ Hercyles og Apollo og þeir være siner gvðar.³⁴

Such cases are not as common as when referring to the Christian God, but the plural *guð* in Christian context is used when referring to the division of the Christian god into father, son and Holy Spirit:

Ferakut mælti: Ef þú kallar guð föður guð ok son guð ok inn Helga anda guð, þá kallar þú vera þrjá guða, er eigi má, en eigi einn guð.

³² Seip, 1949:65

³³ Jónsson, 1932:164

³⁴ Loth, 1969-1970:316

However, this sentence – and generally when there are such cases of plural *guð* – is corrected with the following one:

Rollant mælti: Eigi segi ek þat, heldr trúi ek á einn guð i þrenningu. Þrír personar í guðdómi eru jafneilífir ok samjafnir, í persónum er eiginligr í eining ok eilífliqr í valdinu.³⁵

Beside such examples, plural usually refers to non-Christian gods; depending on the type of the text these can be the Old Norse deities or, when it comes to Christian texts in translations, North-Semitic and Egyptian gods and idols from the Old Testament:

Varu sua þersir .ii. Egiptalandz gudar Apis ok Serapis.³⁶

þa flytið fra yðr oc kastið brot annarlíga gvða Baal oc Astaroth.³⁷

There are few instances of using the word *guð* in singular masculine for a Norse deity; in those cases the reference is towards a named male god:

En þo vænte ec er ver berom ut þoz guð varn or hufi fínu virðilego er her ftendz a þema bQ.³⁸

en þo miklv minni þöck enum mattuga Þor guþi minum. konungr sotti þa til bæiar R(auðs) ok kallaði þar saman alt folk sem i eyiunni var.³⁹

The singular was used as a common noun, with more general meaning in the non-Christian context, by Snorri in his *Edda*. Except these examples, there are not many instances of such use of the word:

Þá spýrr Gangleri: ‘Hvar er sá guð, eða hvat má hann, eða hvat hefir hann unnit framaverka?’ (Gylfagining, 8)

Þá svarar Hár: Fyr øngan mun játum vér hann guð. Hann var illr ok allir hans ættmenn. Þá kollum vér hrímpursa. (11)

³⁵ Unger, 1860:279

³⁶ Unger, 1862:249

³⁷ Unger, 1862:439

³⁸ Johnsen, 1922:21

³⁹ Ólafur Halldórsson (ed.): Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta 1-3, EA A 1-3, Kbh. 1958-2000. page 329

In prose the most common form of the word *guð* is masculine singular which is for the most part used to refer to the Christian God. In other, rare, cases it is used when the gender of the deity is known, such as Þórr, Óðinn or others as Hercules, Baal etc. Masculine singular and plural are also used as a common noun, while plural could also denote the Holy Trinity. Neuter on the other hand is mostly in plural and denotes non-Christian gods. In eddic poetry the word has been used only in *Solarljóð*. In this Christian poem the word is in masculine singular, while neuter or masculine, singular or plural, do not appear in any other eddic poem. This might indicate the late origin of the word *guð* or its particular use for Christian God and Christ. The change of the root vowel might have happened after the entrenchment of Christianity and hence the word *guð* was used only in the texts with Christian topics. Another possible explanation could be a deliberate change of the root vowel in order to distinguish between the non-Christian deities and the Christian God. Skaldic poetry can only confirm that. The word *guð* was used only to denote the Christian God and in this meaning appears only in masculine. The word does not appear in non-Christian skaldic poems either, but in such cases is rather the neuter *goð* used. There are virtually no kennings or heitis with the word *guð* while the word *goð* functions pretty much freely.

To sum up, the words *guð* and *goð*, neuter and masculine, do not seem to be completely interchangeable when it comes to different contexts of usage. However, both *guð* and *goð* were occasionally used in denoting both Christian and non-Christian gods. Such cases where the respective varieties which deviate from their general use are indeed rare and can point out to the period of change from *goð* to *guð* as the one that goes hand in hand with the change within society and introduction of Christianity as an official religion.

Masculine *guð* seems to have been used almost exclusively for the Christian deity (God, Christ or Holy Spirit), unlike the neuter form which covered several referents. Moreover, the masculine *guð* is used in the translations of the Christian texts, prayers and others, as a translation from Latin “deus”, with “dii” in plural, thus functioning as a noun with a more general meaning. The change of neuter *goð* into the masculine as well as the changes in the structure of the word is probably due to the influence of Latin and ecclesiastic writing, or also highly likely through other Germanic languages that were at the arrival of writing in Scandinavia major carriers of the Christian teaching. The neuter *goð* seems to be the older form since it is compared to the other form, *guð*, not that often used in the later writings and in general in the history of writing in the Norse society. According to its etymology the

word's original gender was neuter and was used in reference to the collectivity of Old Norse deities. This correlates with other words denoting deities in the Old Norse such as *bond*, *hopt* and *regin* appearing in this meaning only when plural, rarely when in singular. An interesting point occurs in the distinction between *regin* and *goð* (neuter), in the eddic poem *Völuspá* where *regin* always appears alongside the phrase *ginnheilög goð*, as opposed to *Æsir* and *Vanir* (see below in the chapter on *áss* and *æsir*).

In poetry only the neuter *goð* is used, denoting the group of deities when in plural and as a part of kennings, heitis or in reference to a male god when in singular. The schematic presentation of use of the words in the prose and poetry (noted) is as follows:

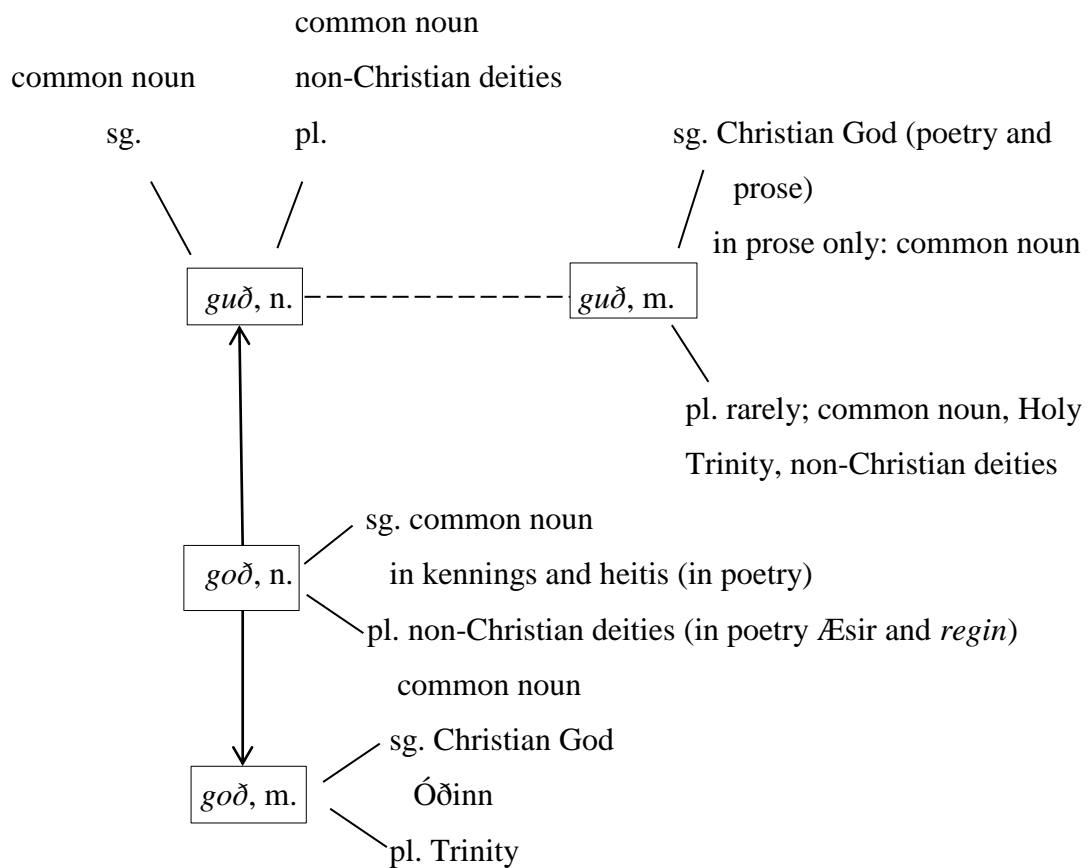


Fig. 5: the use of *goð* and *guð* across the different types of texts

It appears that the forms *guð* and *goð* are not truly interchangeable, at least not neuter *goð* and masculine *guð*. Taking into consideration that *-r* in masculine nominative singular *goð* could have been omitted when referring to the Christian God, giving the impression of a neuter word, and the fact that neuter *guð* was not used to denote the Christian God, I would suggest

classifying such cases as masculine. Hence, neuter *god* or *gud* seem not to be used in reference to the Christian God. The masculine word *gud* could have been used in plural to denote non-Christian deities, but it has rarely been so. In such cases neuter *gud* and *god* were used.

Through the influence of Christianity, not only did the new meaning stick to the word that was common in all Germanic languages, but also it motivated the change of the gender of the noun. The remnants of neuter are visible in the period from the introduction of writing with Latin script up to the 16th century. In analogy to other Germanic languages, Scandinavian *god* also underwent changes in the root vowel from *-o-* to *-u-*. One example that *god* was an original variety compared to *god* can be found in the Old Norse poetry and rhymes that we can find with *god* such as *stod* or *bod*. The variety *gud*, on the other hand, did not rhyme with anything. Changes at hand are both semantic and grammatical – the noun shifts from neuter to masculine, form which is preserved until today, motivated by the new meaning and the idea of the Christian god, the only god, male god.

4.3. The plurals *regin* and *rōgn*

The words *regin* and *rōgn* according to Vladimir Orel's *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* originate from the same Proto-Germanic neuter noun **razinan*. *Regin* is a collective neuter noun, while *rōgn* is neuter plural. Both of the Old Norse variables are used in reference to gods. The parallels can be found in Gothic *ragin* 'advice; decision', Old English *rezn-weard* 'mighty guard', Old Saxon *reginō giskapu* 'divine decision'. Taking these data into account the suggested reconstruction of the original meaning of the Old Norse *regin* would be semantically related to 'decision-making' which through the process of semantic change, such as specialization and metaphor developed into a collective noun meaning 'gods' or, often when used in compounds, 'mighty'. This semantic change was motivated by the general idea that the gods were the makers and rulers of the universe. Jan de Vries explains the word as meaning 'advisories', while *rōgn* in turn as denoting 'gods'. This might be a bit of a strange proposition since according to the data *regin* seems to be used more often than *rōgn* to denote deities of the Old Norse myth.

Geir T. Zöega names them synonyms, which they might be, especially when taking into consideration that both *regin* and *rōgn* have the same origin and are both plurals. However, data shows that *regin* was a preferred variety which according to the context where it has been used was always connected to majesty of the gods, their power and divinity.

The word *regin* and its derivatives occur more often in the Scandinavian sources than in the other Germanic ones. The cause for this could lie in the late official introduction of Christianity into the Scandinavian society. The words are used more extensively in skaldic and eddic poetry, while in prose they have been mentioned by Snorri Sturluson in his *Skáldskaparmál*:

Regin heita goð heiðin, bōnd ok rōgn.⁴⁰

Another example comes from *Fornkonunga saga*:

Kongungr mæltti: 'Hver er Halfdan snialli með Asum?' Horðr svarar: 'Han uar Baldr með Asum, er oll regin gretu, ok þer olikr.'⁴¹

⁴⁰ Wessén, 1945

⁴¹ Petersens & Olson, 1919-1925:55

In these examples, the referent is “Old Norse gods”. The word *regin* in these cases appears in the texts that are of non-Christian thematic. In *Qlkofra þátr* the word *regin* is used as a part of a phrase:

Eyholfr Þórðarson mælti: ‘Þat er satt at segja, at sjá maðr hefir allmjök dregit burst ór nefi oss, enda mælir Rán ok regin við oss á svá gort ofan.’⁴²

Qlkofra þátr is a short satire about a chieftain, and belongs to the group of *Sagas of Icelanders* which are taken to be written after 1200 in the form as we read them today. They describe the fictionalized early Icelandic history, i.e. period from 900 to 1050. *Qlkofra þátr* deals with early Icelandic society, but from the later perspective. It is more of a moral story from the Christian point of view than a historical text.

The phrase *mæla Rán ok regin*, Rán being the sea goddess and the wife of Ægir and *regin* a group noun for Old Norse gods, in fact means ‘to insult with words’. *Qlkofra þátr* is according to the editor Jón Jóhannesson, written in the mid-14th century (between 1330-1370) which might indicate that the meaning behind the phrase became a practice due to the Christian influence. Similar thing happened to other words related to religious practices, such as *blót* ‘sacrifice (to gods)’ which has another meaning - to ‘curse, swear’.

Another example of such usage of the word *regin* appears in *Fljótsdóla saga*, written in the period between 1400 and 1500, but in which events are supposed to be happening in the time before the year 1000:

Huskarll mælti: ‘Illa er slijkum monnum farid, sem þu ertt, mæller rán og regin við huornman, en þorer onguu i gegn ad ganga.’⁴³

Although the topic is situated in the period from 10th to 11th century, the understanding of the world and Icelandic society is utterly a Christian 15th century one.

In prose both *regin* and *røgn* in reference to the Old Norse deities appear only in Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál* and *Fornkonunga saga*. In those instances Snorri quotes skaldic poets, but does not use the word himself throughout *Edda*. The other two instances are part of a phrase that can tell us something on the Christian understanding and attitude towards the Old Norse gods. With the change of the religion and arrival of new institutions there was a need to change the society. This is a great example of how the use of a well-known concept in

⁴² Jóhannesson, 1950

⁴³ Kålund, 1883:43

another context can reshape the attitude towards the concept itself. Such instances can be used as a literary strategy of forgetting and reshaping people's memory. The past and the non-Christian traditions had to be made unfavourable. The prose texts were, as already mentioned, written in the Christian context by Christians, who were writing about the pre-Christian culture and religion with Christian understanding. Many texts have been translated or were based on Latin sources, and placed in the Scandinavian society, usually with the contemporary context and issues. This contemporary context was Christianity's prevalence over the Old Norse myth, with topics placed in the past or present Scandinavia.

Eddic and skaldic poetry are on the other hand considered as original, or rather more original, and as reflecting the vernacular better than prose. In the eddic poetry, poems which are of heroic and mythological content, *regin* and *røgn* are more common than in prose. Eddic poetry is generally seen as composed between 800 and 1100, and is considered to be based on older traditions than the prose texts; however, it is necessary to bear in mind that the dating of the eddic poetry is still a matter of a debate.

In for instance *Atlakviða*, the word *røgn* is used in stanza 12 as a part of a compound *landarøgnir* meaning 'ruler' (land + power), and in stanza 34 *røgnir* is used in reference to Atli, meaning 'monarch, ruler, lord, master'. The compound *landarøgnir* can also be explained through *Røgnir* as one of the heitis for Óðinn meaning 'ruler'. The compounds with *Røgnir* are also often related to battle, as in *Vellekla 7 brak-Røgnir* 'Røgnir of the clash' in kenning for 'battle', or *27 garð-Røgnir* 'Røgnir of the fence' in kenning for 'shield' or *folk-Røgnir* 'battle Røgnir' in a kenning for warrior. Hence, the compound *landarøgnir* could be a kenning referring to the ruler as a legislative and military power.

In stanza 31 of *Atlakviða*, *røgn* is preceded by *dolg*, forming *dolgrøgnir* meaning here 'battle Óðinn' or 'warrior' in addressing Atli, once again confirming him as a ruler.

From these first examples one can see that the words *regin* and *røgn* can be used in varieties of contexts and they appear to be more complicated as we go deeper in the analysis.

Considering the data analysed, I have decided to group the use of *regin* and *røgn* within eddic poetry according to their meaning and form. The word *regin* appears in compounds such as *ragnarøk*⁴⁴, *ginnregin*, *uppregin*, *regnkunngi* and *regindómi* referring to the Old Norse deities and mythology, in *regingrjóti* having more of an intensifying

⁴⁴ varieties such as *ragna rök* and *rök ragna* are also present. It is difficult to decide whether one should group them into compounds or separate words. It has to be taken into account nonetheless that the compound could be separated in order to satisfy the poetic requirements. Similar is with *ragna sjöt* which seems synonymous with *ragnarök*. Some scholars, such as Sturtevant, claim that the compound form was purely Snorri's invention.

meaning, and the word *rogn* in compounds *landarögnir*, *dolgrögnir* related to warriors and rulers. The words also appear of course as independent, and in *Völuspá*, *Lokasenna*, *Fjölsvinnsmál*, and *Sigríðsfumál* the word *regin* means ‘gods’ or ‘divine powers’. This meaning is the most common in both eddic and skaldic poetry and through metaphorical extension could be used for anyone (or anything) that wields a certain amount of power. Metaphors are usually based on the conceptual meaning that has been transferred into another domain, hence are considered younger.⁴⁵ Another group would refer to the compounds of non-religious meaning, such as *landrögnir* and *regingrjóti*, referring to grandness and magnificence.

The religious meaning of *regin* is of primary focus of this analysis, but also its development and relations to the other words within the semantic field. For instance, the eddic poem *Völuspá* thus shows a peculiarity in the use of different terms for Old Norse deities. Different terms occur within one or two connected stanzas⁴⁶:

23. Þá gengu *regin* öll
 á rökstóla,
ginnheilug goð,
 ok um þat gættusk:
 hvárt skyldu *æsir*
 afráð gjalda,
 eða skyldu *goðin* öll
 gildi eiga. (emphasis added)

The formulation “Þá gengu *regin* öll á rökstóla, *ginnheilug* goð, ok um þat gættusk” appears three more times in *Völuspá*, in stanzas 6, 9 and 25. It appears in this quoted stanza there is a distinction between *regin* who are also *ginnheilug* goð, or ‘(all)holy gods’, and *æsir*.

This stanza is connected to the next one⁴⁷ in which the war between Vanir and Æsir is described:

24. Fleygði Óðinn
 ok í fólk um skaut,
 þat var enn fólkvíg
 fyrst í heimi;

⁴⁵ some scholars propose metaphorical language to be older, see Keller, 1989

⁴⁶ connected in the sense that they refer to a previous stanza or are its continuation

⁴⁷ it follows stanza 23 in the manuscript, although contextually the two should switch places

brotinn var borðveggr
borgar ása,
knáttu *vanir* vígská
völlu sporna.

Here the distinction between *Æsir* and *Vanir* is made and if we compare it to the stanza 23, it appears the division would be:

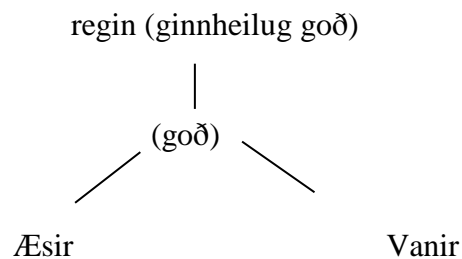


Fig. 6: hierarchical relationship between the deities according to *Völuspá*

This distinction is not present in *Völuspá* only. The eddic poem *Alvissmál* which has been dated to the 12th century⁴⁸ due to the use of words that have been attested in the late skaldic poetry, contains similar division, namely in stanza 10:

Jörð heitir með mönnum,
en með *ásu* fold,
kalla vega *vanir*,
ígræn jötnar,
alfar gróandi,
kalla aur *uppregin*.

The word *regin* here appears as a part of a compound, and could be translated as ‘high powers’ or the ‘upper powers’. Here *uppregin* are distinguished from *Æsir* and *Vanir* and conforms to the schematic representation above. However, in stanzas 12, 18, 22, 24 we come across another distinction between *vanir* and *goðum*, in stanza 26 there are only *Æsir* and *Vanir*, while in stanzas 20 and 30, we come across a distinction between *goð* and *ginnregin*:

⁴⁸ Simek and Pálsson, 1987

20. Vindr heitir með mönnum,
 en váfuðr með *goðum*,
 kalla gneggjuð *ginnregin* [...]

30. Nótt heitir með mönnum,
 en njól með *goðum*,
 kalla grímu *ginnregin* [...]

Ginnregin seems to be synonymous with *uppregin*, and *goð* here stands in reference to the group formed of *Æsir* and *Vanir*. This example also corresponds to the previous schematic representation of division between the deities. There are however divergences from this division as exemplified above, where *goð* would refer to *Æsir* alone. This can be shown from the other stanzas of the same poem where a distinction has been made between *goð* and *Vanir*, and in that case it appears as if the word *goð* is used in reference to *Æsir*. In other cases, *regin* is not mentioned and does not seem to be relevant in those instances.

The questions that arise when we go deeper into the analysis are whether *uppregin* and *regin* or ‘powers’ refer to the same divine beings or is there a distinction that separates them and what is the relation between *goð* and (*upp-/ginn-*)*regin*, *goð* and *Vanir*, and *Æsir* and *Vanir* to *regin*. When trying to answer these questions, it is also important to bear in mind that in eddic poetry there is not even one instance of distinction between *goð* and *Æsir*, i.e. that *goð* usually refers to *Æsir* and never to *Vanir*.

Another eddic poem with various use of different symbols or lexemes of the semantic field “god” is *Lokasenna*. In this poem Loki addresses the gods gathered at the feast at *Ægir*’s place. The gods present, of what we know from the exchange of the dialogue, are *Vanir* and *Æsir*. The first instance of *regin* appears in stanza 4 along with its complement *holl*:

Veiztu, ef þú inn gengr
 Ægis hallir í
 á þat sumbl at sjá,
 hrópi ok rógi
 ef þú eyss á *holl regin*,
 á þér munu þau þerra þat. (emphasis added)

The meaning of *holl regin* would be best translated as ‘gracious gods/powers’ and it might be concluded that here Eldir probably refers to those present who were Loki’s target of spite. Yet, Eldir in two stanzas before, as Loki also in the stanza 1, refers to those present as *sigtíva synir* and *ása*:

1. Segðu þat, Eldir,
svá at þú einugi
feti gangir framar,
hvat hér inni
hafa at ölmálum
sigtíva synir.

2. Of vápn sín dæma
ok um vígrisni sína
sigtíva synir;
ása ok *alfa*
er hér inni eru,
manngi er þér í orði vinr. (emphasis added)

It appears that *sigtíva synir* would be the same as *ása synir*, while *sigtívar* are Æsir who were called ‘victorious’ due to the outcome of the war between them and Vanir. In stanza 3 Loki says:

Inn skal ganga
Ægis hallir í
á þat sumbl at sjá;
jöll ok áfu
færi ek *ása sonum*,
ok blend ek þeim svá meini mjöð. (emphasis added)

The present are sons of ‘victorious tívar/gods’ or Æsir, and their sons. Throughout the poem different words in addressing gods are used, so Loki names them both *æsir* and *goð* which seem to be synonymous, but does not mention *sigtífa* anymore. There is also no mention of *vanir*. In stanza 11 there is one discrepancy in the addressing the gods where Loki mentions *æsir* and *ásynjur*, but also *ginnheilög goð*:

Heilir *æsir*,
 heilar *ásynjur*
 ok öll *ginnheilög goð* -
 nema sá einn *áss*
 er innar sitr,
 Bragi, bekkjum á. (emphasis added)

Loki now makes a distinction between *æsir* and *ginnheilög goð*. This might indicate there were other beings beside *æsir* and *ásynjur* who might have been higher in ranking. Another meaning could be *ginnheilög goð* covering also those unnamed as Vanir or *álfir*.

However, this takes us back to the similar use in *Völuspá* where *regin* were *ginnheilög goð* and seemed to, according to the use of these terms in *Völuspá*, not be synonymous with *Æsir* and Vanir. Those who are *regin* or *ginnheilög goð* seem to be separated from the Old Norse deities that we know of and reminiscences of Snorri's introduction to *Edda* where he states:

Eftir Nóaflóð lifðu átta menn, þeir er heiminn byggðu, ok kómu frá þeim ættir, ok varð enn sem fyrr, at þá er fjölmenntist ok byggðist veröldin, þá var þat allr fjölði mannfólksins, er elskaði ágirni fjár ok metnaðar, en afrækðust guðs hlýðni, ok svá mikit gerðist at því, at þeir vildu eigi nefna guð. En hverr myndi þá frá segja sonum þeira frá guðs stórmerkjum? (*Prologue*, 3)

This might indicate that those eddic poems are younger than thought and were devised under the influence of Christianity and Biblical explanation and representation of non-Christian beliefs, referring to a more noble version of the myth, with *regin* as above the rest of Old Norse deities found in prose and poetry.

Another use of *regin* in *Lokasenna* appears in stanza 32 where Loki accuses Freyja of incestuous relationship with her brother which was later discovered by the gods, or rather *regin*. The word is also used to denote “the ruin of the gods” by Freyr in stanza 41:

32. Þegi þú, Freyja,
 þú ert fordæða
 ok meini blandin mjök,
 síz þik at bræðr þínum

stóðu *blíð regin*

ok myndir þú þá, Freyja, frata. (emphasis added)

41. Ulfr sé ek liggja

árósi fyrir,

unz *rjúfask regin*;

því mundu næst,

nema þú nú þegir,

bundinn, bölvvasmiðr. (emphasis added)

Another instance of *regin*, in its genitive form and as a part of a compound is *ragnarökr* which occurs in stanza 39. The word *regin* is the only word from this semantic field comprising of the words with meaning “god” that is being used in reference to the judgement day, or “fall of the gods”. In *Lokasenna* the words *æsir*, *ása synir* and *goð* are used in other contexts. Considering these findings, it seems that *regin* in *Lokasenna* had a poetic function and was not considered as representing deities detached from the ‘gods’ or the Old Norse deities. Therefore are *regin* often paralleled to (*ginnheilög*) *goð* which can stand for the group consisting of both *Æsir* and *Vanir*; however *sigtíva* usually denotes *Æsir*, as does occasionally the word *goð*. The phrase *sigtíva synir* denotes the same as *ása synir*.

The word *regin* is used it seems when the holiness and supremacy of the gods were pointed out, occasionally in the more threatening occasions, such as Loki’s return to the feast⁴⁹ spoken by the servant (*holl regin*). The word is also used when pointing out the deterioration of Freyja and her wrongdoings when being faced by the gods who have disapproved of her behaviour and were in that way shown as superior to her (*blíþ regin* ‘kind, merciful powers’, the adjective here denoting a higher moral instance).

The word appears in one more setting related to grandness and that is in reference of the doom of the gods (stanzas 39 and 41). In *Fjölsvinnsmál* the word is used also when mentioning the end of the gods (*unz rjúfast regin*), in *Hyndluljóð* in the form of *rögn* (*at rögn of þrjóti*), *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (*ragnarök*), and *Atlamál* (*rök ragna*). The word *regin* appears as a compound furthermore in *Hávamál* and *Hymiskviða* as *ginnregin*, as *reginkunngi* in *Hamðismál* and *regingrjóti* in *Gróttasöngur*.

⁴⁹ Loki uses *sigtífa*, probably in a taunting way, and Eldir answers with *holl regin*

The compound *ginnregin* is formed with *ginn-*, a word that is only known to be used as a prefix in Old Norse. It is related to the Proto-Germanic verb *beginnan* and is used exclusively in mythological context⁵⁰. The probable translation of *ginnregin* would be ‘great/higher powers or deities’. Another related compound is *uppregin*; however, in *Alvissmál*, *ginnregin* is distinguished from *goð*, while *uppregin* from *æsir* and *vanir*. The prefixes *ginn-* and *upp-* are related through their base, *regin*, in a way that *ginnregin* as “original powers”, and *uppregin* “upper powers” are based on the same idea of the gods as creators, which puts them in a superior place in relation to lesser deities. In such cases it appears that *ginnregin* is equal to *uppregin*, and therefore with *goð*, comprising of *ásum* and *vanir*.

Another mention of *ginnregin* is in *Hávamál*, stanzas 80 and 142 which in the second part carry the same message:

80. Þat er þá reynt,
er þú að rúnum spyr
inum *reginkunnum*,
þeim er gerðu *ginnregin*
ok fáði *fimbulþulr*,
þá hefir hann bazt, ef hann þegir. (emphasis added)

142. Rúnar munt þú finna
ok ráðna stafi,
mjök stóra stafi,
mjök stinna stafi,
er fáði *fimbulþulr*
ok gerðu *ginnregin*
ok reist hroptr *rögna*. (emphasis added)

At the first glance there seems to be a distinction between *fimbulþulr*, *ginnregin* and *hroptr rögna* - *ginnregin* made the runes, *fimbulþulr* coloured the runes, and *hroptr rögna* wrote them. *Fimbulþulr* could be translated as ‘mighty bard’, *ginnregin* as ‘supreme power’, and *hroptr rögna* ‘the crier of the gods’. However, *Fimbulþulr* and *hroptr rögna* are poetic words

⁵⁰ In prose it is used only by Snorri in his *Edda*

and are used as a heiti for Óðinn in both skaldic and eddic poetry.⁵¹ Through deduction one can conclude that *ginnregin* might also refer to Óðinn, yet the collective meaning of the word *regin* would be in this case lost, unless we translated it as ‘the most powerful of the gods’, the collectivity of the noun referring to grandness. It is also possible that once again the focus is shifted to a group of deities above Æsir and Vanir, pointing to the Christian influence and modifications in the poetry. In *Hymnaskviða* stanza 4, *ginnregin* is used as opposed to *tívar*:

Ne þat matto
 merir *tívar*
 oc *ginnregin*
 of geta hvergi,
 vnnz af trygðom
 Tyr Hlorriþa
 astraþ mikít
 einom sagdi [...] (emphasis added)

Neither *tívar* nor *ginnregin* could find the kettle. The question is whether this is an example of repetition of the same notion with different referents, or is there a semantic difference between them. In the analogy to the previous example with *Hropta rögn* and *Hroptatýr*, it seems *regin* and *tívar* are sometimes interchangeable and are synonymous; however *regin* is in this example prefixed by an intensifier *ginn-* giving it a somewhat different meaning, hierarchical to the one of *tívar*, therefore we might deduce:

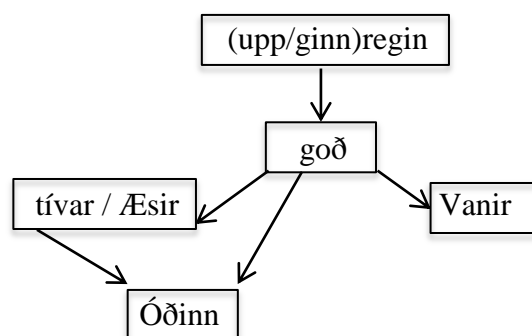


Fig. 7: A schematic representation of the hierarchical division between the terms for ‘gods’ according to the use within the texts

⁵¹ does not occur that often, more common is *Hroptatýr*, *hropta rögn* might have been used according to the analogy, despite *rögn* being a collective noun, and *týr* singular

The highest instances are *upp/ginnregin* and these compounds seem to be interchangeable with *goð* or that *goð* might be the same as *tívar* or *Æsir*. Those who are *goð* are divided into *Æsir* and *Vanir*. Often *goð* refers only to *Óðinn* when in singular, hence those two concepts could be equalised, giving division *goð/Óðinn* followed by *tívar/Æsir*.

This is the impression one gets when analysing the words and tries to put them in a somewhat hierarchical order. However, the use of the words and how they interchange in different texts seems to be chaotic, but it can be summed up into:

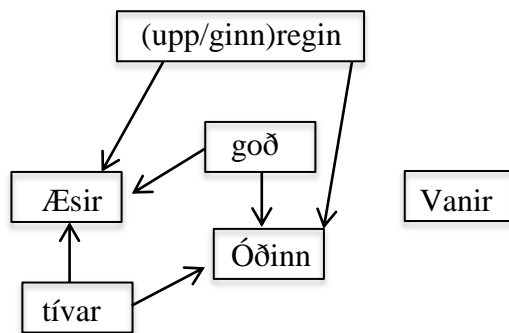


Fig. 8: A schematic representation of the use of terms within the texts and relation to *Óðinn*

In the texts *(upp/ginn)regin* often denotes *Æsir* and *Óðinn* as in *hroptarogn*. *Æsir* are also called *(sig)tívar* and *goð*, while *Óðinn* is referred to as *Hroptatýr*.

Æsir are often called *regin*, *goð* and *tívar*, the two deities *Óðinn* and *Þórr* are the only ones referred to as *regin* in their heitis or kennings, *goð* usually comprise all the deities (*Æsir* and *Vanir*) referring to the totality but *Vanir* are never named *goð* hence there is no arrow connecting the two in the schematic representation. Also, *goð* is never used as corresponding to *tívar*, but it is however often paralleled to *Æsir*. *Óðinn* is referred to as *goð*, *regin* (*hroptarogn*, *Rognir*) and *týr* (*Hroptatýr*), hence the connectors between these concepts.

Skaldic poetry, on the other hand, does not propose distinctions between *regin* and other words from the semantic field, except in frequency. The word *regin* functions as a general collective noun for Old Norse gods as *tívar* or *goð*. The same is the case with the compound *ginnregin* in *Haustlǫng* stanza 13:

Hófu skjótt, en skófu,
 skopt, *ginnregin*, brinna,
 en sonr biðils sviðnar
 (sveipr varð í fǫr) Greipar.

Pat's of fátt á fjalla
 Finns ilja brú minni.
 Baugs þák bifum fáða
 bifkleif at Þórleifi.

Both *regin* and *ginnregin* are synonymous with ‘Old Norse gods’, but are unlike other words from the semantic field not used as often. The compound *ginnregin* appears only in *Haustlǫng*, *regin* in *Haustlǫng* and *Hákornarmál*.

Another compound appearing in skaldic poetry is *hofregin*, ‘temple god’, in *Haustlǫng* used in reference to Þórr which can be read out from the context – he is the one who attacks Hrungnir later in the text, but also has a chariot pulled by the goats:

Knôttu ǫll, en, Ullar
 endilôg, fyr mági,
 grund vas grápi hrundin,
ginnunga vé brinna,
 þás *hofregin* hafrar
 hógreiðar framm drógu
 (seðr gekk Svǫlnis ekkja
 sundr) at Hrungnis fundi. (emphasis added)

Another intriguing word appearing here is *ginnunga* modifying the word *vé* ‘temple’ which is synonymous to *hof*. If we compare it to *regingrjót*, the two prefixes *ginn-* and *regin-* seem to be almost synonymous. However, the prefix *ginn-* appears next to creative yet chaotic powers (e.g. *Ginnungagap*), while *regin* usually in reference to also creative, but rather legislative powers. The compound *ginnregin* could indicate the polarity in the myths of the creation and the end of the world, between the cosmogony and order which will be ended by chaotic powers. The word *ragnarǫk* could denote therefore the end of this order represented by *regin*. Other compounds found in the eddic poetry with *regin* are *reginkunnr*, *reginþing* and *regingrjót*, but also in one kenning, in *Vǫluspá* stanza 33 – *ragnasjöta*, ‘the seat of the gods’, or ‘heaven’. In eddic poetry there are fewer instances of compounds with *rǫgn* – only *landarǫgnr* and *dolgrǫgnr*. In skaldic poetry we come across *þrimrǫgn* which means ‘powerful warrior’, found in a skaldic poem in Egill Skallagrímsson’s *lausavísa* stanza 20. In the next stanza, the word *rǫgn* is distinguished from Óðinn:

Svá skyldi goð gjalda,
 gram reki *bǫnd* af hǫndum,
reið sé rǫgn ok Óðinn,
 rǫn míns féar hǫnum;
 folkmýgi lát flœja,
 Freyr ok Njǫrðr, af jǫrðum,
 leiðisk lofða stríði,
 landóss, þanns vé grandar.

Further in the text Freyr and Njǫrð are mentioned, but only in the second part of the stanza so it does not seem they are part of *regin*. Once again, it appears *regin* refers to *Æsir* alone, with Óðinn as their leader, perhaps meaning here that he is *uppregin*. This could be related to the confusion between division of *týr* into Óðinn.

However, the compound *þrymrǫgn*, denoting ‘mighty warriors’, shows already the process of change within the word’s meaning. In the skaldic poetry compounds such as *þrymregin* (found in *Reginsdrápa*) and *þrymrǫgn* do not bear so much of a mythological meaning, but rather function as an extended meaning to *regin/rǫgn*, or ‘powerful’.

There are more compounds in the eddic than in skaldic poetry that can throw a new light on the process of change of meaning. The compound *reginkunni* appears in *Hamðismál* stanza 25 and is used as a name for a king. Referring to a king as of divine origin was not an uncommon practice; divine origin of the kings was a wide-spread motif in the history of religion. This compound still carries the trace of mythological aspect due to its constituent, *regin*, as in some other cases as well. The word *regingrjóti* was defined as ‘large stone’ in *Lexicon Poeticum*. The compound found in *Gróttasǫngr* stanza 20, could also refer to the riches the mill is producing rather than denoting size. Another way to explain is through the reference for gold, the precious element:

Mun-at þú halda
 Hleiðrar stóli,
 rauðum hringum
 né *regingrjóti*;
 tókum á möndli
 mær, skarpara,

erum-a varmar
 í valdreyra. (emphasis added)

The compound *reginþing* in the eddic *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* stanza 51 seems also not to carry the mythological meaning either, but rather the sense of grandness, the Great Council, as opposed to *heraðsþing*.⁵² It could, on the other hand, confirm *regin* as carrying the meaning of legislative power.

The word *rōgn* appears once in skaldic poetry with its mythological meaning, in *Vellekla* by Einarr skálaglam Helgason, but *regin* is obviously prevailing in the usage.

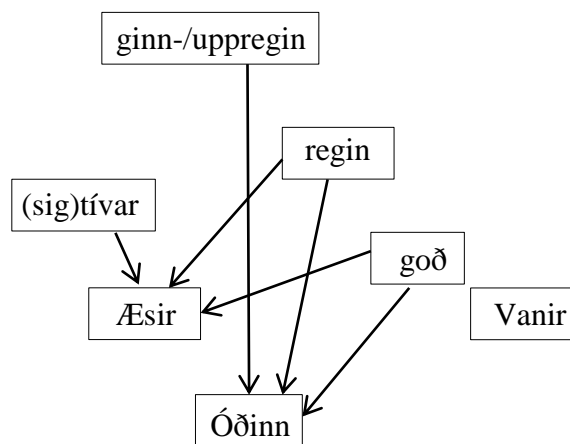


Fig.9: The word *regin* and its relationship to other concepts of the semantic field

The proposed relationship between *regin* and other concepts related to deities in the written texts sketched above shows *ginn-/uppregin* as sometimes used when differentiated from *goð*, and seems to be synonymous with *ginnheilug goð*. The word *regin* is often used as synonymous to *goð* and *Æsir*, but never for *Vanir*. Also, *Vanir* are never addressed as *goð*. The word *goð* denotes *Æsir* and is often used in opposition to *Vanir*. In *Völuspá* the deities termed *regin* are *ginnheilug goð* and are distinguished from *Æsir*, who are *goðin öll*, and *Vanir*. In *Alvissmál* *uppregin* are separated from both *Æsir* and *Vanir* who are all collectively named *goð*. In turn, *goð* is differentiated from *ginnregin*. In *Lokasenna* the term *sigtíva* refers to *Æsir*, while in skaldic poetry *regin* and *rōgn* are used to denote Old Norse gods in general, with *rōgn* as differentiated from *Óðinn* in Egill Skallagrímsson's *lausavísa*. *Óðinn* is named

⁵² *Reginþing* was according to Sophus Bugge a placename (Studier II); however, this compound does not appear anywhere else, and it is uncertain whether such placename existed, unlike other compounds referring to *þing*

Rögnir, *hroptr rögn* in *Hávamál*, and in the same stanza he is called *ginnregin* and *fimbulþulr*. The difference between *rögn* and *regin* is in a nuance of meaning; *rögn* was often used to denote warriors or chieftains, while *regin* was used in reference to a supreme and legislative powers.

The word *regin* is used in prose, eddic and skaldic poetry as an independent noun and as a kenning only in poetry. As a heiti it appears only in eddic poetry. The words *regin* and *rögn* are used to denote Óðinn in both skaldic and eddic poetry. The word *rögn* is used less often and appears mostly in skaldic poetry. It is indeed synonymous with *regin*, but not as common. The word is used also in *Vellekla*, *Haustlǫng*, and a *lausavísa* of Þorvaldr veili. In the later poetry the change of the mythological component in the meaning of the word can be seen, such as in *þrymrögn*, and a phrase that is semantically connected to *mæla Rán ok regin við – rigna við rögn* or ‘to blaspheme’.

The words *regin* and *rögn* have experienced change, and despite small amount of data from poetry and prose, the semantic change is observable. In skaldic poetry they are collective nouns referring to the Old Norse gods, in eddic poetry we come across compounds that have no longer a mythological meaning, while in prose the word was used only as a part of a set phrase that has no connection to the meaning ‘gods’ or ‘powers’. In the eddic poetry the word is often interchanged with the other words from the semantic field; thus we read of the *regin* who are also *ginnheilög goð*, but do not appear to be the same as *Æsir*, *Vanir* nor *goð*. In other instances it is often paralleled to *goð* and sometimes with *Æsir*, but never with *Vanir*. There is also one heiti in reference to Óðinn, which is most likely here because of the analogy with *týr*. There seems to be, however, something different around *regin* and its derivatives – there is a tendency to separate *regin* from the other referents, either through the context (when holiness or majesty is being stressed), or through differentiating between them within the same stanza. This indicates that the word *regin* had a different function than rest of the collective nouns for gods.

The possible process of the semantic change would be the move of the word *regin/rögn* from the meaning ‘Old Norse gods’ to a more intensifying than mythological meaning (as in *reginþing*, *landarögnr*) to end up in a fixed phrase unrelated to its original meaning (*mæla Rán ok regin við*) in prose texts.

There are several motivations and changes at hand, such as metaphorical extension, and external motivation. External motivation for the change within the use of *regin* and *rögn* and the change within the semantic field could have been Christian influence of the Latin

sources and the change within the Scandinavian society. With the change of the status of only one word within the field it caused change of the relationship between other members.

4.4. The lexemes *band* and *hapt*

The neuter words *band* and *hapt* both mean ‘bond’ or ‘fetters’. They also share metaphorical extensions of this meaning. When in plural, they obtain the meaning ‘gods’. Although these nouns supposedly acquire such meaning only when in plural, there are instances of them being used in reference to an Old Norse deity when in singular as well.

According to Vladimir Orel, the neuter substantive *band* originates in Proto-Germanic **bandan* which has later evolved into Old Norse *band* ‘bond, band’. Cognates to Old Norse *band* can be found in Old Saxon compound *hōbid-band* meaning ‘crown’ and Old High German *bant* which was often used to denote ‘priest’s band’, but also ‘band’ with a more general meaning⁵³. The word *band* according to Cleasby and Vigfússon has more than two meanings. When in singular, *band* has a concrete meaning of ‘any kind of band’ as ribbon or woollen band, while the meaning ‘fetters, chains’ appears in both singular and plural. This second meaning, also concrete, can through metaphorical extension also refer to an obligation, giving a secondary meaning to the word. In this case the metaphorical relation is ‘promise as a type of a bond’, such as in the act of making the deal with *handaband* ‘shake of the hand’, or in expression *ganga í bōnd ok eið* ‘to enter into a bond and oath’ where metaphor structure would be the same, i.e. ‘promise as a type of a bond’.

The poetic meaning of the word according to Cleasby and Vigfússon is ‘gods’ which is comparable to *hapt*. Other examples of the use of the religious component of the word are *banda vé* ‘temples’ and *at mun banda* ‘the will of the gods’ in *Vellekla*, or *vera manu bōnd í landi* ‘the gods are present in the land’ in an anonymous *lausavísa* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*. The connection between the two meanings, ‘bond’ and ‘gods’, could be interpreted as ‘the gods that bind’ and could indicate one of the components of the non-Christian Old Norse gods. The word with this meaning (‘bond’ is related to ‘gods’) is apparently used only in the Old Norse although the notion of binding is related to the theological concepts as well, usually negative ones – so, for instance, in Christian writing the flesh or bodies are often referred to as earthly bounds, sin is often compared to bonds, and in Luke Satan is said to have bound a daughter of Abraham as his messenger, taking possession of a woman not letting her stand upright.

⁵³ Cleasby and Vigfússon however attribute *bant* to New High German, while OHG would be *pfand* without any kind of religious semantic component in it

Ursula Dronke (1992:657) postulates that all the various ideas of fetters in the Old Norse myth are conceptually related to the idea of fettered gods which stretches well into, but also beyond, the Germanic sphere. Dronke draws the idea of bonding as part of cult practices from Tacitus in his description of a Semnonic grove which is allowed to be entered only *vincula ligatus*, or ‘by one that is bonded’⁵⁴.

Rudolf Simek (2010) writes also about gods as recipients of a cult when being addressed as *bōnd*, and accepts the idea of the ‘fettered gods’. The scholar Hermann Reichert (2005), goes along with this proposal as well and takes it as an explanation of the word. In the comparison of *bōnd* to *hopt* it has been proposed that unlike *bōnd*, the word *hopt* does not address the gods as recipients of a cult, but is rather used as a plural noun (Simek, 2010:11) and as part of kennings for individual gods. The data will show that *hapt* was used somewhat differently than *band*, yet I would dare to disagree with *band* denoting gods as ‘recipients of a cult’, but rather as a collective noun for ‘gods’ connected to the metaphorical extension - the notion of promise as a type of a bond.

The collective noun *hapt* is defined by de Vries as a neuter noun meaning ‘fetter’, while in plural it obtains its poetical meaning ‘gods’. Cleasby and Vigfússon define *hapt* or *haft* as a neuter noun whose concrete meaning is ‘fetters’ as it is used in *Hávamál* stanzas 148 and 149. The metaphoric meaning would be ‘gods’, and this definition is noted as occurring in plural only. As a collective noun, it might have been that *hapt* was used in analogy to *band* since they were sharing the main meaning. Since the word does not occur as often as *band* when meaning “gods” it might have been that the metaphorical meaning was added in the analogy to *bōnd* which might explain the small amount of data we have on this word. For instance, *hopt* appears with its religious meaning twice in skaldic poetry, while in the prose works it has been mentioned only by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*.

The word *hapt* in eddic poetry does not appear in the meaning ‘god(s)’. In one example, stanza 35 of *Vǫluspá*, it refers back to one god, namely Loki:

Hapt sá hon liggja
undir hvera lundi,
lægiarns líki
Loca áþeccian; [...] (emphasis added)

⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Germania*. chapter 39

The one that is being chained is a prisoner, or *haptr* or *haftr*, and in this case, the god was imprisoned with *harðger hopt* ‘hardy strains’.

The religious component of the word *hapt* seems to have been used only in the formation of kennings and heitis for individual gods, and then it is often used in singular, but there are some instances of the noun in plural, in reference to the totality of deities. We encounter those examples chiefly in the skaldic poetry. In *Haustlǫng* stanza 3 it refers to Óðinn – *hapta snytrir hjalmfaldinn* or ‘helmeted educator of the gods’, and stanza 11 to Iðunn – *mæra mey, stærandi mun hapta*, or ‘the wonderful maiden who increases divine joy/the joy of god’. At another instance, *hapt* is a component of a kenning for Loki in *Þórsdrapá*, stanza 3, where he is named *farmr arma galdr hapt*, ‘husband of goddess of sorcery’, here the word *hapt* being in singular genitive. The phrase *arma galdr hapt* could refer to Sigyn, since she is usually called Loki’s partner. Faulkes (1998) however translates it as “incantation fetterer” led by the notion that Sigyn can ward off spells.

The word *hapt* also appears in some of the heitis for Óðinn, such as *Haptaguð* and *Haptasnytrir*, both names appearing in *Gylfaginning*. These two can be translated as ‘the god of prisoners’ or ‘fetter god’ and the latter as ‘teacher of gods’. The better translation of the *Haptaguð* would be ‘the god of gods’, ‘supreme god’ which is as equally possible as the other two interpretations. The *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* defines *haft* as a heiti for ‘de hedenske guder’ or ‘heathen gods’; but according to the data, functioning as a building block for heitis seems to have been the primary use of the word *hapt*. The relation between fetters and gods can be explained through perhaps old cults of tying god to the place of worship⁵⁵ that relate to the concept of god abiding in its image.

In skaldic poetry *hapt* in its religious meaning occurs most often as a heiti, but once it is used in order to denote gods, namely in *Vellekla* stanza 16. Here the word seems to be connected to a cult practice of binding gods to the idols in order to be worshiped:

Ok herþarfir hverfa
 (Hlakkar móts) til blóta
 (rauðbríkar fremsk rækir
 ríkr) ásmegir (slíku);
 nú grœr jǫrð sem áðan,
 aptr geirbrúar *hapta*

⁵⁵ cf. Matsya Purana where old Indic cults of creating an idol are described

auðrýrir lætr áru
óhryggva vé byggva. (emphasis added)

The word *ásmegir* is in *Lexicon Poeticum* defined as the ‘sons of Æsir’⁵⁶ and in this stanza it collocates with *herþarfir*, the translation of which would be ‘sons of the Æsir who are useful to the army’ or simply ‘warriors’. The words *vé byggja* refer to the inhabitation of the temple by a certain deity since the whole stanza refers to Hákon Jarl’s restoration of sacrifice and worship of the non-Christian Old Norse gods. Finnur Jónsson’s (1967) translation shows concordance between *geirbrúar áru* ‘heralds of the spear-bridge’. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941) does the same and translates *byggja* as ‘visit’, instead of ‘to inhabit’. Lee M. Hollander translates *geirbrúar hapta* (1945) as ‘generous lord’, and *áru* as ‘folk’ that is now allowed to worship once more their old gods. Hollander translates *byggja* in the same way as Bjarni, though not explicitly:

Increase gives the earth as
erstwhile, since the generous
lord let flock the folk, all
fearless, to their worship.

Turville-Petre however collocates *geirbrúar* with *auðrýrir*, or ‘destroyer of the wealth of the spearbridge’ (1976) and in turn *áru* with *hapta* ‘heralds of the gods’⁵⁷. This gives an entirely different meaning to the second half of the stanza. The heralds of the gods could be understood as idols worshiped in temples, with idols or images becoming the abodes of the gods. This could explain the relationship between the two semantic domains, ‘fetters’ and ‘gods’, where gods are bonded to the physical representation.

However, Cleasby and Vigfússon point out that *hapt* and *band* refer to ‘binding gods’, and not ‘bounded gods’, therefore expressing an agent, the one that does the binding. In the Old Norse myth the gods that do the binding are the Æsir. There are three instances of binding in Old Norse myth – binding of Loki, binding of Fenrir, and captivation of Njórð after the war between Æsir and Vanir which could be understood as an act of binding. Óðinn’s self-sacrifice by hanging can also be interpreted as an instance of the ‘binding god’ where Óðinn himself is both the agent and the patient of the act.

⁵⁶ by *Lexicon Poeticum*, Fritzner, Zoëga and Cleasby and Vigfússon

⁵⁷ Here the word could concord with *vé* as well. Since words in different lines could concord with two or more other words, it makes skaldic poetry difficult to analyse in this aspect.

Another example of the word *hapt* appearing in skaldic poetry is *Haustlǫng*, stanza 3 where the word refers to *hjalmfaldinn*, or ‘helmeted one’:

Tormiðluðr var *tívum*
 tálhreinn meðal beina;
 hvat kvað *hapta snytrir*
hjalmfaldinn því valda;
 margspakr of nam mæla
 môt valkastar bôru
 (vasat Hœnis vinr hônum
 hollr) af fornum þolli. (emphasis added)

According to Cleasby and Vigfússon *hapta snytrir* means ‘the friend of the gods’, but it has also been translated as ‘teacher of the gods’⁵⁸. The word *snytrir* was used to denote elegance and wisdom of a person and according to this heiti *Haptasnytrir* can also be translated as ‘the wise god’ and with further extension as ‘teacher’ – he teaches other gods runes after sacrificing himself to gain the knowledge.

This is not the only heiti with *hapt* as a component. Another heiti for Óðinn found in skaldic poetry is *Haptsønir*, translated as ‘fetter-loosener’:

Hróðr gerik of mǫg mæran
 meir Hôkonar fleira;
haptsænis geldk hônum
 heið; sitr Þórr í reiðu.⁵⁹ (emphasis added)

Cleasby and Vigfússon define it as the kenning for poetry literally meaning ‘the atonement of the gods’. Faulkes (1998) translates it as ‘gods’ atoner, reconciler’ but also mentions ‘fetter looser’. Apparently this poses a problem due to the ambiguity of the words. The word however is a part of a kenning *haptsænis heið* ‘reward of the reconciler’, or ‘poetry’ and Finnur Jónsson (1912) translates it as *digt*, ‘poem’. If the poetry is a gift or reward to human kind, the giver can only be Óðinn. The question is how to interpret this heiti and the component *hapt* – either as ‘god’ or ‘chain’. According to the data, the meaning ‘gods’ of the word *hapt* occurs only in skaldic poetry with non-Christian Old Norse topic. In the religious

⁵⁸ Rydbeg (1891:615) translates it as “adorned of gods”

⁵⁹ *Skáldspakarmál*, stanza 304; from *Sigurðardrápa* by Kormákr Ögmundarson

skaldic poetry, *hopt* means always ‘chains’ examples being *Kátrinarðrapá* written in ca. 14th century and *Liknarbraut* from the late 13th century. What’s more, the meaning ‘god’ appears in skaldic poetry exclusively as a part of a kenning and in non-Christian topics, while in eddic poetry and prose it occurs only in the meaning ‘bonds’. On top of that, the word *hapt* is reserved only for the formation of kennings and heitis. This is a major difference in use between *band* and *hapt*. This may indicate that the word *hapt* was used in analogy to *band* due to the fact that they share the primary meaning. The word *hapt* did not have as wide a spectre of use as *band*. On the other hand, since the word *hapt* was used in the formation of the heiti and kennings only in skaldic poetry which is considered as the texts reflecting the oldest traditions, we could suggest that the word *hapt* is of older origin. In the end, it is difficult to determine which came first - *hapt* as ‘god’ or *band* as ‘god’.

Unlike *hopt*, the word *bond* was often related to the idea of ‘binding gods’, while *hopt* functions in relation to the collectivity of the deities. Simek (2010:11), led by Edith Marold’s analysis of the skaldic sources in which she noticed that the word *bond* as combined with the verb *reka* and *vesa* (1981:75), concludes that the word *bond* shows strong connections to religious practices and that it may refer to gods as protectors of land or as holding the land together against the new and foreign influences. In prose the word does not denote its religious component, but is rather used to denote any kind of bond or strain, such as chains, tape, rope, belt, bandage etc. It is also used in its metaphorical meaning such as ‘relationship’ or ‘agreement’. The expression *lausn ok band*, literally meaning ‘release and bind’ refers to ‘bond of obligation’. In its religious meaning it occurs in eddic poetry only once (*Hávamál*, 109), while in skaldic poetry it is more common than *hapt/hopt*. If the word, however, is used in skaldic poetry of Christian topic, such as *Kátrinarðrápa*, *Maríudrápa*, *Ljilja*, *Liknarbraut* etc, the word means always ‘chains’ or ‘imprisonment’.

In *Hávamál* the word *bond* is used in reference to the totality of the Old Norse deities:

Ins hindra dags
 gengu hrímþursar
 Háva ráðs at fregna
 Háva höllu í
 at Bólverki þeir spurðu,
 ef hann væri með *bondum* kominn
 eða hefði hánú Suttungr of sóit. (emphasis added)

Bǫlverkr is a heiti for Óðinn which is also mentioned in *Gylfaginning*, *Skálskaparmál* and *Grímnismál* meaning ‘the evil doer’, the name Óðinn gave to himself referring to his treachery and disguise. The frost giants ask for Óðinn and if he went with ‘the gods’, not knowing Bǫlverkr was Óðinn in disguise. The use of *bǫnd* here would therefore have a similar, if not the same, function as *regin* or ‘powers’, and even *æsir*. I would suggest it is here used as a collective noun for ‘Æsir’ since the setting of the stanza is at the hall of the high one, or Óðinn. The preference for *bǫnd* in this instance instead of any other collective noun could lie in the alliteration with *Bǫlverkr*. However, in the next stanza it is stated that Óðinn swore an oath on his ring, or arm-ring. The semantic spheres of ‘binding’ and ‘gods’ might be connected through this sense of obligation of keeping an oath given to the gods. The binding can be understood literally (arm-ring is a type of a bond) and metaphorically (the sense of obligation of fulfilling an oath). The gods as receivers of an oath could be in that case understood as “binding gods” which would make more sense than Dronke’s proposition of a residual idea of chaining while entering a secret grove from the Germanic times.

In skaldic poetry the word appears in the phrase *at mun banda* ‘the will of the gods/if gods are willing’ (in *Vellekla* 8, *Bandadrápá* 2, 9) and in the *banda vé* ‘temple of the gods’ (*Vellekla* 14). The stanza 14 of *Vellekla* is reflected in the stanza 16 discussed above, both of them having a similar meaning that runs through the stanzas’ lines.

There is one occurrence of the compound *dolgband* ‘war-god’ which is found in a *lausavísa* by Glúmr Geirason. However, it has also been found in the form of *dolgbrandr*, giving a different meaning in the kenning:

Vel hefr hefnt, en (hafna
 hjǫrs berdraugar fjǫrvi)
 folkrakkr of vant fylkir
 framligt, Haraldr Gamla,
 es *dǫkkvalir* drekka
dolgbrands (fyr ver handan
 roðin sák benja rauðra
 reyr) Hôkonar dreyra. (emphasis added)

The kenning as presented here, *dǫkkvalir dolgbrands* is a matter of discussion. The word appears in both forms in different manuscripts. Ernst A. Kock in his edition of the skaldic

poetry transliterates it as *dolgrandr* as well as Finnur Jónsson who comments on both possibilities. This is just one example of the instability of the sources we deal with.

If we are to transliterate it as *dolgrandr*, the meaning of the kenning *dokkvalir* ‘blood-hawks’ which brings us possibly to ‘ravens’ with *dolgrands* ‘swords’, indicating here ‘battle’, would mean ‘birds of the dead’, the ‘dead’ reflecting the ‘blood’ in *dokkvalir*, ‘birds from the battlefield’. The stanza describes the death of Hákon in the skirmish against Haraldr. If *dolgrand* is what it has been meant for this kenning, then we get a better formulation and a more proper kenning. The word *dolgrand* ‘battle-god’ or Óðinn is qualifying *dokkvalir* where *dok-* is understood as ‘dark, black’ forming the kenning ‘Óðinn’s ravens’. This could refer to Valkyries as beings that fly onto a battlefield and pick up the dead. The first interpretation, *dokkvalir dolgrands*, could through metaphorical extension also lead to Valkyries, being then twice removed from its basic meaning.

In *Haustlög* stanza 17 we come across the phrase *bond ollu því* or ‘gods decided/caused it so’, but in stanza 7 of the same poem, Þjóðólfr uses *regin* to address the gods and *bond* for the bonds of Loki. Once again *regin* seems to be used in order to emphasize the greatness compared to the one imprisoned, while *bond* seems to show some kind of instability in use.

Although the words *hapt* and *bond* share the same primary and poetic meaning, their usage is different. In prose we will find more examples of *bond* than *hapt*, but in both cases the meaning would be the exclusively primary one, i.e. that of fetters or bonds. The only time we come across the meaning “gods” in prose is in Snorri’s listing of different names for gods. Snorri himself does not use the words with this meaning throughout the text, but rather uses *guð* or *goð*. In the primary meaning, Snorri uses *band* rather than *hapt*. In the texts of Christian topic, *band* often refers to ‘bonds of flesh’, or in reference to torturing of the Christians as they hold on to their belief. This might be important when trying to make sense between *band* ‘fetters’ and *band* ‘gods’. It could be that *band* due to its stylistic pre-Christian meaning was chosen to denote torturing of the saints, yet the use of *band* in the meaning ‘gods’ was not as common to make a big impact in the course of the change of the religion.

In diplomatic texts, the word *hapt* seems to be preferred for “bonds” and “obligation” rather than *band*.

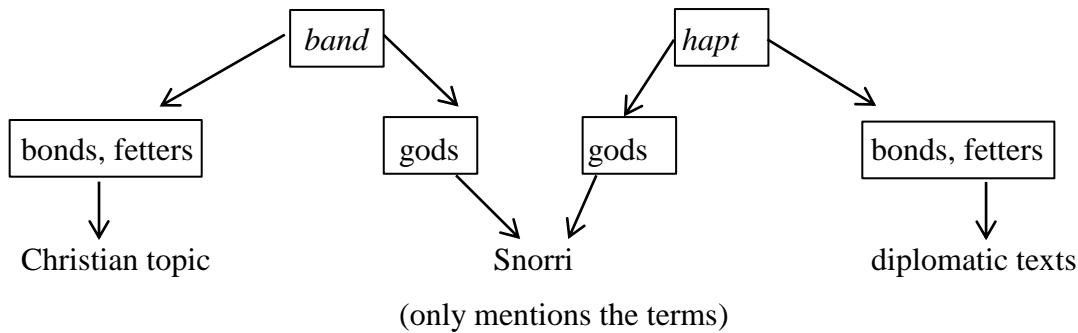


Fig. 10: The schematic representation of the use of the words *band* and *hapt* in prose texts

The only time when these two words meet and are used in the meaning ‘gods’ are in Snorri’s enlisting of the various terms one could use to refer to Old Norse deities. Prose obviously cannot tell us much about the use of these words and what they implied. Snorri shaped our understanding of the non-Christian world as he tried to explain the past for himself and his readers. Data shows that these words were not commonly used in addressing deities, but had a specific purpose which can be read out from poetry – either as a choice for heitis and kennings or in order to conform to the rules of metrics.

In poetry the difference of use between the words is more explicit. The word *band* in its meaning ‘gods’ is used once in eddic poetry (*Hávamál*), while *hapt* does not appear at all. The meaning ‘bonds, fetters’ is more common with *hapt* than with *band*, which does not appear in eddic poetry at all beside once in the meaning ‘gods’. Both of the words in the meaning ‘gods’ appear in skaldic poetry, with *band* being more commonly used than *hapt*. The word *hapt* seems to function exclusively as part of heitis and kennings, while *band* is used only as a collective noun. In the skaldic poetry with Christian thematic, the word *band* is more common with the meaning ‘fetters’. In *Haustlǫng* the word *regin* is used although some stanzas further the poet uses the word *bǫnd* to denote ‘gods’. It seems *bǫnd* could be used in the same way as *regin*, a collective noun for ‘gods’, but most likely to denote *Æsir*, therefore *regin* equals *bǫnd* while *bǫnd* equals *Æsir*.

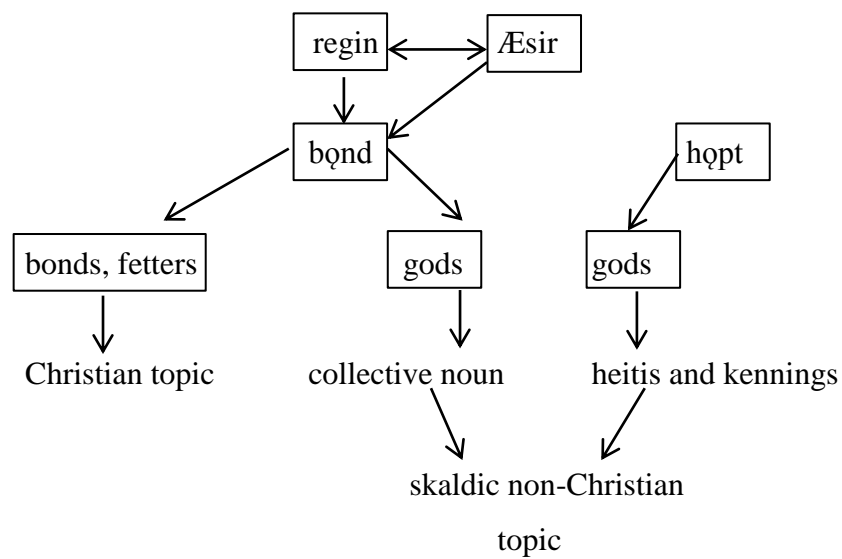


Fig. 11: The use of the words *band* and *hapt* in the skaldic poetry

The question is what these findings indicate and how did the division *band/hapt* into ‘bonds, fetters’ and ‘gods’ happen. I have here tried to propose some ideas on the connection between ‘gods’ and ‘bonds’, yet due to the small amount of data it is difficult to make a hypothesis that would be more firm than another.

4.5. The lexeme *áss* and its plural *æsir*

The word *áss* is best known to us in its plural form *Æsir*. In this form we understand it in reference to the clan of the ruling gods in the Old Norse deities and as contrasted to the gods representing fertility – *Vanir*. The form in plural also has another, more general meaning – it can also refer to all the gods, both *Vanir* and *Æsir*. In *Zoëga* both uses are mentioned, as well as in Cleasby and Vigfússon. The word has its origin in Proto-Germanic **ansir* or **ansuz*. The Gothic word *anses* was used by Jordanes for non-Christian gods, probably rendering the word the Latin *semidei* ‘demi-gods’.⁶⁰ The Proto-Germanic word is identical with Sanskrit *ásu-* ‘life’. The singular form of the word seems to be used only in namecreating for particular gods, such as *Ása-Þórr*. This function was used only in poetry, both skaldic and eddic.⁶¹ The name *Ása-Þórr* is mentioned in *Gylfaginning* besides listing of the gods when Skýmir and Útgarða-Loki make fun of Þórr’s failure of showing the strength he is known of.

In prose the word *æsir* is used to encompass several meanings, all of them in reference to the Old Norse gods. In prose it appears usually in plural,⁶² while in singular it is more common in poetry, especially mythological eddic poetry. I have divided the meaning of the word *æsir* according to use as we find it in prose into four groups. The word could be used for:

1. all the Old Norse gods
2. a group of the ruling gods, as opposed to *Vanir*
3. the gods (or people) who have migrated from Asia
4. particular god, usually either Óðinn or (most often) Þórr

The word as used in prose mostly appears in Snorri’s writings, i.e. *Edda* and *Heimskringla*. In other instances the word appears in *Landnámabók*, *Viga-Glúms saga* and *Bósi saga*. In *Landnámabók* it is a part of an oath given at the þing assembly in legal actions:

hverr sa madr er þar þvrfri logskil af henndi at Leysa at domi skyllði adr eid vinna at þeim baugi. ok nefna ser vatta íj eda fleiri. nefni ek i þat vætti. skyllði hann segia at ek vinn eid at baugi Log eid. Hialpi mer sva Freyr ok Niordr ok

⁶⁰ Mierow, 1915, chapter 13

⁶¹ Snorri mentions *Ása-Þórr* in the listing of the deities in *Gylf.22/30*, but is also mentioned as the son of Alföðr and Jörðin in *Gylf. 13*. In other places, in *Gylf 38, 41, 42 and 55*, *Hárbarðsljóð 52* *Ása-Þórr* is used only when ridiculing Þórr or out of contempt

⁶² except for the already mentioned *Ása-Þórr* and in listing the twelve *Æsir*, each of them being given the epithet of being an *Áss*

hinn almatki os sem ek mvn sva sok þersa sækia eda veria eda vitni bera eda kvidu eda dóma sem ek veit rettazt ok sannast ok hellst at Logum ok oll logmøet skil af hendi leysa þav er vndir mik koma medann ek er a þersu þingi.⁶³

In *Viga-Glúms saga* the word is also used a part of an oath uttered by a chieftain Glúmr Eyjólfsson when evading the answer of having committed the murder he was accused of through word-play. He begins in naming his witnesses and then swears “at ek vinn hofseið at baugi, ok segi ek þat Æsi, at ek vark at þar ok vák at þar ok rauðk at þar odd ok egg, er Þorvaldr krókr fekk bana.”

The legal proceedings were closely tied to the belief as it appears from such examples. The gods were seen as law givers and could be called upon as witnesses. This connection implicates sovereignty and “binding gods” that bind through oaths making a parallel to the previously discussed terms *bond* and *hopt*. The gods usually called upon were, as mentioned in the example above, Freyr, Njorð and an unnamed Ás, often interpreted as Þórr⁶⁴. Cleasby and Vigfússon mention the analogy between modern Swedish word *aska* meaning ‘lightning, thunder’ which derived from *ás-ekja*, or Þórr’s chariot, showing the possible connection between this expression and using the word *Áss* for Þórr. Yet, we can see in the examples in prose that the word *áss* is also used for Óðinn, Loki, Bragi, Ríg, Týr and several other deities. However, there is a clear distinction between using *áss* for Þórr and Óðinn, as opposed to the use for other deities. This conundrum will be further discussed when addressing the *áss* in Old Norse poetry from which we can draw some closer conclusions on which deity is the *Áss* in the oath formulas.

Some scholars propose the Christian influence in formation of the oaths quoted above⁶⁵ since there is no evidence for this formula in sources older than the 13th century. Jan de Vries strongly dismisses this argument and discusses the word *almáttugr* which he argues refers to ‘magical power’ (1931:74) in connection to *áss*.

Although there are similar formulations in Latin (*Sic me adjuvet Deus*) and Old French (*Si m’ait Diex*), according to E.B.Taylor (1876) they seem to be the translations of the Germanic oaths. However, the Latin form was used in 802 in an oath of fealty in the

⁶³ Jónsson & Jónsson 1892-1896

⁶⁴ by Cleasby and Vigfússon and by Bosworth and Toller

⁶⁵ Boor, 1930

capitularies of Charlemagne, which was later on spread in Old French.⁶⁶ An instruction to forming an oath can be found in Jewish tradition as well, in Numbers 30:2 from which the similar practice can be seen: "When a man voweth a vow unto the Lord, or sweareth an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth". All these examples pose an uncertainty on the origin of the deity invocation in oaths and one can only say that this practice seems to have been widespread. This will not be further discussed as the aim is to observe the context where the word *áss* is used.

When it comes to the meanings of *áss* in the Old Norse prose, one can see a variety in use. Snorri himself uses almost all of the meanings mentioned above, namely, to address *Æsir* as one of the clans of the gods, as a term to cover all of the gods, and to refer to the 'historical *Æsir*' as the men who emigrated from Asia.

In *Gylfaginning*, Gangleri asks about *Æsir*: "Hverir eru æsir, þeir monnum er skylt at trúa a", and Hár answers "tolf⁶⁷ eru æsir goðkunnigir" and continues to enumerate the deities. The list includes both *Æsir* and *Vanir*. The sentence "tolf eru æsir goðkunnigir" is also peculiar since it equalizes the meaning of *æsir* and *vanir*. Both of the clans in this example seem to be named *Æsir* and the only ones of the *goðkunnigr*, or of the race of gods. The *Vanir* listed here among *Æsir* are those who have transferred after the war to the *Æsir* group, while others are unknown. From this a logical question appears - are only *Æsir* to be called 'gods' and those who have apparently joined them, and who are then the other *Vanir* since they are not mentioned as of godly race.

The second meaning Snorri uses in his *Edda* is to refer to *Æsir* as opposed to *Vanir*, but in that case he uses instead of *Æsir* the word *goð*:

Eigi er Njörðr Ása ættar. Hann var upp fœddr í Vanaheimum, en *Vanir* gísluðu hann goðunum ok tóku í mót at Ásagíslingu þann er Hœnir heitir. Hann varð at sætt með goðunum ok Vönum. (emphasis added)

In other cases, when *Æsir* are not contrasted to *Vanir*, the word *æsir* is a preferred option. It seems that according to the use of the word, *Vanir* are not of the race of gods, unlike *Æsir* who are synonymous to *goð*. In eddic poetry there is often a contrast to *álfar* and *Æsir* or *goð*.

⁶⁶ Murray, 1832:406

⁶⁷ Óðinn and Loki are not part of the list, but are mentioned as *Æsir*, most likely in order to achieve the number 12 which seems to repeat itself in the *Edda* (in *Prologue* there are always twelve of those on higher positions, in *Gylfaginning* Óðinn is said to have twelve names, similarly to the number of apostles)

Vanir pose a puzzle since they are generally established and accepted as the group of gods usually associated with fertility, which stands in high contrast to the sources and use of the term itself. According to Rudolf Simek (2010), the term *vanir* is used only three times in skaldic, and seven times in eddic poetry. Those seven occurrences in the eddic poetry are limited to five poems (2011:12). Most of the information on Vanir we find only in Snorri's writings. The scholar Lotte Motz (1996) in her analysis shows that Vanir, contrary to the popular belief, were not as closely related to agricultural fertility, but rather to the virility and power of a ruler, and had a close relation to the royal office and powers usually held by Æsir (1996:123). Simek (2010:13) also points out that relation of Njǫrðr, Freyr and Freyja to Vanir is only found in Snorri's listing of the poetic terms (e.g. *Vanaguð*, *Vananið*, *Vanadís*, *Vanr*). The term *Vanir* seems to be rather a name than plural noun for gods unlike *æsir* as can be read from *Vǫluspá* 24:

Fleygði Óðinn
ok í folk of skaut,
þat var enn folkvíg
fyrst í heimi;
brotinn var borðveggr
borgar ása,
knáttu *vanir* vígspá
völlu sporna.

This is the only place that the term is being mentioned, unlike *æsir* which is mentioned throughout *Vǫluspá*, in stanzas 17, 24 and 32.

In *Gylfaginning* Þórr is mentioned as first in the listing of the *æsir*, also with another name – Ása-Þórr and said to be “framaz [...] hann er sterkaztr allra guðanna ok manna”. In *Heimskringla* we come across a similar compound, but for Óðinn – Ása- Óðinn. In this section, Ása- Óðinn is leading the expedition to the northern lands and is described as the most noble of the *æsir* and has taught people religious practices. This prefix in genitive plural probably refers to kinship, in denoting one as of the clan of Æsir. Albert Morey Sturtevant⁶⁸ analyses the prefix in connection to Þórr, where he defines the use as meaning ‘the foremost, the strongest of the Æsir’, not only in reference to his origins, but as an ideal *áss* and an honour to his family exemplifying the primitive virtues of the strength and courage (1953:16).

⁶⁸ Sturtevant, 1953:15-16.

Another word that can support this claim is *ásmegin* ‘divine strength’, as defined by *Lexicon Poeticum* and Cleasby and Vigfússon, which is usually used in reference to Þórr when displaying his strength.

Sturtevant also draws the attention to *ásmegir* as referring to Þórr as the “son of Æsir”, but unfortunately fails to notice the term *Ása-Óðinn* in *Heimskringla*. There Óðinn is portrayed as a leader arriving from Ásaland who under the threat of the Romans (who later formed the Byzantine Empire) leads people along the path which was well known from before Snorri’s time and used as a trading route throughout the Middle Ages. In this case the prefix can be understood as a qualifying adjective, denoting a belonging of the proper noun, and used as Sturtevant proposed. It is not clear how Óðinn and Þórr are connected in this use and what is the purpose to the use of the title. According to the data, which are scarce, the meaning of the prefix is most likely related to some form of leadership and in Snorri’s *Edda*, both Óðinn and Þórr are said to be foremost in something:

Óðinn er æztr ok elztr Ásanna.

Hár segir: ‘Þórr er þeira framast; sá er kallaðr Ásaþórr eða Qkuþórr. Hann er sterkastr allra guðanna ok manna.’

However, while *Ása-Óðinn* is used only once, *Ása-Þórr* occurs six times. It seems this term was preferably used for Þórr, although five of those examples appear in Snorri’s *Edda* only.

At another instance, Snorri calls Æsir *Asiamenn*. In *Sqrla þátrr* Æsir are from *Asialand*, or *Asiaheimr* where they have their fort Ásgard and Óðinn as their king. Both examples are an obvious folk etymology of the word in the attempt to prove the origin of the Scandinavian people as closely connected to those of the great nations of the past and as a part of European history. In the *Prologue* of Snorri’s *Edda*, Ásgard (rendered as “Asian city”) is said to have been Troy (in *Tyrkland*), thus relating the Old Norse traditions and myths to the great Greco-Roman myth. Þórr is, however, said to be the grandson of Priam and his descendant was Óðinn who then led others to the northern lands. On the other hand, in *Ynglinga saga* Troy is never mentioned, but the expedition from Asia can be found in the text. Snorri obviously uses folk etymology as a literary device to connect Norse tradition to the European one, and possibly as an explanation for the, what he regarded as, false beliefs.

In *Morkinskinna* the word *æsir* is used as part of *interpretatio nōrronae* of the Grecian gods and heroes found in the Hippodrome in Constantinople, Byzantium. Another instance of

such translation appears in *Klements saga*⁶⁹ where it says how Emperor Trajan forced Clement to worship the old gods, Þórr and Óðinn. This was a common way to translate and bring the story and the message (usually a Christian one) closer to the Scandinavian society.

In prose the word was mostly used in plural, *æsir*, and was used preferably in reference to all the deities, similarly to the occasional use of *regin* and *goð*. Singular is used only when referring to specific gods, prepositioned with an adjective or in compounds. Most of these do not pose a problem, except for addressing the unknown *áss* in the oaths and the prefix *Áss-*. It seems that compounds with *áss-* in prose occur exclusively in reference to Þórr and Óðinn, while the other gods are only modified by qualifying adjectives. When the word is in singular it is used as a generic term and not as a specific name of an individual. The same is valid for poetry; in both skaldic and eddic poetry singular is used in reference to specific gods, usually forming kennings. There is only one occurrence of such a compound for Óðinn, and that is *hrafnáss* ‘raven-god’ quoted by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*. There are more such names for Þórr, hence, he is known also as *Ásabragr* ‘Æsir-lord’ (in *Skírnismál* 33, and *Skáldskaparmál* 75) and *Ásahetja* ‘champion of the Æsir’⁷⁰ (*Skáldskaparmál* 75).

It has also been proposed that *landáss* from *Egilssaga* (chapter 56) could refer to Þórr.⁷¹ The explanation can also be found in the description of the gods; for example, Loki in *Lokasenna* leaves Ægir’s hall only after Þórr shows up, since he is the only one whose threats Loki fears, as quoted in stanza 64:

“Kvað ek fyr ásum,
kvað ek fyr ása sonum,
þats mik hvatti hugr,
en fyr þér einum
mun ek út ganga,
því at ek veit, at þú vegr”

This shows the might and respect Þórr enjoyed among the other gods despite being often ridiculed by Loki. Notwithstanding, Þórr is the only one who is not accused of hypocrisy by Loki in *Lokasenna*.

⁶⁹ Larsson, 1885:68

⁷⁰ cf. *hetja Guðs* ‘champion of God’. In that period Europe often named crusaders and knights *champions of God*.

⁷¹ Tapp, 1956:85-99

According to the examples listed, the compounds with *áss-* were more often used for Þórr than for Óðinn. Correspondingly, the *Áss* from the oaths might indeed be Þórr.

In skaldic poetry, as it has already been mentioned in some of the examples above, *áss* is primarily used in kennings, while its plural form appears only as a qualifier ‘of the gods/of Æsir’ in genitive as the name explanation, but is never used as a part of a name. For example, Iðunn is called *mey þás kunnir ellilyf ása* ‘maiden who knows the age-cure of the Æsir’ in *Haustlǫng* stanza 9, and *ása leikr* in stanza 12, but one will never find *ása-* as a part of a heiti for her. The use of the word as a qualifying noun is the most common one in skaldic poetry. It is also often used as a part of a kenning for human warriors, as in *Vellekla* 32 (*óss Fróða hríðar* meaning ‘god of (Fróði’s storm) battle’) in reference to Hákon Jarl after the war against Otto II of Germany.

In eddic poetry the word *æsir* is far more often used. In *Vǫluspá* stanza 7 *æsir* appear alone, without any opposition as to *vanir*. They build their own forts (7) and are also creators of life (17). In stanza 17 the creators of life are three of the Æsir (*æsir at húsi*) showing that there are more of them called like that. In the stanza 23 the Æsir are mentioned alongside *regin* and *ginnheilög goð*:

Þá gengu *regin* öll
 á rökstóla,
ginnheilög goð,
 ok um þat gættusk,
 hvárt skyldu *æsir*
 afráð gjalda
 eða skyldu *goðin öll*
 gildi eiga. (emphasis added)

There seems to be a clear distinction between these four instances. The word *regin* seems to be the same as *ginnheilög goð* as discussed in the chapter on *regin*, narrowing it down to three referents. The other two pose a problem since *æsir* are only a part of *goðin öll*. What’s more, *regin* seems to be referring to a juridical authority that has power over the destiny of *æsir* and *goðin öll*. It is clear that *goðin öll* are comprised of *æsir*, but the *vanir* are mentioned only in stanza 24 as ‘warlike’ and that they have participated in the war. This stanza contrasts *æsir* and *vanir*, yet not much more has been told of war between Æsir and Vanir nor Vanir themselves, while the rest of the poem mentions only *æsir* as gathering after the Ragnarök. It

is troublesome to connect the pairs as in who are *goðin öll*, and who are *regin*, but also who alongside *æsir* form *goðin öll*.

The text evidence seems rather chaotic in distinguishing *goð* from *regin* or *æsir* from *vanir* and all the other possible combinations with these referents. The Æsir clan of gods stands more often in contrast to *álfar* than to *vanir*. In eddic poetry there are four instances of distinction of gods into *æsir* and *vanir*, while there are eleven instances of contrasting *æsir* to *álfar*. In *Völuspá* stanza 48 only *æsir* and *álfar* are mentioned:

Hvat er með ásum?
 Hvat er með álfum?
 [...]

In an example from *Hávamál* 159-60 both *æsir* and *álfar* seem to be denoted with the word *tívar*:

159. Þat kann ek it fjögurtánda:
 ef ek skal fyrða liði
 telja tíva fyrir,
 ása ok alfa
 ek kann allra skil;
 fár kann ósnotr svá.

160. Þat kann ek it fimmtánda
 er gól Þjóðrerir
 dvergr fyr Dellings durum:
 afl gól hann ásum,
 en alfum frama,
 hyggju Hroptatý. (emphasis added)

The seer claims she knows how to address the *tívar* rightly and that she distinguishes between *æsir* and *álfar*. The next stanza again presents *æsir* and *álfar* as subgroups, having different qualities. Similarly, *vanir* are often addressed as wise, while *æsir* as powerful, and strong. In *Grímnismál* 4 it seems *æsir* and *álfar* abide at the same place (“Land er heilagt, er ek liggja sé ásum ok alfum nær”), but on the other side, in the next stanza, it is stated that Freyr got Alfheim from *tívar* probably to rule over it as the context implies in this case Æsir.

In the prose introduction to *Lokasenna* it is explained that “Margt var þar ása ok alfa”. Loki a couple of times addresses those present as *ása ok alfa er hér inni eru* (in stanzas 13 and 30), Ægir’s servant Eldir states the same in the stanza 2.

When Loki insults Freyja, he says:

30. "Þegi þú, Freyja,
þik kann ek fullgörva,
er-a þér vamma vant:
ása ok alfa,
er hér inni eru,
hverr hefir þinn hór verit."

If these *álfar* are some anonymous beings the insult would contextually then not make much sense. Further in the poem, Loki makes his statement more clear to us by accusing Freyja of incest. Therefore, it seems that Freyja, Freyr and Njórðr are as related to *álfar* as they are said to be the kin of *vanir*. There are of course poems that do not make such implication, or seem rather unorganized in the use of the terminology. Alvíss in *Alvíssmál* often makes a distinction into *goð*, *álfar* and *ása synir*:

16. "Sól heitir með mönnum,
en sunna með *goðum*,
kalla dvergar Dvalins leika,
eygló jötnar,
álfar fagrahvél,
alskír *ása synir*."

At another instance he divides into *goð*, *álfar* and *ginnregin*:

30. "Nótt heitir með mönnum,
en njól með *goðum*,
kalla grímu *ginnregin*,
óljós jötnar,
álfar svefngaman,
kalla dvergar draumnjörun."

Comparing these two examples, *ása synir* and *ginnregin* seem to be referring to the same group of entities; however, the rest of the context gives a bit clearer image, though still

unorganized. In stanza 10 the deities are divided into *æsir*, *vanir* and *álfar*. In stanza 16, the poet refers to them as *goð*, *álfar* and *ása synir*. Later he mentions only *æsir* and *vanir* (26), and at the end *goð*, *vanir* and *álfar*.

It seems that *goð* refers most often to *æsir* and *ása synir*, while *vanir* and *álfar* seem to be interchangeable. The word *ginnregin* does not seem to fit in the organization of the terms, while in other poems there is a clear distinction between *vanir* and *álfar*. For example, Freyr in *Skírnismál* also makes a division into *æsir* and *álfar* in stanza 7, and later in the poem when Skírnir introduces himself to Gerðr she asks him if he is of *æsir* or *álfar* or *visa vanir*. At another instance, Óðinn in *Vafþrúðnismál* 38 asks Vafþrúðnir how did Njörðr become one of *ása sonum* if he was not born one and where does he then come from:

Seg þú þat it tíunda,
 alls þú *tíva* rök
 öll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
 hvaðan Njörðr of kom
 með *ása sonum* -
 hofum ok hörgum
 hann ræðr hundmörgum -
 ok varð-at hann *ásum* alinn.

The word *tívar* seems to comprise all the deities, much as the word *regin* which can be discerned from the collocation – *tíva rök*. The words *æsir* and *ása synir* seem to be also more or less synonymous, and this is the pairing one comes across quite often.

Vafþrúðnir answers him that Njörðr was created in Vanaheim by the *regin* and was given to *goð*. After the ruin of the gods he will return to *vísun vǫnum*. Hence, it seems that *regin*, *tívar* and *goð* function in the same way, referring to some juridical body that makes decisions involving *Æsir* and *Vanir*. Furthermore, if Njörðr was created by *regin*, probably in a similar way as Óðinn was, from a primordial being, this might give us an answer on who would be *regin* when not referring to *Æsir* or all the gods.

Óðinn is in this poem being referred to as an *áss*, but he is distinguished from *regin*, while *æsir* are in turn, as stated above, distinguished from *goð*:

50. "Fjölð ek fór,
 fjölð ek freistaðak,
 fjölð ek of reynda *regin*:

Hverir ráða *æsir*
 eignum *goða*,
 þá er sloknar Surta logi?"

In *Grímnismál* there is a different division and it is more or less consistent throughout the poem. In stanza 4 the poet writes that *æsir* and *álfar* live together, until the *regin* go into the destruction. Here again we have a term, *regin*, that reminiscence to Titans, but also *Æsir*. These *regin* seem to be the *tívar* from the following stanza who gave *Álfheimr* to Freyr. The *áss* mentioned in the next stanza is *Óðinn* who sits on *Valaskjálf*, a seat which he has set for himself. The first two lines state it was the *blíð regin* who made *Valaskjálf*, hence, *Óðinn* is one of the *regin*. Further, from the stanza 37, *blíð regin* seem to be referring to the same entity as *æsir*:

[...]
 en und þeira bógum
 fálu blíð regin,
 æsir, ísarnkol.

In stanza 42 *allra goða* appears to be the same as *ása synir*, and in 44 *Óðinn* is called *Óðinn ása*. *Óðinn* as the leader of *ása synir*, *æsir*, *allra goða* and *sigtíva synir* (45) might be, according to the use in *Grímnismál*, also referred to as one of the *regin*. It seems that these distinctions are rather a variant exhibiting tendency to repeat the same idea through synonyms. The eddic poem *Alvissmál* is a good example of this. The poem itself seems to serve poetic purposes, as an aid for poets. It seems to function as a catalogue of poetic terms rather than a mythography.

According to all the examples and findings on how the word *áss* was used in prose and poetry, one can say the use differs from prose to poetry and from skaldic to eddic poetry.

In prose the word served as an umbrella term for all the gods which were usually understood as one of the clans. Snorri uses it also as a historic term and as a common noun. The word has later become a part of the everyday language and one finds it in oath formulas which were, as those today, considered binding. The most prominent *áss* is *Þórr*, unlike in poetry where this position is clearly reserved for *Óðinn*. In skaldic poetry it is used primarily as a part of kennings, most often as a qualifier. It appears less often than in the eddic poetry where the word *æsir* has a different role – it is used in distinctions between deities, and was often used

as synonymous to other words from the semantic field. The word would be used to refer to most often all the deities, or in contrast to others, as presented:

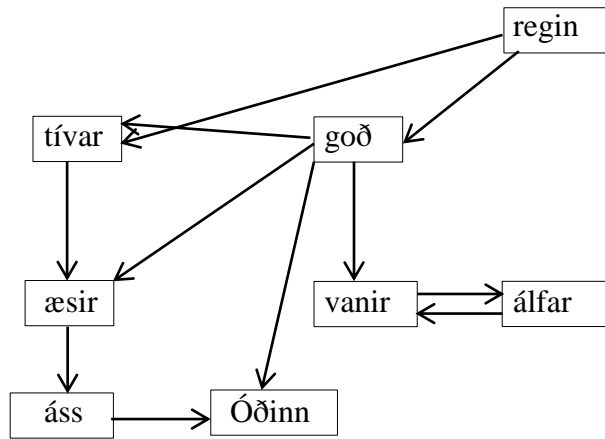


Fig. 12: the use of the word *æsir* in eddic poetry

In the eddic poetry *ása synir* is synonymous to *æsir*, and *æsir* often stands in contrast to *vanir* who in turn seems to be synonymous to the word *álfar*. *Óðinn* is often called *áss*, and *æsir* would be used synonymously to *goð*, *ginnheilǫg goð* and *blið regin*. The words *ginnheilǫg goð* and *blið regin* are also used as synonyms. In a couple of poems *tívar* and *sigtívar* are used and contextually they have the same function as *regin*, e.g. they make decisions on the tribute paid after the war. At another instance, *sigtíva synir* are used in the same way as *ása synir*, i.e. equalizing *æsir* and *tívar*. In *Lokasenna* the Vanir are named *álfar*, and both *æsir* and *álfar* called *ginnheilǫg goð*.

4.6. The lexeme *dróttinn*

The word *dróttinn* is unlike the rest of the nouns of the semantic field defined and used as a singular masculine. The other constituents of the field are plural group nouns, and *dróttinn* hence does not formally fit that well into the semantic field as its other members. The word *dróttinn* means ‘lord’, ‘master’, ‘king’ or ‘chieftain’ and it appears in a variety of uses, all within the semantic borders of ‘leadership’. This word is equally important to analyse, since it has changed within use from its primary meaning, into a specialized meaning used to address the deities, especially Christian one. The most intriguing aspect of the word is its use for Old Norse gods by Snorri, despite *dróttinn* referred solely to God, Jesus and as a common noun in both literary artworks and legal texts of this period.

The dictionaries do not elaborate on this use much, or sometimes do not even mention it. Thus, *Zoëga* defines it as ‘lord, master’, ‘king’ or ‘chief’ and ‘the Lord’, *Fritzner ordbog* does not mention the use for Old Norse gods, while this meaning in *Lexicon Poeticum* is packed together with common meaning ‘lord, master’. The meaning ‘Christian god’ has its own entry, and rightfully so, since it seems to be more commonly used in the literary Icelandic period than in reference to non-Christian gods. In the de Vries etymological dictionary, the word is defined as ‘lord, prince’ originating in Proto-Germanic **druhtinaz* its derivatives being found in all the Germanic languages. In the Old Norse prose texts the word is usually used in its primary meaning ‘lord, master’, and occasionally ‘king’.

In the Old Norse prose texts the word is used in a variety of contexts and meaning. According to these findings we can distinguish seven different forms of use of the word *dróttinn*. Most of the meanings can be summed up into one main meaning, and that is ‘lord’. However, the topic and the type of the text imply slight oscillations. Most common use was as ‘lord, master’ as in contrasting “*þræl eða dróttinn*”, as for example in *Grágás*: “þræll sa er vegr at drottne sinom eða at drottingo eða born þeirra eða fostr”⁷².

Another common use is in the meaning ‘leader’ or ‘king’ rather than ‘slave-owner’ or ‘master’:

Dyggvi hét sonr hans, er þar næst réð lönðum ... Dyggvi var fyrst konungr kallaðr sinna ættmanna, en áðr váru þeir *dróttnar* kallaðir, en konur þeira dróttningar, en drótt hirðsveitin. (*Heimskringla*⁷³)

⁷² Finsen, 1974:178

⁷³ Jónsson, 1900-1901:32

Joseph [...] fyrir þat varð hann *dróttinn* allz egipta. (Gyðinga saga⁷⁴) (king)

I Paradiso ere inn fugl, er Fenix heitir, [...] ok er hann *dróttin* yfir allum fuglum. (Alfróði⁷⁵)

hann sialfi er konungr konunga ok *dróttin dróttna*. (Pétrs saga postula⁷⁶)

All these examples do not have the same referent – the first one refers to a person with a certain power compared to the others, second one refers to the title of a king, third one to the ‘leader’ or ‘ruler’, while fourth one is a reference to Jesus Christ. However these examples might differ from one another, they all share the same notion, and that is being the foremost among its kind and wielding a certain amount of power.

The third kind of use of the word *dróttinn* appears in the legal texts and means ‘landowner’ or in reference to any kind of possession:

þá skal leiglendingr nemna lagadóm landsdróttins síns. hvárt er hann er til kominn eða eigi. oc fõri fram vátta sína þá at hann stemni *dróttni* þangat. þá er leiglendingr lauss við vörn.⁷⁷

The phrase *dýrt er dróttins orð* “powerful are master’s words” is closely connected to the first and second meaning. It is common in legal texts and refers to the power a leader has over his people or an owner over his slave.

The word *dróttinn* is also used as a title of respect and it is mostly attested in the Biblical texts, in reference to Peter, Paul, Daniel etc:

komit heilir dróttnar minir at vitia þrels ýcars [...] Seþ eigi er postola Gvþs Petar oc Pól es her ero comnir.⁷⁸

The mention of *dróttinn* as for non-Christian gods can be found in Snorri’s writings, namely, *Ynglinga saga* and *Skáldskaparmál*. This use can also be found in *Fídesar saga*, *Spesar ok Karítasar* for Old Norse gods, and in *Karlamagnúss saga* for Roman pantheon. *Fídesar saga*

⁷⁴ Wolf, 1995:18

⁷⁵ Kálund, 1908:4

⁷⁶ Unger, 1874:24

⁷⁷ Keyser & Munch, 1846-1849:239

⁷⁸ Bjarnarson, 1878:134

is a translation of the Latin work *Fides spes caritas* on the lives of the group of martyred saints. Here Þórr and Óðinn are rendered from the Latin *dominatoribus vrbis*⁷⁹:

blótit háleit ok ítarlig goð vár sýnilig, ok dyrðkit *dróttna* vára Þórr ok Oðinn⁸⁰

In this case we encounter the lordship of Christ in parallel to the non-Christian gods. As it has been shown in the previous chapters, such rendering was common, but it is intriguing that *dominatoribus vrbis* would be translated as *dróttna vára Þórr ok Oðinn*. Further in the text the emperor Adrianus accuses the three sisters as follows: “Þér [...] hafit illyrðt Óðin en lastat Þór ok Baldr, en skammt Frigg ok Freyju ok Gefjun í orðum, ok lastat ǫll goð vár, ok segit þau ónýt, ok eyðit allri vegsemð þeira”. The reason for using the title of Christ and the most prominent gods of the Old Norse myth might also be one of the literary strategies in showing the fallacy in worshipping non-Christian gods and obstinance of those practicing the false religion. The reasoning behind it is that those who believe in false gods are calling them with the same names as the Christians call their God, therefore showing falsehood of the same deities through the negative characters who believe in them.

Due to the little amount of evidence, one can only speculate as to the reason which can ultimately show up to be only a direct translation of Latin *dominator* ‘ruler, lord’. Snorri also addresses in *Ynglinga saga* the twelve temple-gods or priests (*hofgoðar*) as *díar* and *dróttnar*:

En í borginni var höfðingi sá, er Óðinn var kallaðr; þar var blótstaðr mikill. Þat var þar siðr, at tólf hofgoðar váru æztir; skyldu þeir ráða fyrir blótum ok dómum manna í milli. Þat eru díar kallaðir eða dróttnar.⁸¹

This is the only instance where he names Old Norse deities *dróttnar* similarly to other plural nouns. At another point he names Þórr *dróttinn Þjálfar ok Rǫsku* ‘lord of Þjálfar and Rǫskva’ alongside other kennings he enlists in his *Skáldskaparmál* where the word *dróttinn* indicates ownership.

Seeing that the word, as it will be shown, is not used in this meaning in poetry, neither eddic nor skaldic, it is peculiar why Snorri did use it, especially since *dróttinn* seems to have been a standard in addressing the Christian God and Jesus. If the word is used to denote someone who sways a certain amount of power over the other, the Old Norse gods might by

⁷⁹ Lassen, 2011:103

⁸⁰ Unger, 1877.

⁸¹ Jónsson, 1893:11

being addressed as *dróttnar* show a certain opposition, but also a dangerous match in their power over people, compared to Christ and God.

Lastly, the second most prevailing use in prose works, after meaning ‘leader’, ‘chieftain’ and ‘master’, can be found in the Biblical and Christian texts in reference to Christian deities. Common phrases are *dróttinn guð*, *dróttinn a himni*, *almattigr guð dróttinn*, *mínn dróttinn* and similar. It is also used to render an order of angels in Christian mythology, from Latin *dominationes*, having the same referent as Latin ‘lord’.

The word *dróttinn* is in some cases used to refer to God, and other times to Christ. It also seems that the Latin words *dominator*, *deus* and *dominus* are in the translation interchangeable, hence at some occasions *deus* will be rendered as *guð* and other times as *dróttinn*. For example, collocation *dróttinn mínn* comes from *deus mei*, and Latin *dominus* is sometimes translated as *guð dróttinn* or even *guð dróttinn eðr herra* (e.g. “Her hit fyrsta sinn kallar bókin guð dróttinn eðr herra.”⁸²) as was the similar case in adding Þórr and Óðinn as part of the translation in *Fídesar saga*.

In eddic poetry, the word *dróttinn* appears in the meaning “lord”, “leader”. It appears only once in reference to an Old Norse deity, namely Þórr, in Hymiskviða, stanza 20:

Bað hlunnkota
hafra dróttinn
 átrunn apa
 útar færa,
 en sá jötunn
 sína talði
 lítla fýsi
 at róa lengra. (emphasis added)

The expression *hafra dróttinn* ‘lord of the goats’ denotes Þórr since he rides the chariot pulled by goats. In such cases *dróttinn* functions as a descriptive, while in for instance *þursa dróttinn* for Þrymr⁸³ it functions as an apposition, denoting his title. Þórr is not known for being the king of the goats, while Þrymr truly is titled as the king of jötnar.

At another instance, in *Grípisspá* stanza 5, the word appears in the phrase *skatna dróttinn* ‘ruler of heroes’ for Gripir, Sígurðs uncle, and *gumna dróttinn* ‘lord of the folk’ in

⁸² Unger, 1862.

⁸³ in Þrymrskviða 6, 11, 22, 25, 30, 31

Atlakviða for Gunnarr, king of Burgundians. Both of them ruled lands and were widely known.

From these few sources it can be concluded that the word in eddic poetry was not used in order to denote an Old Norse god, but rather leadership and kingship. The only eddic poem that uses *dróttinn* to refer to a Christian deity is *Sólarljóð*, a Christian vision that combines both pre-Christian and Christian concepts. The word is used to address the Christian God, as for example in stanza 23 – *heilagr dróttinn*, or *dróttinn hefr skapat dularheim*. In such cases, *dróttinn* is referring to *guð*, while in *hafra dróttinn* for Þórr it serves in the formation of a kenning, and as an apposition for Þrymr.

In skaldic poetry the word was used mostly in reference to the Christian God, as an independent lexeme and as a part of a kenning. For instance, the word in collocations such as *mínn dróttin*, *dróttinn guð*, *dómur dróttins* functions as an independent lexeme, while in e.g. *mærðvalds dróttinn* ‘the glory-ruler of mankind’ (in *Brúðkaupsvísur* 3) or *dróttinn dáðstéttar dags lands* ‘the Lord of the deed-host of day’s land’ (in *Leiðrvísan* 24) functions as an element of a kenning for God or Christ. The element *dróttinn* refers to the power of the referent, and it is similarly used in the meaning for ‘king’. Second most common meaning is that of a common noun which was used in the formation of kennings for ‘king’ (e.g. *dróttinn Hǫrða* ‘lord of the Hǫrðar’ in *Magnússdrápa* 3, *Snjallr dróttinn Þrændi* ‘the brave lord of Þrændir’ in *Víkingavísur* 13 etc). These kennings most often include epithets as *dýrr* ‘dear’ and *dýrðar* ‘glorious’, again accentuating the power of the referent.

The word was also used for Old Norse gods in skaldic poetry, yet it has been attested only in Snorri’s quotes of skalds in his *Skáldskaparmál*. Hence, he cites in *Skáldskaparmál* stanza 96 the fifth stanza of *Haustlǫng* where a kenning for Óðinn with *dróttinn* as its element appears:

Fljótt það *foldar dróttinn*
 Fárbauta mǫg Várar
 þekkiligr með þegnum
 þrymseilar hval deila,
 en af breiðu bjóði
 bragðvís at þat lagði
 ósvífrandi ása
 upp þjórhluti fjóra. (emphasis added)

The word *fold* is an Old Norse poetic word for ‘earth, ground, field’ which refers to the goddess Jǫrð, as can be also read in *Alvíssmál*: ‘Jǫrð heitir með mǫnnum, en með Ásum fold’ (stanza 10). Jǫrð is described as being a rival to Óðinn’s wife Frigg, and from that context *foldar dróttinn* refers to Óðinn, him being Jǫrð’s lord. Óðinn is in Snorri said to have created the Earth, Jǫrð thus being antropomorphomized, and declared as owned by Óðinn.

At another instance, Snorri quotes Hallvarðr and his description of Canute the Great and his role of protector of the land is being equalized to that of the God as a protector of the Heavens. Comparing a king’s role on earth to that of God’s in Heaven was a doctrine in the literature and society of the medieval period.

At two other instances the word *dróttinn* refers to kings Harald harðráði and Óláfr Tryggvason:

Vargs var munr flat er margan
 —menskerðir stakk sverði
 myrkaurriða markar—
minn dróttinn rak flótta (stanza 322, *Skáldskaparmál*, for Harald harðráði)

Skiliðr em ek við skylja,
 skálmǫld hefir því valdit;
 vatti ek virða *dróttins*;
 vil er mest ok dul flestum (stanza 397, *Skáldskaparmál*, for Óláfr Tryggvason)

According to the medieval idea that a ruler has been bestowed earthly powers by God, it was frequent to address a king and God in the same way.

The word *dróttinn* in addressing an Old Norse deity appears only one more time, in *Sonatorrek*, stanza 22 in addressing Óðinn with a kenning *dróttinn geirs* “the lord of the spear” according to his signature weapon Gungnir.

The word *dróttinn* is rather closely tied to legal titling, as an ‘owner’, ‘leader’ or ‘king’, and as a designate for the Christian God and Christ. The only instances of an Old Norse god being referred to as *dróttinn* in skaldic poetry can be found in Snorri’s *Edda* and *Sonatorrek*. In such examples *dróttinn* is used similarly to other nouns in the semantic field. These cases exemplify only the use of the word within kennings. However, kennings were not reserved for addressing Old Norse gods, but also the Christian God and kings.

In eddic poetry there is only one example of a kenning being used in denoting a god, Þórr, while the rest of the use refers to a king or a leader. In prose we encounter similar cases; one kenning for Þórr in Snorri's *Edda* and as a collective noun in *Heimskringla*. The other two examples of such use are translations of Latin texts where the referents are any non-Christian god, translated as Old Norse or left in the original, for example, as those of the Roman pantheon.

Snorri in this case deviates from what seems to be general and more common use of the word. The reason for this can be found in the *Prologue* to *Gylfaginning* and at the beginning of the *Ynglinga saga*. Snorri uses a euhemeristic or historical approach in dealing with the myths of pre-Christian Scandinavia and in both of these prologues the Æsir are treated the same, unlike in *Gylfaginning* where Snorri switches to mythography. If Snorri's goal was to show the connection between the beliefs from the mythological stories and his own as a Christian, the word *dróttinn* might have been used to achieve this goal. Since *dróttinn* in Snorri's time was not a word used for anything beyond the sphere of Christian religion or as a common noun, the connection between *dróttinn* and the Christian God might be his intervention in support of Christianity – gods are merely human, and they were elevated to the position of gods because people forgot the name of God. His works therefore seem to be apologetic and in favour to the pre-Christian Scandinavian society, but also in support of Christianity, unlike clerical writings which often portray the Old Norse gods as demons or men in disguise. The word *dróttinn* might indicate Snorri's attempt in showing the belief of his forefathers as advancing towards the Christian truth.

4.7. The lexeme *díar*

The term *díar* poses a problem for our understanding of the structure of the Old Norse myths. The word occurs only in Snorri's texts, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Ynglinga saga*. It is a plural masculine noun which does not appear in eddic nor skaldic poetry, besides Snorri's quote of Kormákr. Zoëga defines it as 'gods or priests', de Vries explains it as a word used exclusively for poetic reasons with its origins in Old Irish *día* 'god'. Other scholars, such as Hermann Reichert (2005:398) connects Proto-Germanic **teiwaz* to Proto-Indo-European **deiwós* 'clear sky' and to Greek *Θεοί*. In the course of the development of languages from Proto-Indo-European, both *θ* and *d* have derived from PIE **dh*, hence Old Norse *díar* and Greek *Θεοί* might be cognates, deriving from the same word. Reichert therefore dismisses the Old Irish origin, but points out the uncertainty of the existence of the word in everyday Old Norse. According to the data, the word does not seem to be used besides those few instances. Furthermore, the half-Irish origin of Kormákr, which was often taken as a proof of the Old Irish origin of the word, also does not seem to play any role since he does not use any other Old Irish words in his texts, not to mention that Kormákr's existence is still a matter of debate.

The word seems to be a relative of *tívar* and both have the same historic path of the semantic development. The word *díar*, however, unlike *tívar*, does not seem to root itself in the use for the meaning 'gods'. In prose we find it in *Ynglinga saga*, in the section on *Asiamonnum*:

En í borginni var höfðingi sá, er Óðinn var kallaðr; þar var blótstaðr mikill. Þat var þar siðr, at tólf hofgoðar vǫru æztir; skyldu þeir ráða fyrir blótum ok dómum manna í milli. Þat eru *díar* kallaðir eða *dróttnar*; þeim skyldi þjónostu veita ok lotning alt fólk. (*Ynglinga saga*, section 2)

According to the text, the chief of Ásgarð was Óðinn, and Ásgarð was an important place for sacrifices. There were twelve temple servants who directed the sacrifices and have also had the function of judges. Snorri names them *díar* and *dróttnar*. The word *díar* appears four more times throughout the text. In section 4 he names Njǫrðr and Freyr as *díar* and *blótgoða* which, especially if they were related to *blot*, translates to 'priests':

Njörð ok Frey setti Óðinn *blótgoða*, ok váru þeir *Díar* með Ásum. Dóttir Njarðar var Freyja, hon var *blótgyðja*, ok hon kendi fyrst með Ásum *seið*, sem Vönum var títt. (emphasis added)

This part comes right after Snorri's account on the war between Æsir and Vanir. According to him, *díar* and magic originate from Vanaheimr. He also points out that among the Vanir intermarriage among close relatives was allowed, hence Njörðr married his own daughter Freyja, unlike among Æsir, where it was forbidden. The very accusation of Freyja for incest is found in *Lokasenna* as well. Vanir could therefore present the negative aspect of the pre-Christian myth, while Æsir are portrayed as a positive clan or nation and ancestors to many great Norwegian families, yet misunderstood by people who elevated them to gods.

Another instance of *díar* is found in the section of migration from Ásaland, where Óðinn is said to leave together with all the *díar* and travel to *Saxland*. The *díar* were also named *hofgoðar* which supports the explanation of *díar* being the temple priests:

Hann gaf bústaði *hofgoðunum*: Njörðr bjó í Nóatúnum, en Freyr at Uppsölum, Heimdallr at Himinbjörgum, Þórr á Prúðvangi, Baldr á Breiðabliki; öllum fékk hann þeim góða bólstaði. (emphasis added)

Snorri in this section also hints to his euhemeristic explanation of the origin of idolatry as described in the previous accounts, such as in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* on the practice of worship of Freyr in Uppsala and temple dedicated to him.

The last mention of *díar* in *Ynglinga saga* is in reference to Njörðr's death, being the last of the *díar*.

As it has already been stated, the word does not appear in eddic nor skaldic poetry beside Kormákr's stanza 3 of *Sigurðardrápa*, as found in Snorri's *Skálskaparmál*, section *Goðaheiti*:

Díar, sem Kormákr kvað:

Eykr með ennidúki

jarðhljótr *día* fjarðar

breyti, hún sá er, beinan,

bindr. Seið Yggr til Rindar. (emphasis added)

Snorri seems to understand the meaning of the word as ‘gods’; however, in his writings he uses it in *Ynlinga saga* as ‘priests’. It appears that Snorri is far from consistent in his use of the terms for gods.

It seems according to the data that the word was as a noun not used to denote the collectivity of the Old Norse deities, nor in singular, unlike its feminine equivalent *dís* and *dísir*. We find *dís* in heitis for female deities, yet its use when it comes to categorization is also inconsistent. It is not clear who *dísir* are and what makes a *dís* besides being a female.

The word *dísir* appears more often and is used in the formation of heitis for female deities or supernatural beings. There seems to be several uses of the word, thus *dís* could mean ‘woman’, ‘sister’, ‘supernatural being, goddess’, ‘norn’ and was used in the formation of kennings. As a part of a kenning it was used in reference to Iðunn in *Haustlǫng* stanza 9 – *Brunnakrs bekkjar dísir* or ‘*dís* of the well-field-bench’, for Valkyries in the same poem, stanza 17 – *ímun-dísir* or ‘battle-*dísir*’ and in *Hákonarkviða* stanza 22 as *dísir hlýrna mans Hǫgna* or ‘women of the sun and moon of Hǫgni’, and once for Christian deities, possibly angels, in the Christian eddic poem *Sólarljóð* 25 – *mála dísir dróttins* or ‘the confidants of the Lord’, not to forget the kennings for the other, more common meanings, such as ‘woman’ and ‘sister’. The inconsistency of the use in skaldic poetry is more than obvious. We come across the same problem in eddic poetry and prose as well. In prose, Snorri also enumerates a vast list of terms for a woman, including *asynjur*, *nornir*, and *valkyriur* (*Skáldskaparmál*, page 40). The Christian short story *Þiðranda þáttur* is a good example of blurring the two traditions, non-Christian and Christian ones. In the story nine black-clad *dísir* or *fylgjur* riding from the north kill a young Christian man for disobeying a superstitious warning. At the end of the story, *fylgjur*, along with other creatures, are said to emerge from mounds and hills, leaving their abodes for the arrival of the new religion.

In the eddic poetry the word *dísir* is often used, yet there seems to be no obvious consistency, but it appears that the word is used for a woman of high birth. Hence, in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* stanza 51 Sigrún and Brynhildr in *Sigurðarkviða hin skamma* are called *dís skjöldunga*, and Guðrún in *Atlakviða* as *dís*. The word *dís* is also used for Norns on several occasions (in *Grímnismál* 53, *Sigrðrífumál* 9, *Hamðismál* 28). Two times the *dísir* were referred to as ‘dead women’ who abide in the mounds (in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 46), and come looking for men (as in *Atlamál* 28), and in *Reginismál* stanza 24 there is a mention of *dísir* who stand on each side of a person, probably referring to the belief that *dísir* are guardians who follow every man from their birth and leave in his death. They are also

known under the name *jóðdis*. It is not certain whether the guardians and dead women are related to *dísir* if not the same, and what is more, how are they connected to Norns. It is usually suggested that there are Norns and lesser Norns such as these guardians. Yet, the word is not reserved only in relation to lesser supernatural beings, but is rather often used in the formation of heitis for goddesses, such as *Vanadís* for Freyja as found in Snorri's *Edda*. However, he did not refer only to goddesses as *dís*. The giantess Skaði is also known as *Qndurdís* from Snorri's *Edda*, but he has also referred to her as an *áss*. It is also rather peculiar that Skaði is never in any text said to be a *jotun*. It is therefore difficult to decide upon the principal meaning of the word due to the variety of use which is, as previously mentioned, consistent only in referring to females of higher rank, either among humans or as a deity, even a goddess.

The feminine variety of the word points out to the existence of the word *díar* in the Old Norse language and shows that the word *díar* is clearly of Old Norse origin.

The feminine form is definitely inconsistently used, showing the instability of the Old Norse myth. The masculine was not attested anywhere else except in Snorri who understands it as 'gods' as seen in *Skáldskaparmál*, but also 'priests' as presented in *Ynglinga saga*. Both feminine and masculine forms cover a wide spectre of meanings and a more precise grouping of the deities seems impossible. The word *díar* is identified usually as a poetic word (as in *Lexicon Poeticum*, Zoëga), but it has not been used anywhere else but in Snorri's texts. By looking at to the findings and the use of the word, it seems Snorri created his own myths according to the mythological poetry and folklore which apparently varied and was by no means consistent. Perhaps he was trying to do what we are doing today – trying to make sense out of it.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the research was to observe how different words used to denote the Old Norse deities function depending on the topic and type of text. The focus is set on the relationship between the constituents of the *dyēus* semantic field. As it can be seen from the analysis, the use of these words shows different functions and meanings they acquire according to the type of the text. Hence, the use varies between texts with Christian topic and those with pre-Christian topic. The function and meaning also depends whether we are dealing with prose or poetry, legal texts to hagiographies, etc. Differences in use are noticeable between skaldic and in eddic poetry as well.

The words seem to acquire additional nuances of meaning which are layered on the basic one according to the context. Some of the words, as *týr*, *díar* and *dróttinn*, seem to be a later invention and have as such led to confusions on the organization of the Old Norse myth. The use of the words in this semantic field is inconsistent, and it is often not sure what do certain lexemes denote in a text. Thus, in some cases it is not sure whom the word *regin* represents – all the gods, some higher instances than Old Norse deities or Æsir. The same can be said of the lexeme *goð* which can encompass all the Old Norse deities or can refer solely to Æsir when standing in contrast to Vanir. In some other examples these words are juxtaposed and seemingly addressing different identities.

The analysis is to a certain degree both contrastive and comparative and does not focus on words in isolation, but rather looks into their interaction between the different types of texts. The use differentiates itself depending on poetry, prose, Christian topic, non-Christian topic etc. Since Snorri's works are important sources for our understanding of the Old Norse myth, it was also of relevance for this thesis to see how he uses this semantic field. What can be seen in the analysis is that Snorri is quite inconsistent in the use of these words, sometimes confusing their meanings. Moreover, he does not use the words in the same way they can be found in other prose works.

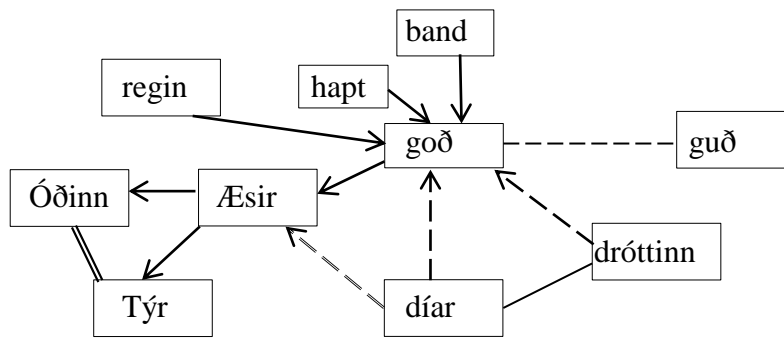


Fig. 13: the use of the *dyēus* semantic field by Snorri

Snorri uses the word *Æsir* to cover several meanings – all the Old Norse gods, a group of the ruling gods, as opposed to *Vanir*, the gods (or people) who have migrated from Asia, and a particular god, usually either *Óðinn* or (most often) *Þórr*. But this also depends on the type of the text. For instance, in *Edda* he uses *Æsir* to denote all the gods collectively and a clan of gods as opposed to *Vanir*. In *Heimskringla* he uses it as a historical term for immigrants from Asia, namely Troy. In reference to this historical explanation of the non-Christian belief, he names *Óðinn* and *Þórr* as *Ása- Óðinn* and *Ása- Þórr*, or ‘of Asia’.

At the same time he uses the word *god* in *Gylfaginning* to denote *Æsir* as contrasted to *Vanir*. Also, he terms all the Old Norse deities as *áss*, and according to Snorri even *Vanir* are grouped under *Æsir*. In *Skáldskaparmál* he only lists *regin*, *rogn*, *hopt* and *bond* as poetic words used by skalds to denote Old Norse deities. He does not show any other different use of these words and apparently parallels their meaning to that of plural neuter *god*. He uses the word *guð* to denote Christian God in his prologue to *Gylfaginning*.

The last two words, *dróttinn* and *díar*, are in *Edda* mentioned as another way of addressing Old Norse gods and are used in the text together in the same sentence, namely “*díar kallaðir eða dróttnar*”. The word *dróttinn* ‘lord’ was used to denote Christian God and as a title in the Old Norse prose. Old Norse gods could therefore represent this bridge between the two concepts, men and the material world, and gods.

In *Ynglinga saga* Snorri does not use the word *díar* in the same way as he uses it in *Edda*, but rather to denote priestly duties of men who were later passed down through generations as gods. Thus, *Njörðr* and *Freyr* were in *Ynglinga saga blótgoðar* and they were known as *díar* among *Æsir*. This might be seen as Snorri’s explanation to why people confused between priests or chieftains and gods, attributing the word *díar* to men. Snorri

implies therefore that their role was connected to the material world, but later falsely interpreted as divine, as could be also read in the prologue to *Edda*.

The word *díar* was not as common as other words forming this semantic field. Moreover, it was used only by Snorri in his quote of a skaldic stanza. One of the possibilities why this word was used to denote Old Norse deities could lie in its origin which is most likely shared with Latin *deus*, *dii*. The words *dróttinn* and *díar* are therefore closer to the meaning of *guð* which Snorri uses only to denote Christian God. The use of the terms that shift from Christian to non-Christian could reflect Snorri's apologetic idea stated in the prologue to *Gylfaginning*.

As already stated, the use, function and meaning changes depending on the type of the text, prose or poetry, skaldic and eddic. Occasionally there is a difference in use depending on the topic, e.g. in legal texts and laws the word *dróttinn* is often used to denote an owner or a master, or the word *band* being used only in reference to bonds. The focus being on the religious characteristics of the words, the use of this semantic field within prose could be sketched as:

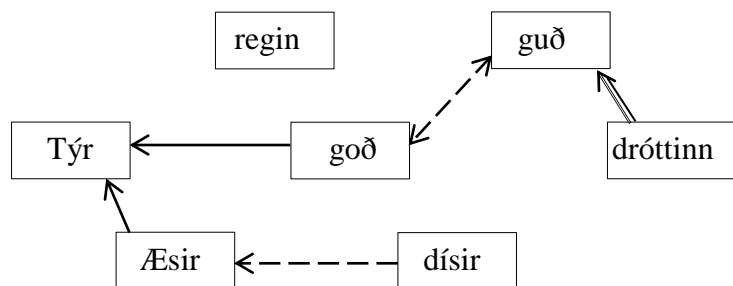


Fig. 14: the *dyēus* semantic field in prose besides Snorri

In prose the word *Týr* is used as a theonym and translation and interpretation of the Roman god Mars. He is referred to as one of the *Æsir* and *goð*.

The semantic field constituents *goð* and *guð* share the origin and are both occasionally interchangeable, especially when referring to the Christian God. They are, however, not often used in the same way, yet the differences are sometimes blurred. The word *dróttinn* is interchangeable with *guð* when denoting Christ or Christian God, while the words *hopt*, *bond* and *díar* do not occur in reference to Old Norse or any other deity. The word *regin* on the other hand became part of a fixed phrase with no mythological meaning behind it.

Unlike *díar*, the female variety *dísir* occurs and stands for female deities and spirits. Their role at times seems to stand in contrast to Christianity; they inhabit landscapes and present the female aspect and nature, unlike Christianity which represents the male aspect and organization and hierarchy.

This schematic representation is rather different to the one within Snorri's use of the semantic field. Snorri's references are skalds and their poems, which could show why there is a difference between Snorri's use and the rest of the prose texts. Yet, Snorri does not completely implement the use of the words as found in skaldic poetry:

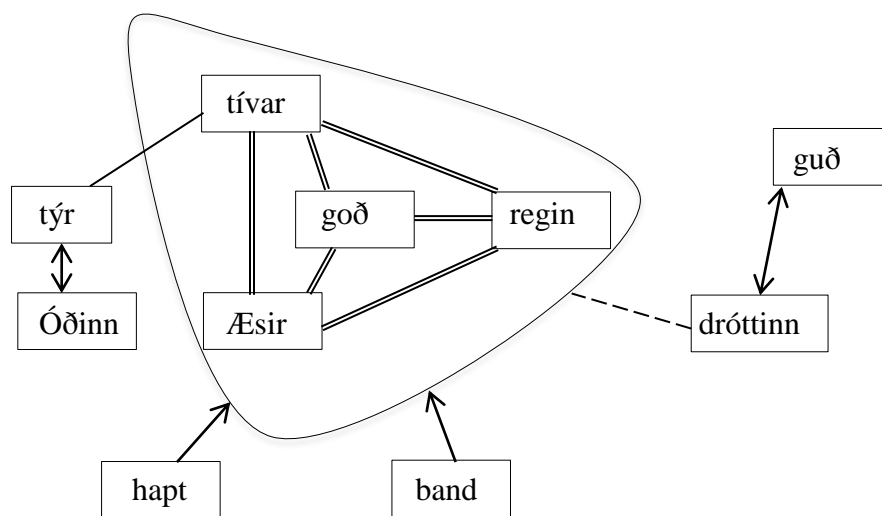


Fig. 15: the *dyēus* semantic field in skaldic poetry

Both eddic and skaldic poetry show high complexity in use of these words and sometimes confuse the reader even more. In this schematic representation the use and meanings are noticeably different to that of prose. The word *týr* is in skaldic poetry used as a building block for kennings and heitis in which case it carries its basic meaning ‘god’. The most common kennings and heitis with *týr* as a constituent are in reference to Óðinn. Other kennings are used for chieftains, warriors and kings. It seems that the word *týr* usually indicates victory, leadership or warlike aspects. Another word used in creating kennings for warriors is *regin*. Also, the word *goð* is often interchangeable with *regin*, such as in compound *goðkynning* and *regikunnr*. The word *æsir* in skaldic poetry appears in kennings, but never in name formation. The word is rather used as a qualifying genitive ‘of Æsir’ when forming kennings for deities. When such a kenning is used in reference to humans, it is then to denote the warrior qualities

of a leader or chieftain. The words *æsir*, *goð*, *tívar* and *regin* form a semantic cluster, i.e. they are most often semantically interchangeable in skaldic poetry. All of them can be used in reference to Old Norse deities equally. The additional semantic nuance of ‘victory’ and ‘leadership’ to the words *tívar* and *regin*, also refer to *Æsir* once we know the background to the meaning, the war between *Æsir* and *Vanir* from which *Æsir* came out as victorious.

The word *hopt* is used in skaldic poetry only in formation of kennings and heitis, unlike *bond* which could be used to refer to a group of deities and was not commonly used as a part of kennings, except in one questionable case - *dolgband*.

The word *dróttinn* was used only in the Christian skaldic poetry. Besides such instances, the word was used once by Snorri in quotes in *Skáldskaparmál*. This could indicate that the word *dróttinn* in reference to Old Norse gods was Snorri’s invention. The reasons might lie in connecting the Old Norse deities to lordship which was later on elevated to divinity by common people.

As do words differ in their use and function between themselves, so they differ in the use between types of poetry. Certain words that have one type of function in skaldic poetry or prose are used in eddic poetry in a different way:

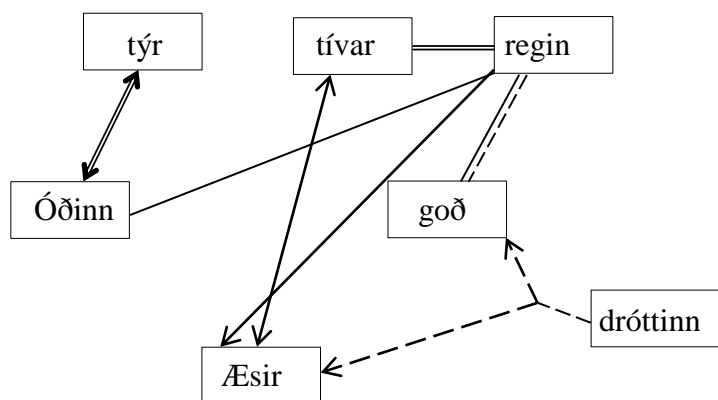


Fig. 16: the *dyēus* semantic field in eddic poetry

The word *týr* is often used in kennings and heitis for *Óðinn*. It is used as a theonym for a one-handed Old Norse god in eddic poetry only in *Lokasenna*. Because of such use which was not attested anywhere else, this could indicate that the poem might have been written based on the Snorri’s *Gylfaginning*. Another explanation could be that Snorri used *Lokasenna* as one of his sources for *Gylfaginning*.

When in the plural form *tívar* often refers to *Æsir*, especially in the compound *sigtívar* which denotes victorious gods. Considering the use of the word in kennings and the characteristics the supposed one-handed god Týr has, the word is related to victory and war.

The word *goð* in eddic poetry is almost synonymous to *regin*, except that the word *goð* was occasionally not used in exactly the same way. Thus, we encounter *ragnarøk* but never *goðarøk*. Moreover, these two words are occasionally juxtaposed, i.e. sometimes the deities are divided into *goð* and *ginnregin* as in *Alvissmál*. The word *goð* is usually in plural and in reference to *Æsir*, other times denoting all the gods.

The word *regin* is common in compounds denoting a ruler or a leader, and is thus also related to *týr* which implies warfare and victory. It is the basis for one of Óðinn's heiti, *Rognir* and as part of kennings for other deities and individuals. It is also used as an intensifying prefix, as in *regingrjót*. The word is often related to glory, so we encounter *ginnregin* and *uppregin*, as seemingly some higher instances of divine beings, but at other instances corresponding to *goð* and *æsir*. The word *æsir* is in eddic poetry, unlike in skaldic, used as a group noun, referring to the totality of deities. In this meaning it is semantically closer to other words functioning in this way, such as *regin* and *goð*.

The word *dróttinn* is found in kennings for Þórr, Þrymr and human chieftains, originating from the primary meaning of the word 'lord'. The word however functions somewhat differently when referring to Þórr, where it is used as a descriptive, unlike in kenning for Þrymr where *dróttinn* functions as an apposition.

As it can be seen, the words of the semantic field *dyēus* shift from one function and meaning to another indicating the fluidity of the borders between them. The fact that the use and function of the words varied to such an extent could imply the instability of the Old Norse myth. It rather seems there was no consistency or organization, and there is often confusion between *Æsir*, *Vanir*, *álfar* etc. The maps on the use and meaning of the lexemes in this semantic field tried to show this instability, but also to point out to the influence Snorri's works had on our understanding of the Old Norse myth. He used those words rather differently than their use in other texts, be it prose or poetry. Snorri in that way not only reshaped the past for his contemporaries, but also for us who are trying to make a sense out of Old Norse tradition and myth.

This research gives a better insight into the relationships between the lexemes, and the relationships between different types of texts, such as prose and poetry, or depending on the

topic, Christian and non-Christian. This analysis can give a better understanding of the Old Norse myth. The aim was to use a different method on the use and functioning of the vocabulary used to denote gods and deities. The research has its weaknesses, especially when it comes to understanding of the Old Norse prose, but also language itself. Skaldic poetry presents a particular challenge and its language complexity could have brought to some misinterpretations. Nonetheless, the purpose of making the structured semantic fields according to the use of the lexemes was to show how fluid and unstable these notions are and how they vary from text to text.

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