The rune-stone Ög 31
and an “elegiac” trope in Sonatorrek

By Joseph Harris

The two interpretations of the poetic coda on the rune-stone Östergötlands runinskrifter 31 are criticized and a compromise using elements of both is offered. Parallels for all readings are sought among runic inscriptions and traditional literature. Sonatorrek 4 supports the new interpretation with an elegiac topos. As a whole the new interpretation and its parallels contribute to a literary understanding of memorial stones.

In modern times two competing readings of the runic inscription Östergötlands runinskrifter 31 (Ög 31) have been published. The present article will offer a third, which may be an improvement and which gains some support by comparison with a passage in Egill Skalla-Grímsson’s poem on the death of his sons. My hope is that these two passages of “elegiac” poetic language will be mutually illuminating. Evert Salberger’s learned and very substantial study forms the basis of my investigation (1990: 5–16), but I begin with the older of the two readings.

Östergötlands runinskrifter 31

Erik Brate describes the stone in his Östergötlands runinskrifter in the national series “Sveriges runinskrifter” (1911: 29–30). Brate cites and draws on descriptions from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, early scholarship which is available to me only very selectively. The granite monument, which measures about 1 meter high and 1.6 meters wide at its base and has a cross in its middle, had been used as a threshold stone in the old church at Å in Björkekind hundred (hårad). It was moved to the churchyard with two other rune-stones (Ög 32–33) when the new church was built. The inscription reads from lower left to lower right in a text band that curves up and down, following the shape of the stone; at the lower right the inscription doubles back, boustrophedon-fashion, upside down, left to right back up the stone. Brate says it is exceptionally clear and as an inscription presents few peculiarities that affect interpretation. Brate read the main speech band as: frustin : riti : stin : ðina : iftr : sikmut
: uk : uki and the secondary, inner band as: tåi : anua : burp(i). He identified the word divided between the main band and the inner band as ukì tåi, i.e. ökêtri, masc. nom. sing. comparative of an adjective ökâtr, ON (Old Norse; essentially classical Old Icelandic) ökâtr; and this identification, discussed further below, is accepted by Salberger. Also accepted was Brate’s analysis of anua as the only instance in this inscription where a word division is not signaled by the colon; the first word, an, is common in Swedish inscriptions as the equivalent of ON hann through a familiar process of h-loss; the second, ua, is the past tense of OSw (Old Swedish) vægha, ON vega. Brate understood this verb in the meaning “transport from one place to another” and interpreted the last word as OSw byrp “burden,” i.e. the stone itself. The first and very standard part of the inscription reads “Frösten raised (ON rétti) this stone after Sigmund.” The remainder may well be intended as a verse “addition” (“tillägget,” Salberger 1990: 5) or, as I will call it, coda, where ökêtri alliterates with (h)ann. Brate explains this poetic coda: “Satsen utgör alltså ett uttryck för Fröstens sorg, i det den säger, att han förde dit stenen som vård åt den döde, mindre glad än han var, då denne levde” (1911: 30). An English translation of the coda in Brate’s sense might be: “and he, more unhappy, transported hither the burden” (i.e., the stone).

The runic stone from Å church in Björkekind hundred (Ög 31). © Antikvarisk-topografiska arkivet (ATA), Riksantikvarieämbetet 2005.
Brate’s exposition of the basic, formulaic dedication (“F. reste denna sten efter S.”) is unobjectionable, and Salberger contributes much additional material to various aspects of it, for example to the names. His differences from Brate begin with the meaning of the verb represented by ua. Salberger points out as a flaw (1990: 8) that Brate’s gloss “ditförde” derives from Fritzner (1954–72 [1886–96]) and West Norse rather than from attestations in Old Swedish. Söderwall’s dictionary of Old Swedish (1884–1918, 1926–73) offers a range of meanings that parallel those of Fritzner, but lacks an exact equivalent of Fritzner’s “føre fra et Sted til et andet” (III 887–88, meaning 2). Salberger will eventually choose another familiar sense of the verb, “to kill,” attested in both Fritzner and Söderwall, but for this meaning he obviously cannot accept Brate’s “burden” as the object of the verb.

Brate’s final spelling, burpi, represents some indecision about whether to read burp or burpi, the latter counting the text-band frame (at the same time part of the cross) as a concluding i-rune, but Brate duly noted the considerable space between p and the vertical line that could, in a pinch, be taken as an i-rune. He was clearly inclined to read burp. Since OSw offers both a byrp and a byrpi, both “burden,” the difference was not crucial to Brate’s interpretation. It is, however, to Salberger, who takes burp as an abbreviated spelling of burður, brudur (ON bróður) “brother.” In his detailed discussion of the forms of OSw “burden” words (9–10), however, Salberger cannot completely rule out the i-less version as a possible interpretation in the inscription under discussion. The insuperable objection to Brate, if it is insuperable, remains the lack of an OSw attestation in Söderwall precisely corresponding to “ditförde.” Salberger’s impressive discussion of the abbreviated forms of “brother” in runic inscriptions (1990: 12–13), however, certainly establishes this as a possible reading of the word, and the agreement between the verb (“to kill” in Salberger’s interpretation) and its object is obvious.

Another area of agreement between Brate and Salberger is their recognition of poetic tone and form in the coda following the usual formula. Whether the lines really are verse is not a question with a simple answer. (On this difficult problem see, more generally, Brate and Bugge [1891], Hübler [1996], Marold [1998], and Naumann [1998].) Both scholars allow for the possibility of verse, and Salberger offers a fine discussion of the poetics of the lines (1990:14–16), including its most problematic element, the alliteration. I need not repeat his excellent study of kátr and ókátr except to emphasize that ókátr, while not limited to verse, has a poetic effect: “Det för oss ovanliga ordet ukikti ‘mindre glad’ kan lätt upplevas som lyft över vardagen och som att ha en viss poetisk prägel” (1990: 15). One result of the negative adjective, especially in the comparative, is to keep alive in the mind the meaning of the primary word (Salberger 1990: 6–8; 15), and the negative adjective, especially in the comparative, is common in litotes, a “marked,” if not strictly poetic, form of speech. Such litotes is frequently understood as a form of irony in Old English poetry (see Shuman and Hutchings 1960). Finally, the line, with expanded abbreviation, scans adequately as type C + type A in the standard Sievers system of Germanic verse.
Despite their areas of agreement, both Brate’s and Salberger’s interpretations of the inscription’s coda seem to me to lack overall plausibility. If Brate’s *burp* is to be a “burden,” it need not be the rune-stone itself. One is tempted to joke that Frösten would be *ókár* indeed if he “lifted” or “weighed” or even “moved” (all meanings of *vegal/vægha*) that stone. Brate perhaps anticipated that mundane objection when he insisted that the comparative adjective referred to Frösten’s condition with and without Sigmund (Brate 1911: 30); this explanation makes sense, but it is read into the text. Salberger’s interpretation is perhaps not so easily set aside in view of the parallels I will offer in the next paragraph but one. Still, one wonders how likely is it that a brother would memorialize his own shame by having it inscribed in runes.5

In the interpretations of both scholars the thought is without parallel in runic inscriptions or in the old literature; at least, neither runologist offers parallels, and Salberger refers to the coda as “det unika” (1990: 5). Uniqueness would seem to disrecommend any interpretation in literature of this kind; and one of the key methods that make Salberger’s essays in general so convincing is his copious use of parallels. We might make shift to save the content of Brate’s interpretation as a poetic variation on “raised this stone,” emphasizing the raiser’s emotion,6 but its form and wording would remain unique. My search of the *Samnordisk Runtextdatabas* yielded six passages (see note) that testify to some interest in the origin and conveyance of rune-stones;7 but they lack, generally speaking, the physical sense implicit in “burden” and in the primary meanings of *vegal/vægha*. And even if *vägha* could be taken in the WScan sense of Brate’s “ditförde,” “burden” would remain to insure that physicality. Five of the passages use general verbs for “convey” or “fetch” or “seek out” (ON forms: *fœra*, *láta fœra*, *heimta*, *sœkja*); only the Danish text uses a verb (*henda*) that looks as if it might offer a potential parallel, but in context it too has a general meaning like *fœra*.8

Salberger’s fratricidal confession surely is without parallel on rune-stones. Though fratricide itself is not unparalleled in the literature (*Ynglinga saga*, *Hervarar saga*, and the myth of Baldr offer immediate examples), I have been able to think of only two traditional passages where a shameful killing, neither actually fratricide, is confessed in a comparable manner. The dying Hildibrandr Húnakappi remembers killing his son: “óviljandi/ aldrs syniaðag” (Kuhn 1962: 314); and in a similar retrospective poem, “Víkarsbálkr,” Starkaðr characterizes the sacrifice of Víkarr as “mér harmast/ handaverka” (st. 19): “hlaut ek óhróðigt/ illt at vinna” (Heusler and Ranisch 1903: 42 [st. 18]). Both killers acted (1) against their will (implicit in *hlaut*) and (2) unhappily (only implicit in the Hildibrandr passage); but it is only the latter quality that is paralleled by *ukitri*, which cannot connote “accidentally” and in fact would rather imply intention, perhaps duty, here. Thus the analogy to these “confessions,” a part of the elegiac “death song” genre,9 seems incomplete; and in the real-life world of the rune-stones *ukitri* in Salberger’s reading could only be understood as an improbable apology.

My proposal, then, lies between Brate and Salberger and relies on the poetic tone or substance of the coda, returning in a general way to Brate’s sense of the verb but
retaining Salberger’s “brother” as the more probable of two possible understandings of burp. But if the object of the verb is not the rune-stone, the other senses of the verb along the lines of “lift,” which are found in both OSw and ON, need not be abandoned. The body of a fallen “brother” or that body as a “burden” could be “lifted,” “weighed,” and “moved” without a sharp line having to be drawn between meanings of the verb. As verse an ua : burp> sur is obviously preferable to an ua : burp, although Salberger tentatively allows a three-syllable second half-line (with two alliterative staves) as a similar verse coda in Ög 32 (1990: 25). But interpretations should, if possible, not stand in isolation in this highly conventional genre, and a passage in Sonatorrek calls out for comparison.

Sonatorrek 4, 5–8

Egill’s great “elegy” from about 961 moves through two opening stanzas about the difficulty of poetic composition in a condition of grief to an ill-understood mythic characterization of poetry in st. 3. In the first half of st. 4 Egill returns to earth with an elegiac topos – the family as a crumbling tree (following Olsen’s brilliant reading, 1936: 219–22). In Jón Helgason’s text the second half-stanza runs (1962: 34):

    era karskr maðr
    sá er koðla berr
    frænda hrers
    af flétium niðr.

Turville-Petre translates (1976: 31): “a man is not happy who bears the limbs of his kinsman’s corpse down from his house,” and this is the widely, perhaps universally, accepted meaning of the helming. I believe that (except for simple textual adjustments for reasons of historical phonetics and metrics such as sá’s for manuscript sá er) this is as close to the “original” reading and literal meaning as we are likely to get. Olsen shows how this image expands upon that of the stanza’s first helming and, with other commentators, supplies a number of useful glosses (Olsen 1936: 219–22), but I have the impression that our passage is usually understood as a reference to Egill’s own experience with the death of Bóðvarr, perhaps in a realistic vein. So understood, it presents an obvious contradiction to the saga’s account, a contradiction I have, strangely enough, not seen discussed. In the prose, of course, Egill, having heard of Bóðvarr’s shipwreck, rides to the shore to find the body. He lifts the corpse to his lap and rides with it directly to Skalla-Grímur’s mound on Digranes, has the mound opened and lays his son inside. In the prose the body is not laid out in a house and not carried “down” to burial.

This discrepancy can be explained by the saga author’s ignorance or only vague knowledge of the body of Sonatorrek (only st. 1 was apparently quoted in the saga’s archetype). Alternatively, he might have known st. 4 but interpreted our passage not as a description of Egill’s actions but as a topos or common place like the rotten tree
image with which it is linked. I think that this second explanation is more likely and is, in any case, the correct way of understanding st. 4, 5–8. The prose author gave a detailed local account, according to which the ship itself fetched up “við Reykjjarhamar” (243) and some bodies “fyrir sunnan fjørðinn”; Þóðvarr’s corpse came “inn í Einarsnes.” But despite its detail, the prose story is surely stylized, as most clearly attested by the famous parallel with the swelling grief of Sigurðr in Volsunga saga.16 Interpreting the prose tale in this vein, a reader is likely to find the immediate burial in Skalla-Grímr’s mound (243: “ok lagði Þóðvarr þar niður hjá Skalla-Grími”) tailored to maximize the drama rather than a sober reflection of real life. The considerable distance among the places involved (Borg, Einarsnes,17 and the tip of Digranes) also makes the handling and transportation of the body perhaps less than realistic (“tók hann þat upp ok setti í kné sér ok reið með út í Digranes”) though it would have been even more improbable to have had Egill carry the corpse on foot. The two accounts, the verse of st. 4, 5–8 and the prose of ch. 78, do have in common the image of a kinsman bearing the body of a dead kinsman to the grave, and I would like to suggest that these are two more or less independent realizations of a common image or topos associated with death and grief.

This suggestion receives some support from other early texts. In Egils saga itself we can compare the moment when Egill takes up the corpse of his brother Þóroðfr (141–42; ch. 45): “… hitti þar Þóroðfr bróður sinn láttinn; hann tók upp lík hans ok fló, bjó um sída, sem síðvenja var til. Grófu þeir þar gróð ok settu Þóroðfr þar í með vápnnum sínum òllum ok klæðum . . .” Egils saga is, it is commonly agreed, prone to parallel structures, and we find a similar scene at the death of the earlier Þóroðfr; but this time the action is reflected indirectly in the king’s orders, the action of lifting and bearing is not so clear, and the kinsman who will bear a kinsman is a cousin: “Hann mælti við Ólvi ok þá bræðr: ‘Takið nú Þóroðfr, frænda ykkarn, ok veitið honum umbúnað sæmiligan ok svá grópt . . .’” (54; ch. 22).

Perhaps the best support for the traditional nature of the image comes from Volsunga saga and its eddic source where Sigmundr takes up the corpse of his dead son Sinfjotli and carries it to the shore; there a ferryman takes the body out onto the water and vanishes in what is probably a form of sea burial under the aegis of the ferryman Odin.18 This scene contains elements of both realizations of the topos in Egils saga ch. 78: a father carries the body of his son down from a house of death (though not from a wake or preparation for burial) to the shore and to a form of ship-burial. In one version of Óðvar-Odds saga the hero similarly loses his promising son Vignir, but the traditional burial imagery is not used, perhaps because of Vignir’s huge size (Boer 1888: 134 [the A version]); it does, however, make several other appearances in that saga: at the death of Oddr’s friends Ásmundr, Þóðr, and Hjálmarr and of Hjálmarr’s beloved Ingibjörg.19 An older version of a similar scene is presented by Baldr’s funeral in Snorri’s account, but the corpse is carried by a collective agent: “En Æsirnir tóku lík Baldrs ok fluttu til sævar.”20 In this case there is no clear lifting and bearing, but the movement down to the sea duplicates Sigmundr’s path. This section of Gylfaginning is
generally thought to be based on older verse. An even older analogue would be Scyld Scefing’s funeral: “hī hyne þæt þæron to brimes faróde./ swāse gesīpas, swā he selfa bæd...” (Klaeber 1950: ll. 28–29) – with, again, collective rather than individual action.

Traditional images of the kind I am arguing for here – “sitting over” the dead might be a comparable motif – are usually not studied and catalogued for their own sake but only (as in the gestures of grief discussed in the literature on “elegy”) in the context of an argument. It follows that the supporting citations in the present argument are not comprehensive but randomly dependent on my memory.

Conclusion

Finally, the traditional image in Sonatorrek 4, 5–8 offers striking verbal parallels to the expression of the same topos in Ög 31. I take kátr : karskr and bera : vega (to use the Icelandic forms) for synonyms. So both passages comprise (1) an adjective for “cheerful,” (2) negation, and (3) a verb for “to bear or lift.” (4) A fourth element, the object of the verb, presents a slightly more obscure parallel. Egill’s “kogla frændi hrers” refers to the corpse (hrór) of a kinsman (frændi); but the reference is fitted brilliantly (as Olsen 1936 showed) to the first half of the stanza with kogla, whereas in Ög 31 we apparently have the simpler burp<ur> “brother.” Less satisfactorily, we could solve burp as “burden,” in which case the idea may be thought roughly parallel to kogla – thus, the “burden (of the corpse of a kinsman or comrade).” 22 (5) If ua can mean “convey from one place to another” as in West Norse (and not merely “lyfta, upplyfta” as elsewhere in OSw), then we should add by implication a fifth parallel since the action of bera/vega would have to refer to movement toward the grave. In both texts this direction of movement would be only implicit though the situation of both texts, the topos discussed above, and, in Sonatorrek only, the words “af fletium niðr” would make it clear enough. (6) Both passages are examples of the litotes of negative adjectival constructions discussed by Rosell and others as most frequently poetic, for Rosell (1942: 69) explicitly equates the effects of a negated verb + adjective (as in era karskr) with a negated adjective (as in ókátr).

One of the purposes of rune-stones like Ög 31 was memorial and, in my opinion, “elegiac” (cf. Harris 2000). The language of “elegy” as we know it from erfikvedi and related “elegiac” poetry seems sometimes to echo from such stones and, in the circular movement peculiar to philology, to suggest a real-life background for the poetry of loss.

* * *

Postscript

My article on Ög 31 was written in the 1990’s and presented in several talks through about 2001. After I submitted it to Maal og Minne in 2005 and subsequently revised it, I found in Nytt om runer’s 2005 bibliography for 2004 the following title: Evert Sal-
berger, “Å kyrkas Ög 31 i norrönt ljus,” *Gardar: Årsbok för Samfundet Sverige-Island i Lund-Malmö* 34 for 2003 (2004), 5–15. No doubt Dr. Salberger had been reconsidering Ög 31 since Lena Peterson’s review (1991; cf. Salberger’s allusion on p. 9). In any case, he here retraces most of the earlier article, adding many useful comparisons, but also retracts his two most important earlier arguments: *ua* does not now mean “killed” but “bore” (*bar*, 12), and *burp* returns to the meaning “burden,” now, however, not in Brate’s sense of the stone itself (“börda, varmed här stenen måste avses,” 12) but in that of a metaphorical or abstract “burden (of grief).” Besides the treatment of the verb *ua*, there is much for me to agree with here, but also some little to take issue with. Salberger soundly rejects the -i Brate had very tentatively supplied from the frame/cross (6–7): the word is *burp*, not *burpi* or *burp(i)*, and I applaud. But Salberger does not draw the consequences for the generally recognized metricality of the line (13). (Strangely he comments here that Brate’s verse arrangement can be defended if it is “modified and changed” to have the -ó- of *ókætri* alliterate with the a- of *(h)ann* “man inte med vá”; but the latter had never been proposed.) What is more, he repeats and augments his earlier – to me convincing – evidence that *burp* can be read as *burp<ur>* (8). The word “brother” not only saves the meter but supplies the relationship between commemorator and deceased that is wanting here by comparison to most similar stones (so also Salberger, 8); moreover, he also convincingly parallels instances of “brother” (“father,” etc.) without the reflexive *sin* we might expect. I appreciate Salberger’s evidence for emotion in runic memorials (13), and my note 6 refers to similar expressions of feeling.

Where I most disagree is in the abstract interpretation of *byrþ*, a possibility I had rejected as too modern. From Fritzner and prose Salberger cites two good examples of abstract/metaphorical “burdens” (10) and a third from the West Götish laws (11), but these are all too late to guide interpretation of this Viking Age, though Christian, monument. Salberger’s only really viable support comes from Hávamál 11: *Byrði betri/ berrat maðr brauto at,/ en sé manvit mikit;/ vegnest verra/ vegra hann velli at// en sé ofdrykkia ̄ols* (text from Salberger, 10). But the “burden” which is “borne” here is wit, intelligence, something immaterial but more positive and less abstract than “grief,” and this is underlined by the parallelism of the second helming where *vega* is collocated with something as material as a *vegnest* that serves as a metaphor for down-to-earth drunkenness. This passage, together with the prose instances, do show that *byrði* could signify an immaterial “burden”; but collocation in this sense with *vega* is conspicuous by its absence, and none of these immaterial “burdens” are unspecified as in Salberger’s new reading of Ög 31. I am certainly not arguing against a recognition of “grief” in early times (see Daniel Sävborg, *Sorg och elegi i Eddans hjältediktning*, Stockholm, 1997) or denying that *vægha* itself later takes on mental meanings (see my n. 23); nor would I totally discount the possibility of Salberger’s new interpretation. But the “burden of proof” is a philological obligation that has not been met here. I believe my favored interpretation – “the more unhappy did he bear his brother (to the grave)” – offers better meter, the needed relationship word (and the “information” that carries [n.
10], a far better context in literary (elegiac) discourse, more philological security, and at least equal runological plausibility. Let the reader decide.

Notes
1 I have consulted Göransson (1750: 238, no. 841), Liljegren (1833: 121, no. 1111), and Wiede (1875: 112, no. 37), but these early witnesses are subsumed into Brate (1911); the other early treatments listed by Brate (29) were unavailable to me here. I thank Daniel Sävborg and Charlotta Olofsson for supplying me with Wiede and Barbro Söderberg, Thomas Hill, and especially this journal’s anonymous reader for critical suggestions; and I thank the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study for the time to finish this article.

2 In a learnedly detailed review of Salberger 1990, Lena Peterson (1991: 162) observes that in making this criticism of Brate, the author abandons his own frequent quest for OWN (Old West Nordic) parallels.

3 Two etymologically distinct strong verbs fell together in the form vægha/vega (one cognate with Go. wigan, Lat. vēho, the other with Go. weihan, Lat. vincō), hence the two very different spheres of meaning. Peterson’s Svenskt runordsregister (1989, s.v. vega), with a total of only two attestations, gives the two meanings as “föra (från ett ställe till ett annat); dräpa.” The first appears to be based on Brate’s explication of Ög 31; the second, on U 338. There we find a clear anum x uā[at]·uikmu–r (Hamun va at Vigm[un]ldr = “Vigmundr killed him”; Wessén and Jansson 1943: 74). This kind of information belongs to a recognizable subtype of the additions to the basic formula, in which the circumstances of death include a specific person or group responsible.

4 Salberger’s comments are based on Rosell (1942: esp. 59–103 [chapter on adjectives]); compare further Bracher (1937), who considers understatement specifically poetic in Old English but not in Old Norse.

5 It does seem that immersion in detail sometimes makes one blind to the general sense: in his discussion of Ög 32, Brate’s translation seems to make the memorialized man at once the brother and the sister’s son of the memorializers though that absurdity is avoided by Brate’s complex and unlikely explanation of the syntax (1911: 32). Salberger’s solution to the crux of this inscription carries the inevitability of simplicity (1990: 17–25).

6 For some references on the question of emotion in runic inscriptions, see Harris (2000: 226 and n. 13).

7 I give only the relevant clauses: U 414 þik · fyrlu · stin · þina · af · kutlanti = þeir forðu stein þenna af Gutlandi (Wessén and Jansson 1945: 193); U 735 uþpralti · lit · uk · lakarni · stan · almiðin · ur · stæþi · fyra = Veðraldi let ur Langgarni stein almiðinn ur staði fóra (Wessén and Jansson 1949: 274); VG 33 þua : hiti : sti is understood as Po[rla (?)]he[m]iti (?) ste[n] (Svárdström 1958: 51); Hs 14 uþk sumum stín þina nur i : bala ... in : = Viþ sottum stein þenna norðr a Balastein (Jansson 1985: 25–26; discussion, 34–39 and Åhlén 1994: 43–44); N 61 auk furtþ af hrikariki u(t)an urulb au = ok farði [the stone] af Hringaríki útan ór Ulföyj(u) (Olsen 1941: 143–50); DR 201 han : hanti : stin : þansi : a ... = han hendi stein þensi a ... (Jakobsen and Mølke 1942: 238, 605).

8 The Danish editors comment on hanti “kan være præt. til vb. hænda, vn. hend, ‘gribe med hånden, tage, samle, finde.’” They go on to compare U 735, as above.

9 See Harris 1992 for a discussion of the “death song”; on the “confession” see specifically pp. 17–19; on the relationship of “Víkarsbálkr” to this material see p. 12. Starkaðr’s diction in “þat er mér harmast/handaverka” (Heusler and Ranisch 1903: 42, st. 19) appears to participate in an elegiac convention discussed in Harris 1983: 52–53.

10 The line would also be regularized with burþi. I am attracted to the argument of a reader for this
journal that the “elegiac” sense would actually be increased by the interpretation “burden” (of the body of the dead); in support he cites one instance each in OWN and OSw of “burden” as a body or body part (cf. kögla discussed below). I allow for this possibility; finally, however, I distrust the i-rune (as explained above) and think the additional information supplied by Salberger’s “brother” gives superior weight to his interpretation.

Another three-syllable b-line that comes to hand is quoted by Marold (1998: 670: “vér skip-tum”); three-syllable a-lines are regular in kviðaháttar and some types of ljóðaháttar.

The most recent edition, by Jón Hnefill Ádalsteinsson, explicates the first helming very differently, passing over the second without comment (2001: 83–89).

The manuscript situation is described by Jón Helgason (1962: 29–30). The comparison, often interpreted as influence, is made by earlier scholars as well.

The manuscript situation is described by Jón Helgason (1962: 30–31) justifies the corrections and emendations here, but for the record they are: 5 karskr = kaskr; 6 kögla = þaugla; 7 hrers = hrærs; 8 niðr = ridr, ridur. Of these 5 and 7 are merely spelling variants; in 6 au can be a spelling of õ, and k for i is demanded by alliteration and sense, however the error may have come about. The error in 8, might, I suggest, be explainable by a scribe who was thinking of the episode in the saga where Egill is on horseback; while I am convinced that the conjecture niðr is correct, the at least plausible reading of the manuscript(s) does suggest some caution toward my emphasis on motion “down” in the topos.

Cited by page and chapter from Nordal 1933 (here 242–57, ch. 78).

The manuscript situation is described by Jón Helgason (1962: 29–30).

Nordal’s maps show two promontories by this name.

In version M (Boer 1888: 76) Oddr returns to Ásmundr’s body after seeking vengeance “ok hefir hann til skip með sér,” where on the shore “verpa þeir haug eptir Ásmund”; in version S (77) it is the friend Hjálmar who carries the corpse on his back while Oddr philosophizes in verse (“mundak Ásmund auðu mínom/ apr ódáenn þoll kaupa”), and they proceed to “verpa ní haug mikinn eptir Ásmund.” Oddr’s next tragedy is the murder of Æðr; again he first attempts a revenge expedition, then returns to the body of his friend: in version M “þeir flytja hann heim með sér í Svíþjóð, þar verpa þeir haug eptir hann” (94), while S adds only that the howe was “fagran” (95). Hjálmar famously dies fighting berserks on Sámsey, and as sole survivor Oddr first buries their opponents (M 106): “Síðan tekr hann Hjálmar, hann laði hann á bak sér ok bar til strandar ofan,” pausing to make mounds for the dead from the ship, before sailing with his friend’s body back to Sweden, where he “leggr síðan Hjálmar á bak sér ok berr hann heim til Uppsala ok leggr hann niðr úti fyrir hallardyrum”; when Hjálmar’s fiancée dies of grief at the news, “þá tekr Oddr hana upp ok berr út í fangi sér ok leggr hana í faðm Hjálmar fyrir hallardyrum... váru þau grafin ok þeir samm” (M 106–07).

Faulkes 1988: 46 (Gylfaginning, ch. 49). Perhaps the question in Baldrs draumar 10 (Kuhn 1962: 278) belongs in this collection of analogues: “hverr man... Baldrs bana á bál vegu?” Váli was destined to kill his half-brother Hóðr and, if we take Bdr 10 literally, vegu his body to the pyre.

Sävborg 1997: 247–50 and references there; but in the present context one might add scenes such as Bolli holding the dying Kjartán even where the verbal cue “sitja þyr” is missing.

Olsen 1936: 221–22 shows that kögla (he writes kögglu) meant “knuckles,” joints (esp. of fingers and toes), in Old as well as in Modern Icelandic, but that another meaning is (was?) “lump” (Olsen: “klump”). He had convincingly emended the unintelligible reading hreba...
med frænda hrør ‘frendenes lik’: den døde kropp som utgjøres av frende føiet til frende, frende-kroppen i oplösning, og dennes lemmer er de kogglar som etter hvert løsner fra den råte stuv. Frendene bæres, koggull efter koggull, ut av ættegården, som ligger höit (berr . . . ntidr). “Corpse of kinsmen” here seems unnatural, despite the parallel in lines 1–3; and the allegory in “koggull etter koggull” is too elaborate for me.

Related meanings in Söderwall (1884–1918) include: “I.2) lyfta ngt. för att utröna dess vigt . . . 3) afväga . . ., bringa i jamvigtsläge; 4) undersöka; 5) uppskatta; II.1) väga på våg . . .; 2) vara af vigt . . .”

Works cited


Jön Helgason, ed. 1962. Skjaldevers. Nordisk filologi A 12. Copenhagen, etc.: Munksgaard, etc.


