

# The Treatise on the Rök stone

An excerpt from *Myteposet*

The Mythic Epic: A Study in Viktor Rydberg's Mythological Researches during the 1880s.

by Ola Östin<sup>1</sup>

Twice during his mythological researches during the 1880s, Viktor Rydberg entered into the study of runes. This was not a new field of study for him. By 1863 he had already written an article about the Gisseberg-stone in the *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts- Tidning* [GHT] 15/9. And by the middle of the 1870s, he had published two papers pertaining to the Tanum-, Björketorp-, and Stentofte-stones.

A letter from Rydberg to Oscar Montelius on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1874 provides the following explanation of his runic studies:

“Presumably, during my stay in Italy, Bugge has made public his interpretation of the Rök stone, of which I have heard report but not seen. Do you know, Doctor, where this interpretation can be read and where at all one will find the newest literature concerning that stone? The truth of the matter is that I have been occupied also with that stone, but do not want to publicize my views concerning it before I am familiar with the latest on the subject. — During the now quickly concluding year, I am prevented from publishing a longer article on the history of runes that I began last year and which was terminated by my foreign travels, by being in no position to follow the literature on the subject and here in Goteborg lacking the possibility of picking up the dropped thread.”

Both of these issues, the history of runes and the Rök stone inscription, are ones Rydberg would return to in the 1880s. In a letter to Oscar Montelius dated November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1881, he says:

“Concerning the origin and ordering of the runes into a row, I have also made investigations, committed to writing in a treatise that I cannot conclude before I make a journey of discovery to Stockholm or Copenhagen. In my view, Wimmer's treatise on the runes is the soundest and the most prudent that has been written on the subject to date; but, nevertheless, he has been rash on one essential point and in addition leaves the riddle that the ordering of the staves presents entirely unexplained.”

This treatise remained unfinished and it is clear from the foregoing account that Rydberg's time the following year was almost entirely filled by his mythological research. After some years, he nevertheless began his researches in the field of runology anew. In a letter of Whitsun 1884, he wrote to Montelius:

“I have finished my preparation for a paper titled *Hjeltetagan och Rökstenen* (The Hero-Saga and the Rök stone) which will be around 25 pages in length like those in the *Nordisk Tidskrift*. Would you like to have it?

“My paper does not offer a new translation of the inscription, merely a small addition that translates a previously uninterpreted row. Otherwise I follow Bugge's translation completely, although at two points, I am of another opinion than him; but these points are of no substantial interest for my subject and therefore can be left aside. Thus, nothing polemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by William P. Reaves © 2007

“The purpose of my treatise is this: when the Rök stone so obviously relates a piece of a story, not a piece of actual history, *which story is it?* Has it died out and been forgotten entirely and completely for all time? Or can it still be brought to light?

“Without giving the Rök stone a single thought during my researches below the known and readily available saga material, I came upon a saga which can be traced back to the 600s that contains *all the data* and a majority of the names that occur on the Rök stone. I know a good deal of the saga-hero Varin’s life, and more of his son’s; I know a good deal about Vilin and the circumstances of his son’s birth and likewise know the four kings, whose 20 sons fall “on the wide field were Sigyn’s horse grazes”. In the saga, they bear the same names as they do on the stone and their sons are called “the twenty.” I have even discovered an echo of the verse about the grazing horse. Therefore there can be no doubt regarding the reliability of the result. I believe it is of significant interest for the on-going saga research and the history of 10<sup>th</sup> century culture, as well.”

With certainty, this letter was never sent, but in its place —without Viktor Rydberg’s knowledge (?) — Susen Rydberg, wrote on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1884 to Montelius:

“Do not be offended that I write to you — it is for my husband’s sake and therefore ought to be permissible.

“The circumstance is this: Viktor is held up by an article on the Rök stone — its relationship to the Heroic saga — *nothing polemic* — and would certainly like to see it published in *Nordisk Tidskrift*. Will Doctor Montelius have it? — If so, I request that you write a few words to Viktor. It would encourage him and hasten and facilitate its completion. He still has so much unfinished work that must be done before our move that I feel completely anxious. You would not believe how some actual words of interest can effect one so alone in his work as Viktor.”

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of July that same year, Montelius wrote to Rydberg that he, on his “brief return to Stockholm on a longer business trip has ...been informed that you are occupied with an article on the Rök stone.” He said that naturally he would very willingly wish to receive “another valuable contribution” from Rydberg’s pen and so would be extremely grateful to receive the article, if in its length and form it would be suitable for *Nordisk Tidskrift*, in which no purely scientific or altogether too lengthy articles could be printed. Whether Rydberg’s article would be suitable in this regard, he would realize best himself.

Montelius’ expectant posturing appears to be justified. What happened with Rydberg’s Rök stone treatise is reminiscent of what happened with his earlier *Völuspá* treatise, which gradually grew considerably in size and which of course never came to be published in its originally conceived state.

In the letter to Montelius, reproduced above, of Whitsun (June) 1884, Rydberg thus states that he had “all the preparatory works finished” and he reckons that the article would be about 25 pages long, as in the *Nordisk Tidskrift*. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of July that same year, he wrote to Sander that he “has finished a long treatise on the Rök stone” and in a letter of August 1884 to the same person, he says:

“The results of my investigations of the Rök stone are a written tome that, once printed, form a book. It was actually never my intent to work with the Rök stone. But while I inquired into the heroic myths that immediately belong to and are associated with the divine myths, I came upon the remains of a saga with Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon and Gothic-German branches, in which I to my surprise discovered the majority of the *names* which occur on the Rök stone and *all* of the events related there.”

Rydberg, however, did not consider this “tome” a finished work, because in a letter to Sander on September 25<sup>th</sup> of the same year, he states that he has “a detailed work

as good as complete,” and the remainder of the letter makes clear that the work in question is the Rök stone treatise.

For obvious reasons — its great size and its scientific nature — publication in the *Nordisk Tidskrift* was not possible, and the treatise lay in manuscript for a long time. Extending 72 handwritten pages in folio format, it is found among Rydberg’s surviving papers in the Rydberg collection, *Kungliga biblioteket* (no. 67). The title of the treatise is *Hjeltesagan och Rökstenen*. It is an appropriate designation, since the investigation can be said to consist of these two main parts.

First (ms. pp. 1-42), Rydberg reconstructs what he says was the original, authentic saga of Ragnar Lodbrok, and then (pp. 43-64) seeks to prove “that the persons and events that are spoken of on the Rök stone in Östergötland, all belong to the actual saga of Lodbrok in the form it had in Sweden in the 10<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 3). In conclusion (p. 64 ff.), he shows that “his own contributions complete the inscription’s meaning” (p. 65) on seven different points.

On one hand, Rydberg’s treatise can be said to be a byproduct of his contemporary mythological research — see his own statements in the letters quoted above — so, on the other hand, one must point out how in many respects it is entirely in line with them.

As Rydberg states in the letter to Montelius cited earlier, he presents no new interpretations of the runic inscription, for the most part. As the basis for his translation — which he himself sheds light on (ms. p. 48) — he used Sophus Bugge’s “*Tolkning af Runeindskriften på Rökstenen i Östergötland*”.

Rydberg’s investigation is undertaken foremost from a saga-historical standpoint. Thus, the source material that he uses in large part is the same as he employed, among other things, in his mythological studies. Certain problem passages are found again in both subjects and the methodic procedures are also unchanged. As a necessary prerequisite for the investigation, he assumed that a connection in Lodbrok’s saga existed (ms. p. 56 f.) and he reconstructed this original connection with the method he later called “the combined nominal and the real method.” When Rydberg entered the Literature-, History- and Antiquities- Academy, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1891 his entrance speech constituted a treatise called *Om hjältesagan å Rökstenen*. In June 1892, he expanded this treatise, before it was printed later that year in the Academy’s *Handlingar* and also published separately.

This treatise, as Emil Haverman has said, is a revision and abridgement of the investigation from 1884. No new conclusions and no new discussions appear in the new version. Rydberg merely reorganized the material, now focusing on the text of the Rök stone from the treatise’s inception, as he cut it down in size. When, by way of introduction, he refers to his older, unpublished work, he speaks of the following change:

“When I now make the same questions the matter of a lecture, the nature of it requires that I omit many pieces of information and supporting evidence and limit myself to presenting the course of the investigation from the immediate starting points to the results that lay closest to them.”

It is this revision that caused the change in title from *Hjeltesagan och Rökstenen* to *Om hjältesagan å Rökstenen*.

After his death on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1895, Rydberg's Rök stone treatise immediately received the following small epilogue. Near the end of that year the first book of the first volume of Schück's and Warburg's *Illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria*, first edition, was published. In his discussion of the Rök stone there, Schück followed Bugge's interpretation without mentioning Rydberg's results. This caused S.A. Hedlund —under the signature "H." —to write an article in *GHT* November 28, 1895, in which he indignantly pointed out this omission. Among other things, he says there:

"A friend of Rydberg cannot find himself in equanimity with this, Mr. S's omission. Both in Uppsala and in Lund, one has long placed oneself at an all too haughty distance from V.R.'s investigations in the field of Germanic mythology, but it would perhaps now be timely, after his death, that one admits the scientificness of a researcher that both of these colleges called an honorary doctor."

In a postscript, Hedlund alternately refers to and cites from a letter that he recently received from Bugge, after he approached him and asked for an opinion on Rydberg and the Rök stone. One part shall be reproduced here from the original, dated November 26<sup>th</sup> 1895:

"In 1885, when we met at the home of our common friend the lecturer Nils Linder in Stockholm, Viktor Rydberg gave me a manuscript containing a treatise about the heroic saga on the Rök stone, informing me that I could use it freely. I believe this was the first draft of the treatise that was printed later.

"Several times and with a lively interest, I have read the treatise *Om hjältesagan å Rökstenen*, which was first printed in 1892. I cannot follow him in most of his combinations, but in one section he has made a combination that I believe leads to a new and more accurate view of an important part of this remarkable inscription. For a long time now, it has been my intention to publish a new work in Sweden on the Rök- inscription. It well deserves it, since in this, Sweden, whose ancient poetry has been almost completely lost, has a small book —a book in stone, with allusions to a whole series of poems. In my work, which I hope to complete during the first half of next year, I intend and it has always been my intent to point out what I owe to Viktor Rydberg for a more correct interpretation of the inscription."

Five years later, when Warburg was occupied with preparing his large biography of Rydberg and wrote to Bugge, he mentioned the following in his response of October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1900; it is obviously this letter that Warburg used in the second part of the work, pages 572 and 628:

"It is thanks to Nils Linder that I got to know Viktor Rydberg personally. Needless to say it has been a pleasure to me. But I want to say that it was only when I got to know Rydberg personally that I got the correct view of his writings. It is then that I learned the central source of light from which so many different rays are radiating.

"Our studies came into contact with one other not only in the area of Nordic mythology, but also concerning the inscription on the Rök stone. If my memory serves me correctly, it was after I had held a lecture on the Rök stone in the Vitterhetsakademien (the Academy of Arts and Antiquities) on June 2, 1885, that Rydberg, who had been present, gave me a manuscript on the Heroic saga on the Rök stone. It was the first draft of the treatise that he read at the Vitterhetsakademien on December 1, 1891.

"After Rydberg's death the editor Mr. Hedlund wrote to me and asked me to express my view on the merits of Rydberg's views concerning the Rök stone, as he (i e: his interpretation) had not been mentioned in the account of the Rök inscription in the History of (Swedish) Literature by you (Karl Warburg) and Schück. I replied that I planned to publish a third edition of the Rök inscription, and in this I wanted to show, that Rydberg had suggested a combination on one point, that in my view led to a better understanding of a whole section. It is still my intention to do this, but the Rök inscription raises so many questions, that I haven't yet been able to realize this intention." [Sophus Bugge died on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1907].

# The Heroic Saga on the Rök Stone

by Viktor Rydberg

Translated by William P. Reaves (c) 2007

The inscription on the Rök stone is a literary document unique in its class. Its heathen origin cannot be doubted, nor the fact that it has not been revised or altered in content during the course of centuries. It is as it was for roughly a thousand years.<sup>2</sup>

It is thus worthy of investigation not only from a linguistic, but from a literary-historical standpoint.<sup>3</sup>

Is it simply a local saga known only in Östergötland, perhaps first composed by the inscription's author? Or does he speak the truth when he says that the inscription tells of "folktales" i.e. stories that were known in wider circles when the stone was raised?

In the latter case, a possibility the researcher is obliged to take into consideration, it is of great weight for the developmental history of the Norse sagas, if points of contact exist between the Rök stone's saga, unfortunately only partially told, and the heroic stories which have come down to our time in a more or less altered condition, and if these points of contact are sufficiently numerous, sufficiently characteristic, and sufficiently convergent that from them one can draw secure conclusions about its relationship to the relevant stories.

To these questions, I have devoted an investigation whose methods and results I have described in a still unpublished work.<sup>4</sup> Below, I have withheld all presumptions and hypotheses. The method that I followed is the combined Nominal and Real methods.<sup>5</sup> I have sought to gather and compare everything in regard to commonalities in names, family relationships, and events and have examined whether they have gained enough data to converge or not. For my own part, I have been as equally inclined to accept a negative outcome of the research as a positive one. The work below has grown to nearly a volume. When I now make the same questions the matter of a lecture, the nature of it requires that I omit many pieces of information and supporting evidence and limit myself to presenting the course of the investigation from the immediate starting points to the results that lay closest to them.

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<sup>2</sup> For a transcription of the Rök stone text, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rök\\_stone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rök_stone)

<sup>3</sup> *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Edited by Rory McTurk, (2005), pp. 406-408: "The Rök inscription with its many allusions to legends and its possible ritual function is a very intriguing document indeed. Unfortunately, its rather incoherent text requires, in order to be fully understood, background knowledge that now seems beyond recovery. However, this very fact, namely that the precise sense and therefore also the purpose of the inscription cannot be established with certainty, is doubtless one of the factors contributing to the apparently ceaseless fascination for scholars that this rune stone has held."

<sup>4</sup> The 72 page manuscript no. 67 preserved in the Rydberg collection in the Swedish Royal Library entitled "Hjeltesagan och Rökstenen" [*Myteposet*, Ola Östin, p. 135.]

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of these methods see *Viktor Rydberg's Investigations into Germanic Mythology*, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 179-222 "Towards a Method of Mythology," (iUniverse, 2007).

## § 1.

The Rök stone inscription begins with the following words:

“For Vamud these runes were raised. And Varin cut them, the father, in memory of his dead son.”

The inscription thus makes it likely that someone named Varin raised the stone.

It has already been pointed out by Bugge (*Antiqvarisk Tidskrift* V, 139), and certainly every reader must see, that the events mentioned in the inscription belong to the realm of poetry not reality, at least in the form they are related. The conquest of a pair of trophies (“war-booties”), twelve times taken, and moreover four groups of five brothers, each with the same name who are the sons of four brothers, in the clearest manner refers to heroic sagas rather than to history. One should not find it strange when he encounters a runic inscription that is alleged to have been carved by a person who solely belongs to the world of the sagas. Germanic heathendom, like the Hellenic, possessed “relics” from its mythic heroic past. For example, it exhibits coats of mail, swords, and jewelry fabricated by Völund and other mythic artists. Recently, the Associate Professor Dr. Sven Söderberg investigated and in association with Prof. Bugge interpreted the runic inscription on a piece of jewelry, according to which it was a gift from Halfdan to Amelung. Naturally, I can neither prove nor disprove that an actual Halfdan gave this particular piece to an actual Amelung; but I can say with certainty that even if this were the case, as soon as the piece of jewelry came into the possession of a person unfamiliar with the actual giver and the actual receiver, the short inscription would be considered evidence by those who knew the heroic stories about the generous Teutonic patriarch Halfdan, his foster brother Amal (Hamal), and his war-band consisting of Amal’s sons and Amal’s relatives (Amelungar) that this piece of jewelry originated from those heroes. This supposition is so obvious that the rune-carver himself would have foreseen and intended it.<sup>6</sup>

Because the Rök stone inscription names a Varin as its author, I will begin the investigation there. I do not assume that the name Varin when it is found in other passages of Old Norse literature refers to the same person as the Rök stone’s Varin. But the method I follow invites me to follow the path to which the commonality of names points without drawing any advance conclusions about the results to which it may lead.

*Ólafs Saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 64 (*Heimskringla*) says: Once, when King Olaf visited Ögvaldsnes, an old man wearing a wide-brimmed hat, who was one-eyed (a traditional characteristic of Odin), came to him.<sup>7</sup> The king conversed through the night with the stranger, who gave knowledgeable responses to all of his questions and seemed to have detailed knowledge about what had happened in ancient times in every land. To Olaf’s question, if he knew Ogvald after whom the isthmus and the farmstead was

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<sup>6</sup> [Rydberg’s footnote]: See Dr. Söderberg’s treatise “*Eine neu entdeckte allemannische Runeninschrift*” (“A newly discovered Allemanish Runic Inscription”) in *Prähistorische Blätter* II, number 3. The piece is a fibula and the inscription *Halfdanilo Amilunge* so much more remarkable as the name *Halfdan* is of Norse, and not of German origin and is borne in the North by one of the most celebrated mythic saga-heroes, whose identity with the ancient patriarch *Mannus*, also acknowledged by Dr. Söderberg, I have pointed out in *Investigations into Germanic Mythology*, Vol. I, no. 25.

<sup>7</sup> At the end of the chapter, Olaf recognizes the stranger as Odin.

named, he answered that Ogvald was a king and a great warrior who sacrificed to a cow and had her with him everywhere he went and considered it fortunate to drink of her milk. Ogvald fought a king named Varin and fell in the struggle. This happened high on the isthmus and in his memory a monolith was raised that stands there to this day. Near his grave mound, another was raised for his cow.

This narrative can be compared to the following one in *Hálfs saga og Hálfsrekka*, ch. 2:

“When Finn the Rich, who settled on Iceland, set with his ship on Ogvaldsnes, ready to leave Norway, he was close to Ogvald’s grave mound and happened to ask if it had been long since the deceased had been buried there. Then from out of Ogvald’s howe he heard this song:

*Þat var fyr löngu,  
er leið heldu  
heldr hundmargir  
Hæklings firar,  
sigldu um salta  
slóð birtinga.  
Þá varð ek þessa  
þorps ráðandi.*

“It has been long since  
they joined the journey,  
many hundreds  
of Hekling’s followers,  
with sails over the shining sea’s  
salty waves:  
In this house  
was I then made the ruler”<sup>8</sup>

Of the same Ogvald, *Hálfs saga og Hálfsrekka*, ch. 2 states that he was a king in Rogaland, that Hekling the viking attacked him, and that he fell in the fight and was buried on Ogvaldsnes. It also says that Ogvald’s queen bore him a son named Jösur.

One of the *Fornaldarsagas*, *Hversu Noregr Byggðist*, ch. 1 says: the son of Hard (*Hörðr*) was Jöfur or Jösur. His (Hard’s) brother was Rugolf (*Rugálfr*). Rugolf was father to Ragnvald and he to Ogvald.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This verse also may be read as: “It was long ago/they laid a course/here in their hundreds,/ Hækling’s men,/sailed the salty/ sea-trouts’ track./ That’s when they crowned me/ king of this mound.” [Peter Tunstall tr., Northvegr].

<sup>9</sup> *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum*, ch. 1: *Garðr agði var faðir þeira, er svá heita: Hörðr, Rúgálfr, Þrymr, Végarðr, Freygarðr, Þorgarðr ok Grjótgarðr. Hörðr hlaut Hörðaland ór skipti. Hans sonr var Jöfurr eða Jösurr, faðir Hjörs konungs, föður Hjörleifs ins kvensama. Rúgálfr átti Rogaland. Hans sonr var Rögnvaldr, faðir Ögvalds konungs*, “Gard Agdi was the father of those who are called thus: Hord, Rugalf, Thrym, Vegard, Freygard, Thorgard, and Grjotgard. Hord got Hordaland from the division. His son was Jofurr or Josurr, father of King Hjorr, father of Hjorleif the Amorous. Rugalf claimed Rogaland. His son was Rognvald, father of King Ogvald.” [George L. Hardman tr., Northvegr]

The Rök stone inscription mentions a Harud (Haruðr) who had three brothers, among whom one was named Rugulf (*Rukulfr*). These sons of four brothers, twelve in all, had died on Zealand, says the Rök stone, and they were conquered by Varin's son or possibly by Varin and his son together.

From this, it appears:

1) that the story of King Ogvald who fell and was buried on Ogvaldsnes, which is fragmentarily and sporadically told in Old Icelandic literature, has at least three names in common with the Rök stone's saga: Varin, Rugulf, and Harud (Hard). In Scandinavian literature, which is rich in names and people, the names Varin and Rugulf occur only on the Rök stone and in the sources cited;

2) that the Rugulf and Harud of the Rök stone are brothers and that the Rugulf and Hard of the *Fornaldarsagas* likewise are brothers;

3) that the Varin of the Rök stone and his son are placed in hostile relationship to the sons of Rugulf and Harud; and that the Varin of *Heimskringla* conquers an Ogvald, who according to the *Fornaldarsagas* is a descendant of a Rugulf, who in turn is brother to a Hard.

These are the initial results of my investigation. They seem sufficiently noteworthy to me to continue the investigation on the same path.

## § 2.

We know that the same Varin who killed the cow-worshipper Ogvald was called Hekling (*Hæklingr*) or Hekling the viking in the sources cited from the *Fornaldarsagas*. Hekling, the German Hegeling, is actually a patronymic designating a member of a famous saga-family, who ruled in Denmark and Friesland according to "*Lied von Gudrun*."<sup>10</sup>

Otherwise, the epithet Hekling is only found in a story-fragment united with the Icelandic novel about Ragnar Sigurdsson Lodbrok.<sup>11</sup> There it is said that when Ogmund the Dane lay in his ship near Samsö around Munarvik, some of his men came ashore in order to pillage and there found a human image made of wood, 40 ells high,<sup>12</sup> ancient and moss-covered. When they wondered aloud who had raised it and sacrificed to this image, they heard a song from out of the statue which let them know that Hekling's descendants (*Hæklings megir*), the sons of Lodbrok (*synir Loðbrókar*), had raised it.

The first verse sung has the following wording:

*Þat var fyr löngu,  
er í leið megir*

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<sup>10</sup> The 13<sup>th</sup> century German poem known as "Kudrun" or "Gudrun Lied" referred to as the "saga of the Hegelings" hereafter.

<sup>11</sup> The *Fornaldarsaga Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar*.

<sup>12</sup> The measurement is an *aln* (literally "forearm"), the distance between the elbow and tip of the middle finger.



*Hæklings fóru  
hlunnalungum  
fram um salta  
slóð birtinga,  
þá varðk þessa  
þorps ráðandi.*

“It is long since  
the sons of Hekling,  
on a viking expedition,<sup>13</sup>  
steered their oar-blades  
over the shining sea’s  
salty passable waves.  
In this house  
was I then made the ruler.”

The verse is obviously a variant of the one cited above which Finn the Rich heard sung from the howe of the cow-worshipper Ogvald, who had been killed by Varin. One verse is modeled after the other. From this, it follows that the hero Varin-Hekling who killed the cow-worshipper was considered identical to the father or progenitor of Lodbrok’s sons by the author of one or authors of both these verses and that the Lodbrokids were regarded as Heklings by both authors .

It is also worthy of remark that hostility against animal-worshippers, especially against a cow-worshipper, is a characteristic feature of the Lodbrok family-saga which was preserved during the transformation and truncating it suffered in Christian times, especially through its “historicizing” and association with the adventure of Ivar (*Ingvar*) and Björn Ironside in the 800s. With the exception of a late tale about Hjalmther and Ölvir<sup>14</sup> produced by a free hand, the Old Norse documents do not tell a single story of an animal-worshiper that does not belong to Lodbrok’s saga and describe the Lodbrokids as in conflict with them. The town of Hvitaby’s residents are cow-worshippers; Lodbrok attacks them. Lodbrok’s sons take up their father’s resolve to conquer the city and Ivar shoots a holy animal dead with his arrows. Östen Beli of Uppsala was a cow-worshipper; his fetish was killed by Lodbrok’s sons. A griffin and an animal are worshipped in a temple in Bjarmaland; they and their priests are slain by Lodbrok’s stepfather Herröd or, to those listening to Lodbrok’s saga, by Vilmund’s father or progenitor, the Ostegoth Bose.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in regard to the task of identifying Hekling’s descendants or sons with “Lodbrok’s sons” and thus Hekling’s family with Lodbrok’s family, evidence exists that it is based on saga-historical grounds and not on an arbitrary use of names by the narrator of the adventure on Samsö. For the moment, I will simply point out that the highly poetic

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<sup>13</sup> The original phrase, "*i ledung farande*," means that the sons of Hekling were on a plundering expedition at sea; "*ledung*" was a tax in the Viking states, where the main source of public revenue was the organized plundering of neighboring lands; one paid this tax by contributing a ship or a part of a ship or a warrior to the expedition. [Tore Lund].

<sup>14</sup> The *Fornaldarsaga Hjálmpés saga ok Ölvis*.

<sup>15</sup> [Rydberg’s footnote] See § 13.

description in the Icelandic novel about the Lodbroks of how Ragnar Lodbrok's men found Kraka-Aslaug on Spangar heath<sup>16</sup> has its parallel in the saga of the Hegelings' narrative of how its young hero's shipmates found a princess near the shore in the guise of a handmaiden who had been kidnapped from her home and placed under the power of a wicked woman. She becomes the hero's wife.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, the research in this direction leads to the following preliminary results: that the Varin mentioned in the Icelandic documents belongs to Lodbrok's saga and that his descendants are Lodbrokids. When the result adduced in §1 that he and the Varin of the Rök stone are identical is brought to bear on these preliminary suppositions, methodology demands we next investigate whether the Rök stone's saga contains elements that characteristically refer to or are identical to elements in Lodbrok's saga such as it has come down to our time in documents that are mainly two to three hundred years younger than the inscription on the Rök stone.

### § 3.

The Rök stone inscription begins with the following words:

“For Vamud these runes were raised.”

“And Varin cut them, the father, in memory of his dead son”

“I tell the folktale (*folkminne*) how many the twofold trophies were: twelve times taken two trophies, namely two from both men.”

“I tell this second: how he withdrew from the Reidgoths, was caught by nine troops, and afterwards lay dead through the fault of cruelty.”

First now the question: Does the saga of Lodbrok we know still contain tales of a battle or duel in which it was characteristic for one combatant to fight two more, concluding with the two victorious?

Saxo says that after the death of his father-in-law Herodus (Herröd), Ragnar came into conflict with Sörli concerning the Gothic crown and that he, together with his three sons, Fridleif, Björn and Radbard, fought a duel with Sörli's strongest warrior and his seven sons.<sup>18</sup> They fought one against two and Ragnar with his Lodbrokids won.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar*, ch. 5

<sup>17</sup> [Rydberg's footnote] See further § 9

<sup>18</sup> Saxo, *Danish History*, Book 9: “Ragnar, after loading the Saxons with tribute, had sure tidings from Sweden of the death of Herodd, and also heard that his own sons, owing to the slander of Sorle, the king chosen in his stead, had been robbed of their inheritance. He besought the aid of the brothers Biorn, Fridleif, and Ragbard (for Ragnald, Hwitserk, and Erik, his sons by Swanloga, had not yet reached the age of bearing arms), and went to Sweden. Sorle met him with his army, and offered him the choice between a public conflict and a duel; and when Ragnar chose personal combat, he sent against him Starkad, a champion of approved daring, with his band of seven sons, to challenge and fight with him. Ragnar took his three sons to share the battle with him, engaged in the sight of both armies, and came out of the combat triumphant.” [Oliver Elton tr.]

Thus, eight trophies in all were taken in pairs from both men. We have no argument for or against the supposition that these trophies, won under similar circumstances, do not amount to the number given on the Rök stone concerning Lodbrok's saga as it was known in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.

It lies outside of the boundaries I have set for this concise treatise to show a common root of Varin's saga and Saxo's story of King Varmund and his son Uffo.<sup>20</sup> Here, I limit myself to pointing out that a fight of two against one plays a primary role in the latter. Varmund's jarls, the brothers Keto and Vigo, secretly proceed to Sweden, seek out the Swedish-king Athislus, attack him when he is alone in a forest and vanquish him, two against one. They kill the tyrant, but under circumstances that spread additional brilliance over his magnificent and chivalrous character. King Varmund rewards the brothers for this deed, but many feel that they have broken proper fighting tradition. Among those was Varmund's son, then still a boy. He remained silent, was reserved, melancholy and somber, until once grown he got the occasion to fight in full view of the Danish and Saxon armies. He fought alone against two of Saxony's most powerful warriors and killed them. With this fight, one against two, he intended to obliterate the disgrace with which Keto and Vigo had tarnished the Danish name by fighting two against one. For one against one was honorable and right.<sup>21</sup>

This maxim is also pronounced in the song *Krákumál* which was placed on the lips of the dying Lodbrok, probably because, as in Saxo's story, he wanted to restore the noble, but broken fighting tradition, inherited from his fathers:

23. *Hjoggum vér með hjörvi.*  
*Hitt telk jafnt, at gangi*  
*at samtogi sverða*  
*sveinn í móti einum;*  
*hrökkvit þegn fyr þegni,*  
*þat vas drengs aðal lengi;*  
*æ skal ástvinr meyja*  
*einarðr í dyn sverða.*

We swung the sword.  
I call the fight honest  
when one man goes against one man,  
and the sword is bared one time.  
Yield not fighter for fighter!  
The character of ancient-heroes was such.  
The lovers of maidens may stand

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<sup>19</sup> In other words, Ragnar and his three sons total four men, while their opponents, Sörli's champion and his seven sons, constitute eight men. Thus Ragnar and each of his sons fight two men apiece.

<sup>20</sup> [Rydberg's footnote]: In § 11 below, I discuss this material briefly. [See Book 4 of Saxo's *Danish History*].

<sup>21</sup> Saxo remarks: "The ancients held it to be unfair, and also infamous, for two men to fight against one; and a victory gained by this kind of fighting they did not account honorable, but more like a disgrace than a glory. Indeed, it was considered not only a poor, but a most shameful exploit for two men to overpower one." [Elton tr.].

fearless in the din of weapons.<sup>22</sup>

Importance ought to be placed on the fact that the inscription on the Rök stone does *not* say that the twenty-four trophies were all taken by Varin's son. It does not say: "I tell the folktale, how many two-fold trophies Vamud took; twelve times he took them, etc" Instead, one finds the expression chosen in a such a way that the author of the inscription diligently seemed to avoid saying this, because it does not agree with the known story. All that one can correctly conclude from his words is that Vamud took part with his comrades in all the events in question, when the trophies were won in pairs. On one of these occasions, four warriors stood against eight, as in Saxo's history of Ragnar. Thus one understands the words: "I tell the folktale how many the twofold trophies were: twelve times taken two trophies, namely two from both men."

#### § 4.

We now come to the next words on the Rök stone inscription:

"I tell this second (folktale): how he (Varin's son Vamud) withdrew from the Reidgoths, was caught by nine troops, and afterwards lay dead through the fault of cruelty."<sup>23</sup>

Do we find support for these words in Lodbrok's saga too?

I must say that the interpretation I have given of this passage is not exactly the same as Bugge's. Let us first consider his, as it is also formally correct. Specifically, what we have here is a double entendre which should be considered from both sides.

*Bugge's translation:* "I tell this second (folktale): how he (Varin's son Vamud) withdrew from the Reidgoths, was caught out by nine troops, and afterwards lay dead on that account."

The translations differ only with reference to the reading and the meaning of the last words in the passage: *ub sakar*, which can be read both as Bugge has: *on that account*, and as I have done: *through the fault of cruelty (ub ubsa sakar)*.

The rune-carver himself probably saw this duality, as I have, and had nothing against one interpreting it in both ways because both lead in the right direction and the latter complements the former.

In Bugge's translation as well as in mine, the passage gives us the following information: 1) Varin's son Vamud was a commander of Reidgothic warriors— a conclusion that is confirmed by the second passage in the Rök stone inscription. 2) On one occasion, when foes awaited him, on what for him was foreign territory, and when he became separated from his Reidgothic warriors for one reason or another, he was

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<sup>22</sup> Literally "We swung with a sword. I consider it equal in the pulling together of swords [battle] that a lad goes against one [i.e. one against one]. A *þegn* should not balk before another; such was, for a long time, the nature of a *drengr*. The beloved friend of maidens should be resolute in the roar of swords [battle]." [Haukur Þorgeirsson tr.]

<sup>23</sup> As noted, Rydberg follows the translation of Sophus Bugge. A modern translation of this line reads: "This I tell second who nine generations ago lost his life with the Reidgoths, and he died with them, because of his offences."

surrounded by nine enemy troops and outnumbered by them. 3) He does not fall in the battle, but was taken captive and killed *thereafter* as a result of the capture.

This follows directly from Bugge's translation: "and *afterwards* [he] lay dead *on that account*." I agree with Bugge that the story may have said that during the course of battle the hero had dared to venture far in among the enemy and that the Rök stone's rune-carver may have intended this with the expression: "withdrew from the Reidgoths"; but, if with the words *afterwards* and *on that account*, he meant that the hero surrounded by enemies and without help of friends was killed on the battleground immediately, he would have used the expressions *afterwards* and *on that account* not only poorly, but quite misleadingly. Instead of simply saying: *he fell*, he has used a lengthy and abstract expression that stands in the sharpest contrast to the inscription's concrete, concise and commemorative style elsewhere on the stone and in comparison is without parallel in Old Norse usage.

Thus, we must strike firmly and say that even in Bugge's translation one must imagine that Vamud was captured and died thereafter in bondage.

This also agrees with the idea that he was overpowered by nine men. If he fell in the midst of a war throng, the place for nine slashing enemies can hardly be imagined around a lone warrior, so one would scarcely expect such an expression. Rather this seems to indicate that they wanted to capture him alive and thus ensnare him within the shield-wall formed by the nine men. Through this, the expression becomes comprehensible.

I come now to my own interpretation of *ub sakar*. Everyone who has taken a position on the interpretation of the Rök stone's inscription knows that its carver held as a rule that wherever the same rune or the same series of runes, if fully written out, would immediately fall next to one another, he wrote them singly and does not repeat them. Examples:

*Sakumukmini* for *sakum mukminni*,  
*Suadh* for *sua adh*,  
*Uarinumnar* for *uarin numnar*,  
*tualraubar* for *tua(r) ualraubar*,  
*umisumanum* for *umissum mannum*,  
*raidhiaurikr* for *raidh Thiaurikr*,  
*ituituaki* for *itu uituaki*,  
*satintsjulunti* for *satint int sjulunti*,  
*fiunu* for *fiun unnu*.

From this it follows that if the rune-carver intended the expression *ub ubsa sakar*, he could not have written it differently than *ub sakar*, according to the rule he followed throughout the inscription, because otherwise he would have placed two *ub*'s and two *sa*'s directly next to one another (*ububsasakar*). Under such conditions, it is not only a privilege but an obligation to take into consideration both possibilities—one as well as other—particularly since they do not negate one another but coincide well. *Ub ubsa sakar* means: "through the fault of cruelty." The expression informs us that the means of death that Varin's son Vamud suffered as a prisoner was one which could be especially characterized as one prescribed by cruelty.

Now, remember what the Icelandic tradition says of Ragnar Lodbrok's ultimate fate; that he had separated himself from his army by forcing his way alone into Ælla's *fylkings*, killing many enemies with his own hand, until he became ensnared between shields where he was captured. Afterwards, he was cast into a pit of vipers and died there.

This narrative not only agrees with what the Rök stone says about the ultimate fate of Varin's son, but also explains the expression that the rune-carver chose when he referred to it.

#### § 5.

After the circumstances of Vamud's death have been indicated, a verse which sounds grand in the Old Swedish language occurs that depicts the hero mounted in full armament with a shield strapped over his shoulders and his horse Goti as a companion in death. The Icelandic novel about Ragnar Lodbrok states that after King Ælla learned who the warrior killed in the snake-pit was, he made every effort to appease and placate Ragnar's sons. First he prepared a grand funeral.<sup>24</sup>

Rules over  
the Reið-sea's shores  
Thiaurik the bold,  
chief of sea-warriors,  
Now he sits armed  
on his horse Goti,  
his shield strapped,  
the prince of heroes.

Here, Vamud is called Thiaurik(r). In and of itself, this sudden change of names is not surprising: we often find such a thing in the Norse poetry, rich in synonyms and kennings. It seems to me that, especially here, an interpreter ought to keep in mind this use of synonyms and thus not take for granted that Vamud and Thiaurik were two different people when the runestone goes on to tell of *a* hero and then immediately after the account of his death mentions his internment in a mound<sup>25</sup> and when the change in names occurs just where the text's free form is placed in the bonds of verse within which synonym-exchanges are the rule and not the exception. Because the rune-carver also is known to have availed himself of a cipher-script, it seems possible that he used it here too and that Thiaurik(r) is a cipher-name.

The Rök stone is also significant because it proves that the runic script, at least during the last heathen centuries, was developed by our forefathers into a fairly detailed branch of knowledge. Researchers who believe that the longer, and so it would seem the pan-Germanic, rune-row was forgotten in Sweden in the ninth century were astonished to learn that it is used here not only ornamentally as first thought, but in actual script. Beside the characters of the longer and the shorter rune-rows one sees twig-runes. Beside regular shorthand, one finds ciphers that require different keys. One of the cipher scripts used is

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<sup>24</sup> Literally *en ärande högsättning*, "an honouring mound-laying." The phrase *att sätta någon i hög* means "to place someone in a [burial] mound".

<sup>25</sup> *högsättning*.

based on the rune-row that arises when one begins with the runes of Tyr's *ætt*, continues with Frey's, and concludes with Hagal's. This script calls for two keys. The first, with which Bugge unlocked a pair of stone's cipher-riddles, allows the meaning of the rune to be determined by its position within the *ætt*; and the second by its position in the rune-row as a whole. The latter key has the following appearance:

f= t  
u= b  
th= l  
o= m  
r= r finale  
k= f  
h= u  
n= th  
i = o  
a= r  
s= k  
t= h  
b= n  
l = i  
m= a  
r fin.= s

If we now use this cipher-key on the name Thiaurik(r), we get:

*Th*, the first letter in Thiaurik corresponds to L  
*i*, second       »       »       »       »   o  
*a*, third        »       »       »       »   r  
*u*, fourth       »       »       »       »   b  
*r*, fifth         »       »       »       »   r  
*t*, sixth        »       »       »       »   o  
*k*, the seventh is not a cipher, but corresponds to  
                  the seventh letter in Lodbrok    k.<sup>26</sup>

Had the seventh letter also been ciphered one would get the name Thiaurif, which does not look like a name, while Thiaurik (Icelandic, *Þiórrekr*) means “the bull-mighty,” an epithet that lends itself well to a fighter of bull- and cow-fetishes, besides sounding like the hero's name Thjóðrekr. By ciphering the first six letters, the name formed from Thiaurik is thus Lorbrok, which is so close to Lodbrok (Loðbrók) using a cipher key, that it is probably intentional and in any case close enough to lead the cipher-seeker it. I understand that the evidence that Thiaurik is a cipher intending Lodbrok is not conclusive because one of the seven letters does not hold true and that the seventh, which is common to both and necessary for the name's formation, is placed without ciphering. Thus, I do

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<sup>26</sup> In the cipher that allows the runes in Frey's *ætt* to correspond to the runes in Tyr's and so on, *k* would remain unciphered for the reason that Frey's *ætt* contains six runes of which *k* is the last, while the two other *ætts* each contain only five.

not assume that my revealing this corresponding relationship shall be considered as evidence of a correlation between the Rök stone story and Lodbrok's saga by my readers. However, the strength of the evidence is independent of this. That five of the seven letters correspond would be enough for a mathematician to say that it is unlikely that this would be due to chance when they are all applied using the same cipher system. It should be added that the name Lorbrok can be considered a variant of Lodbrok, because *lor* (Icel. *lárr*) means a chest for keeping wool. The outfit which Lodbrok wears when he slays the giant-snake — and the one gave him his byname — was a type of pants made of wool, soaked in pitch.<sup>27</sup>

To the horse-name Goti, I shall return below.

Vamud-Thiaurik is called the ruler over the shores of the Reid-sea and just prior to this the inscription says that his comrades were Reidgoths. A closer investigation of the passages in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature where the names Reidgotaland and Reidgoths occur show that it probably was chiefly through the Lodbrok family-saga, as it existed in heathen times, that this name was spread and became preserved in song and writing.

#### § 6.

After the verse quoted above, the Rök stone's inscription reads:

“I tell this for the twelfth, how Sigyn's horse sees food on *Vitängen* where twenty kings lie fallen.”<sup>28</sup>

As far as I can tell, besides the Rök stone, there is only one place in Old Norse literature where a war is mentioned and characterized so that the principle participants numbered twenty. It is a single passage in *Krákumál* 3 which reads: “We swung the sword, we bore the spears high, when we, totaling twenty, reddened steel widely.”<sup>29</sup>

#### § 7.

In direct connection to this, the inscription continues:

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<sup>27</sup> *Þáttur af Ragnars sonum*, ch. 1: “He donned shaggy clothes: trousers and a cloak with sleeves and hood. These clothes were treated with sand and tar, and he took in his hand a great spear, and had a sword on his belt, and in this way he left his men and walked alone to the jarl's dwelling and Thora's bower. And as soon as the snake saw that a stranger had come, it reared up and blew poison at him. But he thrust his shield at it and went bravely towards it and pierced its heart with his spear.” [Peter Tunstall tr.].

<sup>28</sup> The line reads: “*Þat sögum tolfða, hvar hestr sé Gunnar etu véttvangi á, konungar tveir tígir svát á liggja.*” {Following Bugge, Rydberg understands *hestr sé Gunnar* to mean “Sigyn's horse”}

<sup>29</sup> The phrase *tvítugir töldumk* which literally means “twenty were counted” is ambiguous. Haukur Þorgeirsson translates this verse as: “We swung our sword. When we were counted twenty, then we carried our spears high and smeared our reputation widely [with blood]; we defeated eight lords east by Dína's mouth; then, at that battle, we gave enough of a meal to the wolf. Blood fell into the swollen sea, people lost [their] lives.” Thomas Percy translates the line in question as “when I had numbered twenty years” and Margaret Schlauch renders the same line as “in my twentieth year.”



“I tell this for the thirteenth, which twenty kings sat on Zealand for four winters with four names, born to four brothers:

five Valkis, sons of Rodulf,  
five Reidulfs, sons of Rugulf,  
five Haisls, sons of Harud,  
five Gunnmunds, sons of Örn.

Imer (the Wolf) remembers plentiful nourishment. They shall sink, all these, in” ...<sup>30</sup>

As already pointed out above, among the names of the four brothers who are the fathers of the twenty kings occur Rugulf and Harud who are associated with Lodbrok’s saga.

The same can be said of the fourth name: Örn. A hero with the name Örn is mentioned in *Krákumál*. There, Lodbrok sings that he fought with Örn in Álesund and had difficulty attaining victory. “It was”, he says, “something more than to sit on an embankment and kiss maidens.”<sup>31</sup>

The name Rodulf remains. In *Piðreks Saga af Bern*, it says that when Gunnar the Gjukung was on his way to Atli (there called Attila) and to his death in the snake-pit, he made a visit to Rodulf (also called Rodingeir), whose son it says lived on Valkaborg.<sup>32</sup> Here, as on the Rök stone, the names Rodulf and Valki coincide. In the Rök stone inscription, Rodulf is father to five Valkis; in *Piðreks Saga af Bern* he is father to a son who lives in Valki’s or the Valkas’ court. Further down I shall provide reasons that the episode concerning the snake-pit came from Lodbrok’s saga into that of Sigurd Fafnisbane and Gunnar the Gjukung. Regarding Rodulf in particular, an excerpt of *Lodbroksdrapa* in the *Prose Edda*, ascribed to Bragi skald, confirms that a hero with a similar name plays a role in Lodbrok’s saga: *Allr gekk herr ... Rádálfs af bráðum Reifnis mar.*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The stone is damaged here and the line illegible. Rydberg follows Bugge’s interpretation. The Rök stone reads: nuk m--- (m)-- alu --(k)(i) ainhuaR -þ. Rydberg reads the same passage as “nukma--miralus-k-ainhuariþ-----a-----” and understands the line to read: “*nuk man imir alu sikia inhuar ip...*” [*Hjeltesagan och Rökstenen*, p. 70]. Modern scholars read the line: “*Nú’k m[inni] m[eð] öllu [se]gi.*”

<sup>31</sup> Verse 20: *Hjoggunn vér með hjörvi/Hárfagan sák røkkva / meyjar dreng of morgin /ok málvini ekkju. /Vasat sem varmar laugar /vinkers Njörun bæri /oss í Álasundi, /áðr Örn konungr fellir; /böðmána sák bresta, /brá því fira lífi.*

<sup>32</sup> In the German poems, *Biterolf und Dietleib* and *Der Rosengarten zu Worms*, Nuodunc is the son of Rüedegêr. [*A Catalogue of Persons Named in German Heroic Literature*, by George Gillespie, p. 110, s.v. *Rüedegêr*]. In *Piðreks Saga af Bern*, ch. 368 (Edward R. Haymes tr., p. 224), King Gunnar and the Niflungs visit Rodingeir [cp. Rüedegêr]. In chapter 369 (Haymes, p. 225) Duke Naudung [cp. Nuodunc] of Valkaborg is identified as the brother of Rodingeir’s wife, Gudilinda and thus, as Rodingeir’s brother-in-law. Rydberg does not explain his reasoning for identifying Rodulf and Rodingeir (cp. *Hjeltesagan och Rökstenen*, p. 36). In *Piðreks Saga*, they are two distinct characters. Both are messengers of Attila. Rodulf is a duke in Attila’s army, first sent to King Osantrix to win his daughter for Attila (ch. 42). When he fails to win her hand, Attila sends the Margrave Rodingeir of Bakalar, the greatest chieftain in his domain for the same purpose (ch. 43).

<sup>33</sup> What Rydberg takes as the name *Rádálfs*, modern translators take as the epithet *radaralfs*, “brig-elf”. This may be an emendation. A modern transcription of Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa* 11 reads: *Ok fyr hönd í holmi /hveðru brynju Viðris /fengedyðandi fljóða /fordæða nam ráða; /allr gekk herr und hurðir*

The name Harud, which we have already discovered belongs to Lodbrok's saga, occurs in Saxo in the form Herodus as the name of Lodbrok's father-in-law and in Icelandic literature in the distorted form Herröðr as father of Lodbrok's first wife. Of him, *Krakumál* 5 says that "a more famous jarl does not steer the longship toward harbors."

#### § 8.

Of these twelve sons of four kings found again in Lodbrok's saga, the inscription says that "they sat on Zealand for four winters."

Saxo mentions a four-year feud between Ragnar and Danish vassal-kings. In the first year, Ragnar strikes the Skanings at "Whitby"; the following year (*exacta hyeme*) the Jutes at Limfjorden; the third and fourth years he conquers the Skånings for a second time and thereafter the Halländings. "Whitby" recurs as "Hvitaby" in the Icelandic narratives. Whether this name stands in connection to the battlefield *Vit-ängen* ["the White-meadow"] on the Rök stone may be left open with the observation that the aspiration constitutes no impediment as everybody who knows the history of the relationship of aspirations in Saxo's time well understands.

#### § 9.

The Rök stone inscription continues with the following words:

"I tell the folktale to which hero a son is born: it is to Vilin."

Here one must ask: Could the rune-carver have meant that the birth of a son to a hero is something so rare and remarkable that it is suitable to be a "folktale" in and of itself? This is highly improbable. The rune-carver emphasizes that what makes this event, in itself not unusual, a folktale is that it is a son which is born to Vilin. This again implies that the birth of Vilin's son occurs under particularly unusual and difficult circumstances through which it became a subject of more common interest.

In the revisions of heathendoms' heroic sagas which have come down to us, narratives about a birth of this kind exist and the father of the child bears a name that is reminiscent of and may be a variant of Vilmund.

The narrative is treated poetically in *Oddrúnargrátr*.

Borgny, the daughter of king Heidrek, had secret relations with a young hero named Vilmund. She lies in full labor, but cannot give birth. All means used to assist her are of no avail. The poem says that the word of her suffering spread widely, but no one on earth was in a position to help her –no one except a shield-maiden named Oddrun, her childhood friend, whom she had deeply offended by accusing her of the same kind of

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*/Hjarranda framm kyrrar /reiðr af Reifnis skeiði /raðaralfs mari bróðum.* "And on the island, instead of the Vidrir [warrior] of the mail-coat's troll-wife [axe], the victory-preventing witch of a woman had her way. The brig-elf's [sea-farer's] whole army advanced in anger under the unwavering Hjarrandi's [Odin's] hurdles [shields] from the swift-running Reifnir's horse [ship]." (*Skáldskaparmál* 50, Anthony Faulkes tr.).

transgression, the consequences of which Borgny herself now endures. But the noble and compassionate Oddrun comes and assists her by means of powerful spells to bear Vilmund a son and a daughter.

A birth under such circumstances may become a “folktale.” The question now is whether this folktale, like the others mentioned on the Rök stone, also belongs to saga of the Lodbroks.

On first inspection, it does not appear to, because *Oddrúnargrátr* seems to be an episode in the story of Sigurd Fafnersbane and Gunnar the Gjukung. All researchers agree, however, that the material which *Oddrúnargrátr* handles is gathered from some other story and that its incorporation into the Sigurd cycle of songs is fairly loose, and causes basic confusion in it. But as far as I know despite this consensus, no one has asked the question which other story it is.

According to *Oddrúnargrátr*, Borgny’s father is king Heidrek. This name occurs in the Icelandic documents exclusively as belonging to a royal line in Reidgotaland, the homeland of the Rök stone’s heroes. In the family-tree that Icelanders in Christian times fixed to families that wished to be regarded as Lodbrokids, the Reidgothic king Heidrek Ulfham, through his daughter, is a progenitor of Ragnar Lodbrok. In the same genealogies, Heidrek Ulfham has a son named Heidrek who is a progenitor of a Högni, who is one of the primary figures in the ghostly battle of the Hjadnings.<sup>34</sup> This battle was originally an episode in Lodbrok’s saga; that Vilmund also played a role in it shall be demonstrated below. The other primary figure is Hjarrandi’s son Hedin. In the saga of the Hegelings, the wonderful harp-player Hjarrandi (Horand) is jarl to the old Hegeling king, whose son loves Oddrun (Ortrun). The name Heidrek thus belongs to the Lodbrok family-saga.<sup>35</sup>

In *Oddrúnargrátr*, Vilmund is called “Högni’s slayer.” With astonishment, Edda-researchers have asked themselves “which Högni?”, because although *Oddrúnargrátr* introduces the material extolled there into the saga of Sigurd Fafnisbane and transforms its hero, Oddrun’s beloved, into Gunnar the Gjukung, the Högni referred to cannot be the Gjukung of this name (i.e. Gunnar’s brother who is killed by Atli), nor Sigrun’s father Högni, who falls in battle with Helgi Hundingsbane. But there is another Högni, who belongs to precisely the circle of personalities reported in *Oddrúnargrátr*, since he is a descendant of the Reidgothic king Heidrek, and thus a relative of Borgny, Heidrek’s daughter, celebrated in *Oddrúnargrátr*. This same Högni is a primary figure in the battle of the Hjadnings. That this also constitutes an episode in Lodbrok’s saga thus demonstrates that the excerpt from Bragi the Old’s “*Lodbroksdrapa*” that *Skáldskaparmál* preserves partially describes the battle of the Hjadnings and partially an adventure of Sörli and Hamder. According to Saxo, Ragnar has fought a Sörli in Götaland and an Ælla, Hamder’s (Hama’s) son, on English soil —information that, however transformed it became during the course of time and perhaps by Saxo’s hand, nevertheless testifies along with Bragi’s century-older “*Lodbroksdrapa*” that the adventure of Sörli and Hamder was already associated with Lodbrok’s saga a long time ago. In regard to the battle of the Hjadnings, *Krákumál* testifies that the story of the ghost-warriors Högni and Hedin still constituted an episode in Lodbrok’s saga at the time when it was written. It is Lodbrok who lands with his comrades on an island which the

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<sup>34</sup> In *Sörli Thattur*, chs. 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> [Rydberg’s footnote]: Compare § 2.

Hjadnings hold and releases them from continuing their nightly battles until Ragnarök by killing them. It says in *Krákumál* 13 that Lodbrok comes by ship to *Hjaðninga-vági*, and that he and his companions fought there and crushed the shields and the helmets of “the Goths imprisoned in their dead bodies.”<sup>36</sup> Because Vilmund belongs to Lodbrok’s saga, as shall be demonstrated later, and he is called “Högni’s killer,” one must draw the conclusion that on this occasion he accompanied Lodbrok and either killed or took part in the killing of Högni.<sup>37</sup> In Herröd’s saga the memory survives that the name Vilmund belonged to the story-cycle of the Lodbrokids; specifically that a Vilmund originates from Bosí, the comrade-in-arms of Lodbrok’s father-in-law. Like Hjarrandi, the father of Hedin the Hjadning, Bosí is an excellent harp-player and plays *Hjarrandahljóð*.<sup>38</sup>

In character, Oddrun in *Oddrúnargrátr* is the same as Ortrun in the saga of the Hegelings. While in the Norse song she makes the promise to “be helpful to everybody,” in the German she is a model of justice and compassion, who consoles and comforts those whom her family persecutes and mistreats. Oddrun-Ortrun’s mother has the same character in both poems, that of a wicked monster whose only humane feature in both poems is that she is devoted to her son and furthers his plans. In both poems the mother and son stand on one side and the daughter Oddrun on the other. In the saga of the Hegelings too, her heart belongs to a young prince toward whom her family bears hostility. As in the Norse poem, he has a sister named Gudrun.<sup>39</sup>

The last circumstance should be taken into consideration for a particular literary-historical reason. In the German stories of Sigurd-Siegfried, the sister of Gunnar (Günther) is named Grimhild (Kriemhild), in the Norse stories, however, she is named Gudrun. Nevertheless, the name Grimhild also occurs in the Norse stories, but belongs to the mother of Gudrun and Gunnar. There can be no doubt that the German and the Norse Sigurd sagas sprouted from the same stem into branches that grew in different directions south and north of the Baltic Sea. How can the shift in positions made by the names Gudrun and Grimhild be explained? Either Grimhild or Gudrun was the original name of

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<sup>36</sup> Rydberg probably based this reading on the words *hræsildar gotna*. The verse reads: *Hjoggum vér með hjörvi/ Heldum Lakkar tjöldum/ hátt at Hildar leiki/ fyr Hjaðninga vági./ Sjá knáttu þá seggir./es sundruðum skjöldu/ at hræsildar hjaldri./ hjalm slitnaðan gotna;/vasat sem bjarta brúði/ í bing hjá sér leggja*. “We hewed with the sword! In the game of war we lifted our shields by Hedninga Bay; There might men see how we sundered steel and smote on their helms; it was other cheer than when in the arms of brides we lay!” [Margaret Schlauch tr.]

<sup>37</sup> [Rydberg’s footnote]: In the song of the wooden-image on Samsó, *svarðmerðlingar* occurs as an epithet for *Hæklings megir, synir Loðbrókar*. Up until now, this has been unclear and thus this word mishandled by the conjectural critics becomes easily intelligible if one remembers that before Olaf Tryggvesson received the transferred honor of having obtained peace for the Hjadnings, this honor belonged to Lodbrok and his relatives, and that Högni, the commander of one of the ghost-armies, is also called *Svörðr* (gen. *Svarðar*) by the poets. See *Hálfs Saga og Hálfsrekka*, ch. 7, where Hild, Högni’s daughter, is called *Svarðar dóttir*. *Svarðmerðlingar* means Högni’s crusher. [*Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar*, ch. 20: *Ok því settumk/ Svarðmerðlingar/ suðr hjá salti./ synir Loðbrókar;/ þá vark blótinn/ til bana mönnum/ í Sámseyju/ sumanverðri*. “Mighty warriors, Lodbrok’s sons, raised me by the sea-side then; Me upon this shore they worshipped— prayed me for the bane of men,” M. Schlauch tr.]

<sup>38</sup> *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* 12: *Sló hann þar Gýgjarlag ok Drömbuð ok Hjarrandahljóð*. “Then he played the tunes of the ‘Ogress’, the ‘Dreamer’, and the ‘Warrior.’” [Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards tr., *Seven Viking Romances*, p. 220]

<sup>39</sup> [Rydberg’s footnote]: Compare § 3. [“Ortrun: Sister of Hartmuot von Ormanie: she treats Kudrun kindly during her captivity; finally she marries Ortwin, Kudrun’s brother,” in the poem *Kudrun*, according to A *Catalogue of Persons Named in German Heroic Literature* by George T. Gillespie.]

the Gjukung Gunnar's sister; one or the other must have been when the story split into a German and a Norse branch, after which something in the story's wider fate happened that resulted in the transposition of their names. This question is answered through the circumstance presented here that there was a period in the development of the story, represented by *Oddrúnargrátr* in the *Poetic Edda*, during which the ancient saga of Lodbrok met the comparatively newer saga of Sigurd, which itself was expanding with elements from different directions, and was partially incorporated with it. As mentioned, the saga of the Hegelings names the sister of the young Hegeling-prince Gudrun, and names their mother Hild. That Lodbrok and the Lodbrokids are Hegelings, Hæklings, is demonstrated above. In the Norse source, Lodbrok's mother bears the name Hild, expanded to Alfild, because, according to the source's information, she was of the Alfar clan. The poems that combined Lodbrok with Gunnar the Gjukung must have also combined Lodbrok's sister with Gunnar's sister and given the latter the former's name Gudrun. Hild (Alfild) then became Grimhild.

The snake-pit also came into the Sigurd cycle from Lodbrok's saga. The German Sigurd's saga knows nothing of the snake-pit. Had the snake-pit originally been found there, and if it originally was Günther-Gunnar, not Lodbrok, who sung or played the harp while being bitten by snakes there, this presumably would not have been forgotten, because the episode is altogether too remarkable and captivating to not retain its original place. The visit that Gunnar, on his way to the snake-pit, paid to the Rodulf whose son lived in Valkaborg thus also originally belonged to Lodbrok's saga, so too the horse Goti. Neither the German poems nor *Piðreks Saga af Bern*, interlaced with German and Norse material, nor any of the *Poetic Edda*'s poems know that Gunnar's horse was named Goti. The information about this has flown from the interpolated *Kálfsvisa* into the *Völsungasaga* and the *Prose Edda*.<sup>40</sup> However, the peculiar history by Saxo, according to which Ragnar owned cast horses —metal horses which he used to disperse an enemy — can stand in connection to the horse-name *Goti*.<sup>41</sup> Compare the participle *gotinn*, to pour, to cast. We find the horse-name *Mór* varied with *Móinn*, and *Móðnir* with *Móðinn*. Thus it would seem justified to interpret *Goti* as *Gotinn*. One practical proof of the disorder caused by the blending of the two stories at a certain time exists in the Abbot Nicolaus' account of a journey (*Itinerarium*) during the middle of the 1100s. When he wished to report the peculiarities of the Italian city Luna, he says that according to some the snake-pit wherein Gunnar was placed was dug in Luna's beach. In Gunnar the Gjukung's adventure, the city Luna is not mentioned; however it occupies a prominent position in the historicized story of Lodbrok and Lodbrok's sons. Lodbrok sought in vain to occupy Luna; after which his sons came, avenged his misfortune and occupied the city in the sense that it was Rome or with the intent to continue the journey to Rome. The information about Luna's occupation by Northmen, however, cannot be older than the year 859 and consequently first may have been incorporated into the older, purely heroic saga of Lodbrok in the ninth century. Two hundred years later, as the *Itinerarium* makes

<sup>40</sup> The verse appears in *Skáldskaparmál* 58, where it is mistakenly called *Alsvinnsmál*. The relevant line reads: *Gunnar Gota en Grana Sigurðr*, "Gunnar Goti and on Grani, Sigurd" [A. Faulkes tr.]

<sup>41</sup> Saxo's *Danish History*, Book 9: "But Ragnar, when he saw their boundless army, distrusted his own forces; and he put brazen horses on wheels that could be drawn easily, took them round on carriages that would turn, and ordered that they should be driven with the utmost force against the thickest ranks of the enemy." [Oliver Elton tr.]

clear, we find that “some” had incorporated this historic memory with the sagas of Sigurd Fafnisbane and Gunnar the Gjukung and combined it with the Lodbrok legend of the snake-pit.

The reasons I have stated above ought to be sufficient to remove any doubt that the contents of *Oddrúnargrátr* were gathered from Lodbrok’s saga and that Vilmund belongs to the latter. It has also been demonstrated that many of the names and all the events reported on the Rök stone have their counterparts in Lodbrok’s saga.

We also should consider it demonstrated that the remarkable circumstances which accompany the birth of Vilin’s son are the same that accompany the birth of Vilmund’s son in *Oddrúnargrátr*, from whence it follows that Vilin and Vilmund are variant names for the same person. It can now be pointed out in analogy with this that the name Varmund which occurs in *Oddrúnargrátr*, although veiled, may be a variant form of Varin. In the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, Wærmund is said to be the father of Offa; in the Beowulf poem, Garmund is the father of the same Offa. The Old English Garmund answers to the Old Norse Geirmund, which thus is a parallel-name of Værmund, Varmund. *Oddrúnargrátr* mentions a king Geirmund, who is Oddrun’s friend.

#### § 10.

That the heathen saga of Lodbrok was localized in Östergötland explains why a memory-marker like the Rök stone was raised and why the heroes and events reported on the stone were considered “folktales” there. That this localizing was widely known outside of Östergötland’s borders proves the story ancient. The Icelandic legends make Lodbrok’s father-in-law Herröd a king or jarl in Östergötland. Saxo makes Lodbrok’s father-in-law Herodus a king in Sweden. In the *Fornaldarsagas*, Vilmund is a descendent of Herröd’s fosterbrother Bosi, an Östrogothic hero. Heidrek, the father of Vilmund’s beloved, is king in Reidgotaland. The Rök stone demonstrates that the Östrogoths still referred to themselves as Reidgoths in the 900s. According to *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (ch.17), the sons of Lodbrok plague England with warriors gathered from Denmark and Götaland.

#### § 11.

That the names Varin and Vilin not only could be, but actually were, used as synonyms of the names Varmund and Vilmund invite us to investigate the circumstances by which the name Varmund became associated with the others in the sagas. Are these circumstances such that they too reveal a connection between Lodbrok’s saga and the inscription on the Rök stone?

Of a king Varmund who was placed in the Danish list of monarchs by Saxo, the following is said:

Varmund (Vermundus) was a king in Denmark. His reign was the longest, most fortunate, and calmest reported. Advanced in age, he begot a son, Uffo. While he was still a child, Denmark was afflicted with war by the Swedish king Athislus, one of the era’s mightiest warriors, boastful but chivalrous and matchless in a duel. He met Varmund’s

jarl Frovinus. Athislus slew Frovinus in single combat and, in the battle that followed, conquered the Danish army.

This was not the only war with which Athislus afflicted Denmark. Frovinus' sons, the jarls Keto and Vigo, finally liberated Varmund from his restless neighbor. They secretly proceeded to Sweden, overcame Athislus when he was alone in a wood and, two against one, succeeded in killing the tyrant. King Varmund rewarded the brothers for what they had done; but many thought that they had broken honorable fighting-tradition, which set one against one.

Thereafter, Uffo displayed an unusual temperament. The boy stopped speaking. He became reserved and somber. One never saw him smile nor take part in youthful games. As he grew up, he grew incredibly strong, although he never appeared to use his strength.

In his advanced old age, Varmund had become blind. Then a Saxon king, his neighbor to the south, sent a messenger and demanded his kingdom, since he was incompetent to rule and protect it. He did not give into this demand, and so a challenge was issued: his son should meet the Saxon king's son in a duel and Denmark's fate would rest on the outcome of their single combat. These conditions caused Varmund and his men great woe. But then, to everyone's surprise, Uffo broke his silence and requested permission to respond to the challenge. He got it and said that he would take up the challenge on the condition that he fight one-on-two, alone against the Saxon prince and the strongest warrior that could be found in the Saxon camp, simultaneously. Now they learned the cause of the distress that had so long sealed Uffo's lips. He said that when Keto and Vigo overcame the Swedish king two against one, they had brought shame upon the Danish name with this unfair fight. After that fight, two against one, he would fight one against two to obliterate the shame. Many coats-of-mail fit him, but when the youth's chest heaved to take a breath, the straps would break and the buckle and rings split. Although it too was tight, his father's coat-of-mail was the only remedy. Every sword was found too weak for Uffo's arm; only one kept in the earth, which Varmund bore in his youth, proved strong enough. The holmgang happened on an island in the Eider and was witnessed by both the Danish and the Saxon armies. Uffo killed both opponents.

In this story as in *Lodbrok's saga*, we thus encounter an event where —to use the Rök stone's expression —trophies were taken in pairs. And when the heroes of the Rök stone, fighting one against two, have a Varin as father, this story's hero has one Varmund as his father. The story of the old king and his noble son has come to Saxo from more than one source. It is assumed that he knew an old Danish variant of the story or at least a royal genealogy based on a Danish tradition which made Varmund and Offa kings of Denmark. That he knew an Icelandic variant or genealogy is certain, because he says that Varmund's son was also called *Olavus Mansuetus*.<sup>42</sup> In the *Fornaldarsagas*, one finds an equivalent in Olaf *lítilláti* the son of Vermund *vitri* (the wise).<sup>43</sup> That Saxo also knew and especially made use of an English Varmund-Offa story is clear as day and shall be pointed out in detail below.

The byname *lítilláti*, “he who made himself unimportant”, “the one that allowed little to be heard of him,” undoubtedly alludes to the state of seclusion and silence in

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<sup>42</sup> “Olaf the mild.”

<sup>43</sup> *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, ch. 5: *Vermundar ins vitra, föður Ólafs ins lítilláta*.

which Uffo sentenced himself during his boyhood, according to Saxo's narrative; by this he got the opportunity to obliterate the shame the sons of Frovinus brought upon the Danish name. For a similar reason, the author of the Rök stone inscription may have given his Varin's son the epithet *Vamuðr*, *Vámóðr*, "the melancholy", "the indignant," because this occurs as an actual name among the Goths (but not among the Scandinavians as far as I know) and can allude to the indignation and grief on which Varmund's son brooded before he suddenly revealed himself to be a hero and became the avenger of the honorable fighting-custom.<sup>44</sup>

Because Saxo says that Uffo was also called Olaf, I have compiled some information from the Icelandic sources for comparison with the information from Saxo, which shows that an Asmund was identical or blended with a Varmund, and an Uffo was identical or blended with an Olaf.<sup>45</sup>

*Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*: Asmund, owner of the ship Gnod, father to *Olaf* in Görðum.

*Gríms saga loðinkinna*: Asmund, owner of the ship Gnod, father to *Olaf liðsmannakonungs*.

Saxo I, 46: Asmund, father to Uffo.

Saxo I, 161: Vermund, father to Uffo.

*Hversu Noregr byggðist* ch. 5: Vermund, father to *Olaf litilláti*.

Saxo I: Asmund's son, who fights with *Hadding*, is called Uffo.

*Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*: Asmund's son, who fights with *Hadding*, is called *Olaf* in Görðum.

## § 12.

According to the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, near the end of the fifth century, five ships manned with Saxon warriors landed at *Cerdices ora*. Strengthened from home, these Vikings after many years of battle conquered the part of Britain that has been called Wessex since. Their leader was a Cerdic, among whose forefathers, according to the same chronicle, was a Freawine and his son Wig, who descended from Odin, i.e. were great-rulers or kings in their homeland.<sup>46</sup>

The warriors, which in large part came from Angeln and Jutland, afterwards conquered the parts of Britain that have the names East Anglia, Northumberland and Mercia. Their ruler, who took possession of East Anglia, was called Offa. The royal line that came to power in Mercia was also regarded as having descended from Odin and already had been nobility in the motherland. Counted among the nobles that would rule there were Wærmund and his son Offa. The kings of Essex also regarded themselves as "Uffings," descendants of Offa. As a son of Offa, Æsevin, the first king in Essex, was

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<sup>44</sup> [Rydberg's footnote]: See further § 14, where it is pointed out that the designations Vamud and Uffo can have the same meaning.

<sup>45</sup> See *Investigations into Germanic Mythology*, Vol. 1 [Translated as "Teutonic Mythology" by Rasmus Anderson], chapter 39: "The Asmund who is known in the heroic sagas of heathen times is a son of Svipdag and a king among the Sviones (Saxo, *Hist.*, Book 1)."

<sup>46</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, A and E, 495: "Cerdic was the son of Elesa, son of Gewis, son of Wig, whose sister married Offa of Angeln, son of Freawine whom Eadgils slew, son of Frithugar, son of Brand, son of Bældæg, son of Woden." [Gavin Chappell tr., Northvegr].



regarded as being “of Odin’s line.” Even the rulers of a large portion of the Jutes who conquered Kent called themselves “Uffings.” Originally it was the same Offa, the son of the legendary king Varmund, who the royal line of the Heptarchy competed to acquire as progenitor. The monastery annalists first allowed more than one Offa to advance from these legends when they systemized and chronicled these stories.

Among the seven “Anglo-Saxon” kingdoms that were founded by degrees in Britannia, foremost were Wessex and Mercia which fought one another in many long and bloody wars. The enmity between these kingdoms influenced the transformation of the stories their Germanic colonists carried from the mainland, as I will point out briefly here.

There is no doubt that Saxo’s Vermundus, Uffo, Frovinus and Vigo are the Anglo-Saxon sources’ Værmund-Garmund, Offa, Freawine, and Wig. The English variant of the story about Varmund and his son which Saxo uses has made Freawine and Wig not into kings, but into civil servants under Wærmund, the progenitor of the Mercian kings. That Wessex’s regents would themselves concede or that their family-legend would allot Freawine and Wig a subordinate position to the progenitor of their Mercian enemies is more than unlikely. The thing becomes even more questionable, and from a literary-historical standpoint more interesting, when we find another indication that refers to a stubborn inconsistency in the attempt to lower the ancestry of the Wessex kings. Saxo has found in his source that those who commit the disgraceful deed, lamented and forgiven by Offa, the progenitor of the Mercians, were Keto and Vigo, the sons of Freawine-Frovinus, who murdered a chivalrous Swedish king two against one. It is certain that this invention, hostile to Mercia or in any case to Wessex, did not find common credence among those that it was intended to offend. The poem *Beowulf* knows the story about two brothers who kill a great king (there called Ongentheow), and describes his temperament and death in essentially the same manner as Saxo; except in *Beowulf* they are not called Keto and Wig, but Eofor and Wulf, and there they are not sons of Freawine, but of a Wonred. There the Wessex kings are not shamed by the event.<sup>47</sup>

But the old Varmund-Offa-story received the most important transformation and expansion in England by the historical fact that Germanic rulers who were regarded as descending from these legendary kings had made war-campaigns to Britain and conquered territory there. A legend arose that Offa, after having made himself famous and expanding his kingdom on the mainland through successful single combat and fortunate battles, had come over to England and that his sons and descendents traversed the North Sea thereafter and founded some of the kingdoms that made up the so-called Heptarchy.

### § 13.

*Thus in this regard the Varmund-Offa-story became a forerunner to the saga of Ragnar and his sons and their adventures in England arising a century later. The historical attacks by Ivar (Ingvar) and other Nordic rulers on England in the ninth century*

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<sup>47</sup> *Beowulf* 2960-2996. Lines 2995-6 read: “No man on earth had cause to reproach him (the king who rewards Eofur and Wulf) since they earned their glory in battle.” [Chickering tr.]

became a point of connection for the formation of the latter story which partially happened with material and at the expense of the stories that were tied to Germanic migrations into England in the 400s and 500s.<sup>48</sup> For a correct assessment of the saga of “*Ragnar*” Lodbrok, I consider it to be of the greatest importance that one sharply distinguishes between the historical connecting point that this story received and its content of which the greatest part is collected from the Norse and Anglo-Saxon stories about an older hero who won trophies in pairs, namely Varmund’s son Offa and his sons.

First a few words about the historical connecting point and the reason the name Ragnar emerged and was joined together with the ancient legendary epithet Lodbrok.

No scholar doubts that the great war-expeditions that were carried out by the Nordic states in the ninth century must have been fresh in the memory of the Scandinavians for one or two generations after they occurred and thus for a good part of the 900s there must have been persons who knew the birthplace and homeland of the highest Nordic rulers.

But similarly certain is that 150 to 200 years after the great Viking ruler Ivar (Ingvar), the memory of his father’s name and fate were sufficiently murky that the poet found a vacuum to fill. He did so with a great-king “Ragnar Lodbrok” and gathered the historical generals Björn Ironside, Ivar, and other actual or fictional Norse chiefs from the 800s around him as brothers, with him as their father

If we now turn to the foreign annals that are contemporary with these Viking expeditions and campaigns of destruction, they have much to tell of the Nordic rulers. Although they speak of many Norse kings and rulers that lived during this time, they know nothing of the great-king *Ragnar* Lodbrok. Nevertheless, the ancient, legendary name Lodbrok is well known to them. Björn Ironside, who in the middle of the 800s ravaged the Frankish kingdom, is called Lodbroksson. As Gustaf Storm has long since pointed out, Viking rulers were designated in foreign as well as in Danish annals as Lodbroksson, but never as Ragnarsson. A stone in the Orkneys tells of a Lodbrok and *her* sons, whence it follows that the name Lodbrok could be borne by a man as well as a woman.

This has its explanation in the circumstance that we have already seen in the Anglo-Saxon domain, namely that the North Germanic lines of kings and rulers willingly reckoned their lineage up to the legendary king Varmund and his famous son, the original Lodbrok, like princes in other German lands willingly reckoned their lineage up to Hagal’s son Hamal, the progenitor of the Amalians. When I call Offa the original Lodbrok, I do not mean that he bore this name in the Anglo-Saxon sagas and performed the exploit that gave “Ragnar” Lodbrok this epithet in the Icelandic novel; as the foremost figure in the Anglo-Saxon saga-cycle about Britain’s conquerors and their lineage, as the father and progenitor of Germanic generals and colonizers there, and as the hero of admired and celebrated battles one against two, he held the place that was given to “Lodbrok” and the heroes designated as Lodbrok in stories older than the saga of “Ragnar” Lodbrok which became associated genealogically with the story of Varmund and Offa after Britain’s renewed affliction by North Germanic warriors. The story about Varmund and his son has been localized in different countries: in Denmark, in Angeln, in Saxony, and in Sweden. One Anglo-Saxon genealogy allows Varmund’s son to have the sons Dan and Angaltheow. One son is obviously a representative of the Danes and the

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<sup>48</sup> [Rydberg’s footnote:] See §§ 14, 15, 16

other of the Angles. This idea would hardly have occurred to the creator of this family-tree if he did not know that the Danes as well as the Angles made claims on Varmund's son. The claim of the Danes, or in any case the Jutes, on him from ancient times also is confirmed in that the rulers of Kent, which is primarily populated by Jutes, regard themselves as "Uffings," descendants of Varmund's son Offa. A tradition that Varmund reigned in Denmark, probably also caused the country's chroniclers to place Varmund and Uffo in the Danish line of kings. *Oddrúnargrátr*, whose roots in the old Lodbrok's saga I have pointed out above, allows a king Varmund (Geirmund) to rule on Jutland and have a fortress on its eastern coast. In Essex, whose kings likewise were "Uffings", Varmund and his son must have reference to the Saxon kings. According to *Widsith*, Offa and the Angles fought a Danish king named Alewih, and already as a boy, Offa won great territories of land, partly through fortunate single combat and partly through great battles, expanding his kingdom to Fifeldore.<sup>49</sup> According to the Rök stone, Varin and his son, famous because of his holmgang one against two, were kings in Reid-Gotaland, within which the rune-carver certainly reckoned Östergötland and presumably the whole of Götaland. The Rök stone saga lets these Reidgothic kings make war on twelve kings and their close relatives who possess Zealand, and, as I shall demonstrate below, the Rök stone also relates that they conquered Fyen. The neighbors of the Danes in the south and the north thus have allowed the story of Varmund and his son, localized among them, to say that they fought against kings in Denmark, while the Danish story says that they fought Swedes and Saxons. The final result of these localizings was that they all were regarded as correct wherever they occurred — so that Varmund and his son were believed to have ruled in all the countries that made a claim on them as countrymen; in other words, that they had founded a powerful monarchy, which also spread over England after the appearance of Varmund's descendents in Britain. Thus, I assume, the idea arose about an enormous kingdom of the Lodbroks, the same kingdom that the story allows *Ragnar* Lodbrok and Ragnar's sons to establish and divide a century later.

Under such circumstances it is only natural that powerful families in these countries considered it an honor to trace their family-tree to Varmund and Offa, just as the creators of the family-trees of Scandinavian royalty traced theirs back to *Ragnar* Lodbrok once his story had been created and beyond him to Varmund and Olaf *litilláti* (i.e. Offa). Among the epithets with which the skalds of different lands graced the great Viking fathers, by degrees, Lodbrok became the most utilized on the Scandinavian peninsula and in Denmark, and there is every reason to assume that within the families that considered themselves Lodbrokids the name Lodbrok was adopted and perhaps often used as a personal name or nickname. The circumstance that the word *brók* is grammatically feminine may have caused it to be used as a women's name within such

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<sup>49</sup> *Widsith* 35-43: *Offa weold Ongle, Alewih Denum; / se wæs þara manna modgast ealra, / no hwæpre he ofer Offan eorlscype fremede, / ac Offa geslog ærest monna, / cnihtwesende, cynerica mæst. / Nænig efeneald him eorlscipe maran / on orette. Ane sweorde / merce gemærde wið Myrgingum / bi Fifeldore*, "Offa ruled the Angles, Alewih the Danes. He was the bravest of all those men, but could not defeat Offa in deeds. While still a boy, the valiant Offa won the greatest of kingdoms in battle. No one of that age achieved more glory than he. With his sword he marked the border against the Myrgings, at Fifeldore [at the mouth of the Eider river]."

families as well. In legendary genealogies, Lodbroksson and Hegeling<sup>50</sup> are found in the North with exactly the same meaning as “Uffing” in England: descendants of Varmund’s courageous son. As a purely personal name Vilhelm of Jumièges (c. 1070) used Lothbrocus, “king of the Danes.”<sup>51</sup> The monk Bromton (1100s) told of a Prince Lodbrok, who, driven by a storm in a small boat to England, was adopted into king Edmund’s court on account of his beauty, was murdered by a jealous man there and avenged by his sons, who came over to England and ruled there.

From where was the name Ragnar imported into Lodbrok’s saga during its latest stage of development? I believe that Gustav Storm is correct when he assumes that the Danish Viking-prince Ragnar, who ruled in Emperor Karl the Bald’s kingdom and sacked Paris in the year 845, is the man after whom the Norse story named the great-king and onto which it transferred the Lodbroks’ legendary exploits. Among others, I believe that Saxo let his Ragnar Lodbrok besiege “Emperor Karl” and that a ruler named Ragnar actually existed in Denmark in the 800s who regarded himself as a Lodbrokid, because in compensation for a splendid shield a skald named Bragi the Old dedicated a *drapa* of which fragments survive that celebrate — not this Ragnar, as one assumes — but the heroes and exploits that all belong to or are incorporated into the older (pre-800s) Lodbrok’s saga: Sörli, Hamder, Hjarrandi, Högni, Hedin, etc. If he considered himself to be a Lodbrokid, it is understandable that a “Lodbroksdrapa” would be composed in his honor, and if he is the same Ragnar who conquered Paris and thereby acquired fame as a general in foreign lands, it is also understandable why, after his death, a legendary composition of the 800s seeking a historic connection in the Viking-expeditions, transformed Ragnar the Lodbrokid into its Ragnar Lodbrok.

#### § 14.

By that means, the story of Varmund and his son has come to us divided into two parts: the ancient story about them and the newer story about Ragnar Lodbrok; the former has given the greater part of its contents to the latter. Even Offa’s father-in-law seems to have been transferred to Ragnar. The connection in which the Beowulf poem mentions Offa’s consort demands one to assume that like Hygelac’s, she was a daughter of the Gothic king Hæreð. In Saxo, one of Ragnar’s consorts is the daughter of the Swedish king Herodus, whose name is a Latinized adjustment between the name-forms Hæred and Herröd. Among Icelanders, the Goth Herröd is father to Ragnar’s first wife. In Saxo’s time, the division of this saga had long since been completed.

But this was not the case in the tenth century when the Rök stone received its inscription. To its carver, “Bjari the rune-man, the head of the sanctuary,” *Ragnar* Lodbrok was undoubtedly an unknown entity, but Varmund’s (Varin’s) son, however, was well known to him. I consider it likely that the stone was raised by some dignitary in Östergötland, who, like so many others, considered himself a Lodbrokid and descendant of Varmund and in this manner chose to honor himself and his lineage, which in the

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<sup>50</sup> [Rydberg’s footnote]: The designation Hegeling ought to have arisen because one traced Varmund’s lineage back to Hagal, the father of Hamal, the Amalians mythic progenitor, and thereby brought about a connection between the Lodbrokids and the renowned Amalians in the stories on the mainland.

<sup>51</sup> *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* [The Deeds of the Dukes of Norman] by William of Jumièges.

previous century had received an increased glory through the Lodbrokid Björn Ironside and others, who had spearheaded the great raids performed then. The fragmentary account of the Gothic variant of the Varmund-Offa story which the stone provides proves that it still had obvious similarities to the Anglo-Saxon story then. As I will point out below, among the offspring and relatives of its Varin, the Rök stone reports ones with names that occur in the Mercian family-tree as descendants of Varmund and Offa. Before that, I will devote a few words to elucidate the circumstance, which appears odd on the surface, that the Rök stone seems to speak of more than one generation after Varin-Varmund and say that it was raised by their progenitor. Could it actually have been the intent of the stone's author that his readers believe that Varin not only survived his son, but also witnessed the exploits of his descendents? This was probably not the inscriber's intent. We should remember that at that time a poet was considered entitled to allow a series of coming events to be related by someone who was equipped with prophetic vision. Thus, one of the Eddic poems provides a summary of Sigurd Fafnisbane's fate by allowing it to be foreseen and related beforehand by the prophetically gifted Griper. In the same manner, Bjari the rune-man allowed Varin prophesizing to hint at his descendants heroic-deeds. This should be regarded as a poetic convention and nothing more. Besides, we must remember that Varmund is called *vitr* in the Norse genealogies, a word that can include the concept *forspár* (foresight).

#### § 15.

Now some words about the epithet Vamuðr borne by Varin's son on the Rök stone. As I shall show, the epithet can be explained as an allusion to the mental state of Varmund's son Offa during his boyhood. I should add that Offa, the name of Varmund's son transferred by Saxo from Anglo-Saxon and Latinized as Uffo, according to my view, likewise was originally an epithet arisen for the same reason — in other words, the original meaning of the name Offa is the same as the meaning of Vamuðr.<sup>52</sup>

It is commonly assumed that Offa has its Norse counterpart in the name Ubbe (Latinized by Saxo as Ubbo). I do not share this opinion and the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, which distinguishes between the names Offa and Ubbe, does not either. My view is that the doubling of letters in Offa is no more original than the doubling of letters in the Anglo-Saxon names Ælla and Cnebba (Gothic Kniva), and that the name has its actual correspondence in the Norse name Úfe, Ufi. Ufe means what Vamuðr means: “the indignant” (compare adj. *úfr*).

Perhaps I should also remind the reader that bynames in Old Norse literature are very common and can displace the actual name given by the father at the child's reception. In the twenty verses and four half-verses that remain of Einarr skálaglamm's *drapa*<sup>53</sup> about Hákon Jarl, he is only referred to as Hákon twice, but is designated with many epithets. The skald follows the ruler on his war expedition and on his campaign to

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<sup>52</sup> [Rydberg's footnote]: Long into the Middle Ages, one seems to have known that Offa was an epithet. A *Vita Offæ II* (published in *Watts Matth. Paris*) relates that Offa was actually named Pinered and received the name Offa when he first came to the full use of his senses.

<sup>53</sup> The poem *Vellekla*, which contains 37 verses in modern editions. Hákon is not named directly in any of the surviving verses attributed to Einarr skálaglamm.

secure the old doctrine through eight verses before we learn his actual name. In Eyvind Skáldaspillir's poem about the death of Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri,<sup>54</sup> the hero's actual name does not occur in the first ten verses. In Thjóðólfr's poem about Thjazi's adventure with Odin, Hönir and Loki, the name Thjazi does not occur once, and moreover we do not possess an introductory verse that lets us know that Thjóðólfr had received a shield on which the adventure of Thjazi was depicted, should a reader unfamiliar with the myth be left in ignorance about whom the poem's subject is.<sup>55</sup>

#### § 16.

The Beowulf poem says that Varmund's (Garmund's) grandson, Offa's son, is named Eomær. In the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, the family-tree of the Mercian kings has adopted Eomær among Varmund's descendants. In the same capacity, one Cnebba is also adopted into it.

The corresponding name-forms are Imer and Knue.

Is it chance or something more that both of these names are found again on the Rök stone? After having reported the twenty kings that sat on Zealand for four winters, the inscription adds: *nuk man Imir alu*<sup>56</sup> = Imer remembers that he received rich nourishment. The expression can be a double entendre. Imer can be what Imr and Imarr are in the *Prose Edda*, paraphrases for the wolf and thus the passage refers to the large number of casualties in the battles, in which these kings succumbed. But the paraphrase can also be chosen with diligence so that it also alludes to the hero's name Imer = Eomær, Vamud-Offa's son,<sup>57</sup> whom the story may have let appear beside his father in these battles. In Lodbrok's saga, as we have seen in Saxo, the sons of Lodbrok fight by their father's side. After the inscription mentions to which noble man a son is born, namely to Vilin, it adds: *Knua knatti ai unn: Vilini is þar*<sup>58</sup> = waves ripple ever for Knue, it is for Vilin. Knue is the Norse form of the name of Varmund's descendant Cnebba. With reference to *knatti* Icelandic *gnadda* = ripple must be remembered.

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<sup>54</sup> The poem occurs in chapter 32 of *Hákonar Saga Aðalsteinfóstra*. The name Hákon first appears in the 10<sup>th</sup> verse.

<sup>55</sup> Such a verse actually does exist, although it is heavily damaged in the manuscripts and has been reconstructed by modern scholars. In *Codex Regius* [R], lines 1-4 are largely illegible and line 3 has completely disappeared. Gaps in lines 2 and 4 are supplied by *Codex Trajectinus* [T] and *Codex Wormianus* [W]. Line 3 is missing from both T and W, thus it cannot be reconstructed. A gap in R lines 6 and 7 is supplied by T and W, and throughout the verse R, T and W all contain various variants. The first line, however, does seem to refer to a shield (although Anthony Faulkes and Richard North disagree how), and the last word of the verse names Thjazi. [Anthony Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál* 1, pp. 138-139]. This verse most likely was omitted from the edition used by Rydberg, because of its condition. The name Thjazi does not appear in the remainder of the poem.

<sup>56</sup> [Rydberg's footnote]: I will leave a detailed account of this passage for a special treatment of the Rök stone text. [See *Hjeltesagan och Rökstenen*, p. 70. This reading is conjectural. The stone is damaged here. See also footnote 30.]

<sup>57</sup> [Rydberg's footnote]: According to the *Beowulf* poem. His grandson according to the Mercian family-tree in the Chronicles.

<sup>58</sup> [Rydberg's footnote]: See note 1 on the previous page [i.e. footnote 56. See *Hjeltesagan och Rökstenen*, pp. 60-61. Modern scholars read this line as *Knua knatti iatun*, "he could crush a giant."]

§ 17.

In both time and content, the Rök stone's saga occupies a position between the Anglo-Saxon saga of Varmund-Offa and the Norse Lodbrok's saga in its present condition. We have seen that the name Varin is a synonym to Varmund; that Vamud can be an epithet synonymous with Offa; that Imer and Knue have their equivalents in Eomær and Cnebba; that trophies taken in pairs play a prominent role in the exploits of both Offa and Vamud, and that in both a campaign by sea to a distant land forms the story's final chapter — in Offa's saga it is Britain; in Vamud's on the Rök stone it is an unnamed "journey from the Reidgoths." The Rök stone is assumed to have been raised about a century after the Norse war-expedition to England that occurred in the ninth, which gave rise in the eleventh to the saga of "Ragnar" Lodbrok, in which we rediscover the events and nearly all of the names that occur on the Rök stone. The connection between the Rök stone's saga and Varin-Ogvald's story, and the relationship of Lodbrok's saga to the saga of the Hegelings and *Oddrúnargrátr* and their connection to it thus have become illuminated. The pains these investigations have cost me will be richly rewarded, if a researcher with greater powers and better insight than I, is prompted by this, my attempt, to prove, sort out, and continue it.

§ 18.

In closing, a couple of things still add to the meaning of the text.

On the third crossways-line on the backside of the stone — directly after the second occurrence of "it is for Vilin" — stands a group of cipher-letters with this appearance:<sup>59</sup>

u u s s u u s s s 

This group can be deciphered with the assistance of an ordinary cipher key, according to which the runes are divided into three *ætts*:

- 1) *Fröjs ætt*: f. u. th. o. r. k.
- 2) *Hagals ætt*: h. n. i. a. s.
- 3) *Tyrs ætt*: t. b. l. m. r (fin.).

To begin, from the right, we are met by the first twig-rune *Sigel* which, with its side-stroke, announces itself to be the first letter in the first *ætt*, thus *f*.

Thereafter comes *s s s*. The letter *s* indicates that the intended *ætt* is that in which the letter *s* occurs, namely the second *ætt*, Hagal's. The number of *s*'s indicates the position in the *ætt*. Because the number is three, the third position is indicated, that is the one occupied by *i*. Thus for the present, we have *fī*.

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<sup>59</sup> A picture of these runes can be found on the bottom right side of the page at: <http://www.illustrata.com/pages/vadstena/roksten.html>

Thereafter comes *u u*. The letter *u* states that the intended *ætt* is that in which the letter *u* occurs, namely the first *ætt*, Frey's. The number of *u*'s indicates the position in the *ætt*. Because the number is two, the second position is meant, that which is occupied by *u*. Thus for the present, we have *fiu*.

Thereafter follows *s s*, which refers to the second rune in the *ætt* that *s* belongs to, specifically to *n*. With that, we have *fiun*.

Finally again comes *u u* with the same meaning as above, that is to say *u*. Thus we have *fiunu*.

In accordance with the inscription always following the shorthand-rule, *fiunu* may be read *Fiun unnu*, in Icelandic *Fjón unnu = Fyen vunno de*. When the inscription previously spoke of Zealand, it should come as no surprise that we find Fyen.<sup>60</sup>

On one edge of the stone, this group of letters stands partially with common twig-runes, and partially with another group of letters:

r (fin) u t h i n i b r f l u o i

If one reads this row from left to right, at the end, one finds an impossible infinitive form.

The rune-carver himself has announced in three ways that the row should be read from right to left.

1) At the very bottom of the backside of the stone, immediately before this group of letters, he has written *fir fra*, which means *from behind*. By means of a sign of division, he has separated these words from the previously narrated text. They stand by themselves and cannot be read together with the previous or the following text. They intend nothing more than to draw the reader's attention to the next following rune-group.

2) In this rune-group, he has used the common twig-runes so that they refer to reading right to left.

3) The *r*, with which the rune-group begins, reckoned from the left, is *r finale*, which as a rule is used at *the end* of a word.

If we now follow this directive and read from right to left, we get *Joulfr bini ithur*—Icelandic *Jóulfr beini yðr*. It is not the first time that the rune-carver designated the double-sound *ei (ai)* with *i*. He also writes *mir* for *meirr*. *Joulf* is an Odin-name which the Icelandic literature preserves under the forms *Jolfr*, *Jolfuðr*.

A memory that Odin had the byname *Jóulfr* or *Jólf*, particularly in Gotland, is found in *Örvar-Odds Saga* ch. 24, whose hero, when he finds himself in Gotland and roams around in the forests, meets a mysterious man with this name who knows who he is, presents him with wonderful stone-arrows, and introduces him to king Herröd.

*Joulfr bini ithur* thus means: *Odin consecrates* (promotes, advances) *oaths*. The rune-carver says that he himself was the head of a sanctuary, a temple-manager. Perhaps we have a formula here with which the head-priest consecrated the congregation.

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<sup>60</sup> The Danish island of Fyn (Icelandic *Fjón*). The spelling *Fyen* has become obsolete.



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May a Swede born a thousand years after the skald Bjari the temple-manager receive the benefit of his good wish to the rune-stone's reader, with thanks to him who has given us irrefutable testimony on the Rök stone about the love of the runic-art, song and saga that existed in Sweden during the heathen era —a love that ultra-Norwegian, Celtic national, and Church fanaticism have wanted to deny our heathen forefathers.

Fortunately, the interpretation of the Rök stone was begun by Hans Hildebrand<sup>61</sup> and has been continued by Sophus Bugge to whom the main merits of the interpretation are due, and by Fredrik Löffler<sup>62</sup> and others, among them Fredrik Sander.<sup>63</sup> About his interpretation and understanding of the Rök stone's text I will not otherwise comment, but regard myself obligated to point out, however, that he made an important contribution to the unraveling of the text's problems through his reading *sagum mogmini* in a crossways row on the lower part of the backside of the stone, incontrovertibly demonstrating the correctness of George Stephens' and Fredrik Löffler's assumption that the groups of runes with characters from the older rune-row were not applied ornamentally, but actually contain meaning.

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<sup>61</sup> An extensive bibliography of articles on the Rök stone, including several articles by Hildebrand, can be found at: <http://hemsidor.torget.se/users/j/jaow/biblgra.htm>

<sup>62</sup> "Bidrag till tolkningen av Rökstensinskriften" (*Nordiska studier tillegnade Adolf Noreen på hans 50-årsdag den 13 mars 1904*, Uppsala 1904, s. 191-216) [Published after Rydberg's death in 1895]

<sup>63</sup> "Hvem var Sigurd Fafnersbane? Ett bidrag till frågans besvarande hämtadt från runskriften å Rökstenen i Östergötland." Stockholm 1883.