Old Norse Drinking Culture

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Abstract:
This thesis examines the production, consumption and symbolic aspects of alcoholic beverages in the West Norse world mainly during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Chapter 1 is the introduction, source and methodology description. Chapter 2 is devoted to the study of the main types of alcoholic beverages available during these centuries as well as to the production and acquisition of both the raw materials and tools to produce them. Chapter 3 studies the mythological origins and symbolism attached to these beverages, with the main focus on mead. Chapter 4 analyzes the different contexts in which alcohol was consumed during the period under research. Chapter 5 studies the main occasions on which alcohol was consumed. Chapters 6 and 7 approach the uses of alcohol as a tool for acquiring and displaying power. Chapter 6 is devoted to the analysis of alcohol as a way of displaying and acquiring power through the display and offering of both alcoholic beverages and drinking vessels as well as through drinking competitions. Finally, Chapter 7 studies the ways in which alcohol could be used as a tool of deception and personal enhancement. These topics are analyzed using literary, legal, historical and archaeological sources.
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CONVENTIONS

Throughout my thesis I have used the standard editions of Old Norse texts. The Íslendinga saga, Heimskringla and Landnámabók editions that I have used are those published in the Íslensk Fornrit collection. My references to the Fornaldar saga follow Guðni Jónsson’s four-volume Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda and my references to the Sturlunga saga compilation come from Jón Jáhannesson’s two-volume edition. Flateyjarbók will be quoted following Sigurður Nordal’s 1944 edition. Any other saga texts will be provided in the bibliography. My references to Snorri’s Edda come from Hans Kuhn’s Edda; Die Lieder Des Codex Regius Nebst Verwandten Denkmälern. Sagas, even when the name of the author is known, will be quoted by providing the abbreviated name of the saga in italics and the chapter number in roman numbers, followed by the pages in which the reference is to be found in the standard edition in Arabic numbers. Eddic sources will quoted providing either the abbreviated name of the poem in italics followed by the stanza number in Arabic numbers or, when it comes to Snorri’s Edda, by providing the abbreviated name of the book’s section – Prologus, Gylfaginning, Skáldskaparmál or Háttatal – followed by the chapter in Arabic numbers and by the page number where the reference can be found. Norwegian charters and legal sources will be quoted from the six-volume Norges Gamle Love started by R. Keyser and P. A. Munch in 1846, and the 21-volume Diplomatarium Norvegicum. Diplomatarium Islandicum will be quoted from the 10-volume edition initiated by Jón Sigurðsson in 1857. Grágás will be quoted from Gunnar Karlsson’s 1992 edition for Mál og Menning. For these texts I will provide the abbreviated title of the book in italics, followed by the volume number in roman numerals and, finally, in Arabic numbers, the reference to the page in which the charter or law is to be found in the standard edition. Other primary and
secondary sources will be quoted following the standards set in *MHRA Style Guide*. Icelandic authors will be quoted by first name and then patronymic, as is the convention.

When confronted with different spellings for the same word I will follow the spelling as provided in the primary source in which it appears. For my translations I will follow what Kennedy calls ‘the future of saga translations’ where a “clear trend in saga translation today is to demand more from the reader than is asked by a magazine article or a typical novel on sale at an airport shop”¹. As a lover of the Old Norse language I agree with the fact that “in an age when political developments have given a new urgency to understanding philosophies and lifestyles strikingly different from those which now prevail in Western societies, it seems unlikely that translators from very different times and places will generally feel disposed to translate them [the sagas] in a way suggesting that what is unfamiliar in them [the sagas] is of no consequence or should where possible be obscured from the reader’s attention.”² Hence, my translations pay careful attention to representing the mentality and ideology of the Old Norse language while at the same time I try to render them in a form that results perfectly intelligible in Modern English. On some occasions they may sound a bit alien, but since this work is about the Old Norse society, and understanding their language is another way of approaching the culture that created the texts analyzed in this thesis. All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

¹ John Kennedy, translat|ing the Sagas: Two Hundred Years of Challenge and Response, Making the Middle Ages, 5 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 187.
² Kennedy, p. 187.
Abbreviations:
The list of abbreviations follows, when possible, the *sigla* provided by the *Registre* of the *Ordbog over det Norrøne Prosaspreg* and, by Neckel and Kuhn in their edition of the *Edda*. Other abbreviations follow a similar logic to that of these two systems. Alternative titles are provided in brackets. All references to dictionaries and to primary sources in Old Norse are given in an abbreviated form.

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Works by Snorri Sturluson

Gylf  Edda: Gylfaginning
HakG  Hákonar saga góða
Hát   Edda: Háttatal
HkrProl Prologus
Magn Magníssona saga
ÖH   Öláfs saga Helga
ÖK   Öláfs saga kyrra
Skspm Edda; Skáldskaparmál
Yng   Ynglinga saga
Reference Books

**AEW**

**CEP**

**DNM**

**DNML**

**IED**

**IEW**

**LexPoet**

**NGLGlos**

**OED**

**OGNS**

**ONP**

**OrdT**
Íslendinga Sögur: Orðstöðulykill og Texti (The Complete Sagas of Icelanders with Lemmatized Concordance), ed. by Bragi Halldórsson and others, CD ROM (Reykjavik: Mál og Menning, 1996)
CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

While writing my thesis on Old Norse drinking culture I normally received two different reactions to my subject of study while discussing it with friends or fellow scholars. The first is a generalized belief that the Norse were great drinkers. The second, and most usual response, is the belief that my research involved mainly ‘lots of practical research’ and few hours spent without a pint at hand doing proper academic work. It seems, in general, that alcoholic drinks tend to be associated more with fun than with academic research. But alcohol has been a topic of study for a long time. For much of this period, the historical study of alcoholic beverages has been mainly a field of popular research, aimed more to the general beer and/or wine connoisseur than to the academic community.¹ But in recent years the study of drinking and feasting has become a more serious topic of research among scholars of different fields. There have been general studies about the history and sociology of alcohol,² studies about drinking in the Classical World,³ publications about drinking and feasting the Middle Ages in general⁴ as well as particular medieval societies.⁵ Among these last, publications concerning Northern Germanic drinking culture have focused mostly on the Anglo-Saxon world with slight references to Medieval Scandinavia.⁶ Alcoholic beverages have

² For example, see Ian S. Hornsey, A History of Beer and Brewing, RSC Paperbacks (Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry, 2003) and; Bjørn Qviller, Russens Historie (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1996).
⁴ For example, see Andrew Cowell, At Play in the Tavern: Signs, Coins, and Bodies in the Middle Ages (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999); Bonnie Effros, Creating Community with Food and Drink in Merovingian Gaul (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2002) and; Richard Unger, Beer in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
⁵ For example, see Maria Dembińska, Food and Drink in Medieval Poland: Rediscovering a Cuisine of the Past (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
⁶ For example, see Ann Hagen, A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food: Processing and Consumption (Hockwold-cum-Wilton: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1992); Ann Hagen, A Second Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food and Drink: Production and Distribution (Hockwold-cum-Wilton: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1995); Michael J. Enright, Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophesy and Lordship in the European Warband
also been the topic of at least one international conference, namely the International Congress on Beer in Prehistory and Antiquity, held by the University Barcelona in October, 2004. However, a book-length study about Old Norse drinking has been long overdue within the tradition of alcohol studies. So far, apart from brief references to Old Norse drinking culture made in studies about other Germanic cultures, most Scandinavianists have centred mainly on the problems concerning the myth of the mead of poetry, as narrated in both Eddas. Alcohol production and consumption in Medieval Scandinavia have been studied in several articles and book chapters but, again, no book-length studies have been published on this topic. Most of all, there have not been any lengthy studies contrasting evidence from different fields of knowledge in the West Norse world. This thesis is, then, an attempt to fill in such gaps. Many of the topics that I will approach in my thesis have not been previously researched, or at least they have not been approached taking into consideration the role of alcohol and drinking as a relevant subject. For example, the erji, or funeral feast, has been previously studied though from a linguistic point of view and not taking into account the role that drinking had in the ritual. Thus, my study will predominantly rely on primary sources and to a lesser extent on previous research. Taking into account the virtual lack of specialized publications on the topic of Old Norse alcohol production and consumption, my study will be both descriptive and analytical, as one of my main aims is to gather primary sources of different natures to allow a comparative approach to the social history of Old Norse drinking.


This study will deal mainly with alcohol, its production, its symbolic value, and the contexts in which it was consumed in the West Norse world during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I have chosen this time-span for my research because it was precisely during this period that Old Norse literature and other written historical texts flourished. And I have chosen to focus my study on the West Norse area because it was precisely in Iceland and Norway that most of these texts were written down. I aim for my thesis to be interdisciplinary; for this I will rely heavily on written — literary, legal and historical — sources as well as on archaeological evidence and, whenever possible, I will contrast the evidence that they bring forward. My use of the sources will vary according to the nature of the questions I intend to answer in each chapter. Having been trained as a historian and as a literary critic, I will rely heavily on the different written sources, though I have also brought into discussion archaeological and linguistic evidence, albeit to a lesser extent.

My written sources are mainly of three different kinds: literary, historical and legal. The literary sources used for this study are basically eddas and sagas. In my approach to the literary sources I will largely ignore the endless debate between the bookprose and freeprose theorists.8 For the purpose of my analysis, the fact that sagas — and eddas too — might be the written result of a long-lasting oral tradition or the result of artistic creativity is mostly irrelevant. My idea is to bring forward a study about the thirteenth and fourteenth century’s use, perception and symbolism of alcohol. Thus, following Gísli Pálsson, I believe that “the sagas [and eddas] are potentially valuable ethnographic documents with various kinds of information on early Iceland and medieval Scandinavia.”9 Whether the sagas and eddas provide or not historical information about the societies they describe, I will try to use these sources to extract

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information about the societies that created them - that is, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland and Norway. As Gísli Pálsson puts it:

The Icelandic sagas have been extensively studied as pieces of text - as literary and historical documents - by generations of saga scholars. Despite its progress and insights in some respects, this scholarly tradition has remained relatively silent on many pertinent and important issues, particularly social and comparative approaches.

Thus, in this study I will try to follow the school of thought proposed by Gísli Pálsson, and approach my literary sources as an instrument to expand our social understanding and decode the social and symbolic attitudes towards alcohol during the period in which the sagas and eddas were written down and not as a historical tool to understand the societies they describe. My approach to the sagas and eddas will be, then, to consider them as texts meant to be understood and decodified by a thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audience, for “by the time these stories were written, Icelandic attitudes had been moulded by Christian values, and for the saga authors and their public the pagan period was a remote and unfamiliar world, which they could understand and interpret in their own terms.”

That is, the sagas can only be understood and decodified taking into account the values and mentality of the period in which they were produced. Even if the sagas have an antiquarian interest and actually depict accurate historic events or not, the set of values they convey should have been comprehensible to their thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audience. As we will see, in the sagas drinking is always portrayed as a communal act - there are no lonely drinkers in Old Norse literature - and drinking transcends its biological role of quenching thirst and is portrayed mainly as a symbolic act rather than as a physical need. Thus, taking into consideration the symbolism surrounding the act of drinking, I will consider that even if a story about a feast or a drinking scene managed to survive several hundred years through oral tradition, the

10 Gísli Pálsson, p. 1.
symbolism involved in the scene was somehow meaningful to a thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audience.

I have basically three main objectives in this study. The first is to show that alcohol in the West Norse world was a rather expensive commodity, not available to all, as was the case on the continent. The second is to prove that the rarity and high value of alcohol led to a symbolic portrayal of drinking scenes in the literary sources, which can actually be corroborated in the historical and legal sources. Alcohol was a luxury that only few could afford, display and offer. All literary, legal, historical and archaeological sources point in the same direction: alcohol was a commodity that few could afford, and those who could, used it in their advantage. My third main objective is to explore the sources and bring out a new reading of saga literature and thirteenth- and fourteenth-century West Norse texts based on the symbolism of feasting, drinking and drunkenness. This symbolic representation of communal drinking can be quite informative not primarily of the Viking past, but rather of the writing or composing present of the period in which the sagas were committed to parchment. Sagas can help us to understand the way in which thirteenth- and fourteenth-century saga composers and law compilers saw and idealized their past and perceived their present. In brief, my third purpose is to approach the literary sources, by contrasting them with legal and historical sources, as a tool to understand the dreams, ideals, and wishes of the West Norse world as manifested through its alcoholic imagery.

My main saga sources are the Íslendinga sögur, the Fornaldar sögur and the Sturlunga saga compilation. The Íslendinga sögur, also known as Sagas of Icelanders or Family Sagas, were mostly composed during the thirteenth and fourteenth century and narrate events that took place around the period in which Iceland was settled in the late ninth century until roughly the middle of the eleventh century, or the so called, 'saga age'. The Fornaldar sögur (literally Sagas of Ancient Times), also known as
Mythical, Heroical or Legendary sagas, were also written down mostly during the late thirteenth century and the fourteenth century. This saga genre narrates events that took place prior to the settlement of Iceland. They deal chiefly with stories of legendary kings or heroes and their stories make great use of fantastic elements. Due to their fantastic nature the Fornaldar saga have been generally underestimated as a subject of research, mainly because the general trend has been to use sagas as a historical tool for the study of the Viking age. However, Torfi Tulinius has recently brought them back into the academic scene by arguing that "the legendary sagas, despite their fictional nature, teach us about Icelandic society – not as it was, but as it saw itself, and above all as it wished to be." Thus, with his *The Matter of the North; The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland* Tulinius legitimated the Fornaldar Saga as a valuable tool to understand the society in which they were composed. This is precisely the way in which the Fornaldar Saga will be approached throughout this study. And, as we will see, when it comes to the portrayal of alcohol and drinking, they actually seem to depict thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelandic customs and ideals. Finally, my other main saga source is the Sturlunga saga compilation. These sagas were written down around the year 1300 and narrate events that took place in Iceland during the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. Due to the proximity between the events they narrate and the period of their composition they are normally considered to be of great historical value. However, my approach to them will not be mainly historical but sociological. I will use other saga sources, such as Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla*, a large compilation of sagas narrating the lives of the Norwegian Kings; *Fagrskinna*; *Flateyjarbók*; several Íslendinga þættir, or *Stories of Icelanders*; and Ágrip af Nöregskonungasagaum, albeit to a lesser extent. For this study I will rely mostly on the Fornaldar saga, Íslendinga saga and the Sturlunga saga compilation. I decided to use

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these last three saga genres as my main sources because they clearly portray and differentiate the perception that the saga writers had about three different epochs: the period before the settling of Iceland, the age of settlement, and collapse of the Icelandic commonwealth. As we will see, the depiction of the use and symbolism of alcoholic drinks in these three periods - far past, recent past and almost contemporary events - does actually seem to represent the ideals and reality of the attitudes towards alcohol of the society that created them.

Both the Poetic Edda and Snorri’s Edda are my main sources for Old Norse mythology. However, one should take into consideration that these two sources differ in nature. The Poetic Edda is a compilation of several texts gathered in Gks 2365 4to, also known as Codex Regius, written around 1270-1280 but believed to have its sources in an older manuscript. It comprises 29 poems, some of which are believed to have been composed before the Christianization of Scandinavia, though the date of the composition of the individual poems has been the source of much debate.13 Snorri’s Edda is no less problematic. This text, composed in the early thirteenth century by Snorri Sturluson, was intended mainly as a manual for contemporary poets so that they could understand the mythic background of many of the kenningar they were composing and/or transmitting. However, even if this source intends to instruct contemporary poets on ancient lore, one should take into consideration that the book was composed and codified by a thirteenth-century Christian Icelander. From the very prologue to his book, Snorri clearly expresses his euhemeristic approach to the texts that he will interpret for future scholars. And, it is not certain if Snorri’s interpretations of the ‘ancient’ texts transmitted to him have been correctly understood and/or decodified for his contemporaries. As we will see in Chapter 3, there are great issues to take into consideration if one is to take Snorri’s texts as a reliable source for Old Norse

mythology. The main problem I confronted when approaching these texts is that current scholarship recurs to Snorri in order to interpret the mythical lays of the *Poetic Edda* and vice versa, leading to, in my opinion, a series of false assumptions about the mythic roles and origins of alcoholic beverages. From the beginning of his *Edda* as well as from the beginning of his *Ynglinga saga* - the opening and mythological introduction to Snorri's *Heimskringla* - Snorri shows an euhemeristic approach as well as strong compromise with Christian values. Thus, just as with the sagas, one should consider Snorri's *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga* as texts composed by a thirteenth-century Christian to be interpreted and efficiently decodified by other thirteenth-century Christian Icelanders. They offer a Christian, even if well-informed, view and interpretation of a past that was no longer understood during the period of their composition. Thus, Snorri's *Edda* will be considered together with the sagas, as a well-informed Christian anthropological interpretation of the pre-Christian past.

My main historical sources are the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* and the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* is a 21-volume compilation of nearly 20,000 Norwegian charters dating from 1050 to 1590 and *Diplomatarium Islandicum* is an 11-volume collection of Icelandic and Norwegian charters dating from 834 to 1544. The legal sources that I have used are mainly *Norges Gamle Love*, which gathers the earliest Norwegian laws up to 1370 and *Grágás*, a compilation of Icelandic laws from the Commonwealth Period. I will also use *Jónsbók*, which is basically an adaptation of the Norwegian laws made for Iceland once the north Atlantic island lost its independence and became a colony of Norway in 1262-64. These sources are not unproblematic. One should consider to what extent charters actually provide an actual depiction of Norwegian and Icelandic society. Also, does a law actually reflect the attempt to control a generalized problem or should it be considered as an attempt to

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14 This idea will be discussed in Chapter 3.
prevent a foreseen, yet not real, problem? Was a law approved due to a sporadic breach of public order or was it the reflection of an endemic breach? These questions are difficult to answer; in my thesis I will not try to answer them but I will endeavour not to generalize based on what we believe to be 'historical evidence'. Out of the plethora of charters and laws and charters regarding alcohol consumption, sales and import, I have been selective and careful in my approach. Most of all, I have tried not to make assumptions based on isolated sources. Whenever possible, I have tried to contrast legal, historical, archaeological and literary evidence and bring all of them forward at the same time so as to prove or disprove their reliability. I have also tried to contrast discrepancies or coincidences that may lead us to believe that we are actually confronting an actual historical fact that different sources seem to corroborate.

I do not pretend to bring forward a full survey of archaeological finds and research concerning drinking in the West Norse world. However, according to the nature of each chapter, I will utilize different kinds of archaeological evidence; whether it is archaeobotany, central-place digs, or drinking vessel finds. While this is primarily a text-based study, I believe that my thesis will make an important contribution to archaeology and help to further our understanding in the field of alcoholic culture in the West Norse world.

In structuring this thesis I will try to address, in order, the questions of what, where, when, how and why did people drink in Iceland and Norway during the period under discussion, though the main and overall question that will pervade my study is 'what did it symbolically mean to consume alcohol?' Chapter 2 will deal mainly with the different kinds of alcoholic beverages that were available to a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Icelander or Norwegian. In this chapter I will try to answer the question of 'what' or 'which' drinks people knew, produced and consumed during that period as well as the ways of acquiring the raw materials to produce them. For this I
will mostly rely on historical, legal and archaeobotanical sources attesting to the acquisition, production and import of alcoholic beverages or the raw materials to produce them. I have several aims in this chapter. The first is to show that alcohol was a rather expensive and unusual commodity in the West Norse world, which contributed to its symbolic value. The second is to prove that not all kinds of alcohol were equally available or reputed at all times. The third is to prove that mead, one of the beverages most commonly associated with the 'Vikings' was actually not a common beverage but that it made its place in history due to the great symbolic value that its rarity bestowed upon it. In general, in this chapter the reader will become acquainted with the different sources and socioeconomic symbolism of the different kinds of alcoholic beverages available in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Iceland and Norway.

Chapter 3 will deal with the same issues as Chapter 2, but from a mythological point of view. Thus, this chapter will be devoted to the study of eddic literature as well as of the other main source for Old Norse myth, which is Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga*. The main questions that I intend to answer in this chapter also concern the origins of alcohol as well as its symbolic nature. Thus, I will first focus on the myth about the 'mead of poetry'. For this I will contrast, independently, the accounts given by the *Poetic Edda* and Snorri's *Edda* about the acquisition of the 'mead of poetry'. As we will see, contrary to the general approach to these sources as providing complementary information to the same myth, it seems that the two eddas provide different versions of different myths. But the academic trend to use Snorri's *Edda* as a tool to decodify the *Poetic Edda* and vice versa, as we will see, has led to a confusion between myths about the origin and symbolism of mead. Second, in this chapter I will analyze the different mythic sources and settings of alcohol consumption; namely Ásgarðr and Jötunheim. Here, we will see that for the gods, just as for mankind, alcoholic beverages were a commodity that could not be easily acquired. In general, I hope to show that the
mythical sources seem to confirm that which we learned from the historical, legal and literary sources in the previous chapter.

Chapter 4 will deal mainly with 'where' did people drink. As we will see, the spatial location was mostly in drinking halls or in skytningar or taverns. In this chapter I will make use of legal sources regulating the sale of alcohol as well as historical sources attesting probable issues that arose from the import and sale of alcoholic beverages in developing towns. Due to the different ways in which urban life developed in Iceland and Norway, I will consider the two nations separately. In this chapter I will also deal with the symbolism attached to the different seating places that people could have had within the drinking space.

In Chapter 5 I will study the 'when' of drinking, that is, the main occasions in which people gathered to drink. As we will see, alcohol consumption or feasting were not quotidian activities. Alcoholic beverages were not always readily available, and on most occasions communal drinking was held only at major feasts such as funerals, weddings or seasonal feasts. In this chapter my sources will be mainly of a literary nature and I will try to disentangle the symbolic role that alcohol consumption had in those occasions.

Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 will both address similar topics but from a different point of view. The common theme of these chapters is the use of alcohol as an instrument of power. Alcohol consumption, and most of all, alcohol sharing has been in many societies a way of creating a community, of creating bonds and friendship. However, the high cost of alcohol in the West Norse world conferred on these beverages an additional value which, namely, made them also a symbol of wealth and power. Thus, these last chapters will be devoted to answer the question of 'how' alcohol was used in these societies; that is, the uses of alcohol as a symbol or as a tool for

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individuals to assert their position in society. Chapter 6 will deal mainly with the ways in which alcohol and the implements to serve it were used as a way to display and gain political and/or economical power. Here I will study the uses of alcoholic drinks as part of the Old Norse gift-giving culture, as a way to display power through drinking and boasting competitions and through the display of costly drinking vessels. Thus, my main sources for this chapter will be of a literary and archaeological nature. Finally, Chapter 7 will deal with a different way in which alcoholic drinks are related to power, that is, namely, as instruments of deception or as magic drinks that may help a person to take control over someone else’s will. Due to the nature of this chapter, my main sources to answer these questions will be of a literary nature, mostly belonging to the Fornaldar saga.

As can be seen, my methodology and use of sources throughout this study will vary, depending on the questions that I intend to answer in each chapter. Sometimes I will rely more on historical, legal, literary or archaeological sources. But I will try to bring them all together in order to contrast the different kinds of evidence whenever I find pertinent connections. In my approach to all the different kind of sources I will always try to corroborate the evidence brought forwards by a particular kind of source by contrasting it with what we can gather from other sources.
CHAPTER 2: TYPES OF ALCOHOL

I will begin this study by analyzing the repertoire of drinks available to Icelanders and Norwegians during the Viking Age and the Middle Ages. Two texts provide us with what appears to be an exhaustive list of alcoholic beverages during these periods. During a wisdom contest in the Eddic poem *Alvissmál*, probably composed in the early thirteenth century, Þórr asks a dwarf to tell him the names given to q/l (ale?) in the different worlds:

> Segðu mér þat, Alviss, -q/l of ræc fira
> voromc, dvrgr, at vitir-, er drecca alda synir
> hvè þat q/l heitir, heimi hveriom l.

> Q/l heitir med mjönom, en med ásom björr,
> kalla veig vanir,
> hreinalqg íqmar, en í helio miqó,
> kalla sumbl Suttungs synir.16

(Tell me this, Alviss, all the great marvels of men/ I deem,
> dwarf, you know-/ what is q/l called, that which the sons of men
drink/ in each world?
> It is called q/l among men, and among the Æsir björr, / the Vanir
call it veig, / hreinalqg the Íqmar, and in Hell mjöqr, / the sons
of Suttungr call it sumbl.)

This inventory seems to cover the names of most of alcoholic drinks we find in the Old Norse corpus; namely q/l, björr and mjöqr.17 Veig and hreinalqg (or hreinn-lqgr) appear to be generic names for alcoholic beverages, as the first means “a kind of strong beverage, drink”18 while the second can be translated as “clear or pure liquid”.19 However, it seems unreasonable to consider this list as a complete catalogue of alcoholic beverages or as a philological attempt to enumerate all the synonyms of q/l. The poet’s knowledge of different varieties of drinks may have been greater, but his register of them was limited both by the metrics and the alliteration required in the

16*Alv* 33-34.
17 As we will see later in this chapter, q/l and mjöqr can be roughly translated as ‘ale’ and ‘mead’ while björr does not have a Modern English equivalent and should not be mistaken for ‘beer’.
18 “The noun veig appears only in poetry where it seems to refer to alcoholic drinks in general” (*IED*, veig) and “í kenningar, for skjaldeákk, skjaldekk” (in kenningar for the poetic drink or poetry), (*LexPoet*, veig). In Eddic poetry it appears in *Grm* 25, *Bdr* 7, *Hdl* 50, *HHII* 46, *Akv* 35 and, *Alv* 34. Of these instances those of *Grm* 25 and *Bdr* 7 connect it with mjöqr; that of *Hdl* 50 connects it with björr; *Akv* 35 and, *Alv* 34 connect it with q/l and; *HHII* 46 does not connect it with any drink in particular.
19 *IED*, hreinn and lqgr.
composition of this stanza. Furthermore, it would be naïve to attempt to equate all these beverages as different names for qfl for the literary and historical sources seem to make it clear that these were all different. It seems more reasonable to believe that the poet was simply listing alcoholic products and perhaps, by attributing each one of them to a different realm he was indicating their availability (i.e. qfl being the most common among men and hjórr being so rare that it belongs mainly to the Æsir) or a social connotation attached to each one of them. These possibilities will be discussed later.

The list of drinks in Alvíssmál seems to be completed by a riddle posed by Óðinn (appearing under the name Gestumblindi) in the thirteenth-century Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks during yet another wisdom contest. In it Óðinn asks:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hvat er þat drykki,} & \quad \text{er ek drakk í gær,} \\
\text{var-at þat vin nè vatn} & \quad \text{nè in heldr mungát} \\
\text{nè matar eikki,} & \quad \text{ok gekk ek þorstalauss þáðan?} \\
\text{Heiðrekr konungr,} & \quad \text{hyggðu at gálu.}^{20}
\end{align*}
\]

(What is that drink that I drank yesterday? it was not vin nor vatn, nor the best choice of mungát / nor any food, and I went without thirst after that? King Heiðrekr, do you think you know?)

In this case the repertoire is more limited, as all the possible answers but one are supposedly included in the riddle. Due to the way in which the question is posed, almost as a closed-question, vin, vatn and mungát\(^{21}\) seem to comprise the whole repertoire of drinks available, otherwise the riddle would not pose any difficulty. Just to complicate matters, Óðinn includes food in the question, just in case it could be implied that he quenched his thirst by ingesting a food with high water content. As we will see, this food-drink could refer to milk derivatives, such as misa, skyr or sýra, of which the last had a certain alcoholic content. The answer, provided by King Heiðrekr "þar lagðist þú í forsælu, er dögg var fallin á grasi ok kældir svá varir þinar ok stöðvaðir svá þorsta þinn"\(^{22}\) (you laid there in the shade, and dew had fallen on the grass and so you were refreshed and soothed your thirst) is somewhat

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\(^{20}\) Heiðr X, p. 38.
\(^{21}\) While vin and vatn can be translated as 'wine' and 'water', the noun mungát does not have an equivalent in Modern English. As we will see later in this chapter, mungát was some sort of strong qfl.
\(^{22}\) Heiðr X, p. 39.
disconcerting, as it implies that water and dew were considered to be different kinds of liquid.

If my assumption is correct and vin, vatn and mungát somehow comprise a whole catalogue of beverages (except dew), it follows that at least one of these words encompasses a group or is a common denominator for beverages produced using the same or a similar technique. Nonetheless, we cannot discount the possibility that the poet who composed this stanza was, just like the Alvíssmál poet, stylistically limited in his choice of possible drinks.

Combining these two lists we get a catalogue of most of the names for alcoholic drinks used in extant sources. Yet, a very important drink is conspicuously absent; that is sýra, an alcoholic beverage produced by the fermentation of milk, which was one of the island's most common alcoholic drinks well into the nineteenth century. As mentioned earlier on, sýra may account for Óðinn's inclusion of food in his list of drinks for, as we will see in the section devoted to dairy products, it was used both as a drink and as foodstuff.

Unfortunately our sources do not describe the ways in which each drink was prepared and, with the sole exception of vin, there are no references to the ingredients involved in the concoction of alcoholic beverages. In this part of my analysis I will examine literary, historic and archaeological sources that may help us to elucidate the ingredients, preparation and, when possible, the costs involved in the preparation of the alcoholic drinks mentioned in the literary sources. In order to do so, I will follow these premises:

(i). - The different alcoholic drinks mentioned in the sources may not have been equally available in different periods. This would affect their social status, as exotic drinks tend to be more appreciated that those which are consumed on a regular basis. For example, wine might have had a higher rank in the Viking
Age, when its availability was lower due to less trade, than during the Late Middle Ages, when the Hansa and the increased trade between Iceland/Norway and the continent made it more common, though not less luxurious.

(ii). - Norway and Iceland had different economies. Both countries had (and still have) rather limited agricultural areas; while Norway enjoys a larger arable area, agriculture in Iceland is mostly limited to grazing lands rather than to crop growing. My study will focus more on the agricultural situation in Iceland than in Norway, for most of our literary sources, and with them the evidence for the production and consumption of alcohol, come from this North Atlantic island.

(iii). - Between cultures and epochs there may not be accurate translations or equivalents for the drinks pertaining to each of them. There is literary and archaeological evidence to prove that different alcoholic beverages were being produced in Iceland and Norway. It is also difficult to resist the temptation to refer to cognates when it comes to understanding or re-contextualizing the meaning of each of the medieval beverages. But it is necessary to resist this temptation as this could lead us to fall into the trap of false cognates and attribute to these beverages characteristics of our contemporary repertoire of drinks. Accordingly, in this chapter I will resist translating the different terms for each alcoholic beverage from Old Norse into Modern English.

Fermentation is the process by which a certain type of fungus, called yeast, converts sugar into ethanol and carbon dioxide. In the Viking and Middle Ages Scandinavians had basically only four sources of sugar which could be transformed into alcoholic beverages. These are: sugar from milk, or lactose; sugar from cereals, or maltose, sugar from honey, or glucose; and sugar from fruits, or fructose. 23 There is

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23 Sucrose, or sugar obtained from sugar cane, was not known in Europe until the colonization of America in the sixteenth century.
another kind of beverage in which different sugar sources were mixed in order to obtain alcohol. In the following pages I will examine alcoholic production based on these four main groups, discussing the beverages of a mixed nature in a different section. Finally, I would like to note that spirits, obtained by alcoholic distillation instead of by alcoholic fermentation, were not produced nor consumed in Scandinavia until the end of the fifteenth century. Even though alcoholic distillation was described by Aristotle in the fourth century BC the technique was not used in Europe until the eleventh century and only by the fifteenth century could it be used to produce large amounts of spirits.  

"Importen av brännvin till Norden tog fart i slutet av 1400-talet. En stor brännvinproducent på 1500-talet var Bordeaux och därifrån importerades via Tyskland" (The importation of spirits to the North started at the end of the fifteenth century. A great spirit-producer during the sixteenth century was Bordeaux and it was imported from there, via Germany). Therefore, spirits escape the chronological range of this study.

2.1- LACTOSE-BASED DRINKS: MISA, SKYR AND SÝRA

In his 1960 article “The Function of Food in Medieval German Literature”, George Fenwick Jones studies the symbolic role of food and concludes that in Continental Germanic culture "milk and its products, particularly curds and buttermilk, were generally held in low esteem by the upper classes". This may be somehow expected in a society with access to extensive arable lands and a climate that favoured cereal and vine cultivation leading to the production of a fair amount of glucose, maltose and

25 Wahlöö, p. 17.
26 George Fenwick Jones, ‘The Function of Food in Mediaeval German Literature’, Speculum, 35 (1960) 78-86 (p. 82).
fructose-based alcoholic beverages. But in Iceland and Norway, where land suitable for agriculture was scarce, and glucose, maltose and lactose were difficult to obtain, the literary representation of lactose-based alcoholic drinks is strikingly similar to that of the continent.

In Norway, "geographical factors, such as considerable differences in elevation and the limited amount of arable land"\(^\text{27}\) made it difficult for the peasantry to survive solely on crop-growing. Even though areas suitable for grain cultivation were scant, it was nevertheless undertaken on the east coast as far north as present day Tromsø (75°N);\(^\text{28}\) but on the whole, hardly more than 3% of Norway’s land-mass has ever been under cultivation.\(^\text{29}\) Iceland and Greenland endured even harsher agricultural conditions, as "grain could rarely be cultivated successfully in Iceland, and not at all in Greenland, where seeds did not ripen."\(^\text{30}\) This situation led both Icelanders and Norwegians to rely heavily on hunting, fishing and animal husbandry in order to secure their nourishment. A major difference between these countries is that the limited amount of arable land made Norway almost self-sufficient in its grain production, though still relying heavily on imports from time to time, while Iceland depended almost completely on the cereal imports.\(^\text{31}\) Grain production in both countries will be studied in detail, together with the production of maltose-based drinks, in the next section.

The almost complete lack of domestic grain production led these countries to develop a unique drinking culture based on the consumption of dairy products on an almost daily basis. Three main derivatives of milk appear in the sources, though not very often, and the archaeological traces left by their production are in some ways


\(^{29}\) Orrman, p. 262.

\(^{30}\) Orrman, p. 264.

\(^{31}\) Orrman, p. 270.
debatable. These dairy products are *misa, skyr* and *sýra*. *Misa*\(^{32}\) can be translated as whey, or more clearly “milk when the cheese has been taken from it”\(^{33}\) or “*de vandagtige Dele af Melken som udskille sig fra Osten*”\(^{34}\) (the watery portion of milk that is separated from cheese). In general terms, *misa* is a by-product of the *skyr* elaboration. *Skýr* is a type of “curdled milk, curds, stored up for food”;\(^{35}\) “*sammenløben Melk.*”\(^{36}\) (curdled milk.) Cleasby, in the late nineteenth century, mentions that *skýr* “is quite a national dish of the Northmen and the Icelanders of the present day, as it was of the Teutons in more ancient times; for it doubtless was the *lac concretum* of Tacitus *Germania*”\(^{37}\), who mentions that “their [i.e. the Germani] foodstuffs are simple: wild fruit, fresh game, or curdled milk, and they satisfy hunger without fancy dishes and seasonings.”\(^{38}\) Finally, *sýra* is a certain variety of “sour whey, stored up and used for drink instead of small beer;\(^{39}\) or “*syre, kogt sur Myse*”\(^{40}\) (serum of milk, whey). These last two words survive in Modern Norwegian (Bokmål) as *myse* and *syre* respectively, the last one having changed its meaning to denote ‘acid’. Accordingly, as we shall see, the almost complete lack of reference to these milk-based drinks in the literary sources may be not only due to their low status but also to their extremely acidity.

*Sýra* is the milk product we will study more closely, as it appears to be the only one with any alcoholic content. However, as the production of *sýra* is so closely related to the making of *misa* and *skýr* we must pause to explain some technicalities. *Misa*, a by-product of *skýr*, is

> made from skimmed milk and rennet [...]. Until about the beginning of this century [i.e. the twentieth century] rennet was made mainly from a newborn calf's stomach. The calf was slaughtered before it had any

\(^{32}\) Even though *AEW, OGNS* and *IED* spell it *mysa*, I decided to follow the spelling of this word as provided in *Íslensk Forrit* collection, where it appears as *misa*. *IEW* is the only dictionary that acknowledges both spellings.

\(^{33}\) *IED, mysa.*

\(^{34}\) *OGNS, mysa.*

\(^{35}\) *IED, skýr.*

\(^{36}\) *OGNS, skýr.*

\(^{37}\) *IED, skýr.*


\(^{39}\) *IED, sýra.*

\(^{40}\) *OGNS, sýra.*
nourishment other than milk, the stomach was extracted and hung up to
dry with the curdled milk still in it. When dry it was placed in a bowl of
salt water or whey, and after one or two weeks the extract had become
rennet.41

Once the rennet was ready, boiled skimmed milk was poured into a barrel and left to
cool down to about 37°C; then the rennet was mixed with some warm milk and poured
into the barrel while stirring and left to slowly cool down for a couple of hours.42 By
then the milk had already curdled and the skyr was separated from the misa. Finally, the
misa was poured into barrels for fermentation for as long as two years, and when it had
become sour enough it was called syra.43

Syra was the most common alcoholic drink in Iceland until fairly recently. It
used to be diluted with water to soften the flavour, which might have been particularly
strong as “it was common to mix eleven parts of water with one part of sour whey”.44
Undiluted syra was also stored and used to preserve food, as its acidity would inhibit
bacterial growth. As mentioned before, there are only a few literary references to these
products, and in general, whenever they are consumed, they do not seem to be highly
appreciated. This is also noticeable in the few literary and historical references there are
to them and the few compound words derived from them.

MISA

Misa can be translated as “saure molken [or] buttermilch”45 (sour whey [or]
buttermilk) or as “molken”46 (whey) and it is the least frequently mentioned dairy

41 Hallgerður Gisladóttir, ‘The Use of Whey in Icelandic Households’, in Milk and Milk Products from
Medieval to Modern Times: Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Ethnological Food
123).
42 Hallgerður Gisladóttir, p. 123.
43 Hallgerður Gisladóttir, p. 124.
44 Hallgerður Gisladóttir, p. 125.
45 AEW, mysa.
46 IEW, mysa. The IEW mentions myxostr “käse aus eingekochten molken” (cheese made from whey) as
a misa product (see IEW, myxostr).
product discussed in this study. This term appears only twice in the written sources,\footnote{It is not mentioned in NGL, DN, DI, or Grøg. Among the literary sources it only appears in the Íslendinga saga, where ÓrðT returns only two entries for the term, both in Krók. See ÓrðT, mysa.} on both occasions as part of a riddle posed by Króka-Refr to king Haraldr. In this riddle Króka-Refr tells the king that he had a saupsáttr\footnote{Krok XVI, p. 153.} (a whey-agreement) with one of his men. Soon after, the king remembers that “Sá er drykkr á Íslandi, er misa heitir; er þat allt eitt: misa ok saup ok drykkr”\footnote{Krok XVII, p. 154.} (There is a drink in Iceland which is called misa; and they are all the same, misa, soup and drink.) and correctly guesses that by ‘saupsáttr’ Króka-Refr means a ‘missáttr’ (disagreement).\footnote{IEW explains the etymologies of this riddle as: “saupátr ʻuneinigʼ [wortspielend gebildet nach mis-sáttr, indem mis- ʻdie negationʼ scherzhaft auf misa, mysa ʻmolkenʼ bezogen wird]” (IEW, saupsátr) (saupsátr ‘divided, disagreeing’ [pun made from mis-sáttr in which mis- ‘the negation’ is being related to misa, mysa, ‘whey’ as a joke). The relationship between saup and mis (the negation intended as misa or mysa as part of the riddle) is that saup means “buttermilk” or, more generally “saup bedeutet auch ‘was man schlürft, molken’” (IEW, saup) (“buttermilk” or more generally, “saup also means ‘that which is slurped, whey’”), turning saup into mis, the negative particle of ‘disagreement’.} The fact that the king stresses that “there is a drink in Iceland called misa” makes it clear that misa may not have been known in Norway at the time. This perhaps emphasizes the fact that at least by the time the saga was written down during the fourteenth century, there was a substantial dietary difference between both countries, Icelanders relying more than Norwegians on animal husbandry and the intake of dairy products for their subsistence. The pejorative words mqrlandi (suet-land) and mqrjjandi\footnote{IEW, mqrlandi and mqrjjandi.} (enemy of suet), which Norwegians used to refer to Icelanders as a way of making fun of their supporting themselves chiefly from livestock, also bear witness to the different roles that animal husbandry (and with it dairy products) played in both countries.

**SKYR**

Skyr can be translated as “sauere milch”\footnote{IEW, skyr.} (sour milk) or as “geronnene milch”\footnote{IEW, skyr.} (sour milk), and it appears 13 times in 8 different passages of the Íslendinga saga\footnote{IEW, skyr.} and
once in a passage of Islendinga saga. On most of these occasions, it appears as a rather disgusting and low-prestige product. In Bjarnar saga Hiddeleakappa, Bjørn is forced to ask for shelter while travelling in Iceland, and after being received with some discontent he is offered cheese and skyr for dinner. When these are served, he asks the farmer: "'Hvern veg kalla menn slika vist i þövarri sveit?' Hann svarar ok kvað menn kalla ost ok skyr. Bjørn mælti: ‘En vér kallum slika vist óvinafagnað."55 (“How do men call such provisions in your district?” He answered and said men called them cheese and skyr. Bjørn said "In ours we call such provisions enemies’ joy.") Accordingly, almost every time it appears in the Islendinga sagur, it is offered as a sign of hostility or is consumed by the enemies of the saga’s hero.

Examples of skyr being offered as provisions to express the animosity between characters are to be found on several occasions. For instance, in Egils saga Egill sets out on a journey to collect some rents in Norway. During the trip his group of men is forced to ask for shelter among one of King Eiríkr blóðøx’s men. Egill’s group is welcomed and offered bread, butter and "skyraskar stórir"56 (large skyr-vessels), as the host claims that “Harmr er þat nú mikill, er þl er ekki inni, þat er ek mega þr fagna sem ek vilda"57 (It is a great shame that there is no qð in the house, so that I could have welcomed you as I would have liked) and insists that “‘Fúss mynda ek’, kvað Bárðr, ‘at gefa yðr betra drykk, ef til væri.”58 (‘I would be glad’ said Bárðr, ‘to give you a better drink if I had some.’) The host’s opinions on the quality of the beverage he is offering help us to understand that skyr was not a highly esteemed drink, and he is almost ashamed of only having that to offer. However at the same time as the host claims to have nothing better to offer he is offering a feast next-door in honour of king Eiríkr blóðøx. As is to be

54 BjH XXVII, Ljosv X (XX), Korm XVI, Frb XXIV, GrXXVIII, Eb XLV and, Eg XLIV and LVII. Three instances are repeated in the different versions of Ljosv, making a total of 16. (See OrðT, skyr)
55 BjH XXVII, p. 185.
56 Eg XLIII, p. 107.
57 Eg XLIII, p. 107.
58 Eg XLIII, p. 107.
expected, large amounts of *ql* are being drunk at this feast.\(^{59}\) The deception enrages Egill so much that he later ends up killing the farmer, this being the first of many events that lead to his enmity with the king. Egill’s displeasure may have been due not only to the fact that he was offered a rather bad tasting drink, but also to the fact that by offering him *skyr* instead of a better beverage the host was treating him as being of a lower rank; the host was making clear that he held Egill as a low-caste person. In another episode, Egill arrives in similar circumstances at the farm of one of the king’s enemies, whom he is supposed to tax. This time the farmer offers “*stórir askar, fullir af *skyr*”\(^{60}\) (large vessels full of *skyr*) alleging that is all he has to offer. Once more, Egil finds out that there is something better to drink in the house (*mungát* in this case) and, once drunk, Egill ends up mutilating and nearly killing the farmer after vomiting the *skyr* all over him. The cause of Egill’s rage may be the same as that in the previous example: the man should have welcomed him with the dignity that a king’s envoy deserves, and by offering him *skyr* the farmer implies that neither Egill nor the king, whom he represents, are highly high esteemed by the farmer. This lack of respect for the royal authority may be represented in the quality of the beverage that they are offered.

Similarly, in *Kormaks saga*, *skyr* is used to describe the meanness of a character. In this saga Bersi is described as a mean and dishonourable character whose buttocks had been sliced off during a duel.\(^{61}\) One time, when Bersi’s men go to see him, they all sit to eat and the saga reports that “*hann sat einn saman, ok kom fyrr matr hans en annarra manna. Bersi hafði graut, en aðrir menn ost ok skyr.*”\(^{62}\) (He sat alone, and his food was served before other men’s. Bersi had porridge and the others had cheese and *skyr*) Saga literature makes it clear that sharing a table and being generous in distributing food and drink (and other forms of wealth) with one’s men were considered

\(^{59}\) Eg XLIV, pp. 107-08.
\(^{60}\) Eg LXXI, p. 224.
\(^{61}\) Korm XII, p. 250. Having one’s buttocks sliced in a duel or in battle was a sign of cowardice, as they can only be thrust when giving one’s back to the attacker, i.e. while fleeing.
\(^{62}\) Korm XVI, p. 260.
to be some of the assets of a great leader, while meagreness and lack of generosity were
the assets of a villain. Thus, the portrayal of Bersi sitting on his own and eating
porridge (which was very expensive in Iceland at the time) while his men only have
skyr emphasizes the saga’s depiction of Bersi as a dishonourable man.

It also seems that in the literary sources skyr was not only presented as being
offered to others by their enemies; it was also depicted as a dish consumed by worthless
men. In Ljósvetninga saga it is mentioned only in relation to one character, Rindill,
whose first description in the saga is to be found in a dialogue between two men who
have just spotted him in a booth, and on spotting him say: “Hefir þú nákkurn þann sét,
at síðr sé nákkurs verðr en þessi maðr?”64 (Have you ever seen a man more worthless
than this?) Later on Rindill sets out to kill a man, and before ambushing him, he stops to
eat: “Rindill hafði skyr ok mataðisk skjótt, þvi at skyrir var þunnt.”65 (Rindill had skyr
and ate fast because the skyr was thin.) Rindill is killed by Eilifr during the ambush and
the saga reports that “setti þegar kesjuna á Rindil miðjan, en skyrir sprændi ör honum
ok upp á Eilíf.”66 (he thrust the halberd at once through Rindill’s stomach, and the skyr
spurted out of him and all over Eilifr.)

The only other scene in which the Íslendinga saga relate skyr with an enemy
occurs in Grettis saga. Grettir, as an adult, decides to take revenge for some insults he
suffered from Auðunn during his childhood. But, when he arrives at Auðunn’s house,
he is told that Auðunn has gone to the shed to fetch some food. After a while he arrives
with the food, which consists of skyr. When the fight begins Auðunn throws a bag full
of skyr to Grettir, with the result that “Grettir varð allr skyrurgr; þótti honum þat meiri
smán en þó at Auðunn hofði veitt honum mikinn áverka.”67 (Grettir was all covered with
skyr; which seemed to him a greater disgrace than if Auðunn had given him a great

63 Gift-giving in connection with alcoholic beverages and feasts will be discussed in Chapter 6.
64 Ljós VII (XVIII), p. 44.
65 Ljós X (XX), p. 55.
66 Ljós X (XX), p. 55.
67 Gr XXVIII, p. 96.
wound.) Why was being covered with *sky�* a greater shame or disgrace than being wounded? *Skyr* seems to be used not only to tell something about the character of those who consume or offer it, but is also used in scenes to convey the sense of disgust. In *Egils saga* one person vomits it all over another and in *Ljósvetninga saga* a person is covered by *sky�* that spurted from someone’s wound. The disgust seems to come from the flavour, and perhaps smell, which explains why in *Ljósvetninga saga* it is clarified that Rindill could eat it fast because it was *punnr* (thin or diluted). In *Egils saga* it is said that they drank it because “*peir Egill vár u mjóq lýrstir af maði; tóku peir upp askana ok drukku ákaft skyrit*”68 (Egill’s company was extremely thirsty from exhaustion; they took the vessels and gulped the *skyðr*) and on the other occasion Egill and his men are offered *skyðr* the description is basically the same “*Peir Ólvið vár u lýrstir mjóq ok supu skyrit.*”69 (Ólvið’s men were very thirsty and gulped the *skyðr.*) In both circumstances the fact that the party was very thirsty is stressed, perhaps implying that they had no choice but to drink it. This may also explain why it was so insulting for Grettir to be bathed in *skyðr*, for its literary use seems to convey a feeling of disgust and shame and thus Grettir was not only covered in *skyðr* but was also soaked in all its symbolical meanings. As we have seen, in literature *skyðr* seems to have had quite a bad reputation even if in everyday life it was a common product.

‘Real-life’ *skyðr* seems to be represented in two sagas. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, Snorri the goði, one of the wisest and most powerful and honourable chieftains portrayed in the *Íslendinga saga*, helps his namesake Snorri Þórandason who is wounded after a battle. While attending to his wounds, Snorri the goði offers him something to eat and drink -cheese and *skyðr*.70 There is nothing dishonourable portrayed in this scene, and as a matter of fact Snorri the goði seems to act in the best interests of his namesake. There is reason to believe that in this scene the dairy products are represented as they might

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68 Eg LXXI, p. 224.
69 Eg XLIII, p. 107.
70 Eb XLV, p. 130.
have been used in everyday life. So, Snorri, a rich and powerful chieftain, offers skyr not as a sign of animosity, but just as the ordinary food it was, dispossessed of all literary conventions. As we shall see later in this chapter, not even chieftains could afford to consume ql, mungát, mjóðr, vin or bjórr on a daily basis. Snorri then offered what might have been the most common thing to offer: cheese and skyr.

The second and last scene depicting 'real-life' skyr occurs in Fóstbræðra saga after a battle in Norway, in which one of the two main characters of the saga Þormóðr Bersason is wounded and about to die. After the battle a woman gives milk to the wounded, and when she comes to Þormóðr "Konan mælti: 'Þú munt vera sárir mjók, eða villtu drekka mjólk? Þat er sárum mænum gott til styrkðar.' Þormóðr svarar: 'Eigi þarf ek mjólk at drekka, því at ek em nú svá fullr sem ek hafa nýsopit skyr út á Íslandi.'"71 (The woman said: 'You must be greatly wounded, so do you want to drink some milk? It is good to give some strength to the wounded.' Þormóðr answers: 'I do not need to drink milk, because I am now as full as if I had just had a mouthful of Icelandic skyr.') Once more, there seems to be nothing dishonourable in this scene as Þormóðr dies in a very respectable way: composing poetry after falling in battle to defend the king he has sworn allegiance to. He refuses the milk not because it is dishonourable, but because he feels as full as if he had eaten skyr. This seems to be, then, another representation of skyr and milk as they were used in real life, and the fact that he refers to skyr as 'Icelandic skyr' may attest to the fact that it was not produced in Norway, where this scene takes place. Skyr was sometimes carried as provisions, and the bags in which it was transported were "húðum ok bundit fýrir ofan; þat kálluðu menn skyrkylla."72 (hides and [were] tied from above; men called these skyr bags.)

That milk is mentioned as a food drunk after battle or offered to the wounded might mislead us into thinking that it might have been considered to have healing

71 Fbr XXIV, p. 274.
72 GrXXVIII, p. 96.
effects. However it might have been taken after battle just as it might have been ingested during any other occasion. The fact that the same woman who brings milk to Þormóðr later comes with some herbs to cure him seems to support the idea that milk was not considered to have healing effects, at least not such as those of the “lauk ok qmnur grðs” (leek and other herbs) that she brings him. Perhaps milk and its products were offered to the ill or wounded due to their high protein content, which would be a great aid for a rapid healing.

SÝRA

Sýra can be defined as “das sauer gewordene milchwasser” (milkwater turned sour) or as “saure milch” (sour milk) and is related to the adjective sýr, meaning “sauer, unangenehm” (sour, unpleasant). This product is mentioned in only three episodes of the Islendinga saga and in two of the Sturlunga saga compilation. This dairy product was drunk instead of beer, so that the terminology used for beer-brewing ended up being used also for its production. However, sýra is never said to be drunk in the sagas; instead, it is often used for a more noble purpose such as extinguishing fires.

Perhaps the most famous episode involving sýra is that in Gisla saga, where Þorbjörn Þorkellsson, the father of Gisli, is nicknamed ‘sýr’ after using sýra to escape from a fire. This happens when they are being burnt inside an outbuilding. In the shorter version of the saga, it is said that they found “sýruker tvau í þvi húsi” (they found two barrels of sýra in the house) and then they soaked two hafstókkur (goat-

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73 Magic and healing beverages will be discussed in Chapter 7.
74 Fbr XXIV, p. 274. For magic drinks and the medicinal uses of leek see Chapter 7.
75 IEW, sýra.
76 AEW, sýra.
77 IEW, sýr-s.
78 See OrdT, sýra.
79 See the index to the Sturlunga saga compilation.
80 See IED, sýra and; Hallgerður Gisladóttir, p. 124.
81 Hallgerður Gisladóttir, Use of Whey, p. 125.
82 Gis III-IV, pp. 12-15.
83 Gis III, p. 12.
skins) in sýra in order to fight the fire. In the longer version, the facts are rendered in a similar way: "sýruker var inni í búrinu eða stokkaker. Þeir taka sýruna ok bera í eldinn ok slökkva."84 (sýra-barrels or stock-barrels were in the room. They took the sýra and carried it to the fire and extinguished it.) This last passage is significant as it makes a distinction between a sýruker and a stokkaker. As the end result is that they obtain sýra from the barrels, it highlights that there was a difference between the sýra that was used for drinking and the one used for preserving food. A sýruker, or sýra-barrel, seems to have been used mainly for storing sýra. On the other hand, a stokkaker, or stock-barrel, contained food pickled in sýra, as the acidity of the liquid helped to stop food-decomposition. The Old Norse term sírsa, "in molken einlegen"85 (to pickle in whey), describes this food-preserving practice.

During the burning of Njáll sýra is put to similar use: when the burners set the house on fire for the first time "Pá báru konur sýru í eldinn ok slökktu fyrir þeim."86 (Then the women carried sýra to the fire and extinguished it.) The only other time sýra is mentioned in the Íslendinga saga is when a valuable shield is destroyed after being stripped of its gold and thrown into a sýruker87 (barrel of sýra) as an act of contempt against the giver. Hrafnss saga Sveinbjarnarsonar, part of the Sturlunga saga compilation, records a similar use, when a house is being burned "þeir, er inni váru, báru vatn ok sýru í eldinn ok slökktu sem þeir máttu."88 (the ones who were inside carried water and sýra to the fire and put it out the best they could.)

In the three burning scenes, sýra is said to be carried to the fire and on one occasion it is said that "nú taka þeir Gísli hafstqkkur tvær ok drepa þeim í sýrukerin ok verjask svá eldinum"89 (now they took two goat-skins and immersed in the sýra-barrel

84 Gisl IX, p. 30.
85 IEW, sírsa.
86 Nj CXXIX, p. 328.
87 Eg LXXVIII, p. 273.
88 Hrafn XV, p. 219.
and defended themselves from the fire like that.). As far as I am aware goat-skins do not absorb a great amount of liquids so, the correct interpretation of the passage may be that the goat-skins that they were used as fire-blankets to extinguish the fire or that were used as bags to carry the *sýra* to the fire. The same can be inferred from the other two passages, in which people are said to find the *sýruker* but carry the *sýra* to the fire. This can be due to both to the great size of the *ker* (barrels) in which it was stored (up to 1.5 meters in diameter) as well as to the fact that, for insulation purposes, they were partially dug into the earth.90

**Vessels for Storing *Skyr* and *Sýra***

There are few occasions on which the written sources mention the vessels in which dairy products were stored. These vessels might have left some archaeological traces, yet this evidence is not free of controversy. One example comes from Stöng, a farm in the south of Iceland (see figure 4.4) destroyed by an eruption of mount Hekla in 1104.91 One of the rooms in this farm “contained the traces of three barrels set into the floor. A white deposit in the base of one of these has been interpreted as the remains of *skyr*.”92 Traces of barrels have also been found in the Greenlandic settlements from Vatnahverfi and Nipaitsoq, and thus the rooms in which they were found are regarded as storerooms.93 However, Buckland and Perry have found new ways of interpreting such findings. Based on the large amount of ectoparasites (mainly *melophagus ovinus* and *dalmalinia ovis*) beneath one of the rooms in the Icelandic farm of Stóraborg, in use

90 Hallgerður Gísladóttir, p. 126.
92 Buckland and Perry, p. 43.
93 Buckland and Perry, p. 43.
since the Middle Ages but abandoned in 1834,\textsuperscript{94} the authors propose a different approach to the use of these barrels as urine containers. They argue that

Soap did not become widely available in any quantity until the latter half of the nineteenth century and its role was taken both traditionally and commercially by a readily available strong alkali —fermented urine. The collection and uses of human urine, from personal washing and medicine to large scale employment in wool scouring, in Britain have been recently discussed by Stead. Its use for similar purposes on farms in Iceland is alluded to by Jónasson in his general discussion of the insanitary [sic] nature of nineteenth century farm interiors.\textsuperscript{95}

Thus, the use of fermented urine to wash wool would explain the large number of parasites associated with sheep in a single room. Buckland and Perry extend their interpretation to the white residues of the barrel at Stöng. As

Stöng is a fairly dry site and, as a recent sampling programme has shown, the sediments are inimical to the good preservation of organic materials; after nearly nine hundred years, a milk product would be unlikely to leave a ‘white’ residue. The salts precipitated from large scale urine storage, however, could survive and also indurate the sodden timbers of the base of a barrel sufficiently to allow the partial preservation.\textsuperscript{96}

Collection of excrement is usually mentioned in the literary sources, for it was used as a fertilizer. However, the collection of urine is mentioned only once, as a substitute drink for a group of sailors stranded at sea.\textsuperscript{97} All in all, the purpose of these barrels is uncertain; as Buckland and Perry discuss, it seems more probable that they were used to store urine instead of dairy products. If their argument is correct, then one would not expect to find archaeological traces of the storage of milk products. However, there is also historical evidence to the storage of dairy products and the size of the containers.

Evidence for the existence of special rooms to store these large barrels and their \textit{syra} and \textit{skyr} contents comes from \textit{Íslendinga saga}. When Earl Gizurr Þorvaldsson is attacked in his farm he hides in the "\textit{skyrbúr}" (\textit{skyr}-room) where he sees that a "\textit{skyrker stöð á stokkum}".\textsuperscript{98} (\textit{skyr} barrel was standing on some logs.) Then he dips his

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{94} Buckland and Perry, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{95} Buckland and Perry, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{96} Buckland and Perry, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Flóam} XXIV.
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Ísl} CLXXIV, p. 492.
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ísl} CLXXIV, p. 492.
\end{footnotesize}
sword into it and sees that the foam reaches the hilt of the sword. He then notices that
"þar var ker í jórðu hjá lítit, ok var sóra, en skyrkerit stóð þar yfir ofan ok hulði mjök sórukerit, þat er í járdønni var."\textsuperscript{100} (nearby there was a barrel in the earth, and it was sóra, but the skyr-barrel stood above it and mostly hid the sóra-barrel that was in the earth.) Seeing that the barrel was big enough to hide a man, he climbs into the sóra and when the men come in looking for him they thrust spears into the barrel, but are not able to find him, and Gizurr receives only small scratches from the spears. He later he states that "kalt var í sórunni."\textsuperscript{101} (it was cold in the sóra.)

This episode shows several things. First, that there was a room reserved specially for the storage of skyr and sóra barrels. Second, also corroborating our archaeological evidence, it shows that these barrels were dug into the earth for insulation purposes. Thirdly, it illustrates how some of these barrels were big enough to hide a man and for that man to survive an attack inside them. Finally, it shows that sóra was used to preserve food products, as when the attackers hit Gizurr inside the barrel they comment that there is something in there but make no further investigations, as they might have thought that they had hit some food that was being stored in the barrel.

Now, for a liquid to ferment it needs to be at room temperature, otherwise the yeast would not be able to transform the sugar into alcohol. Accordingly, the skyr barrel which is standing on its supports is at room temperature and is said to be foaming, which is a sign of fermentation. Meanwhile, the sóra barrel is dug into the earth and cold, most probably as a way of stopping the fermentation process. Thus, I would suggest that the barrels found dug into the earth were used to preserve liquids that were already fermented, be it urine or beverages. Meanwhile, the barrels standing free in the room (at room-temperature) were used for fermenting liquids.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[100] Isl CLXXIV, p. 492.
\item[101] Isl CLXXIV, p. 492.
\end{footnotes}
Finally, the size of these *ker* is alluded to in the law collection, *Grágás*, in the section containing regulations about moving farms. The law states for a man moving out of a farm that:

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\text{Ef hann á ker inni þar skal hann út hafa fært það, og svo annað gagn sitt, þvotudag þið sidasta í fardögum, nema hinn lofi honum lengur að hafa þar. Því øðins skal hann hús brjúta til þess að fara ker sitt út, ef hann háætur aftur jafnvel sem aður var, en ellegar á hann í stófum út að færa.}^{102}
\]

(If he has barrels inside the house he has to take them out as well as his other domestic utensils, by the latest washing-day of the ‘moving days’ unless is given the permit to have them there for longer. Soon afterwards he shall break the house in order to take his barrels [out], if he breaks it afterwards he shall leave it as it was before, otherwise he shall take them out in staves.)

So, the size of the barrels might have been so great as to make the task of taking them out almost an ordeal, either needing to break a hole in the wall in order to move them out or needing to disassemble them.

As we have seen, dairy products do not seem to have enjoyed an outstanding reputation in the literary sources, even if - and most probably due to the fact that - they were an everyday product. This may be due to the fact that drinks in literature, and food in general, were not valued according to their dietary value, but according to their symbolic status. Thus, dairy products, as an everyday meal and drink occupied the lowest position in the status pyramid while they had the highest rank in availability. In other words, the social status and availability of food and drink were inversely proportional. Taking that into consideration it comes as no surprise that *misa, skyr, síra* or even milk are never mentioned in the *Fornaldar saga*, as they did not agree with the legendary and heroic past portrayed in this group of sagas. The great heroes of the past would never be depicted drinking milk-products. Another possible explanation for the absence of these drinks in the *Fornaldar saga* is that they were produced only in Iceland and therefore not associated with continental heroes.

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102 *Grg*, p. 346.
When it comes to archaeological evidence, these drinks are hard to trace, as their production would not have left any residue, apart from their containers, and even the interpretation of these is subject to debate. The size of the few barrels that have been found, in case they were indeed used for storing dairy products, agrees with the size of the barrels described in the literary sources, and point to large scale production of these drinks, be it as a beverage or intended to preserve food.

2.2-MALTOSE-BASED DRINKS: QL AND MUNGÁT

Cereal-based drinks are produced by the infusion of malted meal (preferably from wheat or barley\(^{103}\)) in hot water in order to break the enzymes in the cereal’s starch, resulting in the production of enough sugar to allow fermentation. Thus, one could say that the brewing process actually starts with the cultivation of the cereals to be used. This forces us to revisit the agricultural history of Norway and Iceland as the amount of grain locally produced would directly affect the price and availability of these kinds of beverages.

Brewing, which is believed to have been ‘discovered’ some 6000 years BC in Ancient Egypt, is a relatively easy process. Yet, the production of beverages produced exclusively from cereals seems to have arrived relatively late to Northern Europe. Based on archaeological evidence from Bronze and Iron Age burials in Northern Europe, Ian S. Hornsey argues that “at least some of the early alcoholic beverages were of a ‘mixed nature’; all kinds of sugar sources being pressed into service. It may not have been until the 1\(^{st}\) millennium BC that ‘pure’ drinks, such as mead and ale, began to appear.”\(^{104}\) These mixed beverages, namely bjórr, will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

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\(^{103}\) The chemical composition of these two cereals makes them the most suitable for brewing. See Hornsey, p. 171.

\(^{104}\) Hornsey, pp. 219-20.
The brewing process of ql and mungät begins with the collection and storage of grain. In Scandinavia, barley was the most widely produced cereal, as it is one of the few grasses that are able to endure the harsh climate of the region. It "was mown with a sickle and then bound in trusses and stacked in ricks."105 In order to allow alcoholic production the grains must be allowed to germinate, which is usually done by soaking the grain in water for a couple of days and keeping them moist for about a week. This allows the shoots to produce starch, which is one of the main elements in the fermentation process, as starch is the main source of maltose. "For brewing purposes, seed germination is terminated, at the appropriate stages, by carefully applied heat. This controlled germination of cereal seeds is known as malting."106 The malted seeds are then ground and the meal can then be used for both bread and brewing. The malted meal is then infused in hot water at a controlled temperature between 50-65°C in order to break down the starch into maltose, which will be transformed into alcohol later on. This process is known as mashing, and its product is known as mash. The mash is then stored in vessels where it is allowed to ferment. Fermentation is produced by a unicellular fungus, the yeast, a member of the genus Saccharomyces, [that] convert sugars such as glucose, fructose and maltose, into ethyl alcohol (ethanol) and carbon dioxide (CO₂), in the absence of oxygen [...] a process referred to as alcoholic fermentation.107

The mash could either be attacked by wild yeasts just by letting it rest outdoors to cool down, or its fermentation could be induced by the ‘controlled’ introduction of yeasts, most likely from saliva.108 It is not unlikely that honey would be added to the mash in order to increase the sugar content and so raise the alcoholic volume of the beverage. After a week of fermentation, the result would be ale with a maximum of 15% of alcohol. It is very likely that both the mashing and the fermentation took place in the

106 Hornsey, p. 13.
107 Hornsey, p. 11.
108 The use of saliva as a yeast source will be discussed in the Chapter 3.
same vessel. As barley is not so suitable for bread-making as wheat is, it is generally believed that barley was mainly grown for brewing purposes, while wheat was grown mainly for baking.  

Consulting the English translations of the sagas and Eddas, one can easily verify that the Old Norse words ‘ql’, ‘mungát’ and ‘bjórr’ are normally translated as ‘ale’, ‘strong ale’ and ‘beer’ respectively. To the modern reader, used to the differentiation between ‘ale’ and ‘beer’ (even though only a few can actually pinpoint the exact difference between them), it may seem reasonable to assume that in the Viking Age and Scandinavian Middle Ages people also had access to these same kind of beverages. However, there does not seem to be any evidence to prove that ‘bjórr’ equates with what we know nowadays as ‘beer’. Beer is actually the hopped version of ale, a technique greatly used by the Hanseatic merchants, who added this plant to ale not only for flavour purposes but mainly because it improves the keeping qualities of ale, making it suitable for storage and export. Maltose-based fermented drinks, both hopped and unhopped, seem to have been known in Old Norse as ql and mungát, while the adoption of the word ‘bjórr’ to name them seems to have been acquired due to the trade with the Hanseatic merchants. Yet ‘bjórr’ was a genuine Old Norse word in use long before the Hanseatic period, most probably designating a drink of a different nature, which will be discussed in the section devoted to drinks of a mixed nature.

The Old Norse word for ql survives in all Scandinavian languages, denoting what we know nowadays as ale and beer. The word ql survives as øl in Modern Icelandic and Swedish and; as øl in Faroese, Norwegian and Danish, all of them related to the Gothic alu or alup. According to Räsänen the Akkadian word ‘uluš’ or ‘ului’, used to denote a beer of uncertain nature, might have been the origin of this word and

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109 Hornsey, p. 170.
111 See IEW, ql and AEW, ql.
its other cognates.\textsuperscript{112} Both the \textit{AEW} and \textit{IEW} translate \textit{ql} as ‘bier’\textsuperscript{113} (beer). Literary and legal evidence contains the word \textit{ql} many times, and even if we know that the word in modern Scandinavian languages refers both to beer and ale, we still have to gather evidence that the Old Norse word referred to malt-based beverages. In the sagas, as we will see in this section, there are several occurrences in which it is reported that merchants arrived with a cereal cargo and that \textit{ql} was drunk soon after or that some members of a household were engaged in \textit{ql}-brewing. Even if these occurrences point vaguely to \textit{ql} as a cereal product, they are not definitive evidence. In the written sources, I can only find a single occurrence in which malt is directly associated with \textit{ql}-brewing. This passage comes from \textit{Viga-Glúms saga}, written in the early thirteenth century. In it Arnórr Steinólfsson goes to a nearby lodge where he has some malt stored. He undertakes the journey soon after he gets engaged and the malt seems to form part of the preparations for his wedding feast. On his way back he is ambushed and the pack horses carrying the malt are stolen. The attackers then comment “Eigi berum vér til alls ógiptu; qlit skulum vér drekka, en þeir munu rāða kosti konunnar”\textsuperscript{114} (We are not completely out of luck; we shall drink \textit{ql}, even if they set the price for the woman. [i.e. get married]) Regardless of the kind of malt that was robbed on this occasion, from this passage we get to know that at least during the thirteenth century, when the saga was written down, \textit{ql} was produced out of malted cereals, for it was only malt (together with the horses) that was stolen and we can expect that the contemporary audience linked the malt with the beverage that the robbers expected to drink.

The literary corpus also attests to the existence of a similar beverage, called \textit{mungát}, a word that appears to refer to a stronger kind of \textit{ql}. \textit{AEW} translates it as

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{113} See \textit{IEW}, \textit{ql} and \textit{AEW}, \textit{ql}.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Glúm XI, p. 39.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
'geringere sorte bier'\textsuperscript{115} (a low-class kind of beer) while \textit{IEW} states that it is "eine art bier" (a type of beer).\textsuperscript{116} The word survives in Modern Icelandic as \textit{mungát} and in Norwegian and Swedish dialects as \textit{mungaat}, and in Danish as \textit{mundgodi}.\textsuperscript{117} Etymologically, the word can have various meanings. It can come "\textit{aus 'munr' und 'gät', also eig. 'geliebter trank'}"\textsuperscript{118} (from \textit{munr} and \textit{gät} meaning actually 'beloved drink'). \textit{IEW} proposes a different etymology for the word as it associates it with "\textit{gät- leckerei}"\textsuperscript{119} (\textit{gät-} something tasty) which would render \textit{mungát} as 'tasty drink'.\textsuperscript{120} In general, the sources seem to point to the fact that \textit{mungát} was indeed a strong kind of \textit{ql}. For example, in \textit{Egils saga} we read that "\textit{þvi na!st var \textit{ql} inn boril, ok var \textit{pat} it sterkasta \textit{mungât}}"\textsuperscript{121} (afterwards the \textit{ql} was carried in, and it was the strongest \textit{mungát}) and "\textit{þá lét \textit{Högni} bera inn skapker ok \textit{mungát}; \textit{Hildirō} bôndadōttir bar \textit{ql} gestum.}"\textsuperscript{122} (then \textit{Högni} came in with vats and \textit{mungát}; \textit{Hildirō}, the farmer’s daughter, served \textit{ql} to the guests.) Unlike poetry, in prose the authors are not limited in their use of vocabulary by metrical rules. Thus, the fact that the author equates \textit{mungát} with strong \textit{ql} may well be due to the fact that that is exactly what \textit{mungát} was. One can not discard the possibility of \textit{mungát} being a brew fortified with other types of sugar, making it an alcoholic beverage of mixed nature. This would explain its etymologies as 'tasty drink', probably related to the sweet flavour conferred to the drink by the extra sugar. Both \textit{OGNS} and \textit{IEW} define \textit{mungát} as a strong kind of \textit{ql}, most probably based on the passage quoted above. But what evidence do we have to prove these definitions right? The definitions seem to be based in the above mentioned passage, in which the \textit{ql} brought in is said to have been the strongest kind of \textit{mungát}, which seem to point only to the fact that \textit{ql} and \textit{mungát} were similar – yet not identical - products. The word does

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{AEW}, \textit{mungát}.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{IEW}, \textit{mungát}.
\textsuperscript{117} See \textit{AEW}, \textit{mungát} and \textit{IEW}, \textit{mungát}.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{AEW}, \textit{mungát}.
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{IEW}, \textit{gät} and \textit{mungát}.
\textsuperscript{120} See, for example \textit{IEW}, \textit{sælgæti}, meaning "\textit{leckerbissen}" (something tasty).
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Eg} LXXI, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Eg} VII, pp. 16-17.
\end{footnotesize}
not occur in the context of the Eddas, but does appear several occasions in the sagas and laws, though it is not recorder in the Diplomatarium Islandicum. However, the previous quotes are the only ones that bear any evidence to the fact that mungát was indeed a strong king of ql.

CEREAL PRODUCTION AND BREWING

Over the last centuries, the climatic and topographic conditions have led to the disappearance of cereal cultivation in Iceland. When Iceland was first settled c. 870 AD some grain farming took place. Soon after the settlement there was a vast deforestation in the island which becomes evident by the decline in birch, as different pollen diagrams show for the period immediately following the settlement.123 This intense deforestation of the country could be partially interpreted as the result of land-clearing for agriculture. Crop-growing continued on the island well into the late Middle Ages, but the production was never on such a large scale as to attain self-sufficiency. Later, at the beginning of the twelfth century, there was a major climatic change, known as the Little Ice Age, which added to the human effects on the landscape in limiting the already meagre agricultural lands in the southern and western areas of the island.124

Icelandic land is generally unsuitable for agriculture, as we can see through “a recent comprehensive survey [which] reveals that 73% of Iceland’s 103000 km² is affected by soil erosion, 17% of which is severe. (...) Currently c. 28% of Iceland is vegetated and forest occupies only about 1% of the total area.”125 Undoubtedly human activity has had a negative impact on the island’s landscape, already prone to erosion. Even if cultivation played only a minor role in the economy, (just as it did in the

124 Orrman, p. 273.
Norwegian homelands) it took the form of continuous cropping\(^\text{126}\) which tends to rapidly exhaust the soil. However, the degradation of the land was not only due to human activity. It was a process already in progress caused probably by the combination of meteorological factors and volcanic activity, as revealed by the "increased accumulation interval between the b/c (tephra) layers and the Vő-900 (tephra) layer\(^\text{127}\) with elevation (which) shows that erosion was already taking place at higher elevations at the time of the Viking settlement."\(^\text{128}\) Thus, the landscape that the original settlers met was one in which the higher lands were already eroded or in the process of deterioration. Accordingly, successful cereal cultivation appears to have been undertaken in regions where the Gulf Stream provided the minimum temperature for the grain to ripen, or at an altitude at which the land was still not eroded; i.e. coastal regions. However, the climatic decline due to the Little Ice Age in the twelfth century and land erosion brought an end to cultivation in less fortunate parts of Iceland.\(^\text{129}\) As Jón Jóhanesson puts it,

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The cultivation of grain appears to have come to an end as early as the 10\(^{th}\) or the 11\(^{th}\) century in both the Northern Quarter and the district of Múlahing, and in these parts of the country grain farming was never of great significance. In other areas this kind of farming continued for a longer period, particularly in regions along the seashore and in areas of thermal springs (...) Apparently the best conditions for the growing of grain were found in the districts where the effect of the Gulf Stream was strongest –that is, in the southeast, the south, and the west.\(^\text{130}\)
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The contemporary saga *Porgils saga ok Hafliða* bears witness to this rapid land degradation. This saga, composed c. 1237, narrates events that took place during the first 25 years of the previous century. So, even if it presents an idealization of the past, this cannot be so far-fetched as not to describe a fertile agricultural past that might still survive in the memory of some of the contemporary readers or listeners of the saga. On

\(^{126}\) Orrman, p. 273.

\(^{127}\) The Vő-900 layer is also known as *Landnám layer*, deposited almost at the same time of the settlement while the b/c layers are believed to have been deposited c. 600 AD and c. 700 AD respectively.

\(^{128}\) Rannveig Ólafsdóttir and Hjalti J. Guðmundsson, p. 163.

\(^{129}\) Orrman, p. 273; and Rannveig Ólafsdóttir and Hjalti J. Guðmundsson, p. 165.

\(^{130}\) Jón Jóhanesson, p. 296.
the occasion of a feast the narrator states that "Á Reykjahólum váru svá góðir landskostir í þenna tíma, at þar váru aldri ófrævir akrarnir. En þat var jáfnan vani, at þar var nýtt mjöll haft til beinabótar."\(^{131}\) (in Reykjahólar there were lands of such good quality at that time, that there were never uncultivated fields. And it was always the custom to have fresh meal for the guests.) The narrator’s emphasis that these were the circumstances í þenna tíma (at that time) seem to imply that the land at Reykjahólar, in the Western Fjords, was not fertile anymore at the time the saga was committed to writing. Similarly, in the description of Iceland in the Bishops’ saga Guðmundar saga Arasonar: eftir Arngrim ábóta Brandsson, written c. 1350, the agricultural situation seems to have worsened, as the narrator states that "korn vex í fám stöðum sunnanlands ok eigi nema bygg."\(^{132}\) (cereal grew in few places in the south and nothing except barley.) Astrid Ogilvie suggests that the passage in Porgils saga ok Haflíða “may be a comment on the state of the soil as much as on the climate.”\(^{133}\) What really matters for the purposes of this study is the fact that cereal production in Iceland had gradually diminished, increasing the cost of producing malt-based alcoholic beverages. So, by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the sagas were committed to writing, cereals and with them alcoholic drinks derived from malted grain were not only a rare but also an expensive commodity.

These two contemporary passages confirm the archaeological results concerning the agricultural situation on the island: cereal cultivation ceased in the north and east of Iceland after the 12\(^{th}\) century. Recent excavations at Svalbarð, in the north-east of Iceland have revealed that “general agriculture is not apparent, as there were no grain processing implements (i.e. sickles, querns, grinding stones) or carbonized cereal grains

\(^{131}\) ÞorHaf X, p. 27.
\(^{132}\) GuðAr II, p. 150.
excavated from the archaeological deposits". When it comes to contemporary written sources (charters, chronicles and sagas) there is no evidence of grain growing in the northern and eastern quarters, which has led scholars to believe that it had ceased in those regions by the end of the twelfth century. However, we know that grain growing kept on in the vicinity of Reykjavik, in south-west Iceland, well into the sixteenth century.

The existence of land devoted to cultivation is also attested by several place names referring to lands for tillage. The Old Norse word for arable lands, ‘akr’, forms part of 9 place-names in the Íslendinga saga and Landnámabók, 6 in the Sturlunga saga, and nowadays it survives in at least 22 place-names. The place-name evidence confirms what is known from archaeological evidence: the distribution of akr place-names seems to be concentrated around the western part of Iceland, mainly around the Akranes and Snæfellsness peninsulas, and around Akureyri, in the north. In the southern districts they are exclusively found near Gunnarsholt and the area in which Brennu-Njáls saga took place. Not coincidentally Brennu-Njáls saga is the saga which has most references to agriculture. Akratunga, the only akr place-name mentioned in the saga does not survive, but it may be related to the present-day Akur, some 10km from Gunnarsholt. In the eastern part of the island only 2 akr place-names survive, and none

135 Ogilvie, p. 240.
136 Ogilvie, p. 240.
137 In the Íslendinga saga and Landnámabók the 9 akr place-names are: Akrafell in Akranes (Ldn), Akranes (Ldn, Hns, BjH, Fbr, Hard, Búrð), Akrar in Mýrar (Ldn, Eg, Gr), Akreyjar in Breiðafjörður (Heið), Akrar in Hörgardalr (Ljós), Akreyrr in Eyjafjörðr (Vígð), Akhróði in Axarfjarðr (Reykj), Akratunga near Hliðarendi (Nj). In the Sturlunga saga compilation the 6 akr place names are: Akr in Hvammssveit (Str!, Ísl, BóðarK, SmB), Akraness (Ísl, PorSk), Akrar in Blónuf-Hlíð (Ísl), Akrey near Helgafellsveit (Ísl), Akreyjar in Breiðafjarðr (Ísl, BóðárK), Aknesingar (Ísl). According to the 2003 edition of the Kortabók Islands there are 22 akr place-names in modern Iceland: Akralur, Akrafjall, Akrafell, Akranes, Akraóas, Akrar (4 different instances of this place-name), Akur (3 different instances of this place-name), Akurbakki, Akurbrekka, Akurey, Akureyjar (2 different instances of this place-name). This information was compiled by revising the index of proper names in the Íslensk Fornrit collection, in Sturlunga saga, and in Kortabók Islands 2003 as well as the OrðT.
138 Ís XXXIX, p. 103.
are mentioned around that area in the Old Norse corpus. Due to the lack of contemporary evidence, if we assume, together with Jón Jóhannesson, that cereal cultivation in the northern and eastern part of Iceland ceased by the twelfth century then we may conclude that these place-names bear witness to early agricultural attempts in these regions.

Even if grain production in Iceland never reached a scale that allowed self-sufficiency, some regions may have generated a surplus that permitted some degree of internal trade. Such a large production may have occurred at some farms where the land was more suited for cultivation than the rest of Iceland, such as the above mentioned case of Reykjahólar, whose fields were said to have been extremely fertile. The late thirteenth century Fóstbræðra saga mentions some internal meal trade at Akranes, as it states that some of the characters “föru út á Akranes at mjólkauðum.”139 (went to Akranes to buy meal.) The information provided by the saga is not completely reliable as it was written roughly two hundred years after the events it narrates; and in any case the meal they acquired is never explicitly said to have been produced in Iceland. However, the place-name ‘Akranes’ (Peninsula of the Arable Lands) implies that at some point in time (at least during the age of the settlement) the land was considered to be fertile enough, maybe so fertile as to have produced enough surplus to trade.

Yet most of Iceland did not enjoy such a situation. Even though cereals were grown, the production was never of sufficient importance so as to grant the country agrarian autonomy. On the contrary, the production tended to diminish as time went on and cereals had to be brought from abroad in order to satisfy the demand.140 Icelanders brought “mainly of barley from Norway, Orkney, and even England. But these imports never reached a significant dimension, since it was only in years of heavy yields that

139 Fbr II, p. 126.
140 Jón Jóhannesson, pp. 297-98.
Norway, where most of Iceland’s trade was carried on, could afford to export grain.”\textsuperscript{141} This situation led to an excessively high grain price. \textit{Grágás}, a compilation of laws dated to the mid thirteenth century, provides us with the following price: “Prjár vettir mjölvegs matar við kú.”\textsuperscript{142} (Three \textit{vett} [measures] of foodstuff estimated by their value in meal equal [the price of] one cow.) A different section of \textit{Grágás} also informs us that “áta fjóðungar eru \textit{l vett}, en tuttugu merkur skulu \textit{l fjóðungi vera}”\textsuperscript{143} (there are 8 \textit{fjóðungr} [weights] in a \textit{vett} [measure], and there should be 20 \textit{mörk} [marks] in a \textit{fjóðungr} [weight]) where each mark equals eight ounces or half a pound.\textsuperscript{144} In other words, 240 pounds (109 kilos) of meal equalled the price of a cow or ca. 570 grams of silver.\textsuperscript{145}

Several sagas and \textit{bættir} narrate trading expeditions to Norway in which homespun cloaks were exchanged for meal. \textit{Brandkrossa pátir} tells about the cargo of some Icelandic merchants in Norway, and states that “\textit{var pá vanði at hafa vararfeldi at varningi, ok svá hafðu \textit{bæði} at \textit{seldu honum feldi, sem hann vildi, ok mæltu mjólfyrir}.”\textsuperscript{146} (it was then a custom to have cloaks as wares, and so did they) and when someone comes to buy them “\textit{bæði seldu honum feldi, sem hann vildi, ok mæltu mjólfyrir}.”\textsuperscript{147} (they sold him the cloaks that he wanted and asked for meal as a payment.) Others obtained their meal in the Orkney Islands, as is the case of the godi Þórir Helgason who is said to have engaged in several trading expeditions, “\textit{en um haustit fórcann útan ok var i Orkneyum um vetrinn. En um várit fórcann út ok hafði bæði mjólf ok annan varning}”\textsuperscript{148} (and in the autumn he went abroad and was in the Orkney Islands during the winter. And in the spring he left and had with him both meal

\textsuperscript{141} Jón Jóhannesson, p. 307. As we have already seen, barley is not so suitable for baking as it is for brewing.

\textsuperscript{142} Grg, p. 478.

\textsuperscript{143} Grg, p. 207 and Grg, p. 472.

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{MED, mörk}.

\textsuperscript{145} “A cow of specified age and condition represented a standard value, customarily but not always, counted in the equivalent of two and a half ounces of silver or 20 six-ell ounce-units in homespun” (\textit{Laws of Early Iceland: The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from Other Manuscripts}, 1, trans and ed by Andrew Dennis and others, 2 vols (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980-200), p. 392).

\textsuperscript{146} Brandkr II, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{147} Brandkr II, p. 188.

\textsuperscript{148} Ljósve Æ VII, pp. 43-44.
and other wares) when he returned to Iceland. Unfortunately these texts do not provide information about the amounts involved in each exchange nor about the prices paid for the meal. Other texts state that it was sometimes given as a gift by Norwegian nobility to some outstanding Icelanders prior to their departure. 149

We may not know about the prices and the amounts of meal brought to Iceland with each expedition. However, the amounts of meal involved should have been quite large, as some texts narrate the adventures of outlaws who fled from Norway hidden in the meal cargo, 150 but the sagas have preserved for us what seems to be one of the main uses of the cargo: brewing. The late thirteenth century Bandamanna saga reports that as soon as he was betrothed, Oddr Ófeigsson sailed to the Orkneys. Once there "Oddr kaupir þar malt ok korn, dvelsk þar nákkura hrið ok þýr skip sitt." 151 (Oddr buys there malt and corn, he stays there some time and makes his ship ready.) The next thing we get to know in the saga is that Oddr returns to Iceland and starts preparing his wedding feast which goes so well that "þóttusk menn eigi betra brullaut þegi hafa hér á landi." 152 (people thought that there had never been a better wedding-feast here in this land.) The text does not mention drinking at the party, but we may assume that ql and mungát were consumed in large amounts as the groom, while making his preparations for the feast, seems to have thought mainly about importing the raw materials for alcohol production: malt and corn. 153 In Brennu-Njáls saga, the Norwegian king offers Hrútr Herjólfsson as much meal as he wants before leaving for Iceland. The text comments that "Þá var ært illa í landi, en þó fêkk konungrinn honun mjðl, sem hann vildi hafa." 154 (there was a dearth in the land, but nonetheless the king gave him as much meal as he wanted.) The idea of receiving free meal from the king, even in times of

149 Ný VI, XXXII and CLVIII.
150 "Fórt þú til Þórólfís Loptssonar á Eyrum, ok tók hann við hér ok bar þik út í mjútskum sinum." (you went to Þórólf'r Loptsson in Eyrar, and he took you in and smuggled you abroad in his meal sacks.) (Ný CXIX, p. 299).
151 Band XI, p. 358.
152 Band XI, p. 359.
153 Drinking at weddings, funerals and seasonal feasts will be studied in Chapter 5.
154 Ný VI, p. 111.
scarcity, might have been a literary topos, a reality that might have existed only in literature. However, the meal that Hrútr got seems to have been put to a similar use as the cereal in the previous passage. Upon his return to Iceland, Hrútr gets married and the saga reports that “drekka þeir veizluna, ok farr hon vel fram”155 (They drank throughout the feast, and it went well) which is not surprising, considering that the groom had just imported large amounts of meal. The Norse settlers in Greenland seem to have used their corn imports in a similar fashion. Eiríks saga rauða reports that once Eiríkr hosted a rich merchant. During the winter Eiríkr complains that he does not have the means to provide his guests with a decent Yule feast. The merchant responds by giving him malt and meal so that “menn þóttusk trautt þvilika rausn sæt hafa í fátækulandi.” 156 (men could hardly recall having seen such magnificence in such a poor land.)

The saga corpus contains plenty of such occurrences in which a large feast is given soon after merchants arrive in Iceland and Greenland with a cargo of malt and meal. However this should not lead us to believe that cereals and their by-products were inexpensive or easily obtained. Thus, Vatnsdæla saga reports that soon after moving to Iceland two sisters decide to prepare a feast in order to increase their popularity: “Gróa keypti malt ok bjó til veizlu ok bauð Ingimundarsonum þangat; -eigi þóttu þær systr svá litils hátta verð”157 (Gróa bought malt and prepared a feast and invited the Ingimundsons to attend; - It was thought that the sisters were not of so little importance.), implying that throwing feasts was an act that could be undertaken only by a few privileged members of the society who could actually afford to offer alcohol. As we will see in Chapter 6, due to the display of economic power involved in such feasts, they turned into a political tool to gain support.

As we have seen, cereals and their derivatives were produced in Iceland; but, in order to guarantee the supply they had to be imported, mainly from a land whose

155 Nj VI, p. 22.
156 Eir VII, p. 220.
157 Vatn XXXVI, p. 95.
production was large enough to assure its internal demand. The result was an increase in prices so that the “Icelanders spared grain, and bread was rare among the common people right up to the last decades of the nineteenth century.”

This situation must have extended to ql and mungát consumption due to the high prices involved in brewing.

If, during the medieval period, Icelanders were brewing ql according to modern techniques, that is minimizing evaporation and waste, it would have taken them 6-9 lbs. of malt to brew 5 gallons of ale (c. 1-1.3 kg. of malt for 6 litres). Thus, a cow’s-worth of meal would have rendered 135-200 gallons (510-756 litres) of ql. To these prices one should add the costs involved in the production. In order to break down the starch in the malt to obtain the minimum degree of saccharification required for the fermentation process, the mash needs to be maintained at a temperature around 65° C for at least one hour. Fuel consumption would then increase the brewing costs, especially in a country where it was scarce, as is the case of Iceland. It has been generally believed that fuel was scarce due to the intense deforestation that followed the settlement of Iceland. However, recent research has proved that forests were carefully managed during the Commonwealth period and they only disappeared due to intense exploitation sometime in the eighteenth century, when it is reported that wood was the main fuel of nearly half of Icelandic farms. Orri Vésteinsson and Ian Simpson argue that Icelanders had access to wood (either driftwood or wood from the forests) as a fuel source, but “it was never the only one and it is clear that for some purposes it was not even the preferred fuel.”

We should then distinguish between the fuels used for industrial purposes (smithies, sharpening blades, etc) and household purposes (cooking, brewing, heating, etc). Excavations at several places identified as smithies covering the period from ca.

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158 Hallgerður Gísladóttir, p. 124.
159 Homsey, p. 17.
160 Orri Vésteinsson and Simpson, p. 185-87.
161 Orri Vésteinsson and Simpson, p. 182.
900-1400 AD have shown that “som brennstoff ble det på Island brukt trekol av bjørk, i Norge også trekol fra andre treslag. (De eneste alternativene på Island kunne være trekol av ‘gulvðir’ og torv.)”162 (Birch charcoal was used as a fuel in Iceland, charcoal of other kinds of wood was used in Norway. (The only alternatives in Iceland could be charcoal of ‘gulvðir’ -yellow willow- and torv -peat.)) This information seems to be corroborated in Orkneyinga saga, where we are told that Torf-Einarr “hann fann fyrstr manna at skera torf þó rðt til elddvðar á Torfnesi á Skotlandi, þvi at illt var til viðar í eyjum.”163 (he was the first man to dig peat for fuel, firewood being very scarce on the islands, at Tarbat Ness in Scotland).164 On the other hand, excavations at halls prove contradictory. Excavations at the fireplace in the large hall at Hofstaðir, in north-eastern Iceland, have produced “several layers of distinctly different ash residues. The lower part of the series seemed to contain primarily peat-ash whereas the middle part was made of charcoal and soot and the uppermost was characterized by white ash, visually identified as wood ash.”165 Meanwhile, excavations at the fireplace in Reykholt, in Borgarfjörður, Western Iceland, show no evidence of wood or charcoal. “Instead, evidence of animal dung or peat suggested that these were used as fuel [suggesting that] already by the time the fireplace was in use [suggesting that] wood for use as fuel was scarce.”166 The archaeological sources thus suggest that fuel types for household needs varied between regions and epochs, most probably depending on their availability.

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163 Orka VII, p. 11.
165 Örri Vésteinsson and Simpson, p. 181.
Literary sources do not help to clarify the problem of the type of fuel used for brewing purposes. As Orri Vésteinsson and Ian Simpson argue, the *Íslendingasögur* reveal that “in the minds of literate Icelanders in the 13th and 14th centuries wood was the expected fuel type. In the vast majority of cases where fuel is mentioned in the Sagas it is wood that is being burnt.”\(^{167}\) From the results of archaeological investigation at Hofstaðir, the literary preference for wood as a fuel seems partially correct, for the lower layer shows that peat was the main fuel, while wood and charcoal appear mainly in the upper layers. However, taking into account the results at Reykholt this literary preference for wood seems to be yet another idealization of the past on the part of the saga writers/composers, as Reykholt was one of the greatest centres of power during the thirteenth century and yet there is no evidence for wood being used as fuel during this period.

The literary sources mention different terms for *ql*-brewing, namely *qlgqrð*, *qlhita*, *qlverk*, *qleita*, *heita* (*ql*-making, *ql*-brewing, *ql*-work, *ql*-brewing and brewing respectively) on several occasions; unfortunately none of them mentions the procedure involved in brewing nor the type of fuel used. There are only two sources that seem to cast some light on this issue; however it is difficult to draw conclusions from them. *Qlkofra þátrr*, written in the mid thirteenth century, narrates the adventures of Þórhallr, better known as Qlkofri (*Ql*-hood), an early eleventh-century brewer who makes his living by selling *ql* and *mungát* at the Alþing. The þátrr reports that one autumn “Qlkofri för í skóg þann, er hann átti, ok ætlaði at brenda kol, sem hann gerði.”\(^{168}\) (Qlkofri went to the woods that he owned and intended to make charcoal, as he used to.) As Qlkofri’s main activity is brewing, we may suppose that the thirteenth-century saga audience would have understood that the charcoal he is producing is intended as fuel for *ql* and *mungát* production and, as the charcoal is said to be produced during the

\(^{167}\) Orri Vésteinsson and Simpson, p. 182.  
\(^{168}\) Qlk I, p. 84.
autumn, it might have been meant for brewing jölaql (Yule ql) to be drunk during the winter festivities.\textsuperscript{169} However, as the events take place during the autumn, we should not discard the possibility that the charcoal is also to be used for heating during the winter. Concerning the possible use of charcoal for brewing, it is worth mentioning that Qlkofri's woods are said to be "\textit{upp frá Hrafnabjörgum ok austr frá Længahlíð}"\textsuperscript{170} (beyond Hrafnabjörg and east from Længahlíð) in north-eastern Iceland, near Akureyri. Thus, this brewer would have had his main activity in an area with several \textit{akr} place-names in it, and if he was a historic personage we could assume that he grew his own barley for brewing. His forest and those of his neighbours are also located some 40 km from Hofstaðir, where, as has already been discussed, we have evidence for wood and charcoal as the main domestic fuel.

\textit{Porgils saga skarða}, a contemporary saga included in the \textit{Sturlunga saga} compilation, is the only other literary source that provides us with some clues about the fuel used for brewing. This saga narrates events between the years 1228-1262 and it was committed to writing roughly a hundred years after the events it describes. It reports that during a winter night at Stafaholt, in western Iceland, "\textit{húsfréyja var at ölgerð ok með henni Björn Sigurðarson ráðismaðr ok höfðu úti hitueldinn, því at þau vildu eigi gera reyk at mönnum. Ok varu því dyrr allar opnar, er þau fóru jafnan út eða inn.}"\textsuperscript{171} (the house-wife was brewing \textit{ql}, and Björn Sigurðarson the steward was with her and they had set the brewing-fire outdoors because they did not want the people in the house to endure the smoke. Therefore all the doors were open, because they were constantly going in and out.) \textit{Hitueldr} is a compound word formed by the noun \textit{heita} (brewing) or \textit{hitu} (heating), and the noun \textit{eldr}, (fire). I have chosen to translate it as 'brewing-fire' rather than as 'heating-fire' (i.e. a fire set in order to brew) as it had been set outdoors and for this particular purpose. Even though the type of fuel is not mentioned, it is quite

\textsuperscript{169} Seasonal feasts will be discussed in chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{170} Q/lk I, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{PorsSk} XVII, p. 129.
noteworthy that they set the fire outside because they did not want to bother those in the house with the smoke. As the scene takes place during the winter, we can safely assume that there was a fire indoors for heating purposes. Therefore the fuel used for the brewing-fire must have been of a different nature than that used indoors, that is, one that produced much more smoke, and was most probably peat (torf) or dung and not wood or charcoal. Another possibility is that the fuel used for heating also consisted of torf, as was mainly done 10 km to the east of Stafaholt, at the farm in Reykjaholt according to the archaeological evidence discussed above. If the main fuels for heating in both farms were indeed torf and dung, then the need to brew outdoors might be due to the fact that the amounts of fuel required to keep the contents of a large cauldron at a temperature of between 50-60°C were larger than those needed to warm a room, making the quantity of smoke produced unbearable for those inside. In some places this situation may have led to the construction of buildings devoted only to brewing, such as the heituhús (brewing-house) at the Alping, mentioned in Orms þáttr Stórólfssonar, included in the Flateyjarbók version of Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar.\textsuperscript{172}

Malt, fuel and water are the only ingredients needed for brewing, as the mash tends to be rapidly attacked by wild yeasts that lead to the fermentation process. As for the equipment, just a cauldron is required, but the cauldron-prices helped to increase the cost of brewing. We know from Grágás that "járnetill nýr og öeldur, og veigi hálfa vætt og liggi í átta skjólar, fyrir fimtan aura."\textsuperscript{173} (an iron cauldron, new and never put on the fire, and weighing half a vætt\textsuperscript{174} and holding eight buckets, is worth fifteen aurar.\textsuperscript{175}) The editors of Grágás comment that "such a cauldron would have been made of riveted sheets of wrought iron. The thickness of the metal in one weighing 40 lbs

\textsuperscript{172} ÓTFlat CDXIII, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{173} Grg, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{174} Half a vætt amounts to c. 18 kg.
\textsuperscript{175} One aura was a weight of just over 27 grams of silver. (Laws of Early Iceland 2, trans. and ed. by Dennis and others, p. 389).
with a capacity of c. 7.5 gallons (ca. 28 litres) would be between 0.5 and 0.6 cm. As metal objects can be easily repaired, the acquisition of a cauldron would have been a once-in-a-life-time investment. However the c. 400 grams of silver (or 6 cows) involved in the transaction would represent a large investment that perhaps most households could not afford.

The mythological lay Hymiskviða, in the Poetic Edda, could reflect a common situation in the world of men when the Æsir impose themselves at Ægir’s place asking for something to drink just to find out that Ægir did not have a cauldron to brew in. This situation can be extrapolated to a human context, in which perhaps several of the poorest farmers did not have the means to buy a cauldron to brew in when they received the visit of their godar asking for drinks after a long journey, such as those instances in which Egill is offered sýra instead of ql. In this same Eddic poem Þórr sets out on a long journey in order to steal a ketill, or qlíóll (cauldron) described as “rúmbrugðinn hverr, rastar diúpan.” (which is capacious, one mile deep.) This cauldron would not have been perceived as extraordinary not only for its size but also for its price!

The 8-bucket (7.5 gallons-28 litres) cauldron mentioned in Grágás could have been the standard size for price-setting, which does not necessarily imply that it was the average cauldron used at most farms. It was far too expensive to be the most common cauldron in use. On the other hand, a big cauldron would also minimize the fuel-costs involved in brewing since more liquid could be brewed at one time; perhaps larger cauldrons were used for the production of ql and mungát. Unfortunately for us, the iron used in the cauldrons was commonly melted and reused once a cauldron was damaged beyond repair. This situation leaves us with only a few and poorly preserved archaeological remains of cauldrons deposited as grave goods. Overall, fragments of 5

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176 Laws of Early Iceland 2, trans. and ed. by Dennis and others, p 207 fn. 79.
177 Hym 5.
different cauldrons have been identified in an equal number of graves, but the remains are too fragmentary as to reach any conclusions about their size. 178

The literary sources seldom mention the size of cauldrons, except to state that they were either big or small. Two exceptions are the thirteenth-century Ljósvetninga saga and Orms þátr Stórólfsssonar, written in the late fourteenth century, but most probably using older sources. The first reports the gift of a "tuttugu skjólna ketill"179 (a twenty-bucket cauldron), i.e. containing c. 18.75 gallons or 70 litres. Based on its size, this cauldron could well have been meant for brewing instead of cooking. If the prices for a cauldron were directly proportional to that mentioned in Grágás, then this particular one would have cost 15 cows or 1.2 kg of silver and could only have been acquired by a very powerful man, as was the case of Þorvarðr, the godi who offered it as a gift. Orms þátr Stórólfsssonar mentions a brewing cauldron at the Alþing’s brewing-house: "hituketill hjá heituhúsínu, sá er tók tvær tunnur."180 (a brewing-cauldron at the brewing-house which could hold two barrelfuls.) A tunna (barrel) denotes a measure and does not seem to have been used before the thirteenth century181 but there are no extant sources that allow us to estimate the volume they refer to.

All the evidence seems to indicate that brewing was an activity performed by both genders. This can be perceived in the nouns heitumaðr (brewer) both extant only in Íslendinga saga182 and in a 1295 charter in which the Norwegian King, Eirik Magnusson passes the following law: "Swa hafuum ver ok fulkomlega firirbodet samdrykkiur ædr gildi leidsagumanna. gullsmida. iárnsmida. Englandz faara. sueína. vinnumanna. häito manna. hæimakuennna ok allar adrar samdrykkiur. vtan stkyningar

178 See Kristján Eldjárn, Kuml og Haugfó: Úr Heiðnum Síd á Íslandi, ed. by Adolf Friðriksson, 2nd edn (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, Íþóðminjasafn Íslands, 2000) This information makes reference to graves 35, 40, 63, 74 and 135.
179 Ljósv XVIII (XXVIII), p. 93.
180 ÖTFlat CDXIII, p. 4-5.
181 IED, tunna.
182 Heitumaðr appears in Isl XXXIV, 267. OrðT does not return any entries for heitumaðr or heitukona. Other dictionaries just provide the two examples quoted here. IED has an entry for heitukona (female brewer) but it makes reference to the charter quoted below, in which the term is heitu manna.
villium ver at halldeszt æftir fornnum sidvanda.”¹⁸³ (Also, we have perfectly prohibited drinking gatherings or banquets of lode-sayers, goldsmiths, ironsmiths, merchants trading with England, lads, labourers, brewers, housemaids and all other drinking gatherings outside the taverns that we hold following the ancient custom. ¹⁸⁴) Even though these terms are rarely used in the literary sources, there are several occasions in which both men and women are said to have engaged in that activity, as will be appreciated throughout this study. When it comes to archaeological remains, the 5 cauldrons found in Iceland, deposited in male and double burials (containing the remains of a male and a female ¹⁸⁵) seem to confirm the literary evidence. With the coming of Christianity, the activity also seems to have been an occupation of the clergy, as was also the case on the continent. Nevertheless, the production of ql and mungát by the clergy in the north could have been undertaken also for liturgical use, as beer seems to have been sometimes used to perform the sacraments of baptism and communion. Íslendinga saga mentions a monk called Þórólfr and the narrator draws special attention to the fact that he was an ql-brewer, for on the few occasions he is mentioned, the text notes that he was an qlgerðarmaðr (ql-maker, brewer): “hann var med Þórólf ðúnk ðolgerðarmaðr”¹⁸⁶ (he was with the monk Þórolf, an ql-maker) and “Þórólf ðúnr frá ðvera, ðolgerðarmaðr”¹⁸⁷ (Þórolf the monk from Þvera, an ql-brewer). There is also a certain priest that seems to have been involved in brewing or in drinking as he was known as “Þórarinn prestr kaggl”¹⁸⁸ (Priest Þórarinn the keg or cask) though the motivations for this nickname are uncertain. These Icelandic priests might have used beer for other purposes than drinking, as two Norwegian charters bring forward evidence for liturgical uses of beer. These are letters sent by Pope Gregory the IX to

¹⁸³ DN XIX, pp. 434-35.
¹⁸⁴ Taverns and other drinking locations, as well as the regulations involved in their handling will be discussed in chapter 4.
¹⁸⁵ Kristján Eldjárn, graves 35, 40, 63, 74 and 135.
¹⁸⁶ Isl CLXXII, p. 488.
¹⁸⁷ Isl CLXXIII, p. 491.
¹⁸⁸ Isl CLXXXIII, p. 508.
Sigurðr, Archbishop of Nidaros. In one of these, dated July 8, 1241, the Pope gives Sigurðr some advice about the administration of the sacraments:

_Cum, sicut ex tua relatione didicimus, nonnunquam propter aque penuriam infantes terre tue contingat in cervisia baptizari, tibi tenore presentium respondemus, quod cum secundum doctrinam evangelicam oporteat eos ex aqua et spiritu sancto renasci, non debent reputari rite baptizati, qui in cervisia baptizantur._

(Since, as we learned from your relating of events, sometimes it happens that, on account of lack of water the children of your land are baptized in beer, the movement of yourself at hand, we answer; because following the instruction of the gospel, water is necessary to those to be reborn in the holy spirit, you should not count the baptismal rites of those who have been baptized in beer.)

Even if baptism in beer due to lack of water was not approved by the Pope, it was among the emergency baptism procedures allowed by the Norwegian church. So far, we have evidence of this being done at least once, with the subsequent doubts of archbishop Sigurd about its legitimacy. This points to a particular understanding of the way to administer the sacraments and of the symbolism of the fluids involved in them, not only on the part of some priests, but also on the part of the head of the Norwegian Church, not to talk about the laity. However, this last procedure seems to have its roots in the amendments to the Gulaping’s Church Law ordinances, ordered in 1164 by the King Magnus under the advice of Eysteinn, who was elected archbishop of Nidaros in 1157. Among Magnus’ additions to the law, we find the following, regarding baptism in case of emergency: “_M[agnus]. En ef vatne ma eigi na. ña fkal ñkira i hverfkonar væto er na ma. En ef engri ner væto. ña fcal rækla i lova fær oc gera kroff’a brioﬆe. oc mellom herða._”

(And if water can not be obtained then it [the child] shall be baptized in any liquid that is found. And if there is no liquid [at hand] then one should spit in the palm of the hand and make the sign of the cross on the breast and between the shoulders [of the child].) Even though this authorization to baptize with any fluid that was at hand can not be taken as evidence for baptism with beer (or for that case with any other alcoholic beverages) at least it leaves that possibility open, as seems to be confirmed by the Pope’s letter. The

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189 _DN I_, p. 21.  
190 _NGL I_, pp. 21, 12.
second Norwegian charter making reference to the use of beer during the sacraments also comes from a letter from Pope Gregory the IX to Archbishop Sigurðr. In it, the Pope advises Sigurðr to discontinue the use of beer instead of wine during the Communion. This practice seems to have sprouted due to the lack and high cost of wine in Norway. But this charter will be analyzed below, in section 2.4, which is devoted to wine.

Ql and mungát are the alcoholic beverages most commonly mentioned in our sources. Their popularity may be due to the fact that, even if expensive, malt and cereals could be easily transported and stored while the raw materials for other kinds of beverages were not only more expensive but also not easy to store, as we will see in the following sections. Maltose-based drinks, in comparison with other beverages, are also relatively easier to brew and store. This might have also contributed to their popularity.

2.3-GLUCOSE-BASED DRINKS: MJQDR

Glucose-based beverages, namely mjǫðr, are produced by dissolving sugar or honey in warm water. The mixture is then attacked by wild yeasts which transform part of the glucose into alcohol. As the sugar-cane was not introduced to Europe until the sixteenth century, the main source to manufacture this kind of alcoholic drink during the Middle Ages was honey. Nowadays, the product we know as mead is produced from honey, but that does not guarantee that the Norse beverage mjǫðr was made using the same ingredients. Perhaps the best evidence to prove that mjǫðr was indeed made out of honey comes from two different passages in Snorri’s Edda. In the section known as Háttatal Snorri quotes the following verse:

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\begin{align*}
Hreintjørnum gleðr horna & \quad (horn ñå litt at horna, \\
mjǫðr hegnir hæl bragna) \quad bragningar skipa sognir; \\
fólkhámnu gefr framafla & \quad framlyndr viðum gamlar, \\
hinn er heldr fyrrir skot skjalgðum, \quad skjalgður hunangs qídur 191
\end{align*}
\]

(The prince gladdens the ships’ crews with pure lakes of horns[drink]. The horn does not get to dry out too much. Mead keeps back men’s miseries. The bold-hearted king who holds shields in front of missiles

191 Hátt 24:15.
Here, as one can see, mjǫðr is equated with 'honey waves', implying that the beverage is actually a honey-based product. The second passage in which honey is clearly involved in mead production is provided by Snorri in Skáldskaparmál: “ðeir blendu humangi við blóðit ok varð þar af mjǫðr.”193 (They mixed honey with the blood and it became mjǫðr.)194 Furthermore mjǫðr and “the word ‘mead’ [are] cognate with the Sanskrit for honey [i.e. madhu], and it is therefore probably an ancient drink.”195 Mjǫðr is also cognate with Old High German metu or mitu and with Old English meodo, all coming from the Indo-Germanic médhu, meaning “honig, bes. met”196 (honey, especially mead), related to the Greek μέδον meaning “wein”197 (wine). Hence, Norse mjǫðr was most probably an alcoholic beverage made out of honey and somehow similar to modern mead.

However, with exception of skaldic poetry and of both Snorri’s Edda and the Poetic Edda, the word mjǫðr does not appear very often in the literary corpus and it is completely absent in the Diplomatarium Islandicum.198 Ian S. Hornsey explains that

Mead probably became an outdated drink for the Vikings long before it did for the Anglo-Saxons, and the possibility exists that mjöðr signifies 'mead' (in which case one could equate [Old English] među with [Old Norse] mjöðr.) For both the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons it seems as though honey-based drinks were superseded in popularity by those with a cereal base.199

The few occasions in which mjǫðr is mentioned in the literature, in comparison with qfl and mungát, support Hornsey’s point of view that mjǫðr was a rather outdated drink at

193 Skspm G57, p. 3.
194 The passages involving the mead of poetry will be studied in Chapter 3.
196 IEW, médhu.
197 IEW, médhu and AEW, mjǫðr.
198 In the Forrataldar saga, mjǫðr is mentioned in Bós XIII, p. 316; GFr XXXVII, p. 275; Heiðr XI, p. 55; Vóls XXV, p. 172 and XXIX, p. 184. In the Íslendinga saga mjǫðr is mentioned in Íþ XXX, p. 78; Vatn II, p. 5; Finnb XXIX, p. 301 (See OrtT, mjöður). In Sturlunga saga mjǫðr is mentioned in GuðDý XIV, 190 and; Isl CIX, 387, CXI, 388, CLIV, 458, CLV, 459, CLXX, 483. (see the index of Sturlunga saga).
199 Hornsey, p. 254.
the time in which the sagas were committed to parchment. \textit{Mjǫðr} seems to have become
the subject of myth and poetry (hence its common mention in the eddic and skaldic
corpus), but not an actual beverage to be found at most feasts or drinking occasions.
Christine E. Fell suggests that “it is tempting to suppose that the ubiquity of poetic
mead like that of poetic gold is largely a nostalgic fiction of the Anglo-Saxons, since
prevalence of the one receives as little support from linguistic evidence as prevalence of
the other does from archaeology.”\textsuperscript{200} This seems to be also the case in Norse culture as
one can perceive from the few occasions in which this drink is mentioned in the saga
corpus and the lack of compound words derived from \textit{mjǫðr}, \textit{mjǫðdrekkja}\textsuperscript{201} “dríkkekar
hvoraf man drikker Mjǫð”\textsuperscript{202} (drinking vessel from which people drink mead) or “mead
cask”,\textsuperscript{203} and \textit{mjǫðrann}\textsuperscript{204} “‘methaus, trinkhalle’ nur poetisch gebraucht,
möglicherweise nach dem vorbild von ae. meodu-ǫrn gebildet” (‘mead hall, drinking
hall’ only poetically used, possibly constructed after the Old English model \textit{meodu-ǫrn})
being the only ones attested in our sources, in comparison with the plethora of
compound words derived from \textit{ql}. Accordingly, \textit{mjǫðr} and its symbolic meanings will
be mostly studied in Chapter 3, when we analyze the mythic roles and origins of alcohol
and its possible connections with poetry.

As we will see, \textit{mjǫðr} was the sole alcoholic beverage consumed by the
\textit{einherjar} in Valhll\textsuperscript{205} but it seems that at some point it lost its high status as the most
luxurious of beverages – consumed in the otherworld by a few selected men - as in the
eddic poem \textit{Grimnismál} we are told that “\textit{við vin eitt / vápnqfugr Óðinn æ lifir}”\textsuperscript{206} (on
wine only/ glorious in weapons Óðinn lives), implying perhaps that \textit{vin} (wine) took the
role of the most prestigious of drinks, becoming the preferred beverage of one of the

\textsuperscript{200} Christine E. Fell, ‘Old English Bear,’ \textit{Leeds Studies in English; New Series. 8} (1975), 76-95 (p. 80).
\textsuperscript{201} The compound \textit{mjǫðdrekkja} appears in \textit{Eg XLVI.} p. 117; \textit{Laxd XLIII.} p. 131, see \textit{OrðT, mjǫðdrekkja.}
\textsuperscript{202} \textit{OCNS, mjǫðdrekkja.}
\textsuperscript{203} \textit{IED, mjǫðdrekkja.}
\textsuperscript{204} Preserved only in \textit{Akv 9.} All the other indexes to our sources do not provide other compounds apart
from these two.
\textsuperscript{205} See Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{206} \textit{Grm 19.}
major deities in the afterlife. Richard Lowry proposes that this change in attitude towards mjǫðr might have been due to the fact that "wine would have functioned just as effectively as mead in this capacity for it, too, was expensive to produce and it had the added advantage of being exotic."\(^{207}\)

But why was mjǫðr superseded by other drinks – either maltose-based as a common drink or by vín as a prestigious drink? The answer to this question may be found in the high cost and difficulties in obtaining honey to produce it.

When it comes to honey production, the only archaeological evidence for beekeeping in the Western Norse settlements comes from the Coppergate site in York, where an artefact interpreted as a beehive was excavated in the 1980s. There was "a layer rich in honey bee corpses together with twisted straw, interpreted as a 'skep' beehive, in Anglo-Scandinavian levels at 16-22 Coppergate. Clearly bees were kept by the inhabitants of York, at least a proportion of whom enjoyed honey as a sweetener or fermented as mead."\(^{208}\) Unfortunately, we do not have any records or evidence of beekeeping in Norway or Iceland. However, if apiculture was practiced in Scandinavia, the production could not have been very high, as one can gather from "an anonymous thirteenth-century [English] husbandry [that] gives two gallons as the average annual yield from a hive. A good hive today would yield about four times that amount."\(^{209}\) Honey seems to have been scarce in the North, so that it was apt to become the subject of myth. For example, in the ninth century the Anglo-Saxon traveller Wulfstan reports that in a land called Estland "þær þið swiðe mycel hunig & fiscad, & se cyning & þa ricostan men drincad myran meolc, & þa unspedigan & þa þeowan drincad medo."\(^{210}\) (there is a great deal of honey and fishing. The king and the most powerful men drink


mare’s milk, the poor men and the slaves drink mead.\textsuperscript{211}) Such an account would have produced a great surprise in Anglo-Saxon England and in Viking Age Norway and Iceland for, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, milk and lactose-based products were the drinks proper for slaves,\textsuperscript{212} while \textit{mj\kappa\varrho r} and other costly beverages were the drinks proper for kings and rich men.

In general, \textit{mj\kappa\varrho r} was not easily brewed, mostly due to the fact that “honey is not easy to produce in large quantities, and the fact that it was the only sweetener available in Anglo-Saxon England [and in Scandinavia] must have enhanced the value of the mead produced from it.”\textsuperscript{213} This might have contributed to the fact that \textit{mj\kappa\varrho r} became the most prestigious beverage at a certain point in Norse history. But, at the same time, its unavailability and difficulties in obtaining the raw materials to brew it must have been the main reason for \textit{mj\kappa\varrho r} to become a drink available only in the otherworld, while \textit{vin}, easier to obtain, took its place as the prestigious beverage. \textit{Mj\kappa\varrho r} was difficult to obtain not just due to the small amounts of honey that could be produced but also due to the particularities of honey storage and brewing. As Ann Hagen puts it,

\begin{quote}
heating to 68 degrees Celsius will destroy honey-fermenting yeasts, but we do not know if this was practised [and] honey gathered in a bad season or kept above 55 degrees Fahrenheit [13 degrees Celcius] will tend to produce an acidic scum and become less palatable.\textsuperscript{214}
\end{quote}

These factors may mean that \textit{mj\kappa\varrho r} was not commonly brewed, if only for the difficulties involved in the process and the unavailability of honey. While it could be easily stored as a sweetener, the storage of honey for brewing required a certain temperature-controll in order to produce a palatable beverage.

\textit{Mj\kappa\varrho r}, as an already brewed product, and honey, as a sweetener and for brewing, were most probably imported from England and the continent. But the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{211} ‘Wulfstan’s Account’, ed. by Lund, trans. by Fell Fell, p. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{212} See above, section 2.1.
\item \textsuperscript{213} Lowry, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Hagen, \textit{Second Handbook}, p. 151.
\end{itemize}

\end{footnotesize}
historical sources also render a few facts related to the sale of mjödr and honey. In *Norges Gamle Love* there are just five regulations concerning mjödr trade and just as many concerning honey imports. This is a very small number of regulations if one compares them with those involving the trade of vin,215 ql and mungät, not to mention that the regulations involving mjödr mention it in conjunction with other alcoholic beverages. This may prove that mjödr was actually being imported in Norway but, it may also suggest that the trade was not of such a large scale (as was the case with other alcoholic beverages) as to deserve much attention in trade regulations. The law corpus states in *Kong Haakon Magnússons Retterbod om Kjöbstevne i Byerne for Tunsberg og Oslo*, passed in Bergen on November 15, 1316, that

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skula utlendzkir men aller hafa upskipat innan atta dagha hit fyrrsta sidan þeir hafa allagu orlaf forget. i bryggju budir malt. miol. rugh. korn. hvæiti. flur. flæsk. baunir. ortar. sild. oc allan annan þunga varengið orlaf orlof fenget. i bryggiu budir malt. miol. rugh.
korn. hvæiti. flur. flæsk. baunir. ortar. sild. oc allan annan þunga varengið orlaf orlof fenget. i bryggiu budir malt. miol. rugh.
korn. hvæiti. flur. flæsk. baunir. ortar. sild. oc allan annan þunga varengið orlaf orlof fenget. i bryggiu budir malt. miol. rugh.
korn. hvæiti. flur. flæsk. baunir. ortar. sild. oc allan annan þunga varengið orlaf orlof fenget. i bryggiu budir malt. miol. rugh.
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(all foreigners shall have unloaded, within eight days since they first got permission to land. in the storage booths malt. meal. rye. grains. wheat. fine meal. meat. beans. herbs. herring and all other heavy wares and unload all into the yard [... with the exception of björr, mjödr and mungät. honey and candles. dried fish. butter. homespun. And all other light wares which shall be unloaded into the yard's booths.)

One day earlier King Håkon Magnusson approved exactly the same law for Bergen; with the sole difference that mungät is not mentioned among the alcoholic beverages.217

In general, the only thing we can gather from these laws is that mjödr, together with other beverages and honey, was being imported into Norway. As with any other wares, it had to be transported to the royal yard where it was priced and taxed.

There is only one extant law concerning the price of mjödr. This price list was approved by King Håkon Magnusson in an undated charter which states that that one shall pay “tunna med sild iii marker. tunna biors ii marker. tunna med miðh iii

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215 *Vin* will be analyzed in the following section of this chapter.
216 *NGL* III, p. 125.
217 This is stated as part of *Kong Haakon Magnússons Retterbod om Kjöbstevne i Byerne for Bergen* on November 14, 1316, See *NGL* III, p. 122.
marker”218 (a barrel with herring 3 marks. a barrel of bjórr 2 marks. a barrel with mjød 3 marks). This means that a barrel of mjød would cost approximately 24 ounces or 700 grams of silver, while a barrel of bjórr would cost 16 ounces or 460 grams of silver.

As we have already seen in the previous section, the prices of alcoholic beverages were state regulated, and so was their sale. Accordingly, on January 29, 1377, King Håkon Magnússon made the following stipulation concerning the sale of mjød as part of his amendments to the privileges of the Hansa:

Swa och forbiodher ver ollum wtldenska monum at kaupa a lande nema a torghe. Swa forbiodum wer oc þeim at bryggia see mungat síelfuer til haruendz eda til vthsalu vthen kaupa þet þer som þet er falt af borghene. [...] swo fyrer biodhom wer oc þeim at velia nokon fungun warningh minna en pundum heliom swo bior midh tunnom en ey minne.219

(We also forbid all foreigners to trade on land with exception of the marketplace. We also forbid them to brew mungat for their own needs or for sale without buying that which is available from the [town] citizens [...] we also forbid them to sell certain light wares of less than a whole pound in weight such as bjór [or ] mjød barrels that are small.)

It is interesting to note that Hanseatic merchants might have been brewing their own mungat, perhaps due to the fact that alcohol prices in Norway were extremely high or to avoid paying the taxes imposed on the local produce. Also, this statute might have forbidden them from selling small amounts of bjórr or mjød as it might have been difficult for the state to tax such transactions. The only other regulation concerning the sale of mjød also seems to keep foreigners from trading it, as it precludes the ownership of a yard, which might have been available only to local merchants. This regulation (as we have already seen in the section concerning maltose-based beverages) on trade and taxes, passed in Nidaros on January 24, 1377, states that “fyrst at uphaffue at engom manne. utlænndskum ne indlænndskum huarcke kall ne konno. loffuett æder thoolest at haffuanock ollthap i bqq warum huarcke winn midh ne biorr æder

218 NGL III, p. 205.
219 NGL III, p. 200.
mumgatt,\footnote{Spelled mumgatt in the original.} with thennom æinum sem garda æiga.\footnote{NGL III, p. 196.} (To begin with, that no person, foreign or local, man or woman, is allowed or tolerated to have an ql-serving\footnote{Oltihap (ql-serving). Even though the word makes reference only to ql, it seems to be a generic drink for serving any other kind of alcoholic beverage.} whether the wares are wine, mjǫðr, bjórr or mumgát, in the town, except those [persons] who own a yard.) As we have already seen, this law seems to be an attempt to regulate the alcohol-selling places in order to control the tax payments involved in the transactions.

No matter how much the state regulated the prices and how much it prevented foreigners from freely selling their wares, the Norwegian Crown tried to encourage merchants to sail to Norway with wares, such as honey, that were scarce in the land. So, on May 10, 1318, King Hákon Magnússon approved the following law concerning foreign merchants in Tunsberg. It reads:

\begin{quote}
Hákon &c. uer uilium ydar kunnight gera at uer uilium at aller utlenzkir men af hvariu lande sem hvairir ero oc ei ero uarer ovinir feir sem sigla uilla til Tunsberghs se feir gudi oc oss velkammer oc sigli i allum timum bide uetar oc sumar oc seli frialsegha allan sin varneng siadar monnum edar adrum nortnom bondom edar kaupmonnum. pundum puna varnengh, tunnum bior, vin oc hunangh fatum.\footnote{NGL III, p. 131.}
\end{quote}

(Hákon &c. We want to let you know that we want that all foreigners of all the lands which there are, and which are not our enemies, who wish to sail to Tunsberg to feel God's and our welcoming; and to sail at all times both during winter and summer and sell in peace all their wares to the townsmen or to any other Norse farmers or merchants. pounds of heavy wares, barrels of bjórr, vin and honey vats.)

Here we can see once more that honey was being imported into Norway. Perhaps the fact that it is listed together with bjórr and vin implies that it was intended for brewing rather than as a sweetener.

Unfortunately the historical sources are too scant to reach any conclusions. The only fact that seems to be certain is that mjǫðr and honey were imported to Norway, but the small number of references may imply that it was not a large-scale trade. We can well imagine that the situation in Iceland was similar. In general, the almost complete absence of mjǫðr in the historical sources agrees with the almost complete lack of
references to the beverage in saga literature. *Mjǫðr* gives the impression of being a discontinued or rare beverage that belonged more to the realm of myth or poetry than to everyday life in medieval Scandinavia.

The evidence from saga literature is not more encouraging than the historical evidence. As mentioned earlier on, *mjǫðr* is mentioned only 5 times in the *Íslendinga saga*, 6 times in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation and 5 times in the *Fornaldar saga*. The occasions in which *mjǫðr* is mentioned in the *Íslendinga saga* may be scant and brief, but it is possible to extract some information from them. For example, in *Finnboga saga* we are told that a feast was organized. For it ‘*eru öxn felld ok mungát heitt, mjöðr blandinn ok mönnum bodit.*’224 (oxen were killed and *mungát* was brewed, *mjǫðr* was blended and people were invited.) Since the blending of *mjǫðr* is mentioned in connection with the brewing of *mungát* it seems that the act of blending *mjǫðr* was the equivalent of brewing it rather than diluting it with water in order to smooth the flavour, as was the case with *vin* and *sýra*. Perhaps the blending refers to the actual diluting of honey in warm water in order to let it ferment. The second reference to *mjǫðr* occurs in *Njáls saga*, when Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi and Kolskegggr engage in a fight at Tunsberg, in Norway. There we are told that ‘*siðan tók Kolskegggr jústa eina fulla af miði ok drakk ok barðisk eptir þat.*’225 (then Kolskegggr took a small goblet full of *mjǫðr* and drank it and fought on after that.) Here it is interesting to note that the scene takes place in Tunsberg, where, as we have already seen *mjǫðr* was being imported during the fourteenth century. This is, perhaps, a historical reference within the saga, as Icelanders travelling in Norway knew that the places where *mjǫðr* was most likely to be found were the market-towns, such as Bergen, Tunsberg or Niðarós. It is also noteworthy that Kolskegggr takes just a *jústa* (measure) of *mjǫðr*. Four *jústar* were

224 *Finnb* XXX, p. 301.
225 *Nj* XXX, p. 78.
the equivalent of a *bolli* (bowl) which means that the amount of *mjóðr* taken by Kolskeggr was a rather small one. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, unlike *qí* or *mungáit* which were drunk in large measures, *mjóðr* was a rare and/or expensive drink, so that it was drunk in small measures.

In *Egils saga* we find Norsemen pillaging *mjóðr* when Egill is raiding in the East. There, after attacking a farm “Egill tók undir hønd ser mjóðdrekku eina vel mikla ok bar undir hendi sér” (Egill picked up a large *mjóðr*-cask and carried it under his arms) and after the raid “sagði Egill, at mjóðdrekku þá vill hann hafa at afnámsfæ.” (Egill said that he wanted to have the *mjóðr*-cask as his share.) This again is in agreement with the historical sources for, as we have seen, Wulfstan reported that in the East *mjóðr* was abundant. However for a thirteenth-century Icelander or for Norsemen plundering in the East a large cask full of *mjóðr* could have been just as valuable as a chest full of treasure due to the high price of alcohol. Finally, we have a further mention of *mjóðr* in *Vatnsdæla saga* as part of what appears to be a comment on the relaxed customs of the time in which the saga was written. In the saga Ketill reprehends his son Þorsteinn for not attacking a group of bandits who are ravaging the region. In order to incite Þorsteinn into action, Ketill tells him that:

> Qnnur gerisk nú atferð ungra manna en þá er ek var ungr, þá gírnusk menn á nokkur framverk, annattveggja at ráðask i hernad eda afla fjær ok söma med einhverjum atferðum, þeim er nökkur mannheitta var l. en nú vilja ungir menn gerask heimaelskir ok siðja við bakelda ok kýla væmb sîna á miði ok mungáit, ok þverr því karlennska ok hardfengi.230

(Now young men behave differently than when I was young, then men desired to achieve feats, either by plundering or by gaining wealth and honour with some deeds that were dangerous. And now young men are fond of staying at home and sit by the fire and fill their stomach with *mjóðr* and *mungáit*, and that is why manhood and valour are on the wane.)

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226 *IED*, *justa*. (Spelled *iústa* in the original.)
227 *Eg* XLVI, p. 117.
228 *Eg* XLVI, p. 118.
229 *A mjóðdrekka* (*mjóðr*-cask) is also mentioned in *Laxd* XLIII, p. 131, but it is just mentioned *en passant* and does not seem to contain *mjóðr*.
230 *Vatn* II, pp. 4-5.
In this nostalgic speech mjǫðr and mungát appear as a symbol of decadence. However, the passage does not tell us much about mjǫðr production or consumption. The mention of mjǫðr as a beverage that is usually consumed is in contrast with the almost complete absence of this drink in the Íslendinga saga. Perhaps its mention refers more to the consumption of alcohol in general than to the consumption of mjǫðr in particular. That is, mjǫðr is mentioned as a symbol of men’s activities than as an actual fact.

In general, the references to mjǫðr in the Íslendinga saga confirm some of the information we got from the historical sources. First of all, the fact that it is said to be drunk in rather small vessels may confirm that it was a rare and expensive drink. This fact is also confirmed by the passage in which Egill claims a mjǫðr-cask as his looting-share. This same passage in Egils saga also supports Wulfstan’s report about mjǫðr being abundant in the East. Finally, the mention of mjǫðr in connection with Tunsberg is supported by the laws in which mjǫðr trade was regulated in this Norwegian town.

In the Sturlunga saga compilation mjǫðr is mentioned only 6 times. Most of them just state that people drank it at feasts, however the beverage is portrayed as a rather rare one. On the occasion of a feast we are told that “mjödrinn var borin í berlum undir Hraun um morgininn efir.”231 (the mjǫðr was carried in barrels to Hraun the next morning.). Mjǫðr might have been presented as a gift to the persons holding the feast,232 or perhaps it was carried to the feasting site because people there did not have adequate brewing instruments.233 In any case, the saga reports that the party “var þar in fegrsta veizla. Skorti eigi góðan mjöð.”234 (there was a splendid feast. There was no shortage of mjǫðr.) This is the only commentary that the saga author makes about the feast, and his description of it being the most splendid feast might be in connection with the fact that ‘skorti eigi góðan mjöð’ (there was no shortage of mjǫðr), that is, the feast was splendid.

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231 Ísl CIX, p. 387.
232 Alcoholic beverages as part of the Norse gift-giving culture will be discussed in Chapter 6.
233 As we have already seen earlier in this chapter, brewing tools and fuel could be rather expensive.
234 Ísl CXI, p. 388.
due to the excess of alcohol, and even better, due to the excess of mjǫðr, which was a rather expensive beverage. In a similar context Íslendinga saga also reports a Yule feast\textsuperscript{235} organized by Gizurr. For this feast "hann [Gizurr] hafði fjölmenn jólaboð ok bað vinum sinum at inum átta degi. Þar var mjǫðr blandinn ok mungát heitt.\textsuperscript{236} (he [Gizurr] invited many people to the Yule feast and invited his friends for the eighth day. There was mjǫðr blending and mungát brewing [as part of the feast-preparations].) It seems that the news about large amounts of mjǫðr and mungát at this feast travel fast, for when Óræfja Snoranson asks for news about Gizurr "Kollr sagði, at hann [Gizurr] hafði jafnan fjölmenn, 'ok nú hefir hann at átta boðit til sin vinum sinum, ok var heitt í móti þeim mjǫðr ok mungát.\textsuperscript{237} (Kollr said that he [Gizurr] often had a large company, 'and now he has invited his friends for the eighth day, and mjǫðr and mungát were brewed for all of them.'\textsuperscript{237}) Here Kollr stresses the fact that there are going to be mjǫðr and mungát at the feast, which seems to be a rather extraordinary fact, considering that mjǫðr is rarely mentioned in the sources. If it was normal for men to offer these alcoholic drinks at feasts there would have been no need to stress the fact that they were promised to the guests. At yet another feast in Íslendinga saga we are told that "var þar druðki fast þegar um kveldit, baði mjǫðr ok mungát. Var þar in bezta veizla, er verit hefir á Íslandi í þann tíma. Hefir þat lengi kynrikt verit með Haukðælum ok Oddaverjum, at þeir hafa inar beztu veizlur halðit.\textsuperscript{238} (there was heavy drinking during the evening, both of mjǫðr and mungát. That was the best feast that had been in Iceland in those times. It has long been the family tradition of the people of Haukðælir and Oddi that they had held the best feasts.) Once more, the mention of mjǫðr and mungát seem to be connected with the fact that the feast is described as one of the best Icelandic feasts ever. The presence of large amounts of these beverages might not have

\textsuperscript{235} Seasonal feasts will be studied in Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{236} Ísl CLIV, p. 458.
\textsuperscript{237} Ísl CLV, p. 459.
\textsuperscript{238} Ísl CLXX, p. 483.
been normal in Icelandic celebrations. After all, the families at Oddi and Haukdælir were among the richest families in Iceland at the time, and so they might have been among the few men who could afford to throw a feast with mjǫðr for all the guests.

The last occurrence of mjǫðr in the Sturlunga saga compilation sets it in a rather ordinary context. It takes place in Guðmundar saga dýra, where it is told that "lengi hafið þér hlegit at því, at mér hafi þótt bað gott ok ek hafa oft drukkit mikit. Nú mun kostr baðs, en ösýnt þykkir mér nú, hversu um mjöðdrykjununa ferr."239 (long have you laughed at me because I had a good bath even though I had drunk much. Now I have the chance to take a bath, and I am now unsure whether I should drink mjǫðr.) Here it appears just as a delicacy that someone enjoys before relaxing in a hot bath. However the reason for people’s laughter at this seems unclear.

In general, the Sturlunga saga compilation has more references to mjǫðr than the Íslendinga sǫgur. But here it appears mainly as a rare beverage that could only be enjoyed at feasts held by rich men.

The references to mjǫðr in Gængu-Hrólfs saga are, perhaps, the most relevant within the Fornaldar sǫgur. In it a group of Danes gets ready to sail back to Denmark after a journey to England. Their preparations as described as follows: "Bjuggust þeir nú allir, þegar váraði, aftir til Danmerkr ok hlóðu skipin með malt, mjöð ok vin ok dúrum klæðum ok öllum þeim varningi, er dúrmætastr var í Danmörk ok fá kunni í Englandi, heldu síðan aftir til Danmerkr."240 (During the spring all of them got ready to sail to Denmark and loaded the ship with malt, mjǫðr and vin and costly clothes and all those wares that are most expensive in Denmark and easy to get in England, then they got on their way to Denmark.) These wares are intended to be used to throw a pompous wedding feast241 at which among such exotic dishes as pheasant or peacocks "eigi

239 GuðDý XIV, p. 190.
240 GHR XXXVII, p. 275.
241 Wedding feasts will be studied in Chapter 5.
vantaði þar inn dýrasta drykk, ál ok enskan mjöð með vildasta vini, piment ok klaret.\textsuperscript{242}

(there was no lack of the most expensive drinks, ql and English mjǫðr with the best vín, spiced and claret.) In this episode we can see what might have been a historical fact. That is, Norsemen travelling and bringing back with them the most expensive and rare delicacies they could find abroad. The malt that they bring back is most probably brewed and becomes the ql that is consumed at the feast. However the most expensive drinks, mjǫðr and vín are imported as a finished product.

The rest of the references to mjǫðr in the Fornaldar saga basically mention its consumption. In Vǫlsunga saga we read that “Grimhildr gefr homun [Sigurðr] meinblandinn\textsuperscript{243} mjöð, er öllum oss kemr í mikót strið.”\textsuperscript{244} (Grimhildr will give him [Sigurðr] mjǫðr blended with malice, and a great grief will come to all of us.) This particular mjǫðr is brewed in such a way that it will induce forgetfulness in Sigurðr.\textsuperscript{245}

A further reference to mjǫðr in Vǫlsunga saga connects its consumption, or lack of consumption, with people’s mood. It reads: “‘Pat geri ek eigi’ sagði hún, ‘at vekja hana né við hana mæla, ok mörg degr þrakk hún eigi mjöð né vín, ok hefir hún fengit goda reiði.’\textsuperscript{246} (‘I will not do that,’ she said ‘to wake her up nor to talk with her, she has not drunk mjǫðr nor vín for many days and she has got a godlike wrath.) Here mjǫðr plays a symbolic role, where its consumption is a synonym of a joyful mood, while the lack of consumption is equated with grief. A fourth mention of mjǫðr occurs in Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks. In it a person is invited to drink some at an erfi (funeral feast),\textsuperscript{247} but nothing else said in connection with the drink: “þá mælti Angantýr: ‘Vel þú kominn, Hlóðr bróðir, gakk inn með oss til drykkju, ok drekkum mjöð eftir fódur okkarn fyrst til

\textsuperscript{242} GHr XXXVII, p. 276.
\textsuperscript{243} Meinblandinn (blended with malice). As mentioned above, blending mjǫðr can refer to the act of brewing it. So this line may be translated as ‘blended with malice’ or ‘brewed with malice.’
\textsuperscript{244} Vqð XXV, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{245} Magic drinks are discussed in Chapter 7.
\textsuperscript{246} Vqð XXIX, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{247} Funeral feasts will be studied in Chapter 5.
sama ok öllum oss til vegs med öllum várnum sóma.”

(then Angantýr said: ‘Welcome brother Hlqôr; come inside with us to drink; and let us drink mjôr in the memory of our father, first us together, and then all of us for glory in all our deeds.) The last occasion in which mjôr is mentioned in the Fornaldar saga is that in Bôsa saga. This occurrence seems to have also some sort of an emotive meaning, as it is mentioned in a simile by a maid. So, when the hero asks her what she thinks about the sexual intercourse that they just had she answers: “svá dátt sem ek hefði drukkt ferskan mjôdr” (I am as charmed as if I just had drunk fresh mjôr.)

In general the Fornaldar saga do not provide much information about mjôr. Perhaps the only exception is that of Gàngu-Hrófs saga, where the characters engage in a trading expedition to England in order to acquire goods that are too expensive in the homelands.

At the beginning of this section it was mentioned that mjôr seems to be an archaic drink that belongs more to the realm of myth than to an everyday reality in medieval Scandinavia. The relative lack of historical and literary references supports this opinion. First of all, the law corpus does not pay much attention to mjôr and honey trade. This makes me believe that the trade of these wares was not at such a large scale as was, for example, the trade of ql, mungátt and malt. Second, the literary evidence also portrays mjôr as a rare commodity in the North, and definitely it does not seem to have been such a common drink as maltose-based beverages were. Mjôr seems to belong more to the realm of the symbolic and of myth, and for this reason I will study its role in the eddic sources and poetry in Chapter 3.

248 Heiðr XI, p. 55.
249 Bôs XIII, p. 316.
2.4- Fructose-Based Drinks: Vin

"Vin skal til vinar drekk"250

For the purposes of this section, I will consider vin (wine) to be exclusively the fermented juice of the grape.251 Being north of the ‘grape frontier’, neither Iceland nor Norway count vin among their native alcoholic drinks. The Old Norse term for wine, vin, is a loan-word from the Latin *vinum*,252 and "wohl zur idg. wurzel 1. uei-, doch ist der idg. ursprung des Wortes nicht unbestritten"253 (probably from the Indo-Germanic root 1 uei-, but the Indo-Germanic origin is not indisputable). In any case, the etymologies of vin attest to it being a cultural import from the Continent. The wine consumed in these countries had to be imported as a finished product, unlike *ql* and *mungât* which were imported mainly in the form of the raw materials (cereal, hops and honey) required for their production. This probably resulted in vin becoming the most expensive of all the available alcoholic beverages, and thus the most prestigious of drinks in the North. In this section, I will analyze the historical sources attesting to the consumption of vin in chronological order, while the literary sources will be analyzed according to the internal chronology of the accounts rather than by the dates on which these accounts were written down.

As mentioned above, even in times of a more temperate climate, both Iceland and Norway were far north of the grape frontier. There have been some disagreements about how far north was it possible to grow vines; some scholars argue that they were not present in the area where the Saxon tribes, both English and continental, dwelled so

250 *Sthr II*, p. 234. "I shall toast my friends with wine."
251 We cannot discard the possibility that berry-wine was produced in Scandinavia; however, the sources do not back up this hypothesis. The possible use of berries in the production of alcoholic beverages will be discussed in the following section, devoted to alcoholic drinks of a mixed nature.
252 See *IEW*, *vin* and *AEW*, *vin*.
253 *IEW*, *vin*.
that "wine was thus not a natural drink amongst the Germanic peoples." To this argument James Graham-Campbell replies that

It is clear from Bede that Britain, as far back as the seventh century, was an island where wine grew in some districts. There are two vineyards referred to in tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charters (at Panborough and Watchet) and Domesday Book records their existence across much of southern England. Although some believe that most of the latter are to be associated with the new Norman overlords, it is clear that not all were newly planted.

David Hill supports this theory and, based on an Anglo-Saxon manuscript illustration found in The Old English Genesis (BL MS Cotton Claudius B.iv, fo. 17r.) as well as on linguistic evidence, argues in favour of the cultivation of vines in Anglo-Saxon England. However, there has never been a debate about vine-growing in Scandinavia. The general agreement is that, due to weather and soil conditions (even before the Little Ice Age) grapes could never have grown in Norway or Iceland, at least not during the Holocene period.

Eiriks saga rauða and Grønlendinga saga are our only sources in which vinvidr (grapevines) and vinber (grapes) are mentioned – both in connection with the name of Vinland, whose etymology is highly debated. The account of the discovery of Vinland according to Grønlendinga saga shows that at least its author had no idea of how to transport grapes nor about the way in which vin was produced. The saga reports that among the first European explorers of America there was a man called Tyrkir, a suðrmaðr (southerner or German). One day it happened that Tyrkir was missing, and

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254 Lowry, p. 8.
257 The etymology of Vinland is quite controversial as it is unclear if it should be spelled 'Vinland' or 'Vinland'. For more information on this topic see Magnúst Stefánsson, 'Vinland or Vinland', in Vinland Revisited: The Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium, Selected Papers from the Viking Millenium International Symposium, Sept 13-24 2000, Newfoundland and Labrador, ed. by Shannon Lewis-Simpson (St. John's N.L.: Historic Sites Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, Inc., 2003), pp. 319-30 and; Alan Crozier, 'Arguments against the *Vinland Hypothesis*, in Vinland Revisited, ed. by Shannon Lewis-Simpson, pp. 331-40.
258 Even though suðrmaðr is often used to refer to Germans the noun tyrkir and name Tyrkir mean 'Turkish'. The inclusion of a German in the account may have been a way of giving credibility to the
when he finally went back to the camp seemed to be quite cheerful. When the other men ask him where had he been

Hann taloði þá fyrtst lengi á þýzku ok skaut marga vega augumum ok grettí sík, en þeir skilðu eigi, hvat er hann ságoði. Hann mælti þá á norrónu, er stund leið: 'Ek var genginn eigi miklu lengra en þit. Kann ek nekkur nýmæli at segja; ek fann vinvið ok vinber.' 'Mun þat satt, füstri minn?' kvæð Leifr. 'At vísu er þat sattí', kvæð hann, 'því at ek var þar fóðr, er hvárki skorti vinvið né vinber.'

(Then he first spoke for a long while in German and his eyes moved in all directions and had a wry face, and they understood nothing of what he was saying. After a while he then said in Norse: 'I did not go much further than you. I have some news to tell: I found grapevines and grapes.' 'Is that true, foster-father?' said Leif. 'I know it for sure' he said, 'because I was born where there is no lack of grapevines and grapes.')

The explanation for Tyrkir's strange behaviour must be in his account of the finding of grapes and grapevines. As Krappe argues, the actions of the southerner appear to be those of a drunken man, unable to make any sense and to control his gestures. The only possible source of this intoxication is the assumed consumption of grapes. If this was the case, then this episode would prove that "the sagaman was ignorant of the true nature of wine, the result of a fermentation process. On the part of the Icelanders and Greenlanders of that remote period such ignorance is excusable enough." The confusion of the episode's author, and perhaps also of many of his contemporary Icelanders, might have been due to the fact that the only thing he knew about the production of wine was that it was made out of grape-juice, believing then that the grapes were equally or even more intoxicating than the juice itself.

Also, in Gronlendinga saga there are two episodes in which different sets of explorers harvest and transport grapes back to Greenland. The first one occurs late in the summer, just after Tyrkir finds the grapevines. The morning after the episode related above Leifr Eiríksson proposes:

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259 Gnm III, p. 252.
261 For a possible Irish source of this episode see the Immram curaig Maile Duín (The Voyage of Máel Duín's Boat) chapter 29 and Krappe, p. 271.
Two years later a different crew arrives in Vinland and "bjuggu þar þann vetr ok fengu sér vinber ok vinvið til skipsins. Nú buask þeir þadan um várit eptir til Grönlinds ok kömu skipi sinu í Eiríksfjǫrð."²⁶³ (lived there that winter and got grapes and grapevines to load the ship. And when the spring came they made ready to travel to Greenland and their ship arrived in Eiríksfjǫrð.) In these passages, the author says that the grapes were cut down during the summer and stored, most likely in a pile inside the ship, through the winter. Now, this cargo in reality would have resulted at best in a load of rotten grapes with a few raisins on top. It should also be noted that grapevines are not trees as is implied in the text. These passages also reveal that the author was not aware of the nature and storage of grapes, as must have been the case with most of his contemporary countrymen. As a matter of fact grapes are extremely difficult to store and transport because they rot easily, and as a consequence most Icelanders would have never seen a grape in their lifetimes.

As mentioned above, both in Iceland as in Norway, wine had to be imported as a finished product. An entry in the late ninth-century Sanas Chormaic (Cormac’s Glossary) is perhaps the oldest written evidence of Norse wine-trade; specifically between the Norse and the Irish, who probably imported their wine from the Frankish Empire (and maybe even from southern England). In it, Cormac mac Cuilennáin (836-908 AD) defines Epscop fina as “a vessel for measuring wine among the merchants of

²⁶² Gran III, pp. 252-53.
²⁶³ Gran IV, p. 257.
the Norsemen and Franks."^{264} *Epscop* may be closely related to the Old Norse words *askr* and *kaupa* (i.e. *askr-kaup*), the first element of the compound meaning “a Norse measure for liquids equal to four bowls or sixteen *jústur*"^{265} and the second element meaning ‘to buy, to trade’. *Fin* being the Old Irish word for wine (*vín* in Old Norse), we would have that *epscop fina* would be understood as ‘a measure for trading wine’ by the Norse who traded with the Irish.^{266}

*Vín* was by far the most expensive drink in the Norse repertoire, displacing *mjqær* from the high-prestige position it had during the pre-Christian period. Accordingly, in the Eddic poem *Grimnismál* Óðinn prefers to drink *vín* instead of his usual *mjqær*; “en við vín eitt vápngáfugr Óðinn æ lifr”^{267} (but on wine alone, glorious in weapons, Óðinn lives), most surely because wine was a beverage more in accordance with his status. In the poem *Eiríksmál*, probably composed in the second half of the tenth century, wine seems to have already taken the place of *mjqær* as the most prestigious drink at Valhalla. In the poem, on occasion of King Eiríkr’s arrival in Valhalla Óðinn commands: “Valkyriar vin bera, sem visi komi.”^{268} (Valkyries bear the wine as if a leader was coming.) *Vín* might also have become a prominent beverage due to its symbolism in the new faith, and having Óðinn as a *vín* drinker might have been a way of taming the god, of Christianizing him. As Richard Lowry puts it,

> One may see a shift from pagan to a Christian sphere of values, including wine as the prestigious beverage. Wine would have functioned just as effectively as mead in this capacity for it, too, was expensive to produce and it had the added advantage of being exotic.^{269}

But, exactly how expensive was a barrel of *vín*? A few Norwegian charters inform us about the price fluctuation between the late thirteenth and the early fifteenth

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^{265} *IED*, *askr*. Unfortunately there is no clue to the volume contained by the *bolli*, *jísta* or *askr* measures.
^{266} Another possible etymology could be related from the Old Norse words ‘*askr*’ (‘ash’), ‘*koppr*’ (‘cup, small vessel’ and ‘*vín*’ (wine), i.e. an ash-cup for wine, though as the vessel is said to be meant for trade the first etymological approach seems to be more sound.
^{267} *Grm* 19.
^{268} *Eksm* 1.
^{269} Lowry, p. 8.
centuries. There are only three documents making reference to wine prices in Norway and Iceland. The earliest of these is a 1294 charter sent by the Norwegian king, Eirikr II Magnússon, to a merchant in Bergen in order to remind him of a debt contracted with Arnold the wise (Arnoldus sapiens) and Reinward the white (Raynwardus albus) for the purchase of 10 barrels of wine. In it the king tells the merchant “Vos ab eisdem Bergis ad duos annos emistis decem dolea vini pro cxx marcis monete noricane et persoluistis eisdem xix marcas de predictis denariis, centum vero et vna marca adhuc remanent insolute.” (Two years ago in Bergen you bought 10 barrels of wine for 120 marks, Norwegian currency, and the sellers received only 19 marks of the above-mentioned amount, leaving 101 marks pending.) Simple mathematics shows that the deal was struck at 12 Norwegian marks a barrel between the Bergen merchant and the probably (due to their names) English traders.

The second document to consider is a law passed by the Norwegian king Hákon Magnusson on May 29, 1306, setting the market price for wine and other imports. In this law he declares that “alle haande win som inden packmarckedt er kommen, skall dij lade indschriiffue paa kongsgaarden, hvad indt er förrt, oc page orloff till at skiffue op, oc a pa konungen for hver fadt win 18: Engelsker, saa oc aff hver fadt ollie y toldt.” (All foreign wine that is brought to the city market they shall register at the king’s yard, what is brought in, and allow it to be written down, and pay the king for each barrel 18, English currency as a toll, the same for every barrel of oil.)

Wine was not only heavily taxed, but its price was also regulated by the Crown.

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\text{Thedt er forne winsetning ij Bergin, Stoef Romennj for 16: Engelske, thed beste, oc minde om der er lettere kiib paa, ein stoup Asoie Bastart eller Spansk win dott beste skoll settist for 12 Engelske, oc hui mindre at lettare se, Item ein stoup Rinsk win thed beste for 10: Engelske, oc hui mindre at lettare see, Item ein stoup Gaskonie Pöttow oc Gabinj, det beste for 8: Engelske, oc hui mindre at lettare see.}^{272}
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270 DN V, p. 28.
271 NGL IV, p. 361.
272 NGL IV, p. 361. Approved on May 29, 1306. Asoie Bastart was a type of wine from Aix, in Burgundy; it refers to a wine that was either sweet or sweetened, or to a wine disguised with raisin juice. It is not certain where Gabinj was, but it might be a French region. See NGLGlos, Asoie Bastart and Gabinj.
It is an old wine-agreement [establishment] in Bergen; A large barrel of the best Roman [Italian?] wine is to be bought at 16, English currency, and less when it is lighter; a barrel of Aix Bastard or Spanish wine of the best quality shall be set at 12, English currency, and less when it is lighter; item a barrel of the best Rhenish wine for 10, English currency, and therefore less when it is lighter; item a barrel from Poitou in Gascony and from Gabinj of the best quality for 8, English currency, and therefore less when it is lighter.

The statute opens by stating that the wine-price is established according to the old set prices in Bergen, which may lead us to suspect that wine prices had not varied in a long period of time. Maybe then this law was passed to impose a new and, possibly, higher tax on the imports. There would have been no need to revise the law or to reaffirm it, unless foreign merchants were trying to alter the price of their merchandise or if an increased supply of wine reduced the prices so that the Crown had to interfere in order to control the trade as well as to protect its own economic interests. Such seems to have been the case when in the late twelfth-century Bergen had a wine surplus. Sverris saga reports that in 1186, after Easter

*Dar war margt komit kaupmannal til bæiar, nær af allum lýndum. Sudurmenn hafóu flutt þangat win micilh, suo at win war æigi dyrra en mungat. Pau war eitth sinn, er menn sætu þ windryckti nækurki, en þeir willdo þetra taka meïta winid; en swinn Sudrmanna willdi æigi taka meïra winid. Skilur þa æigi meïra aa en win einn winpot, ok þcketu þeir, til þeir er Nordmen willdo gasga til ok briota wpp budina. En Sudrmenn woru fyktir þanna ok lýgu wih swerdum, ok sérðiðt menn af þau. Pui nest spurðiðt þetta win beïinn, ok hlupo til wopma aller þyðskir menn ok svo bæïarmenn ok bþruæ; fêlu margir menn ok flest af bæïarmænum.*

(Many merchants, from nearly all lands, had come to the city. The Southern-men [Germans] had brought there a large amount of wine, so that wine was not more expensive than mungat. It happened on one occasion, when men sat at a certain wine tavern, that they wanted to have more wine brought to them and the lad working for the Southern-men did not want to bring them more wine. They discerned that there was just one wine-pot and they threatened that the North-men would go and break into the booth. And the Southern-men were inside and put out their swords and told them to get away. And after that they got on their feet and all the Germans went to arms and so did the town’s people and several men fell dead, mostly on the side of the townsmen.)

In this passage we can see how the increase in volume of wine available leads to a reduction in its purchase price. The result of the price reduction (so that wine becomes cheaper than mungat) is that the German merchants refuse to continue selling their

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273 Sv LXXII(CIII, CIV), 135.
wme. Perhaps one of the ways in which such price-fluctuation could have been controlled was by imposing heavier tolls on wine.

Going back to our 1306 statute, we can also perceive that since its prices are set in English currency it is also probable that the wine market at the beginning of the fourteenth century was controlled by English merchants. Also, since the tax-per-barrel was of 18 marks while the highest price per barrel was set at 16, one may assume that the toll was imposed on those buying the wine instead of those selling it; if not the English merchants, instead of making a profit, would end up losing up to 110% in each transaction. This would then mean that the market price for a barrel of wine, after taxation, would oscillate between 26 and 34 marks. If the prices for alcoholic beverages did not vary much then a law passed by Hákon Magnússon ten years later, on November 14, 1316, may give us a point to contrast the prices of wine and bjórr, as he declared that “engin madr skal kaupa bior dyra en fyrir mork tumnuna. nema hver sem pat gerrir bæti konungi fim morkum silfrs ok se biorin uptækur”274 (No man shall trade bjórr for more than a mark per barrel, and he who does it shall pay a fine of five marks of silver to the king and will have the bjórr confiscated.) This means that, before taxes, wine was up to sixteen times more expensive than Hanseatic bjórr!

The last document providing wine-prices is a charter dated 1420 in the Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland. It provides a price-list for trade between Icelandic and English merchants. According to it, one could acquire “iii{ tunnur biors firir hundrar”275 (four barrels of bjórr for a hundred) while one would get “tunna vins firir klent .c.”276 (a barrel of vin for a clean hundred). In other words, one could acquire 4 barrels of bjórr for the price of a milch cow or two marks and a half (i.e. 570 gr.) of silver, while a single barrel of wine would cost four times as much (roughly 2.3 kg. of silver as pure as

274 NGL III, p. 124. The same price and penalty was established by the king one day later for björ trade in Tunsberg and Oslo, see Kong Haakon Magnussøns Retterbod om Kjöbstevne i Byerne (Bergen, November 15, 1316) in NGL III, p. 127.
275 DN XX, p. 28.
276 DN XX, p. 28.
that used to pay for the four barrels of bjórr). That is, a barrel of wine was 16 times more expensive than a barrel of bjórr. Considering that the average compensation paid for the death of a slave was 12 oz. (340 gr.) of silver, and that paid for the killing of a freeman was 100 oz. (2.83 kg.) of silver, this nearly equates to a barrel of wine as the compensation for killing a freeman, or roughly one slave for a barrel of bjórr. Taking these prices into consideration it is easy to understand why, among the three pleasures to be enjoyed in an afterlife in Valhöll, Snorri Sturluson pays a special attention in his Edda to an everlasting source of mead. Alcohol was a commodity worth dying for.277

Even though the previous charters provide the exact price per barrel of wine, one should be careful in drawing any conclusions from them, for we do not know if the quality of the wines or if the volume of the barrels was the same through the ages, not to mention special prices between friends or bad deals made by accident. Not even the currency is the same in these three documents, making it difficult to establish trends of price variation. All we can conclude from these charters is that by the beginning of the fourteenth century wine traffic seems to have been an English trade; they, for their part, acquired it from Italy, Spain, France and Germany.278.

In spite of her commercial relationships with England, wine was not exactly abundant in Norway. After the Conversion, one of the most common uses for wine was for the celebration of the Christian Eucharist, but it seems that not all the parishes in the land had access to this product. Some priests had to resort to tricks in order to be able to perform their office. This particular situation can be attested in a letter sent by the Pope Gregory the IX to Sigurd, archbishop of Niðarós, in 1237. It reads:

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\text{Tue fraternitati querenti, an deficienti in quibusdam ecclesiis suffraganeorum tuorum eucharistia propter frumenti penuriam simplex obdata undecumque confecta populo, ut sub quadam decipiatur pietatis specie, ac cerevisia vel potus alias loco vini, cum vix aut nunciam vinum reperiatur in illis partibus, sint}
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277 As will be discussed in Chapter 6, the possession of alcohol, as a luxury item, became a tool by which men could display and/or increase their power.

278 There are several other laws dealing with wine sale in taverns, but these will be dealt with in Chapter 4.
Your brotherhood enquiring about the Eucharist being lacking in certain churches of your supporters due to the scarcity of grain [wheat] and therefore simple bread, made in any way, is given to the people; and about a certain deceiving of the faith under the appearance of piety, by which beer or even another drink might be [offered] in the place of wine since wine is hardly or never to be found in those regions, so we answer: that neither is properly done, since the sacrament ought to be made holy in the manner of visible bread of grain [wheat] and wine of grapes in which the word of God is consecrated through the office of the priest, because without doubt these sustain the true flesh and blood; nevertheless blessed bread might be able to be given to the people, just as in certain regions it has become customary.

The lack of wine to celebrate the Eucharist in some Norwegian parish churches might not have been as bad as it was in Iceland. After all Norway is much closer to the Continent and had better commercial relationships than Iceland. Thus, we can well extrapolate this situation to Iceland. Unfortunately we lack documents that would help us clarify the situation there. The only information we have about wine for the Eucharist in Iceland comes from the Church Law in the Icelandic law handbook Grgás. Here it is stipulated that "Ef þeir [the priests] vilja hafa vin og hveitimjöl, þá skal hver þeirra gjalda honum [the archbishop] þróar álnir á tölf mánuðum." (if they [the priests] want to have wine and wheat meal, then each one of them shall pay him [the archbishop] three ells every twelve months.) The amount of wine involved in this transaction is not stipulated. However, what is relevant in this decree is the phrasing 'ef þeir vilja hafa vin' ('if they want to have wine'). This would imply that it was not mandatory for the priests to have wine for the mass. Perhaps it was customary to substitute it with something else, like beer, as was the case in Norway. Or maybe they celebrated the Eucharist without wine or any other beverage at all. Modern historians specializing in the Icelandic Commonwealth period might be aware of the way in which Church funds

280 Grg, p. 18.
and administration were managed. During this period, parish churches were privately owned by godar or stógodar, who tried to reap for themselves as much Church income as possible; sometimes even donating their properties to the churches that they owned, for Church properties were tax-exempt. Taking this into consideration, we can expect that most parish-church owners tried to save the large amounts of money involved in buying wine for the Eucharist.

Even if the references to wine are not abundant in the literary sources, some of the historical facts about the wine trade are alluded to in them. The taxation imposed on wine and other imports as well as the expropriation laws for those who failed to declare their goods are clearly reflected in Prestissaga Guðmundar Goda, most probably written by the abbot Lambkárr Þorgilsson (d. 1249), a disciple and close friend of Guðmundr Arason himself. The saga reports that in 1187 the priest Ingimundr returned to Norway after a trading expedition to England:

*En um væri áðr þá hafði Ingimundr prestr farit vestri til Englands kaupferð ok kom vestan at hausti til Björgynjar. En er þeir koma af Engandi með mikil gaði vins ok hunangs, hveits ok klaða ok margr annars, þá vilja menn Jóns kulfungu taka upp fyrir þeim ok rena þá.*

(The previous spring Ingimundr the priest went to the west on a trading voyage to England, and in the autumn he came back from the west, to Bergen. When they arrived from England with plenty of good wine and honey, wheat and clothes and many other things, then the men of Jón kulfungr wanted to take the cargo and keep it.)

As we will see below, this action does not seem to be a mere act of piracy but an action taken by taxation officers to confiscate goods that were not declared. With such a valuable cargo being at stake, Ingimundr starts to use his connections and has one of his friends to talk with Jón kulfungr. After hearing the argument that previous kings allowed priests to freely bring wine into the country, Jón decides to let Ingimundr the

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281 Wine appears in 4 passages of the Sturlunga saga (PrestGuð XII, þórðK XLVIII, PorSk II and, Stríð II); in 2 passages of the Íslendinga sögur (Eg XVII and Jökul III) and; in 19 passages of the Fornaldar sögur (Bós XI and XIII; Gfr XXXVII; Heiðr X; HjQ XII, XXI; HÍ XXIII; Hrólfr XXXIX; Ragn 1; SgrílaSt XXVI; Vqís XX, XXI, XXIV, XXVIII, XXIX, XXXV and, XXXVIII; YngV VII and; ÞørstBm II). In the Poetic Edda it is mentioned only in 6 instances (Rb 32, Grm 19, Sd 17 and 29, and Akv 2 and 14).


283 PrestGuð XII, p. 136.
priest keep his property. When the news arrives to the ship, Jón’s men gather all the goods onboard in order to declare them to the toll-agents:

*Pá gengu menn Jóns at átta vintunnum stórum, er kaupmenn áttu, ok spuru, hverr átti. En Ingimundr prestr kemndi sér fimn eda fjórar ok svá margt annat, þat er þeir spuru eftir, þar til er þá grunadí, at hann myndi eigi svá audiður madr vera sem hann sagði, ok meltu við hann: ‘Nu sjáum vér, prestr, at þá munt kenna þer þat, er aðrir eigu, ok nennum vér eigi at missa alls.*

(Then Jón’s men went to eight large barrels of wine which belonged to the merchants and asked who owned them. Ingimundr the priest claimed five or four of them and a similar proportion of the rest of the goods that they inspected. That went on until Jón’s men suspected that he was not such a rich man as he claimed to be and then they said to him: ‘Now we see, priest, that you want to claim for yourself that which belongs to others, and we do not intend to lose everything.’)

Ingimundr, of course, does not own all the cargo he claims for himself. However he manages to keep part of these goods.

This episode may attest an expropriation court in Bergen, just like the ones mentioned in the law corpus. Jón kuflungr is not mentioned elsewhere in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, but he has all the characteristics of a high-ranking toll collector, making decisions about tax exemptions from his *kontor* somewhere near the port. In this episode we can also see that lower-ranking officers kept part of the expropriated goods. What we do not know is if this appropriation on the part of the lower-ranking officers was legally established or if the saga is denouncing corruption in the lower spheres of the tax-office.

Wine trade in the Vestmannaeyjar is also attested in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation. In *Þóðar saga kakala* it is mentioned that in 1247 Svarþófó ðóðr travelled from Norway to the Vestmannaeyjar taking with him a wine cargo. Later in the summer Þóðr kakali went back to Iceland and “*kom Þóðr i Vestmannaeyjar. Tök hann þar vin mikit, er hann átti, en Svarþófó hafói út flutt ok skilit þar eftir i eyjunum.*”

(Þóðr arrived to the Vestmannaeyjar. There he took a large amount of wine which he owned and which Svarþófó had imported and left for him in the islands.) This literary

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284 PrestGuð XII, p. 137.
285 ÞóðK XLVIII, p. 84.
reference to wine import in the Vestmannaeyjar is in agreement with the historical sources for, as we have seen, the only source regulating wine-prices in Iceland was redacted in that same location.

The mid thirteenth-century *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* is the only Íslendinga saga that makes reference to wine trade between England and Norway. In it bórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson, paternal uncle of Egill, goes on a trading voyage to England some time in the late ninth century. The expedition “komu fram á Englandi, fengu þar góða kaupstefnu, hlóðu skipit med hvetí ok hunangi, vini ok klæðum, ok heldu apru um haustitt; þeim byrjaði vel, komu at Hqrðalandi.”286 (landed in England; there they had plenty of trading. They loaded the ship with wheat and honey, wine and cloth; and in the autumn they went back. They got a fair wind and arrived at Hqrðaland.)

Most of the remaining references to wine belong to the realm of the fantastic, which is not strange as, with the exception of the one in *Jókuls þáttr Buasonar*, they form part of the *Fornaldar saga*.287 Due to the proportion of wine references in our sources (4 times in the *Sturlunga saga*, 3 in the *Íslendinga saga* and 19 in the *Fornaldar saga*) it seems that wine, as an exotic drink, belongs both to the glorious legendary past and the realm of myth. Considering wine-prices after taxes in the fourteenth century this does not come as shocking news. Maybe saga authors idealized a remote past in which wine was, if not abundant, at least a commodity one could access more easily than in the expensive present. This disproportion in the references to wine in the internal literary chronology might have been a way of exalting the legendary heroes, a way of showing their high status by having them drinking the most expensive of beverages.

The remaining reference to wine in the *Íslendinga saga* bears more resemblance to an episode of a *Fornaldar saga* than to the *Íslendinga saga*. This

286 *Eg* XVII, p. 42.
287 References to wine in the Eddic corpus will be studied in Chapter 3.
occurs in Jøkuls þáttr Buasonar, where, after killing several ferocious Jøtnar in Jøtunheim in order to rescue a Saracen princess and her brother, the hero “eptir þad leysti hann þau og gaf þeim vin að drekka.”288 (after that he untied them and gave them wine to drink.) The presence of wine might be explained due to the fact that the Jøtnar were holding a feast289 and Jøkull’s deed may have been possible due to the fact that the Jøtnar are said to be very drunk when they are attacked. However, in the text the Jøtnar are said to be consuming ql and not vin at the feast.290 This might be due to the fact that literary wine may have been reserved for the most valiant heroes and not for savage creatures, such as the Jøtnar, even if they own it.

As previously mentioned, wine is a drink that seems to belong to the mythical realm of the Fornaldar saga, the genre in which it is mentioned more often. Among these, Volsunga saga is the one in which it appears more often (7 occurrences). In this group of sagas, the consumption of wine is limited to basically two different settings291: the halls of kings and supernatural places. Let us analyze the supernatural episodes first.

In Þorsteins þáttr bojarmagns, the hero visits an undirheim (an underground dwelling) where a royal elfish feast is being held presumably to welcome an emissary that has just arrived from India. At this feast, he can see that “var þar af engu drikkit utan af silfrkerum. Trapiza stôð á gólfi. Allt sýndist þeim þar gullligt ok ekki drikkit nema vin.”292 (there they drank out of silver goblets. A table stood there over the floor. Everything there seemed to be golden and nothing but wine was drunk.) This otherworldly wine-drinking is set here in an atmosphere befitting the status of wine: a court in a golden room, drinking the most expensive of beverages out of the finest drinking vessels.293 The fact that the guests drink nothing but wine might be intended to

288 Jøkul III, p. 57.
289 The connection between Jøtnar and alcoholic beverages will be studied in Chapter 3.
290 Jøkul III, p. 55.
291 With the exception of Bósa saga, as we will see.
292 Þorsteinn II, p. 322.
293 Drinking vessels will be studied in Chapter 6.
stress the magnificence of the scene. In contrast, *Hrólfs saga kraka* offers a scene in which king Hrólfr and his champions find themselves drinking wine at the cottage of a poor farmer called Hrani. There, in the middle of the night, the heat is so unbearable that they “vöknudu við þat, at þorsti var svá mikill kominn á þá, at þeim þótti náliga óbariligr, svá [...] þeir stóðu upp ok þörri þangat til, sem skapiker eitt stóð með vin, ok drukku þar úr.”294 (woke up because of that, for the thirst was so great that they thought it was nearly unbearable, so [...] they stood up and went thither where a large vessel with wine stood, and drank from it.) The presence of such a large amount of wine in the house of a poor farmer seems improbable. However later in the saga we find out that Hrani the farmer was none other than Óðinn in disguise, justifying, thus, the large amounts of wine.295

*Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* presents yet another uncanny episode involving wine and the only episode of animal-drunkenness in the Old Norse corpus. This scene takes place in England, under the rule of King Ella who owns a lion so ferocious that it would spare no one’s life. When King Hrólfr Gautreksson approaches the court of Ella, the lion’s guardians decide to play a trick on Hrólfr: “þeir hófðu áðr dýrit ært með vini ok alls kyns drykk inum sterkasta”296 (they had already maddened the animal with wine and all kinds of strong drinks) so that the lion rampages through the forest. When the troops of King Hrólfr encounter the lion, they find that “leó sýnir mátt sinn ok kastar hala sinum í hring um eikrnar ok kippir svá upp með rótum. Síðan gripr hann með klónum ok kastar í loft upp, sem þá er köttir leikr at fuglum.”297 (the lion tests his strength and twists its tail around oak-trees and pulls them up including the roots. Then he grips the trunks with its claws and throws them up in the air, like a cat playing with birds.) When Hrólfr sees this he provides what for him is the most logical explanations for the lion’s

294 *Hrólfr* XXXIX, p. 75-76.
295 As we have already seen, *vín* is Óðinn’s sole nourishment according to *Grim* 19.
296 HG XXIII, p. 136.
297 HG XXIII, p. 137.
strange behaviour “pat mundi ært vera ðør af drykk.” (it must have been previously maddened with drink.)

Wine could also be used as a metaphor for the female genitalia, as is the case in Bósa saga, when Bósi asks for the sexual favours of a farmer’s daughter by using the following ‘pick-up line’: “Ek vil brynna fola minum í vinkeldu þinni” (I want to water my colt in your wine source) and explaining to her in which part of his anatomy his colt might be found: “Hvar er folinn þinn, hjartavinrinn minn?’ sagði hún. ‘A millum fóta mér, ástin mín’ kvað hann.” (‘Where is your colt, friend of my heart?’ she said. ‘It is between my legs, my love’ he said.)

Wine appears as a rather exotic drink, and the authors do not show much familiarity with it. The drink is then portrayed in rather bizarre contexts, let them be mythic realms or used to induce animal drunkenness.

Wine consumption at kings’ halls is, on the contrary, surrounded by an aura of sumptuousness and done in a luxurious context. Here wine is actually depicted as a high status beverage to be served in abundance. For example, at the court of King Buðli “Hann [Sigurðr] sezt hjá henni [Brynhildr]. Slóan ganga þar inn fjórar konur með stórum borðkerum af gulli ok með inu bezta vini ok standa fyrir þeim.” (He [Sigurðr] sat next to her [Brynhildr]. Then four women went in carrying large golden table-goblets and the best wine and stood in front of them.) Here wine is served in costly vessels and served in an almost ritual way by four maidens whose sole role is to pour wine. At the same court “Brynhildr ok Gunnarr sátu við skemmtan ok drukku gott vín.” (Brynhildr and Gunnarr sat together at the entertainment and drank good wine.)

And at King Atli’s court Gunnarr commands “statt upp ok gef oss at drekka af stórum

298 HG XXIII, p. 137.
299 Bósa XI, p. 308.
300 Bósa XI, p. 308.
301 Vqís XXIV, p. 167.
302 Vqís XXVII, p. 178.
kerum gott vin, þvi at vera má, at sjá sé vár in síðasta veisla.”\textsuperscript{303} (stand up and give us good wine to drink in large goblets, because it may be that this is our last feast.) Wine seems to be accompanied by the adjective \textit{góðr} (good)\textsuperscript{304} and served in large amounts. Taking into consideration wine-prices, wine abundance was used as a symbol of opulence. A final courtly scene involving wine is that of \textit{Sýrla saga sterka} where, “En sem drottning sá hann, rénaði henni öll reiði ok varð með öllu orðfall. Sidan sætti Högni Sýrla við drottningu, systur sína, ok var nú drukkt lystlegt vin ok leikar framðir með kurt.”\textsuperscript{305} (and when the queen saw him she had a fit of anger and became completely silent. Then Högni sat Sýrli next to his sister the queen, and now a delightful wine was drunk and they proceeded courteously.)

These courtly scenes involving wine are presented in a glamorous way, with wine-bearers and golden goblets, seats being assigned and people interacting with courtesy. It seems that the authors use wine as a symbol to enhance the status of the courts they are describing. Wine is mentioned in order to make these courts appear refined and wealthy.

There are just a few Icelandic charters attesting to the wine situation in the country. Most of them concern church figures, for example, in a charter dated 1277, in Skálahót, it is stated “at herra biskup pacade honum vinsamlíg ord oc presentr. er konungr hafði sendi honum. tunnu vins til ðessásaungs. oc pund vax. oc pundflurs.”\textsuperscript{306} (that the bishop thanks him for the friendly words and the present which the king has sent him [of a] barrel of wine for the mass and a pound of wax and a pound of flour”). The wine and flour might have been intended for the Eucharist. In another charter, dated

\textsuperscript{303} \textit{Véls} XXXV, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{304} As we will see in Chapter 3, \textit{mjóðr} also tends to be accompanied by several standard adjectives. However, while this seems to be regular in the case of \textit{mjóðr}, \textit{vin} is not regularly accompanied by an adjective. In any instance, this may be due to the fact that \textit{vin} replaced \textit{mjóðr} as the prestigious beverage and perhaps some of the conventions in the naming of \textit{mjóðr} might have been also transferred to wine.
\textsuperscript{305} \textit{SýrlaSr} XXVI, p. 409.
\textsuperscript{306} \textit{DI} II, p. 159. \textit{DI} III, p. 130 records a similar gift of wine and flour. Most other references to wine in the \textit{DI} only list wine as part of the equipment that the priest should take to mass. See for example \textit{DI} III, p 130.
1279, King Magnús send two barrels of wine to Bishop Árni Þorlaksson. The reason for these wine-gifts to the Skállhólt bishopric are explained in a letter from King Henry to the bishop, in it, the king states: “qui in episcopum de Scalhelte in Islandia nuper es creatus, panem, vinum, servisiam, neque alium liqvorem, nisi lac et aquam” (that in the bishopric of Skállhólt in Iceland nothing is grown, bread nor wine, nor beer or any other liquor, except milk and water) and so he sends two ships loaded with these goods so that they can be used for the mass. Skállhólt seem to have been the place where most wine-gifts were sent, and from there it was distributed to other parish churches in the land. That would explain a charter stating that “Item ath einginn prestur taki vin edr hueite annars stadar enn j skalhollti [...] oc giallde [v. aura eyre [v. aura j vintoll til skalholts arlegha.” (item, that no priest takes wine or wheat from other place than Skállhólt [...] and pays 5 aurar as wine-toll to Skállhólt every year).

In spite of all these gifts, wine seems to have been scarce, so that it had to be carefully rationed. So, in a charter written ca. 1323-28 it is stated that: “Bydz ok hcfudprestum sub pena suspensiones officij et beneficij. at þeir syngi sealfir messur) [...] sealfr prestr sa er messo syngr blandi [uatni uid uin] i kaleck. en æigi klerkr. sua at meira se af [uatni enn uini i kaleck]. [sva at vatn riki yfir uini[n]u.” ([we] order also that all the priests, under the penalty of suspension from the office, that only them sing mass [and that] only the priest that sings mass blends water with wine in the chalice, and not the clerk, so that there is more water than wine in the chalice [so that water is more abundant than wine). Perhaps, at some point in history some other church officers were in charge of bending the wine in the chalice, and the wine was not very diluted. This might have been used as an excuse for the laity, or other church officers, to have at least a taste of the gift of kings – wine – at least every time that the Eucharist was

308 DI IV, p. 606.
309 DI IV, p. 588.
310 DI II, p. 536.
celebrated. This practice might have proven quite expensive to the Church, hence the stress on the fact that the concentration of water should be higher than that of wine. Yet, wine was not always present at mass, not even diluted. A charter dated 1375, begins with the words “af hui ath vijn hefir ecki et cetera”\(^{311}\) (because we have no wine et cetera) instructs the priests to continue with the celebration of mass every Sunday.

As we could see in the previous pages, wine was not a very common beverage in Scandinavia. Just like mjöðr, it was a rather expensive drink, albeit easier to obtain than mjöðr. The historical sources confirm that wine was imported in large amounts in Norway, although at a rather high price. Wine seems to have been less common in Iceland than in Norway, and perhaps its price was much higher in this North Atlantic island than in Norway - where it was imported from Germany and England. Wine availability, even if at a high price (compared with the apparent unavailability of mjöðr and its also high prices) might have turned it into the most prestigious of beverages to be found in the North. The almost complete lack of references to wine in the Diplomatarium Islandicum attests to the unavailability of this beverage in Iceland. When this drink is mentioned in the Icelandic charters it is, mostly, to make reference to its absence. Perhaps also due to its high value it became the preferred beverage of Óðinn and perhaps also the ideal drink to be consumed by prestigious guests at Valhöll. Wine’s price may have also have played a role in the fact that it is more commonly found in the legendary sagas than in the pseudo-historical Íslendinga saga and Sturlunga saga. Its price and rarity may have led also to the conception of a mythic Vinland, where wine grew wild and was free to take.

\(^{311}\) DI III, p. 307.
In his study on the bog people and the funeral practices during the Early Iron Age, P. V. Glob discusses the food and drink remains found in several burials. When discussing the remains of the ca. 2500 year-old Tollund Man, discovered in Denmark in 1950, he comments that

there was an alcoholic drink in the Iron Age, as has been revealed by the analysis of sediments in bronze vessels of the period. It was half way between beer and fruit wine. Barley and the wild plants cranberry and bog myrtle were used in its manufacture. The alcoholic content may have been increased by the addition of honey.\textsuperscript{312}

He notes that this agrees with Tacitus’ (born ca. 56 AD) description of the Germans, who “as a drink [...] use the sap from barley or wheat, fermented into something like wine.”\textsuperscript{313} Hornsey reports that the dregs of a beverage similar to that described by Glob were recovered from a bronze bowl found at the grave of an Iron-Age woman in the Island of Lolland, in Denmark; and that the dregs in a container in a Bronze Age oak-coffin burial at Egtved, East Jutland, proved to be of exactly the same nature.\textsuperscript{314} The components of the drink were

1. - Honey, as indicated by the pollen of lime [...] 2. - Fruits and leaves used respectively as a source of sugar, and for flavouring. The fruits were identified as being as being from either Vaccinium oxycoccus L. (cranberry), or V. vitis-idaea (cowberry), and the leaves were those of sweet gale (Myrica gale L.). 3. - Cereal grains (identified as wheat).\textsuperscript{315}

More than a thousand years separate the periods in which these beverages were deposited and that of our research. Yet many questions spring from these discoveries. Taking into account that remains of two almost identical beverages were recovered from Bronze and Iron Age burials one wonders if there was continuity in the tradition of brewing similar mixed beverages into the Viking and/or Scandinavian Middle Ages. If there was a certain degree of continuity, then, in the case of its occurring in the

\textsuperscript{313} Cornelius Tacitus, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{314} Hornsey, p. 219.
\textsuperscript{315} Hornsey, p. 219.
written records, what was this drink called? Also, due to the apparent lack of dregs dating to our main periods of research, are there any other archaeological remains that may point to the existence of mixed beverages with a higher alcohol volume than those made only out of cereals or fruits?

As I will discuss in the following pages, it seems that this kind of mixed beverage was called bjór. The study of this beverage is not unproblematic, due to several circumstances. First of all it is not widely mentioned in the saga corpus, as it appears only in the Sturlunga saga compilation; and when it comes to the Poetic Edda it is mentioned on 9 occasions, but none of these are very informative about the nature of the drink. The second problem one confronts is that the best evidence to understand the nature of this drink comes from Anglo-Saxon sources, but in order to have some certainty about the validity of the results one would need to accept that Old English beor is equivalent to Old Norse bjór. Even if these words are cognates one cannot take for granted that they actually referred to the same type of beverage. The third problem is that bjór seems to have shifted its meaning at some point in the thirteenth century so that it became equivalent with Old High Germanic bior. As we will see, bior seems to be equivalent (but not cognate) to Old Norse ql or mungát. This change in meaning might have been the result of German linguistic influence due to the intense Hanseatic trade of ql and mungát. This fact means that one has to approach the historical sources with extra care, as their use of bjór might actually refer to ql. Let us start our analysis with the few certainties that we have about this drink.

As mentioned above, Old Norse bjór seems to have had a change of meaning. The oldest written attempt to explain of what bjór is occurs in the manuscript GKS 1812 4to (written c.1192 and now at the Stofnun Arna Magnússonar, in Reykjavík)

316 Isl CL, p. 453 and Íðrök XXXVIII, p. 70.
317 Alv 34, Vkv 28, Gór II 23, Akv 1 and 15, HH 17, Sd 5, Hdl 33 and Vsp 37.
where *björ* is glossed in Latin as *mulsum*\(^{318}\) (i.e. mead) which may be just an attempt at a definition by making reference to a beverage similar to *björ*. From this gloss it is possible to infer that the drink was sweet and that honey was probably one of its ingredients (perhaps used to add flavour as well as to increase the alcohol content), hence the association of *björ* with mead. However, roughly 150 years later, in a testament dated March 13, 1355 (in Stavanger, Norway) we get to know that the priest and deacon of Stavanger inherited from Pørgeir Berdorson "*tunnu biors eór tunnu med humla mungaat en bioren er ei till*"\(^{319}\) (a barrel of *björ* or a barrel of hopped *mungát* if there is no more *björ,*). In this last source the distinction between *mungát* and *björ* seems to imply that *björ* is a malt-derived drink that can be substituted by hopped *mungát.* This is very close to the modern distinction between ale and beer, which became current since "a number of writers from the sixteenth century onwards have drawn a technical distinction between 'ale' and 'beer', reserving the word 'beer' for a malt-based liquor to which hops have been added, and using the word 'ale' of the unhopped variety."\(^{320}\) However, the possibility exists that *mungát* was actually a drink of a mixed nature, for as we have already seen, it was defined as a strong kind of Qt. Thus, the alcoholic content of Qt might have been enhanced by the addition of honey.

Unfortunately these two 'definitions' of *björ* are all we have left to understand what *björ* was made out of. A number of charters and laws from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries seem to equate it with beer (hopped ale), but as we will see below, this might well be due to a change of meaning that developed once the Hanseatic League took over the trade of Qt in the area, importing with it the name they used for hopped ale in Old High Germanic: *pior* or *bior.* This of course does not imply that Old Norse *björ* was originally a loan word. As a matter of fact, "the origin of the [Old

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\(^{318}\) ONP, *björ.*

\(^{319}\) DNIV, p. 298.

\(^{320}\) Fell, p. 76.
English] word *beor* [and the Old Norse word *bjórr*] is obscure. It has cognates in all the West Germanic languages, but not in Gothic, not even Crimean Gothic.\(^{321}\)

The Old Norse word *bjórr* has disappeared from modern Scandinavian languages.\(^{322}\) It is only present in the Modern Swedish *bira*, used to refer to both beer and ale, though it is rarely used, as the everyday word for these beverages, just as in other modern Scandinavian languages, is *öl* or *äl* (derived from the Old Norse *qI*). At first glance it is tempting to equate *bjórr* with Modern English *beer* and Modern German *Bier*, however, one must first consider the scant and fragmentary evidence that we have about this beverage. *IED* suggests that *bjórr* is "no doubt a word of German extraction, *öl* (*öldr*), ale, being the familiar word used in prose [...] *björ* however is very current in poetry"\(^{323}\), implying that the authors have equated *bjórr* and *qI*, the only difference being that the former is the poetical expression of the later. *ONP* tells us that *bjórr* is a "strong alcoholic beverage (prob. based on honey, more highly valued than *mungátt*, quotations from *Sturlunga saga* and *Sverris saga* suggest an imported product)."\(^{324}\) *IEW* mentions that the word *bjórr* is "besonders von ausländischem bier gebraucht [...] wahrscheinlich aus ae. *beor* (engl. *beer*) [...] Zugrunde liegt wohl klosterlat. *biber* ‘getränk’, zu. lat. *bibere* ‘trinken’. [or] von germ *beura*, zu bewwu- ‘gerste, korn’\(^{325}\). (especially used for foreign beer [...] probably from Old English *beor* (English ‘beer’) [...] The root is probably the monastic Latin *biber* ‘to drink’ from the Latin *bibere* ‘drink’ [or] from the Germanic *beura, bewwu* ‘barley, corn’). *AEW* coincides with this last point in the *IEW* and also explains *bjórr* as deriving from *bewwu*.\(^{326}\) However, as mentioned above, it seems that all definitions are correct as Old Norse *bjórr* shifted its meaning once the Hanseatic League started taking over the *qI*.

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\(^{321}\) Fell, p. 77.
\(^{322}\) See *IEW*, *bjórr* and *AEW*, *bjórr*.
\(^{323}\) *IED*, *bjórr*.
\(^{324}\) *ONP*, *bjórr*.
\(^{325}\) *IEW*, *bjórr*.
\(^{326}\) *AEW*, *bjórr*. 92
trade in Norway and ‘pior’ or ‘bior’, the Old High German word for ql, displaced the earlier meaning of Old Norse bjórr.

Assuming that the hypothesis of a shift in the meaning of bjórr is correct, one then needs to approach the study of both meanings of bjórr by analyzing separately its two different semantic stages. The oldest meaning of bjórr, which most probably denoted a fruit or berry based drink strengthened with honey, will be referred to as ‘Nordic bjórr’ whereas the later meaning, by which bjórr referred to hopped ql, will be referred to as ‘Hanseatic bjórr’.

**Nordic Bjórr**

*Bjórr* seems to be an indigenous word of the Old Norse vocabulary and, in case it happens to be a loanword from German extraction as IED suggests, we can be sure that it was in use long before trade with Germany reached its boom with the Hanseatic League. The word, though it was infrequent before the thirteenth century, was already in use at least by the mid tenth century. In the *eddic* poem *Eiríks mal* it is said to be drunk in Valhöll, as Oðin orders his einherjar to wash the bjórr-vats, “biór-ker at leyðra”327. Around 985 AD Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspíllir used it in his poem *Háleygjatal* in a kenning for blood “hróka-biór”328 (ravens’ bjórr). Bjórr also appears in a few of the eddic poems contained in the thirteenth-century Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda*. Two of these poems mentioning bjórr, *Völundarkviða* and *Atlakviða*329, have been stylistically dated to the ninth century. In *Völundarkviða* it is used to get a maiden drunk in order to rape her “bar hann hana bírí, þvíat hann betr kunnt”330 (He

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327 *Eksm* 1. This passage possibly equates bjórr with mjóðr due to the fact that mjóðr is the beverage most commonly associated with Valhöll, but the drinking vessels to be prepared are supposed to contain bjórr instead. This reference and probable equation of both drinks is uncertain, as the inclusion of bjórr in the poem might have been due to stylistical requirements rather than to the similarity between drinks.

328 *Háleygjatal* is preserved fragmentarily as part of *Skspm*. See *Skspm* 2, p. 7.


330 *Vlk* 28.
overcame her with björr, because he was more knowing than her) while in Atlakviða
Guðrún seems to be highly aware of treason precisely because “bjóri var hon litt
drukkan.” (she had drunk little bjórr.) In this same poem bjórr is mentioned as a
delightful or sweet drink “bjóri svásum”:

These five occurrences are the oldest sources for the use of Old Norse ‘bjórr’, as
it does not survive in any runic inscriptions. From them we can infer that as early as the
ninth or tenth century a beverage called bjórr was known in the Norse world. This
beverage, in short, was: a) drunk in Valhöll; b) used in kennings for blood; c) probably
highly intoxicating and; d) sweet or pleasurable to drink. Before continuing with the
analysis, it is necessary to make a pause in order to look for more evidence, outside the
Nordic countries, of drinks that may be related to Nordic bjórr.

Nordic bjórr seems to have its closest relative in the Anglo-Saxon beor, which is
glossed in several Old English manuscripts as ‘mulsum’ or ‘ydromelum’, just as is the
case in the late 12th century Old Norse GKS1812 4to manuscript, where ‘bjórr’ is
glossed as ‘mulsum’. In 1974 H. E. Kylstra brought forward the hypothesis that Old
English beor was indeed something different from beer and ale. Kylstra reached this
conclusion based on Old English glosses for the Latin ydromelum as being ‘beor vel
ofetes wos’ and ‘idromelum’ being ‘appelwin, beor’. (apple-wine, beor). Taking
these glosses into account Kylstra concluded that in Anglo-Saxon England beor “was a
hydromel or aqueous mead, about the manner of fermentation, etc., of which, however,
nothing whatsoever is known.” The only certainty concerning beor is that “when beor
occurs in OE we have no data whatever in support of the translation ‘beer’.” It would be

331 Drunkenness in connection with power and treason will be studied in Chapter 6.
332 Akv 15.
333 Akv 1: “delightful bjórr” or “sweet bjórr”.
334 See Kylstra; Fell; Griffiths and; Hornsey.
335 Kylstra, p. 9.
336 The gloss of beor as appelwin might have some French influence as there is “a northern french drink
called bêre, which is a Norman word still used as a dialect word to signify ‘cider’. Bêre, by definition, describes a fermented drink which is made solely from the juice of apples.” Hornsey, p. 256.
337 Kylstra, p. 9.
also illogical to equate *beor* with *mulsum* or *ydromellum* based on the Old English glosses just as it would be illogical to equate *bjórr* with *mulsum* based on the gloss in Ms GKS1812 4to. As Bill Griffiths argues, “translations [...] may be influenced by other considerations [...] that affect the choice of equivalent; information may be insufficient to give an accurate meaning; exact equivalence between drinks of different nations or times may not be possible.”

Based on the glosses and the information that we have at hand it may be impossible to find out what *bjórr*’s ingredients were. If, based on the reference to sweetness in the glosses for both *beor* and *bjórr*, we can consider them to be similar types of drinks, then the only conclusion we can extract is that it was some sort of brew or wine fortified with honey. “To have honey as one ingredient does not at all exclude the presence of malt or even hops as other ingredients” nor does it exclude the possibility that it was some sort of berry wine fortified with honey, as was the case with the dregs found in the remains of the Tollund man or at the Egtved burial. Perhaps it was a beverage such as *bragget*, which “in the later Middle Ages [referred to] ale with added honey, and spices.” It seems that “the drink in question [*beor*] was a honey-sweetened fermented juice” but honey may not have been its only ingredient, otherwise it would have been called *mjódr* or *među*. A definition that has not been proposed yet is that *bjórr* refers to a ‘pure’ fermented drink made out of fruits or berries - other than grapes - a fact that would justify the sweet flavour mentioned in the glosses.

**Hanseatic bjórr**

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338 Griffiths, p. 233.
339 Griffiths, p. 234.
341 Graham-Campbell, p. 32.
As mentioned above, after the advent of the Hanseatic League and its hegemony over qf trade in the North Old High German bior seems to have taken over the meaning of Northern Germanic björr. Kylstra advances the hypothesis that

In Scandinavia, the imported beer of Hanseatic origins comes to be distinguished as björr from the traditionally indigenous qf. [...] In the early language, and in Old Norse generally, it occurs much more rarely than qf, and this word in time asserted itself as the generic term for fermented malt-liquors and the normal Scandinavian word for 'beer'.

Perhaps the best evidence for this shift in meaning can be perceived in price-lists. It is logical to expect that, due to the costs of the ingredients, a drink containing honey would have been more expensive than one containing only malted cereals. Accordingly, in 1282 a law was passed stipulating that “skolu ok husbændr hafa biorsalu ef þeim likar ok sele bollan fyrir fim ærtugh [...] Bolle mungatz skal gialda fímtan penningha.” (housemasters can sell björr if they please and sell the bowl for five qrtug [...] a bowl of mungát shall be paid at fifteen penningar.) Taking into consideration that an qrtug was most probably equivalent to twenty penningar (i.e. a hundred penningar for a bowl of björr) this would imply that a bowl of björr was six times more expensive than a bowl of mungát. This would be acceptable by the consumer only if the ingredients involved in the brewing of björr were more expensive than the ingredients involved in brewing mungát. That is, up to 1282 björr might have still referred to Nordic björr, a sweetened beverage. In 1316 another law was passed establishing that “engin maðr skal kaupa bior dyra en fírir mork tunninga.” (no man shall trade björr for more than a mark [or a hundred] per barrel). As we have no way to compare the price per barrel with any previous sources, we have no way of finding out which björr this text refers to. However, by 1420 we hear that one could acquire “iiij
tunnur biors firir hundrat'\textsuperscript{346} (four barrels of bjórr for a hundred) while one would get "tunna vins firir klent .c."\textsuperscript{347} (a barrel of vin for a clean hundred). First of all it is quite noteworthy that from being a drink that was up to six times more expensive than mungát, now bjórr became a beverage from four to sixteen times cheaper than wine, which would place it on the same price-scale as mungát. Second, the price per barrel of bjórr decreased four times compared with 1316 prices. There might be several explanations for this fact. After all more than a hundred years separate both price-lists and the currency could have become devalued, or the advent of the Ilansa could have made bjórr cheaper. However, it is bjórr price in contrast with wine price what makes me suspect that this charter is referring to Hanseatic bjórr rather than to Nordic bjórr.

Unfortunately the evidence is too scarce to draw any straightforward conclusions. However, based on archaeological evidence it seems that in Northern temperate Europe at least, some of the early alcoholic beverages were of a 'mixed' nature; all kinds of sugar source being pressed into service. It may not have been until the 1\textsuperscript{st} millennium BC that 'pure' drinks, such as mead and ale, began to appear.\textsuperscript{348}

Drinks of a mixed nature have been recorded in Bronze Age Scandinavia, and there is no reason to suppose that their concoction would have disappeared with the advent of 'pure' drinks. Bjórr might have been one of those mixed drinks that survived until the Early Middle Ages. The fact that in the oldest sources bjórr is mentioned implies that it is a drink native to Scandinavia. It is also interesting to note that in the law corpus, references to q1 decrease proportionately to the increase of references to bjórr, which makes one suspect that there was a shift in the meaning of bjórr. As we have seen, glosses in Anglo-Saxon and Norse manuscripts equate bjórr with mead or a similar drink. This may imply that in its earliest stage it was a drink of a mixed nature, fortified

\textsuperscript{346} DN XX, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{347} DN XX, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{348} Hornsey, pp. 219-20.
and sweetened with honey or fruit juices. But languages seem to shift in order to adapt to trading necessities, and that might have been the case with Nordic bjórr.

2.6 - CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, there were mainly four different sugar sources that could be used for alcohol production: lactose, maltose, glucose and fructose. Of these, the only source that was ready at hand and could be obtained relatively easy was lactose. However, the ordinary nature of these beverages, added to their acidic flavour, led them to be somewhat despised. Cereals, the source of maltose, were produced in Norway and Iceland, albeit on a scale that did not grant these countries agrarian independence. However, grain could be easily transported, stored and brewed. Even if the costs of grain and malt were quite high, maltose-based fermented drinks seem to have been the most popular ones during our period of study. Glucose-based drinks were difficult to produce. First of all, honey, the only available glucose-source for producing them, was not easily obtained nor easily stored. All our sources suggest that by the period in which the literary sources were written down mjöd had already become an outdated or archaic beverage, produced, maybe just on a minor scale. Vin, the only fructose-based beverage mentioned in the sources seems to have been the most prestigious of the beverages that were actually consumed. This is partly due to its high cost as well as to its exotic nature. As we have seen, saga writers did not seem to be familiar with the raw materials involved in wine preparation. It was a product mainly consumed in the legendary sagas and, most often in a rather exotic context. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries wine was mainly imported from Germany and possibly England. Finally, beverages of a mixed nature are most likely to have existed. However, the virtual lack of references leaves us without an answer about the ingredients involved in their preparation. Bjórr
seems to have been a fortified kind of *ql*, perhaps involving the use of honey as an additional sucrose source.

In Iceland, brewing was a rather expensive procedure. This is not only due to the lack of raw material to produce alcohol, but also to the lack of fuel which was necessary both for malting and brewing the mash. Brewing cauldrons, as has been seen, were not easy to procure. Thus, alcohol production and consumption in the West Norse world seems to have been an activity which only the rich and powerful could afford. This high cost of alcohol meant that each beverage had a symbolic meaning and status attached to it. Wine, as the most expensive and exotic product became the beverage associated with Óðinn and with the kings and heroes of the *Fornaldar saga*. Perhaps only the richest members of the societies that produced the literary sources could afford to consume it. *Ql* and *mungát* are the most commonly mentioned beverages, perhaps because they were the easiest ones to produce, transport and store. On the other hand, lactose-based beverages are conspicuous by their virtual absence in the literary and historical sources. If there was a source of alcohol that could be consumed on an almost daily basis, it was most probably a dairy-based product. However, the fact that they were relatively inexpensive and acidic might have prevented them from being the subject of literature. And when they was the subject of literature they are often portrayed as products consumed by villains or offered as an act of treachery, that is, if they are said to be drunk at all, for more often they appears in literature serving other roles, such as extinguishing fires or as a hiding place. Finally, *mjóðr* and *bjórr* do not seem to have been consumed often, if at all. They became the subject of poetry and myth, as we shall see in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3- MYTHOLOGICAL ORIGINS AND IDEAS OF ALCOHOL AND DRINKING

In this chapter I will approach Old Norse drinking culture according to the mythological sources. However, I will focus more on what these sources have to tell us about the origin and role of alcohol than on the act of drinking. The study will be mostly based on both the Poetic Edda and Snorri's Edda, though I will also refer to any other sources that may contribute to clarify the mythic construct of alcoholic beverages.

Alcohol in general, particularly mead, seems to play diverse roles in Old Norse mythology. This is due to the fact that our sources provide several, and sometimes contradictory, stories about the origin and function of alcoholic beverages. Thus, in this chapter I will approach the topic from many different angles, paying special attention to the various ways in which mead is portrayed. In the first section, “Mead, Wisdom and Poetry”, I will study the different stories about the way in which the Æsir gained access to mead as well as its possible connection to poetic diction. It is my belief that the different fragments referring to this story either form part of several different stages in the development of a single myth or that they actually belong to different myths about the way in which the gods and mankind gained access to mead. This idea diverges from the accepted scholarship, which considers the different renderings and sources of the myth as fragments belonging to a single tradition.

The second section, ‘Drinking in Æsgardr’ will be devoted to the analysis of the few references to drinking in the realm of the Æsir. First, I will examine the role of the mythical goat, Heiðrún, from whose udders flows the mead that the einherjar drink in Valhalla. This goat, as we will see, has some connections with the Jötun. Secondly, I will study the way in which the Æsir's drinking halls are presented and the role of drinking in the afterlife. Finally I will briefly analyze the role of the Valkyrjur as waiters in Valhalla.
The third and last section, "The Æsir’s Quest for Alcohol Among The Jætnar" will focus on mythological drinking scenes which take place outside of Ásgardr. Here I will analyze different fragments that indicate that, apparently, in Old Norse mythology the Jætnar were perceived as the Æsir’s main source of alcohol and, perhaps, even as the inventors of brewing. Here we will see, once more, what seem to be several stages of the evolution of a single myth (if not several myths) in which the creation of alcohol was attributed to the Jætnar. This may be part of the evolution of a myth in which brewing was originally the creation of the dwarves and at a later stage was credited to the Jætnar.

3.1- MEAD, WISDOM AND POETRY

Almost at the beginning of Skálskaparmál, a treatise about poetic language written c. 1220, Snorri Sturluson provides us with an elsewhere unattested account of the creation of poetry. This story is narrated as part of a dialogue between Bragi, the god of poetry, and Ægir, most probably identified as the god of the sea. During their conversation Bragi answers Ægir’s question about the origin of poetry. He tells him that after the war between the Æsir and the Vanir both families of gods “laqðu með sér friðstefnu ok settu gríð á þá lund at þeir gengu hværirtveggju til eins kers ok spýttu í hrúka sinum.” (arranged a peace meeting and set a truce in this way, that both sides went to a vat and spat their spittle into it.) Not wanting to let this peace-symbol decay, they decide to create a man out of the spittle-mixture. This man is called Kvasir, a being so wise that he has an answer to every question that is posed to him. He then travels

349 Though there is a possibility that Bragi, the god of poetry, is the deified representation of Bragi Boddason, a ninth-century poet. On this topic see Gabriel Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1964), pp. 185-86.

350 In Skspm 33 Snorri mentions that Ægir, the sea-god, had asked for hospitality in Valhöll (Ægir sötti heimboð til Ásgardø), but the only occasion in which Snorri’s Edda depicts Ægir in that hall, is at the beginning of Skspm, as a part of the frame-story in which he talks with Bragi. Thus Ægir the sea-god and Ægir the character in the frame story may be identical.

351 Skspm 57, p. 3.
around the world teaching his knowledge. But when Kvasir arrives as a guest to two dwarves, Fjalarr and Galarr, they kill him and mix his blood with honey in order to brew mead with the attribute that “hverr er af drekkur verdr skáld eða fræðamaðr.”\(^\text{352}\) (whoever drinks from it becomes a poet or a scholar.) This mead is poured into three vessels, two \textit{ker} (vats) called Són and Boðn, and a \textit{kettill} (pot) called Óðrérir. The dwarves keep the mead and conceal their crime by saying that Kvasir suffocated in his own wisdom because he could not find anyone wise enough to ask him intelligent questions. Later, Fjalarr and Galarr go on a boat trip with Gillingr, a \textit{jötunn} and, when their boat capsizes, Gillingr drowns. His widow weeps so loudly that Fjalarr cannot stand the noise and kills her. When Suttungr, Gillingr’s son, finds out about the death of his parents he tortures the dwarves in revenge. The dwarves save their lives by offering him the mead they made out of Kvasir’s blood as a compensation for Gillingr’s death. Suttungr accepts the mead and puts it in a place called Hnitbjørg (Beating-Rock), and sets his daughter, Gunnlöd, as its safe keeper.

This story about the origin of the mead of poetry is extant only in Snorri’s \textit{Edda}. As a matter of fact the \textit{Snorra Edda} is also the only source in which it is possible to find references to the creation of such wisdom-conferring mead. However the sage Kvasir does appear in three further texts. Let us examine them in order to find out if these other references to Kvasir can provide additional information about the origin of mead and of poetry. The first of these references is to be found in Snorri’s \textit{Gylfaginning} 50 when the Æsir chase Loki in order to punish him for Baldr’s death. Apart from mentioning that it is Kvasir who finds the way to capture Loki the only other bit of information we get about him is that he: “\textit{altra var vitastr, er Kvasir heitir.}”\(^\text{353}\) (was the wisest of all, who is called Kvasir.) The second source is a stanza of Einarr skálaglamm’s poem \textit{Vellekla}, composed c. 986 but preserved only in Snorri’s \textit{Skáldskaparmál}. The stanza reads

\(^{352}\text{Skspm 57, p.3.}\)

\(^{353}\text{Gylf} 50, \text{p. 48.}\)
The third and last occasion on which Kvasir appears in the Old Norse corpus is in Snorri’s *Ynglinga saga*, also in connection with the story of the war between the Æsir and the Vanir. In this source, however, Kvasir does not appear as a man created out of the truce-spittle but as a member of the Vanir given as hostage to the Æsir after the war. Snorri recounts that the Æsir sent Hœnir as a hostage and “*mœð honum sendu Æsir þann, er Mimir hét, inn vitrasti madr, en Vanir fengu þar í möt þann, er spakastr var í þeira flokki. Sá hét Kvasir.*”\(^{356}\) (with him the Æsir sent that one who is called Mimir, the wisest man, and thus the Vanir gave in return the wisest one among them. He was called Kvasir.) He is not mentioned again in the saga, so we do not get to know about his destiny. Yet the story goes that the Vanir behead Mimir and send his head to the Æsir. Óðinn takes Mimir’s head and preserves it in herbs so that it will not rot. Óðinn then utters some magic charms over it so “*át þat mælti við hann ok sagði honum marga leynda hluti.*”\(^{357}\) (that it spoke with him and told him many secret things.)

Let us examine the four different episodes in which Kvasir is mentioned in order to find more information about the origins and roles of mead and poetry. First of all, it is quite noteworthy that Kvasir only appears in texts written by Snorri Sturluson, for even if *Vellekla* was composed by Einarr skálaglamm, the poem’s surviving fragments are preserved only as part of Snorri’s *Edda*. Of the four episodes in which Kvasir is mentioned only three may help us to gain some information about the origins of mead and poetry. These are, namely, the accounts of the war between the Æsir and the Vanir (preserved in *Skáldskaparmál* and in *Ynglinga saga*) as well as Einarr Skálaglamm’s stanza containing what appears to be a kenning for poetry: *Kvasis dreyra* (Kvasir’s

\(^{354}\) *Skopm* 3, p. 12.


\(^{356}\) *Yng* IV, p. 12.

\(^{357}\) *Yng* IV, p. 13.
blood). First, I will analyze the fragments referring to the gods' war and then continue with the study of Einarr skálaglamm's stanza.

3.1.1 - PARALLELS BETWEEN KVASIR'S AND MÍMIR'S MYTHS

Even if Kvasir's role is not the same in both renderings of the war between the Æsir and Vanir, it is possible to find some structural parallels between the two versions of the truce. First, in both accounts the end result of the truce is that the gods obtain wisdom; in Skáldskaparmál this takes place through the creation of Kvasir while in Ynglinga saga it is achieved by the exchange of wise hostages. Thus the exchange of hostages and of spittle seems to be an exchange of lore, of knowledge, between the two groups of gods. Second, in Ynglinga saga Mimir assumes a role similar to the one Kvasir has in Snorri's Edda. That is, in both accounts one of the sages gets slain, and the killing results in the acquisition of even more knowledge. In Skáldskaparmál knowledge is gained in the form of the mead that turns a man into a skald (poet) or a fræðamaðr (scholar) while in Ynglinga saga knowledge is obtained in the form of a head which utters marga leynda hluti (many hidden things). In either case the result of the war and, moreover, of the truce is the acquisition of wisdom. In other texts Mimir's knowledge is associated with mead consumption, which renders a further parallel with the mead made out of Kvasir’s blood. The seeress in Völuspá says:

alt veit ec, Öðinn,                  hvar þá auga falt:
i inom mæra                               Mimis brunnir!
Drecer mitð Mimir                        margin hverian
af veði Valfóðr.\textsuperscript{358}

(all I know, Öðinn, where you hid your eye: in the famous well of Mimir! Mimir drinks mead every morning from Valfóðr's [Öðinn's] pledge.)

Snorri quotes this stanza in Gylfaginning 15 and provides the following interpretation:

undir þeiri rött [of Yggdrasill] er til hrimþursa horftr, þar er Mimis brunnr, er spekkð ok mannvit er í fólgi, ok heitir sá Mimir er á brunninn. Hann er fullr af visindum fyrir þvi at hann drekkur ör

\textsuperscript{358} Vsp 28.
brunninum af horninu Gjallarhorni. Par kom Alfqór ok beiddisk eins drykkjar af brunninum, en hann fekk eigi fyrr en hann lagði auga sitt at veði.359

(Under that root [of Yggdrasill] which turns towards the frost-giants, there is Mimir’s well, which conceals wisdom and understanding, and he who is at the well is called Mimir. He is full of knowledge because he drinks of the well from the horn Gjallarhorn. There went Alfqór [Öðinn] and requested one drink from the well, and he got nothing before he laid his eye as a pledge.)

According to Snorri, the well has intelligence and wisdom (spekð ok mannvit) contained in it, and it is not clear if Mímir acquires those attributes because he drinks from the well or because he drinks from it using the horn Gjallarhorn.360 But, as Öðinn pledges his eye in exchange for a drink from the well, while VǪluspá does not mention the drinking vessel he uses, we can assume that it is the liquid itself (mead according to VǪluspá and unspecified in Gylfaginning) which confers the wisdom. Öðinn making a sacrifice in order to obtain wisdom is a commonplace in the Eddic sources. However, on the only occasion in which Mímir appears drinking mead in Eddic poetry it is never mentioned that he does so in order to obtain wisdom.361 Thus, Mímir’s acquisition of wisdom by the consumption of mead is only extant in Snorri’s Edda. In her analysis of VǪluspá Gro Steinsland attributes Mímir’s knowledge to the fact that he drinks from Öðinn’s pledge, arguing that the vǫlv– makes this remark about Öðinn’s eye and Mímir’s well because

hun vet at han matte betale dyrt, og enná har han ikke nok kunnskap. Han ser ikke så dypt som volven selv. Nei, hun vet at maktabalansen i kosmos er truet, at det nå er Mime som drinker mjød hver morgenstund av Valfadors øye. Mime bruker det pantsatt øyet som drikkerek. For det er Ódins pant som gjør Mimes brønn til en visdomsbønn.362

(she knows that he [Öðinn] had to pay an expensive price, and yet he has not gained enough knowledge. No, she knows that the cosmological balance of power is in danger; that now it is Mimir who drinks mead every morning from Valfðr’s eye. Mimir uses the pledged eye as a drinking vessel. Because it is Öðinn’s pledge which turns Mimir’s well into a wisdom-well.)

359 Gylf 15, p. 17.
360 Snorri stresses the af þvi at (because) when making reference to the fact that Mímir obtains his intelligence by drinking from the horn, and not from the well.
361 See Vsp 28. The stanza just states that Mímir drinks mead, without mentioning any effects that the liquid may have on him.
362 Gro Steinsland and P. M. Sørensen, Voluspá (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1999), pp. 55-56.
A similar argument to that of Steinsland was first suggested by LeRoy Andrews in his 1928 article in which he explores the possibility of Mimir's head and mead as originating from the Germanic tradition of using human skulls as drinking vessels.\textsuperscript{363}

Thus, he proposes that

\begin{quote}
Such a drinking-vessel fashioned from the skull of Mimir could readily have been designated in poetry both the head of Mimir and his fountain, from which Odin drank. That the wisdom of the living head should be retained in a beverage drunk from the skull is a not unnatural conception.\textsuperscript{364}
\end{quote}

The different accounts about Mímir (in which he appears as a \textit{Jjtunn} or an \textit{As} and, as either a disembodied head or a whole being) are not free of controversy and the possibility that there are different traditions about him, perhaps fused as one in later sources, has already been suggested by several authors.\textsuperscript{365} As for Eddic poems, the evidence they provide is insufficient to find out whether the mead, the vessel or Óðin's pledge is actually the source of Mímr's intelligence. It is difficult to extract any conclusions from the sources narrating the story of Mímir and his mead. At the moment it is only possible to suggest that, due to structural similarities between both stories of the truce between the \textit{Æsir} and the \textit{Vanir} and between the roles that Kvasir and Mímir play in them, we should not discard the possibility that Snorri did, in fact, record at least two different traditions that connect mead with wisdom. Another possibility is that, by the thirteenth century, the sources which Snorri employed for the composition of the myths about Mímir and Kvasir were already the synthesis of several different older traditions. Thus, I would like to ask, together with LeRoy Andrews "whether certain other Old Norse mythological matter may not have originated under the influence of this myth [i.e. Mímir's head and well myth], particularly the somewhat farcically

\textsuperscript{363} Drinking vessels and the idea that the Norse might have used skulls as drinking vessels will be analyzed in chapter 6.


\textsuperscript{365} Jacqueline Simpson, 'Mímir: Two Myths or One?', in \textit{Saga-Book}, 16 (1962-65), pp. 41-53. Mímir also appears in several kenningar for \textit{jqtmar}, as for example in \textit{Skjøt} 18: "Hrekkamímir" (Mischief-Mímir).
employed conception of Odin securing his poetic inspiration from a draught of the mead of Suttungr.\textsuperscript{366}

\textbf{THE NAME KVASIR AND THE ORIGIN OF BREWING}

Perhaps knowing more about the possible origin of the name Kvasir could help us to gain insight into the basis of the myth about the mead of poetry. As a starting point we shall note that the name Kvasir is recorded only by Snorri, both in his Edda and in Ynglinga saga, and is not attested elsewhere in Old Norse sources.\textsuperscript{367} The only one of these sources that actually links Kvasir with mead or poetry is Skáldskaparmál 57.

There have been different attempts to clarify the etymology of Kvasir's name,\textsuperscript{368} as AEW mentions, "Die etymologie ist unsicher. Der zusammenhang mit dem mythus des skaldenmetes hat zum vergleisch mit asl. kvasu 'gegorener trank' geführt, aber das ist höchst unsicher."\textsuperscript{369} (The etymology is uncertain. The connection with the myth of the mead of the scalds has led to the comparison with Old Slavic kvasu 'yeasted drink', but it is highly uncertain). Eugen Mogk has explained that:

\begin{quote}
Kvasir n'est qu'une personification d'une boisson enivrante dont le nom rejoint le 'kvas' des peuples slaves. En effet, Kvasir est, avec un substantif kvas, dans le même rapport que Eldir, nom d'un des serviteurs d'Ægir, avec eldr 'feu', Órnir, nom d'un géant, avec órn 'aigle', Byggvir, nom du serviteur du dieu de la fécondité Freyr, avec bygg 'orge', etc.\textsuperscript{370}
\end{quote}

(Kvasir is nothing else but the personification of an intoxicating drink, whose name is paired with the kvas of Slavic people. As a matter of fact, Kvasir is, together with a substantive kvas, in the same relationship as Eldir, the name of one of Ægirs servants, with eldr 'fire', Órnir, the name of a giant, with órn 'eagle', Byggvir, name of the servant of Freyr the god of fertility, with bygg 'barley', etc.)

\textsuperscript{366} Andrews, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{367} As mentioned before, the name Kvasir appears only in Yng IV; Gylf 50; Skspm GS7 and 3; and in the skaldic poem Vellekla, preserved only as part of Skspm.
\textsuperscript{368} Turville-Petre, p. 40; IEW, Kvasir. For a curious attempt to explain this name as a misunderstanding of the Latin adjective "quasi" in Orion's myth see N.S. Hagen, 'On the Origin of the name Kvasir', Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi, 28:24 (1912), 127-139.
\textsuperscript{369} AEW, Kvasir.
\textsuperscript{370} Georges Dumezil, Loki (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), p. 75. Quoted from Dumezil as Mogk's article is not properly referenced by the author and has proven impossible to locate.
Following Mogk’s argument, the name would actually mean ‘the kvas’; but as Hagen correctly points out, the substantive ‘kvas’ is not attested in the Old Norse corpus. It does, however, survive in some modern Scandinavian dialects: “*dans le danois du Jutland, kvas désigne les fruits écrasés et, en norvégien, le moût des fruits écrasés.*” (in the Danish of Jutland *kvas* refers to the crushed fruits and, in Norwegian, to the must of crushed fruits) As a verb it is probably related to *kvāsa* and *kvasa*, which in Scandinavian dialects means ‘to press the juice out of’. If Hagen’s and Dumézil’s assumptions are correct, and the noun *kvas* originally means something on the line of juice of pressed fruits then the name Kvasir would mean ‘the juice of fruits’, ‘the must’, which can indeed sometimes be mixed with honey and water in order to add flavour to mead. We can also find a surviving cognate in the modern Russian noun *kvas*, which designates an alcoholic beverage produced out of fermented black-bread.

Going back to the myth itself, it seems that Kvasir’s nature was mainly liquid. His was created out of spittle. Afterwards he continued his existence in the form of blood, which was extracted by the dwarves in order to transform it into mead, a different kind of liquid. Finally, he was transformed again into spittle, for Óðinn delivers the mead in that way after stealing it from Suttungr. Mogk attributes the story about Kvasir and his connection to the mead of poetry to Snorri’s misreading of the kenning *kvasis dreyri* in the poem *Vellekla*. He argues that Snorri misinterpreted *dreyri* as ‘blood’, rendering the verse as ‘listen to Kvasir’s blood’ while in other

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371 Hagen, ‘Origin of the Name Kvasir’, p. 129.  
372 Dumézil, p. 75.  
373 The must is the juice of fruits before the fermentation process is complete.  
374 Hagen, ‘Origin of the Name Kvasir’, p. 129. Hagen also mentions the Danish noun *kvas* (crushed fruit) and the verb *kvase* (to squash) as well as Modern English quash among the surviving cognates, thus she finds that the Old Norse *Kvasir* would mean something on the line of ‘liquid of the fermenting mash’.  
375 “Créer un homme à partir d’un crachat, c’est une chose dont il n’y a pas d’autre exemple dans l’ethnographie ni dans la mythologie comparés” (To create a man out of spittle is a thing for which there is no other example ether in ethnography or in comparative mythology.) Mogk, Eugene, quoted in Dumézil, p. 76.  
376 Óðinn’s theft of the mead and Kvasir’s final transformation into spittle will be dealt with later in section 3.1.3.
kenningar in which it appears it is usually used with the sense of 'liquid'. As Dumezil puts it "loin donc que la kenning kvasis dreyri prouve que, au Xe siècle, les scaldes aient connu l'histoire de Kvasir tué et de l'origine sanglante de l'hydromiel de poésie, il est bien probable que l'expression a signifié 'le liquide kvas." (the kenning kvasis dreyri is far from proving that in the 10th century the skalds had known the story of the death of Kvasir and of the bloody origin of the mead of poetry; it is quite probable that the expression signified 'the liquid kvas.) This assumption seems to be correct also in the light of the fact that even if Snorri's contemporary and succeeding skalds used mead in kenningar for poetry, they paid no heed to Kvasir's blood myth in the construction of their kenningar. Maybe at the time Snorri wrote it, the myth was already perceived as a misinterpretation of the kenning.

Let us focus on Kvasir's existence as blood, which seems to be the only source of the wisdom that is transmitted with the mead of poetry, even if it may be just as a by-product of the god's spittle involved in his creation. In other sources drinking the blood of supernatural creatures appears as a source of courage or wisdom, in particular wisdom connected with speech abilities. For example, in the prose between stanzas 31 and 32 of Fáfnismál, Sigurðr tastes the blood dripping from the dragon's (Fáfnir's) heart as he roasts it, and the result is that he gains the ability to understand the language of birds. This idea is supported in the prose version of the story, Víslensaga, where the same happens and thus confirms that in the late thirteenth century this ancient belief was still supported, even if just as a transmission of the older Eddic lays. In Hrólfssaga Kraka ok Kappa Hans, Hóttir, formerly a coward and a coal-biter, drinks the blood of a dragon and not only does he become a brave warrior, but also a very

377 Dumézil, p. 76.
378 Dumézil, p. 76.
379 Composed during the late thirteenth century and largely based on the Eddic lays about Sigurðr and the Niflungs.
articulate one. Thus, in spite of Mogk’s and Dumezil’s argument about Snorri misreading dreyri as blood instead of liquid, there is no apparent contradiction between Snorri’s reading of the kenning and the connection between blood and wisdom. Blood and mead are elsewhere equated, as is the case of several kenningar for blood in which it is said to be the ravens’ wine or the ravens’ drink, accordingly battles were a ravens’ feast. Now, ravens were considered to be, apart from good omens in battle, Óðinn’s pets; maybe as an extrapolation of Huginn (Thought) and Muninn (Memory), Óðinn’s ravens which may represent his intellectual abilities. Thus, ravens were animals associated with wisdom as well as great blood-drinkers.

John Stephens argues that the story about Kvasir’s killing is that of a quest for knowledge. “Kvasir”, he states, “was killed for his blood, since this is what the dwarves take” as there is no other evident motivation for his murder. He also finds a further blood connection in this search for knowledge. Kvasir’s killers were two dwarves, and “dwarfs are elsewhere associated with both wisdom and blood: they are repositories of wisdom and Völuspá 9 tells that they were made from [Brimir’s] blood.” Following his argument one would conclude that dwarves, as a product of blood and carriers of wisdom, would be the expected and most obvious brewers of the mead of poetry. There is however another evident reason for the dwarves being the brewers of the mead of poetry. As Dumezil puts forward:

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\text{Comme les Scandinaves avaient pris l’habitude d’attribuer aux nains la fabrication de tout l’équipement divin [...] ils auront attribué aux nains la fabrication de l’hydromiel et l’idée de mélter du miel, pour les faire fermenter, aux ‘fruits écrasés’ que désignait primitivement le nom commun kvasir.}
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380 Hrólf/XXXV-XXXVI, p. 66-69.
381 Turville-Petre, p. 59.
383 Stephens, p. 259. Vsp 9 reads: “hverr skyldi dverga dróttir skeopia / ør Brimis blódi ok ør Bláins leggiom” (who should shape the dwarves people out of Brimir’s blood and from Bláins legs.) Snorri, on the other hand, says in Gylf that they were created out of the maggots which grew on Ymir’s flesh, while his blood was turned into the sea. Gylf 8 and 14.
384 In Skspm 35 dwarves create Sífi’s golden hair, Óðinn’s spear Gungnir, Freyr’s ship Skibblaðnir, the arm ring Draupnir, Freyr’s boar and, bòrr’s hammer Mjöllnir. In Sárla pátr they create Freyja’s necklace.
385 Dumézil, p. 77.
As the Scandinavians had taken the habit of attributing to the dwarves the creation of all the divine equipment [...] they attributed to the dwarves the creation of the mead as well as the idea of mixing honey, in order to induce fermentation, to the ‘crushed fruits’ to which the noun *kvasir* originally referred to.

The dwarves seem to have several reasons to be considered as the creators of the mead of wisdom and poetry. Accordingly, mead is sometimes referred to in kenningar as the drink of dwarves. This could explain the reasons for Óðinn’s drunkenness at the court of Fjalarr in *Hávamál* 14:

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Qir ec varð, varð ofrQlvi,
at ins fröða Fjalars.386
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(Drunk I became, became more than drunk, at wise Fjalarr’s place)

This passage is commonly considered as part of the myth of the stealing of the mead of poetry, to be discussed below. The name Fjalarr, as we have already seen, belongs to one of the dwarves who brewed the mead of poetry in Snorri’s account. Fjalarr is also attested as a dwarf-name in *Volsöpá* 16. However, *Dvergatal*,387 the catalogue of dwarves in which it appears within the poem, is not free of controversy and is generally assumed to be a later interpolation. Fjalarr is also recorded as a *Jǫtunn*-name in *Hárbarðsljóð* 26 and Snorri lists it also as a *Jǫtunn*-name in *Skáldskaparmál* 75.

Could it be that by the time Snorri recorded the name Fjalarr the myth of the mead was at a stage in which its creation was attributed to the dwarves instead of to the *Jǫtunar*, thus the name Fjalarr was assumed as the name of a dwarf? We shall never know. In the surviving literature both dwarves and *Jǫtunar* appear as excellent brewers; therefore both races are perfect candidates to be portrayed as creators or owners of the drink.

Finally, the myth of the creation of Kvasir could be the reflection of a brewing ritual. Mogk has argued that “*la naissance de Kvasir à partir d’un crachat communier des Ases et des Vanes repose sur une vieille technique élémentaire, sur un des procédés*”

386 *Háv* 14.
387 *Dvergatal* comprises stanzas 9-16 of *Vsp.*
par lesquels beaucoup de peuples, d’une part, obtiennent la fermentation et, d’autre part, concluent amitié.\textsuperscript{388} (the birth of Kvasir from the communal spittle of the Æsir and the Vanir lays on an ancient elementary technique, on one of the procedures by which many nations, on one hand, produce fermentation and, on the other, settle their friendship.) The sources that point to the treaty after the Æsir-Vanir war make reference to a certain agreement between the races of gods, but only those quoted by Snorri mention what it consisted of and, as mentioned before, they point towards an exchange of wisdom. As we will see in the sections devoted to the role of alcohol in making marriage settlements and in funeral feasts,\textsuperscript{389} agreements were usually sealed with a toast, and as we will see in the last chapter of this study, sharing a drink was an important symbol of friendship. Thus the myth might have originated in social practice. Alternatively, the practice of sealing agreements and reaffirming friendships with alcohol could have originated from the myth of how the first dispute in the world was settled. In conformity with this argument, Oddgeir Hoftun proposes that in Snorri’s myth of the creation of the mead of poetry it is not only the mead itself that plays a central role, but also the act of brewing. \textit{"Ikke bare ølet, men også bryggingen av det har vært en hellig handling som fulgte ritualle påbud og krevde sine hellige ingredienser i form av ord og handlinger i tilleg til råstoffet og den rent nødvendige bearbeidingen."}\textsuperscript{390} (Not only the beer, but also its brewing, have been a sacred act which followed a ritual order and needed its own sacred ingredients in the shape of words and actions in addition to the raw ingredients and their absolutely clean preparation.)

\textsuperscript{388} Mogk, quoted in Dumézil, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{389} Feasts will be studied in Chapter 5.
According to Dumezil, creating a man out of spittle is not attested in the ethnography of any other cultures nor in any other mythology;\textsuperscript{391} but using the natural yeasts which are present in spittle in order to ferment a liquid was practiced in several Indo-European and non-Indo-European cultures. We can find a reminiscence of this practice in the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka when, during a brewing contest two women ask for the help of the gods: "Signý het á Freyju, en Geirhildr á Hótt. Hann lagði fyrr dregg hráka sinn ok kvöðst vilja fyrr tilkvámur sina þat er var milli kersins ok hennar. En þat reyndist gott òl."\textsuperscript{392} (Signý invoked Freyja and Geirhildr called Hótt [one of Ódin’s names]. He put his spittle in the dregs and said that for his coming he wanted that which was between the kettle and her. And that proved to be good ale.) This episode bears some resemblance to the myth of the creation of Kvasir, who is formed out of the gods’ spittle and later transformed into an alcoholic beverage. But, due to the similarities and to the late date of Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka, we shall take into account the possibility that the saga was influenced by Snorri’s account of the creation of the mead. In any case, we can just consider it as a literary example of the use of the yeasts present saliva for brewing. So, in Snorri’s account, we may be attesting several myths: that of the origin of brewing, that of the mead of poetry and finally that which instructs about the several ritual uses of alcohol.

3.1.2 - GAINING THE MEAD

From the ninth century onwards skaldic poetry often made references to the myth of the mead of poetry in kenningar that allude to its owners (i.e. dwarves, Jǫtunn

\textsuperscript{391} Dumézil, p. 76. However, Stith Thompson contradicts Dumezil’s point of view, as he records another case in an Indian tale in which spittle was transformed into a man: see Thompson, Stith, Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends, CD ROM (Indiana: Intelex Corporation/Indiana University Press, 1993), D437.5- Transformation: Spittle to person.

\textsuperscript{392} HálfI, p. 95.
or Óðinn) or its origins, representing a well established tradition that equated a particular kind of mead with poetry. The connection seems to have been so close that “skalds use base words such as mjǫðr, biórr, ql, qldr, vin, lið, and veig exclusively in kennings for poetry or blood.”394 Also, “with few exceptions, those hundreds of verses and dozens of half whole strophes [...] in the extant corpus which comment on the act of poetic composition do so either by referring specifically to the poetic mead story or by contriving a ‘consonant’ metaphor”395 legitimizing in the process, if not the myth of Kvasir, at least the myth about mead as the source of poetic diction (though, to my knowledge, there are no references to wisdom being the product of drinking this mead outside of Snorri’s Edda). As we will see, there is a variant of the myth of the mead in which Óðinn retrieves the mead from the Jǫtnar and gives it to the Æsir and those men who are to become skalds. Consequently mead became not only the source of poetry, but also an ‘Óðinnic’ gift to men while Óðinn himself acquired a new rank and became, among the many other roles he already had, god of poetry. As early as the ninth century, Bragi Boddason described what a skald is, letting us know that alcohol and poetry were intrinsically connected.

Skáld kalla mik skapsmið Viðurs,
Gaús giafráquð, grepp óhneppan,
Ygg’s qlbera, óðs skap-Móða,
hagsmið bragar. Hvat er skáld nema þat?396

(They call me a skald, thought-smith of Viður [Óðinn], the receiver of Gaút’s [Óðinn] gift, not lacking in art, Ygg’s [Óðinn] ale-bearer, mind/poetry creating Móði [i.e. poet], skilled maker of poetry. What is a skáld other than that?)

A skald would then be the smith of Óðinn’s thought, the receiver of Óðinn’s gift (the mead of poetry?), and the ale-bearer of Yggr (Óðinn). References to skalds as recipients

393 See Skspm 3 for a list of these terms.
396 Skspm 54.
of the mead of poetry are so abundant in the corpus of skaldic poetry that there must have been a strong tradition connected with this particular form of inspiration.  

There are also several references to another possible origin of poetry in the form of Bragi, god of poetry, who appears to be a divinized portrait of the ninth-century poet Bragi Boddason and in any case usurps Óðinn's role as god of poetry. It is interesting to note that he is said to be married to Iðunn, the goddess whose fruits conferred immortality on the Æsir. Poetry and immortality were not distant concepts in the Old Norse world - one way of gaining 'immortality' among men was through a good poem in one's honour, which is further reflected by the important place that skalds occupied in the court. However, Bragi is never directly linked to the mead of poetry.

Finally there is another tradition related to the mead of Suttungr (and maybe of dwarves) in which mead does not appear to be connected with poetry at all. These sources are preserved in Eddic poetry and have been, on several occasions, interpreted in the light of Snorri's Edda. However, when it comes to the different stories about how the mead reached the worlds of the Æsir and men, there are many discrepancies about the properties of the mead as well as of its acquisition. We should remember that myths change through time, and those which were committed to writing may represent not only different traditions about a particular myth, but also several different stages in its evolution. Keeping that in mind, in this section I will analyze the different fragments in which Óðinn gains access to the mead in the Poetic Edda and question them as independent sources in order to see what can be learnt from them.

The story of how Óðinn gained access to the mead is recounted in four different sources, though not all of them allude to it as being the source of poetry or wisdom. As a matter of fact, it seems that these refer to different meads or, more likely, that they

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397 For a further analysis on the mead as origin of poetry and its skaldic tradition see: Clover, 'Skaldic Sensibility', pp. 63-81; and Frank, 'Snorri and the Mead', pp. 155-70.

398 "The Norse word epíli, which appears in various forms in all Germanic languages, does not only mean 'apple'. It is applied to other round fruits, and even to acorns." Turville-Petre, p. 186.
represent different traditions of Óðinn’s acquisition of a ritually and socially significant beverage. There also seems to be a certain evolution in the concept of the mead, which I will try to outline in the following pages, though it is impossible to reconstruct the whole myth of the acquisition of the mead based on the fragments in which it is narrated.

Óðinn’s acquisition of the mead, not always represented as theft, is preserved in the collection of Eddic poems Hávamál stanzas 11-14, 104-10 and 140, as well as in Snorri Sturluson’s Skáldskaparmál G57-58. Some of the sources tell a similar story, but with some differences, which can add to our understanding of a particular kind of mead as the source of poetry. I will begin the analysis of these myths, taking as a starting point the most extensive of the Hávamál fragments.

Rather than a single poem, Hávamál is a compilation of several different poems, or fragments of poems, in which the main narrator is Óðinn. It is preserved in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda, written c. 1270. Scholars have not arrived at a single conclusion when it comes to the number of different poems into which the 164 stanzas of the Hávamal are divided. And when it comes to the dating and possible Christian influences in the poem, there is even less agreement. The poem seems to be the work of an editor who brought together 5 or 6 different poems, which can be thematically divided as follows:

a) The Gnomic Poem (stanzas 1-103), comprising a collection of sayings and advice about social behaviour.

b) The Gunnló Episode (stanzas 104-10), where Óðinn relates how he acquired the mead (of poetry?).

c) The Loddfáfnismál (stanzas 111-37), where advice is given to a character called Loddfáfnir.

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d) *Rúnatal* (stanzas 138-45), where Óðinn relates how he got access to runic knowledge (and mead) through a self-sacrifice.

e) *Ljóðatal* (stanzas 146-64), in which Óðinn lists the spells he knows.\(^{400}\)

The larger fragment in which the story about the mead is related falls in a section of its own, where Óðinn is the sole and only narrator. Due to its brevity, I will quote it in its entirety.

104 - *Iin aldna iqtun ec sótta; mú em ec aprt um kominn;
fái gat ec þegjandi þar;
mærgom orðom melta ec i minn frama
i Suttungs sáloff.

(104. - The ancient *iqtunn* I visited; now I am back;
little got I by being silent there; many words I spoke
to my advantage in Suttung's hall.)

105 - *Gunnlǫð mér um gaf* gullnom stölli á
dryce ins dýra miðdar;
il íðjgjál lét ec hana eptir hafa
sins ins heila hugar,
sins ins svára sefa.

(105. - Gunnlǫð gave me from upon her golden
throne a draught of the precious mead; a bad
recompense I gave her afterwards for her sincerity,
for her affectionate response.)

106 - *Rata munn* létomc rúms um fá
ok um griót gnaga;
yfir oc undir stóðom iqtina vegir;
svá hatta ek hafó til.

(106. - The mouth of the gimlet managed to make up
space and bit on the rock; above and below me were
the ways of the giants [i.e. rocks]; in such a way I
risked my head.)

107 - *Vel keyptz litar* hefi ec vel notíð,
fás er fródom vant;
þviat Öðrerir er nú upp kominn
á alda vés íadár.\(^{401}\)

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\(^{400}\) As the fragments to be analyzed within the next few pages don't fall within parts of the poem around which there is disagreement, I have chosen to present a rather abridged way of dividing the poem taken from Carolyne Larrington, ‘Prologue to Svava Jakobsdóttir’s ‘Gunnlǫð and the Precious Mead’’, in *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. by Paul Acker and others (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 27-29 (p. 27). For different approaches to the way of dividing the poem see: Jón Helgason, ‘Indledning’, in *Eddadigte I: Vǫluspá-Havamál*, ed. by Jón Helgason, 3 vols (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 1955), pp. V-XVII; David A. H. Evans, ‘Hávamál’, in *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. by Pulsiano, pp. 272-73 (p. 272) and; David A.H. Evans, ‘Introduction’, in *Hávamál*, ed. by Evans, pp. 1-38 (pp. 4-8).

\(^{401}\) This verse can have two different readings. If we read *vel* with a short ‘e’ then it would be making reference to a “well-bought beauty”. However, if we read *vél* instead of *vel* then the verse would refer to a beauty bought by fraud, which seems to be more fitting with the context and with the way in which Óðinn presents his deed, openly admitting that it was not a very fair trade.
(107. - Of the well bought beauty have I made good use, to the wise now little is lacking; because Öðrerir has now come up to the sanctuaries of men.)

108-  lífr er mér á, at ec væra enn kominn
íqna gærðom ór,
ef ec Gunnlædar ne nytac, innar góða kono, þeirar
er lágðómkr arm yfir.

(108. - I am not sure if I would have come safe from the Jötun's yard if I had not made use of Gunnlæð, the good woman, over whom I laid my arm.)

109-  Íns hindra dags gengu hrimbursar
Háva ræðs at freygr,
Háva hljó i;
at Bglverki þeir sporðo,
ef hann væri með bærðom kominn
eda hefði hánom
Suttungr of sóit.

(109. - The following day went the frost-giants to Hávi's [Öðinn] hall to ask for Hávi's advice. They asked about the mischief-doer, if he had come to his retinue or if Suttungr had killed him.)

110-  Buògif Æðinn
hygg ec at unnit hafi;
hvat skal hans tryggðom trúða?
Suttung svikinn
hann lét súmbli frá
oc grotta Gunnlæð.402

(110. - I thought that Öðinn had sworn a ring-oath; how shall his oaths be trusted! He left Suttungr betrayed at the feast, and made Gunnlæð weep.)

The placing of this fragment within Håvamál looks like a conscious editorial choice, for it follows the theme of the advice given in the last verses of stanza 103. In it, a narrative voice that cannot be clearly associated with Öðinn, and which is perhaps an intrusive second narrator in Håvamál, ends its advice declaring that "fimbulsambi heitir, sá er fát kann segia, / þat er ósnotrs aðal."403 (great fool is called / that who can say little, that is the characteristic of the fool.) This places stanza 104 in context, as it appears as an example of what a man can achieve by the art of speech. Accordingly, the 'Gunnlæð Episode' opens with Öðinn bragging about how he managed to have his way at Suttungr's due to his oral abilities: "Fát gat ec þegjandi þar; / mærgom orðom mælta ec i minn frama / i Suttungs sqlim."404 (little I got there by being silent, many words I spoke in my advantage at Suttungr's hall.). Seen in this context, it is interesting to note

402 Håv 104-10.
403 Håv 103.
404 Håv 104.
that the acquisition of the gift of poetic eloquence (if that is what Öðinn indeed acquired by drinking mead), in the form of mead, would have been achieved by means of the use of another kind of eloquence. However, the poem pays little attention to the mead itself and seems to concentrate more on the deception Öðinn practiced on Gunnlqð in order to obtain her favours.

Four out of the seven stanzas of the fragment focus on Gunnlqð's story, while the mead is mentioned only on two occasions: *Gunnlqð mér um gaf gullnom stóli á / drycc ins dyra miðdar* (Gunnlqð gave me from upon her golden throne/ a draught of the precious mead) in stanza 105 and *Óðrerir / er nú upp kominn / á alda vés iðdar* in stanza 107. (*Óðrerir / has now come up to the sanctuaries of men.*) Stanza 105 tells us that Öðinn convinced Gunnlqð to allow him to drink from the precious mead and that he gave her a poor reward for her 'sincere heart'. Stanzas 107 and 108 tell of the seduction of Gunnlqð as a stratagem to take the mead to the world of men and acknowledge Gunnlqð's central role in his escape. Finally, in stanza 110 the frost-giants are aware that Öðinn himself was the *bœverkr*, 'mischief-causer', and reproach him for breaking the ring-oath he made (presumably with Gunnlqð) thus making Gunnlqð cry. The mead does not seem to be the central object of the fragment, which seems to focus more on Gunnlqð's tragedy of either falling in love or getting married and then being abandoned. With this, I do not mean that the mead does not play an important role; after all its acquisition was the main objective of Öðinn's expedition. But its theft does not seem to upset the Jötunar as much as the deception of the Jötunn girl. They went on their quest to find the 'mischief-causer', and once they find him, they question him about his cheating of Suttungr and Gunnlqð and about his honesty in general, but they do not mention a single thing about returning the mead. This episode seems to be mostly
related with the Æsir's constant quest to take advantage of the Jqtnar, and part of their constant quest to obtain alcoholic beverages at the Jqtnar's expense. 405

There are as many different versions of the myth of the mead as renderings of it. It is my belief that the one preserved in Hávamál 104-10 does transmit the myth of the acquisition of mead for gods and men, but it may relate more to a proto-mead than to mead as an actual source of poetry and knowledge. 406 A drink with such an important ritual and social implication could well have had a myth attached about how it came to the realm of men. The closest parallel that comes to mind is that of Prometheus stealing the fire from the gods in order to offer it to mankind. Just as in the Greek myth, the stealing of the fire or mead does not imply that those who were robbed were to be rendered fireless or meadless, 407 thus the offence consisted more in the act of defiance from the gods towards the Jqtnar than in the actual loss of the object. As a result, and as we can perceive in Hávamál 109 and 110, the Jqtnar were more offended about being tricked than by the actual loss of the mead.

There are two instances in Hávamál 104-10 that are considered to link the mead with the mead of poetry, but that approach seems to be due more to the attachment of a rather unusual adjective to the mead as well as to the reading of the later and longer version of the myth (namely that in Snorri Sturluson's Skáldskeppsmál) as a way of de-codifying these stanzas. Let us begin with the fact that mead is called dyrr mjög (precious mead). The Old Norse adjective dyrr (precious, dear) appears thirteen times in Eddic poetry 409, in which it is linked twice with mead and three times with strong alcoholic drinks in general (veig). In Helgakvida Hundingsbana II, after going inside

405 Jqtnar, as alcohol providers, will be studied in section 3.3.
406 Van Hamel argues, in the light of Snorri's use of this fragment and its relationship to the other two fragments in Háv, that this section of the poem seems to represent the earliest version of the myth. See A. G. van Hamel, 'Gods, Skalds and Magic', SBVS, 11 (1928-36), 129-52.
407 The Jqtnar, as we will see in section 3.3, were often depicted as master brewers.
408 Háv 105.
the mound of her dead husband and offering to stay with him in the land of the dead, Sigrún tells him that now “vel scolom drecca dýrar veigar”\(^{410}\) (we shall drink the precious beverage), after which she makes up a bed and prepares herself to lie with him. The *dýr veig* in this instance seems to be associated more with a sacred wedding than with poetry. In *Hljóðskvida*, an Eddic poem not included in the *Codex Regius* but preserved as part of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *dýrar veigar* seems to refer to any costly or dear beverage in general. In it, King Humli\(^{411}\) asks his men to sit and rest during the winter, while he has the chance to prepare his revenge for some offences. Then he tells his retinue:

\[
\begin{align*}
Síja skulum i vetr & \quad ok sálliga lifa, \\
drekka ok deíma & \quad dýrar veigar. \text{\(^{412}\)}
\end{align*}
\]

(We shall sit during the winter and have a life of enjoyment, / talk and drink the precious beverage.)

In *Hvndluljóð* 50, *dýrar veigar* refers to a more special kind of drink, as it is meant to be a certain *minnisql*, (memory-ale), which is in the power of Hyndla, a dead *jaltnun-* woman. Following a pattern that we will discuss in the following pages, one the Vanir, Freyja on this occasion, journeys to visit a *jaltnun* in order to obtain an alcoholic drink. In this case, she tries to acquire *minnisql* on behalf of Óttarr, her lover, so that he will be able to remember his lineage. This ale bears some resemblance to the mead of poetry in its ability to confer a certain degree of knowledge and maybe even rhetoric, as she asks Hyndla

\[
\begin{align*}
Ber þá minnisql & \quad minom gelti, \\
svát hann qíll muni & \quad orð at lína \\
þessar ræðo & \quad þrídís morni \\
þá er þeir Angantýr & \quad ættir rekia. \text{\(^{414}\)}
\end{align*}
\]

(Bring the ale of memory to my boar [Óttarr had assumed this shape] so he can remember all the words

\(^{410}\) *HHIII* 46.

\(^{411}\) It is noteworthy that the Old Norse noun *humull*, to which the name Humli might be related, means ‘hop-plant’. The word *humull* is related to the Latin *humulus*, meaning hop plant. See *IEW*, *humall*.

\(^{412}\) *Heiðr* XII, p. 58-59.

\(^{413}\) Magic drinks are analyzed in section 7.1.

\(^{414}\) *Hdl* 45.
and remember this conversation in the third morning,
when he enumerates his kin for Angantyr.)

Thus, it seems that this ale would confer on him not only the ability to remember
Hyndla’s words, but also the verbal ability to make a proper speech at Angantyr’s hall
and, with it, re-gain his status. As the j̸³tunn-woman denies them the drink, Freyja
states that “hann scal drecca dyrar veigar”\(^\text{415}\) (He shall drink the precious beverage),
providing us with the third and last example in the Eddic poems of such an adjective
attached to a drink that is not associated with the mead of poetry.

The only other instance in which the adjective \(dýrr\) is attached to mead is in
another passage of H̸ávamál usually considered to be one of the versions of the myth
of the mead of poetry. The stanza is contained in the part of the poem known as Ru̸natal,
which together with the Gnomic Poem (H̸ávamál stanzas 1-103) is “considered to be
among the oldest surviving Eddic verse, although a number of scholars have maintained
that they can identify post-Conversion material in the Gnomic Poem.”\(^\text{416}\) The Ru̸natal
itself is not free of controversy, as its depiction of Óðinn’s sacrifice, hanging from a tree
to come back to life nine days after has been paralleled with the image of Christ on the
cross.\(^\text{417}\) Almost at the beginning of Óðinn’s narration and enumeration of how he
obtained runic lore, Óðinn explains how he was hanging and suffering from thirst; then
when he got access to the runes, we are told

\[
\text{Fimbulliød nio nam ec af inom freagia syni} \\
\text{Bqlþórs, Bestla fаждur,} \\
\text{ec ec drycc of gat ins dyra mjadar,} \\
\text{ausinn Öðreri.}\text{418}
\]

(Nine powerful spells I got from the famous son of
Bqlþór, Bestla’s father, and a drink I got of the
precious mead, poured from Öðrerir.)

On this occasion, just as in H̸ávamál 105, Óðinn gets a single drink of the \(dýra
mjadar\)\(^\text{419}\) from a j̸³tunn. This time it is provided to him by the son of Bqlþór, Bestla’s

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\(^{415}\) H̸áv 50.  
\(^{416}\) Larrington, ‘Prologue’, p. 27.  
\(^{417}\) Turville-Petre, pp. 42-50.  
\(^{418}\) H̸áv 140.
father. “Bólthór, whom Snorri calls Bólthorn, was a giant, and was father of Bestla, Óðinn’s giantess mother. The famous son of Bólthorn must, in this case, be a giant and Óðinn’s maternal uncle.”420 However, in his journey to the land of the dead Óðinn obtains wisdom from his uncle and not from the drink itself. Apart from quenching Óðinn’s thirst, the dyra mjóadar does not seem to play any role in his quest for wisdom, it is more a sign of greeting and offering hospitality than the main objective of Óðinn’s journey.421 The offering of the mead seems to be more in relationship with Óðinn’s thirst and hunger while he was hanging from the tree and a friendly answer to his complaint422 “við hleifi mic sældo né við hornigu”423 (no bread did they offer me nor a [drinking] horn) than the actual offering of a sacred drink.

The misconception of the mead which Óðinn gets in Hávamál 105 and 140 being the mead of poetry, may be due to the fact that scholars tend to approach these stanzas taking Snorri’s account as a tool for their interpretation, not taking into account that the fragments may belong either to a different myth about mead or just to a myth involving mead. Another element that might have led to this misreading may be the fact that in these passages mead is labelled dyra mjóadar. As we have seen above, the adjective dyrr is commonly attached to beverages in Eddic poetry.424 Mead, unlike other drinks, seems to have had a special role in Old Norse society, which is also reflected in the linguistic fact that almost every time mead is mentioned in Eddic verse it has an adjective attached to it. Mead appears accompanied by an adjective in 60% of the 23

419 The fact that the mead is called Óðrerir will be discussed below.
420 Turville-Petre, p. 49.
421 In Eddic poetry, it is a commonplace that when someone enters a hall he is said to be thirsty, and with the exception of Grm and Hym in which the mead is expected but not offered, the newcomers are usually welcomed with something to drink. Háv 3, Vm 8; Skm 16; Ls 6, 10; Prm 22, 24 and Bdr 7. In Snorri’s Gylf2, when Gylfi enters Valhalla, Hár welcomes him by saying “en heimill er matr ok drikkr honum sem allum þar í Háva háll.” (and you are free to have any food and drink like everyone else here in Hávi’s hall.)
422 In the case of Óðinn, his being thirsty and hungry without having any hope of hospitality, and later receiving a horn to drink from as a sign of friendship has a parallel in the prose section preceding the first stanza of Grm.
423 Háv 139.
424 42% of the occasions in which it is used in Eddic poetry it is attached to drinks, the remaining 58% of the occasions it is used for either kings, warriors or weapons. See CEP, dyrr.
times it is mentioned in Eddic poetry. The modifiers to be found accompanying “mjqdr” are:

1. - Dyrr (precious, dear): “ins dyra miaðar” (Hávamál 105 and 140)
2. - Heilagr (holy): “helga mjqdr” (Sigdrísfumál 18)
3. - Mærr (famous): “mæran drycc miaðar” (Lokasenna 6); “inn mæra mjqdr” (Skírnismál 16); “mjqdr mærar” (Atlamál 8)
4. - Forn (ancient): “forns miaðar” (Skírnismál 37; Lokasenna 53)
5. - Gödr (good): “inn göða mjqð” (Grímnismál 13)
6. - Hreinn (clean, bright, clear): “inn hreina mjqð” (Sólarlýð: 56)
7. - Skírr (clear, bright, pure): “skíra miaðar” (Grímnismál 25); “mjqðr, skírar veigar” (Baldrs draumar 7)
8. - Meinblandinn (mixed with evil, poisonous): “meinblandinn mjqdr” (Sigdrísfumál 8); “blend ec þeim svá meini mjqð” (Lokasenna 3)

In contrast to the ways in which mead is commonly described, other drinks mentioned in Eddic poetry do not tend to have an adjective associated with them. None of the 8 occurrences of bjórr, 9 of vin, 19 of q1 nor the 2 of mungát have any attached adjective. They are just the plain drink, with no characteristics added. The only one which has some modifiers connected to it (apart from mjqdr) is veig, which, as we have seen above, in many occasions works as a substitute for mjqdr.

The fact that “mjqdr”, unlike other drinks, tends to be accompanied by a modifier reflects that mead was considered to be a special drink; that it was a subject in itself for poetic celebration, but this does not imply that every single kind of mead had special attributes. Thus, this should not lead us to believe that every time mead is called

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425 CEP, mjqðr.
426 Even though this poem is not included in the Poetic Edda it is written in eddic metre.
427 Veig, according to IED means “a kind of strong beverage, drink” (IED, veig.), OGNS defines it as “stærk drikk” (strong drink) (OGNS, veig.) The drink can thus mean any strong beverage, but due to the few occasions in which it appears in the whole Old Norse corpus and the fact that in Eddic verse it seems to be used as a synonym of mead on most of the obvious occasions, it could well be taken as meaning ‘strong mead’. In Eddic verse veig is described as skírr (clear, bright, pure) in Bdr 7; dyrr (dear) in Hnd 34, Hlqð 16 and HHII 46, and hollr (salutary) in Hlqô 7 in 5 of the 9 times it is mentioned.
famous, ancient, holy or precious, it refers to a poetry-inspiring beverage; it appears to be mainly the result of a poetic convention.

The second element which, in my understanding, leads scholars to link the mead in stanzas 105, 107 and 140 of Hávamál with the mead presented by Snorri in his Skáldskaparmál is the fact that it is called Óðrerir, as is one of the containers in Snorri’s book. Faulkes proposes that the etymology of Óðrerir probably comes from ódr (mind, fury, frenzy) and hræra (move, stir) or hrærir (mover).428 Thus it would mean ‘mover of the mind’, ‘stirrer of the mind’ or something alike. Apart from its mention in Skáldskaparmál the name occurs only twice in Eddic poetry and once in Einarr skálaglamm’s poem Vellekla (preserved as part of Snorri’s Edda) and never again in the whole Old Norse corpus. The two instances in which it occurs in the Poetic Edda are the previously mentioned stanzas, Hávamál 107 and 140. In the first one, Óðinn says few lacks to the wise as “þviat Óðrerir / er nú upp kominn á alda vís íadár.”429 (because Óðrerir has now come up to the sanctuaries of men.) In this case, Óðrerir seems to refer to the mead itself and not to its container. Then, in stanza 140, when his uncle gives him a drink of the dýrr miqðr, Óðinn says that it was “ausinn Óðrerí”430 (poured from Óðrerir) and therefore it refers the name of the container. In the critical apparatus to his edition of Skáldskaparmál Faulkes argues that “Óðrerir apparently refers to the contents of the pot, which accords better with the etymology, though in Hávamál 140 it refers to the container.”431 In contrast, in his edition of Hávamál, D. Evans comments, regarding stanza 140, that

ausinn Óðrerí is difficult. Ausa commonly means ‘sprinkle’, with the dat. of that which is sprinkled (e.g. ausa barn vatni). We might therefore take ausinn here as nom. to agree with ek, and Óðrerí as referring to the mead itself (as apparently in [Hávamál] 107).432

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429 Háv 107.
430 Háv 140.
Regarding stanza 107, in which Öðrerir is also mentioned D. Evans states:

Öðrerir is, in Snorrí’s account, one of the three vessels in which the sacred mead is stored by Suttungr, and this is evidently also the sense it has in 140 below. Here it would seem rather to denote the mead itself; probably this was the original sense of the word, and its application to the vessel containing it is secondary, for it appears to be compounded from óðr ‘soul; poetry’ and hrérir, agent noun from hræra ‘to stir up’ […] thus, ‘stirrer-up of the soul (or, of poetry).’

Finally, in Vellekla, Einarr’s reference to Öðrerir seems to allude to the mead itself and not to the container:

Eisar vágr fyrir visa, verk Rægns mér hagna, þyr Öðreris alda, aldor hafs við fles galdra.

(Wave of time’s sea rushes before the prince. Rognir’s [Óðinn’s] deeds benefit me. Swell of Öðrerir pounds against song’s skerry [teeth].)

In spite of the disagreement over Öðrerir referring to the container or the contents (though Evans’ argument for it referring to the contents seems to have a more solid base), the evidence we gather from these fragments does not link the mead Öðrerir to the mead of poetry nor to Öðrerir, the container, that Snorri talks about in Skáldskaparmál.

The links between these references to Öðrerir, the passages involving Óðinn and the mead in Hávamál, and Snorri’s account of the mead of poetry seem to be due to a tendency among scholars to interpret Eddic poetry taking Snorri as a point of departure for their interpretation. We shall have to keep in mind that Snorri was not the transmitter of a unique corpus of ancient lore referring to a unified mythological belief, which was not possible in an oral culture covering such an extensive area as the Old

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433 Though it is stored in the three containers, Són, Boðn and Öðrerir by the dwarves Fjalarr and Galarr and not by Suttungr. See Skspm 57.
434 Evans, Commentary, p. 121.
435 Skspm 3.
436 Snorri Sturluson, Edda, ed. and trans. by Faulkes, p. 71.
437 As for the other two containers of the mead, Són and Boðn, mentioned by Snorri, Roberta Frank comments that “None of these container names is mentioned again in skaldic verse until the thirteenth century, when Snorri’s brother, Síghvatr Sturluson (ca. 1238), and Gizurr Þorvaldsson (ca. 1254) borrow two of the vat names [i.e. Són and Boðn] from Snorri’s handbook and use them in poetry kennings.” Frank, ‘Snorri and the Mead’, p. 161.
Norse religion did. Regarding this faith in the reliability of Snorri’s *Edda* as a decodifying tool for more ancient verse, I agree with Svava Jakobsdóttir in her criticism that

Most scholars and interpreters of *Hávamál* are confident that Snorri’s account is a reasonably reliable source concerning the relations between Gunnlöd and Öðinn, and that we may therefore refer to it to explain the more obscure aspects of *Hávamál* [...] The belief that sts. 104-110 tell how Öðinn acquires the mead by seducing Gunnlöd, even though there is in fact no evidence for it, is remarkably tenacious. Most scholars avail themselves of this explanation whenever the mead of poetry is mentioned, as if it were irrefutably proven, and yet neither account has been fully explained.439

This seems to apply not only to the way in which the Gunnlöd-Öðinn relationship has been approached, but also to the interpretation of the verses containing some elements that seem to allude to the mead of poetry recorded in Snorri’s *Edda*. Accordingly, Evans stretches the meaning of Öðrerir from being the ‘stirrer-up of the soul’ to being the ‘stirrer-up of poetry’. It is easy to see mead, or for that matter any other alcoholic beverage, as a ‘stirrer-up of the soul’, but to turn it into a ‘stirrer-up of poetry’ one would require Snorri’s account as a background. It seems that the mere mention of Öðrerir or a dyrr miqór tends to make scholars think about the mead of poetry. This might be due to the popularity of Snorri’s work.

In an earlier stage of the myth, Öðrerir might have denoted the mead itself. Later, it might have become associated with the gift of poetry, perhaps due to the connection with the main arena in which skalds recited their poems - the drinking halls. What we are contemplating in these fragments are, perhaps, several different stages in the development of one myth, and there is no need to unify them all in order to arrive at a single story which might have never existed in a consolidated form.

Let us proceed to the third occasion in which the myth of the mead is narrated. This occurs in the section of the *Hávamál* known as the Gnomic Poem, which, as

mentioned before, is considered to be among the oldest surviving pieces of Eddic poetry. The narrator in this section of the poem is Óðinn, and he tells the story in the following words:

11. - *Byrði betri*  *berrat maðr brauto at*
   *en sé manvit mikit;*
   *vegnest verrat  vegra hann velli at,*
   *en sé ofðrycia qls.*

(11. - No better burden can a man carry on the road than a store of common sense; worse journey-provisions can he not carry on the field than to become drunk on ale.)

12. - *Era svá gott,   sem gott qveda,*
   *qð alda sona;*
   *þvlat færa vet, er fleira dreccer,*
   *sins til gedð gumi.*

(12.- It is not so good, as good it is said to be, ale for the sons of men; because the less he knows, he who drinks more, about the mind of men.)

13. - *Ómninis hegri heitir   sá er yfir ælðrum þrumir,*
   *hanna stelr geði guma;*
   *þess fuglís fjaðróm  ec fjaðradr varc*
   *i garði Gunnlaðar.*

(13.- The heron of oblivion is called, that which hovers over the ale-drinking. He steals the minds of men; I was fettered in this bird's feathers (shape) at Gunnlað's court.)

14. - *Qlr ec varð,   varð ofrålvi,*
   *at ins fróða Fjalars;*
   *þvi er ælðr bæzt, at apið uf heimitir*
   *hverr sitt geð gumi.*

(14.- Drunk I was, I became more than drunk, at wise Fjalarr's place; the best thing about ale-drinking is when, afterwards, each man recovers his mind.)

In contrast to the other two versions of the myth, in this fragment Óðinn finds himself at the hall of a dwarf instead of that of a *Jǫtunn*. Fjalarr is mentioned among the dwarves in *Væluspá* 16 (he is also one of the dwarves who kills Kvasir and brews the mead of poetry out of his blood according to Snorri's account) and is also the name of a being, most probably a *Jǫtunn*, in *Hárbarðsljóð* 26. Turville-Petre comments that

440 Háv 11-14.
However the fragment could be interpreted in several different ways. It could refer to two different occasions in which Öðinn found himself under the influence of alcohol (once at the court of Gunnlöð, in stanza 13, and once at Fjalarr's, in stanza 14), as examples of his teaching about the negative effects of drinking in stanzas 11 and 12. Apart from the mention of Gunnlöð added to the myth of the mead of poetry as recounted in Skáldskaparmál and a probable (albeit unlikely) confusion between Fjalarr and Suttungr, there is nothing that links stanzas 13 and 14 except the moral context of the fragment about the disadvantages of the excessive consumption of alcohol. Seen in this way, this pair of stanzas would fit perfectly with both the preceding and following stanzas as two different examples of the ways in which a man can make a fool of himself.

This group of stanzas, in which the only references to Öðinn's drunkenness are made, seem to be in contradiction to the idea of the mead of poetry. First of all, in Hávamál's stanza 12 Öðinn introduces qlit as being something bad to consume and not very recommendable as it takes away men's wits, which is in opposition to the idea of the drink which confers wisdom and poetic diction. This statement seems to be supported by his own experience in stanzas 13 and 14, in which he becomes forgetful, as the óminnis hegri (heron of oblivion) takes over him. Also, the result of alcohol consumption is Öðinn's drunkenness and not the acquisition of wisdom. The fragment then ends by stating that the best of drinking is when men are able to recover their wits.

This is also in contrast with the enlightening beverage portrayed by Snorri, as the

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441 Turville-Petre, p. 37.
443 The fact that the drink in question is said to be ql and not mjöðr may be due either to metric and alliteration requisites that did not allow the poet to use the noun mjöðr or to the fact that the beverage being discussed is ql, thus the passage would not have any connections with the myth of mead.
beverage portrayed by Snorri has the ability to turn men into poets and scholars, while the one mentioned in Hávamál 14 seems to have the opposite effect: it makes men lose their minds. Regarding the contradiction between these stanzas and Snorri’s account, Oddgeir Hoftun comments that in stanza 14 “dette kan ha å gjøre med øl – eller mjøddrikking som ikke var kultisk, altså et svirelag der drikken ikke var brygget og viet som skaldedrikk eller til andre spesielt rituelle formal.”444 (This can be related with a mead or mead-drinking that was not cultic; therefore the brew drunk there was not brewed and given as a poetic-drink or was destined for another ritual activity.) On the same line of thought, Tove Lyngra says that the ale Óðinn talks about in stanza 12 “refereres til andre steder [and] må være av en mer profane karakter.”445 (refers to another episode [and] must be of a more profane character.) In any case, stanzas 11-14 must refer to a stage in the development of the myth of the gaining of alcoholic beverages in which they were not yet connected with wisdom, in which drinking led to a great hangover instead of to a great knowledge.

Seen in a more conventional way, these stanzas could also be interpreted as part of the myth of the mead of poetry. In order to do this one would have to overlook the fact that Fjalarr actually means Suttungr; that by drinking, in stanza 14, Óðinn becomes more than drunk (ófróðvi) instead of gaining wisdom from the ingestion of the brew (which is said to be ale instead of mead, as mead is never mentioned in the two stanzas) and; that in stanza 13 Óðinn is rendered witless and forgetful instead of being endowed with wisdom and poetic diction, as a result of drinking the ale (not mead) at Gunnlóa’s court. If we overlook these details, then we are left with the fact that in stanza 13 Óðinn is taken over by óminnis hegri, the heron of oblivion. This bird, as Ursula Dronke suggests, is usually used as a reference to drunkenness due both to its ecstatic

444 Hoftun, p. 265.
appearance while hunting and its vomiting as a way of defence and feeding its young. As the vomiting abilities of the bird and the mention of Gunnlqð in the same stanza are the only connections with the myth of the mead as recounted in Snorri’s Edda, I will leave the analysis of this fragment for the following section, so as to contrast it with Skáldskaparmál’s version of the myth.

3.1.3 - GAINING THE MEAD OF POETRY

The fourth, and youngest, account of the myth about gaining the mead was written by Snorri Sturluson in his Skáldskaparmál sometime in the early thirteenth century, though the oldest surviving manuscript is dated to the early fourteenth century. Snorri was acquainted with Hávamál and indeed quoted some verses of it in order to explain his rendering of the myth. According to Snorri, after the dwarves Fjalarr and Galarr brew the mead out of Kvasir’s blood they store it in the vessels named Óðrerir, Boðn and Són. As mentioned above, they go on a fishing trip with Gillingr (a Jqtunn) who accidentally drowns. Fjalarr kills his widow because he cannot stand her weeping and the dwarves offer Suttungr, Gillingr’s son, the mead of poetry as compensation. Suttungr takes the mead and puts it in a place called Hnitbjarg and sets Gunnlqð, his daughter, as its guardian. Snorri then explains that “Af pesu kállum vér skáldskap Kvasis blóð eða áverga drekku eða fylli eða nakkvars konar lág Óðreris eða Boðnar eða Sónar farstkost áverga [...] eða Suttunga mjóð eða Hnitbjargara lágér”. (Because of this we call poetry Kvasir’s blood or drink of dwarves or the content or some kind of liquid of Óðrerir or of Boðn or of Són, or dwarves’ transportation [...] or Suttungr’s mead or the liquid of Hnitbjarg.) This is the point at which both Snorri’s and

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447 The text in the oldest manuscript (De la Gardie) seems to have been greatly altered, thus most editions are based on the Codex Regius, dated to the first half of the fourteenth century, and believed to be the closest one to the original. See Anthony Faulkes, ‘Snorra Edda’, in Medieval Scandinavia, ed. by Pulsiano, pp. 600-602.

448 Sksmp 57.
Hávamál's 104-10 accounts are said to meet. Next we are told that Óðinn sets off on an expedition in order to steal the mead. He calls himself Bqlverkr (mischief-causer) and takes lodging with Baugi, Suttungr's brother, where he performs the work of nine slaves for a whole summer in exchange for one drink of the mead. Once the summer passes Óðinn and Baugi go to Suttungr to ask him for the drink but he refuses to give him even a single drop of it. So Óðinn produces an auger called Rati and drills a hole into the mountain (presumably Hnitbjarg) so he can go in after assuming the shape of a snake. Once in there, he goes to where Gunnlǫð is and stays with her for three nights, after which she allows him to drink three draughts of the mead. Óðinn empties each of the containers - Óðrerir, Són and Boðn - with each draught and then escapes assuming the shape of an eagle (arnarhamr). Then Suttungr adopts an eagle shape too, and chases him. When both eagles approach Ásgarðr, the Æsir set out in the yard an imprecise number of vat(s) where Óðinn "spýttı hann upp miðinum i kerin"449 (spat out the mead in the vats),450 but in the chase he realizes that Suttungr is getting close to him, so he releases part of the mead through his rear end. The mead he spits is collected "en Suttunga mjǫð gaf Óðinn Ásunum ok þeim mannnum er yrkja kunnu"451 (and Óðinn gave Suttungr's mead to the Æsir and to the men who have the knowledge to compose poetry) while the one he excreted is left for anyone to collect, and is called "skáldjífla hlut"452 (fool-poets' share).

In contrast to Hávamál 104-10, where the wooing of Gunnlǫð seems to be the main focus of the story, in Snorri's account the mead occupies a central role. Also, in the final chase, Suttungr's sole objective seems to be the recovery of the coveted mead which was not offered freely by him, and not avenging the sorrows of Gunnlǫð, as is the case in Hávamál 109 and 110. As a matter of fact, the mead of poetry occupies such

449 Skýpm G58, p. 5.
450 In spite of the fact that the verb is clearly "spýta" (spit) it is commonly assumed that Óðinn actually vomited the mead, as will be discussed below.
451 Skýpm G58, p. 5.
452 Skýpm G58, p. 5.
a focal role that Snorri forgets to tell us what happened to the *jötunn* once the pursuit came to an end because he concentrates only on telling the fate of the mead.

Snorri seems to have used a source very similar to *Hávamál* 104-10 in order to explain the myth. First, in Snorri's account Óðinn calls himself Bqlverkr in his expedition to gain the mead. The name, meaning 'mischief-causer', bears some resemblance to the results of his excursion in *Hávamál*, as in the poem he brings grief to the realm of the *Jötunr* with the beguiling of Gunnlǫð. There are three different reasons that may explain why Óðinn is called Bqlverkr in Snorri's account. First, it can be due to the re-use of *Hávamál* 109, where the *Jötunr* arrive at Óðinn's hall in order to find if the 'mischief-causer' was among the Æsir so that "*at bqlverki þeir spurðu*"⁴⁵³ (they ask for the 'mischief-causer'). In Old Norse manuscripts, it is very atypical to find capitalization, even in proper names. So, in the manuscript of the *Codex Regius* of the *Poetic Edda*, it is possible to read both ‘*at Bqlverki þeir spurðu* ’ and ‘*at bqlverki þeir spurðu*’. In the first instance, *Bqlverkr* would be unmistakeably a proper name for Óðinn. As a matter of fact, Óðinn lists ‘*Bqlverkr*’ as one of his names in *Grimnmál* 47. However, if we read ‘*bqlverkr*’ it can be interpreted as an noun, and thus the *Jötunr* could have arrived at the hall looking for the 'mischief-causer' and not for a specific person under that name. The fact that *Grimnmál* lists it as a personal name does not necessarily mean that they were looking for someone under that name, as the noun could have well been assigned to Óðinn at a later stage, perhaps as a result of his dealings with Gunnlǫð. Two different possibilities arise from this fact: Snorri had access to the poem either orally or in a written way. If it was transmitted orally, Snorri could have mistaken the adjective *bqlverkr* for a proper noun; if Snorri had access to a written version of the myth, he could have interpreted *bqlverkr* as *Bqlverkr*, turning the adjective into a name. The result, in any case, is the same as *bqlverkr* becomes a proper

⁴⁵³ *Háv* 109.
name in *Skáldskaparmál*. Regarding Snorri’s particular use (and creation of personal names) Roberta Frank argues that “the euhemeristic determination of Snorri and his predecessors to uncover meaning in *fornar kenningar* could have led to a proliferation of such mythological figures as Kvasir, Boðn, Són, and Gillingr and to stories lending them legitimacy."454

Frank’s argument leads to the second possible origin of *bqlverkr* as a personal name in *Skáldskaparmál*, namely the fact that Snorri created a name out of the noun. There is enough evidence to believe that the names of the mead-containers in his account of the myth were nouns raised to the status of proper names455 and there exists the possibility that he did the same with the noun *bqlverkr*. The same applies in the case of *rati*, the name of the auger Óðinn used in order to get into Hlinthjórg. In *Skáldskaparmál* we are told that the auger was called Rati, while in *Hávamál* 106 it is said that he used a nameless *rati* (auger) for the same purpose. Again, Snorri seems to have turned a noun into a proper name, just as he might have done with the name Kvasir, as discussed above.

Thus the soundest explanation is that in Snorri’s re-creation of the myth there were reminiscences of an earlier stage of the myth in which the stealing of the mead was considered an ‘evil’ act, which made Óðinn gain the name of *Bqlverkr*, instead of the heroic task which Snorri portrays.

### 3.2 - Drinking in Ásgardr

Among the drinking scenes portrayed in *Eddic* literature only a few take place in Ásgardr; so as to make one believe that there was no longstanding drinking tradition in the realm of the gods. There are, however, several occasions in which drinking and drinking customs in Ásgardr are hinted at in the texts. In this section I will try to draw

454 Frank, ‘Snorri and the Mead’, p. 158.
some meaning out of these fragments in order to find information about the drinking culture in the afterlife with the gods. These fragments can be grouped into those which make reference to the producers of the drink, to those who pour the drink, to those who drink it, and to the place in which the drinking takes place.

3.2.1- SOURCES OF ALCOHOL IN ÁSGARDR

According to the material preserved in both Eddas there seem to be only two sources for the alcohol that is consumed in Ásgardr. One is the previously mentioned mead that Óðinn stole from the Jótnar. The second source of mead is Heiðrún, a goat that lives on the roof of Valhöll, from whose udders enough mead flows to ensure that the einherjar are never thirsty. Heiðrún’s myth is preserved both in the Eddic poem Grimnismál and in Snorri’s Edda, though the account in this last source seems to be influenced by the one in Grimnismál. In Grimnismál, probably composed in its actual rendering at the end of the tenth century and preserved in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda and in the manuscript AM 748 I 4to, Óðinn tells us that:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Heiðrún} & \text{ heitir geit, er stendr hællo á Heriafóðrs} \\
\text{oc bít af Læradar limum;} \\
\text{scapker fylla} & \text{ hón skal ins scíra miðjar,} \\
\text{knáat sú veig vanaz.}^{456}
\end{align*}
\]

(Heiðrún is the name of the goat that stands over the hall of Heriafóðr [Óðinn] and bites from Læradar’s foliage; a vat she shall fill with bright mead, that beverage cannot be exhausted.)

Snorri’s account of the myth does not add much information to what we know from Grimnismál, as he tells us that “Geit sú er Heiðrún heitir stendr uppi á Valhöll ok bít barr af limum trés þess er mjók er nafnfrægt er Léraðr heitir, en ör spenum hennar rennr mjóðr só er hon fyllir skapor hvern dag. Þat er svá mikit at allir einherjar verða fullðrúknir af.”^{457} (There is a goat called Heiðrún that stands on top of Valhöll and bites the foliage of the tree that is very famous and that is called Léraðr, and from her udder mead flows so that she fills a vat each day. This is so much that all the einherjar can

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456 Grm 25.
457 Gylf 39, p. 33.
drink their fill from it.) Snorri seems to be paraphrasing the poem and all his rendering adds is the fact that this mead was intended for the consumption of the einherjar. So for the purposes of this section I will consider both accounts as the same version of the myth. Heiðrún also appears listed as a name for a goat in Skáldskaparmál, stanza 509. She makes a further appearance in the Eddic poem Hyndluljóð as a reference for Freyja’s lasciviousness. For the moment let us focus on the fact that there is, in Valhöll, a goat that produces an infinite amount of mead.

There have been several attempts to disentangle the etymology of the name Heiðrún, as it is unclear where the name is derived from. Old Norse heiðr can be interpreted as an adjective, meaning ‘bright’ or ‘cloudless’; as a masculine noun meaning ‘honour’, or as a feminine noun meaning ‘heath’. The first two readings could be applied to mead. As an adjective it could refer to mead as being bright, just as skírr (clear, bright, pure) is otherwise used to describe it. The meaning ‘honour’ could be also attached to mead, as being the drink of noblemen or as part of the honour of being with the einherjar drinking it in Valhöll. Thus, these two readings of the name would refer to heiðr as a quality of the product, not of the producer. The third reading, though, would make more reference to the goat itself than to the mead, as goats would be expected to graze on the heath.

Liberman argues that the first two possibilities are quite plausible, stating that heiðr would mean either “bright sky (then Heiðrún is a heavenly she-goat) [or...] clear

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458 In the chapters preceding Gylf 39 Snorri quotes several stanzas from Grm. In chapters 36 to 38 he quotes stanzas 38, 18, 19 and 20. In chapter 40 he quotes stanzas 23, 24 and 44. Thus, while creating this section of his book Snorri had the poem Grm as a background, which leads me to believe that his rendering of Heiðrún’s myth is just a paraphrase of Grm 25.

459 Liberman comments that in some manuscripts of Snorri’s Edda instead of mead Heiðrún is said to produce milk; see Anatoly Liberman, “The Origin of the Eddic Animal Names Heiðrún and Eikþyrnir”, General Linguistics, 28.1 (1988), 32-48 (p. 32). However, as he does not list the manuscripts in which this appears and none of the consulted editions of Snorri’s Edda mention this fact, it was impossible to confirm and analyze this fact.

460 IED, heiðr and OGNS, heiðr. See also IEW, heiðr and AEW, heiðr; they provide exactly the same translations as those in IED and OGNS.
used specifically about mead or milk, or it simply means 'sacrificial drink'".\textsuperscript{461} Even if these readings clarify the etymologies of the name Heioðrún, they leave us with the problem of the name-choice. As Liberman states:

Bugge was right in stating that on the face of it Heioðrún is a singularly inappropriate name for a goat. No other female animal in the Edda has a name ending in -rún [...] A giantess, a valkyrie, or a character from heroic poetry could have been called Heioðrún, but not a goat.\textsuperscript{462}

This is, taking into consideration considering that female names ending in -rún are usually those of Jqtunn-women and valkyries. Valkyries, whose function was among others to serve mead to the einherjar\textsuperscript{463}, can be somehow connected with a mead-providing goat while, based on the ending -rún, Else Mundal has argued that "Namnet skill seg ut ved at namneelementa ikke er slike som ein elles finn at i dei mytologiske dyrenamna, men derimot i personnamna, og då særskilt i mytologiske personnamn som har tilknyting til jotunverda."\textsuperscript{464} (the name differentiates itself because the name-elements are not like the ones one finds in the mythological animal-names, but on the contrary one finds them in personal names that have a connection with Jqtunheim.) As we will see, Heioðrún’s similarities to the Jqtnar seem to be more complex than her name-ending. However a third possibility arises, as John McKinnell has shown in his 2001 article "On Heiðr", the name Heiðr is attributed to vqlur (seeresses) who are invited to prophesy at feasts. One of the characteristics shared by most of these vqlur is that they "may be of an alien origin connected with the far north - a Lapp [...] or a giantess."\textsuperscript{465} Even though the aim of McKinnell’s article is to identify the narrator in Vqlursdá, his arguments cast some light on the fact that in Old Norse mentality the name Heiðr was associated with vqlur, Jqtunn-women or Lapps, and thus Heioðrún not only has another link with personal names but also with persons connected to magic, as was

\textsuperscript{461} Liberman, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{462} Liberman, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{463} On this role of the valkyries, see section 3.2.3.
the case of the Jqtnar. Accordingly, IEW explains the name Heidrún as “die eine rune besitzt, die hoch in ehren gehalten wird, d.h. die eine herrliche magische gabe hat”³⁴⁶ (the one who owns runes, is held in honour, i.e. who has a marvellous magical gift). AEW renders it as “die ein herrliches geheimnis besitzt”³⁴⁷ (she who possesses a marvellous secret). These definitions add to the interpretation of the goat as a being that possesses some magical gifts. Even if this is seen as reference to the religious or cultic use of mead, there are not enough elements to support such an opinion.

Léraðr, the tree from which Heiðrún grazes and which grows from Valhøll could be identified with the world-tree Yggdrasill. If such is the case then, while consuming it in order to quench the thirst of the einherjar, Heiðrún would be also contributing to its decay and therefore to Ragnarök. Mundal suggests that this situation is doubly grim as “den dystre bakgrunn for det lystige livet i Valhal er at for kvar sup mjød einherjane tek, drikk dei seg nærmere til Ragnarok.”³⁴⁸ (the gloomy background of this cheerful life in Valhøll is that for each draught of mead that the einherjar take, they drink themselves closer to Ragnarök.) In this case Heiðrún would also have a role similar to that of the Jqtnar, who sometimes collaborate with the Æsir but will also prompt and fight against them at Ragnarök.

The last appearance of Heiðrún in the Old Norse corpus occurs during the confrontation between Freyja and the dead Jqtnn-woman Hyndla in the Eddic poem Hyndluljóð. This poem, which is usually dated to the twelfth century and preserved only as part of the fourteenth-century Flateyjarbók, tells of Freyja’s journey to consult Hyndla in order to gain knowledge about the ancestry of her lover Óttarr and a drink of minnisql (memory ale) which will allow Óttarr to remember all the information that he is provided with. When Freyja asks the Jqtnn-woman for the drink she replies:

46. - hleypr þu, edlvina,  úti á náttom.

³⁴⁶ IEW, Heiðrún.
³⁴⁷ AEW, Heiðrún.
³⁴⁸ Mundal, p. 246.
It is interesting to note that not only Heidrún is the first simile that Hyndla finds to insult Freyja after being asked for alcohol, but also that the goat serves as an example of lasciviousness. Freyja’s erotic escapades are well known from sagas and Eddic literature, but Heidrún’s are not mentioned elsewhere. The goat’s behaviour could well be part of a now-lost myth but could also refer to the sexual patterns of goats, which mate at any time of the year, perhaps turning them into an example of lust. As is well known from saga literature, both the Jötnar and Jötunn-women are linked with a great sexual eagerness. On this Mundal comments that “forestillingane on det moralsk lauslepte [of Heidrún] knyter seg ikke berre til groderikdomsguðdomane, men også til jotumaktene. Om denne geita som beiter fredelag på taket til Valhall, skulle vise seg å vere ein representant for jotumaktene...”\(^{470}\) (the representation of the moral looseness [of Heidrún] does not have links only to fertility, but also to the Jötnar’s might. If this goat that bites peacefully at Valhalla’s roof should be interpreted as being a representative of the Jötnar’s might....)

Even if linking the mead-producing goat to the world of the Jötnar can seem far-fetched, there are several elements shared by both kinds of beings. The first and most important in this context is their role as alcohol-providers for Ásgarðr.\(^{471}\) But we should also take into account the fact that they are both connected with the coming of

\(^{469}\) Hdl 46-47.

\(^{470}\) Mundal, p. 242.

\(^{471}\) The role of the Jötnar as the Æsir’s main source of alcohol will be discussed in section 3.3.
Ragnarök and serve as examples of sexual proclivity. Also, if the root heidr in Heiðrún is the same as that of the vqlur’s names then they would also be linked with magical practices.472

Whether the goat is related to the Jqtnar or not is a question that might have no answer. But one shall bear in mind that the only attested external sources for alcohol in Ásgardr are the Jqtnar while Heiðrún is the only source of alcohol within Ásgardr. This might indicate a lack of brewing in the realm of the gods. This does not necessarily imply that the Æsir did not know how to brew, just that there is no evidence of brewing or the equipment needed for brewing among the gods. There is only one source that links the Æsir with brewing. This occurs in the previously mentioned late thirteenth- or early fourteenth century brewing competition in Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka,473 where the contestants request the help of the gods in order to produce the ql. Even if the Æsir contribute by adding their saliva to the dreg, it does not prove that the they knew how to brew; at most this episode can give us some ethnographic evidence about the contemporary practices involved in brewing, using the wild yeasts contained in saliva. This is the only episode in which the Æsir are actively involved in brewing, but as it forms part of a late saga and of an episode with a strong Christian view on marriage, we cannot consider it as a proof of an actual pre-Christian belief that the Æsir did know how to brew.

Even if we take as given that the Æsir did not master any brewing techniques, a question arises from Heiðrún’s endless mead-production: ‘why did Óðinn undertake a

472 There exists, however, the possibility that the goat’s name has a manifold meaning, as Liberman argues: “The form Heidrún concealed several highly appropriate puns. First of all it made one think of the sky (heid) and valkyries (-rún), i.e. of Valhalla. Secondly it evoked the idea of a sacrificial mead […] The root -rún, with a short vowel, had other ties with words for cattle. A wild, i.e. uncastrated, boar was called runi, presumably from renna, ‘be in heat’ […] It may be not for nothing that Heidrún got the reputation for running around with he-goats at night […] Finally it is hard to imagine that the poet who made up the name Heidrún did not hear that it sounded very much like the Latin word haedus ‘goat.’” Liberman, pp. 40-41.
473 Hálfl., p. 93.
journey to steal mead from the Jätnar if on his own roof he had such a goat as Heiðrún? Oddgeir Hoftun poses this question and comments that

(it can seem strange that Óinn must go through so much in order to obtain for the gods the mead that Suttungr had, while on the roof of his own Valhöll he had Heiðrún, who produced large amounts of mead. But this is not actually the myth about how Óinn got hold of mead, but it is the myth about how Óinn acquired wisdom for gods and men.)

Hoftun seems to be right in questioning the motivations of the journey if the result of such an expedition was only to gain mead, which was already abundant in Valhöll. We shall, however, remember that we are dealing with a mythology which did not follow a unique plot. Accordingly we shall not expect a system in which everything must follow a strict cause-effect and chronological order. It is indeed not clear why Óinn would set out on an expedition to gain just plain mead while he already had plenty of it at home. Hoftun argues that Óinn’s journey was due to the fact that Suttungr’s mead was one which conferred wisdom. Assuming that the original mead which Óinn stole from the Jätnar was indeed one capable of transmitting the gift of poetry, it would still not be clear why he would go through the pains of acquiring it while at home there was already a god of poetry, i.e. Bragi? Would it not be easier to ask Bragi to allow someone to become a poet? The explanation might be that mythologems, which are a set of repeated symbolical patterns, can have different roles and interpretations within the same system of beliefs. The question of ‘why Óinn crossed the world in order to steal the mead?’ may not have an actual answer if one follows the logic that he already owned mead and poetry in Ásgarðr. Perhaps Heiðrún’s myth belongs to a later or earlier stage in the development of Norse mythology; perhaps it belongs to a different tradition. In any case, myths do not necessarily have a logical explanation for the acts they describe.

474 Hoftun, p. 255.
475 On this topic see M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij, Myth: The Icelandic Sagas and Eddas, trans. by Mary P. Coote (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1982), pp. 46-68.
As for drinking within Ásgarðr, there seems to be plenty of evidence to prove that it occurred, even if within the Eddic texts we have only one scene in which drinking actually takes place in Ásgarðr.\textsuperscript{476} This involves Hrungnir, a \textit{Jqtunn} who arrives in Valhøll after chasing Óðinn. When he arrives at the hall "\textit{buðu Æsir honum til drykkju. Hann gekk i høllina ok bað fá sér drykkju [...] En er hann gerðisk drinkinn þá skorti eigi stór ord}"\textsuperscript{477} (the Æsir invited him to a drink. He went into the hall and asked to be served a drink [...] And when he became drunk then he did not lack big words) so that he acts insolently against the gods, and after several threats he "\textit{drekk lézk hann mundu alt Ása q}"\textsuperscript{478} (threatens that he will drink all the Æsir's ale). It is only at this point that the Æsir call upon Þórr to get rid of the \textit{Jqtunn}. This situation is in some ways similar to that of Óðinn going to Jötunheim in order to drink all of Suttungr's mead, perhaps attesting a feud between Æsir and Jótmar for the possession of alcoholic beverages.

3.2.2- DRINKING PLACES IN ÁSGARD

The Eddic poem \textit{Grimnismál} (stanzas 4-17) provides us with a list of the twelve or thirteen halls owned by the Æsir.\textsuperscript{479} Only in three of these halls do we find references to active drinking, though one cannot discount the likelihood that they were all actually drinking halls. Of these, it was mainly Valhøll that attracted the attention of the composers of Eddas and sagas, while drinking in the only other two halls in which the ingestion of alcohol is said to take place is limited to a mere reference. Of Sókkvábekkr it

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{476} In Snorri's \textit{Edda} three different drinking scenes within Ásgarðr are described; namely that of Gylfi visiting Valhøll as part of the frame-story in \textit{Gylfaginning}, that of Ægir in an unspecified hall in Ásgarðr as part of the frame-story in \textit{Skápm} and, finally that of Hrungnir (a \textit{Jqtunn}) in another unspecified hall in Ásgarðr. However, for the purposes of this chapter the first two scenes will not be taken into account, as they appear to be more Snorri's creation in order to provide his narrations with a frame-story than the actual transmission of a myth in which king Gylfi and Ægir actually visited the gods. Nevertheless, these scenes provide us with information about what Snorri did actually know about the drinking culture in the realm of the gods, as he might have intended to provide us with a 'realistic' account of how was it drunk among the gods. Furthermore, he might have extracted information from other myths (not transmitted in his \textit{Edda}) in order to create such scenes.
\item \textsuperscript{477} \textit{Skápm} 17, p. 20.
\item \textsuperscript{478} \textit{Skápm} 17, p. 20.
\item \textsuperscript{479} Namely Brúðheimr, owned by Þórr; Ýdalir, owned by Ullr; Álfheim, owned by Freyr; Valaskjálf, perhaps owned by Óðinn or by Vali (Simek, Rudolf, 1993, Valaskjálf); Sókkvábekkr, owned either by Saga, Óðinn or both; Valhøll owned by Óðinn; Brynhimeyr, owned by Pizzi; Breidablik, owned by Baldr; Himinbýggr, owned by Heimdall; Föllkvangr, owned by Freyja; Glitnir, owned by Forseti; Nóatún, owned by Njörðr and a probable (unnamed) hall owned by Viðarr.
\end{itemize}

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is only said that "þar þau Óðinn oc Saga dreccu um alla daga, / glaðr, or gullnom kerom."480 (there Óðinn and Sága / drink every day gladly from golden goblets) and of Himinbiþrg it is said: "þar varðr goda dreccr í væro ranni, / glaðr, inn góða miðr"481 (there the gods warder / gladly drinks the good mead in the large house.) From these passages we only learn that, in these halls, those who drink do it gladly; but nothing is told about the nature or origin of the drinks there consumed.

There seems to be evidence in the saga corpus for another drinking scene within Ásgarðr. Eyrbyggja saga contains a reference to a drinking scene which may have taken place within Prúðheimr, Þórr’s hall. However it is not described in detail. In it Þorsteinn þorskabitr, son of Þórolfr Mostarskegg – a great Þórr worshipper - is seen entering the otherworld and being greeted by his dead father. His entrance to the otherworld is attested by a shepherd who describes it in the following words:

hann sá, at fjallit lauskr upp norðan; hann sá inn i fjallit elda stóra ok heyrdi þangat mikinn glaum ok hornaskvið; ok er hann hlýddi, ef hann námí Bênkkur orðaskil, heyrdi hann, at þar var heilsat Þorsteini þorskabitr ok færnumum hans ok mælt, at hann skal sitja í qndvegi gegnt feðr sinum.482 (he saw that the mountain opened on the northern side, he saw great fires inside the mountain and heard a great merriment and noise of horns coming from there; and when he listened to check if he could perceive some conversation he heard that Þorsteinn þorskabitr and his men were being welcomed and said that he [Þorsteinn þorskabitr] should sit at the high-seat opposite to that of his father.)

This scene may reflect two different sets of beliefs. The first of these is that of an afterlife inside a mound or a mountain, as is the case of Helgafell, where Þorsteinn is being welcomed to a feast in the hereafter within Miðgarðr. The second possibility is that, since his father was a great Þórr worshipper and Þorsteinn himself was consecrated to that god at the moment of his birth, what the shepherd actually saw was a brief feasting scene within Þórr’s hall. If this is the case, we are presented with an afterlife in which drink and a social hierarchy – through the allotment of seating places - was commonplace within

480 Grm 7.
481 Grm 13.
482 Eb XI, p. 19.
Prúðheimr; indicating that at least Þórr’s hall was also a drinking hall, though with an unattested nature of the beverage consumed in it.

As mentioned above, only Valhøll attracted the attention of those who committed the Eddas and sagas to writing. This is may be due to the fact that this was Óðinn’s hall, who was the god of poetry and those who transmitted the information were probably poets themselves. It can also be due to the fact that Valhøll was a very honourable place to spend an afterlife, as those who went there were those killed in battle, which in a warrior society must have been considered as a highly esteemed afterlife. According to Grímnismál 8-9, Valhøll is located in a place called Glaðsheimr and it shines like gold. Spear-shafts are used as rafters, shields form its roof and are laid on the benches and there is a wolf on the western doors. However, in Valhøll’s appearance in stanzas 8-10 of Grímnismál nothing is said about drinking within it. This information is provided only in different scattered sections of other texts.

According to Snorri, Valhøll was a place where the most honourable dead went, and they had a drink that was fitting to their rank - mead. When in Gylfaginning Gylfi asks if the einherjar drank water in Valhøll, Óðinn replies:

Undarlíga sprýðu nú at Alfáðr mun bjóða til sin konungum eða jærlum eða qðrur riðisgnum ok muni gefa þeim vatn at drekka, ok þat veit trúu mín at margr kemr sá til Valhallar er dýrt mundi þikkjask kaupa vazdrykkin ef eigi veri betra fagnaðar þangat at víjja.⁴⁸³

(An extraordinary question you ask now, whether if All-father would invite to his place kings or earls or other powerful men and would give them water to drink, and I know by my faith that many that come to Valhalla would think that they have paid a high price to buy a drink of water if there were no better joys to be had)

This passage is followed by the description of Heiðrún and how she provides the einherjar with mead. From this passage we learn that mead (and Valhøll) was a pleasure worthy of kings, earls and other high-standing men, just as wine was to be considered later. An everlasting source of mead was bliss to die for. As a matter of fact,

⁴⁸³ Gylf39, p. 33.
fighting, drinking and eating seem to have been the only pleasures to be enjoyed in this hall. In Gylfaginning, Óðinn describes the daily activities of the einherjar in the following words: "Hvern dag þá er þeir hafa klæzk þá hervœða þeir sik ok ganga út í garðinn ok berjazk ok fellr hverr á annan. Pat er leikr þeira. Ok er líðr at dægurðarmáli þá riða þeir heim til Valhallar ok setjazk til drikkju." (Each day once they have got dressed they put on their armour and go out to the garth and fight and fell each other. That is their game. And when it gets near to dinner-time then they ride home to Valhöll and sit to drink.) Drinking and eating seem to have been the only activities held within the hall, while all the violent activities were conducted outside. Most probably the fighting took place outdoors due to the hall’s status as a gridastaðr (sanctuary), that is, a place where all forms of violence were banned. The only drink that was consumed in Valhöll, and apparently in all Åsgardr, was mead. This fact points towards the high social esteem of this beverage, which came to be considered an otherworldly drink, worthy only of the worthiest of dead men. There is however a reference to the consumption of wine. In Grímnismál, Óðinn states that: "En víð vin eitt vápngrˤfugr / Óðinn æ lifir." (and on wine alone / glorious in arms Óðinn lives.) This passage can be approached in three different ways. First we know that “wine was not a natural drink amongst the Germanic people.” Thus we can infer that wine, as an exotic drink, was the only drink fit to be drunk by the father of the gods, while the next beverage in the social scale (mead) was reserved for the einherjar. Second, taking into consideration that Scandinavia is far north of the grape frontier, one can infer that this mention of wine was a late non-native addition to the text made once the wine import to Scandinavia made it popular but still expensive enough as to be considered as ‘the food of Óðinn’. Finally, one cannot disregard the possibility that vin was used as a

484 Gylf/41, p. 34.
485 On Åsgardr as a gridastaðr, see section 3.3. As we shall see in Chapter 4, this perception of Valhöll as a sanctuary seems to have been the model for more earthly halls.
486 Grm 19.
487 Lowry, p. 8. Also see section 2.4 in this study.
poetic synonym for mead, just as ql or bjórr seem to be used in its place whenever alliteration or rhyme conventions require it. Thus the ‘food of Óðinn’ could be mead and not wine. An objection could be made by saying that just as sometimes mead is substituted by ql, bjórr and perhaps vin in poetry, it could also be done the other way around, thus mead could be used as a substitute for any of these other beverages. The possibility exists, and this substitution was most probably done in poetry. But when it comes to prose, where the conventions are not strict as to force the use of ‘poetic synonyms’, mead was not used as a substitute for another term and was held as the drink of highest esteem.

3.2.3- SERVING DRINKS IN ÁSGARÐR

If kings and earls expected to be greeted in Valhãll with the best of drinks, they also expected service according to their rank. This was provided by the valkyrjur.

While enumerating the names and roles of the different Ásynjur, Snorri apparently488 interrupts his account in order to state that “enn eru þær aðrar er þjóna skulu í Valhãll, bera drykkju ok gæta borðbúnaðar ok qlgagna.”489 (and there are other ones which should serve in Valhãll, bear drinks and take care of the table service and the drinking vessels490.) He then continues “þessar heita valkyrjur. Þær sendir Óðinn til hverrar orrostu. Þær kjósa feigð á menn ok ráða sigri.”491 (they are called valkyrjur. Óðinn sends them to every battle. They allot death to men and determine victory.) Maybe it is due to the fact that in Eddic literature there are no drinking scenes in Ásgarðr (apart from Hrungrir’s, where Freyja is the one that pours the drink to the

488 I say apparently, as from the context, the Valkyries appear to form part of the Ásynjur for two different reasons. First, after interrupting his listing of the Ásynjur in order to introduce the valkyries he says ‘enn eru þær aðrar’ (and there are other ones). This aðrar (other ones) seems to imply that the valkyries were ‘other’ Ásynjur. The second reason is that after the brief enumeration of the valkyries, he proceeds with his account of the Ásynjur’s origins, as if he had never interrupted the account. Maybe he did not interrupt the list; this inclusion of the valkyries within the female deities would explain why they do not have a myth attached to their origin, as most supernatural beings do in his Edda.
489 Gylf36, p. 30.
490 Even though qlgagna is translated as ‘drinking vessels’ it can be literally translated as ‘ql-vessels’.
491 Gylf36, p. 30.
that the valkyries never appear in their role as servers at Valhalla. In the poem
Grimnismál, we find another reference to valkyries as servers in Valhalla. In it, Öðinn
recites a series of stanzas (after drinking an unnamed liquid from a horn) in which he
provides the court of King Geirrød with knowledge about the realm of the Æsir, among
which is the following:

Hrist oc Mist     vil ec at mér horn beri,
Sceggiqld oc Scqgul,
HilÐ òc bruði,  Ñlqcc oc Herfiqur,
Gall oc Geirqul,
Randgríð oc Ráðgríð oc Reginleif,
þar berat einherirom qt.493

(Hrist and Mist I want to bear me a horn, Skeggiqld and Skqgul, Hildr and Brúðr, Hlqkk and Herfiqur,
Gqll and Geirqul, Randgríðr and Ráðgríðr and
Reginleif they bear ale to the einherjar)

Snorri quotes this stanza almost verbatim494 in his description of the valkyries’ activities
in Gylfaginning 36. But in the Eddas in general, the valkyrjur seem to be more
concerned about exercising their ‘chooser of the slain’ activities instead of serving the
einherjar. However, there are several other references to valkyrjur as drink bearers.

The eddic poem Eiriksmál composed (c. 960) in honour of Eiríkr blóðax and
preserved only in Fagrskinna, and only one (the first) stanza in Snorri’s
Skáldskaparmál, gives us a hint of how the drinking was organized at Valhalla. In the
first stanza, Öðinn wakes up from a dream and speaks:

Hvat er þat drauma? (kvad Óðinn) ek hugðumk fyr dag litlu
Valhøll rýðja       fyr vegnu fólki;
vakta ek einherja,  það ek upp risa
bekki at strá,  bjórker at leyðra,
valkyrjur vin bera,  sem við komi.495

(‘What is that dream?’ said Óðinn ‘I thought that soon before daybreak
/ I cleared Valhalla for the slain people. / I woke the einherjar up, I bade
them rise up, / to strew the benches, to clean the bjørr-cups, / [I bade]
the valkyrjur to carry vin as if a leader was coming.’)

492 This scene, where Freyja pours drinks for Hrugnir instead of having one of the valkyrjur doing it,
reinforces the idea that the valkyrjur were considered as being part of the Æsynjur.
493 Grm 36.
494 The only difference is that in the 6th line Snorri provides the name Geirahqð in the place of Geirqul.
  Rudolf Simek notes that Geirahqð “in several Eddie manuscripts of Grm 36 is found instead of Geirqul.
  (DNM, Geirahqð.)
495 Eksm 1.
The poem not only illustrates the role of the *valkyrjur* as wine bearers but also portrays the *einhaerjar* as janitors of the hall and as hosts of new guests. Another source attesting this role of the *valkyrjur* as drink-bearers is the Eddic poem *Sigrðrifumál*, preserved in the *Codex Regius* of the *Poetic Edda* and later incorporated in *Völusunga saga*, the prose version of the story. In the poem, the young hero Sigurðr wakens Sigrdrif, a valkyrie, and asks her to ‘teach him wisdom’. Her answer is in the form of alcohol:

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Björ færð ec þér, brynþings apaldr,
magni blandinn oc megintir;
fullr er hann liðr oc licnstafa,
göðra galdrar oc gamanrúna.496
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(Bjór I bring to you, tree of battle [warrior], / mixed with strength and great fame; / it is full of verses and comfort, / with good magic and merry talk.)

There seems to be just enough literary evidence for the *valkyrjur* serving as maids of warriors. However, their personal names bear etymologies linked more to their role as warriors than to that of drink-bearers. To my knowledge, there are no valkyrie-names which refer to drinking. Accordingly, the main literary role of the *valkyrjur* was that of the choosers of the slain, as their name indicates.

On some Gotlandic picture-stones, there are some illustrations that appear to make references to the entrance of a warrior to the otherworld. And in some of them the warrior is portrayed as being received by a woman who holds a drinking horn for him.

As we can see in the top panel of the Stenkyrka stone, (Figure 3.1) a warrior is being offered a drinking horn by a long-haired woman in his probable entrance to the otherworld. The scene is repeated in the top panel of the Tjängvide stone (Figure 3.2) and in the top panel of the Klinte stone (Figure 3.3) where a warrior, surrounded by other warriors and a dog is also greeted by a lady with a drinking horn. These scenes could be considered, as they traditionally are, as a warrior making his entrance to the otherworld and being welcomed by a *Valkyrie*. Even if these carvings antedate the period with which

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496 *Sr 5.*
we are concerned, we can well take them as a background for the religious beliefs of the Viking Age and its perception during the Scandinavian Middle Ages.

3.3- The Æsir's Quest for Alcohol Among the Jotnar

Apart from being the archetypal adversaries of Æsir and men, the Jotnar have several roles in Old Norse mythology. Jotunn-women usually marry or have sexual intercourse with the Æsir, while the males of the race struggle to gain control over the Ásynjur. They are also associated with origins and ends: Jotnar are, through Ymir, the origin of the world and they bring about its end at Ragnarök; also three Jotunn-women are associated with the end of the Golden Age. The Jotnar are also linked with wisdom and in a certain way they contribute to the wellbeing of the Æsir since, according to Snorri, it is a Jotunn who builds the walls of Ásgardr. In general we could say, with Lotte Motz, "the giant is in Scandinavian tradition above all the enemy of cosmic order." However, the Jotnar have another role, as the providers of alcohol and hosts of feasts. The best-known example of this last role is the previously discussed story of the theft of the mead.

It is quite noteworthy that most of the drinking scenes described at length, both in Snorri's Edda and in the mythological poems of the Poetic Edda, take place mainly among the Jotnar. In general, mead and feasts seem to be related to them and to their realm, Jötunheim, in particular. In this section, I will analyze the Eddic drinking scenes which take place outside Ásgardr with the intention to find out more information about the role of the Jotnar as alcohol-providers and feast-holders as well as their connection with brewing. I believe that the evidence shows that brewing was not known in Ásgardr;

497 Vsp 8.
498 See, for example, the eddic poems Vm and Hdl.
thus the Æsir had to harass the Jqtnar in order to have access to alcohol, as we have already seen in the previous analysis of the myths of the mead as recorded in Håvamál and in Snorri’s Edda.

Apart from the previously mentioned references in Håvamál, there are three mythological lays in the Poetic Edda in which drinking scenes are directly associated with the Jqtnar. Let us begin with the analysis of Hymiskviða, probably composed in the first half of the twelfth century. It relates the story of Þórr’s journey to Hymir’s hall with the purpose of obtaining a cauldron big enough for Ægir to brew ale for the Æsir. The Jqtunn Ægir, elsewhere known as Hlér or Gymir, and his wife Rán, one of the Ásynjur, were the Old Norse deities of the ocean. The poem opens with a feasting scene in the following words:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ár\ \text{valtivar} & \text{ veiðar námo}, \\
oct\ \text{sumblsamir} & \text{ áðr saðir yrði}, \\
hrista\ \text{teina} & \text{ oc á hlaut sá}, \\
\text{fundu ðeir at Ægis} & \text{ orkost hvera}.\quad\text{502}
\end{align*}
\]

(Once the gods took the product of their hunting and gathered in a banquet. Before they were satisfied they shook the twigs and saw the lot, and they found that there was no cauldron at Ægir’s.)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sat bergbúi} & \text{ barneitr fyr} \\
\text{mitg glicr megi} & \text{ miscorblinda}, \\
\text{let í augu} & \text{ Yggr barn í þrá:} \\
\text{þú scalt ásum} & \text{ oft sumbl gora!}\quad\text{503}
\end{align*}
\]

(The mountain-dweller sat happy as a child in front of them, very much like the son of the great mash-bender. Óðinn’s son [Þórr] looked into his eyes in defiance: ‘You shall often make feasts for the Æsir!’)

The last stanza of the poem clearly states that the feast was held at Ægir’s place, which also seems to be confirmed by the fact that Ægir was expected to provide the Æsir with brew and to have a cauldron with him. The conflict apparently begins when

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500 These are, namely Hym, Ls and Prk.
502 LexPoet renders qorkstr hvera as “rigeligt forråd, overflod” (ample choice, abundant) (LexPoet, qorkstr). ONP and OGNS do not list it. For my translation I follow the IED: “fundu þeir at Ægis orkost hvera” they found no cauldron by Ægir.” This translation confers the exact opposite meaning on the sentence. IED, orkostr.
503 Hym 1-2.
504 “En veir hverian vel skolo drekka / glór at Ægis eitt hqrmeitið” (and each winter we shall amply drink ale at Ægir’s) Hym 39. The meaning of the word hqrmeitið is unknown. See LexPoet, hqrmeitið.
the feasters run out of drink before they have had their fill of it. However, Ægir does not
give the impression of being concerned about the lack of brewing cauldrons and drink
for “qnn fekk íqtí / orðbæginn hálr.”505 (the quarrelsome men annoyed the Jqúnn.) He
seems to be quite happy about not having the means to provide alcohol and thus bring
the party to an end, for when the Æsir find out about the lack of cauldrons, his reaction
is said to be “sat bergbúi / barnteitr.”506 (the mountain dweller sat glad as a child.)
Ægir’s happiness may be due to the fact that he had the perfect excuse to send the
annoying Æsir back to Ásgarðr. However, the excuse does not seem to satisfy the Æsir
as Þórr, offended, looks him in the eye and tells him: “hú scalt ásom / opt sumbl
gora!”507 (You shall often make feasts for the Æsir!) These words give the impression of
being more a reminder of Ægir’s duties towards the Æsir than the imposition of a new
task on him. What Þórr seems to be doing is just reminding Ægir of his obligations and
letting him know that his excuses are not enough to break the status quo. His
responsibility has so far been to “often make feasts for the Æsir” and Þórr is just
ensuring that the tradition continues. Ægir might have been an excellent brewer in order
to incite the gods to choose him as a host for their partying and force him to brew for
them, even if this implied that Þórr had to undertake a long journey to fetch a brewing
cauldron, as happens later in the poem.

As a matter of fact, Ægir seems to have a strong connection with brewing. Of
the ten times he is mentioned in the Poetic Edda,508 nine are directly connected with his
role as a host of feasts. Snorri’s Edda depicts him in a similar role: “Ægir sótti heimboð
til Ásgarðs, en hann var búinn til heimferðar þá bað hann til sin Óðni ok þllum Ásum
á þriggja mánaða fresti.”509 (Ægir went to a feast in Asgarðr, and when he was about to
part and go back home then he invited Óðinn and all the Æsir to his place in three
months’ time.) Finally, when in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, Egil mentions him in his *Sonatorrek* he refers to the god of the sea as “qlsmiðr” (ale-smith).

Despite the fact that in Snorri’s *Edda* Ægir appears as a guest of the gods before hosting a party himself, in the *Poetic Edda* his role is always that of the host. In *Grimnismál*, just after revealing his identity at Geiðrór’s drinking hall Óðinn says: “qllom ásom pat skal inn koma / Ægis bekki á, Ægis drekko at.”⁵¹¹ (All the Æsir shall come to Ægir’s benches, to Ægir’s feast.) This makes Ægir’s hall sound like the regular place for the Æsir to feast, as it occurs in a context in which Óðinn is revealing his identity by demonstrating his knowledge of the world and by telling about the Æsir’s customs. The idea of the *Japtunn*’s hall as the usual place where the Æsir celebrate their feasts seems to be confirmed in the very last lines of *Hymiskviða* when, after fetching the cauldron Þórr re-affirms his initial statement about Ægir’s duty to host the Æsir’s feasts by stating “enn véar hverian vel scolo drecca / qlór at Ægis eitt hærmeitið.”⁵¹² (and always we shall amply drink ale at Ægir’s [?])⁵¹³ Even if it is not possible to make much sense out of *Hymiskviða* 39 or locate the poem at a certain point in mythical time, Ægir’s destiny as a (probably forced) host of feasts for the Æsir comes from the remaining occasions in which he appears in the *Poetic Edda*. These occur in *Lokasenna* (also called *Ægisdrekka* in paper manuscripts),⁵¹⁴ an Eddic poem that depicts one of Loki’s confrontations with the Æsir and the Elves. The dating of this lay has been the subject of much controversy, as, due to its satirical nature, it has been considered to be

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⁵¹⁰ *Eg* LXXVIII, p. 249.  
⁵¹¹ *Grm* 45.  
⁵¹² *Hym* 39.  
⁵¹³ The translation of this passage is difficult since this stanza is corrupt. *LexPoet*, tells us about ‘hármeitið’ that “ordet er forvansket og alle de foreståede rettelser lige uantagelige (LexPoet, hármeitið.)” (The word is deformed and all the proposed corrections are equally unacceptable). For ‘véar’ the *IED* states: “in Lex. Poet. Entered among the names of gods, but scarcely rightly so, for the Hým. 39 is corrupt; ‘véar skulu’ probably is ‘Véorr skylfi’... drekka eitt óldr, may W[éar]. (i.e. Thor) enjoy a banquet with Ægir!” (IED, véar).  
either an early and purely pagan poem or, for the same reason, a late and Christian poem mocking the pagan gods.\textsuperscript{515}

The action in \textit{Lokasenna} takes place during one of the feasts in \AE gir's hall. The prose preceding the verses in the \textit{Codex Regius} of the \textit{Poetic Edda} explains that this episode happens as part of the same celebration described in \textit{Hymiskvida}.\textsuperscript{516} However this does not seem plausible for the prose says that "\textit{Þórr kom eigi, hvat hann var i austrvegi}"\textsuperscript{517} (\textit{Þórr} did not come, because he was in the east), and if this was the continuation of the same feast described in \textit{Hymiskvida} \textit{Þórr} could not have been absent, travelling in the east, since he had just brought the cauldron and stated that he (\textit{Þórr}) should always enjoy \AE gir's ale. A sudden trip to the east would not make any sense. Carolyne Larrington, while trying to explain Loki's entrance to \AE gir's hall, says that "the prose introduction seems to misunderstand the poem."\textsuperscript{518} This idea could also apply to the misunderstanding of the date at which the party took place. The most probable explanation for these contradictions is that the editor of \textit{Lokasenna} was trying to unify two different stories about two different occasions in which the \AE sir were drinking at \AE gir's or that he was trying to bring together two different traditions about the events at the same feast. As the evidence in the sources points to either two different stories or two different myths I will consider the feasts in \textit{Lokasenna} and \textit{Hymiskvida} as being different occurrences of drinking at \AE gir's hall.

The feast described in \textit{Lokasenna} shows some similarities with the one mentioned in \textit{Skáldskaparmál} 33. In both accounts \textit{Þórr} is absent, as Snorri tells that '\textit{Þórr var eigi þar. Hann var farinn i Austrveg at drepa tróll}’\textsuperscript{519} (\textit{Þórr} was not there. He

\textsuperscript{515} For a further analysis of the dating of the poem and its pre-Christian and Christian elements see Sørensen, 'Loki's Senna', pp. 239-59.

\textsuperscript{516} \AE gir, er qbro naf<i>h</i>yt Gymir, hann hafði búit ásom ql, þá er hann hafði fengit ketil inn mikla, sem nú er sagt. (\AE gir, who is also called Gymir, he had brewed ale for the \AE sir when he had got the great cauldron, as it was just told.) \textit{Ls} 'Prologue'.

\textsuperscript{517} 'Loki's Quarrel', trans. by Carolyne Larrington, in \textit{The Poetic Edda} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 84-96 (p. 84).

\textsuperscript{518} \textit{Skspmn} 33, p. 40.
had gone to the east to kill trolls.) and *Lokasenna* reports that “Þórr kom eigi, þvít hann var i austrvegi.” (Þórr did not come, because he was in the east.) Both sources comment about the quality of the service at the hall, but they do so in a different way. In *Lokasenna* it is said that “menn lofðo miíc, hverso góðir þiðnustommenn Ægis vóro.” *(People praised much how good Ægir’s servants were.) These servants are also mentioned by Snorri, and in both accounts it is said that one of them is murdered by Loki. However, in *Lokasenna* it is said that Loki killed him because he was envious, while in Snorri’s text the murder happens after Loki’s quarrel with the Æsir (and not before, as in *Lokasenna*) and there is no reason given for it. However, in spite of the presence of servants, in Snorri the service is of a rather supernatural character, as “at þeirri veizlu vannsk alt sjálft, þæði vist ok qi ok qll reída er til veizlunnar þurfí.” *(at that feast everything served itself, both the food and ale and all the utensils that were needed for the feast.) From this we can infer that Snorri was mixing two different variants of the myth: one in which the servants are so good that Loki murders one of them and another in which servants appear to be unnecessary, as everything served itself. In short, what we can deduce from these divergences is that there seems to be a well established idea about the gods drinking at Ægir’s hall, or that we are being misled by the many different variants that might have been preserved about the same feast.

If this last case is true and we are looking at several different variants of the same myth, we can then gather that it was a very important feast (and myth) as to lead to several different traditions around it. But why would this particular feast be so important as to be recorded in many variants? As Preben Meulengracht Sørensen suggests, this feasting scene might have been perceived as the very last one before

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520 Ls ‘Prologue’.
521 *Skspm* 33, p. 41.
Ragnarök, as it is set in a frame of time between the death of Baldr and the capture of Loki. Also, Loki’s final words in Lokasenna point towards this idea:

\[
\text{Ql gorðir þú, Ægir, en þá aldri munt }
\text{siðan sumbl um gora; en hér inni er,}
\text{eiga þin qll, leiki yfir logi,}
\text{oc brenni þér á baki.} \quad \text{(You brewed Ql, Ægir, but you will never again host a feast. All your possessions that are in here, may fire play with them, and may your back be burnt.)}
\]

Loki’s words not only imply that the drinking tradition at Ægir’s hall has come to an end for reasons we will see below but also, that in mentioning the end of all the feasters by fire, Loki evokes an image of Ragnarök, when Surtr will burn the world. This idea of holding a feast before battle is in agreement with examples from other literary sources. See Chapter 4.3.

But, why does Loki emphasise that Ægir will not be able to hold more feasts? This might also be related to Loki’s motivations to rush into the feast and incite the Æsir to violence by insulting them. Ægir’s drinking hall is described as “griðastaðr mikill” (a great sanctuary) which means that it was a place of inviolable peace. The poem has plenty of references to the fact that the hall is a sanctuary, perhaps as an explanation for why the gods do not attack Loki. We may find the reason for this behaviour in Bragi’s speech:

\[
\text{Veit ec, ef fjór útan verac, svá sem fjór innan enc }
\text{Ægis hqll um kominn,}
\text{hqfuo Pitt ba?ra }
\text{bæra ec i hendi mér.} \quad \text{(I know that if I was outside, just as now I am inside Ægir’s hall at the moment, I would carry your head in my hand.)}
\]

Other gods react in a similar way in what seems to be an effort not to defile the place. Þönn asks Bragi “at þú Loca / qveðira lastastqfom Ægis hqllo í” (that you shall not say insulting words to Loki in Ægir’s hall.) and when she confronts Loki she stresses

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523 Ls 65.
524 This idea of holding a feast before battle is in agreement with examples from other literary sources. See Chapter 4.3.
526 Ls ‘Prologue’, “A great sanctuary”. Literally “Place of holy peace”. This might well reflect the idea(l) of the drinking halls at the time the prose passage was written.
527 Ls 14.
528 Ls 16.
that "Loca ec vgeca lastastqfin / Ægis hñllo i". (I don’t say insulting words to Loki in Ægir’s hall). The formula lastastqfin Ægis hñllo i (insulting words in Ægir’s hall) is repeated on several occasions and stresses the fear of the insulting words. As Philip Anderson points out “repetition of lines and phrases serves to emphasise particular points and give an indication of what the poet finds important about the speaker.” His argument is about the use of the word ‘lastastqfin’, but I believe that, over all, the poet is highlighting not the words themselves but the fact that they may be articulated inside Ægir’s hall, and thus defile the grïðastaðr by breaking the peace even in a verbal sense. In the end, the grïðastaðr is defiled and it ends up losing its holiness. Loki’s last stanza would appear as a boast of his triumph, by stating that Ægir will not be able to hold more feasts and that they all will be consumed by fire. I would like to draw attention to the first half of the stanza. “Qþ gorðir þú, Ægir, en þú aldri munt / sidan sumbl um gora” (You brewed ale, Ægir, but you will never again host a feast.) implies that Ægir brewed ale and held parties more than once. But, why won’t Ægir continue his habit of holding feasts? The proximity of Ragnarök, as Anderson points, may be an explanation for this. However, we know also that the grïðastaðr had been defiled, not only by the exchange of words between the gods, but also because Loki had killed Fimafengr, one of Ægir’s servants, inside the hall. Therefore the sanctuary has lost its holiness, and whatever (cultic) feasts took place there could not be celebrated anymore, at least not in Ægir’s defiled hall.

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529 Ls 18.
531 Gylf 34 gives us a clue of the ways in which a grïðastaðr could be defiled: svá mikils virðu godin vé sin ok grïðastaði at eigi vîluðu þau saurgra þá með blöði úlfins þott svá segi spærnar at hann mun verða at bana Óðni. (Gylf 34, p. 29.) (so greatly the gods valued their sanctuary and place of inviolability that they did not want to spoil it with the blood of the wolf, even though the prophesy says that he will be the death of Óðinn.)
532 Anderson, 148.
In Viking and Medieval Iceland and Norway, drinking halls had an important religious and cultic role as places in which society was shaped.\textsuperscript{533} Also, the events at this particular feast among the gods will help us to interpret some reenactments of the senna and drinking matches in other literary sources.\textsuperscript{534} Meanwhile let us focus on the fact that Åegir's hall was considered as a gridastaðr by the gods and this would imply that they consider it as a place apt for feasting. The only other gridastaðr mentioned in the Eddas is Ásgarðr.

Going back to the Jótnar as alcohol providers, the instances we have presented so far can prove only that the Æsir had a certain predilection for feasting in Åegir's hall. But this does not necessarily point to a connection between the Jótnar and mead, ale or feasting. There are, however, some other instances among the Eddic poems that indicate that mead or ale are an exclusive possession or attribute of the Jótnar. In Hyndluljóð, for example, once Freyja has obtained all the information that she needed from Hyndla, a Jótn-un-woman, she asks her for 'memory-ale':

\textit{Ber þú minnisql minom gelti, 
svát hann òll muni ord at tina, 
þessar ræðo.}\textsuperscript{535}

(Give memory òll to my boar / so that he all remembers, words to recount / from this conversation)

We are not told what kind of memory ale\textsuperscript{536} this is, nor why it is in the possession of the Jótn-un-woman. Whatever its origins and history are, the ale does not belong to the Æsir, and they cannot produce something similar; if they could, Freyja would not need make a journey in order to wake a dead Jótn-woman and ask for it. Whatever its origins and history are, it must be a precious beverage as the mere request for some triggers Hyndla's anger. When Freyja questions her about different topics Hyndla answers, if not willingly, at least politely, but as soon as the Jótnun contemplates the

\textsuperscript{533} Drinking halls will be analyzed in Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{534} Drinking matches will be discussed in Chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{535} Hind 45.
\textsuperscript{536} As we will see in Chapter 7, in literature ale is related to memory loss, especially in the cases in which it is a magical concoction.
possibility of losing some of the minnisqñ she answers "snúðu burt heðan!" (get away from here!) Her other responses are to threaten Freyja with not letting her leave the place and poisoning the ale.

In Skírnismál, Gerðr, a Jótunn-woman, offers some mead to Skírnir as a sign of welcome. But the mead that she has to offer does not seem to be a very special one, even if she calls it maerr mjǫðr (famous mead) and, later, when she has betrothed herself to Freyr she calls it forn mjǫðr (ancient mead) when toasting. As mentioned before, these adjectives seem to be the result of poetic convention rather than implying that the mead is a special one. It also does not seem to be a special kind of mead due to the willingness and ease with which she offers it.

It is quite noteworthy that Gerðr's father is called Gymir, which happens to be one of Ægir's names. A further parallel between Gymir-Ægir and Gymir is that both of them own a maerr mjǫðr (famous mead). The texts, however, do not make explicit if they are the same Jótunn, though everything else suggests that they are not. As for their place of abode we know that Gymir lives in Jötunheim as the prose preceding stanza 11 in Skírnismál tells us. On the other hand we don't know where Gymir-Ægir lives. However, due to his role as lord of the ocean his hall is most probably in the sea and not in Jötunheim.

What we know so far is that Gymir is the owner of ancient mead, while Ægir produces a certain kind of ale that is a favourite among the gods and which the Æsir seem to prefer to the mead produced by Heiðrún. The most probable explanation is that

537 Hyndluljóð 46.
538 This place might be Jötunheim, or, more probably Hel, one realm of the dead, which is sometimes visited to get information. This last supposition might be reinforced by the fact that Freyja's initial words to Hyndla are "Yaki, mar mejjal!" (Hdl 1), "Wake up, maid of maids!"
539 Skm 16.
540 Skm 37.
541 Gerðr "var Gymis dōttir, jótuna ættar ok Aurboðu" (was Gymir's daughter, of the Jótunar and Aurboða) while Gymir-Ægir was married to Rán and their daughters were the waves. Thus, the only possibility to equate Gymir, Gerðr's father, with Gymir-Ægir is that Gymir-Ægir conceived her with Aurboða out of wedlock.
we have one tradition that splits into two: the tradition of Gymir as owner of mead and
the tradition of Gymir-Ægir as a master brewer and host of feasts.

Finally, the last drinking scene in Jötunheim is that in Prymskvíða, when Þórr
travels there in disguise in order to recover his hammer. This scene describes what a
wedding feast would be like among the Jötunar.\footnote{Wedding feasts will be studied in chapter 5.1.} In this case, however, it is only said
that mead is served in large amounts.\footnote{Prk 22-25.}

From what we can gather from the sources, it appears that the Æsir do not know
how to brew. This may explain why they terrorize the Jötunar in their quest for alcoholic
beverages. Not a single Æsir is associated to the production of alcohol, even though it is
a very important product for them! Their only sources for these beverages are Heiðrún
and the Jötunar. These last may be related with feasting and eating due to the fact that
the Old Norse noun Jötunn is “perhaps related with the verb eta (to eat), a supposition
strengthened by the cognate Old English term "eoten" and Middle English "ettin."\footnote{DNML, "jötunn."}

The idea about the lack of brewing in Ásgarðr seems to be reinforced by the
Eddic poem Hymiskvíða. When in the poem Þórr is sent to fetch a cauldron for Ægir to
brew in, the Æsir do not have any idea of where to find one. Instead of going to the
dwarves so they can forge one, Týr decides to resort to Hymir, another Jötunn, in order
to get one because he has “móðugr, ketil, / rúmrugdóinn hver, rastar diúpan.”\footnote{Hym 5. ‘Rqst’ as ‘mile’ is used metaphorically, only to express a great depth, but not necessarily a mile.} (a
gigantic kettle, of great capacity, / a mile deep) This shows that the Æsir did not have a
brewing cauldron of their own (or at least not one big enough as to brew mead for them
all) for if they did Þórr would not have been obliged to make such a long journey when
he could just have gone home to fetch their own. Thus, they did not brew or at least not
for feasts. Accordingly, whenever the Æsir need to get mead, ale or brews in general, as
well as the means to brew them, the first option is to resort to the Jötunar.

\footnote{\textit{Prk} 22-25.}
3.4. – Conclusion

As we can see, there seem to be several different myths about the way in which gods and men gained access to alcohol as well as about the way in which alcohol was perceived. The myths about Óðinn gaining the mead sometimes refer to the brew as an intoxicating one and on other occasions as being the source of wisdom and poetic diction. However the earlier stages of the myth of the mead seem to refer to the way in which alcohol was acquired by the gods and men and not to a particular mead which conferred a particular kind of knowledge. The misunderstanding of the sources may be due to the fact that most scholars tend to base their analysis of the different sources of the myth on Snorri’s rendering or to the poetical convention surrounding the use of the word *mjǫðr*, which tends to attach an adjective to the noun.

The origins of mead (and perhaps of brewing) are also manifold. The creation of Kvasir and the mead of poetry appear only in Snorri’s texts and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the myth of Kvasir was the result of Snorri’s misinterpretation of a kenning. There are many links between mead and poetry in skaldic poetry; however, in the mythological poems of the Poetic Edda there seems to be no connection between alcohol and wisdom. On the contrary, in Eddic poetry, mead is portrayed as a drink that takes men’s wits away. The other possible origin of brewing is either the dwarves or the *Jótnar*, for the sources seem to imply that the *Æsir* did not know how to brew. Therefore we have several different stories telling about the pains some of the *Æsir* had to endure to get access to brews. Even the main source of mead in Valhöll – Heiðrún - seems to have connections with the *Jótnar*.

Finally, the fact that the *Æsir* are portrayed as engaged in a constant quest for alcohol, and the fact that endless mead and endless food are considered the main attractions of the most reputed of the afterlife dwellings, reflects the actual difficulties
that men had in obtaining these products. As we have already seen in chapter 2, prices and availability meant that alcoholic beverages were not easy to obtain. This scarcity seems to have been extrapolated to the world of the gods who, just as the Norsemen, also had to struggle in order to get hold of alcoholic drinks.
CHAPTER 4: DRINKING PLACES: **SKÁLAR, HALLAR, SKYTNINGAR AND HIJUKÓLFAR AND OTHER DRINKING LOCATIONS**

4.1- **HALLAR AND SKÁLAR**

Most of the wedding, funeral, seasonal and other feasts that will be discussed in Chapter 5 were certainly celebrated in drinking halls instead of in skytningar\(^{546}\) or out in the open. After all, the halls were buildings (or part of buildings) whose most important role was to provide a place for the king or chieftain to gather his followers in order celebrate. However, the halls were not used exclusively for feasting purposes. As Preben Meulengracht Sørensen puts it, “these were the places which formed the framework of domestic life in the Viking Age, of work and rest, entertainment, banquets and festivity – practically all manifestations of peaceful human intercourse.”\(^{547}\) In a certain way we could say with Stephen Pollington that the hall was “a theatre, a church, a court, a town-hall, a community centre and a pub.”\(^{548}\) However, during the largest part of the year the hall was used, as any other room or building in the farm, to perform daily activities. For example, at the chieftain’s house in Borg, in Lofoten, “room C is interpreted as having two main functions; during most of the year it was an ordinary living room, but on special occasions it functioned as a ‘banqueting hall’ in which the chieftain’s great feasts took place.”\(^{549}\) These feasts could have been of a secular or of a religious nature – as seems to be attested by the large amount of guldgubber\(^{550}\) found at the site. Halls were multipurpose rooms (either attached to or separated from the main building) but for the purpose of this analysis I will study only those occasions on which they were

\(^{546}\) Skytningar and hjukólfar will be discussed in section 4.2.


\(^{548}\) Pollington, p. 10.


\(^{550}\) Guldgubber are small gold-foil male and female stamped figures found in sites across Scandinavia and believed to have a religious connotation. There is no English translation for this term.
used to hold feasts, leaving aside the religious and/or domestic activities that took part in them most of the time.

In order to begin this study it is necessary to consider one of the main symbolic roles of halls, namely, the role they played in the display and preservation of power. The hall was the place where the chieftain exercised his authority. It was here, and mostly during feasts, that the chieftain created and reaffirmed his power,\textsuperscript{551} where he gathered his followers, where he created and strengthened his alliances by "the giving of gifts, the bestowal of honours, the granting of land. It [the hall] is both the starting point and culmination of the most significant communal rituals, judgements, deliberations and celebrations and thus is a special, even holy, place which the unworthy are not to approach."\textsuperscript{552} Hence, I have reserved all these power-related aspects of drinking halls for the final chapters of this study, where the relationship between drinking and power will be studied.

The two most common Old Norse words for halls are \textit{skåli} and \textit{halla}. Jan de Vries defines the term \textit{halla} simply as "\textit{halle}"\textsuperscript{553} (hall) while Alexander Jóhannesson states that it is a "\textit{grosses haus}"\textsuperscript{554} (great house). "According to Stefan Brink the word 'hall', \textit{halla} is possibly a loan from West Germanic language, maybe first adopted in the skaldic language."\textsuperscript{555} However, in the written sources the word \textit{halla} is used "only of a king’s or earl’s hall, whereas a private dwelling is called a \textit{skåli}, \textit{eldhus}."\textsuperscript{556} \textit{Halla} is also used to name the different drinking halls of the \textit{Æsir} and of the \textit{Jotnar}. \textit{Skáli} can be translated as "\textit{scheune; trinkhalle}"\textsuperscript{557} (barn; drinking hall) or as a "\textit{hütte, schlafzimmer, saal, vordiele}"\textsuperscript{558} (hut, bed chamber, hall, porch). This distinction in the naming of the halls of nobles and those of farmers imposes also a geographical division as both

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{551} The relationship between power and alcohol will be studied in Chapter 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{552} Enright, p. 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{553} \textit{AEW}, \textit{halla}.
  \item \textsuperscript{554} \textit{IEW}, 242.
  \item \textsuperscript{555} Sorensen, ‘The Hall’, p. 268.
  \item \textsuperscript{556} \textit{IED}, \textit{halla}.
  \item \textsuperscript{557} \textit{AEW}, \textit{skáli}.
  \item \textsuperscript{558} \textit{IEW}, 815.
\end{itemize}
wooden and stone hallar were to be found only in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, the British Isles, Permia, Bjarmaland, Garðariki and, in general, in countries with a monarchy; but none of the halls of the Norwegian landholders or of the Icelandic godar and land-owning farmers were to be named hól. In other words, the literary sources make a geographical division in the naming of the building, even if there were no major architectural differences between them. Only skálar were to be found in Iceland, but not only there, as the halls of non-noble landholders in other countries were called by the same name. Perhaps the difference in the naming of these rooms/buildings comes from the fact that the hallar, belonging to the royalty, were mainly used as drinking halls, while the farmers and petty-king’s/chieftains’ skálar were multipurpose rooms, which rarely held feasts and were used more often as a sleeping room or as a place to shelter cattle or other mundane activities.

The earliest Viking Age hallar were rooms, such as Room C in Borg. That is, they formed part of the chieftain’s house; (see figures 4.1 and 4.2) but later, when the monarchy became better established and the king’s authority and power increased, they became the room in which the king held his court as well as his banquets in a more regular basis. Such is the case of King Hákon Hákonsson’s hall, (see figure 4.3) in Bergen. This early thirteenth-century stone construction seems to differentiate the areas devoted to the King’s political activities and feasts from those devoted to ordinary eating and/or sleeping. The construction of Hákon’s hall began around 1217 but “i 1247 var det bare én steinbygning i kongsgarden” (in 1247 there was only one stone building in the king’s garth). Then, in 1261, “ble begge hallene for første gang bygg som i dag” (the hall was first built as it stands today). This new construction differentiated social spaces. Accordingly, in the basement there is a large area devoted

559 Other words used to name halls are stofa, eldhús, sal, rann.
560 Rognvald Rocher Nielsen, Bergenhus og dets Festningsverker, Foreningen Håkonshallens Venner (Bergen: John Griegs Boktrykkeri, no date), pp 14-15.
561 Rocher Nielsen, p. 15.
mainly to eating in a rather mundane way (and most probably reserved for the nourishing of low status guests at his fortress) while the King’s hall, court and high seat were located on the first floor. This was not the case in Iceland, where there was no central authority and the skálar remained throughout the Middle Ages as a multipurpose room or building of the settlement where different members of the society ate and feasted all-together and where the chieftain also performed his political activities.

Since skálar were used for various activities, it was necessary for them to have movable benches and furniture in general. When the time for a feast arrived the skáli was decorated in order to display the chieftain’s or owner’s high-status and symbolic possessions, such as weapons, drinking vessels and tapestries. Also, in case of need, any large building could play the role of a skáli. For example, in Egils saga we are told that Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson prepares a feast for King Haraldr hárfagri at his farm in Northern Norway and must improvise a hall because his skáli is not large enough to accommodate both the King’s and his own retinues.

翦órólfur hjó veizlu í möti konungi ok lagði á kostnað mikinn; var þat ökveðit, nær konungr skyldi þar koma. Þórólfur bað þangat fjalla manns ok hafði þar allt þit besta mannval, þat er kostr var. Konungr hafði nær þríðu hundrúð manna, er hann kom til veizlunnar, en Þórólfur hafði fyrir þimm hundrúð manna. Þórólfur hafði látit þúa kornhlæðu mikla, er þar var, ok látit leggja bekkir í ok lét þar drekkja, þvi at þar var engi sifja svá mikil, er þat sjólmenni mettt alltí inni vera; þar varu ok festir skildir umhverfis í húsinu.562

(Þórólfur prepared a feast to welcome the king and he ran into great expenses; it was fixed to take place when the king arrived. Þórólfur invited a large number of guests, including all the best choice of people, those who were the leading men. The king had a retinue of nearly three hundred men when he arrived to the feast and Þórólfur had a retinue of five hundred men.563 Þórólfur had prepared a great barn that was there and had benches set in it. He arranged for the drinking to take place in there because there was no room large enough to accommodate all the men. Shields were fastened all around the building.)

Similarly, in Njáls saga we read that “Síðan bað Þóskuldr þeim heim í Ossabæ; hann hafði þar marga fyrirbóðsmenn ok mikit sjólmenni. Hann hafði látit taka ofan skála

562 Eg XI, p. 28-29.
563 That is, the king had a retinue of around 360 men, while Þórólfur’s retinue was of six hundred men.
sinn, en hann átti útibúr þrjú, ok váru þau búin at hvíla l. Þeir koma allir til veizlu, sem hann hafði bodið; veizlan för allvel fram.\textsuperscript{564} (Then Hóskuldhr invited them to his home in Ossabær; he had a large number of feast-guests and a large company. He had torn down his hall, but he had three store-houses, and they were arranged for sleeping in.\textsuperscript{565} Everyone whom he had invited attended the feast; the feast went very well.)

Even though these episodes represent quite unusual events, they illustrate how even a barn or a store-room could actually be decorated and dignified to receive a king or a large number of guests. Perhaps this honour did not come from the building itself, but from the actual magnificence of the host as well as from the decoration of the building. So, this passage emphasizes Þórólfr’s expenses in providing an outstanding feast as well as his efforts to decorate the barn. After all,

\begin{quote}
one common feature of buildings interpreted as halls is that they generally have a large central open space, ideal for use as an assembly room.\textsuperscript{566}
\end{quote}

In general any building with a large central open space could function as a hall, its prestige coming mainly from the power of the chieftain who owned the building, from the central location of the hall itself, and most probably from the ornamentation of the hall. Even though any large building could serve as a hall, for the purposes of this study we will understand a hall in the terms in which Jenny Walker defines it, which is “as a monumental, ideologically expressive building with associated high-status artefacts.”\textsuperscript{567}

Our sources do not pay much attention to the description and outline of the halls in which the action takes place. But the saga writers show an especial interest in the portrayal of the different power relationships that are played out within the hall, such as

\textsuperscript{564} N\ý CIX, p. 276-77.
\textsuperscript{565} Halls were commonly used as sleeping quarters for the guests once the feast came to an end for the night. This was due to the lack of space needed to accommodate a large number of visitors.
\textsuperscript{566} Pollington, p. 71.
the seating order\textsuperscript{568} and, on some occasions, the decoration of the hall. In this section we will focus our attention mainly on the ornamentation of the halls.

In the literary sources it is possible to read about chieftains and powerful farmers preparing their halls to receive the guests. For example, in \textit{Gisla saga} we read about two simultaneous feasts in neighbouring farms. In one, "\textit{Drýkkja skylfi vera at hvóratveggi, ok var strát gólf á Sæbóli af sefinu af Sefítjárn.}\textsuperscript{569}\) (There was to be a drinking feast at both places and the floor at (the house at) Sæból was strewn with sedge from Sefítjárn.) Meanwhile, at the other farm "\textit{På er þeir Þorgrímur hjuggusk um ok skyldu tjalda húsín, en boðsmanna var þangat ván um kveldit, þá mælti Þorgrimr við Þorkel: "Vel kæmi oss nú reflarnir þeir inir góðu, er Vésteinn vildi gefa þér.\textsuperscript{570}}\) (At Þorgrimr's they started the preparations and were about to place the hangings in the house because the guests were expected in the evening. Then Þorgrimr spoke with Þorkel: "Well would serve us now those good tapestries which Vésteinn wanted to give to you.) And when Þorgrimr the chieftain finally gets the tapestrie(s) he expresses his joy "\textit{Pessa þurfu vær nú,} segir Þorgrímur, \textit{ok láta upp refilinn}}\textsuperscript{571}\) (This is what we need," says Þorgrímur, and he put up the tapestry.)

The decoration of the hall might have been a way for the chieftain to acquire prestige. In \textit{Laxdóla saga} the glory of a magnificently decorated hall is preserved in an account of a wedding feast at Hjarðarholt, this description might help us imagine the way in which halls were prepared for a feast. The saga reports that: "\textit{Pat sumar lét Ólafr gera eldhús í Hjarðarholti, meira ok betra en menn hefði fyrð sét. Váru þar markaðar ágætligar ságuð á þilviðinum ok svá á ræfrinu; var þat svá vel smiðat, at þá þóttu miklu skrautligra, er eigi váru tjalðin uppí}\textsuperscript{572}\) (That summer Ólafr had a fire-house built in Hjarðarholt; it was larger and better than men had seen before. There were carved

\textsuperscript{568} Seating arrangements within the hall are studied in the last section of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{569} \textit{Gisl} XV, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{570} \textit{Gisl} XV, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{571} \textit{Gisl} XV, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{572} \textit{Laxd} XXIX, p. 79.
glorious stories on the wood of the gables and on the rafters; it was so well crafted that it was thought more splendid in its ornamentation when the tapestries were not hanging.) In this narrative can see that the ornamentation of at least some halls was not dependent only on the hangings, but also on wood carvings. Such a hall could not go unnoticed, and one of the guests at the first feast to be celebrated at this hall composed a poem to honour both the owner and the hall. The poet, Úlfr Uggason "hafði ort kvæði um Ólaf Hóskulsson ok um sjögur þær, er skrifaðar váru á eldhúsinnu, ok forði hann þar at böðinu. Petta kvæði er kallat Huídrápa ok er vel ort."⁵⁷³ (had composed a poem about Ólaf Hóskulsson and about the stories that were carved on the fire-house, and he recited it there at the wedding. This poem is called House drápa and is well composed.) It seems then, that this magnificently decorated hall achieved its ultimate purpose; it brought glory to the owner and immortalized him in one of the most sought-after forms of immortality in the Old Norse world, through a poem. Several fragments of Huídrápa, composed in the late tenth century, are preserved in Snorri's Edda and, according to the extant fragments about the carvings, these seem to have represented several mythological scenes.

In the Fornaldar saga the decoration of the halls is also described in terms of their wall hangings, but instead of using straw to cover the floor people are said to have used a more expensive material: cloth. For example, in Völusunga saga, we can read that Brynhildr's hall "var fjaldat af inum dýrstum fjöldum ok þakit klæðum allt göfni"⁵⁷⁴ (was hung with the most precious tapestries and cloth covered the whole floor) while Guðrún's hall is described as "Þær gengu inn í þá ína gögru höll. Salrinn var skrifaðr innan ok mjók silfrí búinn. Klæði váru breidd undir fætr þeim."⁵⁷⁵ (They went into the splendid hall. The room was painted and engraved and adorned with much silver. Clothes were spread under their feet.) In general, it seems that the hall decoration was

⁵⁷³ Laxd XXIX, p. 80.
⁵⁷⁴ Völ XXIV, p. 168.
⁵⁷⁵ Völ XXV, p. 170.
based, then, on wood carvings (most probably painted); tapestries and some sort of covering for the floor, whether it is straw or cloth.

A final element in the decoration of a hall might be the display of prestigious objects, such as weapons or ornamented drinking vessels. In the Room C, considered as the hall of the building complex at Borg in the Lofoten Islands, a large number of highly decorated glass sherds has been found. These seem to be more numerous in a particular area of the room. This “concentration of luxury objects in the northern corner is so striking that a likely explanation seems to be that most of them stood here on shelves or in a type of cabinet.” If this is the case, then we should consider the possibility that on that area of the room a large number of prestigious objects was concentrated, maybe with the purpose of displaying them, as we read in the quotation from Völsunga saga making reference to the room being decorated with silver, most probably silver goblets, and why not, other kinds of glass drinking vessels.

The symbolic role of halls might have not only been linked to the power of its owner. They might have also been an earthly representation of the otherworld halls. It is known that the Old Norse otherworld was full of drinking halls. Basically each of the Æsir owned a hall in which to welcome the deceased, there is a drinking hall at Hell’s court, and several of drinking halls in Jötunheim. Both Eddas preserve only a few descriptions of the halls of the gods as well as of the activities that take place in there. Perhaps the best known and documented of these is Valhöll, Óðinn’s hall. The eddic poem Grimnismál says that: “Fimm hunduð dura / ok um fiórom tøgom, / svá hygg ek at Valhöll verat.” (Five hundred doors and forty, so I think there are in Valhöll.) Apart from its great size, the poem relates that there are two animals living on the hall’s roof;

576 Munch, p. 254.
577 Grm 5-26.
578 Bdr.
579 Grm 23.
Heiðrún, a goat that provides the hall with mead; the other animal is a hart called Eikþyrmir, from whose horns originate all the waters. Both of these animals are said to graze a tree called Léradr. Presumably this tree stands on the roof of the hall, and it is not quite certain if it is an equivalent of the world-tree Yggdrasill. In any case, that representation of animals grazing on the roof of the hall might be a mythological interpretation of the animals that probably grazed on the turf roofs of earthly halls. As for the decoration of Valhöll, we are told that “skjóptom er rann rept, / skjóldum er salr ākstriðr, / bryniom um bekki strát” (the hall has spear-shafts as rafters, shields are the hall’s roof, mail-coats are strewn on the benches) and “vargr hangir / fyr vestan dyrr / ok drúpir qrn yfir.” (a wolf hangs across the western door and an eagle droops above.)

Based on a stanza by Þjóðólfr inn hvinverski and on the same stanzas of Grímnismál, Snorri makes a more lengthy description of Valhöll. According to him, when King Gylfi enters Gláosheimr, where Valhöll is located within Ásgardr, “þá sá han þar háva höll, svá at varla mátti han sjá yfir hana. Þak hennar var lagt gultum skjóldum svá sem spánþak. Svá segir Þjóðólfr inn hvinverski at Valhöll var skjóldum þykð.” (then he saw a high hall, so that he could barely see over it. Its roof was made of gilded shields instead of tiles. So Þjóðólfr inn hvinverski says that Valhöll was roofed with shields.)

When it comes to real life it would be difficult to find a hall of such dimension and decorated in a similar fashion. There are however two literary instances in which halls are described bearing some resemblance to Valhöll. In Hrólfss saga kraka it is said that King Aðils had a tree standing in his hall. After burning the hall in which he was in order to kill his enemies “fórdæi hann sér ok hjóp at trúnu, sem stóð i höllinni, ok

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580 Heiðrún and her role as a mead provider has been studied in Chapter 3.
582 Grm 9.
583 Grm 10.
584 Gylf 2.
var þat holt innan, ok svá komst hann úr höllinni med fjölkynngi sinni ok göldrum.  

(He saved himself by running to the tree which stood in the hall, it was hollow and so he came out of the hall by using his magic and sorcery.) It is doubtful, however, that this tree could have been standing in the hall as a symbol of the tree at Valhalla. The fact that it is said to be a hollow tree means that, unlike Yggdrassill, it was already dead and most probably it is meant to be an example of King Ædils’ tricks rather than an actual representation of the tree in Ódinn’s hall.

The only other mention of a hall with a tree standing on its centre comes from Völsunga saga. In it is said that “Völsungr konungr lét gera höll eina ágæta ok med þeim hætti, at ein eik mikil stóð í höllinni ok limar trésins med fógrum blómum stóðu út um ræfur hallarinnar, en leggrinn stóð niðr í höllina, ok kölluðu þeir þat barnstokk.”

(King Völsung built a glorious hall in this fashion; a huge oak stood in the middle of the hall, and the branches of the tree with fair blossoms stretched out through the roof of the hall, and the trunk stood down in the hall, and they called the tree Barnstokk [Child-tree]). In this instance, the tree seems to be closer to a representation of Yggdrasill, adding to Völsungr’s hall an otherworldly decoration and disposition. In any case, the saga evidence of trees standing inside halls is too scant to justify any conclusions about this being an unusual form of decorating a hall or a literary motif to grant the halls of some rulers with a godly attribute, maybe stressing their godly lineage.

_Hallar and skálar_ are not described at length in the literary sources. Their main role was as symbols of power, because he who could afford to own a hall most probably was able to afford throwing a costly feast. Hence they had to be decorated magnificently and stocked with drinks when it was the time to hold a feast. They are symbols of power.

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585 Hrólf XLI, p. 82.  
586 Völs II, p. 113.
due to the ornaments that are displayed in them, but most of all because of the activities that take place within them. 587

4.2- **SKYTNINGAR AND HJÚKÓLFAR**

In chapter 83 of *Laxdæla saga*, it is told that a group of merchants arrive in Iceland around the year 1000. The saga explains that "Petta sumar kom skip í Dægurðarness ok settisk þar upp. Bolli tók til vistar í Tungu tólf kaupmenn; váru þeir þar um vetrinn, ok veitti Bolli þeim allstórmannliga." (That summer a ship came to Dægurðarness and it was drawn ashore there. Bolli lodged twelve merchants in Tunga; they remained there during the winter, and Bolli provided for them very magnificently.)

In the *Íslendinga ságur*, it is common to find similar occurrences of a man providing accommodation for a group of foreign merchants in Iceland and in Norway. On most occasions the accommodation was provided by a rich or powerful person whose farm and income allowed him to have surplus enough to host a group of merchants. However, in Norway, with the advent of the Hanseatic League and the increase in international trade, the number of merchants looking for a place to lodge in must have also increased. And as trading-towns grew in size and importance, the floating population accompanying such growth must have also increased beyond the local population’s capacity to lodge them in their houses. As a consequence of the increase of the floating population a new kind of establishment was required in order to provide the travelers with accommodation, food and, drink. These establishments were called *skytningar* and are rarely mentioned by name in our literary sources; though it is possible find several allusions to them in the legal corpus. *OGNS* defines the *skytningar* as "samliv av personer som gjøre sammenskud av det fornødne til deres bevörtning med

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587 The feasts that took place inside the halls will be studied in the following chapter.
588 Chapters LXXIX-LXXXVIII of *Laxd* are also known as *Bolla ðátrr*.
589 *Laxd* LXXXIII, 236.
mad og drikke.”⁵⁹⁰ (cohabitation of persons who gather to amuse themselves with food and drink.) IED tells us that they are “a ‘scot-house,’ an inn or club, where each guest paid or contributed his own scot or shot (skot), whence the name; skytningar and hjúkólfr are synonymous.”⁵⁹¹ Hjúkólfr, are defined as “samling, sammenkomst af flere mennesker i et hus til selskabelig glæde”⁵⁹² (a meeting, a gathering of several persons in one house for social enjoyment), or as “a club-house, inn”.⁵⁹³ The few instances in which these establishments are mentioned in our sources⁵⁹⁴ make it difficult to detail their function or any differences there might have been between a skytningar and a hjúkólfr. Since it seems impossible to define them in twentieth-century categorical terms I have decided to leave both terms untranslated in my study.

In this section I will analyze the references to skytningar as well as the laws referring to the consumption and sale of alcoholic beverages in them. As mentioned above, literary and legal references to these establishments are quite scarce, but at the same time they are enlightening about the circumstances of alcohol-trade in the Norwegian medieval period.

Taking into account that the creation of skytningar was a result of the urbanization process, it comes as no surprise that there is virtually no reference to this kind of establishment in Iceland, as the country did not develop market towns until the early-modern period. Víga-Glúms saga, most probably composed in the first half of the thirteenth century and preserved in full in a mid fourteenth-century manuscript, contains

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⁵⁹⁰ OGNS, skytningar.
⁵⁹¹ IED, skytningar.
⁵⁹² OGNS, hjúkólfr.
⁵⁹³ IED, hjúkólfr.
⁵⁹⁴ Apart from a few references to skytningar and hjúkólfr in the law corpus, skytningar are mentioned only in four sagas: ÖK II, p. 205 Ísl LXXIX, pp. 342-43, Laxd LXXIII, p. 212 and, Glúm XXI, p. 68. (See OrdT, skytningar: the term appears two times in Laxd. And once in Glúm). Hjúkólfr do not appear at all in the literary sources (see OrdT, hjúkólfr and the index to Sturlunga saga). This information was compiled using the OrdT, and the indexes of Heimskringla, Sturlunga saga and the Fornaldar saga. The KLNM does not provide any examples of skytningar apart from that in ÖK.
the only reference to an Icelandic skytningr.\(^{595}\) The saga narrates that, at some point during the late tenth century while at Arngrimr's farm "einn dag spurði Arngrimr Steinólf, ef hann vildi fara með honum á Grund ofan til skytnings ok vera þar næri tvær eða þríár."\(^{596}\) (One day Arngrimr asked Steinólfif he wanted to go with him to Grund down to the skytningr and stay there two or three nights.) IED dubs this instance of an Icelandic skytningr as "suspicious".\(^{597}\) The lexicographers do not specify why its veracity should be doubted, but it must be either because the scene takes place in Northern Iceland (in Eyjafjörður) or because, being the only reference to such an establishment in Iceland, it might seem of a doubtful nature and an invention of the author. However, Grund was located near a kaupangr, or market place (in the area nowadays occupied by Akureyri, the second largest city in Modern Iceland) and we should not discard the possibility of a skytningr being located there in order to lodge the foreign merchants visiting the marketplace. As Jónas Kristjánsson puts it "Vera má, að skytningur hafi verið haldinn á Grund, er mikil drykkjarföng höfðu borízt þangad frá útlöndum."\(^{598}\) (it could be that there was a skytningr at Grund, where many drinks were brought from abroad.) Regardless of the historicity of this reference to a skytningr in Eyjafjörður, the passage in Víga-Glúms saga gives us some clues about the way in which skytningar were perceived during the first half of the thirteenth century - when the saga was composed. In this episode, while at his farm, Arngrimr asks Steinólfif to go to a skytningr for a couple of days. This might be because skytningar were places where people could gather and socialize. Also, as in them people were expected to pay for their own food and drink this would free a person from the economic burden of having to provide friends with drinks for several nights. This last would explain why Arngrimr chooses to leave his own farm and look for accommodation for himself and his guest

\(^{595}\) The skytningar mentioned in Ísl LXXIX, p. 342-43 and Laxd LXXIII, p. 212 refer to Norwegian establishments.

\(^{596}\) Glúm XXI, p. 68-69.

\(^{597}\) IED, skytningr.

\(^{598}\) Glúm XXI, p. 68, fn. 1.
elsewhere. *Skytningar* could also have been perceived as places where the locals could go for a couple of days to trade with foreign merchants. Another possibility is that, since alcohol was scarce and expensive to produce or buy, not every farmer could afford to have a stock of alcohol. So, *skytningar* might have been the places where not so rich farmers went when they wanted to enjoy a drink without having to purchase or produce a whole barrel at once.

With the sole exception of this previous reference to a *skytningr* in Iceland, the rest of the sources refer to *skytningar* or *hjúkólfar* in Norwegian marketplaces. In his *Óláfs saga kyrra*, Snorri Sturluson provides a good description of the circumstances in which these establishments began to flourish in Norway. This saga takes place between the years of 1067 and 1093, during the reign of Óláf Haraldsson *kyrri*, which was a period of peace and prosperity in the country. As can be expected during a period of harmony, Snorri tells that; “um daga Óláfs konungs hófusk mjók kaupstaðir í Noregi, en sumir settusk at upphaft. Óláfr konungr setti kaupstað í Bjørgyn. Gerðisk þar brátt mikít setr auðigrar manna ok tilsiglingar kaupmanna af qorum lándum.” (In the days of King Óláfr marketplaces grew fast in Norway and some new ones were established. King Óláfr set up a marketplace in Bergen. Soon many wealthy men settled there and merchants from other lands took their wares to that place.) As a result of this increase in trade and in the number of foreign merchants, the customs and organization of the country started to change, but also, as shall be expected, this demographic explosion resulted in the fact that “Á dögum Óláfs konungs hófusk skytningar ok leiðudrykkjur í kaupstaðum.” (In the days of King Óláfr *skytningar* and drinking-bouts developed in the marketplaces.) The increase in the number of *skytningar* and drinking-bouts in marketplaces can be interpreted as a consequence of the large number of merchants, both foreign and local, who required places to lodge and, perhaps, due to the increase in

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599 *Skytningar* and *hjúkólfar* are not mentioned in DI.
600 ÓK II, p. 204.
601 ÓK II, p. 205.
the amount of alcohol being imported by these same merchants. An example of this is
found in *Orkneyinga saga*, during an episode in Bergen. The saga states that: “En er
þeir kómu til bæjarins, var þar fyrir fjálmenni mikit, bæði norðan ór landi ok sunnan,
ok fjöldi af þórum landum, er þangat hafði flutt gazku mikla. Gengu þeir skipverjar í
skytninga at skemmta sér.”602 (When they reached the town there was quite a gathering
of people there from the north and south of the country, and many too from overseas,
bringing all sorts of good things with them. Kali and his shipmates started having a
good time round the taverns.)603

A historical and archaeological example of these *skytningar* in Bergen comes
from a runic stick (*runakefli*) which seems to attest *mungát* commerce in the town. This
stick, carved with runic inscriptions was most probably sent by one merchant to his
partner, and it reads: “Hafgrimi, félaga sinum, sendir þórir fagr kvedju Guðs ok sina,
sannan félagskap ok vináttu. Mart skortir mik, félagi! Ekki er mungátit, engi fískarnir.
Vil ek at þá vitir, en eigi kref þú.”604 (To Hafgrimr, his friend, sends þórir God’s and his
greetings, true fellowship and friendship. Much is lacking (to me), fellow. There is no
mungát nor fishes. I want you to know, but do not demand them from you). This
inscription was most probably sent by a merchant, dealing with *mungát* in the town, to
his provider. Similarly, inscription 650, Gullskoen, attests to the trade of corn in
Bergen. There are many other inscriptions attesting to the trade of meal, corn and
alcohol in Bergen. Some of these inscriptions seem to have been carved in a *skytningar*
context, but they would require a study devoted only to them.605

It seems that it was possible to lodge both in private houses as well as in
*skytningar*. At least in a 1316 law it is stated that “skal ok engi gardzbondi nea

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602 *Orkn LX*, pp131-32.
603 *Orkneyinga saga*, trans. by Hermann Pálsson, p. 110.
604 *Norges Inskrifter med de Yngre Runer*, 6, ed. Knirk, James E., 7 vols (Oslo: Norges
605 An excellent study of runic inscriptions concerning sexual affairs and taverns was done by Kristiina
  Viking and Medieval Studies, University of Oslo, 2003).
bæarmadr [byggia uttendum manni lengr hus sinn [i senn en half manadar leighv ok aldri lengr hinum sama samflæyt en .vi. vikr.]

(No garth-owner or townsfolk shall lodge foreigners in their place for more than half a month and never in successive occasions within 6 weeks.) The regulation does not state why it was forbidden to house people for extended periods of time. But it is relevant to note that it clearly states that this prohibition extends both to gardzbondi and bæarmadr (garth-owners and townsfolk) for it means that foreigners lodged both in private houses as well as in establishments designed for that sole purpose. While it is possible to suppose that alcohol was sold at skytningar, we do not know if it was also possible to acquire it in private houses.

The legal corpus does not state the existence of any particular kind of building at which alcohol could be sold. From the evidence it seems that anyone who was interested in selling alcoholic beverages could do so, as long as some requisites were met. Before proceeding with the analysis of these requisites, it is necessary to note that most of the Norwegian alcohol sale regulations were recorded during the fourteenth century, when the Hanseatic trading-towns as well as the import of German alcohol were at their peak.

A law passed in 1358 by King Hákon Magnússon might serve as a good example to start our analysis, as it clearly phrases all the requisites a person should meet in order to sell alcohol. The law states that:

Skulu oc engir menn viin tappa utan i staderens kellare. huat manne sem huer er eda huat bref huer hefr af os. oc at þat blijr aðr sætt af radzmonnum oc gialdkyra huat er þat skal gialda.
(No man shall serve wine from without the town's cellars, regardless of who that man is or of whichever letters he has [received] from us; and that beforehand, the lawmen and the king's rent-master must set how much should be paid [for it].)

This statute gives notice about three alcohol sale facts that are confirmed elsewhere in the law corpus. First, it mentions the existence of *staderens kellare*, which are interpreted as "*byens vinkjælder*" (town's wine-cells), from which the imported beverage was probably distributed to the town. Second, it states that the price at which these beverages were to be sold at *skytningar* were state-regulated. And third, that anyone who wanted to (and paid the required tax) could sell alcohol so that *skytningar* could be held at private homes and/or garths. But let us now discuss the other bits of evidence we have for these three facts.

The previously mentioned 1358 law stipulates that "*skulu oc engir menn viin tappa utan i staderens kellare*" (No man shall serve wine from without the town's cellars). This kind of ordinance was not new to the merchants as just 13 years before Hákon Magnusson's law, King Magnús Eiríksson passed a decree in almost the exact same terms. In it he states that

\[\text{Skulu ok eingir men viin tappa utan i staderens kellare ok at pet verdr akr set of logmanne radhmonn gialkyra hvat er pet skal gialda.}\]

(No man shall serve wine other than that of the town's cellars and [never] before the lawmen and the king's rent-master have set how much should be paid [for it].)

The town's cellars appear to have been, more than cellars, toll offices where imported goods were priced and taxed by the crown before the garth-owners and the townsfolk could acquire them. Accordingly, the crown forbade merchants to sell any wares that had not been previously taken to the town's cellars: "*Firibiodom wer ok ollom gastkommun monnon at fara a land vt med nokkrom varninge at selia han eda manga par vt.*" (We also forbid all guest-comers [foreigners] to disembark with any wares

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609 *NGLGlos, kellari.*
610 *NGL III, p. 166. Kong Magnus Eriksöns Retterbod om Vaabensyn i Jamteland; Bergen, March 15, 1345.*
611 *NGL III, p. 166.*
for selling or for trading.) This was not a veto on foreign trade but just a measure to control imports and to ensure that they were properly taxed before being sold to the townspeople. The prohibition to trade any wares without them first being taxed might be somehow based on a law passed much earlier by King Hákon Magnusson I in 1316. This reads:

Skulu vtslendzskir men aller hafa upskipat innan atta dagha hit fyrista sidan þeir hafa aflagu orlof fenget [...] vin ok bior. miðd oc mungaut. hunang oc [...] allar annar vornengar uttan þungga vornnegh skipitz upp i gardz budir ok kellara i þen gard sem hver hefir ser.612

[All foreigners shall have disembarked their wares within the first eight days after they have received their leave to do so [...] wine and björr, mjót, and mungáit, honey and [...] all other wares that have not been taxed shall be disembarked into the garth’s booths and cellars in that garth which we own.]

As we can see, this regulation applies not only to wine, but to all kind of beverages (and to all wares in general) imported to Norway. As we saw in Chapter 2, once the taxes had been paid and the quality of the wares was checked, they were priced by the king’s men and were then ready to be sold in public houses.

The fact that, unlike this 1316 statute, the previous laws stipulate that no wine other than that coming from the town’s cellars should be served without mentioning other kinds of beverages does not mean that foreign mjót, mungáit or bjór were not taxed. Their absence from these stipulations might imply that, unlike wine, these drinks could be both imported or locally produced, so that they could be sold even if they did not come from the town’s cellar. But as we can see in this last ordinance from King Hákon Magnússon I, all foreign wares were to be taxed. Unfortunately for the local garth-owners this did not mean that the local produce to be sold at skytningar was not excised. A law passed by King Hákon Magnússon in 1377 attests the toll imposed on local brews:

Item um tha menn alla, kalla æder konor, er fora malli æder mummgatt i byeg off hæradie till theff at bruga that her, och thappa her utt affter, være sackader sinni halffre marck huar theru, than kaupir æder selir,

The toll on local products was, as we can see, of half a mark for qλ, mungát and any other brews. And the taxation was not only imposed on those who sold the product, but also on those who brewed it or contributed with money in order to finance the business.

Ten years later King Hakon passed a different law, establishing the tax per unit of malt used to brew. In it he states that “item at heitu vider [vnder hueria .ij. pund heitta gialde øyri.” 614 (item, for brewing it shall be such, for each 2 pounds of [malt used for] brewing an aura shall be paid.) However, wine, as a foreign product, was subject to a heavier tax than local brews. This might have been a measure taken by the king to protect the local market and brewers from the cheaper prices of the German products.

Accordingly, in 1282 there was a toll which “vinnumenn øyri vndir vinfat øda .xx. aska kerald ok haðan af minna ok smere eru” 615 (labourers [pay] one øyrir for each wine-barrel or 20 askr 616 cask, and thence less the smaller they are) while the same law applies a tax of “fimm penninga veghna undir huern pundz þungha øda biortunnu ef þeir vinna eptir endilongum [bryggium ok bæ varum. en halfan øyri fyrir lest hueria er þeir vinna up i garða or skipum.” 617 (five pennics on behalf of each pound in weight [of malt?] or for each björr-barrel if they work along the piers and in our town, and half an øyrir more when they work in garths out of the ships.) This tax, applied to those

613 NGL III, pp. 196-97. Kong Haakon Magnusson's Retterbod om Handelen og Taxterne i Nidaros; Nidaros, January 24, 1377.
614 NGL III, p. 143. Kong Haakon Magnusson's Retterbod om Udlaendingers Kjøb og Varers Salg. Udateret (Uvist om af denne Kogne eller af Haakon Magnusson II) Not dated, and it is not known if it was passed by King Hákon Magnúsun or by King Hákon Magnusson II.
616 Askr and its probable use as a standard measure for wine trading have been discussed in chapter 2.4.
retailing in garths, shipyards and piers shows that the levy on wine was much heavier than that imposed on ql or bjórr. This was, perhaps, due to the fact that these last beverages could be produced locally.

Actually, the prices for German ql were set by the king, who provided a maximum charge per volume. So, the measure of German ql was not to be served over the maximum price of three English pence, otherwise both drinker and server were to be fined half a mark each and the seller would have all his product confiscated:

\[
\text{Item at tydysk allt skall thappast fir fria peninga ònnszka, huer rett mott marckar kanna. Einn hver er dyra säll oc sua hinn er dyra kaupir se seckiter sina halffua marck huar thera oc upitçkitt qflet, thann samma thumma, thar finst medt thi. 619}
\]

(Item, that all German ql shall be served for three English pence, in any manner of known currency. And he who sells it for more and also he who buys it for more shall pay a fine of half mark each and the ql as well as any barrels that are found are to be confiscated.)

While it is possible to imagine the reasons for a garth-owner to sell his ql at a price higher than that established by law, the circumstances under which a consumer would be willing to pay a higher price for it are enigmatic. In any case, the price regulation on foreign beverages might have been a measure to ensure that the local products would have a competitive price in the market. And, at least for some local merchants, the risk of having all their alcohol stock confiscated if they breached this law would have been the equivalent of putting them out of business, due to the amount of money they would require to create a new cellar.

The King was the ultimate recipient of the taxes imposed on alcoholic beverages and, as we have already seen, he might have also received important amounts of alcoholic beverages coming from the confiscation courts. Most of the alcohol sale regulations, as can be perceived in the previously mentioned regulations, included confiscation in case of disobedience, usually phrased as “hver sem þat gerrir þæti

618 The alcohol-prices set by the Crown for each of the beverages have already been discussed in chapter 2.
619 NGL III, pp. 196-97. Kong Haakon Magnúsens Rettebóð om Handelen og Taxterne i Nidaros; Nidaros, January 24, 1377.
620 See Chapter 2.
(each one who does that pays the King a compensation of five silver marks and [has] his bjórr confiscated.) Similarly, after the products were priced by the lawmen it is usually mentioned that “skall logman oc raaidmen aegha af hvario winfathe er þappast til utsalo fym stob vins.” (the lawman and counselors are to have, from each wine-barrel that is to be served for sale, five cups of wine.) We do not know how much or how often these confiscations took place or how much the lawmen collected as tax or wages in beverages. However, these products must have been used to supply the royal cellar and to provide the royal feasts with enough beverages. The king himself also seems to have made some profit from his beverage surplus by establishing hjúkólfar on his estates. An example of these royal skytningar is to be found in Íslendinga saga, when in 1230 Jón and Gizurr spend Christmas at the king’s court, but are said to have lodged at a hjúkólf located in the king’s garth. They “váru með konungi um jólf sem aðrir skutilsveinar. En síðan gengu þeir í hjúkólf á konungsgarði. Þat var eitt kveld nær geisladegi, er þeir mágar kómu ór hjúkólfínunum ok váru mjök drukknir.” (were with the king during Christmas, as other pages were. And after that they went to the hjúkólf in the king’s garth. It happened one evening near Geisli Day that the cousins came from the hjúkólf and were very drunk.) This hjúkólf in the king’s garth was most surely owned by the crown and provided with drinks from the royal cellars and probably stocked with beverages both bought and confiscated by the king’s men.

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621 *NGL* III, p. 124. *Kong Haakon Magnusssóns Retterbod om Kjöbstevne i Byerne*; Bergen, 14 November 1316). The same price and penalty was established by the king one day after for bjórr trade in Tunsberg and Oslo, see ( *NGL* III, p. 127. *Kong Haakon Magnusssóns Retterbod om Kjöbstevne i Byerne*; Bergen, November 15, 1316).


623 *Ísl* LXXIX, p. 342-43.

624 Geisladagr. (Beam-day.) This festivity is not well documented and its meaning is unclear. The IED mentions “it is probably a rendering of Epiphany, though it is not used of that very day, which is called Brettándi, but of the seventh day after” (IED, geisl). While OGNS equates it with St. Hilary’s Day, on the 13th of January (OGNS, Geisladagr); Árni Björnsson does not list it among the Icelandic Feasts and Holidays (see Árni Björnsson).
As mentioned before, by the late fourteenth century anyone who wished to do so could sell alcohol and, most probably own a skytingr as long as he or she paid the corresponding taxes, served products from the town’s cellars, had their products valued by the lawmen and sold them at the price established by the Crown. But a new requisite appears for the first time in the law corpus, according to this new law those who serve alcohol must own a building where they can serve their drinks. At least in this law passed by Hákon Magnússon it is stated that “Fyrst at uphaffue at engom manne. utlænndskum ne indlænndskum huarcke kall ne konno. loffuett æder thoolest at hossua nockorn ollthap i bqq warum huarcke winn miod ne biorr æder mumgatt, whan thennom æinum sem garda æiga.” 625 (To begin with, that no person, foreign or local, man or woman, is allowed or tolerated to have an ql-serving whether the wares are wine, mjöd, björn or mungt, in the town, except those [persons] who own a garth.) We do not know if this was the first time that a law was passed in order to promote drinking in an enclosed space. As we can see from the redaction of the ordinance, it was not important what kinds of alcohol were being sold, the main concern was gathering all drinkers within a limited space. This ordinance could have been an attempt to stop people from selling alcohol on the streets and thus to avoid public drunkenness or to keep people from drinking on the streets. Whether or not this was the first time that the Crown attempted to control drinking on the streets, it was surely a law that strengthened the position of skytingar as places where people were to gather in order to drink. The preservation of public order by establishing garths as the only places where alcohol was to be sold may have not been the principal interest of the crown in passing this law; after all it is easier to tax a well located establishment than a merchant selling his product on the streets.

625 NGL III, pp. 196-97. Kong Haakon Magnusson's Retterbod om Handelen og Taxterne i Nidaros; Nidaros, January 24, 1377. 
626 Ollthap (ql-serving). Even though the word makes reference only to ql, it seems to be a generic drink for serving any other kind of alcoholic beverage.
A law passed by King Eiríkr Magnússon on September 16, 1282 in Bergen could be a forerunner of this attempt to encourage drinking within a confined space as it proved more profitable to the Crown. This law states that

_Skolu ok hushøndr hafa biorsaulu ef þeim likar, ok sele boðan fjyrir fimming ok ærtug. Þeir sem æiga garða ok isitið ok olgsgr eiga sælflir, ok sva hinir sam læigah garða ok isitið ok olgrn hafva, bolle mungaz skal gialda fimtan penningha veghna, æda x. svarta maðan þeir ganga._

(Garth-masters may sell _bjárr_ if they like, and sell a bowl for five and an _qrtug_. Those who own a garth and seating places and have their own drinking vessels as well as those who rent a garth and seating places and drinking vessels shall pay fifteen _penningar_ on behalf of [it], or pay 10 black [coins] whilst they do so.)

Again, this law states that whoever wants to can sell alcoholic beverages. The ownership of a building, drinking vessels and seating places is not a requisite to do so as long as an extra tax, apart from that imposed on the beverages, is paid. While this might have discouraged the creation of _hjúkólfsar_, later on, the ban on street alcohol-sales might have left the alcohol-traders with no other choice but to establish _skytningar_ and and pay the extra price for their privilege.

But what kind of behavior was to be expected among the _skytningar_ patrons? There are not many references to what actually went on in these establishments, and in most occasions they refer to brawls. Let us take a look at these sources.

_Skytningar_ are portrayed as places in which people could overindulge in drinking and they are, accordingly, the scene of drunken fights. Chapter 104 of _Sverris saga_, written around 1300, presents King Sverrir’s view on the issues of public drunkenness. In it the King makes a speech, generally referred to as “A Speech Against Drunkenness”, where he presents his point of view on the moral relaxation of society.

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628 _Qrtug_. The exact amount that an _qrtug_ comprised is not clear. It was, perhaps, equivalent to twenty _penningar_. (See _IED_; _örtug_.)
629 _Svarta_ [penningar] (black money). _NGL_Glos_ explains that _svarta penningar_ refers to “_særskilt_ (daarlig), omend almindelig udbredt slags mynt, der i 1282 venedes eller haabedes efterhaanden at velle gaa ud af cirkulationen; ogsaa i andre lande betegnes som ’sorte penge’ (monnais noires, zwarte penningen, black money) _en stærkt kobberblandet myntsort, hvori sulver næsten var forsvindende._” (_NGL_Glos_, _penningar_.) (a special (terrible) universally widespread type of coin, which in 1282 had already or was about to go out of circulation; in other countries it was also known as ‘black money’, a kind of coin with a strong copper content, where silver was almost absent.)
due to alcohol consumption. King Sverrir pronounces his speech during one summer in which there were many German merchants in Bergen, bringing large amounts of wine "Suðr-menn hofðu flutt þangat vin mikit. Sva at þa var i Biorgyn eigi dyra vin en mungat."\(^{630}\) (the southerners [i.e. the Germans] had brought there a large amount of wine, so that there in Bergen wine was not more expensive than mungat.) The consequence of the decrease in the wine-price is that the townsmen overindulge in it, and the story ends up with the death of several men as a result of their not being used to drinking large amounts of that expensive beverage. The text states that

That summer there were also many other sources of unrest related to the drink. One man, who was one of the Birkibeinar, was so witless with the drink that he jumped between the hall and the King's sitting-room. And he thought that he could leap over the narrow passage. And he got killed. Another man jumped off the pier in the King's garth and drowned.)

So, concerned about the events related to the unrest caused by the excess of wine in the city, the King makes a speech in which he expresses his gratitude to all English, Icelandic, Orcadian and Faroese merchants for bringing commodities such as meal, clothes and honey to Norway. At the same time he blames the German merchants for bringing only wine and with it drunkenness to his land.

> En um hyðerska menn er hígat ero comnir mikill fioló oc med storum scípum oc æþla heían at flytia smíor oc screid er mikil lundeyia er at þeiri brofþutningo. en her kemr i stáðinn vin er menn hafa til lagz at kaupa hvarir-þegio minir menn oc hóar-menn eda caupmen hefir af þvi caupi mært ilti staðit en ecki gott hafa marga her tyni sinu lift firir þesa soc.\(^{632}\)

(But about the Germans who come here in large numbers and with large ships in order to acquire butter and dried fish, which is abundant in this land, and which they take to their land, and here to this land comes [they bring] wine, which men have become accustomed to buy for companionship, both my men and the townsfolk and the merchants. And because of that they have brought a great harm to this place and nothing good. Many have lost their lives for this reason.)

\(^{630}\) Sv CIII, p. 109.
\(^{631}\) Sv CIII, p. 109.
\(^{632}\) Sv CIV, p. 110.
Sverre Bagge argues that as to King Sverrir’s “logic in blaming the Germans, one may object that it was probably not too difficult to get drunk on the national product, beer [...] and further that wine must normally have been so expensive that only a small minority could afford to get drunk in that way.”\(^{633}\) As discussed in Chapter 2, the price of wine was excessively higher than those of ql, hjórr and mungât\(^{634}\) and Bagge’s assertion seems to be sound when it comes to the lack of possibilities for the common folk to get inebriated with wine. But why then put the blame on wine and the Germans for the increase on drunkenness and moral relaxation? Bagge suggests that it was because “the Germans have imported so much that wine was not more expensive than beer”\(^{635}\) so that “when Sverri combines the attack on the Germans with the attack on drink, it is probably an indication of a general interest in trade and provisions rather than simply a reaction against an acute moral problem.”\(^{636}\) Even if Sverris saga narrates that there was so much wine so that it became cheaper than mungât the import of large quantities of wine so that its price was reduced so drastically seems quite unlikely. Apart from the literary evidence, Bagge does not offer any documentation for this fact and so far I have not found any document (charters nor laws) proving that that was actually the case in the late twelfth century. Thus, another probable interpretation of this passage of Sverris saga is that either the King or the scribe that produced the text referred freely to alcoholic beverages under the generic term of “wine”, which is mentioned only once, at the beginning of the speech, and is also the only drink brought up in the discourse. This would also explain the blame on German merchants, who were not only importing wine but also (and mostly) beer. We shall keep in mind that

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\(^{634}\) Bagge adds that in 1306, around the time that the saga was committed to parchment, “the price of a cup of the most expensive wine was sixteen pence, i.e. seventy-five kilograms of grain or one third of a cow. This means that serving fifty-four persons one cup each of this wine would cost the value of an average farm in Western Norway. The price of the cheapest wine was one half of this.” (Bagge, p. 72, fn. 62).

\(^{635}\) Bagge, p. 72.

\(^{636}\) Bagge, p. 72.
Sverrir's speech was not against wine, but against drunkenness in general and against the Germans in particular; and for this purposes one drink is as good as the other. However, if the passage is indeed historical, then it serves only to prove that twelfth-century Norwegians were not used to consume wine and would also help us to understand why, later on, imported alcohol was so heavily taxed and why the price of alcohol was regulated by the Crown.

The only thing we can assume almost for sure is that with the increase of Hanseatic trade more skytningar must have come into existence in order to house foreign merchants and that, together with it, the offer and demand for foreign alcoholic beverages must have increased as well as the number of merchants involved in such business. But only a few sources let us glimpse what happened inside these skytningar; and the way in which the laws and sagas portray the skytningar is very similar to what King Sverrir describes in his speech. For example, an undated law passed by King Hákon Magnusson\textsuperscript{637}, stating who could serve alcohol and where alcohol could be served states that: "Item lagligom gordon ma oll tappaz oc skullu gordbønderne sielfiue lade tappa oll om the villia eller skilrika danekonor som the villia sielfue forsvara. En ingen frillor eder løyso quinnor skullu oll tappa.")\textsuperscript{638} (Item, by law in garths only the garth-master himself is allowed to and must serve q/l if he wishes, or [this can be done] by clearly respectable women that he wants to answer for. And no prostitutes or loose women shall serve q/l.) The presence of prostitutes at skytningar is also referred to in the fourteenth-century Króka-Refs saga where Grani, one of King Harald Gráfeldr’s closest men, is said to be a great womanizer. Once, when he is absent from the court at Trondheim everyone agrees that the most probable explanation is that

\textsuperscript{637} As the amendment to the law is undated it is impossible to know whether it was passed by King Hákon V Magnusson (ruling ca. 1299-1319) or by King Hákon VI Magnússon (ruling ca. 1343-1380) or by King Hákon Magnusson (ruling ca. 1093-1094).

he “mun hann hafa farit um herbergi at leita sér kvenna.”639 (must have gone to the herbergi640 to find himself some women.) This episode may well be referring to what might have been a common practice at the time the saga was written and perhaps also at the time in which the events in the saga took place. We do not know exactly when the saga was composed but it has been dated to the fourteenth century. So, if the previously mentioned law against prostitutes serving at skytningar was indeed passed by King Hákon V Magnusson - ruling from ca. 1299-1319 - in the early fourteenth century this could make the law almost contemporary with the writing of Króka-Refs saga. Orkneyinga saga mentions a skytningr in Bergen, and it stresses that: “Unnr hét húsfreyja gafug, er garðinn átti, þann er þeir drukku f.”641 (The tavern they were drinking at belonged to a lady of good family called Unn.)642 The fact that it is stressed that the owner was a lady of good birth might be a historical reflection of the laws concerning who was able to serve in the skytningar.

Another of the issues that bothered King Sverrir were the brawls derived from drunkenness. Since skytningar were places where foreign merchants gathered they were also places where trade took place and transactions were settled. Problems might have arisen while reaching a commercial agreement and this could have well lead to some quarrels, as in the one attested in Arons saga, composed towards the middle of the fourteenth century but relating events of the first half of the thirteenth century.643 In this saga it is said that:

639 Krók XVII, p. 154.
640 Herbergi can mean either a ‘room’ or an ‘inn’. However, in the saga corpus, the term refers more often to a room in a house than to an inn. In this instance the meaning seems to be clearly ‘an inn’.
641 Orkn LX, p. 132.
642 Orkneyinga saga, trans. by Hermann Pálsson, pp. 110.
644 Ar XIX, p. 274.
(bóðr drank at the skýtningr, there where the drinking was intoxicating. [...] And bóðr sat after and then some officers of the king. And in the course of the night approached he got into a dispute with them and they fought. They hit each other with horns and lanterns. bóðr was a hardy man and very strong. They were very badly beaten, those who were against him, and became both black [bruised] and bloody.)

Skytningar fights are also portrayed as being a mere exchange of arguments, as is the case in Sneglu-Halla þátr when "Konungr gekk úti um stræti ok fylgdin með honum, [...] þeir heyrdu í eitt herbergi deild mikla. Þar voru at sútari ok járnsmór, ok þar næst flagusk þeir á. Konungrinn nam staðar ok sá á um stund."645 (the King went out to the street and his followers went with him. [...] They heard a great quarrel at a certain herbergi. It was a tanner and an iron-smith, and they were about to jump at one other. The king stopped in that place and watched for a while.)

In theory it was the taverner’s duty to keep his skýtningr in peace, as attested in an addendum to some regulations on skýtningar and alcohol prices passed by Magnús Eiríksson. This states that: "Pat vilium ok at huar sæm fyrnæmst sakar þryosdko at halda vord af garde sinum æda husum gialde fiora mærk."646 (we want this also; that those who for the sake of sullen obstinacy neglects to keep watch over their garths or houses pay [a fine of] four marks.) And again, in 1358 a law was passed by Hákon Magnusson stating "Pat vilium ver ok at huer sem firirnæmt sakar þriodsko at halda vord af garde sinum eda husum gialdi .xij, aura."647 (we want this also; that those who for the sake of sullen obstinacy neglect to keep watch over their garths or houses pay 12 aurar.) The recurrence of this law might imply that lack of order both in skýtningar or garths and in private homes where alcohol was sold was a continuous problem. We have no documents attesting to the intervention of the state to control brawls in places where alcohol was sold. As a matter of fact, Sneglu-Halla þátr records the only

645 Snegl III, p. 267.
646 NGL III, p. 166. Kong Magnus Erikssons Retterbod, indeholdende Privilegier for Oslo; Haaløysa, April 25, 1346.
647 NGL III, p. 177. Kong Haakon Magnussøns Retterbod, indeholdende Privilegier for Oslo; Oslo, January 22, 1358.
instance in which a state figure (the king) is said to witness one such fight, and, as we have seen, it reports that the King did nothing to prevent the fight. Maybe, according to the mentality of the age one should have expected the king to intervene and impose his royal authority to keep the peace. However, the lack of action on the part of the king might be part of the several criticisms against the royal figure which characterize this páttr.

As mentioned before, we do not know much about what went on at the skytningar or about the behaviour the patrons followed inside them. But there is some evidence to confirm that, when the locals left the establishment, there were some breaches to the public order. This comes from a 1295 document which attests not only who were the usual clients of the skytningar but also that once they left they followed the same behaviour they followed inside it. Due to this kind of conduct (whatever it was) King Eirikr Magnússon had “frirbodet samdrykkiur ædr gilldi leidsagumanna. gullsmida. ïænsmida. Englandz faara. suæina. vinnumannna. heito mana. hæimakuenna ok allar adrar samdrykkiur.” 648 (prohibited drinking-gatherings or guilds of skippers, gold-smiths, iron-smiths, England-goers,649 servants, labourers, brewers, housemaids and all other drinking-companies.) The fact that the King decided to prohibit guilds and drinking bouts among people of these occupations might attest to the fact that they were the most common skytningar clients or that they were the worst troublemakers when drunk. In the same law King Eirikr Magnússon ordained that “utan skytningar vilium ver at halldesz æfis fornnum sidvanda.” 650 (we want [people] to behave according to the old custom outside the skytningar.) Again, we do not exactly know what the king meant by “fornnum sidvanda” (old custom) outside the skytningar. He might have made reference to the days in which skytningar did not exist and the local patrons drank at home. After all, some of the occupations he refers to seem to be

648 NGL III, p. 25. Kong Erik Magnússøns Retterbod om Forholdene i Bergen: March 9, 1295.
649 Presumably merchants who engaged in international trade.
650 NGL III, p. 25.
those of men and women who lived in the same town such as servants, labourers and housemaids; while gold-smiths, iron-smiths and brewers could be foreign, it seems unlikely for them to travel with all their instruments in order to bring their trade to a market-town.\textsuperscript{651} The same applies to the England-goers, as the name seems to imply that they were local merchants travelling abroad. All the occupations seem to point toward locals who left the \textit{skytningr}, most probably intoxicated, in order to go home. That is, the law seems to be aimed at controlling the transit of drunken locals on their way home, and to instruct them to keep public order. After all, foreign merchants most probably lodged in the same places they were drinking at, and their drunken behaviour was only of the concern of the inn-keeper who, as we have already seen, was expected to look after his place and keep it in peace. Similarly, \textit{Diplomatarium Islandicum} contains a charter, dated 1323, in Oslo, stating that priests should "en reigi til Ílhusa edr annarrar samdryckiu"\textsuperscript{652} ([not go] to ale-houses or other drinking gatherings).

Finally, the selection of those who were not allowed to gather to drink and were asked to keep public order might not have reflected only the most common \textit{skytningr} customers. If one reviews the occupation list one might find that merchants, skippers, brewers, gold- and iron-smiths also represent the wealthiest members of society; therefore, they were the ones that were able to spend more money on alcohol and thus more likely become more intoxicated and cause trouble.

The development of \textit{skytningar} indubitably caused some changes in the drinking culture. Before the advent of these establishments most of the drinking took place during special occasions and within a drinking hall. Those present were mostly dependants or acquaintances of the chieftain or farmer who owned the hall, and it was the chieftain’s or farmer’s responsibility to provide his guests with all they required

\textsuperscript{651} The possibility exists that they were indeed foreign, however in the market town they required a proper space to practice their profession, making it unlikely for them to lodge at a \textit{skytningr}.

\textsuperscript{652} DI II, p. 536.
during their sojourn at his place. His role as the provider helped the host to enhance his reputation, show-off his wealth and, most important, to raise his status in society. But with the advent of skytningar now there were no such opportunities to display power; at least not with such largesse as must have been the case in the hqll or skåli. Moreover, drinking at the skytningar took place at a location where, no matter how rich or powerful the lodger was, he was not the master of the house and he engaged in drinking surrounded, at least partially, by strangers. This change in attitude can be perceived in Laxdæla saga in a scene which depicts the behaviour of Bolli, an Icelander, spending the winter at a skytningar in Norway. In it is said that:

Bratt fannsk þat, at Bolli myndi vera maðr framgiarn ok vildi vera fyrir þórum þænum; honum tósk ok svá, því at maðrinn var grækur; fókk hann bratt mikla vörðing í Noregi. Bolli hélt sveit um vetrinn í Drándheimi, ok var auðkennt, hvar sem hann gekk til skytninga, at menn hans varu betr binir at klæðum ok vápnum en annat bejarfélk; hann skaut ok einn fyrir sveitunga sina alla, þá er þeir sátu í skytningum.653

(Soon it was found that Bolli must be a striving man and that he wanted to be greater than other men; he managed this because the man was open-handed; he soon gained much honour in Norway. Bolli kept a company of men during the winter in Trondheim, and he was recognized whenever he went to the skytningar because his men were better clothed and armed than other townsfolk; and he alone paid for the drinks of all his company of men when they sat in skytningar.)

This scene depicts the confrontation of the two -different- worlds of the skáli and the skytningar. Bolli, as a leader in Iceland, is used to act as a host and provide for his men at his skáli.654 However, when he finds himself at a skytningar (and we must remember that there were probably no skytningar in Iceland) he displays the same drinking ethos that would be expected from a host in his land. In the skytningar, just as in his skáli, he feels the obligation to be magnificent and provide for the needs of all his retinue in order to affirm his social status. Hence, he provides his men not only with clothes and weapons, which were the typical gifts that a chieftain offered to his guests, but also supplies his men with drinks. This attitude must have been atypical at a skytningar, where men were

654 At the beginning of this section we saw the same Bolli housing twelve foreign merchants and lavishly providing them for the entire winter at his farm in Iceland.
expected to pay for their own share and, perhaps the recognition he gained both in
Iceland and Norway was partly due to the extravagance of his generosity.

As we have seen in the previous pages, skytningar and hjukólfrar seem to be a
phenomenon that developed only in Norway, while Iceland continued having skálar as
the main drinking locations. This might have been due both to the absence of
urbanization and low numbers of foreign merchants visiting Iceland, while in Norway
trading-towns developed since the Viking Age and grew in size with the advent of the
Hanseatic League. To start with, alcoholic beverages could be sold in houses or
skytningar as well as in the streets or in other public places. The only requisites that had
to be covered were first, that the alcohol to be sold had to come from the town’s cellars;
second, that the beverages were valued by the king’s men and; third, that the merchant
paid the tax corresponding to the beverage he sold. Later on, perhaps due to the
increased imports of alcoholic beverages and the need to keep control over the taxation
of local and imported beverages, the sale of alcohol was restricted to skytningar and
hjukólfrar. These establishments seem to have been quite troublesome, so that the state
had to regulate the prostitution and breaches of public order that took place in them,
imposing fines on those skytningar owners or managers who failed to comply.

4.3– OTHER DRINKING PLACES

There were many other places where men drank apart from the hallar, skálar,
skytningar or hjukólfrar. In a certain way, every occasion on which men gathered could
be taken as an excuse to have some drinks, even if it was not within the context of a
wedding, a funeral or a seasonal feast;655 or at a royal holl, at a farmer’s skál or at a
taverner’s skytningar or hjukólfr. The literary sources mention a few other circumstances
in which men and women treat themselves with alcoholic beverages. These drinking

655 Weddings, funerals and seasonal feast will be studied in Chapter 5.
occasions are not mentioned often in the literary corpus, and comprise such gatherings as the \textit{Ping} and \textit{Alþingi} (that is, namely, the local and the national assemblies respectively), battles, and a few lonely drinkers. In this section I analyze what the sources have to tell us about these drinking locations and, when possible, extract some information about the ethos around them.

\textbf{4.3.1- Drinking at The Ping}

The most important and powerful men of Iceland gathered at both the \textit{Ping} and \textit{Alþingi} during the spring and autumn, and during the summer, respectively, in order to discuss and settle legal matters. During these assemblies, chieftains, lawyers and farmers from all over the country gathered in one place, but, one can not expect that the sole purpose of such an important meeting was to discuss court cases. The \textit{Íslendinga Sögur} portray the assemblies as places where people also gathered to arrange marriages, exchange the latest gossip, display military and economical power, play games, meet old friends and, of course, have a few drinks. As \textit{Laxdala saga} puts it, during a \textit{Ping} in Norway “\textit{Pátt pótti skemmtanarsfar at sækja þann fund} [...] \textit{Pangat var ok kaupstefnu at sækja. Fundr þessi var allfjölmennur; þar var skemmtan mikil, drykkjur ok leikar ok alls kyns gleði.}”\textsuperscript{656} (Visiting the assembly was considered as a great entertainment [...] There was also a market to visit. This assembly was attended by many people; there was plenty of entertainment, drinking and games and all kinds of merriment.) Other sagas also depict the assemblies as an occasion which people attended looking for festivities and in order to have a good time.\textsuperscript{657} The author of the early fourteenth century \textit{Grettis saga} offers an explanation for these activities during the assemblies on the occasion of a spring \textit{Ping} celebrated at Hegranes, in Iceland. He explains that “\textit{Kom fjölmenni mikit ór allum herðum, þeim sem menn áttu þangat at sökja. Sánu menn þar lengi á várítt bæði}

\textsuperscript{656} \textit{Laxd} XII, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{657} For example see \textit{Heiði} XVII, \textit{Eb} XLI, \textit{Vatn} XXXVII.

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yfir málum ok gleði, því at þá var mæt gleðimanna í herðum.”658 (A large gathering came from all the districts, those who had men to prosecute in that place. The men stayed long there during the spring both engaged in legal cases and having merriment, because in that time there were many cheerful men in the districts.) This reference to the festivities at the local assembly (added to the many other ones in which the thing is portrayed as a joyful event) can be interpreted as the way in which medieval Icelanders perceived the atmosphere at the Viking Age Ping: a time at which even if there were legal cases to be settled, there were also opportunities for merrymaking. The comment about the fact that “in that time there were many cheerful men in the districts” as an explanation for the merriment at the assembly can also be interpreted as a comment on the political unrest of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries in Iceland. For the author, both the cheerfulness and the men who feasted during the assemblies belong to the past, probably implying that at the time of the composition of the saga the atmosphere was quite different at the Ping.

However, references to drinking at the assemblies are not so abundant.659 This may be due to the fact that for most Icelanders the annual journey to the Alþingi was a lengthy one. The national assembly, established in 930 A.D. and celebrated during the summer at Pingvellir, in southwest Iceland, was a young institution. The participants needed to take with them all the provisions they required for their journey and their stay at the Ping. Later on, merchants arrived at the assemblies in order to sell their products. But when the assemblies were still quite young, as in the case of a reference to a Ping around 960 A.D., we are told that “þat var þá háttæ, at menn vistuðu sik sjálfir til þings, ok reiddu flestir mali um sqóla sina.”660 (It was then the custom that men carried their own provisions to the Ping, and most men rode with a knapsack on their saddle.) Again,

658 Gr LXXII, p. 229.
659 The most common entertainments at the assemblies, according to the Íslendinga Sögur, were ball-games and wrestling matches.
660 Gr XVI, pp. 45-46.
this allusion to the way ‘things used to be’ can be read as a statement saying that ‘things are no longer that way’ and that men do not need to carry their provisions any more. In any case, if carrying food provisions for a 15-day stay at the Ping or at the Alþingi can be seen as a troublesome, then transporting by horseback a large volume of alcohol to provide one’s retinue was most surely an ordeal. So, drinking at the Ping or Alþingi might have not been a common practice during the early stage of these institutions.

The late thirteenth-century Qlktosra þáttr tells the story of a merchant called Þórhallr who was nicknamed Qlktosri [Ql/-hood] because his main trade was to sell ql at the Alþing. The þáttr reports that “Hann hafóti þá ídju at gera ql á þingum til fjár sér, en af þessi íðn varð hann brátt málkunnigr qllu stórmenni, þvi at þeir keyptu mest mungát. Var þá sem opt kann verða, at mungátin eru misjaðt vinsæl ok svá þeir, er seldu.” The þáttr seems to imply that both the ql and the mungát were brewed at the site of the þing (gera ql á þingum). Most probably Qlktosri went from booth to booth selling his brews, as on the only two occasions in which the Íslendinga sagur mention men actually drinking at the þing the scenes takes place at the booths of the chieftains who are attending the assembly. These scenes occur in Brennu-Njáls saga and Gysla saga; let us review these episodes.

In Brennu-Njáls saga, the Njálssons decide to visit the booths of several godar at the Alþingi in order to find support for their case. When they start visiting the chieftains, first “Þeir gengu til búðar Gizurar hvita ok gengu inn í búðina; Gizurð stóð

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661 Qlkt I, p. 83.
662 Mungátin eru (the mungát are). It is interesting to note the plural in this construction, implying that maybe he sold either different types of brews or, perhaps, different kind of mungát.
663 As we shall see in Chapter 6, it is giving, not selling, alcoholic beverages that enhanced men’s reputations.
(they went to the booth of Gizurr the white and went in; Gizurr stood up to receive them and invited them to sit and drink.) In this scene we can well suppose that when Gizurr stood up to welcome them he was already sitting at the *pallr* (cross-bench) drinking with his retinue and was just inviting the newcomers to sit and join the merrymaking. A similar scene follows in the next two visits to other booths, but without any mention of drinking. On these occasions it is only mentioned that the chieftain was sitting at the *pallr* and invited the men to sit. Probably drinking was taking place at these benches. As for the sitting arrangement at the *pallr*, the same saga states in various instances that the chieftain was sitting at the centre of the bench, sometimes on a high-seat.

It seems however that not all instances of drinking at the assemblies were considered as honourable. People might have been expected to sit and drink while they sorted out legal matters, settled agreements and strengthened bonds; but once they started neglecting their duties at the *ping* because of their overindulgence in drinking, then gossip began to spread. Such is the case in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* when, during a spring assembly

*Nú sitja þeir við drykkju, Sýrdólir, en aðrir menn várur at dónum, því at söknarþing var. Pá kemr maðr inn í búð þeira Haukdóla, gassi mikill, er Arnór hét, ok mælti: ‘Allmikvit er um þýr Haukdóla, er þér gáð Einskis annars en at drekka, en vilið eigi koma til dóma, þar sem þingmenn þýrur eigu málu við at skipask; ok þykir svá qílum, þótt ek kveða upp’.*

(Now the men from Sýrdólir sit to drink [at the Haukdalr booth] while the other men were at the court because there were lawsuit sessions. Then a very noisy man, called Arnór, comes into their bothand and said: ‘There is a very great issue about you Haukdalr people, that you pay no heed to any other thing than drinking; and that you do not want to come to the court where your þingmen are dealing with important matters; and everyone thinks so though (only) I say it out loud.)

Of course the men cannot endure such harsh comments and having their reputation at stake, so they go to the court in order to offer their support only to find that it is not

664 Nj CXIX, p. 297.
665 Sitting places and their social relevance will be studied in the last section of this chapter.
666 Nj CXIX and CXX.
667 Gísl VI, p. 20.
needed at all. The saga seems to imply that after finding themselves without any business at the ping they go back to the booth (presumably to drink again) since soon after another man comes to find them at their booth to bring them new gossip.

There are only three instances in which drinking at the ping is explicitly mentioned in the Sturlunga saga compilation. In these three occasions in which people drink at the ping one can notice that by the Age of the Sturlungs, when the Ping and Alþingi were long established institutions, there had been some changes in the drinking places at the assemblies. As we will see later in this section, it seems that at least by the late twelfth century merchants such as Qlkofri had expanded their businesses and established drinking booths (qlbúð) at the ping locations. This does not mean that drinking at the godar’s booths stopped taking place, but it means that a new kind of gathering space appeared at some point in the development of the assembly sites. The first of these drinking scenes takes place in 1181, when Páll Sjónason, godi of Reykholt, is attending the ping. Sturlu saga mentions that, on the way to his booth, Páll runs into Jón Lofsson, and he invites Páll to join him at his booth: “Páll báð han hafa þókk fyrir bódit, - ‘en ek mun riða til búðar minnar, en vér munum drekka allir samt um þingit.’ Ok svá gerðu þeir.”

668 (Páll thanked him for the offer, - ‘but I shall ride to my booth, and we shall drink together at the ping.’ And so they did.) From the answer we can gather that Jón was actually inviting Páll to drink at his booth, but it is not clear if that ‘drinking together at the ping’ would actually take place at an establishment where people could gather to drink or if it was supposed to take place in the open, at the assembly site, as people seem to have engaged in drinking while the assemblies took place. In any case, by the year 1231 we get an explicit mention of a drinking-establishment at the assembly site. That year during the ping “Gekk Sturla þá til búðar Snorra, ok var hann kominn í hvílu, er Sturla klappaði þar at durum. Kallaði Sturla

668 Stsl XXXIII, p. 112.
Then Sturla went to Snorri's booth, but he had gone to bed when Sturla knocked at the door. Sturla called Snorri to the qlbūð [ql-booth] and there told him about the killing. Maybe by the early thirteenth century this kind of establishment had become more common at the assembly sites. All that we can know for sure is that there was a transition in the places where people gathered to drink during the assembly. The third and last reference to drinking at the ping in the Sturlunga saga compilation is of a dubious nature. The same Sturlu saga mentions, just after the scene in which Páll Sölsson and Jón Loftsson agree to drink at the ping that “Sturla var oftast í búð sinni ok gekk Ólaf ok let skemmta sér heima í búð,” (Sturla was often in his booth and rarely went out and had his entertainment in his booth.) The context of the saga makes this seem as a rather isolated case; maybe already by 1181 it was more common for men to go looking for entertainment at the qlbūð, where they could meet more people, than to stay at their own booth.

Drinking at the ping seems to have become a problem by the end of the thirteenth century. The Icelandic law-code Jónshók, composed during the last quarter of the thirteenth century, attempts to regulate this problem by prohibiting alcohol intake at the lágréttta. The law states that “Drykk skal engi til lágréttu bera, hvarki til sqlu né annan veg; en ef borinn verðr, þá er upptækur, ok eigu þingmenn þat.” (Drink shall not be taken to the lágrétta, neither to sell nor in any other way; and if it is taken [to the lágréttta] then it is confiscated and the members of the assembly will keep it.) Furthermore, the same law states that “en ef nokkur sлаz i mat eda mungát ok rækir þat meirr en þingit, hann skal enga uppreist eiga sins máls á þeim degi.” (if someone engages himself with food or mungát and pays more heed to that than to the ping, he shall not raise his speech [case] to anyone during that day.) These two fragments of the

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669 Isl LXXX, p. 80.
670 Srl XXXIII, p. 112.
671 The lágréttta was the place where the assembly took place.
672 Jb, p. 8-9.
673 Jb, p. 8.

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same law seem to be contradictory, as the law did not allow any drinks to be carried to the *lagrétta* and at the same time it stipulates what is to be done if someone pays more heed to his drinking than to the assembly. In any case, what we can gather from this evidence is that people did actually consume alcoholic beverages during the assembly meetings. This might have led to some trouble, perhaps due to drunken speeches or drunken behaviour during the meetings, so that alcohol-consumption was banned at the assembly site. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that this law also bans the sale of alcoholic beverages at the *ping*, for this law is almost contemporary with *Qljofra hátt*, which is believed to be composed during the late thirteenth century. Perhaps the *hátt* is actually narrating events that took place during the time of its composition instead of events that took place soon after the settlement of Iceland.

4.3.2- Drinking at a Battle-Place

Maybe one of the most common images of the popular perception of the Viking Age is that of a group of drunken Norsemen or berserks raiding a village. However, this image is not very common in the literary sources, as there are only a few instances in which alcohol is said to be consumed before or after a battle. As is to be expected, the battlefield as a drinking place is to be found mainly in the *Fornaldar sagur* rather than in the other saga genres, as it is precisely this group of fantastic sagas that deals mainly with legendary Viking raids. Thus, the evidence that we are about to examine may belong more to a romanticized vision of the Viking Age than a historic portrayal of drinking while looting.

As we have seen in previous chapters, alcohol was an expensive commodity, a fact which could well have turned it into a commodity worth raiding for. This point of view seems to be supported by *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* where, during an attack in Gotland the Swedish king orders his people to evacuate the town leaving all their food,

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674 "The *lagrétta* was the public court of law held during the general assembly." *(IED, lagrétta)*
drink and jewellery on display. The reaction on the part of the attacking army is to believe that

Konungr þessi hefir verit hjartaraggr, er hann hefir hlaupit hér frá svá mikilli sælu dýrra gripa ok þar med búit sínun óvinum viss ok drykk. Erum ver mjök fallnir í fullsælu eftir vart esfíði. Skulum ver hér fyrst drekka ok sneða, en súðan skal skipa várú herfangi." 675

(This king has been feeble-hearted, and he has run away from so many precious things and left food and drink for his enemies. We have been greatly rewarded for all our troubles. We shall first drink and eat here, and then divide our loot.)

The saga states that the idea of leaving so many luxuries at hand was of course a defensive trick, for the king knows that the invading army will be tempted by all the luxuries he left behind, so that they would cease to pursue him in order to indulge with food and drink. Thus, at least in the mentality of the late thirteenth century that gave birth to this saga, the goods that were most sought during the Viking raids were not only material riches but also food and, moreover, alcoholic drinks, which were quite expensive in the Norse homelands.

It is probable that after having taken control over a village the raiders seized as many valuables as possible, alcoholic beverages included. So, in several instances the Fornaldar saga portray the troops drinking and feasting after a battle. Unless the attackers carried their own provisions and barrels full of alcohol to combat (which seems rather unlikely due to the weight of liquids) all the goods they required for their feasting should have been seized at the place of the battle. Accordingly, in Yngvars saga viðförla we are told that after the army takes control over the city of Heliopolis “Þar tóku þeir margs konar gersamar ok mikinn fjárhlut ok báru til skipa.” 676 (There they took jewelry of many kinds and many valuables and carried them to the ships.) Afterwards Yngvarr’s army most probably committed to drinking the wine they found in the locality, as the saga reports that the next morning “þá snerist fagnadr tilfars ok

675 HG XIII, p. 94.
676 YngV VII, p. 445.
"gleði vín í mikinn harm" 677 (then all the joy of the silver and the pleasure of wine turned into great sorrow.) Similarly, in Eymundar þáttr Hringssonar we are told that after a battle day "menn sváfu fast í öllum tjöldum, er þeir váru farmóðir ok mjök drukknir" 678 (all the men in all the tents were fast asleep, they were exhausted by the journey and very drunk.) Once more, all the provisions must have come from the cellars of the villagers. In the same way, in Gǫngu-Hrólfss saga, after having seized Novgorod and stripped the dead of their valuables, we are told that King Eiríkr "gekk í borgina með sinu füruneyti, ok hofðu alls kyns gleði með drykk ok hljóðfærum." 679 (the king went into the city with his followers and had all kinds of merriment with drinks and musical instruments.) Once more, the depiction of a fornaldar saga raid involves securing the invaded town’s alcohol supplies and celebrating while depleting them. 680

It seems quite reasonable to believe that, at least in the mentality of the saga composers, Viking raids involved the seizing of alcoholic beverages. This might have been a way of collecting provisions for the rest of the journey or a way of treating the self after a battle. But considering the prices of drinks in Medieval Scandinavia, alcohol, just as jewelry, was a commodity worth fighting for and, if possible, worth taking back home as the product of the expedition. The beverages seized during the raids could then be either drunk in situ or taken back home and used to gain power through the strengthening of friendship bonds through feasts. 681

Drinking after battle seems to have been a way of rewarding the self. But perhaps drinking before combat could have been considered as a quite heroic attitude or a way of strengthening the bonds between friends before the fight. Maybe this was a way in which the leader and his followers were to feast for the last time all together. Drinking as a group was a way of strengthening friendship and pledging allegiance to

678 Eym CIII, p. 212.
679 GFr III, p. 170.
680 Further scenes of drinking after a battle can be found in GFr XXX, p. 246 and HG XXXII, p. 163.
681 Gift-giving culture connected with alcohol will be studied in chapter 6.
one’s leader. Thus, drinking before going to war could also have been a way of reaffirming the bonds of the army to its lord as well as a way of reaffirming the friendship and loyalty between warriors before confronting death. This attitude can be perceived in Hrólfs saga kraka. In this saga, before going to fight his last battle (in which he and all his warriors die) King Hrólfr kraki sits to drink with all his retinue: “Hrólfr konungr sprettr nú ór hásætinu, er hann hafói áðr drukkit um hrið ok allir hans kappar, skilja nú við drukkinn góða at sinni ok eru úti því næst.” (King Hrólf leaps now from the high-seat after having drunk for a while, and all his champions did the same, they left the good drink and went out [to fight].) The saga portrays black magic and not drunkenness as the ultimate reason for King Hrólfr’s death so, the act of drinking before battle is not portrayed as an unreasonable thing to do. It is also quite significant that after having engaged in so many battles it is only this last one in which the king is portrayed as sitting to drink with his retinue. It might have well been the king’s custom to drink before combat, but the fact that the author decided to present this final battle in such a fashion might be intended to present the heroic attitude of this war-band, remaining calm before confronting death.

The manner in which the Íslendinga saga depict feasting while on a raiding expedition or after a battle is similar to the portrayal of comparable events found in the Fornaldar saga. For example, in Brennu-Njáls saga we are told that after a battle in Scotland “Jarl gerði þá veizlu mikla, ok at þeiri veizlu gaf jarl Kára sverð gott ok spjót gullrekit, en Helga gullhring ok skikkju.” (The earl held a great feast, and at that feast the earl gave Kári a good sword and a gold-inlaid spear, and to Helgi a gold ring and a cloak.) Perhaps the main difference is that here the feast is held by the earl in order to express his gratitude to his followers, while the drinking scenes after battles depicted in the Fornaldar saga appear as a logical consequence of distributing the battle-spoils.

682 This will be discussed in Chapter 6.
683 Hróf/L, p. 98.
684 Nj LXXXVI, p. 207-208.
Gunnars saga Kelduguðufjóls, probably composed sometime at the beginning of the fifteenth century, provides what, to my knowledge, is the only scene of drinking while on a Viking raid to be found in the Íslendinga sögur. The saga tells that, at some point during the late tenth century, Gunnarr spends a summer raiding and "Vard þeim gott til fjör og frægðar. Einn dag sigldu þeir að eyjum nökkurum. Þeir lögðu að landi og tjölduðu á landi og sofa af nóttina. Þeir sofmuðu skjót, er menn voru drouknir og móðir."\(^{685}\) (They gained much wealth and renown. One day they sailed to some islands. They made the land and pitched their tents and slept through the night. They quickly fell asleep because the men were drunk and weary.) As the text states that they had been raiding for a long while, one can then suppose that they got drunk with alcoholic beverages that were the product of plundering. Thus, at least this saga supports the Fornaldar sögur perception that, during raids, people looted for alcoholic beverages as well as for material goods.

In general, we have seen that apart from drinking at hallar and skytningar the saga corpus also presents other less frequent drinking scenarios. These are basically assemblies and battles. When it comes to drinking at the assemblies, the evidence we have from contemporary sources seems to prove that this is a historic fact. Alcohol consumption at the ping evolved mainly from drinking in one's booth -when the ping was still a young institution- to a more public form of drinking at qlíbúðar (qlí-booths) due to the later arrival of professional brewers to the site. People could also drank during the assemblies, but this seems to have been a source of trouble, so that alcohol consumption during the meetings was banned. But this last point seems to be debatable, as our only source for this is contradictory.

The Fornaldar sögur present several drinking scenes before and after battles take place. However, the nature of these sources does not let us arrive at any

\(^{685}\) GunnK VII, p. 368-69.
conclusions about the historicity of this fact. It seems logical to assume that alcohol was sought for as a product of raids and as a spoil of battle because, after all, it was just like gold and jewelry, a rather expensive commodity in the North. However, the way in which the sources portray such scenes make me believe that alcohol-consumption scenes in these circumstances are more the product of a romanticized vision of the Viking age than an actual historical fact. Evidence in other kinds of sources such as the law corpus, the Sturlunga saga compilation, or the Íslendinga saga is either scant or too absent as to draw any conclusions.

4.4 - Seating Arrangements in the Hall as a Symbol of Power

On his way back home from consulting a dream interpreter Guðmundr Eyjólfs­son has to spend the night at the farm in Tjörness, where he is welcomed and assigned a place to sit in the hall.

(And he was placed on the 'high-seat' and Ófeigr Járnerðarson was placed further in, in front of him. And when the tables were set, then Ófeigr put his fist on the table and said: 'How big does this fist seem to you, Guðmundr?' He said: 'Very big.' Ófeigr said: 'Do you think that there is any strength in it?' Guðmundr said: 'I think there is.' Ófeigr says: 'Do you think that a great blow can come from it?' Guðmundr says: 'A very great one.' Ófeigr says: 'Do you think that it can do any harm?' Guðmundr said: 'Broken bones or death.' Ófeigr answers: 'How

687  The original reads 'qndvegi', which in an Icelandic context is very similar to the 'high-seat'. For the sake of clarity, at the moment I will translate 'qndvegi' as 'high-seat' and not as 'opposing-seat'. These concepts will be dealt with in detail later in this section.
would you like to receive your death from it?' Guðmundr said: 'Very badly, and I would not like to get that.' Öfeigr said: 'Then don’t sit in my place.' Guðmundr said: 'That shall be done,' and sat in another place. It could be perceived that Öfeigr wanted to be reckoned as the greatest one in there, as he had always occupied the high-seat.)

This passage illustrates the conflicts that commonly arose in relation to the seating arrangements made for the guests in the halls. As we will see in the following pages, the seating order in the hall followed a rigorous arrangement, that categorized and classified and organized the community in the hall according to the place that each of its members held in society. The hall was a microcosm in which the community was symbolically placed representing the social structure. Among the criteria for the seating order, social status, gender and age seem to have been most common. In this section I will analyze the role of seating arrangements in the hall in connection with power display and recognition. For this purpose, I will approach the topic following the sequence of events with which seating was organized. That is, I will start by studying the guests’ arrival and recognition in the hall, as knowing the status of a guest was essential to provide him a seat in accordance to his rank. I will then proceed to study the different types seating allocation available as well as their social significance. Finally, I will analyze the different situations that arose in connection with seating in a hall.

The host of a feast had to carefully plan the seating arrangement of his guests in order to maintain social structure and, maybe more importantly, to avoid offending his guests by assigning them a place that was not in accordance with their status. As seen in the example provided above, these difficulties increased when there was an unexpected guest in the hall, especially if the newcomer was a stranger, as sometimes the seating order had to be rearranged. If the newcomer was someone the host was acquainted with, he was simply assigned a sitting place. But if he was a stranger, then the host’s first task was to identify the newcomer by asking his name and family in order to know his status and, perhaps, his prowess or faults. Then, once the status of the newcomer was established (if at all), the second task was to provide the guest with a seat according to
his social rank. As seen in the example from *Ljósvetninga saga*, the position accorded to the newcomer could sometimes cause some perturbation among other people at the hall, who might have felt jealous if the person who had just arrived was assigned a place of more importance than the one they held.

Sitting in the appropriate place at public gatherings seems to have had special importance in the worldview of the Norse. Considering that feasts and social meetings did not happen very often, they were one of the few occasions on which people had a chance to show-off their wealth and status and, through that, to re-assert their rank and both display and find out where they stood in the power-pyramid.

Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising (and perhaps even symbolic) that the opening lines of the lore known as *Hávamál* give advice about expected behaviour when entering a hall:

\[
\text{Gáttir allar } áðr gangi fram,} \\
\text{um scóðaz scyfi,} \\
\text{um scegnaz scyli;} \\
\text{þvat óvist er at vita } \text{hvar óvinir} \\
\text{sitja á fleti fyrir.} \text{688}
\]

(All the doorways, before you walk forward, / one should look at, / one should spy, / because it is not known for certain where enemies sit ahead in the house.)

And once the guest enters the hall he speaks the following words:

\[
\text{Gefendr heilir! } \text{gestr er inn kominn,} \\
\text{hvar scal sitia siá?} \\
\text{mioc er bráðr, } \text{sá er á brændom scal} \\
\text{sins um freista frama.} \text{689}
\]

(Blessed be the giver! A guest has come arrived, / where shall he sit? / Great is his haste, the one who by the fire is going to be tested out.)

In Old Norse literature there is a plethora of examples that follow the model of these two stanzas. Both the size and weather of Iceland and Norway forced travellers make breaks during their journey and ask friends and strangers for hospitality. And it seems to

688 Háv 1. This stanza is also found in the beginning of Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*, when Gylfi enters the hall of the gods. See *Gyf* 2.

689 Háv 2.
have been customary to offer hospitality to almost every person who asked for it, be it a friend or an enemy. Some extreme examples of the duty to offer hospitality can be found in *Vápnfröinga saga*, *Njáls saga* and *Valla-Ljóts saga*. For example, *Vápnfröinga saga* narrates how after a journey to summons Þorleifr inn kristni (Þorleifr the Christian) the weather conditions force Ketill to return to Þorleifr’s farm and ask for lodging.\(^{690}\) In *Njáls saga* we hear about Flosi, who rides with one hundred men to the farm of a man he had murdered and asks for hospitality. There, in spite of the humiliation and hatred of his host, he and his men are provided with a meal.\(^{691}\) Something similar happens in *Valla-Ljóts saga*, where we get to hear an explanation for this sort of forced hospitality. There Ljótr confronts Þorgrimr for hosting their enemies and asks ""*Hví töktu við óvinum várum, Þorgrimr frændi?*" Hann svarar: *'Pat eina samði mér.***\(^{692}\) (‘Why did you receive our enemies, kinsman Þorgrimr?’ He answered: ‘That was the only appropriate thing for me to do.’) In other words providing hospitality, even to one’s foes, was considered as an honourable conduct.

Returning to our *Hávamál* stanzas, they stress, apart from the duty of hospitality, the need to find an appropriate place to sit in the hall. As William I. Miller puts it: ""More tense than the *mannjafnaðr* game was the feast itself where the ranking games were played, for the host had to seat his guests and the seating arrangement was its own man-comparing game.***\(^{693}\) On most occasions, the conventions of the seating order are kept implicit as ""everyone generally had an idea of who belonged where.""\(^{694}\) However we find a few occasions on which these rules are verbalized. There seem to be three standards, which can be summarized through the next three brief examples. First, and

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\(^{690}\) *Vápnf*, p. 34-35. In the saga Þorleifr the Christian’s reaction when his summoners leave is: ""*Hann bad þá atri hverfa, ef védrii taki at harróna*"" (He invited them to return if the weather began to worsen) (*Vápnf*, p. 34.) This, plus the fact that the narrator stresses the fact that Þorleifr is a Christian may be a way of comparing the ethos of heathen and Christian religions more than an actual reflection of reality.

\(^{691}\) *Nj* CXXXVI, p. 359-62.

\(^{692}\) *Vall VII*, p. 254.


\(^{694}\) Miller, p. 176.
most common in any kind of gathering are the men's personal and social qualities. A clear example of this occurs during a feast at Fornastaðir, when the hosts are preparing to receive the guests: "'Faðir,' segir hann, 'hvárt skal skipa mænnum at mannvirðingu eða eptir framgøngu?"695 ('Father' says he, shall I arrange the seating of the men by honour/rank or according to bravery?"") This kind of seating arrangement could be only applied to men, though, as we will see later, women could also be placed according to their status. The second most common way of arranging the seating was by gender. This is made clear at a wedding feast in Rangárvellir, where "Skipuðusk menn þar í sæti, en konur skipuðu pall, ok var brúðrin dapr heldr. Drekka þeir veizluna, ok fer hon vel fram."696 (The men were arranged there on the seats [benches], and the women were arranged at the dais and the bride was downcast. They drank, and the feast went well.) According to the literary sources, a gendered distribution of guests was the most common arrangement at wedding feasts, as it is often stated that men and women sat in different locations during these gatherings. Finally, there is a third way of arranging the seating, which is not mentioned very often, this is by age, as is explicitly told in Svarfdæla saga. There, during a wedding at Grund "Varð mænnum skipat í sæti á Grund; sátu allir ellri menn á annan bekk, en Þorsteinn svæðuför ok Karl, son hans, ok Klauði, frændi þeira, á annan."697 (The men were arranged in their seats at Grund; all the older men sat at one bench, and Þorsteinn svæðuför and Karl, his son, and Klauði their kinsman at another.) There are a few instances in which children are said to attend feasts698 and in the few that do mention their position in the hall they appear playing on the floor, as is the case of Hallgerðr Hóskuldsdóttir who during a feast "lék sér á gölfínu við aðrar meýjar".699 (played on the floor with other girls.). It seems more plausible to find children playing on the floor during feasts than to find them engaged in drinking

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695 Ljósv XV(XXV), p. 83.
696 Nj VI, p. 21-22.
697 Svarfd XIV, p. 165.
698 For example, see Finnb VI and Vain VII.
and socializing or doing politics at the benches. And cases like that of Egill Skallagrimsson, who at the age of three is forbidden from attending a feast because, as his father states, "þú kannt ekki fyrir þér at vera í fjólmenni, þar er drykkjur eru miklar, er þú þykkir ekki góðr viðskiptis, at þú sér ódrukktinn" (you cannot behave properly as to be at a gathering where there is heavy drinking; you are not easy to deal with even when you are not drunk) seem more unlikely. This might be a particular trait of Egill's or a literary invention to characterize Egill rather than a common occurrence for children at feasts.

There is yet another way of allocating places called tvimenningar, which is drinking in pairs with each couple sharing a drinking vessel. It seems that this custom designated a man and a woman as drinking partners during a feast. For example, at a feast in Egil's saga we are told that:

Par var hlutaðr tvimenningar á òpinum, sem síðvenja var til. En þar at gildinu var sá maðr, er Hógni hét; hann átti bú í Leku; hann var maðr stóraúðgr, altra manna fríðastr sýnum, vir maðr ok ættmár, ok hafði hafisk af sjálfum sér. Hann átti döttur allfríða, er nefnd er Hildiríðr; hon hlaut at siða hjá Bjargólfr.

(In the evening they cast lots to decide on the tvimenningar, as was the tradition. At the banquet there was a man called Hógni, he lived at Leka, he was a wealthy man, he was the handsomest of men, a wise and he came from an ordinary family and had achieved his position by his own means. He had a very attractive daughter who is called Hildiríðr, she was allotted to sit together with Bjargólfr.)

Similarly, in Kormáks saga, the tvimenningar consists of a man and a woman, as "Kormákr sat útar við dyr í tjaldinu ok drakk tvimenning á Steingerði." (Kormákr sat on the outer side of the bench, near to the door in the tent and drank tvimenningar with Steingerðr.) Of course, when there were not enough women to pair every man with at the feast, two men were assigned to sit and shared the same horn. Íslendinga saga offers an example of this. The saga tells that "sat þá Ísleifr Gizurarson innar frá Hrafni ok

700 Eg XXXI, p. 81.
701 Eg VII, p. 16.
702 Korm XXV, p. 295.
(then Ísleifr Gizurarson sat next to Hrafn and both drank from the same silver goblet and, throughout the day, they saluted each other with a kiss while each toasted to the other.) More than a homoerotic scene, this last occurrence seems to be a parody of what actually happened when a man and a woman drank tvimenningr. After all the tradition seems to have been outdated by the thirteenth century since, when it is mentioned in *Egill's saga*, the narrator states that they did it ‘*sem síövenja var til*’ (as was the tradition). This might be an antiquarian touch on the part of the narrator, who may be trying to portray ancient Icelandic customs. *Tvimenningr* drinking between men and women also seems to be a literary motif since it often leads to a feud derived from the intimacy between drinkers.

The choice of seats available in a hall were the háseti, qndvegi, pallet, bekkir, and, of course, the floor (gólf). The most prestigious of these was the háseti (high-seat), which is a compound of the words hár (high) and sæti (seat), the person sitting on it was called the hásetismaðr (high-seat man). It was normally placed in the middle of the bench, and the prestige of the other seats in the hall was set according to their distance from and position relative to it. The háseti, as IED puts it, was associated with the nobility, i.e. kings and earls. Accordingly of the 24 times in which the háseti is mentioned in the *Íslendinga saga*, in 8 instances it is associated with a king; in 2 cases it is associated with a queen; and in 3 cases it is an earl who occupies it. However, it seems that it was not only associated with nobility, but with wealth and power in general, as in 11 instances we also find the háseti in Icelandic locations, in

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703 Isl CLXX, p. 483.
704 IED, hár.
705 OrdT returns 24 entries for the term háseti, namely, those discussed below. See OrdT, háseti.
706 Eg XI, LV (bis), Nj CLIV, Bárð XVII (bis), Jqkul III, Vigl IV, VI and, Flóam XII.
707 Nj III (bis).
708 Flj IV, XIV and Vigl IV.
these cases occupied by godar or by rich farmers [mestr bönd]. For a contemporary audience, the location of the high-seat was most probably well known, and so we can find only a few references stating its place within the hall. Brennu-Njáls saga, for example, tells us that at the hall of Guðmundr inn riki, a powerful Icelandic chieftain “hásæti var í miðri búðinni, ok sat þar Guðmundr.” (the high-seat was in the middle of the room, and Guðmundr sat there.) This remark on the location of the high-seat might be due to the fact that it was oddly placed, making it noteworthy, as one would expect for the hásæti to be located in a place where the guests could see their leader but also in a position in which the leader would be able to see all of his men. Thus, being located in the centre of the room, the hásætismaðr could not be aware of that what happened at his back. Another chapter of the saga locates the hásæti at the dais, from where the leader could keep an eye on all the attendants: “settu hann á pall í hásæti” (placed him at the high-seat, on the dais), which makes it a more strategic location.

The qndvegi (also spelled qndugi) was the next most honourable place to sit within a hall. This is a compound word formed by the elements and (opposite) and vegr (way), meaning ‘the opposite seat’ (to the high-seat). IEW translates it as “hochsitz” (high-seat) and relates it to the root and-, meaning “entgegen” (towards), equivalent to the Gothic anda- and the Latin ante, meaning “gegenüber” (opposite), which confirms the etymologies provided by IEW. The man who sat at it was called qndvegismaðr (also spelled qndugismaðr), that is, the next person in rank or esteem from the hásætismaðr. That means that the two seats of highest honour were facing each other. And here we find a difference between the Icelandic and the Norwegian traditions. As in Iceland there was no nobility and, as the hásæti was mostly reserved

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709 These occur in Eb XXXIII, Nj CXVI (bis), CXVIII, CXIX, CXLVII, CLIX and, Eir IV.
710 Nj CXIX, p. 301.
711 The term hásætismaðr occurs only one in the Islendinga saga, in Kjaln XIV. See OrdT, hásætismaður.
712 Nj CXLVII, p. 421.
713 IEW, qndvegi.
714 IEW, and-.
for royalty, then qndvegi was the name of the seat of highest honour in Iceland. On the other hand, in Norway qndvegi was the name of the second highest place of honour, though sometimes the term is used to designate both of these opposing places. The qndvegi was reserved for the king’s or earl’s most esteemed men or for his high-status visitors. For example, in Egils saga we read that: “af qllum hirðmínum virði konungr mest skáld sin; þeir skipuðu annat qndvegi.”715 (of all his retinue, the king held his poets in highest regard, they occupied the other qndvegi.) The qndvegi is often mentioned in connection with halls in Iceland and it is the place at which the godar are said to be sitting at meetings and feasts. The seat seems to have been decorated by a pair of wooden posts or pillars, called qndvegissúlur (qndvegi posts), about which little is known716 but they still play an important role in Icelandic history. According to Landnámabók Ingólfur Arnarson, the first settler of Iceland took his qndvegi-pillars with him when he migrated to Iceland. When he sighted land “skaut hann fyir børð qndugissúlum sinum til heilla; hann mælti svá fyir, at hann skyldi þar byggja, er súlurnar þæmi í land”717 (he threw overboard his qndvegi-pillars for good luck; he then said that he should settle there where the high-seat pillars landed.) This action inspired a full generation of settlers who also cast their qndvegi-pillars overboard and settled at the place in which they came ashore.718 Or maybe this act only inspired several saga-composers, providing them with a poetic motif to embellish the stories of the first generation of settlers. It is also interesting to note that the qndvegi (or opposing seat) had meaning only in connection with the high-seat, which it opposed. Nevertheless, once the concept was taken to Iceland it kept its name, even if there were no high-seat to

715 Eg VIII, p. 19.
716 For further reading on qndvegi-posts see Hörður Ágústsson, ‘Óndvegissúlur í Eyjafirði’, Árbók hins Íslenska Fornleifafélags, (1975), 105-28.
717 Ldn VIII, p. 42.
718 For example, see Eb III, Ldn (S) CLXXIX (this occurrence is also mentioned in Vatn XII and XV), Korm II and Laxd III and V. Eg XXVII narrates that a coffin was used in a similar fashion.
oppose it. The qndvegi changed its meaning, from being the 'seat opposing the high-seat' to being the 'seat opposing the other opposing seat'.

The rest of the attendants sat at the bekkr or pallr. The term bekkr can be translated as ‘bank’719 (bench), “especially of the long benches in an old hall used instead of chairs”720 and depending on its position it could be an æðri bekkr (higher-bench) or an óæðri bekkr (not-higher-bench or lower bench). The first of this was the most prestigious of both benches. The etymology of the term pallr, according to IED, is uncertain, but the word is believed to be of Norman origin.721 AEW, translates it as “bank, bühne”722 (bench, stage) and relates it to the Germanic root *plaza, while IEW says that “wahrscheinlich altes lehnwort aus dem slav.: aslav. polu ‘seite, diele, bank”723 (probably old loanword from Slavic :Old-Slavic polu ‘side, floorboard, bench). In the literary sources this word is used as a synonym of bekkr, though it most probably refers to the dais or higher-bench. As mentioned earlier on, the prestige associated with each of the places in the bench was set according to their distance from and position relative to the hásæti and/or the qndvegi. The closest the seat is to the high-seat the more prestige is associated with it. This can be perceived in Þorsteins þátr uxafóts during a royal feast in Norway. At this feast “var Ívarr ljómi þá með konungi í svá mikilli virðingu, at tveir menn sátu þá upp í milli þeira konungs.”724 (Ívarr the Radiant was there with the king in such high honour, that only two men sat between him and the king.) Similarly, in Jökuls þátr Buasonar we are told that during a feast “settist konungr í hásæti og á æðra hönd honum Jökull, en son hans á æðra”725 (the king sat on the high-seat and Jökull [sat] on one side of him and his son on the other.) That is, the

719 AEW, bekkr and IEW, bekkr.
720 IED, bekkr.
721 IED, pallr.
722 AEW, pallr.
723 IED, pallr.
724 Púxaf XIII, p. 365.
725 Jákuls III, p. 58.
prince, or the second person in importance at the feast, sits next to the king (or goði).\textsuperscript{726} The bench on the king's (or goði's) side, called æðri bekkr, was the one that enjoyed the highest esteem; second to it in importance was the bench facing the king's or goði's bench, called Óæðri bekkr. When it comes to an Icelandic context where, as we have seen, there were no high-seats but just a pair of opposing seats, the difference between that qndvegi located on the high-bench and that located on the lower bench was often made explicit. Thus, we hear that "maðr sat i Óndugi á inum æðra bekk"\textsuperscript{727} (a man sat on the opposing seat on the higher bench) in contrast with "þér mun skipat á inn æðra bekk gegnt qndugi Hrúts"\textsuperscript{728} (you will be seated on the lower bench, next to Hrútr's opposing seat). This was just a way of clarifying who actually occupied the most honourable of the opposing seats.

There are just a few instances in which the social importance of the lower bench is explicitly stated, as on most occasions it can be perceived from the internal politics of the saga. However, Fjótsdæla saga provides an explicit, though not complete, list of the people expected to occupy the lower bench. In it, Þorvaldr is ordered to "sittu á æðra bekk þar sem mæstast þrælar og frjálsir menn."\textsuperscript{729} (sit on the lower bench, there where the thralls and the free men gather.) This does not necessarily mean that only slaves and free men sat on the lower bench; Þorvaldr is actually being assigned a seat on the lower bench and among those who are more distant from the high-seat. As we have seen, an qndvegi was also located on the lower bench, but its proximity to the qndvegi on the higher bench or to the hásæti raised its status as compared to those seats on the same side of the table but that were more distant from it.

Since each position at the bench had a social status linked to it depending on its relative position from the high-seat or opposing seat on the higher bench, seat allotment

\textsuperscript{726} The fact that the prince sits next to the king and not on the seat opposing the high-seat may be due to the fact that there was none in the room, as will be discussed later in this section.

\textsuperscript{727} Kjaln XIV, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{728} Nj XXII, p. 60.

\textsuperscript{729} Fj V, p. 223.
could sometimes prove chaotic. It had to be planned extremely well. Accordingly, the seating order in the hall can sometimes be described in rigorous detail, as it is quite meaningful for the development of the story, while at the same time it provides information about the characters and their place in society. This can be well represented during a feast in Njáls saga. This saga reports that:

Gunnarr haföi marga fyrrirboðsmenn, ok skipaði hann svá sínum mínnum: Hann sat á midján bekk, en innar frá Bráínn Sigfússon, þá Úlfr aurgöði; þá Valgarðr hinn gráí, þá Mqrór ok Runólfr, þá Sigfússynnir; Lambi sat innstr. It næsta Gunnari utar frá sat Njáll, þá Skarphéðinn, þá Helgi, þá Grímur, þá Hóskuldr, þá Hafr inn spaki, þá Ingjaldr frá Keldum, þá synir Pórís austan úr Holt; Pórir vildi stíja ystr vírðingamanna, þvi at þá þotti hverjum gott þar, sem sat. Hóskuldr sat á midján bekk en synir hans innar frá honum; Hrútr sat utar frá Hóskulði. En þá er eigi frá sagt, hveruðu qórum var skipat. Brúðr sat á midjum palli, en til annarrar handar henni Pórgerðr, döttir hennar, en til annarrar handar Þórhalla, döttir Asgrímun Einýla-Grímssonar. Þórhildr gengur um heína, ok báru þar Bergþóra mat á bord.730

(Gunnarr had many guests and he allocated seats to his men in the following fashion: He sat at the centre of the bench [bekkr] and next to him, towards the inside, sat Bráínn Sigfússon, then sat Úlfr aurgöði, then sat Valgarðr the Grey, then sat Mqrór and Runólfr, then the Sigfússons, but Lambi was further in. Next to Gunnar, towards the outside sat Njáll, then sat Skarphéðinn, then Helgi, then Grímur, then Hóskuldr, then Hafr the Gentle, then sat Ingjaldr frá Keldr, then the sons of Pórir from Holt in the east. Pórir wanted to sit on the outermost of the places allocated to the honourable men, because then everyone would consider themselves well seated. Hóskuldr sat at the centre of the other bench [bekkur] and his sons next to him towards the inside; Hrútr sat next to Hóskuldr towards the outside. And there is nothing said about how the others were seated. The bride sat at the centre of the dais and on one side of her sat Pórgerðr, her daughter, and on her other side sat Þórhalla, the daughter of Asgrímun Einýla-Grímsson. Þórhildr attended the guests and Bergþóra carried food to the table.)

But a few moments later Bráínn Sigfússon falls in love at first sight with Pórgerðr Þórstóinsdóttir and declares himself divorced from Þórhalla, and soon after, at the same feast, he marries Pórgerðr. Due to the change of status of Þórhalla and Pórgerðr the seating arrangements must be changed so that “Pa var skipat konum í annat sinn; sat þá Þórhalla meðal brúða. Ferr nú þoðið vel fram.”731 (then the women were seated in a different way; so Þórhalla sat between the brides. Now the wedding feast went on well.)

730 Nj XXXIV, pp. 88-89.
731 Nj XXXIV, p. 90.
In general, seating places had to be carefully assigned, so that the guests would be well pleased with the justice with which they were located within the hall, and the attendants felt that everyone was honoured according to his/her rank. If a guest felt that he was assigned a seat that did not correspond to his honour, the whole feast could end in drama. A good example of this is that of Ófeigr, in *Ljósvetninga saga*, who felt that he was seated below his rank. But seating someone above his rank could also be interpreted as an act of mockery and be perceived as an offence. For example, in *Njáls saga* “Flosi gekk inn i stofuna ok settisk niðr ok kastaði í pallinn hásaetinu undan sér ok mælti: ‘Hvárki em ek konungr né jarl, ok þarf ekki at gera hásaeti undir mér, ok þarf ekki at spotta mik.’” (Flosi went into the room and sat down and threw over the bench the high-seat that was under him and said ‘I’m not a king or an earl, and there is no need to place a high-seat under me, and there is no need to make fun of me.’) Hildigunnr, his hostess, excuses herself for that and says that she meant no harm by this action and her apology is accepted. Men had to be allocated to a place which honoured them accurately according to their rank and deeds, otherwise they could feel insulted if they felt that the place was inappropriate for them. This rule also applied to women. The most famous seating dispute in Old Norse literature, leading directly to the greatest and most famous feud in Iceland, starts when Hallgerðr is displaced from her seat at the *pallr* so that another woman can take it. The conflict begins when “gekk Bergþóra at pallinum ok þórralla með henni, ok mælti Bergþóra til Hallgerðar: ’Þú skalt þoka fyrir konu þessi.’ Hallgerðr mælti: ‘Hvergi mun ek þoka, því at engi hornkerling vil ek vera.’

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732 Provided at the beginning of this section.
733 *Nj* CXVI, p. 290.
734 The conception of honour and mockery in this passage bears some resemblance to Snorri’s statement in his Prologue to *Heimskringla*, where he states that: ‘er þátr skálda at lófa þann mest, er þá eru þeir fyrir, en engi myndi þat ðora at segja sjálfum honum pæi verk hans, er allir þeir, er heyrró, vissi, at hégómi varri ok skræk, ok svá sjálfir hann. Pat varri þá hað, en eigi lof;’ (it is the habit of poets to praise the most those in whose presence they are, and none would have dared to say in front of him about deeds which all those who listen, as well as he [the praised man] himself, knew to be falsehoods and lies. That would be mocking and not praising.) (*HkrProl*, p. 5)
'Ek skal hér ráda,' sagði Bergróra.' Bergóra went to the pallr, and Þórhalla went with her, and Bergróra said to Hallgerðr: 'You must move aside for this woman.' Hallgerðr said: 'Not at all shall I move, since I do not want to become the old woman sitting in the corner [i.e. the one hat is pushed about from one corner to another].' 'I shall decide things here' said Bergróra.) Hallgerðr has to move and cannot forgive the humiliation. Her quest for revenge turns into a feud that sets the whole district in chaos for several years and ends in the death of several dozens of men, including her own husband as well as Bergróra's.

But how were seats allocated? In general, when a stranger arrives at a hall a scene similar to the following one takes place: "Ganga þeir til stofunnar, ok var hon altþjóðuð ok skipuð á báða bekki; skorti þar eigi glaum né gleði. Þeir ganga fyrir Steinþórr ok kvæðja hann vel. Hann tók vel kvæðju þeirra. Hann spurði, hverir þeir væri. Þeir sagðu náfn sin ok fður sins." (They walked into the room and it was hung all round with tapestries, and the benches were occupied on both sides; there was no lack of merriment or good cheer. They walked towards Steinþórr and greeted him warmly. He received their greetings warmly. He asked who they were. They said their names and that of their father.) As is to be expected, the newcomers entering the hall go in search of the man of highest rank in order to ask for quarters. They should be able to recognize him easily, as he is the man sitting at the qndvegi. Once they find him and identify themselves, they ask for a place to stay as well as for a place to sit in the hall. But it seems that they made a mistake in locating the highest rank man in the room because Steinþórr then directs them to the host of the feast, as it is his and not Steinþórr's duty to assign the seats. Steinþórr tells them "'pat er ráð mitt, at þit gangið yfir fyrir hann Hávarð, hærkarlinn, er sítr gegnt mér; spyrið hann eptir hvárt hann vill taka við ykkur

735 Nj XXXV, p. 91.
736 Hávls XIV, p. 340.
(it is my advice that you two go to Hávarðr, the grey-haired man who sits opposite me; ask him whether he will take you or not into with him into his community.) The fact that they go to Steinþórr instead of to Hávarðr, mistaking him for the host of the feast, might have been due to a confusion between the opposing seats. Hávarðr is sitting across from Steinþórr, and for the newcomers it might have been difficult to distinguish who was the host and who was the guest of honour since both of them occupied an qndvegi. When they finally manage to locate the host, "skipar þeim broðrum útar frá sér. Sátu þeir þá glaðir ok kátir."738 ([Hávarðr] seated the brothers farther out from him. They sat there glad and cheerful.) Their cheerfulness might not be due only to the fact that they found lodging but also to the fact that that the position they get is in accordance with their rank and that they consider themselves well placed.

The pattern to be found in most sagas follows this example; the newcomer enters the hall, identifies himself and his family, when his background is known he is assigned a place to sit according with his rank. However, the places are not always honourable ones, and people of lower strata and/or dubious morals tend to be seated apart. This could sometimes lead to trouble when other people disagreed with the way seats were allocated. A good example of this kind of situation can be found in Honsa-Póris saga, where Þórir and his foster son arrive in Norðtunga to a large gathering. "Er þar fjældi manna kominn, ok var sveininum gefit seturim, en þórir reikar á gólfínu."739 (A large number of men had arrived and the boy was given a seat, and Þórir strolled on the floor.) Þorvaldr, another visitor to the hall, is not familiar with the people of the district and finds this rather curious as, unlike the other guests, he is not aware of the fact that Þórir's place is on the floor because he is a slanderous and selfish man who is at the time engaged in an unjust lawsuit against Blund-Ketill, a honourable man. Þorvaldr then inquires about the man on the floor:

737 Hâvds XIV, p. 340.
738 Hâvds XIV, p. 341.
739 Hons VII, p. 20.
'Hver er sjá maðr, er reikar um góða?' segir Þorvaldr. Arngrímr svarar: "Hann er barnföstri minn." "Já," segir Þorvaldr, "hví skal honum eigi rúm gefask?" Arngrímr kvæð hann eigi varða. "Eigi skal svá vera," sagði Þorvaldr ok lafir kalla hann til sin ok gefr honum rúm at sitja hjá sér.740

("Who is the man who is strolling on the floor?' asks Þorvaldr. Arngrímr answers: 'He is the foster-father of my son.' 'Really?' says Þorvaldr, 'why isn't a seat given to him?' Arngrímr said that that he was not a person of any importance. 'It should not be like that' said Þorvaldr, and has Þórir called over to him and gives him a place to sit next to him.)

Þorvaldr might have asked about the man on the floor for two reasons. First, the presence of Þórir might have struck him because Þórir was the only man not being properly seated. Second, he might have found it unusual to see someone with the appearance of a rich farmer and who was also fostering the guest’s son being assigned a place commonly assigned to slaves or children. Hence, he does not find it proper for a free man to be sitting in a place that does not correspond to his status and invites him to sit down beside him. Þorvaldr does not seem to be aware that sitting places were not allotted only on the base of economic status, but also according to the morality and honourable behaviour of the guest in question. Þorvaldr thus breaks the norms of social equilibrium chosen by the host through seating arrangements; and the result is that when Þórir sits down he starts talking with Þorvaldr and through slander convinces Þorvaldr to support him in his unjust case against Blund-Ketill. People try to talk Þorvaldr into abandoning the case. They advise him "ger eigi þetta, Þorvaldr, því at eigi er góðum dreng at duga, þar sem hann er; en þú átt við þann um, er bæði er vitr ok vel at sér ok at qllu vinscell."741 (don’t do this Þorvaldr, because it is not a noble-minded man that you are helping, and you fight against someone who is both wise and fine and very popular.) However he still supports Þórir and, as expected, the deal ends in a series of lawsuits and armed confrontations between honourable people, which leads to the

740 Hons VII, p. 19.
741 Hons VII, p. 20.
burning of Blund-Ketill inside his farm.\textsuperscript{742} The lesson that the saga seems to convey is that once the symbolic order of seating within the hall is altered then, as a consequence, the social order is also disrupted. Innocent men are killed; unjust lawsuits are supported and won; halls are burned down. One cannot disrupt the symbolic harmony without disturbing the social harmony.

However, people’s positions could be upgraded within the hall without altering the social order, though this could only be achieved by accomplishing something which justified such a change of status. Perhaps the most famous example of this is that of Hqttr, in the legendary \textit{Hrólfs saga kraka}. Hqttr is a farmer’s son who goes to the king’s hall looking for entertainment. There people start bullying him and when he opposes them “\textit{siðan tóku þeir hann ok settu i beina sorp. En þat er háttir þeirra um matmál ok svá sem af er etit hverju beini, þá kasta þeir til hans}.”\textsuperscript{743} (then they took him and stuck him into a pile of bones. It is their habit at mealtimes that when they have finished gnawing the meat from a bone, then they throw it at him.) In other words, Hqttr is placed in the least honourable place in the hall - the floor - and treated in the most humiliating way. While he is perfectly capable of surviving this treatment (having bones thrown at him) a similar ‘game’ proved fatal for the historical Anglo-Saxon Archbishop Ælfheah, in the year 1012, who was killed by a group of Norsemen who treated him in a similar fashion.\textsuperscript{744} Hqttr, however, endures this treatment until Bqðvarr rescues him from the bone-pile and seats him at the bench by his side. Even if he is now placed in a more honourable seat, the men do not consider that his status has changed and start once again throwing bones at him. Hqttr still acts like a coward, he still does not deserve his

\textsuperscript{742} \textit{Hons} VIII and IX.
\textsuperscript{743} \textit{Hrólf/XXXIII}, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{744} The \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicles}, manuscript E, reports that on 1012 Archbishop Ælfheah was captured by a group of Vikings who “led him to their ‘hustings’ on the Saturday in the octave of Easter, and then pelted him there with bones and the heads of cattle; and one of them struck him on the head with the butt of an axe, so that with the blow he sank down and his holy blood fell on the earth, and sent forth his holy soul to God’s kingdom” \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles} E: 1012, 142. Further on this kind of game, see Ian McDougall, ‘Serious Entertainments: A Peculiar Type of Viking Atrocity’, \textit{Anglo-Saxon England}, 22 (1993), 201-25.
place among the honourable men, who are not pleased with his presence at the bench. However this changes soon after when, after having defeated a dragon, Bqōvarr forces Hqttr to drink its blood, which turns him into a valiant man. King Hrólfr acknowledges this change in his behaviour and admits Hqttr among his champions and he is assigned an honourable place on the king’s bench and the men consider him to be well-seated.\footnote{Hrólfr XXXVI.}

Stories like this, of a peasant who upgrades his position in society, of a freed slave who is later to be identified as a man of high birth, or of a low-caste stranger who then proves to be a famous hero are a commonplace in saga literature, and they are to be found, most of all, among the \textit{Fornaldar sagur}. This might be a literary motif to engage the audience present in the rooms in which the saga were read or recited. As Lars Lönroth puts it: “one function of this motif is evidently to make the audience identify the performer with the traveller”\footnote{Lars Lönroth, ‘The Double Scene of Arrow-Odd’s Drinking Contest’, in \textit{Medieval Narrative: A Symposium}, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1979), pp. 94-119 (p. 96).} or stranger sitting in the hall. It was a way of engaging the audience by presenting a society similar to theirs when it comes to the power-struggles and symbolic attitudes reflected through the politics behind seat-arrangements. Perhaps the main difference when it comes to this is that in literature it was easier to upgrade one’s status than it was in reality.

In general, we can see that the hall is not only portrayed as a place for rejoicing. Apart from being the ideal and idealized place where friendships and loyalties are created or strengthened, the hall is also presented as the scene for hidden power-struggles and status-recognition presented through the intertwined protocol by which each attendant was assigned a place based on his status. The place each person occupied in the hall was a symbolic representation of the position each person occupied in society. The struggle to be allotted a better place in the hall was nothing but another way of epitomizing the struggle to acquire a better place in society. Perhaps that is the
reason why saga literature puts more weight on describing the way in which seats were allotted in the hall than in describing the acts of comradeship that took place at the benches. The description of seating arrangements was both a way of characterizing individuals and their relation with other individuals as well as a way of adding information about the political situation of the area in which the saga takes place.
In Old Norse we find several formulaic expressions such as *drekka veizlu*, *drekka erfí*, *
drekka brúðhlaup* or *drekka jól*. These expressions mean, if one were to do a word-by-word translation, to ‘drink a feast’, ‘drink a funeral’, ‘drink a wedding’ and ‘drink Christmas’, respectively. However, the element *drekka* (to drink) is, on these occasions, better translated as ‘to celebrate’. It seems that, at least in the mentality of Viking Age and Medieval Scandinavians, the act of drinking was intrinsically related to the act of celebrating. Perhaps, the act of *drekka brúðhlaup* or any other feast did not involve drinking at all, but the expression manifested a wish or an ideal of consuming alcohol in order to celebrate. In the following pages, I will study the major feast and possible drinking occasions in the Old Norse world and try to figure out the role, if any, that alcohol consumption played in their celebrations.

5.1- Wedding Feasts

According to the *Íslendinga saga*, marriages in Viking Age and Medieval Iceland seem to have been in most cases the result of an agreement between families in order to increase their power by creating new alliances. This does not mean that in some cases the marriage did not spring from love, but it seems that at least according to literary ‘reality’ the main motivation for a marriage was mainly political, economical and even sometimes aesthetical, this last being in some cases the closest approximation to the idea of romantic love. Thomas Bredsdorff in his *Chaos and Love: The Philosophy of The Icelandic Sagas* proved effectively that love is indeed the second pattern (after the quest for power) that motivates the action in the *Íslendinga saga*. However, in many cases most of what we hear of a newly wed couple is that “takast mū ástir með...”
peim hjónum" (the couple came to love each other) or similar sentences to express that the affection came, if at all, only after they had begun their life together. Only in rare instances do we get a good insight into the blissful or miserable married life of the characters, like in the case of Njáll Þorgeirsson or of Gunnar of Hliðarendi in Brennu-Njáls saga.

In this section I will examine and focus on the evidence we have for both the arrangement of wedding feasts and the role that alcohol played in such ceremonies. I will start by examining the three different stages of the arrangement of the feasts as well as the logistics involved in the choice of place and host for the feast. The logistics of the ceremony are linked to the role that hosting a feast had in the quest for power in Old Norse society. This role is not only connected to the political manoeuvres that lay behind the union of families, but is also related to the ability to host a feast and thus offer alcoholic beverages which play an important role in Old Norse gift-giving culture. Unfortunately only a few scenes mention alcohol intake in the context of wedding ceremonies. In this section I will also examine those few scenes in order to try to understand the role that alcohol played in this ritual.

The sagas present three different stages in the marriage ceremony - namely the festa, then an intermediate period between festa and wedding and finally; the bod.

The first stage of the marriage ceremony is the festa, that is, the settling of the marriage agreement; the betrothal itself was referred to as brullaupsstefna. In it representatives of both of the interested parts would meet and arrange the bride-price (bruðkaup, literally 'bride bargain') and establish the time and place to celebrate the wedding feast (bod).

**THE FESTA**

747 Finnb XXIX.
749 Alcohol as part of the Old Norse gift-giving culture will be studied in Chapter 6
As we will see in this section, during the *festa*, the place and time for the wedding feast were set. In general, we can see that the wedding feast took place at the farm of the most honourable or powerful member of the families involved in the agreement. The reason for this may have well been that the richest and most powerful host would be able to provide the best feast and parting gifts for the guests, thus increasing with this his circle of influence. This honour and influence gained through the feast would also be transmitted to the groom and by association to the father of the bride. So, it might have been in the best interests of both families as well as of the newly wed couple that the feast was hosted by the one most likely to provide the most honourable feast and thus grant them the greatest support network. Meanwhile, on the side of the feast-host, he gained new allegiances, as both the newly married couple as well as the members of their families would create bonds with him and find themselves with the obligation to return the favour of hospitality and alcohol-gift-giving.

On some occasions the desire to celebrate the feast at the farm of the most powerful man as well as the reasons for the choice are made explicit: "*Pá mælti Gunnarr: 'Bið ek enn, at þú látit hér vera bodit í Hvammi, ok mun þá gørt verða með mestri sæmd.'*" (Then Gunnarr said 'I want to ask also that you host the wedding feast here at Hvammr so that it will take place with most honour of all.') It seems that on some occasions people would offer to host the wedding feast in order not to attend one at the farm of someone else of less honour or in order not to be considered of inferior rank than some other possible host. Thus, we have, for example, that in *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, for the wedding of Helga and Þorstein "*Fór Helga þá til Hofs með Þorsteini fagra, því at Þorsteinn hvíti vildi brúðkaupit inni hafa, því at hann þóttisk*

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750 This also includes extended family.
751 In general, the gift of alcohol was a gift that only a few could pay back, thus leaving the guests with the obligation to repay this gift with friendship, loyalty and allegiance if they could not return the favour. This aspect of gift-giving as a way of gaining power will be studied, in connection with alcohol and feasts of course, in Chapter 6.
752 *Hans* XI, p. 32.
Helga went to Hof with Þorsteinn the fair because Þorsteinn the white wanted to hold the wedding feast himself since he thought it inappropriate to attend the feast at someone else’s, that is why it was done in this way.) The problem of arranging the wedding feast’s location and thus determining the most honourable person to host it could actually lead to some problems when there was more than one candidate, as was, for example, the case in Íslendinga saga. In it, Sæmundr, considered to be “göfgastr maød á Íslandi í þenna tíma” (the most honourable man in Iceland at that time) made arrangements to marry Langlif, the daughter of the Orcadian earl, Haraldr Maddaðarson. However the wedding never took place because “Sæmundr vildi eigi sækja brúðkaup í Orkneyjar, en jarlinn vildi eigi senda hana út hingat.” (Sæmundr would not go to his wedding feast in the Orkney Islands and the earl would not send her from the Orkneys.) The saga does not state the reason for these negatives to attend the feast at someone else’s place, especially because everything seemed to be favourable for the wedding. However, it seems that the disagreement sprouted from the different perspectives on the place where the feast should be held, as none of the possible hosts would admit to being less honourable than the other. Thus, we can observe that hosting a fortnight-long wedding feast was not perceived as an economic burden; it was mostly perceived as a way of showing-off economic solvency and thus a way of acquiring power. It was a way of proving that one was the most honourable member of both families and, most probably, another way of exhibiting that one was able to host a well provided feast, where – expensive- alcoholic beverages were abundant.

As with many other kinds of contracts, the “festa” seems to have been sealed by both of the interested parties shaking hands and perhaps also sharing a drink. Hrólfss saga Gautrekssonar preserves a reference to what seems to have been a brew drunk on

753 PHvit VII, pp. 17-18.
754 Ísl XVII, p. 242.
these occasions, called festarql (betrothal-ql): “drekkr hann enn it sterkasta festaröl.”\textsuperscript{756} (then he drank the strongest festarql.) This betrothal-ql might have been just a normal ql that was drunk on the occasion of a betrothal as a means of sealing an agreement more than an ql especially brewed for the event, as was the case with the Jólaql. The only other reference to drinking in order to seal a marriage agreement comes from Gunnars saga Keldugnipsfils: “ok með hennar samhykki festir Gunnar Helgu sér til handa, og hófst þar in sæmilegasta veizla, og var þeirra brúðkaup drikkið á Hörgslandi.”\textsuperscript{757} (Gunnarr betrothed Helga with her consent and agreed to host a honourable feast, and then their betrothal was drunk at Hörgsland.) No other saga mentions drinking or toasting after a betrothal has taken place. However, even if the evidence for drinking a toast to seal a betrothal agreement might appear very weak, coming from a two occurrences -one from a rather fictitious Fornaldar saga- we can not disregard the possibility that this was an actual practice.

**THE PERIOD BETWEEN FESTA AND BOD**

During the span of time between betrothal and wedding, the feast was arranged. The literature shows no evidence of any special rites of separation or transition taking place in the interim and nor does the groom or the bride seem to occupy a special position within their community. During this period, the feast was arranged and provisions were gathered. Finnboga saga ramma provides us with a good example of preparations for a wedding feast. In it, the feast arrangements for Finnbogi’s wedding are described in the following fashion: “Síðan bjuggust þeir við veizlu. Eru öxn felld og mungát heitt, mjöðr blandin ok mönnum boðit.”\textsuperscript{758} (Then they got ready for the feast. Oxen were killed and mungát was brewed, mjöðr was blended and people were invited.)

Thus, the essential preparations for the feast consisted in preparing enough food and

\textsuperscript{756} HG II, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{757} GunnK XVI, p. 374.
\textsuperscript{758} Finnb XXIX, p. 301.
drink and gathering enough guests to make the feast an honourable one. Other sources do not mention so explicitly what the preparations consisted of. In most cases we are just informed that after the betrothal "var at veizlu snúit ok víða mónnum til bodit um heradit"\textsuperscript{759} (the feast was arranged and people from far and wide were invited to the wedding feast) or something similar. However, when we read sentences such as "Lídr til bodsins. Guðrún hefir mikinn viðrbúnað ok tilqflun"\textsuperscript{760} (The time for the wedding feast approached. Guðrún made great preparations and gathered a vast supply of provisions) we can well assume that people in the farm were engaged mainly in slaughtering and most of all in gathering and/or purchasing corn or honey for brewing as well as in collecting enough fuel for the process.

**THE BOD**

There are nearly 300 references "bod" (wedding feasts) and "brullaup" (weddings) mentioned in the *Íslendinga sögur*.\textsuperscript{761} The Old Norse term "bod" has four possible meanings: a bid; a wedding feast; a bidding or commandment; and a message. However, in the saga corpus the word is most often used in the sense of 'wedding feast' while its other meanings appear more frequently in the legal corpus.

Looking at the time of the year chosen to celebrate wedding feasts in the literary corpus, one notices that almost by rule of thumb they took place during two specific periods: around mid-summer and during the winter nights. As for the summer weddings, we can see that most of them took place around mid-summer: "var bodidt hálfum mânaði fyrir mitt sumar"\textsuperscript{762} (the wedding feast was half a month before mid-summer); "skyldi bod vera hálfum mânaði eptir mitt sumar"\textsuperscript{763} (the wedding feast

\textsuperscript{759} Flj X, p. 238.
\textsuperscript{760} Laxd LXVIII, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{761} OrðT returns 241 entries for the term bod and 45 entries for the term brullaup. See OrðT, bod and brullaup.
\textsuperscript{762} Nj XC, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{763} Nj II, p. 9.
should be half a month after mid-summer); “skal Snorri hafa boð þat inni, ok skal vera at miðju sumrī”\(^{764}\) (Snorri would host the wedding feast and it should take place at mid-summer) or; in more general terms “brullaupið vera at Þverá hálfum mánuði eptir þing”\(^{765}\) (the wedding was to take place at Þverá half a month after the þing.) These are some of the most common dates at which summer weddings took place: on most occasions close to mid-summer, that is, around July 28.\(^{766}\) The winter weddings took place, similarly, around the period of the winter-nights, that is, the three days that marked the beginning of winter, which in the Viking Age “fell in the period October 10-17.”\(^{767}\) Thus, we have most winter wedding-feasts arranged to take place: “boð stofnattr at veturnótum”\(^{768}\) (the wedding-feast was set to take place during the winter-nights); “var brullaup á kveðit at veturnótum.”\(^{769}\) (the wedding was set to the winter-nights); “Skyldi það boð vera um haustið á Geirlandi um veturnatr.”\(^{770}\) (That wedding-feast should take place in the autumn, in Geirland, during the winter-nights.) Other times of the year are exceptionally appointed, but in general most weddings took place at these two particular times of the year.

The reasons for the wedding feasts to be arranged to take place around mid-summer and the winter-nights most probably follow economical reasons. Van Gennep proposes that

The impact of a marriage on a group’s daily life seems to me to explain [...] why marriages are held in spring, winter, and autumn – i.e., at the time of little activity and not at the moment when there is work on the fields. I would not go so far as to deny a persistence of the ancient periods of rut or the influence of celestial cycles [...] But this influence hardly explains the frequency of marriages in the autumn. It is often said, on the other hand, that this time is chosen because the agricultural work is completed, the granaries and the treasuries are full, and there

\(^{764}\) Laxd LXX, p. 207.
\(^{765}\) Ljósv XII.
\(^{766}\) IED, sumar.
\(^{768}\) Laxd XLVI, p. 139.
\(^{769}\) Vall I, p. 235.
\(^{770}\) GunnK X, p. 377.
is good opportunity for bachelors to establish a home for themselves for the winter.\textsuperscript{771} Van Gennep’s point of view seems to be confirmed by Æðrandi’s refusal to attend a certain feast during the working period “Æðrandi heitir ferðinni, er á liði sumarit ok heyverkum er lokir”\textsuperscript{772} (Æðrandi promised to go (to the feast) when the summer was gone and the hay-making finished.) The reaction to his decision not to attend the feast at once is that “Áetill segir, at Æðrandi færi vel.”\textsuperscript{773} (Ketill says that Æðrandi acts correctly.) And most probably he did, refusing to feast while there was still plenty of work to be done at his farm.

There are two other probable reasons for wedding feasts to be celebrated at the beginning of the winter. The first is that by then all the Icelandic merchants due to return to Iceland for the winter would have arrived, most probably bringing as their cargoes enough malt and corn to guarantee a good alcohol supply for the winter which could also be used for the wedding feasts. If that was not the case, the groom could still sail abroad to obtain corn for the feast brews, as is the case of Oddr, in Bandamanna saga, who as soon as his wedding is set arranges a expedition to the Orkneys in order to buy malt and corn and thus provide his guests with a splendid feast.\textsuperscript{774} Also, it was at the beginning of the winter that cattle were slaughtered in order to guarantee that the remaining stock would have enough food to survive the winter. These two factors should have provided farmsteads with a surplus of meat and corn that could well be used in feasting.

Another probable reason to hold wedding feasts at these times of the year could have been also of an economic nature, for then they could be celebrated in conjunction with other festivities or other weddings as well as with funerals. There are, indeed, a

\textsuperscript{772} Fíj XIV, p. 258.
\textsuperscript{773} Fíj XIV, p. 258.
\textsuperscript{774} Band XI, p. 358.
few instances in which two wedding feasts are celebrated together\textsuperscript{775} while many of the weddings set for the beginning of the winter may have coincided with the winter-nights’ feasts. This could have helped the organizers to share and/or save in the costs involved in the preparation of the feasts.

**Drinking at Wedding Feasts**

In most of the references to wedding feasts the narrator does not stop to depict the events nor does he stop to describe the actual wedding ceremony. In only a few instances is the seating arrangement described, and from these we can gather that men and women sat at different tables.\textsuperscript{776} Perhaps the best descriptions of seating arrangements and wedding feast activities in the sagas come from *Brennu-Njáls saga*. According to this saga, it seems that it was customary that “skipuðusk menn þar í sæti, en konur skipuðu pall.”\textsuperscript{777} (the men were arranged at the seats and the women were arranged at the dais.) The groom “sat á midjan bekk”\textsuperscript{778} (sat in the middle of the bench) while “brúður sat á miðjum palli.”\textsuperscript{779} (the bride sat in the middle of the dais.) The compound word *brúðbekkr*\textsuperscript{780} (bride’s bench) also attests the gender-oriented seating arrangements on these occasions. A few women seem to have been appointed to look after the guests “Pórhildr gengr um beina, ok báru þær Berghóra mat á bord.”\textsuperscript{781} (Pórhildr waited upon the guests, she and Berghóra carried the food to the tables.)

There are also just a few references to the actual drinking scenes during weddings, and on all occasions it is just mentioned as part of the feast and not as holding a ritual significance in itself. So, in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* we are told that

\textsuperscript{775} For example see *Kjárn* II and XVII and *Nj* XXXIV.

\textsuperscript{776} Sitting arrangements at feasts have been discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{777} *Nj* VI, pp. 21-22.

\textsuperscript{778} *Nj* XXXIV, p. 88.

\textsuperscript{779} *Nj* XXXIV, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{780} This word appears only twice in the saga corpus, namely in *Svarfdl* XVI and *Laxd* LXIX. See ÖrðT, *brúðbekkr*.

\textsuperscript{781} *Nj* XXXIV, p. 89.
"drykkja skylti vera at hворотveggja boðinu ok var stráð gólfid á Sæblóli."\(^{782}\) (there was supposed to be drinking at both weddings and the floor was covered with straw at Sæbló.) During a wedding feast in Norway we are also told that "brúðrin var á bekk sett ok öll drykkjustofan alskipúð af mönnum ok konungr í háseft"\(^{783}\) (the bride was sitting at the bench and the drinking hall was fully manned and the king sat on the high-seat) which may also be taken as a reference to active drinking during the feast, but still we have no description of ritual drinking, if there was actually a ritual drinking at all. Similarly in the two instances in which drinking takes place during a wedding feast in Brennu-Njáls saga it is only mentioned as part of the feast: "drekka þeir veizluna, ok fer hon vel fram."\(^{784}\) (They drank throughout the feast and it went well) and " nú sátu menn hver í sinu rúmi ok drukku ok várku kátir."\(^{785}\) (Now every man sat in his seat and drank and were merry.) Finally, in Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfísís all we are told is that "drakk hann bruallaup til hennar."\(^{786}\) (he celebrated [his] wedding to her.) Perhaps of all the scenes that involve drinking at a wedding feast it is only that from Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfísís XVI that may show some hints of ritual drinking as part of the ceremony. This would be, if at all, expressed in the act of toasting for the bride’s wedding. However this interpretation seems far-fetched, and in general it would belong, together with the other scenes, to a mere description of joyful celebration than to an actual description of a wedding ritual. Perhaps the best description of the activities that took place at wedding feasts comes from a completely different kind of source. This is the Eddic poem Prymskvíða, dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century,\(^{787}\) in which Þórr travels to Jötunheim disguised as a bride in order to marry a

\(^{782}\) Gísl XX,

\(^{783}\) Vígl VI, p. 73.

\(^{784}\) Nj VI, p. 22.

\(^{785}\) Nj XXIV, pp. 89-90.

\(^{786}\) GunnK XVI, pp. 376-77.

\(^{787}\) See Alfred Jakobsen, 'Prymskvíða', in Medieval Scandinavia, ed. by Pulsiano, pp. 678-79.
$Jqtnn$ and thus recover his stolen hammer. Just as in the examples from saga literature, the poem describes a wedding feast involving a banquet with large amounts of food and alcohol:

(They arrived there soon in the evening / and in front of the $Jqtnar \, ql$ was served / he alone ate an ox, eight salmon, / all the delicacies which were intended for the women, / Sif's husband drank three casks of mjöðr.)

Even though the large amounts of food and drink consumed by Þórr are of a farcical nature, the victuals listed in the poem may represent the actual foodstuff consumed at wedding feasts. As we have seen, drinking and eating were central parts of the feast, but, again, there are no elements that could be considered as ritual or symbolic drinking in order to celebrate the wedding in the poem. The symbolic union seems to be represented more by the gifts presented to the bride in order to show friendship and love, and thus welcome her to her new family:

(In came the wretched $Jqtnn$'s sister / the one who dared to ask for the bride-fee: / 'you shall hand over the red rings / if you will gain for yourself my affection, / my affection, every favour.)

Þórr's intended sister-in-law demands the brúðkaup in order to welcome him/her to the family and gain all her affection. Perhaps this expresses the role of the valuables that the bride took with her. Maybe these were intended to gain friendships in her new family through gift-giving. Prymskviða is, indeed, a humorous and satiric poem. But in order to

\[^{788}Prk\, 24.\]
\[^{789}Prk\, XXIX.\]
be effectively satiric it must present elements that correspond with reality in order to suspend the disbelief. Perhaps some of the elements of the wedding ceremony that it presents correspond to factual wedding traditions, representing the proper attire (but the wrong bride), the actual banqueting (but taken to a carnivalesque extreme) and the actual role of the brúðkaup as an instrument to gain friendships with the bride’s new family (but this new family is a horrific sister-in-law).

In general we have seen that weddings were celebrated at times of the year in which a surplus of food and drink could be obtained and at the times of the year in which the farming activities decreased or ceased. This could guarantee not only a proper attendance but also that the feast could be celebrated with due honour not only to the couple but also to their families. Honour seems to have been a central element in the decision of the place where the feast was to be celebrated, and perhaps the host’s honour was also at stake in arranging a proper feast with enough food and drink for all the guests. Drinking seems to have been a central element both in sealing the wedding agreement and at the wedding feast itself. However, the literature does not provide any clues to what could be a symbolic use of alcohol for celebrating the union.

5.2- Funeral Feasts. - Drinking the Erfi

Old Norse literature records several instances in which people gather at an erfi, or funeral feast, in order to drink to the memory of the deceased. However, this ritual drinking seems to have more purposes attached to it than the mere honouring of the deceased. The erfi seems to have been a rite of passage perhaps more relevant to the change of status of the living than to the change of status of the deceased. Throughout this section, I will analyze the ways in which this ritual drinking is portrayed in the literary sources. As we will see, it appears to be that the erfi corresponds, in the minds of the saga writers, more to a ritual performed in the legendary past than to an actual
practice during the centuries in which the sagas were committed to writing. In this section I will also analyze the social role and relevance that these feasts seem to have had for the culture we are studying.

IED defines the noun erfi as “a wake, a funeral feast”\textsuperscript{790} and its associated verb at erfa as “to honour with a funeral feast; to inherit”.\textsuperscript{791} AEW defines it as “leichenfeier, erbe”\textsuperscript{792} and relates it to the Latin orbus “beraubt von” (robbed off) and the Greek orphanos “verwaist” (orphaned).\textsuperscript{793} These words are related to the nouns erfð and erfingi meaning ‘inheritance’ and ‘an heir’ respectively. These words may find a common origin in the word arfi, which “originally meant cattle [and later shifted its meaning to refer to] inheritance, patrimony”.\textsuperscript{794} IEW relates it to the root arfr “ochse”\textsuperscript{795} (ox). Thus, the erfi could be interpreted as a feast in which the dead is honoured, but also as an inheritance feast in which the heir receives, in front of several witnesses, the goods and rank of the deceased. The role of the feast might have been, then, both to honour the deceased as well as to gather together a large number of people who would bear witness to, and therefore legitimate, the new status of the heir or heirs.

The literature clearly represents this twofold role of the erfi as a rite of passage for both the deceased and the living. As Nilsson Stutz puts it, “the internal structure of the ritual defines clearly the participants’ roles, facilitates the transition emotionally and, most simply, makes the social change more evident to all involved.”\textsuperscript{796} However, the ways in which the erfi are represented in the literature tend to focus the attention mainly on one of these two roles. That is, erfi are portrayed mainly either as feasts at which the deceased is to be honoured or as feasts at which the heir is to legitimate his

\textsuperscript{790} IED, erfi.
\textsuperscript{791} IED, erfa.
\textsuperscript{792} AEW, erfi.
\textsuperscript{793} See AEW, erfí.
\textsuperscript{794} IED, erfð and arfr.
\textsuperscript{795} See IEW, arfr.
new status in society. The representations of these roles are not exclusive of each other, but usually one of these roles is more predominant in the description of the wake.

5.2.1- The Erfi As an Inheritance Feast

The descriptions of erfi as ceremonies in which the successor takes possession of the rank and goods of the deceased are far more numerous than those in which the main purpose of the feast is to honour the memory of the dead. Of course this does not necessarily mean that the deceased was not mourned and that the bereaved cared more about the act of succession than about mourning. However, as will be seen in the following pages, it appears that the erfi was perceived as a ceremony whose main purpose was the transmission of power and status, while the mourning and funerary rites were considered to be a separate ritual.

In chapter 36 of his Ynglinga saga Snorri Sturluson tells us about the erfi customs during the times of the legendary King Ingjaldr.

Pat var sôvenja í þann tíma, þar er erfi skyldi gera eptir konunga eða jarla, þá skyldi sá, er gerði ok til arfs skyldi leiða, sitja á sôrinni fyrir hásatínu allt þar til, er inn væri borit full, þat er kallat var bragafull, skyldi sá þá standa upp í móti bragafulli ok strengja heit, drekka af fullit síðan, síðan skyldi hann leiða í háseti, þat sem átti faðir hans. Var hann þá kominn til arfs alls eptir hann.797

(It was the custom at that time, when an erfi should be prepared for a king or an earl, that the one who prepared it and was to receive the inheritance should sit at the edge in front of the high-seat until the toast [or goblet] called the bragafull was brought in; then he should stand up and go towards the bragafull and make a solemn vow, then gulp down the beaker; then he was to be led to the high-seat, which belonged to his father. Then he was allowed to receive all his inheritance.)

As we can see, the act of drinking and making an oath seem to have been the central elements in the change of status ritual. It is only after quaffing the goblet and making an oath that the heir is allowed to take possession of his father’s status and possessions. Central to this ritual is also the act of drinking the bragafull, which is a compound word containing the elements bragr (best) and full (toast or goblet). Thus the name of this toast (or goblet), bragafull, means literally ‘best of toasts’ (or ‘best of goblets’).

797 Yng XXXVI, p. 66.
According to IED “it seems properly to mean ‘the king’s toast’”\(^{798}\) as ‘bragr’ can also be rendered as ‘king’. Lee explains that “the cup drunk in honour of the dead person was called \textit{full} in depictions of the pagan period, but minni in Christian times.”\(^{799}\) However, the 4 instances in which a \textit{full} is drunk in the \textit{Islendinga saga} do not correspond to funerals.\(^{800}\) The only other occasion on which this toast is mentioned in the literary sources seems to confirm this last rendering of \textit{bragafull}. This reference also occurs in \textit{Heimskringla} when, in \textit{Hákonar saga góða}, we are told that during sacrificial feasts the heathen used to drink \textit{ql} and toasts to Óðinn, Njörðr and Freyr. Then, after these toasts had been drunk,

\begin{quote}
\textit{skyldi þat drekka til sigurs ok ríkis konungu sinnum –en síðan Njórðar full ok Freys full til árs ok friðar. Þá var márgum mínnum lítt at drekka þar næst bragafull. Menn drukku ok full franda sinna, þeirra er heygðir háfóu verði, ok váru þat minni kállna.}^{801}
\end{quote}

(one should then drink to the glory and might of his king –and then Njörðr’s toast and Freyr’s toast for abundance and peace. Many men used to drink next the \textit{bragafull}. Men also drank a toast for their friends, those who had already been buried, and that was called a \textit{minni} [memorial toast].)

Thus it seems that the \textit{bragafull} is a toast drunk in the honour of the king both at \textit{erfi} and feasts. In the case of \textit{Ynglinga saga} it was most probably drunk in the memory of the dead king, though it can also be interpreted as the toast by which the heir becomes king himself.

The only other occasion in which the ritual surrounding the \textit{erfi} is described in our sources occurs in \textit{Porsteins þáttur bajarmagns}, counted among the \textit{Fornaldar saga} and dated to the late thirteenth century. In it Góðmundr the son of the deceased King Góðmundr\(^{802}\) of Glæsisvellir travels to the land of the King Geirrðr, a \textit{Jötunn} of whom all the previous kings of Glæsisvellir have been tributaries. The reason for his journey to

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textit{IED}, \textit{bragr}.
\item Lee, 122.
\item The term \textit{full} appears in \textit{Eg} LXXII (bis), and XLIV (bis). See \textit{OrdT}, \textit{full}.
\item \textit{HakG} XIV, p. 168.
\item The name ‘Góðmundr’ seems to correspond more to a title than to a personal name, as the same Góðmundr puts it: “\textit{Fadér minn hét Úlfheðinn trausti. Hann var kallaðr Godmundr sem allir aðrir, þeir á Glæsisvöllum bía}.” (My father was called Úlfheðinn Trusty. He was called Góðmundr as all the others that live at Glæsisvellir.) \textit{PorstBm} V, p. 329.
\end{footnotes}
Jötunheim is that "Hefir konungr gert mér boð, at ek skyldi drekka erfi eftir fóður minn ok taka slikar nafnbætr sem fáðir minn hafði." (The king has sent me a message, that I shall drink erfi for my father and take such a rank as my father had.) Once they arrive at King Geirrór's they are led into the hall in which the king is drinking. Then the ritual begins. When Godmundr enters the hall he is welcomed by the king and then

Godmundr settist á skórina fyrir öndvegum gagnvart konungi. Var sá síðr þeira, at konungssson skyldi ekki í háseti sílja, fyrr en hann hafði tekt nafnbætur eftir fóður sinn ok drukkt væri í fyrsta full. Riss þar nú upp í vensta veísla, ok drukku menn glaðir ok káðir ok fórú síðan at sofa. 804

[Godmundr sat down at the edge in front of the high-seat opposite the king. It was their custom that the son of the king should not sit on the high-seat before he had taken the rank of his father and before the first toast was drunk. Now began a great feast, and men drank gladly and cheerfully and afterwards they went to sleep.]

Even though the feast begins the night the heir arrives, the actual status transition does not take place until the following day. During the morning the feast continues, and in it

Síðan tók konungr gudvefjarskikkju ok logði yfir Godmund ok gaf honum konungsnafn, tók síðan horn mikit ok drakk til Godmundi. Hann tók við horninnu ok þakkaði konungi. Síðan stóð Godmundur upp ok stókkinn fyrir sæti konungs ok strengði þess heit, at hann skal engum konungi bjóna né hýðini veita, medan Geirrór konungr líföll. [...] Síðan drakk Godmundr af horninnu ok gekk til sætis sins. Váru menn þá glaðir ok káðir. 805

(Then the king took a costly kirtle and laid it over Godmundr and gave him the title of king, then he took a great horn and drank a toast for Godmundr. He then took the horn and thanked the king and made this oath, that he should never serve nor obey any other king as long as Geirrór lived [...] Then Godmundr drank from the horn and went to his seat. Everyone was glad and cheerful.)

Except for the use of the costly kirtle, the rituals described both in Ynglinga saga and in Porsteins þáttr bejarmagns are basically the same. In this last case also the swearing of an oath and the drinking are essential to the transition ritual. Not much attention is paid to the memory of the deceased. 806 It is also interesting to note that what Snorri describes as a pre-Christian tradition here is now attached to the Jötmar. This might reflect the contemporary perception of the erfi as a purely pagan (and thus impious?) ritual. This

803 PorstBm V, p. 329.
804 PorstBm V, p. 330.
805 PorstBm VI, p. 331.
806 Due to the late composition of the þáttr one cannot discard the possibility that its author was familiar with Ynglinga saga.
last idea seems to be sound, for most of the references to erfi in the literature appear in the Fornaldar sqgur while most of the few that are mentioned in the Íslendinga sqgur take place in the period just after the settlement of Iceland. And, while not a single erfi is mentioned in the Sturlunga saga the references in Heimskringla are attached to events that took place before the Christianization of Norway. Thus, it seems that in the mentality of the saga composers the erfi is a rite that corresponds mostly to the legendary and pre-Christian past. For example, in an Anglo-Saxon context, we have “material evidence that indicates some form of funerary feasting ceases after the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons” and that might have been the case also in the Old Norse world

We know little about what went on at the actual erfi apart from drinking a ritual toast and swearing an oath. They were feasts to honour the dead and to legitimate the change of status of the heir. As Nilsson Stutz puts it:

Death can be seen as a life crisis. Aside from the literal sense of it, death is truly a life crisis that needs to be handled, first, by the dying and those closest to him or her. And of course, with death the survivors need to seek a way to return to functioning life.

But in many cases the erfi are represented as feasts to celebrate more the transition of the living than the memory of the deceased. They appear to be more feasts to celebrate and facilitate the continuation of life, or at least the continuation of social standards.

Accordingly, in many cases, the erfi were celebrated not immediately after someone’s death, but mostly when the conditions were better to grant the largest attendance to the feast and thus add to the status of the heir. Thus, in the late thirteenth century Ragnars saga loðbrókar we hear of an erfi which took place three years after the death of a king:

Sá atburðr hefir verit út í löndum, at einn konungr átti tvá sonu, ok tók hann söt ok andalast, en synir hans viða drekkAR erfi eftir hann. Póir bjóða til þessar veislu svá, at allir menn skyldu koma þangat, þeir er á


\[808\] Nilsson Stutz, p. 67.
It happened in foreign lands, that a king had two sons; he became ill and died and his sons wanted to drink an erfí in his honour. They announced this feast thus: that all men should attend, they who hear of it in the following three winters. Now this was reported wide through the lands. And during these three winters they prepared for this feast. And when the summer came, and the erfí was to be drunk [celebrated], and [when] it was the time that had been announced, there was such a large gathering that no one could judge how many were there, and many large halls were made ready and many tents were set outside.)

*Laxdóla saga*, an *Íslendinga saga* also dated to the mid thirteenth century, provides us with another example of a long span of time in between the moment of death and the celebration of the erfí; and it also provides an explanation for such a delay. In it Hóskuldr Dala-Kollsson, one of the first settlers of Iceland, dies sometime in the early tenth century. Concerning his burial we are told that “*Litt var fé borit í haug hjá honum*”810 (Little wealth was buried with him in his mound) maybe implying that his heirs did not care much about the well-being of their father in the afterlife. However, when it comes to the feast, it is described as the second largest feast ever celebrated in Iceland: “*Var pat svá mikit fjölmenni, at pat er saga manna flestra, at eigi skyrt niu hundrud. Dessi hefir qnmur veizla fjölmennust verit á Íslandi, en sú qnmur, er Hjaltasynir gerðu erfí eftir fjóur sinn; þar varu tólf hundrud.*”811 (It was so crowded that it is said by many men that it had no less than nine hundred [guests]. This is the second most crowded feast there has been in Iceland, and the most attended is the erfí that the Hjaltasons arranged for their father; there were twelve hundred [guests].) The saga reports that his heirs “*peir broðr tal um þat, at þeir muni efna til erfis eftir fjóur sinn, þvi at þat var þá týska í þat mund.*”814 (the brothers discuss that they should prepare an erfí for their father, because that was the custom in that time.) However the

809 Ragn XIX, p. 281.
810 Laxd XXVI, p. 73.
811 Laxd XXVII, p. 74.
812 That is actually 1080 guests, as the Old Norse term *hundrad* referred to 120.
813 That is, 1440 guests.
814 Laxd XXVI, p. 73.
feast does not seem to be intended principally to honour the dead as much as it is intended to add to the social prestige of the heirs. As Hóskuldr Dala-Kollsson dies in the autumn, it is difficult for the bereaved to gather enough provisions and it is also difficult for the guests to travel. So they decide to postpone the feast to the next summer because “Sva lizk mér, sem ekki megi svá skjóttr at þessi veislú smúa, ef hon skal svá virðulig verða, sem oss þotti söma.”815 (It seems to me that we cannot celebrate this feast soon, not if it should be as worthy as to honour us.) It appears then, that the feast is intended to honour the new status of the heirs as well as to gather as many witnesses to this newly acquired role. Thus, at the end of the feast it is said that “Þessi veizla var in skárlíugst á at qlíu, ok fengu þeir bróðr mikinn söma.”816 (This feast was magnificent in all respects, and gained much honour for the brothers.) This great amount of honour for the brothers was acquired at the expense, the saga claims, of inviting the entire Alpingi, including godar, farmers, beggars and anyone who cared to attend to a fortnight-long feast at which 900 guests817 were entertained.818

The largest erfi reported in the sagas was celebrated after the death of Hjalti Bóðarson. This is attested briefly in Landnámabók, Bárðar saga Snæfellsás, Bolla þáttr and Laxdæla saga. Landnámabók states that

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\begin{align*}
\text{Hjalti, son of Bóðar skálp, came to Iceland and settled in Hjaltadal [...] his sons were Bórvallr and Bóðr, renowned men. The most renowned erfi in Iceland was that which they offered for their father; it was attended by twelve hundred guests, and all the men of distinction were offered departure gifts.}
\end{align*}
\]

815 Laxd XXVI, p. 73.
816 Laxd XXVII, pp. 74-75
817 That is actually 1080 guests.
818 The role of feasts and alcohol as a means to increase someone’s power will be studied in Chapters 6 and 7.
819 Ldn. p. 238.
820 That is 1440 guests.
The rest of the sources for this erfi, which are most probably based on Landnámabók, report this erfi also very briefly and in almost the same wording as the one in the quote.\textsuperscript{821} In any case, organizing a feast at which over twelve hundred guests\textsuperscript{822} attended must have taken quite a long time, and this erfi was most probably not celebrated immediately after the death of Hjalti but when the conditions were better for men to travel to it and when the heirs had enough time to gather enough provisions to entertain such a large gathering.

The longer the wait between the moment of death and the celebration of the erfi, the better the opportunities to organize a better feast and assure a larger attendance to it and thus grant a greater honour to the heirs. Regardless of the cost of these feasts, which must have been enormous, we must note that the honour gained from the feast was for the heirs and not for the deceased. From these examples we can gather that the main purpose of the feast was not to honour the deceased (who had already been buried long before the feast took place) or to facilitate the deceased’s transition to the otherworld. Otherwise the feasts would have been celebrated as soon as possible after the death in order to grant a quick adjustment of the dead to their new status.\textsuperscript{823} The erfi seems to have been intended as a ritual of transition for the living. It was a feast to celebrate the newly acquired status of the heir, and many sagas attest to this succession, which did not take place at the funeral but at the erfi. For example, in Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar, we are told that during spring the after the death of King Hringr, King Ingjaldr sends messengers to invite King Hrólfr to attend the erfi in honour of King Hringr. After a long journey Hrólfr finally arrives in Denmark, where the erfi is to take place. When he

\textsuperscript{821} Bárðr XXII, 171; Laxd XXVII, 74 and; Boll LXXIX, 232.
\textsuperscript{822} That is over 1440 guests.
\textsuperscript{823} The texts do not comment about a period of exclusion for the bereaved between death-burial and erfi. For the avatars of the deceased on their journey to the otherworld see Fernando Guerrero, ‘Stranded in Miðgarðr, Draugar Folklore in Old Norse Sources’ (unpublished master of philosophy thesis, Centre for Viking and Medieval Studies, University of Oslo, 2003).
arrives to the hall “Druku þeir nú allir samt með miklum veg erfi Hrings konungs”\textsuperscript{824} (They all drank [celebrated] together in grand style the erfi of King Hringr.) and the actual succession comes after the drinking has taken place. Then “Á því þingi er tekinn Ingjaldr til konungs eftir fóður sinn yfir Danmörk alla. Sitr hann nú ok semr ríki sitt á þá lund, sem Hrólfr konungr gaf ráð til.” \textsuperscript{825} (They have a meeting where Ingjaldr is made king of all Denmark after his father. Now he sits and rules his kingdom in the way in which king Hrólfr advised him to.) As we can see, the actual succession to the throne takes place not immediately after the death of a king, but when the circumstances allow the presence of worthy guests that would add to the honour of the new king. This, of course, does not imply that the heir to the throne did not start ruling immediately after the death of his father. He must have exercised his rank and power from the very beginning; however it was at the erfi, following the ritual in front of numerous and relevant witnesses, that his power became legitimate.

The literary corpus often presents the erfi taking place long after the actual burial due to the need to arrange a proper feast that would be large enough to honour the heir and, perhaps, the deceased. But was this really the case? As we have seen, the tradition of celebrating erfi is referred to in the sagas as an ancient pagan custom and definitely not in vogue during the period in which the sagas were committed to parchment. Is it possible, then, that the erfi had a further purpose than offering a feast in which the heir got access to his new rank, surrounded by an atmosphere in which he could display and legitimate his newly acquired wealth and power? Bertram S. Puckle argues that “much as it may have been contributed to the continuation of the usage, hospitality was certainly not the origin of the funeral feast. The special object of the gathering was largely for the purpose of offering prayers for the soul, in the actual

\textsuperscript{824} HG XV, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{825} HG XV, pp. 104-05.
presence of the body, till the burial." 826 We don't know much about the actual religious practices of the Norse, but we know that the literary sources do not preserve any reference to praying. Also, we know that the erfi was celebrated long after the burial, so its main purpose might not have been to pray for the soul of the deceased while the body was disposed of. 827 The main questions that remain are "Why was the erfi celebrated so long after the burial or cremation?" and "What is the symbolism of the act of drinking the bragafull before the change of status?" None of these questions seem to have a clear answer, and in many cases the erfi scenes raise more questions than they answer. However, the importance of drinking might explain why "the custom of funerary drinking is much more pronounced in Old Norse texts [than in Anglo-Saxon texts], which are, of course, from a later period. 828"

Regarding the first question, it is possible that the long period that the heir had to wait between the death and the feast in which he was acknowledged as the legitimate successor corresponded to the same length of exclusion or mourning period the heir had to go through. Thus, the explanation might correspond more to a ritual practice than to the social prestige portrayed in the literature. We must concede that in a society like that of the Viking period news took a long time to travel, and in order to have the right number and quality of guests, people would have to wait until the news of the death arrived at the right places and for the guests to prepare to engage in a long journey. It was necessary, also, to wait for the right time of the year in which potential guests could

827 In the ninth century Wulfstan described a funeral feast in Eastern Europe in the following terms: "There is a custom among the Este that after a man's death he lies indoors uncremated among his relatives and friends for a month, sometimes two. The kings and other high-ranking men remain uncremated sometimes for half a year - the more wealth they have the longer they lie above ground in their houses. All the time that the corpse lies indoors it is the custom for there to be drinking and gambling until the day on which they cremate it." (Wulfstan's Account', ed. by Lund, trans. by Fell, pp. 23-24.) Even though the location of this account escapes the geographical scope of this study, it is interesting to note that 'the more wealth they have the longer they lie above ground' perhaps in order to allow more time to prepare the succession and grant a larger attendance to the funeral. Also, in this case, the funeral feast precedes the funeral.
travel. But archaeological evidence seems to point also towards the fact that the journey to the Otherworld was undertaken by ship, horse or foot, and possibly it was a long journey. Is it possible that the length of time in between the death and the celebration of the erfi corresponds to the length of time it took the soul of the deceased to arrive in the otherworld? We know, for instance, that among the Lapps "some believed that the journey [to the otherworld] lasted three weeks, while others said three years."\(^{829}\) If this was the case also among the Norse, it would explain the actual change of status taking place such a long time after the moment of death as the period of exclusion of the heir. Thus, the interval between death and transference of power to the heir would correspond to length of time required by the soul of the deceased to conclude his journey to the Otherworld. In the meanwhile, the heir would assume the role but not the status of his predecessor. If such was the case, then the erfi would be a feast to celebrate the arrival of the departed to the otherworld, and thus, once he had fully departed this realm, the heir was able to assume his new rank and claim his inheritance.

Drinking the bragafull would then be the first toast that the heir makes after or while assuming his new rank. Actually, it seems that this is indeed the first thing he does once his new status has been acknowledged. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the bragafull was 'the toast of kings' and it does not seem to have been drunk only at funeral feasts, but in general, it was drunk on occasions in which the king was to be honoured. However, the explanation for the urgency and the symbolism of the toast does not seem to lie in a probable period of exclusion for the bereaved in which the ingestion of alcohol was forbidden. The act of drinking at this ceremony seems to be linked more to the role of the leader as the master of the hall and provider of drinks than to the completion of a bereavement process. After all, one of the most important roles of the leader was that of provider of alcoholic beverages and feasts. The offering of rather

\(^{829}\) van Gennep, p.154.
expensive alcoholic beverages, as a part of the gift-giving culture, aided leaders to gain and retain their power and prestige.\textsuperscript{830}

There need be no real conflict between the meanings of festive group and warrior retinue since the \textit{comitatus} which Tacitus describes also does a double-duty; in time of war it serves the leader in the field and in time of peace it serves him in the hall where most effort is expended in getting drunk and in staying drunk for as long as possible\textsuperscript{831}

In this case, the description of the Germans by Tacitus seems to fit very well with what we learn about the Norse in the saga corpus. Enright also states that the Germans chose their kings during feasts\textsuperscript{832} probably undergoing a similar ritual drinking. The function of the \textit{bragafull}, offered by a lady to the new king might be that of creating bonds. His people might have been offering the new leader the gift of drink, which he would compensate much more lavishly during the many feasts that he was expected to host during his rule.

Another possible explanation is that the act of drinking together was a way of creating bonds and reaffirming friendship.\textsuperscript{833} So, this first drink of the leader in front of his people would have been considered as the way in which he created a new liaison with his followers. Therefore, the fact that he drank the \textit{bragafull}, reserved for kings, could be a symbolic acceptance of power and by doing so he accepts the responsibilities a leader has towards his people. He is allowed to sit on the high-seat only when these duties are accepted through the act of drinking.

Snorri tells us that the heir sat in front of the high-seat until the \textit{bragafull} was brought in, then the heir stood up and fetched the vessel and quaffed it as part of the ritual. However Snorri omitted the detail of who the drink bearer was. In an act as symbolic as the enthronement of the heir to the high-seat the gender or rank of the bearer must have been of great importance. “The completed cup-offering among the Germans signifies the sealing of a contract between lord and man but it is ambiguous in

\textsuperscript{830} This will be studied in Chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{831} Enright, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{832} Enright, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{833} This will be studied Chapter 6.
that same rite, when the presentation is by an unmarried woman, can also create marriage." So, in the case that the cup-bearer was a man, we would expect him to be of high rank and at the same time representative of the community, in whose name he would seal a bond with the leader. But, if it was a woman, would we expect an erfi and a wedding feast to be celebrated together?

As matter of fact, in the literature the accession of the heir to the throne and to his inheritance is sometimes accompanied by a further ritual of transition, that is, a wedding to be celebrated at the same time as the erfi. There are three instances of a wedding being celebrated together with an erfi in the Fornaldar sqgur and they seem to suggest that this was perceived as customary when the king died without a male heir or without a male heir old enough to take over the throne. An illustrative case is that provided in Qrvar-Odds saga. In it, after a long journey Qrvar-Oddr returns to Greece and finds that his friend, King Herrauðr has died and been buried in a mound long ago.

Following his return

Qrvar-odd's wife, was, as it might be presumed, King Herrauðr's only heir, and most probably the king had arranged for her to marry Qrvar-Oddr upon his return. Even though Qrvar-Oddr was not a direct heir to the throne, he must have been aware of the fact that he was expected to marry the king's daughter, thus his relative rush in arranging the erfi and completing the rite of passage to become king and fill the power gap that had been left after the king's death. As Snorri tells us, it is the duty of the heir

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834 Enright, p. 83.
835 Qr v XXIX, pp. 332-33.
to organize the erfi and Qrvar-Oddr, most probably knowing that he was the successor, takes responsibility of arranging the feast. Yet, he could not become a legitimate heir without his marriage. Thus, it is at the same feast that all the requisites for his accession to the throne are fulfilled and wedding and erfi are celebrated together.

Gængu-Hrólfs saga relates a similar story. In it Hrólf Sturlaugsson returns to Denmark and finds that his friend the king has died, leaving only a female heir Ingigerðr. When he arrives she has an announcement to make: “Sagði Ingigerðr nú einarðóliga, at hún vildi engan mann eiga nema Hrólfs Sturlaugsson” 836 (Ingigerðr announced heartily that she would not marry any other man but Hrölf Sturlaugsson.) Then something rather unusual happens. “Gerði Björn þeim nú sæmiliga veizlu, ok drukku erfi Þorgnýs jarls.” 837 (Björn prepared a honourable feast and they celebrated an erfi in honour of Earl Þorgný.) What is unusual in this feast is not the celebration of a marriage and an erfi on the same occasion but that this is the only instance in which the erfi is not organized by the heir. It might be because it was originally intended as a wedding feast and ended up becoming an erfi due to the unexpected death of the king. However, most probably both marriage and death were expected to be celebrated on the same occasion.

Similarly, Friðþjófs saga ins frækna tells about King Hringr, who falls ill, and being aware of his imminent death and of the fact that his sons are still too young to rule the kingdom, decides to hand the kingdom to his friend Friðþjófr and to give him the hand of his daughter. Without having any previous reference to marriage, as soon as the king dies Friðþjófr celebrates his wedding together with the erfi: “Síðan andaðist konungr, en Friðþjófr gerði brúðslaup sitt, ok var þá drukkit erfi eftir konunginn. Síðan settist hann at landráðum” 838 (Then the king died, and Friðþjófr celebrated his

836 GHr XXXIV, p. 267.
837 GHr XXXIV, p. 267.
838 Frið V, pp. 102-03.
wedding, and then they celebrated an *erfi* in the honour of the king. Afterwards he started to rule the land.)

These sources do not tell us either who the drink-bearer was during the *erfi*. Should we expect it to be the female heir and bride-to-be? The texts do not provide us with any clues as to answer this question. The only instance in which a woman is said to be the drink-bearer occurs in *Völsunga saga* after the death of Queen Borghildr’s brother. In the saga we are told that “*Hún gerir nú erfi bróður sins með ráði konungs,* [...] *Borghildr bar mönnum drykk. Hún kemr fyrir Sinjööla með miklu horni.*”839 (She arranged her brother’s *erfi* with the consent of the king [...] Borghildr herself brought the drinks to the men. She came to Sinjööla with a large drinking horn.) However, in this *erfi* there no issue of succession or marriage, and it is stressed that the queen herself brought the drinks as part of a plot to poison Sinjööla. This episode seems to represent, then, a feast for honouring the dead by taking revenge upon his slayer. But, again, this is the only example of an explicit female cup-bearer at an *erfi*. In general, it is possible to see that in all the previous instances the wedding was motivated by the possibility of having a power void due to the absence of a male heir to the throne and by the need to fill this void.

In the *Íslendinga saga* there is only one example of *erfi* as an inheritance feast associated with a wedding. This occurs in *Laxdöla saga*, which tells of the *erfi* of Unnr Ketilsdóttir, one of the first settlers of Iceland. This feast, apparently organized by Unnr before her death, may illustrate what was expected to take place at an *erfi* in which the transmission of authority and goods were the main objective. The saga relates that Unnr was fonder of her grandson Óláfr feilan than of anyone else and so “*lýsti þvi fyrir mǫnnum, at hon ætladi Óláfi allar eignir eptir sinn dag i Hvammi.*”840 (she declared in front of every one that she intended to leave all her possessions in Hvammr to Óláfr

839 *Völs* X, p. 133.
840 *Laxd* VII, p. 11.
when she died.) When Unnr feels that age is overcoming her, she then arranges Óláfr’s wedding and invites a large number of prominent people, as she knows that she will soon die; “ek ætla þessa veizlu síðast at búa.”\textsuperscript{841} (I think this is the last feast I will hold.) The day of the wedding feast Unnr enters the hall when all the guests have arrived and makes a speech concerning her last will: “Björn kveð ek at þessu, bróður minn, ok Helga ok aðra frændr mina ok vini; börstað þenna með slíkum búaði, sem nú megu þér sjá, sel ek i hendr Óláfi, frænda minum, til eignar ok forráða.”\textsuperscript{842} (Björn my brother, and Helgi and all my other relatives and friends I call your attention on this; I hand this homestead and all the goods which you can see to the ownership and management of Óláfr, my kinsman.) Death forebodings seldom prove to be wrong in the Icelandic sagas and, accordingly, after uttering these words Unnr goes to her bedchamber and dies in the course of the night. The next morning when her body is found the festivities continue, but now “Var nú drukkt allt saman, brullaup Óláfs ok erfi Unnar.”\textsuperscript{843} (Now both Óláfr’s wedding and Unnr’s erfi were celebrated together.) Unnr is then buried on the last day of the feast, which is an exceptional occurrence for, as we have seen, other erfi are celebrated after the burial has taken place; though in this case the burial had to take place afterwards due to the particularities of the moment of death, in the middle of a celebration. It seems that Unnr arranged the wedding feast in order to celebrate her erfi;\textsuperscript{844} at least the only speech she makes during the whole episode seems to point towards this. As we learn from the saga, Unnr was a rather wealthy person, and this episode may narrate what would have been considered as an ideal erfi. That is, one in which the person manages to state his or her last will in front of a large number of

\textsuperscript{841} Laxd VII, p. 11.  
\textsuperscript{842} Laxd VII, p. 12.  
\textsuperscript{843} Laxd VII, p. 13.  
\textsuperscript{844} In Landnamabók, most probably the author’s source for this episode, Unnr is called Auðr, and the events concerning her death and erfi are narrated in a similar fashion: “en er þjár nætr hafði veizlan staðið, þa valði hún gafir vinum sinnum ok réð þeim heilraði; sagði hón, at þá skyldi staða veizlan enn þjár nætr; hon kveð þat vera skyldu erfi sitt.” (Ldn p. 146) (and when the feast had gone for three days, then she gave presents to her friends and gave them wise counsels; she said that they should continue the feast for three nights more; she said that this should be her erfi).
people before dying, thus avoiding the many problems that might have originated concerning the inheritance and succession of a wealthy and powerful person.

In all the previous instances we have seen that the actual purpose of the erfi seems to have been to honour the heir and legitimate his new position and not to honour the deceased. This kind of celebration does not appear to be exclusive to Old Norse society. In England, for example, as late as the nineteenth century:

The funeral repast was at one time known as the ‘averil’ at which a special form of crisp bread or cake and ale was provided [...] The word averil or arvel means ‘heir ale’ or succession ale, from which we see that the feast was once considered not so much as a commemoration of the dead but as a banquet to welcome the new heir to the title or property.845

As we have seen, there is no clear reason for the erfi to take place long after the death. One possibility is that the span of time between the moment of death and the accession of the heir to his new position is in agreement with the time it took for the soul of the dead to arrive at the otherworld. Once it had fully departed this realm the heir could claim the goods and title of his predecessor. The ritual drinking before the inheritor could access the high seat can be interpreted as a form of creating a bond with his followers. In general, we can see that the erfi was a feast to celebrate the continuation of life, and maybe, the end of a period of mourning.

5.2.2- THE ERFI AS A FEAST TO HONOUR THE DECEASED

Only in a few instances does the erfi appear to be conducted with the main purpose of honouring the dead. However, in most of these cases it is difficult to establish if the intention was indeed to honour the dead instead of the heir as the sagas refer to the feasts with standard phrases just mentioning that an erfi was celebrated in someone’s memory. “Var hann út leiddr at þeim síð, sem þá var, ok drukkit eptir hann erfi”846 (He was buried according to the custom of the time and an erfi was drunk in his

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845 Puckle, p. 104.
846 Kjain XVII, p. 41.
honour) is the regular way in which most erfi are described, without any further reference to the event. In other instances we are only told that an erfi was organized in someone's honour and that the heir(s) had organized it. Even if these sources explicitly state that the erfi is to be celebrated in honour of the dead we cannot take for granted that that was the case. First of all, the lack of description of the actual feast does not allow an insight into whether or not the erfi was indeed mainly celebrated for honouring the deceased. Second, and most important, as we have seen, there seems to be a formulaic tradition in the way the erfi are referred to. In the previous section, where the main purpose of the erfi appears to be that of a succession feast, the same formula is used, even if honouring the dead was not the main reason for the celebration.

This leaves us, then, with just a few cases in which the main purpose of the feast was the actual honouring of the departed; namely, Eyrbyggja saga and Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks: two sources of different nature. In Eyrbyggja saga, Þóroddr and a group of men drowned while fishing. When their relatives hear the news “buðu þau Kjartan ok Þuríðr núðum sinum þangat til erfis; var þá tekí jölaqí þeirra ok snútt til erfisins.” (Kjartan and Þuríðr invited their neighbours to the erfi, their Yule-ql was then taken and used for the erfi.) On the first night of the erfi Þóroddr and all the other drowned men’s ghosts show up to the feast:

847 A few examples are: “Síðan fara þeir heim, ok er þá drukkt erfi eptír Vésteinn. Or er þat er gárt, fer hverr heim til sínns heimilis” (Gisl XIV, p. 49) (Afterwards they go home and then an erfi is drunk in honour of Vésteinn. And when that is done everyone went to his own home); “Nú er erfi drukkt eptír Þorgímun, ok gefr Þórkr göðar vingafar márgum mánum.” (Gisl XVIII, p. 56) (Now an erfi is drunk in honour of Þorgímun and Þókr gives good gifts of friendship to a large number of men.); “Þóðr, fáðir þeira, sött ok andadísst, ok var úþerð hans veglig ger eptír fornum sið. Ok er erfið var drukkt, fæði húsfreyja” (Þóðr I, p. 164) (Þóðr, their father, became sick and died, and his funeral was carried splendidly according to the old custom. And when the erfi had been celebrated Þóðr’s wife gave birth.)

848 A few examples are: “Veizlu hefi ek þar stofnada, ok aðla ek at drekka erfi eptir þádr minn” (Nj CVIII, p. 276) (I have prepared a feast, and I intend to drink erfi in honour of my father); “Pat verður nú næst til lúðínda, at Gisli skeiðarnef tók sött ok andadísst, en mágar þóris buðu honum til erfið.” (Gullf. XV, p. 209) (The was the next thing that happened, that Gisli Skeiðarnef became sick and died and Þórir’s brother in law invited him to the erfi.); “Eptir andlát borsteins lét Karl gera mikla veizlu á Grund ok baði til Húværði ok sonum hans ok álum vinum sinum innan dal.” (Svarfd XIX, 183-84) (After his death Karl prepared a large feast at Grund and invited Húværðr and his son as well as all his friends in the valley).

849 Eb LIV, p. 148.

850 Jölaqí (Yule-ql) will be discussed in the next section, where seasonal feasts are analyzed.
Menn fagnuðu vel þrórði, því at þetta þótti góðr fyrirburðr, því at þá hæfðu menn þat fyrir satt, at þá varð mæmum vel fagnat at Ránar, ef sædaudør menn viðuðu erfis sins; en þá var enn lít af numin fornaskjan, þó at menn væri skíðir ok kristnír at kalla.\[^{851}\]

(The people welcomed þrórði since they thought it was a good omen because it was an old belief that men had been well received by Rán\[^{852}\] if the drowned attended their own erfí; there was still a small degree of belief in the old lore even if the people had been baptized and called themselves Christians.)

However, the ghosts do not disappear once the erfí has concluded and the story of a good omen turns into a massive haunting.

What makes me believe that this might have been an erfí to honour the dead more than an actual succession feast is the fact that the feast is organized almost immediately after the news of the drowning become known. So, without having time to organize it properly, the heir takes whatever qf there is at hand to celebrate the feast.

Also, it seems that the central element of the celebration is the dead, and the beliefs about their entrance to the otherworld. Furthermore if there are elements concerning the succession of Kjartan they are not mentioned at all, though this might be due to the fact that the central incident of the episode is actually the haunting and not the erfí. What is striking in this occurrence is the fact that the erfí was celebrated almost immediately after the death of the fishermen. Was this because there were no important succession issues to resolve? After all þrórði was not a góði. Or is it possible that since men who drowned at sea were believed to go and dwell with Rán, in the sea, their journey to the otherworld was believed to be shorter, thus the erfí could be celebrated soon after death?

In Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks King Heiðrekr is slain and no one knows who has committed the deed, so that his death goes unavenged. We are told that succession takes place, and his son Angantýr takes the title of king and claims his inheritance:

\[\text{Pá læt Angantýr, sorr Heiðreks konungs, kveðja þings, ok á þvi þingi var hann til konungs tekinn yfir öll þau ríki, er Heiðrekr konunge hæfði}\]

\[^{851}\] Ebr LIV, p. 148.

\[^{852}\] Rán was the goddess of the sea.
This episode has all the characteristics of an erfi: the heir summons an assembly to witness his succession, rank and inheritance are handed to him, and finally he makes an oath. The only thing that remains pending is the actual erfi. But this takes place a short time after the succession assembly, when Angantýr discovers his father’s slayers and avenges him. Only then “lætr Angantýr gera veizlu mikla á Danparstöðum á þeim þæ, er Árheimar heita, at erfa fóður sinn”854 (Angantýr arranges a large feast to hold an erfi in honour of his father in at place called Árheim, in Danparstaðir, where he lived) and, of course he then sits on the high-seat. Since all the succession issues had already been resolved during a previous assembly, the main purpose of this erfi must have been to honour King Heiðrek.

In this case the succession and erfi ceremonies take place on different occasions, and the high-seat seems to be central to understanding the fact. In a previous work I have discussed the possibility of an actual belief that the souls of those whose deaths remained unavenged could not reach the otherworld.855 If this was the case, it would explain the erfi as a feast to commemorate the arrival of the soul to the otherworld. Hence, the heir would only receive possession of rank, inheritance and high-seat once his predecessor had fully departed this world. Two people could not hold the same rank and occupy the same high-seat. In the case of Angantýr, he was to hold the rank and possessions as his father’s murder had little hopes of being avenged. However, he refused to occupy the same high-seat, for his father had not fully departed this world. Only when he is sure that Heiðrek’s soul has left this world he does occupy the

853 Heiðr XI, p. 51.
854 Heiðr XI, p. 52.
855 See Guerrero, Stranded, pp. 38-57.
symbolic seat. If my assumptions are correct, then one could perceive this erfi as a feast to celebrate Heiðrek’s departure: the king has finally gone to the otherworld.

It seems, then, that erfi actually had a twofold purpose. First, its role was to celebrate the end of the soul’s journey to the otherworld, which seems to have been a rather lengthy one. Second, and most important, was the celebration of the continuation of life and the symbolic transition of the heir to his new rank.

5.2.2- Other Evidence from Compound Words

There are two synonymous compound words related to erfi, these are erfidrápa \(^{856}\) [erfi-poem] \(^{857}\) and erfikvæði \(^{858}\) [erfi-poem] that might cast some light on what went on at the erfi. Perhaps the most famous of these is Sonatorrek, an erfikvæði composed by Egill Skalla-Grimsson in honour of his son Bǫðvarr. Egill’s daughter offers to carve it in runes as Egill recites it; once this is done they intend to let themselves die of grief for Bǫðvarr’s death. Egill’s daughter’s argument for composing this poem is that “Seint ætla ek þórstein son þinn yrkja kvæðit eptir Bǫðvar, en þat hlyðir eigi, at hann sé eigi erfþur, þvi at eigi ætla ek okkur sitja at drykkjumni þeirri, at hann er erfður” \(^{859}\) (I don’t think that your son Þórsteinn will compose a poem in honour of Bǫðvarr, and that is not proper, that he does pay attention to the erfi, because I don’t intend for us to be sitting there drinking when he is given an erfi.) From this example we can see that it might have been expected to have funeral poems recited in the memory of the dead while people sat at the drinking benches.

\(^{856}\) This term appears only in 6 different occasions in the literary corpus: Laxd LXXVIII, p. 229; GrXXV, p. 89; Fbr III, p. 130 and V, p. 139 and; ÓH Cl., p. 281 and CCXII, p. 366. (See ÓrðT, erfidrápa)

\(^{857}\) The drápa is a heroic poem. For more information on this poetic genre see Jónas Kristjánsson, Eddas and Sagas: Iceland’s Medieval Literature, trans. by Peter Foote, 3rd edn (Reykjavik: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntaf lífslag, 1997), pp. 90-111.

\(^{858}\) This term occurs only in Eg LXXIX, p. 245. (See ÓrðT, erfikvæði)

\(^{859}\) Eg LXXVIII, p. 245.
The rest of the references to erði poems do not attest the place or occasion where they were recited. But perhaps the fact that they are named erðadrápa implies that they were poems to be recited during the erði, in honour of the dead.

In general we have seen that the main purpose of the erði seems to have been celebrating the succession of the heir to his new rank. Only a few instances make reference to an erði actually being celebrated to honour the dead. It seems reasonable to assume that these feasts were celebrated after a certain period of time, which corresponded to the amount of time required by the soul to arrive to the otherworld, a period that the heir utilized to arrange a proper feast at which guests of high rank would attest and legitimate his accession to power. These feasts are said to last three days, and included ritual drinking and swearing of oaths on the part of the heir, most probably as a way to create a bond with his followers. The fact that all these celebrations occur among high-ranking men might imply that their main purpose was to legitimate the transfer power and status to the heir, which was not only unnecessary but also unaffordable to the lower strata of society. There also seems to be a formulaic tradition for referring to erði, expressed by the words drekka erði eptir (celebrate an erði in honour of) and in most cases it is referred to as an ancient custom, no longer extant at the time the sagas were written.

5.3- Seasonal Feasts

Apart from wedding and funeral feasts the other major feasting occasions mentioned in the sources are seasonal feasts. Those which are most commonly mentioned in the literary corpus are Jól, the vetrnætr (winter nights) and, to a lesser extent, the sumarnætr (summer nights) or sumarmál (summer meal). These were celebrated at fixed times of the year; that is, mid-winter, the beginning of winter and
mid summer, respectively. Alcohol consumption seems to have played a central role in these festivities, which were of a religious nature. As Igor de Garine puts it:

Drinks are a means of establishing and maintaining contact with human and also supernatural powers [...] In many religious and magical rituals, liquid offerings are made to the supernatural powers. They consist of natural drinks - water, milk, blood, beer and wine - and more recently spirits. 860

These feasts were celebrated at crucial times of the year, either when travelling and farming activities ceased or began due to the change in the climate conditions as well as to the reduction or increase of the day-time. At these points of the year friendship and communion with the gods might have been sought, and a way of renewing the bonds with the gods might have been both through sacrifices and communal drinking. 861 Thus, in this section I will analyze the role that alcoholic beverages might have played at such festivities. The vetraet and sumarnættr, as we have seen, were mostly the seasons in which there was a surplus, and thus they were mostly combined with other festivities such as weddings and funeral feasts. They were the proper moment to host a feast due both to the decrease in farming activities combined with the need to ‘dispose’ of all the extra stock that could not be kept throughout the winter.

The other main seasonal feast was Jól. The Old Norse term Jól can be rendered into English as Yule or Christmas and it was a fortnight-long celebration that took place in midwinter. The etymology of the word itself is not free of debate. Ágríp of Nóregskonungasǫgum, written in the late thirteenth century, records what might be the earliest attempt to clear the origin of the word Jól. Its author tells that

En hér hafir at skýra spurdaga þann er kristör men gera, hvat heidnir menn myndu til jóla vita, með þvi at jól var eru risin af burð drottins várs. Heidnir men gerðu sér samkundu ok í tign víð Óðin, en Óðinn heitir mærgum nafnum. Hann heitir Víðir ok hann heitir Hár ok Tróði ok Jólnir, ok var af Jól í jól kalluð. 862

861 As we will see in Chapter 6 communal drinking was a way of reaffirming and strengthening the bonds between fellow drinkers.
862 Ágr 1, p. 2.
(And here it is proper to solve the question which Christian men pose, [about] what heathen men understood by Jól, because our Jól has its origin in the birth of Our Lord. Heathen men organized a banquet at which they honoured Óðinn, and Óðinn is called by many names. He is called Viðrir and he is called Hfr and Priði and Jónir, and it was after Jónir that Jól was named.)

Thus, it is probable that in the thirteenth century Jól was perceived as a feast in honour of Óðinn. But plenty other possible etymologies have been put forward ever after. IEW associates it with the root aulos meaning “grosser dorsch (gadus callarias)”863 (a large type of cod) and offers another possible explanation associating the word “Jól ‘weihnachten’ und ýlir mit aul- zu verbinden (vegetationsgottheit, aul- ‘stiel der pflanzen archangelica und angelica’)”864 (jól ‘Christmas’ and ýlir to connect [them] with aul- ‘angelica silvestris (vegetation-godhead). There have been attempts to relate jól to Old Norse ql, to Latin ioculus (fun), and with the name Julius [Caesar]865 and there is no agreement yet about the origin of the word. AEW says that its basic Germanic form is seen in *jehwla and *jegwla “das auf idg. *jeku zurückweist. Weitere anknüpfungen unsicher”866 (point back to Indo-Germanic *jeku. Further connections are uncertain).

There were some problems, especially during the conversion period, in differentiating pagan Jól and Christian Yule due to the similar time of the year in which they were celebrated. Thus, Snorri tells that Saint Óláfr heard that “hqfiou þrbló stór at míðjum vetri, blótðu þeir þá til fríðar ok vetrarfars góðs.”867 (at Mærin there was a large gathering and there were great sacrifices during midwinter, they sacrificed for peace and for a good winter.) When King Óláfr arrives in Mærin to investigate the problem the farmers save themselves by claiming that it was a Christian and not a pagan feast:

Bar konunge þat á hendr bóndum, at þeir hofði haft miðsvetrarblót. Ólvír svarar ok segir, at bændr váru ásannir at þeirri sæk. ‘Hqfðum vérer,’ segir hann, ‘þólaði ok viða í hérðum samdrykkjur. Aðla bændur eigi svá knept til jólaveistul sér, at eigi verði stór afhlaup, ok drukku

863 IEW, aulos-s.
864 IEW, jól.
866 AEW, jól.
867 ÓH CVIII, p. 178.
The king accused the farmers of having had a midwinter sacrifice. Qlvir answers and says that the farmers were not guilty of that charge. ‘We had’ says he ‘a Jól feast and collective drinking far and wide in all the districts. The farmers do not intend to make such scant provisions for their Yule-feast so that there is a great surplus, and the men are drinking that, Lord, for a long time now. There are great chief-places and big houses in Mærin, and many people live in the vicinities. Men think it good entertainment to drink in a large company.)

It is known that Mærin was one of the last Norwegian regions to convert to Christianity. So, if we assume that the farmer Qlvir was actually lying in order to save his head, we might have a good description of what a Jól feast consisted in, or at least a thirteenth-century perception of what these feasts consisted in. For what we can gather from this description, it seems that the Jól feast was mainly a drinking gathering and that it took place shortly after the Christian Yule, hence the excuse that the gathering is nothing else but the continuation of the Christian feast.

The literary sources, however, seem to have a rather biased perception of the pagan Jöla blöta, or Yule sacrifices. On some occasions we hear that as late as the thirteenth century someone “hafði um vetrin jóladrykki eftir norrænum síð” (had during the winter a Jule-drinking according to the [Old] Norse tradition) but we are not told what this consisted of. However, some of the Fornaldar sqgur give us at least an impression of how thirteenth-century Icelanders imagined this feast. Thus, Bósa saga ok Herauðs says that a Jól feast was celebrated in the following fashion:

\[\text{Ok sem inn kom þat minni, sem signat var þor, þá skipi Sigurðr um slagna, ok tók þá at ökryrst allt þat, sem laust var, hnfur ok borðiskar ok allt þat, sem engi helt á, ok fjöldi manna stukku upp ór sinum setum ok léku á gólfinu, ok gekk þetta langa stund. Pvi næst kom þat minni inn, er helgat var Óllum Asuni. Sigurðr skipi þá enn um slagna ok stilli þá svá hátt, at afgangaða kvað í höllurni. Stóðu þá upp allir þeir, sem inni váru, nema brúðgumin inn ok brúðrin ok konungrin, ok var nú allt á ferð ok fór innan um alta höllina, ok gekk því langa stund. [...] Pvi næst kom inn Ólins minni. Pá lauk Sigurðr upp hörpunní. Hún var svá stör, at makti standa rétt í maganum á henni; hún var öll sem á gull lei. Þar tók hann upp hvita gýfa gullsaumada. Hann stó nú þann slag, sem Faldaþeykjur heitir, ok stukku þá faldarnir af konunum, ok lóku þeir fyrir ofan þvertreið. Stukku þá upp konunum ok allir menninir, ok engi hlutur}^\text{868, 869}

\[\text{868 ÓH CVIII, p. 179.}^\text{869 IS LX, p. 315.} \]
var þá sö, at kýr þoldi. En er þetta minni var af gengit, kom inn þat minni, er signat var Freyju.⁸⁷⁰

(When the memorial cup consecrated to Þórr was carried into the hall Sigurðr changed the tune. Then everything began to move, knives, plates and anything else which no one was holding on to and lots of people jumped up from their seats and danced on the floor. This went on for quite some time. [...] and after that it was time for Óðinn's toast to be drunk. Then Sigurðr opened the harp. It was heavily inlaid in gold, and so big that a man could stand upright inside it. From inside he took a pair of white gloves, gold embroidered, and played the 'coif-thrower'. Then all the coifs were blown off the ladies, and danced above the crossbeams in the hall. All the men and women jumped to their feet, and nothing remained still in its place. When Óðinn's toast had been drunk, there was only one more left, the toast to Freyja.)⁸⁷¹

In this quotation we can get a clear impression of the way in which thirteenth-century Icelanders perceived the pagan Jól celebration. It seems that when the sagas were written down Jól was largely misunderstood as a pagan festivity during which anything could happen. It was a seasonal feast that conflicted with one of the major Christian festivities, as thus it was often portrayed as it is in Bósa saga, that is, largely as a feast during which the un-Christian powers were set loose.

⁸⁷⁰ Bósa XII, p. 311-12.
In chapter 10 of *Fljótsdæla saga* we are told about Helgi Ásbjarnarson, the son of a rich farmer and a young and prominent man who is acquiring a great deal of popularity in Eastern Iceland. He marries Þórdís, the sister of Bjarni Brodd-Helgason, who is described as *hinn mesti skögurgr ok höfðingi mikill* (the most prominent man and a great chieftain). Þórdís is nicknamed Þórdís *toddja* (load) because “*hún gaf aldri minna en stóra toddja, þá er húnskyldi fátaekum gefa, svo var hún örlát*” (she never gave less than a large load when she gave to the poor, she was so open-handed). When Helgi and Þórdís have been married for a winter “*þá bað hun Helga selja land þetta, því at hun þóttist eigi halda mega risnu sinni fyrrir atkvæðar sakir – ’ok vilda ek, at þú keptyr landit í Mjóvanesi, því at mér sínist þá eigi jafnmjök í garðshlói.*” (then she asked Helgi to sell the land because she thought she could not keep her hospitality due to all the visitors – ‘and I want you to buy the land at Mjóvanes because I think that not so many people at the gate there.) So the couple moved to Mjóvanes, where Helgi farmed for a long time.

I have chosen this passage to open the penultimate chapter of my thesis because it illustrates several (though not all) of the issues that are the thematic unit of my last two chapters: the relationship between alcohol and power. Here we can see a young and prominent man, the son of a rich farmer, who is rising (or attempting to rise) in the power spheres of tenth-century Iceland. He complies with all the requirements that a

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872 “If you hear foolish words from drunken men, do not quarrel with those who are drunk on wine and lose their wits. Such things increase the sorrows of many and even lead to death.” (*Vígs Æx*, p. 163.)
873 *Flj X*, p. 239.
874 *Flj X*, p. 240.
man at the time needed to gain prominence and maybe become a great leader: he is the
son of a rich farmer, he is popular in his district, he marries the sister of a godi and he
has a large number of visitors to whom his wife (and surely he too) displays great
generosity. His wife, bedroom, is a woman who belongs to an upper-class family, whose
household role seems to be that of “bestower of gifts”. Her nickname is explained as
based on her generosity to paupers; it seems that one of the roles of women of
prominent families was precisely this - to offer gifts to visitors (pauper or not) and thus
enhance the reputation of the family. However, something goes wrong in Helgi’s
attempt to become a leader of men and he has to quit the power struggle. A symbol of
his rising popularity is the large number of visitors that seem to seek him, but his wealth
is not enough to cope with that economic burden of displaying generosity to all his
guests. Not being a chieftain, he does not have the extra income from taxes that might
allow him to be adequately hospitable and increase his power. Helgi’s example may be
one of the innumerable failed attempts of many prominent men who were struggling to
acquire an influential position in medieval Iceland.

In the following chapters I will study the way in which alcohol was perceived in
Norse society and how the ways in which it was displayed, offered and/or consumed
helped some men to increase their power over other people. This will be approached
from different points of view. Chapter 6 will focus on the ways in which the offering
and consumption of alcoholic beverages was used as a way to display power. This will
be approached from three different angles., First, I will start by studying the role of
alcohol as a part of the Old Norse gift-giving culture and the ways in which alcohol
consumption could be interpreted as a symbol of friendship while, on the side of the
provider, it was a way of displaying wealth and power –which in turn as a tool to gain
friends and influence people. Second, I will study the display of wealth by the use of
prestigious or expensive drinking vessels. As we will see, each kind of drinking vessel
had an inherent social status which not only matched the context in which it was used or displayed, but also was in accordance with the value of the drink it contained. Finally, I will study the way in which alcohol consumption was used to enhance and/or display men’s power through drinking contests and boasting during toasts, which was, after all, another way of reaffirming someone’s superiority. A last way in which alcohol consumption could be used as a way to display power was through seating arrangements in the drinking place. Seating arrangements played an important role in the acknowledgement of men’s prestige; but this topic has already been discussed. Chapter 7 will be devoted to more sinister ways in which alcoholic beverages could be used to acquire power. In it I will study the roles of alcohol and drunkenness as tools to influence men’s wills and to betray or attack an enemy. Finally, in Chapter 7 I will also analyze the concoction and role of magic alcoholic beverages, which could be used as a tool to manipulate people’s minds.

But, first, let us start with a theoretical overview of how power was perceived in Iceland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when most of our primary literary sources were committed to parchment. All of these considerations will be, as expected, taking alcohol and the contexts in which it was consumed as a unifying factor.

The origins of saga literature (as the outcome of an ancient oral tradition or the product of medieval Icelandic fiction-authors containing perhaps a kernel of historical truth) will be considered as irrelevant for the purposes of this study. Regardless of the historical or the literary origins of the saga literature and, regardless of the obsolete (but still current) debate between the Bookprose/Freeprose theories initiated by Heusler in 1914 with his Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga, I will approach saga literature as a construct (historical or not) that reflects the contemporary ideology of the period in

875 See Chapter 4.4.
which sagas were written.\textsuperscript{876} As ideology I understand the definition of it given by Torfí Tulinius:

the ideology of a society or social group can be defined as the aggregate of representations, values, and hierarchies of value that condition the relationship of the individual to the world in general and society in particular. It might be called the characteristic worldview of a society or social group.\textsuperscript{877}

In this sense, ideology, as related to alcohol consumption would represent a conception of the world in which men interact with and perceive each other (as individuals or as part of a society) according to the representations, values and hierarchies that surround the particular context, manner and, intent of alcohol offering and intake. The context of alcohol consumption can be either at a feast or as part of general hospitality, in a public gathering or in private, among friends or enemies and among friends or strangers. The manner in which it is offered and consumed can be in a ritual or non-ritual manner. Finally, alcohol offering can be with the purpose of deceiving or pleasing, of befriending or betraying, of communication or misunderstanding, and of displaying wealth and power. All these topics will, of course, be approached as factors in the quest for power, which is what will occupy us through these last chapters.

Before engaging in the study of these multiple approaches to Old Norse drinking culture we must consider the social relevance of alcohol in this society. As Jón Viðar Sigurðsson explains, in medieval Iceland “The creation and maintenance of friendship was almost always linked to feasts and gifts [...] Those who ate together and drank together, belonged together.”\textsuperscript{878} In this sense, hosting a feast created social bonds, both between the guests themselves as well as between the host and his guests. This bonding could take place at two different levels: social and economic.

\textsuperscript{876} For a discussion about the ongoing debate about freeproselbookprose debate see Carol Clover, "Icelandic Family Sagas (Íslandingasögur)", in Old-Norse Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide, ed. by Carol Clover and others (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 239-315 and; Gíslí Sigurðsson, Medieval Icelandic Saga, pp. 1-115.

\textsuperscript{877} Tulinius, p. 40.

At the social level, this bond was created partly due to the role of alcohol as a social catalyst. As Igor de Garine puts it,

One might wonder if the temptation to escape the harsh realities of life by using both the energising and soothing properties of alcohol could be considered a feature of many human beings, allowing them to reach a psychological stage in which inhibitions diminish in an amiable and understanding in-group. This might be interpreted as a consequence of the self-consciousness of the human being and his craving to stop it.  

Alcoholic drinks can work as a conversation facilitator, a taboo breaker and/or a feud 'resolver' or catalyst for they can be an aid to break social inhibitions that might be difficult to discuss when sober. Apart from working as a communication-enhancing tool, the act of drinking together creates a different kind of bond between companions at table. The community that gathered at the drinking benches, whether they were members of the leader's retinue or guests at a feast, ideally became a putative family.

Not coincidentally, as Enright discusses, the Germanic word *druht* (Old Norse *drött*) "recognized as the most widespread and most important vernacular name for the *comitatus*" was also used to signify "festive procession" or "wedding procession". After studying the evidence of the use of this word Enright convincingly argues that both meanings and social practices of *druht* might imply a symbolic act of adoption. Fellow drinkers - members of the lord's retinue or his guests - are made part of the family by creating a symbolic blood-bond through ritual drinking. "Once made a 'son', the new member also becomes the brother of his companions and, as [...] his status and condition is sealed with a ritual drink with his 'family'. He is doubly bound by the sacred symbols of his new life, by holy bonds of weapons and liquor." Creating symbolic family ties with the members of a community was also a protective measure, a means of diminishing the dangers of incorporating a stranger into the household. This

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879 de Garine, p. 3.
880 As the quotation at the beginning of this chapter shows, alcohol can also generate misunderstandings and quarrels, due to its properties as a inhibition breaker.
881 Enright, p. 71.
882 Enright, p. 77.
also increased the leader's or host's power, as it augmented the number of his unconditional supporters and this would, in turn, raise his status.

In this (social) sense, a chieftain or farmer could increase his power by hosting feasts in which alcohol was most probably offered, because the general inebriation or feeling of well-being at a feast helped him create and surround himself with a community centred on his own figure. This community would, then, respond with solidarity to the host and his needs as it would react to the needs of its own family. In other words, feasting created an extended and extensive foster-family; thus, increasing the social and political power of the person who created such a community.

These social contexts in which alcohol served as a social catalyst and as a bond creator, were of special relevance in medieval Iceland. During the Sturlung age, when power started to be concentrated in the hands of a few families, the stórgodær had to surround themselves with a large retinue in order to assure their well-being throughout the power-struggles of the period. And this is, precisely, the same period in which the largest amount of saga literature was committed to parchment. Thus, if literature is a vehicle of ideology, we should expect to see many of the concerns about retinue formation and disintegration reflected in the literature of this period. This might apply to the Fornealdar saga in particular, since “for political and ideological reasons, this literature [i.e. the Fornealdar saga] was very useful to the social class in power at this time in Iceland.” Tulinius also argues that “if the fornaldarsaga was the literary arena in which the ideals that inspired social change were expressed, it was also that in which the ills that plagued Icelandic society were displayed more openly.” Accordingly, as we will see in the following pages, many of the elements surrounding drinking, the hall and the political uses of alcohol present in the Sturlunga saga compilation also occur,

883 Tulinius, p. 45.
884 Tulinius, p. 254.
though more often, in the Fornaldar saga. Hence, I will focus my study largely on these two saga groups.

Turning to the economics of alcohol consumption, we will see that it enabled chieftains and/or farmers to gain more power, since feasts functioned as a social tool partly due to the value and cost of alcoholic beverages offered. In general, one can say that

The prestige value of alcoholic beverages depended on their economic value (i.e. expense and the difficulty of obtaining them) as well as on their symbolic significance (as an indicator of ethnic or social identity.) It is worth noting that the social value was not derived from the alcohol itself but from its conspicuous consumption in the proper context and with the proper accoutrements.\(^885\)

The value of alcoholic beverages was social and mainly linked to how easy or difficult it was to gain access to the beverage offered. As we have previously seen in Chapter 2, not all drinks were equally available to medieval Icelanders and Norwegians. Wine, being the rarest and most exotic had a higher value and esteem. At the opposite extreme one finds milk-based alcoholic beverages, which were readily available. Hence feasting or providing one’s guests or retinue with \textit{vin}, \textit{mjöðr}, \textit{mungrát}, \textit{ql} or \textit{skyr} was perceived differently, and contributed on a different scale to enhance the reputation of the host. And of course, it also showed the status of the drinkers and/or the perception the host had of them. In other words, due to its value and cost, alcoholic beverages acquired a symbolic nature. For example, one would not expect to see a king being welcomed with a goblet full of \textit{skyr}, as that could be considered as an insult on the part of the host.

Drinking, even more than eating, has a status-conferring and status displaying function [...] It is a socioeconomic and cultural marker. This aspect is well sustained. In most societies, the rich and the elite may consume sophisticated expensive drinks (often alcohol), the poor drink crude ones and long to imitate the upper strata’s behaviour.\(^886\)

\(^{885}\) Lowry, p. 7.
\(^{886}\) de Garine, p. 6.
These different social values of the beverages available seem to be supported by the Eddic poem *Rígsþula*, in which Heimdallr, one of the Æsir, goes to explore the world and originates the different social classes. When he arrives at the house of those who are to be called *lærl* (Earl) and give origin to the ruling class, he receives the following hospitality:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Fram setti hón} & \quad \text{sætla fulla}, \\
\text{silfrí varða} & \quad \text{settí á bíðð}, \\
\text{fún oc flestí} & \quad \text{oc fugla stíehta}; \\
\text{vín var í kærno,} & \quad \text{várðír kálcar}; \\
\text{druecó oc dómno;} & \quad \text{dagr var á sinnom.}^{887}
\end{align*}
\]

(He set out full plates, / silver-ornamented, she set on the table, / fresh game and pork meat and roasted fowls; / wine was in the cups, ornamented goblets; / they drank and talked; the day was passing.)

However, when he arrives to the household of those who are to be called *þræll* (Thrall, or Slave) he gets the following welcome:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pá tóc Edda} & \quad \text{öcvinn hleif}, \\
\text{þungan oc þysson,} & \quad \text{þprunginn sóðom}; \\
\text{bar hón meirr at þat} & \quad \text{miðra sætla}, \\
\text{sóð var í bolla.} & \quad \text{settí á bíðð};^{888} \\
\text{var kálfr sóðinn,} & \quad \text{krása beztr.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Then Great-Grandmother took a lumpy loaf, / heavy and thick, full of grains; / she brought more then in the middle of the plates, / broth was in the bowl, she set it on the table; / it was calf-broth, the best delicacy.)

In these examples we are able to see the different goods found at the table of two different social classes. While in the household of the ruling class we can see the most luxurious dishes and, most important for this study, the most prestigious beverage (*vín*) the lowest class seems to have the roughest foodstuff and tableware. Also, stanza 4 does not mention any drinks at the thrall’s table, though one cannot discard the possibility that the beverage was actually the calf-broth served in the bowl. If one was to see a beverage listed with the thrall’s meal, one would expect to see a drink that was just as rough as the meal they eat, and must have been most probably water, a milk product or,

\[
\text{887 Rp 32.} \\
\text{888 Rp 4.}
\]
perhaps, broth. Unfortunately stanza 18 in which, following the pattern of the poem, Heimdallr shares a meal with those who are to be called Karl (the Common Folk, i.e. Farmers) is lost. We do actually know that he shared a meal with them for stanza 19 begins with "reis frá borda"889 (he rose from the table), and there we could have expected to find a list of foodstuff, drinks and tableware appropriate to their social class; that is, most probably, ql or mungát.

At least in theory, people were expected to consume drinks within the limits of their social class. Accordingly, in the Íslendinga ságur and in the Sturlunga saga, which deal mainly with farmers, we rarely find references to vin890 while in contrast there is a plethora of references to the consumption of ql and mungát. On the other hand, the Fornaldar ságur, which narrate mainly the stories of legendary kings and heroes, have several references to vin. As mentioned earlier, this difference might be due to an idealized conception of the Scandinavian past, in which there was plenty of wine, the most exotic drink, available. But, if these sagas are indeed an ideological construct, one should then expect that these references to kings and heroes drinking wine are also ideologically and symbolically loaded. They followed (or maybe created) the notion that wine is the proper beverage of the ruling class.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, alcoholic beverages were not exactly cheap. So, due to the great economic cost of both production and procurement, they became highly valued within the realm of the symbolic; and so did the containers in which they were served. Taking all of this into consideration, hosting a feast or offering alcoholic drinks was not only a matter of joy and celebration; it was also a way of doing politics, a way of acquiring or augmenting one's power. And this is what will occupy us in the following pages.

889 Rh 19.
890 In the Íslendinga ságur there are only two direct references to vin, namely in Jákul III and in Eg XVII, that is of course, apart from the Vinland sagas (see OrdT, vin). In the Sturlunga saga there are only four direct references to vin, which occur in PrestGuó XII, ÞórdK XLVIII, ÞorSk II and in SteIÒ II. For an analysis of these occurrences, see Chapter 2.
6.1- ALCOHOL AS PART OF THE OLD NORSE GIFT-GIVING CULTURE

This section will be devoted to the study of the way in which feasting and alcoholic drinks were used and portrayed in mediaeval Icelandic literature in connection with the quest for power through gift-giving. Among the several ways in which power can be defined, I have chosen to follow one of its meanings, as provided by the Oxford Dictionary, which is power as he "capacity to direct or influence the behaviour of others; personal or social influence." First I will analyze the role that alcohol played as part of the prevailing gift-giving culture, where its main role was more of a symbolic than of an economic nature. Secondly, I will analyze the role of feasting and alcohol as symbols of wealth and power, and the role they played in reaffirming and increasing the power of individuals or groups of individuals. My main goal in this section is to clarify the role that alcohol, as a rare and expensive commodity, played in the struggle for power in the Medieval Icelandic Commonwealth.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, in Iceland, unlike the rest of Europe, the lack of resources meant that alcoholic beverages were not only scarce but also a rather expensive commodity. The situation was just slightly better in Norway. Ale prices did not decrease even when in the late thirteenth century the Hanseatic and English merchants were able to start exporting large amounts of beer to the Nordic countries, and the average price of a wine barrel remained higher than the price paid as compensation for the death of farmer. In general, throughout the Middle Ages alcohol remained a costly product and its offering could have been just as valuable and meaningful as the offering of an expensive gift that could have been difficult to repay. In short, at least during the period in which most of the sagas were written down, alcohol was a commodity that not every ordinary farmer could afford either to produce

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891 OED, Power.
892 For alcohol prices see Chapter 2.
or to buy; and even less to offer freely to a large gathering of men and women. Definitely not every average Icelander could afford to host an average fortnight-long feast for 60 people or more. It seems that both in literature and in real life this was reserved only for chieftains or for wealthy farmers, figures who already enjoyed an influential role in society, and, as we will see in this chapter, they used alcohol and feasting to increase their power.  

In my opinion there were two ways by which alcohol could help to increase the power of a certain individual. First, alcohol, through feasting and hospitality, formed part of the Icelandic gift-giving or gift-exchanging culture. Secondly, the possession and most important, the generous offering of alcohol served as a way of displaying an already existing wealth and power, which in return would increase the number of allegiances of the provider.

Let us begin by analyzing the role of alcohol as part of the Icelandic gift-giving culture. The ideology behind gift-giving is summarized in stanza 42 of Iljavamál, a collection of Eddic poems that impart social wisdom. This stanza reads:

Vin sinom scal maðr vinr vera
oc gialda gisv við gið.
hlár við hlátri sceali hgilœar tacæ,
enn lausung við lygi.  

(A man should be friend to his friends / and pay back gift for gift; / laugh for laughter he learns to give, / and treachery for lies.)

In other words, in order to gain and maintain a friendship, gifts should be exchanged, gifts should be repaid with other gifts. As Jón Viðar Sigurðsson puts it in his book, Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth

"In Iceland, gifts were employed to establish or renew ties of friendship or loyalty. If the recipient could not afford to give another gift in return, the gift should be paid for by rendering services; otherwise it could be taken back. It was the return gift or service that ensured the right to own or dispose of the gift. Because of the strong obligation to reciprocate,

893 For a study of gift-giving in archaic societies, such as pygmy communities, Polynesian tribes or the ancient Roman world, and not involving alcohol in its discussion, see Marcel Mauss, The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies (London: Routledge, 1990).
894 Iljav 42.
gifts were a good instrument by which the various types of chieftain could bind support to them.\(^{895}\)

Accordingly, it is customary in literature to see the host of a feast offering gifts, such as swords, axes, rings, horses etc, to his guests before they left for their own farms. This was a way of reaffirming the already existing friendship and bonds between the host and his guests. Refusing to accept a gift meant that the recipient did not want to acknowledge the friendship anymore. The same happened when it came to the offering of alcohol, refusing to accept a drink or to drink with a certain community could be interpreted as a sign of hostility. So it is reported in *Halldor þáttr Snorrason's inn súðari* that during a feast the king finds out that one of his men is drinking less than the others.

It is said that when the king sees this man’s horn

\[
\text{sá gørla í gegnum, at hann hafói drukkit vel til hálfs við ðóri; en honum gekk seint of at drekka. Pá mølti komungr: 'Seint er þó menn at reyna, Halldórr,' segir hann, 'er þú nóisk á drykkju við gamalmenni ok hieypr at vendiskomum um sökvedum, en fýgir eigi komungi þinum.}^{896}
\]

(it was noticeable that he had drunk half as much as Þórir, who was a slow drinker. Then the king said ‘It takes a while before you see people in their true colours, Halldórr’, he said, ‘and you break faith in drinking with old men, and rush off to whores late in the night instead of following your king.’)

People have to rush to Halldórr’s defence to prove that he is loyal to the king, by saying

“þér møltuð illa ok ómakliga í gærkveld til Halldórr, vinar yóvars, er þér kemmuð honum, at hann dryikki sleitiliga.”\(^{897}\) (you spoke badly and unjustly to Halldórr, your friend, when you accused him of drinking unfairly.) Halldórr was being accused of not drinking enough, of refusing the king’s friendship either by neglecting his alcohol or by not engaging with the community in general drunkenness. As we will see later in this chapter, a person remaining sober among drunkards was normally considered a threat to his less aware companions; however, in this case the main reason for the king’s anger seems to be Halldórr’s refusal to drink as much as his drinking mates. Halldórr seems to

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895 Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, p. 91.
896 *Halls II*, p. 268.
897 *Halls II*, p. 268
be refusing the king's costly gift and therefore he appears to be refusing the king's friendship.

Now, it seems that the same ideology that was applied to material gifts could be also applied to alcohol and feasting in Iceland. In saga literature one can often read about the way in which good friendships were maintained, both through the exchange of material; gifts as well as through the exchange of feasts. For example *Laxdela saga* narrates that through the years

Deir Ólafr ok Ösvifr heldu sinni vináttu, þött nokkut vært þástir á með inum yngrum mænum. Pat sumar hafði Ólafr heimboð húfsrum mánuði fyrir veitr. Ösvifur hafði ok bóð stofnat at vetrнтtum; hauð þá hvárr þeirra qðrum til sín med svá marga menn, sem þá þátti hvárum mestr sömi at vera.898

(Ólafr and Ösvifr preserved their friendship despite the ill feelings between the younger men [in their families]. That summer Ólafr held a feast two weeks before the beginning of winter. Ösvifr had also organized a similar feast during the winter nights; each of them invited the other to attend his feast with as large a following as he felt did him the greatest honour.)

Similarly, the friendship between Njáll Þorgeirsson and Gunnarr of Hliðarendi, perhaps the most celebrated friendship in saga literature, seems to have the following basis: according to *Njáls saga* "Pat var sidvenja þeira Gunnars ok Njáls, at sinn veitr þá hvárr heimboð at qðrum ok vetrgnið fyrir vináttu sakir." 899 (It was the custom between Gunnarr and Njal, because of their close friendship, that every winter one of them would invite the other to his home for a winter feast.) There are too many examples of friends exchanging feast for feast through the years to list them all here. It seems as if the act of being invited to a feast needed to be returned in a similar fashion, just as it happened with material gifts. The main difference being that material gifts could be repaid either with other material objects or with services, while a symbolic gift, such as a feast and alcohol could be repaid only within the same symbolic sphere to which

898 *Laxd* XLVI, p. 139.
899 *Nj* XXXV
feasting and drinking belonged to. That is, it could only be paid back with allegiance, friendship or another feast.

As a matter of fact, it seems that feasts could be offered to a person as a gift. For example in *Vatnsdæla saga* it is said that, after a battle King Ívaraldr tells Ingimundr that “en þá er vör hæfum skipað riki várt, skal ek launa þér líðsemdina með heimboði ok vingjífum.”\textsuperscript{900} (when we arrive in our kingdom, I shall reward your support with a feast and with gifts of friendship.) Just like any other gift, feasts and alcohol could be offered in exchange for support or expecting a return-gift that had a similar symbolic meaning. And just like any other gift, the gift of a feast or alcohol had to be returned in a certain way; material or symbolic. But what happened when it was beyond someone’s means to repay a feast? And taking into consideration the current alcohol prices, it seems that more often than not, most of the guests to a feast were not able to return the favour to their host. Then they had to pay back symbolically, with friendship and support, by creating a community around the figure of the chieftain. As Jón Viðar Sigurðsson puts it, “those who ate together and drank together, belonged together.”\textsuperscript{901} In this sense, hosting a feast created social bonds, both between the guests themselves as well as between the host and his guests. This binding resulted in an increased power for the chieftain, not only as a result of expanding his network of support, but also by strengthening the inner bonds within his community. A good example of how this worked comes from *Íslendinga saga*, where Gizurr organizes a feast to which he invites members of two rival families that have had a long blood-feud. When the tension at the feasting hall starts growing due to the fact that two feuding groups are gathered in the same hall, Gizurr makes the following speech:

\[
Áðla ek at þessi samkundu skulím vér binda með fullu göðu várn 
félogskap með mágsemð þeiri, er til er hugat. En til varhygðar vil ek
\]

\textsuperscript{900} *Vatn IX*, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{901} Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, pp. 126-27.
I intend that at this feast we shall bind our fellowship in all trustworthiness, among every one of our families here. But as a precaution I want to establish a truce among all the men who have come here together, so that in both word and deed each person will maintain his good faith toward all others.

The result of this speech is an actual truce, and the saga reports that by the second day of the feast the ancient dispute had been forgotten and "gengu með hornum allir" (everyone went to the drinking horns) so that in the end the members of the previously feuding families "drukku af einu sifrkeri ok minntust við jarfanum um daginn, er hvárr drakk til annars." (drank from the same silver goblet and, throughout the day, they saluted each other with a kiss while each toasted to the other.) Thus ends a long history of killings through the bonds created in the drinking hall, and the result of this is an increased power for both of the families, as from then on they counted on each other's support when later on they engaged in feuds with other people.

Alcohol and feasting could be used as a display of power, and as a way of increasing it by gaining alliances through the bonds created in the drinking hall. For example, Vatnsdalasaga narrates that on one occasion two foreign sisters arrive in Iceland and, as a way of affirming their place in society they organize a feast. The saga summarizes this act in the following manner "Groá keypti malt ok hjó til veizlu ok bað Ingimundarsonum pangat; - eigi þóttu þær systr svá litils háttar vera" (Groá bought malt and prepared a feast and invited the sons of Ingimundr to attend; - thus the sisters were not held to be of such little importance.) Thus, the sisters make clear that they have economic power which can be transferred into political power. Their first act when they arrive in Iceland is to make that clear by offering a feast. The statement that they bought malt implies most surely alcohol-brewing and with it the ability to freely offer alcohol.

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902 Isl CLXX, p. 483.
903 Isl CLXX, p. 483.
904 Isl CLXX, p. 483.
905 Vatn XXXVI, p. 95.
at a feast. This gift-giving of alcohol helped them to state/affirm the role that they were willing to play within Icelandic society and, even if only within a thirteenth-century Icelandic point of view, the narrator points that the possibility of offering a feast in which alcohol was offered helped a person to be recognized as an influential character: either on the economic grounds of having wealth to spare or, most probably, by their ability to gain alliances through the symbolic gift-giving of a good that could be repaid with loyalty or friendship. The politics involved in feast-organizing, as we have seen, become apparent through all the decisions involved in the selection of a host for a wedding feast. 906

In saga literature, there are several cases of chieftains struggling to host a feast and gladly hosting wedding feasts just as there are too many cases of chieftains or farmers exchanging feasts as a symbol of friendship as to mention them all. In general, it seems as if hosting a feast was not only an economic burden (due to the usual fortnight length of feasts and high alcohol prices), but those who were economically able to host one actually fought for their right to host a feast. This can only be perceived as a means of gaining political power or acknowledgement. First of all, as we have seen, not every ordinary farmer could afford to host a fortnight feast due to the costs. But most important, hosting a feast was a way of making a social statement as well as a way of stating/assuring one’s place in society. The social statement was a proclamation of one’s wealth and most of all, one’s willingness to share that wealth with the members of the community. The way of stating one’s place in society was more or less the same, but on the symbolic level. It was a way of making allegiances and increasing one’s network of support; both by creating a community around one’s household as well as a way of creating a network through gift-giving that could be repaid – for most people- only with allegiance and friendship. Generosity in the Old Norse world was a synonym of a great

906 See section 5.1.
leader. And the display of generosity through alcohol offering worked in a twofold way: firstly as an act of generosity by freely offering a costly gift and secondly as a way of creating a support network by creating bonds between fellow drinkers.

6.2 – DRINKING VESSELS

As seen in Chapter 2, alcoholic drinks were a rather rare and expensive commodity both in Iceland and Norway. This implied that the possession and offering of these beverages was a symbol of prestige, wealth and power on its own, and of course, the more expensive the drink a man was to serve at his table the more respect he would gain from his hospitality. However, the prestige attached to the drink to be served could be highly enhanced by serving it in a vessel whose qualities matched in prestige those of the provider, of the consumer, and of the drink to be served. These drinking vessels were sought by the ruling class, in order to help them display their influence in society as well as their wealth. In this section I will study the characteristics and social status associated with each of the drinking vessels most commonly mentioned in the literary sources. But, before doing so I would like to briefly analyze evidence for the rarity of luxurious drinking ware.

The Old Norse word ‘rikr’, meaning both ‘powerful’ and ‘rich’, attests to the ideological connection between these two ideas. Accordingly, a display of wealth was at the same time a display of power. In order to be able to demonstrate their power, among many other things, “members of the elite classes desired prestige items in order to support better their status within their own society.”908 As Helgi Þorláksson puts it:

907 And that was the custom; the food was served on the table before the men, as there were no dishes then. (Heið XXII, p. 276.)
Acquiring goods from abroad was essential for the leading men of Iceland. Most of the farmers were probably self-sufficient, but the chieftains, governed by status motives, needed luxury goods, and, being in charge of churches, they had to provide them with necessities from abroad. 909

One can count alcohol and the raw ingredients to produce it as well as drinking vessels as part of these luxury imports. In this context it is interesting to note that both the Íslendinga saga and the Sturlunga saga compilation report the import of alcohol and its ingredients but not the import of drinking vessels. On the other hand, in the Fornaldar saga alcoholic drinks are always ready at hand but these sagas do mention the import of drinking vessels, which tend to have a mythic origin. Instances of this can be found, for example, in Helga þátr Þórissonar, where two emissaries from the mythical land of Glæsisvellir appear at the court of King Óláfr Tryggvason in order to offer him a present:

'Erum vit sendir af Guðmundi á Glæsisvöllum hingat til yðr. Hinn sendi yðr kveldju sina ok þar með tvau horn.'
Kónungr tæk við, ok váru gullþvin. Þetta váru allgöðir gripir, Óláfr komungr átti tvau horn, er Hymningar váru kallaðir, ok þó at þau verir harðla góð, þá váru þau þó beiri, er Guðmundr sendi hónum. 910

('We are sent to you by Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir. He sends you his greetings and also two horns.'
The king accepted them, and they were adorned with gold. This was an extraordinary possession. King Óláfr had two horns, that were called the Hymningar, and even though they were very good the ones that Guðmundr sent him were far better.)

This pair of horns from Glæsisvellir is mentioned in a similar fashion in Norna-Gests þátr, chapter 1. King Óláfr’s horns seem to have been such a prestigious possession and/or symbol of power that the same Helga þátr reports, and concludes the story, by asserting that Óláfr had these horns with him when he died at the battle of Svöldr, in 999/1000 AD. 911 Similarly at the end of Þorsteins þátr þæjarmagns, it is also reported that at the moment of his death Óláfr Tryggvason had a pair of drinking horns with

910 Helg II, p. 350.
911 See Helg III.
These horns, called Hvitingar, are said to have come from Jötunheim. It seems that, at least as a literary motif, King Óláfr's drinking horns represented some sort of authority or status so that the tradition of his ownership of them was preserved in different sources.

Another drinking vessel with mythological origins is to be found in Bósa saga. In it, Bósi sets out on a deadly mission to Bjarmaland (Permia) in order to obtain a vulture's egg for King Hringr. The egg has the characteristic that it is a “gammsegg, at skrifat er allt med gullstofum utan” (vulture egg that is inscribed all over with gold letters on the outside.) When Bósi finally steals the egg and brings it to the king “fjerði Bósi homum eggit, ok var þá brotin rauf á skurninu, ok váru þar í tíu merkr gulls, ok hafði konungr skurnit fyrir borðker.” (Bósi brought him the egg, and the shell was cracked, and it was worth ten marks of gold, and the king used the shell as a table goblet.) The characteristics of this borðker (literally ‘table-goblet’) seem to be those of many of the different ker that we will analyze below: that is, it is made of a precious metal and highly ornamented. In general, this seems to be yet another legendary story of a high-prestige drinking vessel that is said to have been obtained in an exotic land.

Archaeological remains throughout Scandinavia attest to the import of drinking vessels from Europe. The acquisition of these goods was possible due to the local production of commodities scarce on the Continent. As Peter Sawyer puts it:

Long before the Viking period it [i.e. Scandinavia] was a source of exotic luxuries, especially furs, that were exported to the Mediterranean and Western Europe. In return, Scandinavians obtained fine metalwork, jewellery, glassware and other high quality goods.

912 The Hvitingar horns are given to King Óláfr Tryggvason after a long struggle with Jarl Agði, from whom they were stolen. Jarl Agði steals them back and takes the horns with him to his grave, from where they are finally recovered for the use of the king.
913 See PosriBm XIII.
914 Bósi VI, p. 296.
915 Bósi IX, p. 304.
Concerning imported glassware, a large amount of glass shards have been unearthed in Northern Norway, at the farm site of Borg, in the Lofoten islands. As a matter of fact, it was the casual discovery of highly ornamented glassware by a local farmer in 1981 that led to the discovery of the site. This occurred when “the local farmer started ploughing the land and revealed not only settlement traces but unexpected finds such as tin foiled pottery and gold foiled glass” Later excavations proved Borg to be a central place, with a longhouse measuring 80 metres. This longhouse is where the majority of the glass fragments at Borg have been found. The Borg finds encompass “a large number of objects displaying wealth, power and prestige, including objects of religious and military significance. They comprise imported tableware for feasts (at least fifteen or sixteen glass vessels; two Tating pitchers; a bronze vessel).” As Näsman and Roesdahl mention, the quality of this imported tableware must mean that they were used for special occasions, for feasts in which the chieftain living at Borg needed to display his power and wealth by boasting of the possession of luxurious symbols of his status. The provenance of the imported vessels is uncertain, however “the ceramic and glass material on the whole points to the continent: France and the lower Rhine.” These areas, as we have already seen in Chapter 2 are precisely the areas from where wine was imported to Scandinavia, and one could expect that these luxurious vessels were used to drink a rather expensive beverage at the hall. All in all “about 55 fragments of glass have been found at the site [i.e. the long-house]—sherd of at least 6-7 vessels.”

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917 Glass shards have not been found in Iceland.
922 Altogether 256 glass shards were recorded from the excavation of the whole site. Cf. Ingegerd Holand, ‘Glass Vessels’ in Borg in Lofoten: A Chieftains Farm in North Norway, ed. by Gerd Stamsø Munch and others (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2003), pp.211-229 (p. 211).
1992, the shard collection, dated to the 1st millennium AD, was up to 115 fragments representing ten to twelve vessels. These shards are highly ornamented, as for example those belonging to a "reticella glass of a delicate blue colour, the twisted thread blue and yellow." Colourful reticella ornamentation does not seem to be common in North-Western Europe, as shards of this kind of decoration have only been found at Ribe, in Denmark; Whitby Abbey, in England; Staraja, in Russia and Portchester, in England. But the most luxurious ones belong to a vessel, possibly a funnel beaker stylistically dated to the period between 750 and 850 AD, decorated with gold foil, of which no other specimen has been found in Northern Norway. Based on minor differences in the chemical composition of the glass as well as in slight colour variations, all twenty-three shards of gold-foiled glass seem to indicate that they come from two different vessels. A few similar "sherds have appeared on nine other sites in Scandinavia and elsewhere in North-Western Europe [presenting] traces reminiscent of certain elements in the Borg glass, like lines, lozenges and triangles. Absence of evidence could on some occasions imply evidence of absence, and the high ornamentation, and most probably also high cost, of this gold-foiled vessel can well mean that there weren't many other similar examples in Norway. Its uniqueness must have implied great prestige for its owner when the vessel was displayed at feasts. Also, considering their remote origin, these kinds of vessels could also have lead to some

924 Henderson and Holand, 'Glass from Borg', p. 33 and; Holand, 'Glass Vessels', p. 211.
926 See Holand, 'Glass Vessels', p. 213. Other types of reticella glass are known from other many sites around North-Western Europe.
927 See Henderson and Holand, 'Glass from Borg', p. 49 and; Holand, 'Glass Vessels', p. 218.
928 See Holand, 'Glass Vessels', p. 217.
929 These have been found at sites in Dorestad, Liege, Valsgärde, Paderborn, Åhus, Niedermunster, Torslund and Ribe. Cf. Henderson and Holand, Glass from Borg, p. 50.
930 Henderson and Holand, 'Glass from Borg', p. 49.
931 Some earlier examples of glass, dated between the third and first centuries BC, having a similar gold decoration have been found in Italy, and are stylistically believed to have their origin in Egypt. Cf. Henderson and Holand, 'Glass from Borg', p. 49.
mythological legends about their origins, similar to the ones previously discussed from saga literature.

The fact that there are ten to twelve vessels recorded from the site at the long-house does not imply that there was an abundance of them at any single time. It seems that, considering the period during which the site was in use, there were “around three vessels per century or one per generation [...] only one or two vessels were new at any one time, and that, unlike pottery, there was a steady import of glass vessels all through the Late Iron Age.” 932 Although we are unable to estimate the lifespan of each vessel, the fact that luxurious containers were not abundant at any single period of time adds to the symbolic role that they may have played at ceremonies. With an average of three vessels per century one can well assume that each one of them had an important role in the chieftain’s display of wealth and power.

An urban site, market-place and probably royal seat, in function within the period AD 890-1300,933 located in Vestfold, in the Oslofjord, has the largest documented collection of shards in Norway. This site, called Kaupang or Skiringssal [Marketplace or perhaps Shining-Hall934] has revealed over 2000 fragments of pottery, which added to other findings, show that it was more a trading centre than a farming site.935 Due to the variety of shards, it is impossible to define how many vessels they belonged to. “Ellen Karine Haugen has suggested that most of the foreign pottery vessels are more probably the visiting merchants’ containers for provisions and for cooking than wares destined for sale at Kaupang.”936 Yet, some of these shards belonged to tin foil decorated artefacts, which might imply that they were prestigious wares rather than daily use pottery. But we shall return to this point later in this chapter.

932 Roland, ‘Glass Vessels’, p. 211.
934 For a discussion on the possible meanings of Skiringssal see Stefan Brink, ‘Skiringssal, Kaupang, Tjolling: the Toponymic Evidence’, in Kaupang in Skiringssal, ed. by Dagfinn Skre pp. 53-64.
936 Blindheim, p. 11.
For the moment, let us concentrate on the glass shards found at the site. Over 450 glass pieces have been excavated at Kaupang. As Charlotte Blindheim states;

some of them could be the remains of whole bowls or beakers, which were brought here to the market. But others have more probably been taken home as fragments, to be melted down to glass beads, of which we have found many hundreds in the settlement area.\(^{937}\)

As it is impossible to determine which glass shards belong to complete vessels and which ones were raw materials for jewellery production (and perhaps one should also consider that entire vessels that were accidentally broken were re-used in the fabrication of glass beads) I have decided to focus only on the glass fragments deposited as grave-goods. For the purposes of this study I will assume that the glass shards found in graves were most probably deposited as a whole or as intentionally broken vessels during the inhumation. Of the 407 graves excavated in Kaupang, only 5 contained glass shards and one a copper alloy mount for a drinking horn. All these graves - catalogue numbers 277, 283, 284, 301, 304 and 305 - are boat grave inhumations.\(^{938}\) These graves contents and approximate dated are as follows:\(^{939}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRAVE</th>
<th>DATE (AD)</th>
<th>GLASS FINDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>304</td>
<td>800-850</td>
<td>5 glass shards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>283</td>
<td>850-950?</td>
<td>Copper alloy drinking horn mount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301</td>
<td>860-900</td>
<td>Glass shard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>305</td>
<td>c. 900</td>
<td>3 glass shards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>284</td>
<td>900-950</td>
<td>Fragmentary glass beaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>277</td>
<td>950-1000</td>
<td>Glass shard (from beaker?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that glass shards seem to be a rare grave offering (in comparison with the multitude of soapstone and pottery vessels deposited in the Kaupang Graves) attests to the rarity and probable high value of ornamented glass drinking vessels. Also, just as in the case of Borg, we seem to have only three examples of glass vessels per century.

What is also striking is that they all were deposited almost in succession; that is almost

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\(^{937}\) Blindheim, p. 12.

\(^{938}\) Table based on Frans-Arne Stylegar, 'The Kaupang Cemeteries Revisited', in *Kaupang in Skiringssal*, ed. by Skre, pp. 104-127.

\(^{939}\) Stylegar, pp. 104-127.
one every 33 years on average, starting in AD 800. It is tempting from this data to consider the possibility that these graves might represent a lineage of chieftains, each buried with his own prestigious drinking vessel. However, we know that these graves belonged to rich merchants or local farmers, as the royal cemetery in Vestfold is located in Borre, near Kaupang. In any case, the fact that, at least in the case of grave offerings, glass drinking vessels were also a rare artefact at the Kaupang site confirms their high cost and, with it, the prestige associated to them.

Glassware and drinking vessels seem to have been imported to Scandinavia throughout the Middle Ages. This does not imply that highly decorated vessels were a cheap commodity available to all. On the contrary, they seem to have been quite rare, and thus a symbol of status and power. But at some point during the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries, with the emergence of the Hanseatic League, they appear to have become more common. This fact seems to be attested by a law, passed in 1316 by King Haakon Magnusson, regulating the import of 'beer-finery'. The law reads “varom monnum ero [eindi lutir lofader at kaupa ne ut fgara i Tydesko lande nema biors glis oc [adrer lutir pa sem varo lande ero litt parfléger]940 (our men are not allowed to buy nor to journey to the German Land to obtain hjörr finery and other goods that in our land are of little use.) This law might imply that an excess in the import of hjörr-finery, i.e. drinking vessels, led either to a decrease in their symbolic value or to a great loss of Norwegian capital due to the people's desire to acquire luxurious drinking vessels. To my knowledge there are no other laws regulating the import of drinking vessels.

All in all it is a difficult task to identify the different archaeological finds and connect them with the names they are given in the literary corpus. For example, the Old Norse word gler (glass) is used to refer to glass drinking vessels on only three occasions, namely in the Eddic poem Hymiskviða (gler), in the Homiliu bók (gler-

940 NGL III, p. 118. Kong Haakon Magnussöns Retterbod om Udlendingers Told; Bergen, July 30, 1318.
kaleikr) and in Mariu saga (gler-ker), leaving us with only these three Old Norse signifiers for the different types of glass vessels recorded in archaeology. This fact may be connected to the fact that Iceland, where most of our literary sources were written down, has not yet yielded any archaeological evidence of glass drinking vessels. Also, as we will see, the terminology used to denote different kinds of drinking vessels seems to overlap from time to time. At the same time, the descriptions of the vessels given in the literature are scant; so it is difficult to know exactly which particular kind of vessel they refer to. Perhaps drinking horns and jugs are the only ones we can identify with actual remains.

The most common Old Norse drinking vessels are the kalkr or kalekr, the ker and the horn. In the following pages I will study the characteristics and social esteem of each one of these types of vessel.

**Kalkr or Kalekr**

Perhaps one of the most prestigious drinking vessels was the kalkr or kalekr. Both these words mean chalice, cup or goblet. Even though this kind of vessel is mentioned only in a few instances in the written sources, we can gather its high regard from the role it plays in the Eddic poem Rígsþula, mentioned earlier in this chapter, where it appears at the table of the ruling class. At the house of Jarl, one finds that “vin var i kúnno, vårðir kalkar.” (wine was in the cups, ornamented goblets.) Here we find the most luxurious dishes, and the most luxurious objects in a setting that corresponds with the rank of the host. As we can see, the drink at the table is wine, the most expensive of beverages in

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941 The world gler appears in many other occasions in the corpus, albeit with a different meaning. “The word originally meant amber” and can also refer to glass-beads and even to glass windows (gler-gluggar) or ice. (See IED, gler) The above mentioned are the only instances in which it refers to an actual glass vessel. The ONP online entry for gler reports 26 instances of the use of the word; however, since the project is not yet complete, they are not provided. OrdT provides only one example, namely, that in Nj XIII, p. 233; “hálta sem gler” (slippery as ice) and so there are no references to glass-vessels in this group of sagas (see OrdT, gler).
942 IED, kalekr and kalkr.
943 Rp 32.
the Norse world, and one can expect it to be served in one of the most prestigious of vessels; a silver-decorated kalkr or goblet to match the silver-ornamented plates.

Within the context of Eddic poetry, we find another instance in which goblets appear in a royal setting, though in a more sinister context. In Atlakviða, one of the poems that recount the story of the Vǫlungs, they are mentioned when Guðrún feeds Atli the flesh of his sons to eat as revenge for the death of her brother. On this occasion

\[ Ut \text{ gecc } \text{ p} \text{ } \text{Guðrún} \]
\[ \text{med } gylom \text{ kálki,} \]
\[ \text{Atla } \text{l gong,} \]
\[ at \text{ reif } \text{ g} \text{old } rýgnís. \]

[Then Guðrún went out to meet Atli/ with golden goblets, to offer tribute to the gods.]

As for their contents we are told that: it "umðo qlscálir Atla, vínhaðar."\(^{945}\) (the ale-cups of Atli resounded, heavy with wine) It is interesting to note that the goblets are said to be qlscalir [ale-goblets] even though they are used for wine. This inconsistency is most probably due to the requirements of metrics and alliteration in the poem. After all one would expect that such luxurious vessels would be full of wine instead of ale.

This same episode is also described in the Eddic poem Atlamál:

\[ Mæg hæfir þú þinna \]
\[ mist, sem þú síst skýldir; \]
\[ hausa veiz þú þeira \]
\[ hafsøa at qlscálim, \]
\[ drýgða e æ þer svá dryceio: \]
\[ dreýra blett e æ þeira. \]

(You have lost your boys, as you least wanted; / their skulls, you know, you had as ale-cups, / I increased that drink for you, I blended it with their blood.)

Vǫlungsaga saga, largely based on the Eddic poems about the Vǫlungs narrates the episode in almost the same words as Atlamál 82: “Þú hæfir misst þinna sona, ok eru þeira hausar hér at borokerum hafðir, ok sjálfir drakktu þeira blóð við vin blandit.”\(^{947}\)

(You have lost your sons, and their skulls are here as table-goblets, and you drank their blood mixed with wine.)

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\(^{944}\) Akv 33.  
\(^{945}\) Akv 34.  
\(^{946}\) Am 82.  
\(^{947}\) Vqls XXXVIII, p. 211.
In a similarly grim context, *Vqlundarkviða*, an Eddic poem narrating the imprisonment and revenge of a smith named Vqlundr, describes the forging of what is most probably pair of silver goblets. In it Vqlundr says to King Níðuðr:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gace þu til smiðjo} & \quad \text{þeirar er þú gørdir,} \\
\text{þar fior þu belgi} & \quad \text{blóði stœna:} \\
\text{sneid ec af hauðuð} & \quad \text{hína þinna,} \\
\text{oc undir fen fiours} & \quad \text{fætr um logðac.} \\
En þær scalar. & \quad \text{er und sqrom voro} \\
\text{sveip ec utan silfrí,} & \quad \text{senda ec Níðuðr.}\quad 948
\end{align*}
\]

(\text{Go to the smithy that which you built! there you will find blood-stained bellows:/ I cut off the heads of your boys,/ and under the mud of the forge-well their feet I laid.} \\
\text{And those bowls that beneath the hair were:/ I cast in silver, I sent them to Níðuðr.})

On this occasion the heads of the children also end as high prestige vessels, decorated in silver. We are not told exactly into what kind of vessel they were transformed; while the skulls are referred to as *scalar* (bowls) this does not necessarily refer to the end product.

The stories about Guðrún’s and Vqlundr’s revenge seem to have been well known both in the Middle Ages, and in the present day these episodes may account for the generalized and romantic misconception that the Vikings used the skulls of their enemies as drinking vessels. As far as I have gathered from the sources these are the only two occasions in which such a custom is attested in the Old Norse corpus.\(^949\) And as we can see from the context of these episodes, turning skulls into goblets seems to have been considered quite a barbaric and isolated act, inspired mostly by revenge. Also it is possible to perceive that both King Ætli and King Níðuðr were not aware of the fact that the goblets they had been using were made out of human heads.

A further occurrence of a *kalkr* related to heads, though in a different fashion, is that narrated in the Eddic poem *Hymiskviða* during one of Þórr’s strength-contests. On this

\(^{948}\) Text 34-35. \\
\(^{949}\) There are also references to the use of skulls as drinking vessels in *Historia Longobardum* I, 27 and II, 28.

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occasion the Jótunn Hymir challenges Þórr to prove his strength by breaking a glass-goblet.

29 - Er at hændom kom, 
hrá sét bresta 
sló hann sitandi 
báro pó heilun 

(When Hlórriði [Þórr], when he had it in his hands / soon threw the glass against the stone column; / he struck it against the column while sitting / yet whole they took it back to Hymir.)

30 - Frilla kendi, 
eitt, er vissi: 
"Drep við haus Hymis! 
hann er hardari, 
kostmóðs iotuns, 
kalki hveriom." 

(Until the beautiful mistress taught him / a kind advice that she knew: / Strike it [the vessel] against Hymir's skull, it is harder, / the meat-weary Jótunn's, than any kalkr.)

31 - Hafra dróttinn, 
færdís alla 
hálstofn ofan, 
en vinferill, 

(Hardy stood up the lord of goats [Þórr], / bringing all his Ás power; / whole was the man [Hymir] on the top part of the head, / when the round wine-barrel broke.)

In this incident the kalkr is removed from a regal context. However we can see that, as in the previous instances, it is associated with wine since it is referred to as a round vinferill⁹⁵¹ (wine-barrel). This then agrees with our premise that goblets were the most esteemed drinking vessels and, even if they were not always used to consume wine, the ideological association around them tends to link them with the most esteemed of beverages - wine.

These drinking vessels do not appear very often in saga literature. There are just three further instances in the sources, two of which are connected with supernatural events and the other one with a pagan ritual.⁹⁵²

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⁹⁵⁰ Hym 29-31.
⁹⁵¹ Vinferill – This seems to be a scribal error, as the compound makes no sense. The original word was most probably vinferill [wine-barrel]. See IED, vinferill. IEW and AEW do not contain entries for this term. Nor did any other dictionaries I consulted.
⁹⁵² The only instances are those in Hallfr XI, p. 199, Gullp III, p. 185-86, and Yng XXXVII, p. 68.
Snorri Sturluson narrates in *Ynglinga saga* that during a feast offered to King Hjørvarðr by King Granmarr in Norway, the men sat at a *tvimeningr* drinking session.\(^{953}\) In it:

> Háxæti Hjørvarðs konungs var bútt gagnvart háxæti Granmars konungs, ok sáu allir hans menn á þann pall. Pá møtt Granmarr konungr við Hildigunni, döttur sín, at hon skyldi búa sík ok bera qa! vikingum. Hún var allra kvinna fríoðust. Pá tók hon silfrkalk einn ok fyllti ok gekk fyrir Hjqrvarð konung ok møtt: “Allir heilir Ylfingar at Hrólfs minni kraka” ok drakk af til hálfs ok seldi Hjqrvarði konungi. Nú tók hann kalkinn ok hænd hemar með ok møtti, at hon skyldi ganga at sitja hjón homum.\(^{954}\)

[King Hjørvarðr’s high-seat was arranged opposite the high-seat of King Granmarr, and all his men at that bench. Then said King Granmarr to Hildigunnr, his daughter, that she should get ready and serve ale to the Vikings. She was the most beautiful of all women. Then she took a silver goblet and filled it and went towards King Hjqrvarðr and said: ‘All health to you Ylfings, in memory of Hrólfr Kraki’ and drank half of it and passed it to King Hjqrvarðr. Then he took the goblet and her hand with it and said that she should go and sit next to him.]

This passage seems also to confirm the prestige that goblets enjoyed during the Viking Age. First of all, this particular goblet is said to be used during feasts, at which a king could well display his wealth in front of as many witnesses as possible. As mentioned before, wealth and power were not only exhibited at feasts by showing the large numbers of supporters that a man had, but also by showing magnificence both in the goods offered during the feast and in the vessels in which they were served. As mentioned earlier on, concepts of wealth and power seem to have been coupled, as the Old Norse adjective *rikr* means both ‘powerful’ and ‘wealthy’, and they were most probably made conspicuous in the same fashion: ostentation of wealth and display of power. Hence at the feast, the king shows that he is a *rikr maðr* [rich-powerful man] by exhibiting his luxury objects, such as a silver goblet. The power-display effect of the feast might have not been the same if the vessel had been roughly made out of wood, for example. Second, as we have seen before in relation to goblets, these vessels seem

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\(^{953}\) *Tvimeningar* will be discussed in Chapter 6.

\(^{954}\) *Yng* XXXVII, p. 68
to be particularly associated with the nobility, and only later with the Christian Church’s services.

The only religious use of a *kalekr* in our sources occurs near the end of *Hallfreðar saga*. In this episode the late King Óláfr Tryggvason appears in a dream to a Hebridean abbot in order to report that some slaves from his parish have stolen the grave-goods of his poet Hallfreðr. The grave-goods are recovered by the abbot and are said to have been put to the following use: “*Kalekr var gerr af hringinum, en altarisklæði af skikkjunni, en kertastikur ör hjálminum.*”\(^{955}\) (A chalice was made from the [golden arm-] ring, and an altar-cloth from the cloak, and candlesticks from the helmet.) On this occasion, the chalice would have also been used for wine, as dictated by Christian liturgy.

The final occurrence of a goblet in the written sources is that in *Porskfirðinga saga* and is also connected to a dream. The saga narrates that the night before he is supposed to break into Agnarr’s burial-mound, Þórir dreams that Agnarr appears to him and asks him to break into Valr’s cave instead. Once Þórir agrees to do so Agnarr offers him a goblet and the following scene takes place:

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\text{Nú er hér kalkr, er þú skalt drekka af tvá drykki, en fórnumatr þinn eimn drykk, en þá verðr eptir þat sem mó.} \text{ Síðan vakanr Þórir, ok væru þessir hlutar allir þar í hjá honum, er Agnar gaf honum. Ketilbjörn vaknar ok hafði heyrt allt þeirra viðræli ok svá sét, hvar Agnar fór. Hann bað þórir taka þenna kost. Eptir þat tók Þórir kalkinn ok drakk af tvá drykki, en Ketilbjörn eimn. Pá var enn eptir í kalkinum. Þórir setti þá á munn sér ok drakk af allt. Nú fél í þá svefn. Agnar kom þá enn ok ávitaði Þórir, er hann hafði allt ór drukkit kalkinum, ok kvæð hann þess drykjar gjalsa mundu hinn síðara hluta aví sinnar.}^{956}\]

(‘Now here is a goblet, and you shall take two drinks from it, and your companion one drink, and that which is left after shall be left.’ Then Þórir woke up and all these wares which Ægnar gave him were there by his side. Ketilbjörn woke up and he had heard all their conversation, and he had also seen where Agnar went. He asked Þórir to follow this plan. After that Þórir took the goblet and had two drinks from it and Ketilbjörn one. There was still more drink left in the goblet. Þórir raised it to his mouth and drank all. Now sleep overcame them. Then Agnar came again and rebuked Þórir because he had drank all the contents of the goblet and said that he would pay for this drink later in his life.)

\(^{955}\) *Hallfr* XI, p. 119.  
\(^{956}\) *GullP* III, pp. 185-86.
On this occasion, it is not clear what the contents of the goblet were. However we can assume from the context that it was some sort of supernatural drink that would help Þórir in his quest to break into Valr’s cave. It is not clear whether the drink itself was the one that conferred the power (if any) or if it was the goblet that transmitted the might.\textsuperscript{957} However, since the goblet was in the possession of Agnarr’s ghost, one can imagine that it was part of the riches that were buried with him in the mound, most probably being of his treasures and thus a rather costly vessel.

The few appearances of goblets in the written sources allow us to draw a few conclusions about their role in the Norse society. First it seems that they were highly appreciated drinking vessels, as in most instances they are said to be made out of precious metals and in one instance of glass. Accordingly they appear in scenes where power and wealth are being displayed. Kalkr also seem to be associated with the ruling class as we can see from the majority of the examples given above. They were objects owned and used by kings or earls, and maybe later on by the Church. Finally, and perhaps the strongest evidence of the high regard they enjoyed, we have the fact that they seem to be used almost exclusively for drinking wine.\textsuperscript{958} In general, they seem to have been the most valued drinking vessels portrayed in our literary sources.

\textit{Ker}

The term ker is a bit more puzzling than kalkr and kalekr. The word ker can refer both to a tub or vessel as well as to a goblet or cup, and these vessels seem to have been of different qualities and made out of different materials. Thus in the literary corpus we can find references to ker (vessel, tub, goblet), ausker (bucket), qlker (ql vessel), vinker (wine vessel), sýrker (sýra vessel), skapker (the large vessel in the hall

\textsuperscript{957} Magic drinks will be discussed in chapter 7.1.
\textsuperscript{958} Ynglinga saga is the only occasion in which the beverage served in them is said to be ale.
from which the horns/cups were filled); and based on the materials employed in their fabrication we get the compounds _gullker_ (golden vessel) and _silfrker_ (silver vessel). Even though they are not literally mentioned in the sources, one should not discard the possibility that some other _ker_ were made out of wood or glass. Also, depending on their size and function one can distinguish between a _ker_ as a tub or cask and a _drykkjuker_ as a _ker_ designed specially to drink from rather than as a large container.

The prestige associated with this drinking vessel could also vary, as one cannot expect that a _sýrker_ used to serve _sýra_ - the most worthless of drinks\(^{959}\) - would enjoy the same prestige as a _gullker_ or a _vinkker_ used by the chieftain or farmer to drink the costliest of drinks at a feast. One also should not expect to see wooden and golden _ker_ being used in the same context or having the same symbolic meaning as prestigious objects when it comes to a display of power or showing appreciation to a farmer’s or chieftain’s guests. Let us start our study of these vessels by looking at the occasions on which the word _ker_ is used as a simplex and proceed then to the study of the different kinds of _ker_, in descending order of prestige associated with them.

The word _ker_ was used indiscriminately both to signify a large container or one that could be used to drink from, it referred both to a tub or a cup. In general it can be considered to mean ‘vessel’ and its context or prefixed element was what gave it its meaning as well as its value. And, as vessels, it seems that they could come in all sizes. For example, in _FlÓamanna saga_ we hear about an otherwise unknown kind of duelling. Here we are told that: "Þá bað Randvídri þrándi hólmgöngu, þá er kölluð er kerganga; skal þar berjast í keri ok byrgja yfir ofan ok hafa kefli í hendi."\(^{960}\) (Then Randvíðr challenged þrándr to a duel, that which is called _ker_-duel; they should fight inside a _ker_ and cover it with a lid and have sticks in their hands.) This must have been quite a large tub so as to be able to accommodate two men armed with staffs and give them enough

\(^{959}\) The different types of alcoholic beverages and their connotations are discussed in Chapter 2.

\(^{960}\) _FlÓam_ XVII, p. 264.
space to combat. *Ker* this size were most probably used to store water, as mentioned in *Hardar saga*: "Porgeir gyðilskeggi og Sigurðr Torfafóstri fluttu vatn frá Bláskeggsá við tólfta mann og fylltu selabátinn af vatni og helltu i ker það er var út í Hólmi."\(^{961}\) (Þorgeirr purse-beard and Sigurðr Torfi’s foster-son moved water from the Bláskeggsá [Black-Beard’s river] with another ten men, and filled a seal boat with water and poured it into that *ker* that was out on Hólmi.) They also seem to have been of a smaller size, so as to be able to keep drinking-water on a ship, while larger amounts were stored in a larger container. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, we have a small but illustrative account of how merchants organized their food and drink needs while on a journey. Regarding the water supply we are told that "skyldu ok allir skiparar eiga drykk saman, ok skyldi ker standa við siglu, er drykkr var í, ok lok yfir kerinu, en sumr drykkr var í verplum, ok var þaðan bætt í kerit, svá sem ör var drukkit.\(^{962}\)" (all the sailors should have the same drink, and the *ker* in which the drink was should stand by the mast, and a lid was over the *ker*, and some drink was in casks [verpill], from which the *ker* that was used to drink from was refilled.) This kind of container would have been smaller, as the main vessel for water storage was a *verpill*, or cask, while the *ker* in question was most probably bucket-sized. Perhaps the bucket found in the Oseberg ship-burial was a *ker* used for this purpose. Of course we cannot expect every *ker*, as a bucket, to be as highly ornate and prestigious as that found in the royal grave at Oseberg (figure 6.2).

When it comes to those *ker* that were actually used as drinking vessels we have several examples (both in simplex and compound form) throughout the literary sources. On the occasions in which *ker* appear without a prefix, they seem to refer to prestigious and, perhaps, highly ornate vessels used to display wealth and power.

For example *Fóstbræðra saga* narrates the use of several of these vessels during a Yule feast in Greenland:

\(^{961}\) *Hard* XIV, p. 65.
\(^{962}\) *Eb* XXXIX, p. 104.
The passage is highly illustrative of how holding a feast could increase a man’s power and/or reputation. We are first told that Þorkell hosts a feast for all his friends in Greenland. However, his purpose is not only to provide entertainment but to do it for his glory, and for that sole purpose he brews munagat, since offering a commodity rarely available in Greenland would definitely prove that he is a rikr maðr. However, it seems that the simple offering of alcohol was not enough to increase his fame; it had to be provided in the right setting and with the proper paraphernalia that would prove to his friends that he is powerful and, hence, a suitable candidate to be a leader of men. The only problem seems to be that, apart from alcohol and a hall, he lacks the implements of display. Hence he has to borrow this gear: furniture, tapestries and goblets. Perhaps in order to disguise the fact that all these luxury items were borrowed, Þorkell decides to hand them back once all the guests had left the feast.

To distinguish between ker in general and other ker that were used specifically for drinking purposes, a prefix was sometimes added. So we have compounds of ker such as drykkjuker (drinking-ker), boroker (table-ker), and skapker (a large ker from which other ker were filled)

963 Fbr XXII, pp. 226-27.
The *drykkjuker* (drinking-ker) is mentioned only in one instance in the literary sources. This is in a royal setting, in *Viglundar saga*, when King Haraldr attends a feast arranged by Sigurðr. The feast is arranged properly for a king, and the saga reports that "*þessi veizla var vönduð mjök at öllum fængum.*"\(^{964}\) (this feast was carefully prepared with all means.) The king designates a man called Þorgrímr as his and his men’s cup-bearer, and the cup being used was a large *drykkjuker* (drinking-ker) for we are told that "*Þorgrímr bar eitt stórt drykkjuker fyrir Grim, þá stöemplist út af kerinu, þvi at Þorgrímr drap við fæti, ok kom á klæði Grims.*"\(^{965}\) (Þorgrímr carried a large drinking vessel for Grimr, then little was spilt out of the *ker* because Þorgrímr stumbled and it was spattered over Grimr’s clothes.) Once again, the vessel used at the feast must have been a quite ornate one, so as to be fitting not only with the standing of the king and his men who are being served in it, but also with the lavish way in which the feast is said to be prepared. We are not told if they were made out of glass or precious metals.

*Boraker* (table-ker) are mentioned only in four sources,\(^ {966}\) two of which are of dubious historical trustworthiness, but can still provide us with an idea of how the saga writers perceived the *ker* in the legendary past. The first occurrence of a *boraker* is that of the legendary *Bósa saga* mentioned at the beginning of this section. As we have already seen, this *boraker* is made out of a vulture’s egg\(^ {967}\) "*at skrifat er allt med gullstöfum.*"\(^ {968}\) (which is inscribed all over with golden letters) and "*var þar í tíu merkr gulls, ok hafði konungr skurnit fyrir boraker.*"\(^ {969}\) (was worth ten marks of gold; and the king used the egg-shell as a table-ker.) The shape of the egg may well resemble that of a cup. Perhaps the story of the vulture and about how the drinking vessel was obtained was, as earlier discussed, a story made up in order to enhance the honour of a highly

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\(^{964}\) *Vigl* V, p. 69.
\(^{965}\) *Vigl* V, p. 69.
\(^{966}\) *Bós* IX, Víglsh XXIV and XXXVIII, ØH CXC and ØK III.
\(^{967}\) The vulture is not a scavenging bird native to Iceland, hence it was easily made into an animal worthy of legendary adventures.
\(^{968}\) *Bós* VI, p. 296.
\(^{969}\) *Bós* IX, p. 304.
decorated and already prestigious vessel by attributing it a legendary origin. As we will see, when it comes to drinking horns, there were stories about bulls whose horns were decorated with gold, most probably to justify a mythic origin of a pair of drinking vessels. In this case we would have an equivalent, where a cracked egg-shell would also produce a pair of drinking vessels that are said to be golden in nature.

The other two occurrences of a table-ker in the Fornaldar ságur take place in Volsunga saga. In the first instance, they are mentioned in a royal setting, when Brynhildr welcomes Sigurðr to her place. Then “gangja þar inn fjórar konur með stórum bórðkerum af gulli ok með hinu bezta vini ok standa fyrir þeim.” (four women went in with a large golden table-ker and with the best wine and stood before them.) They seem to have been highly prestigious vessels, not only because they were used to serve the best of wines, but because in the ideology of the saga composers (and perhaps of the audience too) they were the proper drinking vessels used to honour the best known heroes of the legendary past.

Bórðker appear in a more historical context in Snorri Sturluson’s Heimskringla. In Óláfs saga kyrra Snorri tells us how bórðker replaced drinking horns as the drinking vessel befitting kings.

Óláfr konungr hafði há hirðsíðu, at hann lét standa fyrir bórði sinu skutulveina ok skenka sér með bórðkerum ok svá állum tínum þámunum, þeim er at hans bórði sáru. […] Haraldr konungr ok aðrir konungar fyrir honum væru vantar at drekka af dýrahornum ok bara æl ör þvígi um eld ok drekka minni á þann, er honum sjámnist. (King Óláfr had then the court tradition of having a cup-bearer standing in front of his table and serving him and all the honourable men that were sitting with him at the table with table-ker […] King Haraldr and all the other kings before him were accustomed to drink out of animal horns and

970 “In England between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, ‘grypeseye,’ or griffin eggs, were highly prized collectibles, listed in the inventories of noble houses and often made into cups in which beverages thought to possess powerful health-giving qualities were brewed.” David E. Jones, An Instinct for Dragons (New York: Routledge, 2000). p 146.
971 Vqsl XXIV, p. 167.
972 The second occasion on which a bórðker is mentioned in Vqsl is when Guðrún turns the skulls of her and Atli’s boys into drinking vessels. (Vqsl XXXVIII, p. 211) While in verse these vessels were called kalkr, as we saw above in the section devoted to kalkr, the saga names them as bórðker.
973 ÓK III, p. 205-6.
974 That is Haraldr Sigurðsson, his predecessor to the Norwegian throne.
Taking into account that Óláfr kyrre ruled Norway from 1067 until 1093, some 80 years before the birth of Snorri Sturluson, we can consider these events to have reached Snorri orally and to contain, perhaps, a kernel of truth. Again, this account seems to confirm that bordker were vessels refined enough for kings to drink from. However, some 40 to 50 years before Óláfr kyrre introduced the custom of drinking from bordker, we find in Óláfs saga Helga that Saint Óláfr had already started using them at his high-seat.975 Snorri tells us that “á einum sunnudegi, at Óláfr konungr sat i hásæti sinu yfir bordum ok hafði svá fasta áhyggju, at hann gáði eigi stundanna. Hann hafði í hendi knif ok heðt á tannar ok renndi þar af spánu nýkkura. Skutilsveinn stóð fyrir honum ok heðt bordkeri.”976 [during one Sunday when King Ólaf sat on his high-seat at the table and was so absorbed in his thoughts that he did not notice the time. He had a knife in his hand and remained silent and was there making chips of wood. The cup-bearer stood in front of him and held a loving-cup.] In case Snorri’s comment about Óláfr kyrre is accurate, then Saint Óláfr’s use of bordker may be interpreted as an anachronism on the part of the author. However, this anachronism might have been due to the fact that Snorri knew about the prestige associated with bordker use and wanted to transmit it to Saint Óláfr by depicting him as drinking from one.

From the few examples of the use of a bordker we can gather that they were highly appreciated drinking vessels as they all appear in a courtly context. Also, the examples of Volsunga saga XXIV and those of Heimskringla coincide in a different aspect. In all these scenes, a cup-bearer is introduced to hold the table-ker for the person who is drinking from it. Perhaps this was another way of displaying power. But from these passages we can also gather that bordker had some degree of dignity in themselves, so that they required the service of a person “specialized” in holding them.

975 Seats at the hall and heir social connotations will be studied in section 6.2.2.
976 ÓH CXC, p. 342.
This dignity imbued in the ritual of drinking from such vessels was most probably also transferred to the person drinking from it.

The word *böröker* means, etymologically, ‘table-vessel’, and it is interesting that in none of the examples do we actually see a *böröker* lying on the table. Perhaps this meaning of “table-vessel” originated and applied to less refined and daily-use drinking vessel to be found at farms and not in courts. This kind of drinking vessel would most probably be so ordinary as to escape any mention in the literature.

Other *ker* made out of gold and silver are mentioned in the literary sources, and apart from that made out of an egg-shell, these are the only materials they seem to be made of in the literature. We cannot discard the possibility that *ker* were also made out of glass, soapstone or wood; but, for some reason they were not considered to be worthy of mention in the literature.

Based on the contents of these vessels, we find the compounds *qlker* (*ale-ker*) and *sýraker* (*sýra-ker*); however references to *qlker* do not refer to a drinking vessel but to a large tub and to piglets in a riddle on another occasion. In *Völsunga saga*, both Sigmundr and Sinfjótli hide in the antechamber of King Siggeir in order to seek revenge. The story goes that they: “gangga inn i forstofuna, þá er var fyrir höllinni, en þar varu inni ölker, og leynast þar.” (go into the antechamber that was in front of the hall, and there were ale-ker, and they hid there.) Similarly, *Orkneyinga saga* reports *qlker* large dimensions: “ölker bæði mörg ok stór.” (a great number of large ale-ker.)

The third occurrence of this compound is as part of a riddle told by Óðinn to Hleiðrkr:

“Sá ek á sumri sólbjörgum á,”

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977 Gullker. See *Völs* XXIV and *Þórist* Bm X.
978 Silfrker. See *Þórist* Bm II.
979 *OrðT* does not return any entries for the term *qlker*, meaning that it is not mentioned at all in the *Islefang* *ságur*. It is not found in the *Sturlunga saga* nor in the *Fornaldarságur*. *ONP* returns several entries for this term, but, since the project is still unfinished, it does not mention where are they found. In any case, we are certain that they are not to be found in the sagas.
980 *OrðT* provides 4 different entries for the term *sýraker*. One in Eg and three in Gisl (of which one is repeated). These are the examples discussed below. See *OrðT*, *sýraker*.
981 *Völs* VIII, p. 125.
982 *Orkn* LXVI, p. 152.
The compound *sýrunker* also seems to be used for large containers of *syra* rather than drinking vessels. In *Egils saga*, a *sýrunker* is used to dispose of a shield\(^985\) while in *Gisla saga*, two *sýrunker* are used as a hiding place.\(^986\) In the *Sturlunga saga* compilation they are mentioned just once, also as a hiding place.\(^987\) As these are the only occurrences of these compounds in our written sources,\(^988\) one may be well justified in assuming that both *sýrunker* and *qlker* do not refer to drinking vessels but to large containers for those drinks. Perhaps, after all, the *ker* as a drinking vessel was used especially for more costly drinks such as wine and appeared only in high-status settings while horns or less refined cups were used for *ql*, *mungát*, and *syra*.

**SKÁL� AND ÁSKR**

The drinking vase most commonly associated with *ql*, *mungát* and *björr* is the drinking-horn. However in the Eddic literature we find evidence of another kind of vessel that seems to be exclusively linked to the consumption of *ql*, at least

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\(^983\) Heiðr X, p. 48.  
\(^984\) The answer to this riddle is 'a sow feeding her piglets'. The piglets drink in silence while the sow squeals.  
\(^985\) See Eg LXXVIII, p. 273.  
\(^986\) See Gisl III, p. 12.  
\(^987\) Isl CLXXIV, pp. 492-93.  
\(^988\) The *ONP* online entry for *qlker* reports six instances of the use of the word; however, since the project is not yet complete, they are not provided. *OrdT* does not provide any examples. *IED* provides four examples, three of which are mentioned above. The fourth corresponds to *Sjórn*, the Old Norse version of the *Old Testament* and not included in our sources. The *ONP* entry for *sýrunker* returns eight instances of the use of this compound, but they are not listed. Four of these examples should be equivalent to the four provided by *OrdT*, quoted above (the compound occurs 3 times in *Gisli* and once in *Eg*) and three equivalent with the three times that the word is used in the passage of *Isl* mentioned above. The eighth and last example, not listed in the *ONP*, should be that in *Biskupa saga*, which do not form part of our primary sources.
etymologically, named qlskáðr\textsuperscript{989} [ql-cup]. So, in Atlakviða it is said that: “umðo qlscáðir Atla, vínhaðgar.”\textsuperscript{990} (the ale-cups of Atli resounded, heavy with wine.) While in Atlamál, as we have seen earlier in this section, it is said that the boys’ skulls are used as qlskalir: “hausa veiz þú þeira hafða at qlscádlom.”\textsuperscript{991} (their skulls, you know, you had as ale-cups.) Even if on both occasions the vessels are said to be used for drinking wine instead of ql, we can at least conclude from the first element of the compound that there was one period in the history of these vessels in which they were mainly used for drinking ql. Another possibility is that the choice of drink to be served in these cups was conditioned by the poets’ rhyming and alliterating needs more than by the actual liquid poured into them. Or maybe, originally, the cups in the story were used to drink ql, but later on, as wine took the leading place of honour among beverages the drinks were altered in order to befit the status of the drinkers.

The last occurrence of this compound word is that in Hamðismal where during a battle it is simply stated that “styrð varð í ranni, stucco qlscádlir”\textsuperscript{992} (tumultuous it became in the longhouse/ the ql-cups sprang.). But since we are not told what was drunk from these vessels, we cannot ascertain that they were used for ql, as their name suggests.

Finally, the least prestigious of vessels might be the skyraskr [skyr-bowl]. As the second element ‘askr’ (ash) suggests, this was a wooden bowl. Wooden bowls or askr were most certainly one of the most common vessels that a Norse man or woman would use on a daily basis. However they are rarely mentioned -only in one source- and on this occasion they are related to the lowest of drinks, skyr.\textsuperscript{993} In Egils saga, we are told that

\textsuperscript{989} These occur in Akv 34, Am 79 and Hm 23.
\textsuperscript{990} Akv 34.
\textsuperscript{991} Am 82.
\textsuperscript{992} Hm 23.
\textsuperscript{993} See ONP, askr. The word is used to name the tree or any objects made out of its wood, including drinking vessels. However the only intances in which it is used to name a drinking vessel or measure are those mentioned in Chapter 2, and the only instance in which an askr is named in connection with a drink is that in Eg.
errands. At some point Egill and his men have to ask for shelter at the farm of a man called Ármóðr where they are welcomed in the following fashion: “Ármóðr lét þá setja þeim bord, en síðan váru settir fram stórir askar, fullir af skyri; þá lét Ármóðr, at honum þætti þat illa, er hann hafði eigit mungát at gefa þeim.”⁹⁹⁴ (Ármóðr then had the tables set, and afterwards big bowls full of skyr were set in front of them; then Ármóðr let them think that he thought it bad that he had no mungát to offer them.) After the king’s men have been drinking skyr for a while, they find out that it was all treachery, and that Ármóðr actually had some better drink to offer them. Then they left the skyr as “því næst var þl inn borit, ok var þat it sterkasta mungát; var þá brátt drukkinn einnemningar; skyldi einn maðr drekka af dýrshorni.”⁹⁹⁵ (afterwards ql was brought in, and it was the strongest kind of mungát, the drinking was then done without men sharing a vessel, each man could drink alone from his animal-horn.) This passage is quite illustrative in the sense that it allows us to understand the value of each drink as well as that of the vessels they were served in. First of all we have a group of men representing the king on a mission, and as the king’s representatives they should expect treatment similar to that which the king would get from the farmers. When asked for shelter, the farmer pretends that he has nothing other than skyr to offer, which is accepted by the men, as they believe that the farmer is giving them the best of his provisions. As the skyr is said to be served in large bowls, we can suppose that the men were actually sharing the vessels in which the skyr was served. However, as soon as the king’s emissaries find out that there were better provisions to be had, they feel offended and demand them. The offence consisted in offering a beverage that was below their status while he actually had something better to offer. He gave them a slave’s or low-class people’s drink, which means that in the perception of the farmer they were lower-class men, undeserving of his best victuals. This offence extends, of course, to the king,

⁹⁹⁴ Eg LXXI, p. 224.
⁹⁹⁵ Eg LXXI, p. 225.
whom they are representing. Once the trick is discovered and the offence made clear the farmer tries to compensate by offering the best of drinks available. Not only do the contents improve, but there is also a change of vessels to drinking horns. And there is now one horn-per-person in contrast with the large bowls that they had to share before. We can also perceive that there is a vessel appropriate for each drink. While *syra* is served in an *askr*, *mungât* is offered in a *horn* as it is a vessel more befitting to the social status of the drink. Similarly, wine was never offered in a *horn*, as the vessels that corresponded to its status were the *kalkr* and those *ker* that were highly ornated or made out of a precious metal.

6.3 - *MANNJAFNADAR, BOASTING AND DRINKING CONTESTS*

Feasts and gatherings in general offered an opportunity for men to meet and socialize and, at the same time, they offered the possibility for men to boast and compare their deeds and prowess with those of other men of the same or similar rank. This form of showing-off led to a kind of competition known as *mannjafnadar* (a comparison of men) and is "a dispute in which each contends that his hero is the greatest."\(^{996}\) This dispute could in some cases be between men of opposing groups, who maintained that a person in their band had better qualities than the best man in the opposing group. But the *mannjafnadar* could also take place between two or more men, friends or not, who boast about their own qualities and deeds at the same time that they ridicule the accomplishments of the opponent. Lars Lönroth correctly asserts that:

> Regarded primarily as a 'party game' the *mannjafnadar* is a battle of wits, in which the contestants take turn in making boasts and insulting each other according to certain formal rules. The fun of the game consists in finding witty and formally correct repartees, matching the opponent's previous boast while at the same time turning it to ridicule.

\(^{996}\) *IED, mannjafnadar.*

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As a literary motif, on the other hand, the mannjafnadar is used to bring out the differences in character between two warriors and to prepare for the revelation of some hero’s true identity.997

William Ian Miller defines it in a similar fashion as:

It [mannjaflnad] was the term for a quasi-formal contest, a kind of slanging match, which seemed to figure largely at feasts, especially when people were in good spirits with drink. The game was to choose the best man in the district, town, or hall; it was, in short, our ranking game of who’s the smartest, prettiest, sexiest, coolest, best athlete, least sexually attractive.998

Mannjafnadar did not take place exclusively in a drinking setting, as they could be held at any place where large numbers of people gathered, such as the privy or at an assembly.999 Perhaps the association of the ‘game’ with a drinking context comes from an episode found in Heimskringla. There, in Magnússona saga, King Eysteinn and King Sigurðr alternately exchange visits to entertain each other. But during a certain evening “er menn töku at drekka, þá var mungát ekki gott, ok váru menn hljóðir.”1000 (when the men started to drink the mungát was not good and all the men were taciturn.) When boredom becomes unbearable for the attendants King Eysteinn comes with an idea to save the night, and proposes a game: “Sá qlisdr hefir opt verit, at menn taka sér jafnðarmenn. Vil ek hér svá vera láta.”1001 (It has often been an ql-custom for men to find an equal match for themselves. I want that to be done here.) The competition starts when King Eysteinn names his brother, King Sigurðr, as his opponent and the mannjafnadar takes place in the following fashion:


998 Miller, p. 174.
999 The mannjafnadar, in a legal context, consisted in comparing corpses of men belonging to opposing bands, killed in a feud, in order to calculate the compensation owed by one part to the other. For example, see Heið XXXVI and Grønland VI. However, for the purposes of this study I will limit the study of mannjafnadar to a comparison of men within a drinking setting. For an analysis of mannjafnadar as a legal procedure see Miller, pp. 109-29.
1000 Magni XXI, p. 259.
1001 Magni XXI, p. 259.
1002 Magni XXI, p. 259.
(‘I will take you, brother, as my equal-man. I’ll start by saying that we both have an equal name (title) and equal estates. I don’t find any difference in our birth or in our upbringing.’ Then King Sigurðr answers: ‘Don’t you remember when I used to break your back [at wrestling] if I wanted, and you were a winter older?’ Then King Eystræinn says: ‘I don’t remember the less that you got a single game in which you were the most agile.’ Then King Sigurð said: ‘Do you remember how it used to go in swimming [contests] between us? I could immerse you in the water if I wanted.’"

The series of boasts continues increasing, and goes from sports to personal appearance, political abilities, etc. and it ends only when both kings become furious: "Eptir þat þagnuðu þeir báðir, ok var hvártveggi reiðr. Fleiri hlutir urðu þeir i skiptum þeira braðra, er þat fannsk á, at hvárr dró sik fram ok sitt mál ok vildi hvárr vera qðrum meiri, en helzk þó friðr milli þeirra, meðan þeir lífðu."1003 (After that they both became silent and both of them were angry. Several things happened in the exchange between the brothers when it could be perceived how each brought himself and his speech forward, and each one wanted to be greater than the other. However there was peace between them while they lived.)

The fact that King Eystræinn refers to the comparison of men as an qliðr (ale-custom) most surely means that mannjarfnaðar are considered a drinking game, regardless of the fact that drinking is not mentioned at all in this scene. However, since the event takes place within a drinking hall, even if it is a hall provided with bad mungát, one can well imagine that the series of boasts took place while the contestants drank. But, at least according to the narration in Magnússona saga, alcohol does not seem to play an active role in this ale-custom. Another scene that mentions mannjarfnaðar as an entertainment to be had at large gatherings or during feasts comes from Svarfdæla saga. Here, on the occasion of a wedding feast1004 Griss makes the following speech: ‘‘Vel samir þat í svá góðu samsæti at tala mest þat, er eptir megi hafa, ok strengja heit eða taka sér jafnaðarmenn.’ Porsteinn sagði þat óvitrlega til

1003 Magn XXI, p. 262.
1004 Wedding feasts are discussed in Chapter 5.
lagit.”\textsuperscript{1005} (It is fitting at such a fine gathering to talk about great deeds that are worth of remembrance, and to make oaths or find ones equal \textsc{i.e.} entering a mannjafnaðr contest.) Þorsteinn said that it was a foolish thing to do.) Once more we can see that mannjafnaðar and oath-making, by which men could prove their worthiness, were considered as activities that took place at large gatherings such as feasts, where alcohol was consumed. Þorstein’s words, saying that such competitions are not advisable may spring from the fact that these competitions, instead of creating a sense of unity within the group, led to hard feelings within the contestants and their supporters. This could be dangerous, as “ranking demoralizes losers more than it exalts winners.”\textsuperscript{1006} Taking into consideration that these comparisons were between the best or most powerful men in the district then, as will be discussed later in the section, if the loser did not take his defeat with humour, his sense of humiliation could lead to a series of killings or feuds.

Basically, the contest consists of men showing-off their prowess while minimizing and ridiculing the physical, intellectual, martial and moral qualities and achievements of the opponent. In other words, this ale-custom is an intellectual battle whose objective is for one man to prove that he is more powerful than the other. Perhaps that is why the contest opens with a statement of ‘equality’ between the contenders, as only a contest between men of similar status would guarantee a fair duel; it would be meaningless to make a comparison between men of different standing.

There seem to be three possible endings for this kind of “game”, depending on who participates in it and on whether alcohol plays an active role or not in the mannjafnaðar. When the contest is a confrontation between the actual men that are being compared it normally ends when one of the contenders runs out of achievements to boast of. A second variant is when drinking takes an active part in the competition. In that case it ends either when one contender outdrinks the other or when one runs out of

\textsuperscript{1005} Svæfð XVI, p. 165.  
\textsuperscript{1006} Miller, p. 177.
deeds to boast of. The third possibility occurs when the competition takes place between a group of people who are comparing two or more men that are not present at the debate. In this last case it ends when a person brings out irrefutable evidence that proves that his candidate is the man with the most outstanding profile. Regardless of who participates in the competition, and of the active or passive role of alcohol in it, in most cases the outcome is a sense of enmity between the men being compared. This might be due both to the hard feelings generated by the exchange of public humiliations that the sides have to deal with as well as to the sense of being a lesser man that accompanies the loser at the end of the game. A good example of how such games could end in a killing comes from Eyrbyggja saga. In it a group of men try to find out who is the best man in the district. The saga reads:

Annat haust eptir at vetrnóttum hafði Snorri goði hausthöð mikill ok bauð til vinum sinum. Þar var glíðrykki ok fast drukkt. Þar var glíðrið marg; var þar talat um mannjafnafni, þær þar varri gáfgastur mannr í sveit eða mestur hafðingi; ok urdu menn þar eigi á eitt súttir, sem opnað er, ef um mannjafnafni er talat; várur þeir fléstir, at Snorri goði þeittí gáfgastur mannr, en sumir nefndu til Arnkel; þeir várur enn sumir, er nefndu til Styr.1007

(The following autumn, during the winter nights, Snorri the goði held a great autumn feast and he invited his friends to attend. There was glíð-drinking and people drank heavily. There was a great glí-entertainment; there was talking about comparison of people (mannjafnafni), about who was the most eminent man or the greatest chieftain in the district; and the people in there were not of one opinion, as it usually happens when there is a comparison of men; the most of them thought that Snorri the goði was the most eminent man, and some named Arnkel; there were still some that named Styr.)

When the comparison of men starts people cannot reach an agreement about who is the most eminent man. But the discussion comes to an end when a man states that “engir liggja heimamenn Arnkels ógildir hjá garði hans, þeir er Snorri heftr drepit, sem Haukr, fylgðarmaðr Snorra, liggr her hjá garði hans, er Arnkel heftr drepit.”1008 (none of Arnkell’s household lies, killed by Snorri, near his garth and without compensation in the same way that Haukr, Snorri’s follower, lies here near the yard killed by Arnkell.)

1007 Eb XXXVII, p. 98.
1008 Eb XXXVII, p. 99.
This statement is enough to bring the *mannjafnaðr* to an end, as it proves Snorri’s inferiority since he has not avenged his follower. As soon as Snorri hears the verdict he tries to bring back balance and prove himself as the most powerful by killing Arnkell.

“This comparison of men ends because one interpreter of men’s deeds has asserted an interpretation with which all agree. Snorri must now act, create new facts which interpreters may use in comparative duels, in order to maintain status.”

This scene also takes place in a heavy-drinking context and the *mannjafnaðr* is, just as in *Magnísson saga*, considered a sort of *qlteit* [*ql-entertainment*]. But, just as in *Magnísson saga*, drinking does not seem to have an important role in the contest. According to Karen Swenson’s study on *mannjafnaðar* and *sennur*, there are eight self described occurrences of *mannjafnaðar* in the literary corpus, of which only five take place in a hall where men are drinking. These are, apart from the two already mentioned, that in *Óláfs saga Helga CXLI*, *Orkneyinga saga* XXXIV and *Flóamanna saga* XXV. However this last occurrence cited by Swenson actually takes place while a group of men are sitting in the toilet, as both the Long and Short versions of the text clearly state that it takes place while “*menn sáti i náðahúsi í Brattahlíð*”¹⁰¹¹ (men sat in the privy in Brattahlíð) and “*menn sáti i heimilishúsi þar í Brattahlíð*”¹⁰¹² (men sat in the closet there in Brattahlíð) and it is not stated if this took place after drinking. To complicate the matter, the *mannjafnaðar* in *Óláfs saga Helga* and *Orkneyinga saga* also take place while drinking, but alcohol does not seem to play an active role in the contest. So, why are the *mannjafnaðar* alluded to as an *qlsiðr* (*ql-custom*) or *qlteit* (*ql-entertainment*)? What is the role alcohol plays in them? First of all we could say that the *mannjafnaðar* were just a game to keep people entertained while drinking, without the need for the drink to play a part in the game. Nonetheless, alcohol may have played an

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¹⁰¹⁰ Swenson, p. 44.
¹⁰¹¹ *Flóam* XXV, p. 304. Long version after AM445 b, 4to.
¹⁰¹² *Flóam* XXV, p. 304. Short version after AM 516, 4to.
important, if not active, role in these comparisons of men. After all, the literary sources show that it was important for men to know how to drink in moderation, to know how not to ‘drink their wits out of themselves’ for that impairs not only their perception of reality but also their verbal skills.\textsuperscript{1013} So, in contests of wits, such as \textit{mannjafnадar}, it must have been of utter importance to remain sober so as to not exaggerate or boast of deeds that had not been achieved, for that would put the contestant in ridicule and be added as a point against him.\textsuperscript{1014} One can also mention that if the game takes place while drinking, men should have also made a point of their prominence by displaying a great deal of alcohol tolerance that allows them to outdrink the opponent and prove themselves as role-models of sobriety, which is yet another asset that the best of men can boast of.

These ideas seem to be confirmed in \textit{Qrvar-Odds saga} in a scene that is not defined as a \textit{mannjafnадar}, but shows traces of being a combination of a \textit{mannjafnадar} and a \textit{senna}. A \textit{senna} or “gibing or jibing”\textsuperscript{1015} is another form of verbal confrontation between two or more people. As Lars Lönroth puts it:

\begin{quote}
The \textit{senna} is a competitive exchange of boasts and insults, while the \textit{mannjafnадar} is a somewhat more formalized version of the same sport, usually taking place at the drinking table and sometimes referred to as \textit{qileitu}, ‘beer entertainment’, in which case it may be combined with a drinking contest. The \textit{senna} and the \textit{mannjafnадar} are similar enough to be treated as more or less identical\textsuperscript{1016}.
\end{quote}

The purpose of the \textit{senna} is, however, to discredit the adversary while that of the \textit{mannjafnадar} is to find who is the best of two or more men, without necessarily aiming to disqualify any of them. In addition, the \textit{senna} does not involve a boast on the side of any of the adversaries, it consists more in the utterance of a series of reciprocal disqualifications and insults. A further difference is that in the \textit{senna},

\textsuperscript{1013} The role of alcohol as an instrument of power and deception is studied in section 7.2.
\textsuperscript{1014} As we will see further down in this section, oath-swearing was the contest in which men could boast about deeds that, even if they had not yet achieved them, they considered themselves capable to accomplish.
\textsuperscript{1015} \textit{IED}, \textit{senna}.
\textsuperscript{1016} Lönroth, ‘Double Scene’, p. 97.
the contestants are not potentially equals, and they do not compare themselves with each other. The senna exchange is not simply a comparison of relative 'goodness'. The participants do not assess 'manliness' against an agreed upon standard; they are not members of the same social group; they do not share, even as fictional agreement, a definition of 'good behaviour'.

The drinking scene in chapter XXVII of Qrvar-Odds saga is then, according to the previous definitions, a mixture between a mannjafnaðr and a senna as the men who participate in the drinking contest are not of equal standing as well as due to the fact that two men's deeds are being contrasted with those of one. But in every other sense it can be well considered as a mannjafnaðr. In it Sigurðr and Sjólfur enter into a drinking contest with Qrvar-Oddr, a legendary hero already in his own time, who disguises himself as a low caste vagrant at the palace of the King of Gotland. On his arrival in Gotland, Qrvar-Oddr asks for information about the king and the most prominent men in the court:

'Hvat er göfugra manna með honum?' sagði Oddr.
'Par eru tveir menn,' sagði karl, 'ok heitir annarr Sigurlr, en annarr Sjólfur. Þeir eru óndvegishólðar konungs ok inir mestu bardaugumenn.'

('Who are the worshipful men with him [i.e. with the king]?' said Oddr. 'There are two men' said the man 'and one is called Sigurðr and the other Sjólfur. They sit in the bench opposite to the King's throne and they are the greatest warriors."

The description of Sigurðr and Sjólfur contrasts with that of Qrvar-Oddr; he appears as a vagrant covered in bark who is assigned a sitting place in the lower bench, between the freed-men and the slaves. Still the two men enter a drinking contest against Qrvar-Oddr, which consists of him proving that he can drink and boast of more deeds than the two of them together. The contest takes place in the following fashion: both Sigurðr and Sjólfur must take a drinking horn each to Qrvar-Oddr and, after he has quaffed them, they must recite one boastful stanza each, praising their deeds and minimising those of Oddr. Afterwards Qrvar-Oddr must carry two drinking horns to where Sigurðr and Sjólfur are sitting. They must quaff a horn each and Oddr must, in his turn, recite two boastful

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1017 Swenson, p. 54.
1018 Qrv XXIV, p. 300.
The contest goes on like this, each side delivering two stanzas and quaffing two horns, for three rounds. Then after having recited his two stanzas "Oddr settist nú niðr, en þeir færa honum horn ok fylgir.engi kveðskapar. Hann drekkr af, en þeir setjast niðr. Ok nú farir Oddr þeim horn ok kvad þetta" (Oddr sits down, and they brought him the horns and delivered no poetry. He drinks them, and they sat down. And now Oddr brings them the horns and recited this) after which he recites his two stanzas. The game goes on like this for yet another four rounds, with Oddr emptying two horns and reciting two stanzas while Sigurðr and Sjólfþr only drink up their horns but deliver no poetry at all. After these four rounds "Konungsmenn hlýða skemmtan þeira. Enn færa þeir Oddi hornin, ok vinnr hann skjótum þau bæði. Eftir þat riss Oddr upp ok gengr fjörir þá ok þykkt vita, at nú sigur at þeim drykkrinn ok allt saman, at þeir váru fjörir lagðir í skáldskapnum." (The king's men listen to the entertainment. And they [Sigurðr and Sjólfþr] took Oddr the horns and he quaffed them both. After that Oddr rises up and goes towards them and he realizes that they are conquered by the drink and at the same time that they were beyond composing poetry.) After this he recites a further six stanzas about his deeds. The end result is that "þeir bræðr fellu þar safnir niðr, ok varð nú ekki af þeim meira um drykkjuna, en Oddr drekkr lengi, ok eftir þat leggjast menn niðr ok sváfu af nóttna" (the brothers fell asleep there and they had nothing more to do with the drink; on the other hand Oddr stayed drinking for a long while, and after that the men went to bed and slept through the night) and Órvar-Oddr is the clear winner of the contest.

It might seem bizarre that the two most prominent men of Gotland (who sit opposite the King at the table) enter into a mannjafnaðr with a vagrant (who sits

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1019 See Qrv XXVII.
1020 Qrv XXVII, p. 315.
1021 Qrv XXVII, p. 318.
1022 Qrv XXVII, p. 320.
between the freed-men and the slaves), and that this contest that seems so unevenly matched still manages to raise the interest of the whole court. To make the contest seem even less fair, the vagrant has to match both the accomplishments and drinking of the two best warriors of the land. In terms of the spectators this might have been as exciting as a wrestling match between two berserks and a toddler. This may be a narratorial technique, as the reader is well aware of the fact that the vagrant is indeed one of the greatest legendary warriors, making the reader (and not the court and the actual audience to the contest) the one who is really interested in the outcome of the match. In the eyes of the reader the contest is not so ill-matched, as maybe two of the greatest warriors would actually prove to be as powerful and verbally skilled as Qrvar-Oddr. This justifies what is, just in appearance, an uneven match of accomplishments, drinking and verbal skills. We must also take into consideration the fact that this is a legendary saga, so that the laws of literary realism apply less than in other saga genres.

In any case, in this mannjafnadr alcohol clearly plays an important and active role as part of the contest. For the first three rounds the game seems evenly-matched, with both sides drinking their horns and reciting their poetry. But then, after the fourth round, Sigurðr and Sjólfur stop boasting. This could be due either to the fact that they had already become too drunk to compose poetry or to the fact that by then they had run out of accomplishments to boast of. This last possibility seems to be correct, since the drinking continues for yet another four rounds, and only then does Qrvar-Oddr notice that “heir váru fyrir lágir í skáldskapnum.” (they were beyond composing poetry.) The contest does not end, then, when one of the contestants runs out of accomplishments to boast of, but to further the humiliation of being lesser men than their opponent it continues until they are outdrunk. Sigurðr and Sjólfur cannot invent new

1023 The importance of seating arrangements has been discussed in Chapter 4.
1024 Qrv XXVII, p. 318.
1025 It is interesting to notice that in this passage poetry-composing is not necessarily connected with drunkenness, as one could suppose from the story of Óðinn’s drunkenness connected with the invention of poetry.
deeds to boast of, as any deeds they had already attained would already have been
known to their audience; this principle can be extrapolated to other mannjafnadar in
literature. Finally, Qrvar-Oddr seems to make a point about how much better a man he
is not only by having achieved more valorous deeds in his life than them both, but also
by being able to drink much more than both of them without becoming drunk. He
proves his manliness not only in his deeds, but also in his ability to drink as much as
necessary and not losing self-control.

However, men less extraordinary than a legendary hero could end up drinking
‘their wits out of themselves’ while in a boasting mood; and on some occasions people
did profit from their drunkenness. This occurs in another kind of prowess contest, one in
which men boast of the deeds that they think themselves able to achieve instead of
about the ones that they have already accomplished. The need to prove ability and power
leads some heroes to make oaths that they cannot achieve regardless of the possibility of
losing their honour or their life in the attempt to fulfil it. And, as is to be expected from
our topic of research, oath vowing combined with drunkenness in the wrong context
seems to have been the instrument for the downfall of many a great warrior.

Jómsvikinga saga, one version of which is included in the fourteenth-century
Flateyjarbók, narrates the rise and fall of the Jómsvikings, a legendary warrior clan of
the tenth century. For the purposes of this study we will focus on the source of their
downfall. This begins while they attend an erfi at the court of King Sveinn. The
Jómsvikings start drinking the funeral toast, and

drekkja þeir Jómsvikningar ákafliga hit fyrsta kveld, ok fær á þá mjöck, ok
þat sama fimmr Sveinn konungr, at þeir gerast nær allir öldödir med þeim
hætti, at þeir váru allir svá málgir ok káíir ok þykkit liitt fyrir at mela
þat, er þeir vilðu giarna ömelt hafa, ef þeir verði öðrukkinn1026.

(the Jómsvikings drank enthusiastically the first night, and they drank
large amounts, and King Sveinn noticed it, that they became almost
completely drunk and so running this risk; that they all were so
talkative and merry and thought little before speaking that which they
would have rather left unspoken if they were not drunk.)

1026 Jvs CXLIV, p. 197.
King Sveinn, being the secret arch-nemesis of the Jómsvikings, cannot let this opportunity pass by, and profits from the drunkenness and loquaciousness of the men to plot their downfall by proposing a drinking game; “nokkura nýja gleði til skemmtunar mönnun”\(^{1027}\) (some new merriness [game] for the entertainment of the men), which consists of making oaths. King Sveinn convinces them to engage in the game by telling them that

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\text{\textquoteleft veit ek menn gört hafa jafnan\'}, segir hann, \textquoteleft at göðum veizlum ok þur, er mannval er gott saman komit, at menn hafa strengt heit sér til skemmtanar ok ágætis, ok er þess fúss, at vèr freistum þess gamans, því at ek þykjemst þat sjá, svá miklu sem þér eruð nú ágætari, Jómsvikingsar, um alla norðurhálfi heims an allir menn aðrir, þá er þat aðýsyt, at þat mun með meira móti vera, er þér vilið upp taka um heistrengingar en aðrir menn.}^{1028}
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(‘I know that men have done comparisons’ he says ‘at good feasts and there where upstanding men gather, that men have made oaths for their own entertainment and glory, and this is what I am eager for, that we try this for fun, because I think that you, as great as you are also more glorious, Jómsvikings, than all other men on all the northern parts of the world, it is obvious, that you must with more reason be the ones that will make vows instead of other men.’)

Once the trap is set - by the combination of drunkenness and alluding to men’s prowess and manliness in order to coerce them into promising great deeds - the Jómsvikings fall for it and make vows so great that they are beyond their means.\(^{1029}\) This leads them to their deaths as can be attested in the following chapters of the saga. On their side the Jómsvikings are too drunk to be able to remember the vows they make. The next morning they must be reminded of the vows they made the previous night so that they can try to accomplish them and at least try to save their honour in the attempt.\(^{1030}\)

These drinking games in which men were supposed to display their prowess, by making vows in which they would put all their strength and wits to a trial, could be

\(^{1027}\) Jvs CXLIV, p. 197.
\(^{1028}\) Jvs CXLIV, p. 197-98.
\(^{1029}\) Jvs CXLV, p. 198-99.
\(^{1030}\) “Nu talast þau Æstróð við, ok spyr hón, hvárt hann minntist nokkut, hverð hans hefði heit strengt um kveldi. En hann svarar ok lézt eigi munu, at hann hefði neins heit strengt.” (Jvs CXLVI, p. 199) (Now he and Æstróð talk and she asks whether he remembered something of the way in which he had made vows during the evening. And he answers and he remembers nothing, that he had made vows to no-one).
easily abused by more sober people who saw in the combination of drunkenness and boasting an effective tool to conquer an enemy who otherwise could not be defeated by weapons.1031

Making this kind of vow did not always have to end tragically, but on some occasions they ended with some men losing their honour, without the need of an enemy inciting them into making vows beyond their means. We can find an example of this in Harðar saga when, during a Yule feast, a group of men make a series of vows in the following fashion: “er menn váru kommir í sæti jólakveld hit fyrsta, stóð Hróarr upp ok mælti: ‘Hér stig ek á stokk, ok strengi ek þess heit, at ek skal hafa brotit haug Sóta vikings fyrir önnur jól.’”1032 (when the men had arrived and sat down on the first Yule evening Hróarr stood up and said: ‘Here I step on the trunk and make this vow, that I shall have broken into Sóti the viking’s burial mound before next Yule.’) This creates a chain reaction of men who want to prove themselves just as worthy as Hróarr and make similar vows, sometimes not without questioning the whole purpose of the game, as is the case of Hkrór, who questions; ‘Mun eigi samnligt at fylgja þinum siðum? Strengi ek þess heit at fara með þér í Sótahaug ok eigi fyrr í burtu en þú.’1033 (‘Is it proper to follow your tradition? I make this vow, to go with you to Sóti’s burial mound and not to be gone before you.’) All in all, the whole ideology of the game becomes clear through Helgi’s vow. “Helgi strengdi ok þess heit at fylgja Herði ok Geir, hvert sem þeir færi, ef hann kæmist, ok meta engan meira, meðan þeir lífði báðir.”1034 (Helgi also made this vow, to follow Hkrór and Geirr, wherever they went, if he was able to follow, and acknowledge no one as their superior as long as both of them lived.) As may be expected, only Hkrór manages to keep his vow and, with it, his honour.

1031 Drunkenness as an instrument of power and deception will be discussed in Chapter 7.2.
1032 Harð XIV, p. 38.
1033 Harð XIV, p. 39.
1034 Harð XIV, p. 39.
What is relevant about this passage is that, at least in saga literature, it seems that whenever men of similar standing drink together there is no actual need for a troublemaker to incite them to prove that one is more worthy than the other. Drinking men will do of their own accord. Helgi's vow not to recognize anyone as superior to the group of men that are joining the mound-breaking expedition proves the ideology behind this vow-making drinking game. It is, in a certain way another form of *mannjafnaðr* in which the contestants compare with each other with regard, not to the feats that they have achieved, but to those they are willing to achieve.

In general *mannjafnaðar* and oath-making contests were games by which men tried to state their place in society by declaring how powerful they were. This was done either by boasting of the deeds they had accomplished or by promising to undertake deeds that would prove them worthier than other men. These games, as presented in the literary sources, seem to have taken place while drinking, though the act of drinking did not necessarily play an active role in the competition. Drunkenness, however, seems to have a passive role, as alcohol consumption while engaging in these competitions could lead a man to boast about deeds he had not achieved or about feats that he would not be able to achieve. Remaining sober while drinking seems to have been another attribute to be sought by men who wanted to be worthy of praise and admiration.
CHAPTER 7 – ALCOHOLIC DRINKS AS A TOOL OF POWER: DRUNKENNESS AND DECEPTION

7.1 - MAGIC DRINKS

Another way of gaining more power through alcohol was the use of magic drinks. These could be used either to enhance or deteriorate the personal qualities of the consumer or to render an enemy helpless. As we will see below, the magical properties of these drinks could have a physical or an intellectual effect on the consumer, and on some occasions they could have both effects. The intellectual consequences can be divided into mnemonic and emotional, which sometimes are simultaneous. In short, the mnemonic properties of magic drinks could make a person gain or lose their memory, while the emotional properties could make a person gain or lose affection for a certain individual or group of individuals. On the other hand the physical effects of the magic drinks can be of two different types; that is, they can have an influence on either people’s vigour or their health. When it comes to the influence over the drinker’s vigour, the potions seem to be of only one kind: the drinker gains strength and/or courage by the intake of magic alcoholic beverages. The effects on health can be twofold, that is, the consumption of these alcoholic beverages can either take away or restore their wellbeing to men and women and can even cure wounds. Perhaps not surprisingly most of the references to magic drinks come from the Fornaldar sqgur, as

1035 Now, even if people think such things incredible, it is yet necessary that each person reports what he has seen or heard. And it is not easy to contradict what learned men have written in the past. If they wanted to, they could have told it [the story] differently if it had happened in another way. (Glfr XXXV, p. 231).
their link with the fantastic make them an ideal motif to be included in this genre. Within this genre *Gyngu-Hrólf saga* and *Völunga saga* are the texts in which magic beverages are mentioned most often, so I will largely depend on them for my study. The rest of the examples to be analyzed are found in the *Poetic Edda*, and there is just one instance of a magic drink coming from the *Íslendinga saga*, but in this case the saga in question — *Gull-Póris saga* — deals more with the realm of the fantastic than with the pseudo-historical facts typical of the genre.

As we will see below, all the above mentioned properties of magic alcoholic beverages, excepting the ones involving health, are analogous not only to the effects of alcohol on people but also to many of the aspects of alcohol discussed earlier in this study. But before proceeding with the analysis of these magic drinks, let us begin by exploring the components of such beverages.

This section will be the most speculative of all this study. This is partly due to the fact that here we are dealing with magic drinks, whose role I am trying to explain. But the speculative nature of this section is mostly due to the same properties of the magic alcoholic drinks to be discussed, which are very similar to the effects of non-magic alcoholic drinks, just taken to an extreme situation in which a few drops of a certain concoction can transmit the effects of over-indulging in drinks. These properties are loss of memory, the ability to increase or decrease friendship and lastly the fact that people that ingest these drinks feel able to achieve that which they are not able to achieve even when sober. As I discuss the properties of each kind of magic potion I will explain the reasons why I believe that the idea of each of these drinks might be inspired by the actual effects of alcohol over the organism, but taken to an extreme. In general, I believe that the actual magic in these concoctions was the ability to create the effect of an intense drunkenness, but just with a few drops.
Magical Recipes

There are very few sources for the ingredients that were added to alcoholic drinks in order to concoct a magic drink. Most of these references are to be found in Völusunga saga as part of a gnomic poem recited by Brynhildr in order to instruct Sigurðr in the magic arts. This poem is almost identical to the eddic poem Sigdrifumál, found in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda. Since the mid thirteenth century Völusunga saga is a prose adaptation of the eddic poems concerning the Völusung cycle, I will quote directly from the Poetic Edda and include in the footnotes the references to its equivalent in the saga.

Among the recipes to blend a magic drink we can find the following, instructing how to avoid being poisoned:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Full seal signa} & \quad \text{oc vid fári stá} \\
& \text{ok verpa lauki i lág:} \\
& \text{þá ec þat veit,} \\
& \text{meinblæðinn miðr.}\end{align*}
\]

(You shall make a sign on the cup and look for mischief / and throw leek in the drink: / then I know this, / that to you the mead will never become poisonous.)

The instructions clearly involve, apart from the use of leek or garlic, a certain ritual to be performed over the cup that may contain a poisoned drink. The main active ingredient, though, is garlic or leek. Wilhem Heizmann renders the word laukr as "lauch (allium)" (leek (Latin allium)), but then renders the Latin allium as "Knoblauch" (garlic). AEW translates is as "lauch" (leek). This plant is not often

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1036 Sd 8; Völts XX, p. 159.
1037 Laukr can be translated both as leek and, in as garlic. This last seems to have been the main meaning in old poetry. See IED, laukr.
1039 Heizmann, 91. A more serious study than that of Heizmann was done by Pollington, who recorded a miscellany of Old-English medical texts. According to his study, both leek and garlic have similar medicinal properties as do all the other plants in the same family. "Leek leac the vegetable leek (allium porum), and any alliaceous or layered vegetable generally, such as an onion, garlic, etc. Garlic in particular is a powerful antibiotic, and inhibits the growth of bacteria. Hatfield recounts the traditional English proverb, recorded in the 17th century 'Eat leeks in Lide and ramsins in May / And all the year after Physicians may play'" (Stephen Pollington, Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plant Lore, and Healing, (London: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2000), p. 136. Also, "Garlic garclife (alIium sativum). This strongly-flavoured root has its name direct from Old English, where gar signifies 'spear' (sharp-tasting, or with long and slender leaves?) and leac any kind of multilayered onion-like vegetable, our word 'leek'.

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mentioned in the sources; however it seems to have been a highly esteemed plant. According to the Eddic poem *Vöcluspa* it was the first plant to grow when the Earth was created\(^{1041}\) and as a matter of fact it is the only plant mentioned in the creation myth. On the other hand *Völsunga saga* mentions that it is the best of herbs: “Svá bar hann af öllum mönnum sem gull af járni eda laukr af ödrum grösum”\(^{1042}\) (So he excels all other men like gold is to iron or like garlic/leek is to any other herbs) but the source does not attest why. Perhaps a clue to the properties of this plant is to be found in *Ragnars saga Lódhrókar*, where we are told that “pat er nátúra þess lauks, at maðr má lengi lifa, þótt hann hafi enga aðra fæðu”\(^{1043}\) (it is the nature of this leek/garlic, that a man may live for a long while even though he has no other food). This turns leek/garlic into an almost miraculous plant being able to confer and/or sustain life. However its magic uses are attested only in one other source, namely *Völsa þáttr*, a short story of a legendary nature included in *Flateyjarbók’s* version of *Óláfs saga helga*. The life-preserving properties of the plant are exploited in this narrative, where the plant is used to preserve the life of an amputated horse phallus in the following fashion. The housewife confiscates the horse-phallus from a thrall that has been using it to bully people in the farm. Once the penis is in her possession she: “vefr innan i einum linduki ok berr hjá lauka ok önnur grós, svá at þar fyrir mætti hann eigi rotu.”\(^{1044}\) (wrapped it in a linen kerchief and set it in leek/garlic and other herbs so that it would not rot.) The result of this practice is that

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The plant has strong antiseptic qualities and there are many apocryphal stories of its use against infective diseases, coughs, asthma, bronchitis and so on. In folk tradition, garlic has been associated with the devil, but conversely could be worn to protect against the walking dead on All Hollows Eve.” (Pollington, *Leechcraft*, p. 124).  
1041 *AEW*, laukr.  
1042 *Völs XXXII*, p. 194.  
1043 *Ragn I*, p. 221.  
1044 *Völsa CCLXV*, p. 442.
the penis could become erect at will in order to be used at the household’s religious ritual.  

Perhaps this belief that leek/garlic could preserve life so that it could be considered as an antidote against poisoning comes from what seems to be an actual ‘medical’ use of the plant, as described in Fóstbrædra saga. In it a healing-woman treats the wound of injured warriors, and for this purpose “Hon hafði þar gært í steinkatli af lauk ok qnnur græs ok vellt þat saman ok gaf at eta þeim inum sárum mænum ok reyndi svá, hvárt þeir hafðu holsár, þvi at þá kenndi af laukinum þr sárinu.”  

(See Fbr XXIV, p. 275.) Perhaps this technique to find out if a wound was deadly or not became, at some point, mistaken and in the folklore leek/garlic became understood as a life preserving plant and as an effective antidote against poisoning.

What we can know is that, as mentioned earlier on, leek was normally used for brewing before and even long after the introduction of hops to Scandinavia. As Erik Kjersgaard mentions

Man har vistnok altid tilsat fremmede stoffer, dels for at give smag, dels for at forøge øllets holdbarhed. Foruden de nævnte urvisbjog kunne man bruge egebark, hvis indhold af garvesyre virker konserverende; men i tidlig middelalder foretrak man i hvert fald pors (myrica gale).  

(People have probably always added other ingredients partly to enhance the flavour; partly to augment the beer’s lifetime. Besides the previously mentioned herbs people could use oak bark, as the acid it produces during fermentation works as a preservative; but in the Early Middle Ages people added leek [myrica gale] to each barrel.)

Almqvist coincides with this point of view and explains that:

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1045 This mixture of leek/garlic and other herbs is, perhaps, analogous to the lifsgræs used in EgÁsm to restore life to an amputated hand so that it can be re-implanted on the stump. See EgÁsm XIV, p. 355.
1046 Fbr XXIV, p. 275.
1047 That is, if the wound had damaged a man’s bowels or stomach, then the smell of the plant would come out through the orifice; in that case the wound would be considered as deadly.
It may be mentioned, however, that herbs other than hops were certainly used not infrequently by the Scandinavians in their beer-making. In Old-Norse sources we sometimes hear about intoxicating drinks to which herbs were added [...] and we know about the Cinerarea beer (porsöl [leek-beer] in Swedish).\textsuperscript{1049}

Carving certain runes on the drinking vessel was also a way of transferring magical properties to a drink. However, this would actually turn the vessel into the conveyor of the spell, while the drink probably would remain a conventional drink. But it seems that the runes could also be carved onto the drink, as it says in \textit{Sigrdrifumál:}

\begin{verbatim}
a gleri oc a gulli, oc a gumma heilum,
i vini oc virtri, [...] Allar vóro af scafnar, þaur er vóro á rístmar,
oc hverfóðar við inn helga míqá.\textsuperscript{1050}
\end{verbatim}

(in glass and in gold, and in men’s charms, / in wine and in new ale. [...] / All were scraped off, those which were carved on there, / and were mixed in the holy mead.)

The poem does not specify what was the purpose or properties of this mead blended with the scraps of all the runes carved on many different objects; however these scratches seem to have added to whatever was the magic purpose of this drink.

The rest of the magic ingredients that appear in the literary corpus are of a more abstract nature. So at the beginning of \textit{Sigrdrifumál’s} gnomic lore Sigurðr is offered some \textit{björr}, but it is not a regular drink as Sigrdrifa tells him:

\begin{verbatim}
Björ /ceri ee
magni blandinn
fullr er hann lióða
godra galdra
brynings apaldr;
oc megintiri;
oc licnstaja,
oc gamannína.\textsuperscript{1051}
\end{verbatim}

(Bjórr I bring you, apple-tree of the battlefield, / blended\textsuperscript{1052} with strength and with much glory; / it is full of charms and healing staves, / good magic and merry talk.)

The main ingredients in this \textit{björr} full of charms are two abstract concepts: \textit{magn} (strength) and \textit{tirr} (glory). The first of these is mentioned in a handful of occasions in connection with magic drinks. In \textit{Válsunga saga} we read about a magic drink that

\textsuperscript{1050} \textit{Sd} 17-18; \textit{Váls} XX, p. 161.
\textsuperscript{1051} \textit{Sd} 5; \textit{Váls} XX, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{1052} As we could see in Chapter 2, to blend the mead can also refer to the act of brewing it.

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causes memory loss. We are told that “sá drykkur var blandinn með jardar magni ok sá ok dreýra sonar hennar, ok í því horni váru ristir hvers kyns stafir ok roðnír með blóði”\textsuperscript{1053} (that drink was mixed with the strength of the earth and the sea and the blood of her son, and on the horn were carved all kinds of runes and reddened with blood.)

The saga bases its rendering of the events on the eddic poem \textit{Guðrúnarkviða II} in which it is said that:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
Fæði mér Grímnir full at drecca,
svalt oc sárlíct, nē ec sacar mundac;
þat var um aukit urðar magni,
svalkóldom sæ oc sonardreyra.\textsuperscript{1054}
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

[Grímíldr brought me a cup to drink from / fresh and sour, I could not remember; / it was increased with the strength of the earth / the cold of the sea and the blood of sons]

However the poem expands the list of the contents of the drink and, apart from a plethora of runes carved on the horn, it lists some of the ingredients:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
Vörð þeim bíoði bgl margv saman,
urt altz viðar oc acarn brunnininn,
umdägg arins, ìðrar bólmar,
svins lifr sódin, þvat hon sacar deyfði.\textsuperscript{1055}
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

[There were in the björr many evils together / herbs of all trees and the acorn / hearth dew, bowels of sacrifices, / boiled pig’s liver, so that her claims were forsaken]

The list of ingredients does not really help to clarify what the ‘strength of the earth’ consists of. It may be making reference to the several magic plants that were used in its concoction, seeing, perhaps, the psychotropic effects of the plants as being drawn out of the earth in which they grew. This seems a logic explanation, most of all taking into consideration that the ‘strength of the earth’ is sometimes said to be helpful just as in the examples of \textit{Váltsunga saga} and \textit{Guðrúnarkviða II} it is said to be noxious.

\textsuperscript{1053} \textit{Válts} XXXII, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{1054} \textit{GóðII} 21.
\textsuperscript{1055} \textit{GóðII} 23.
One instance of the beneficial properties of the ‘strength of the earth’ comes from the eddic poem *Hyndlulíð*, where it is said that an (unnamed) main deity born of nine mothers put it to a good use:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Vara einn borinn} & \quad \text{qllom meiri,} \\
\text{sá var aukinn} & \quad \text{iardar megni;} \\
\text{pann gveda stilli} & \quad \text{stóraugaxstan,} \\
\text{sif sìfiðan} & \quad \text{síòom gørvqllom.}^{1056}
\end{align*}
\]

(One was born greater than all / he was increased with the strength of the earth / they calmly say that he is the wealthiest, / by marriage related in all abodes.)

This same deity, who could be identified with Heimdallr due to the fact that he was born of nine mothers, is also said to have been “svá var aukinn iardar megni, / svalkqldum sæ ok sonardreyra”\(^{1058}\) (increased with the strength of the earth, the cold of the sea and the blood of sons), which is exactly the same formula used for the magic drink in *Guðrúnarkviða II*. Even if in this instance the ‘strength of the earth’ is not used in connection with a beverage it makes reference to a positive quality maybe obtained by the same means of using ‘power-plants’.

The last instance in which *iardar magn* is used in the literary corpus also makes reference to a positive quality of this magic ingredient. This comes from yet another eddic poem, in this instance *Hávamál* 137. In it is said that “hvars þú ql dreccir, kiós þú þér iardar megin! / Þvat íqð tæcr við qlórt.”\(^{1059}\) (when you drink ql, choose for yourself the strength of the earth,/ because the earth takes everything with it.) Svava Jakobsdóttir interprets this stanza of *Hávamál* in connection with stanzas 141, in which the narrator affirms to have grown powerful and wise, and stanzas 107 and 108 of the same poem, in which the theft of the mead by Óðinn is narrated. She argues that in stanza 141 “Óðinn might be confirming his right to the realm, as kings had to do; he has been through both parts of the ceremony properly, and has grown in wisdom and been

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\(^{1056}\) *HdI* 43.

\(^{1057}\) See *Gylf* 27, p. 25.

\(^{1058}\) *HdI* 38.

\(^{1059}\) *Háv* 137.
‘aukinn iarðar megni’ (empowered with the strength of the earth). In other words, he has slept with the goddess."¹⁰⁶⁰ This explanation seems to be a bit far fetched. First of all, Svava is mixing several poems that were composed separately and later assembled as a unity called Hávamál. The poem called Loddflöfnismál [stanzas 111-137] does not contain any chronological clues that allow us to place it as taking place before or after the poem narrating the theft of the mead [stanzas 104-110]. On the other hand, the references to jårðar magn in the poem make only reference to its use when drinking ql - which due to metric and alliterative requirements could be interpreted as mjótir, vin or any other alcoholic drink - saying that it shall be chosen when ingesting alcohol, and probably when inhebriated, as the earth takes it all. However, there are no references in the poem to the empowerment of Ódinn due to its ingestion; the use of jårðar magn appears just as a piece of advice among a long list of gnomic lore. Empowerment or a certain strengthening is mentioned in Guðrínarkviða II, Hýndlulíðið and Vǫluspá saga, but never in Hávamál. David Evans’ interpretation of the stanza seems to be more plausible. He explicates that:

There might be a specific connection with the so-called terra-sigilata, cakes of earth rich in iron oxide, stamped with the image of Diana or Christ, exported from Lemnos and recommended as a remedy against poison. This is referred in the Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany [...] There may also be a connection with the more general belief in the earth’s holy and curative properties.¹⁰⁶¹

Thus the ‘strength of the earth’ could be interpreted as using the curative properties of the earth, but that still would not explain the occasions on which it is said to be noxious. That is unless we consider as well the harmful properties of the earth, which could also be explained as the use of different magic plants, all of which dragged their strength from the soil and which could be used both to harm and/or to alleviate.

As we can see, the texts do not provide a large number of ingredients that could be added in order to prepare a magic concoction. Leek/garlic is the plant which is

¹⁰⁶⁰ Svava Jakobsdóttir, p. 39.
¹⁰⁶¹ Evans, ‘Commentary’, p. 131.
mentioned more often, and its perception as a magical ingredient could be due to its medical uses. When it comes to ingredients of a more abstract nature, *jardar mang* is the most commonly mentioned, but its obscure nature does not let us grasp the full meaning of the concept.

**INTELLECTUAL EFFECTS OF MAGIC DRINKS**

As mentioned earlier on, magic drinks could affect the intellectual abilities of those who consumed them. This could be both in a mnemonic and in an emotional way. I will begin with an analysis of the ways in which the consumption of magic alcohol helps or impairs people’s memory and then continue with an analysis of its impact on human emotions.

The effect of magic alcohol over people’s memory is the type of influence most frequently referred to in the literary corpus. On most occasions these drinks are intended to erase the recollection of past events and only in a few instances they are supposed to improve the knowledge of past events. When it comes to memory loss the general formula tends to follow a similar pattern to that of Sigurðr in *Vǫlsunga saga*: “Eitt kveld, er þeir sátu við drykk, ris drottning upp ok gekk fyrir Sigurð ok kvætti hann ok mælti: […] ‘Tak hér við horni ok drekk.’ Hann tók við ok drakk af.’ […] ok við þann drykk mundi hann ekki til Brynhildar.”¹⁰⁶² (one evening, when they sat with drinks, the queen rose up and went to Sigurðr and greeted him and said: […] ‘Take this horn and drink’ He took it and drank […] and because of this drink he could not remember Brynhildr.) In general terms, the person is always tricked into drinking the magic drink and the loss of memory is always related to the person’s beloved one, as is the case with Sigurðr. Likewise, after Sigurðr is tricked into forgetting Brynhildr, his fiancée, so that he can marry Guðrún, later on Guðrún is tricked in a similar fashion into forgetting the

¹⁰⁶² *Vǫls* XXVI, p. 173.
death of Sigurðr and her sons: “Síðan farði Grímhildr henni meinsamligan drykk, ok varð hún við at taka ok mundi síðan engar sakar.”\textsuperscript{1063} (Then Grímhildr brought her a harmful drink, and she was coerced into taking it and afterwards she did not remember the charges.) Since this drink is brought to her by the same Grímhildr who takes the drink to Sigurðr we can infer that both drinks were concocted using the same methods as both have the same results: obliviousness of the beloved ones.

\textit{Porsteins saga Vikingssonar} describes a beverage that has similar effects, though, as we will see further on, it has also the property of making a person sick. In this saga we are told about Kollr, King of Indialand, who had a horn with the following properties: “\textit{Pat var nátúra drykkjar þess, er í var nedra gölf, at hvern, sem af drakk, fekk vanheilsu þá, er lepra heitir, ok óminni svá mikit, at hann mundi engan þann hlut, sem áðr hafði verit, en ef drukkit var af efra hlut hornsins, þá bættist þegar.}”\textsuperscript{1064} (Such was the nature of this drink, that was in the lower part, that each, who drank from it, got that illness that is called leprosy, and the loss of memory was so great that he could not recall that which he had been, and if it was drunk from the upper part of the horn, then both -health and memory- were restored.) The results are that when Vikingr drinks from it “\textit{mundi hann engan hlut, sem áðr hafði verit, en sízt til Hunvarar.}”\textsuperscript{1065} (he did not remember anything, that which he had been, and he remembered Hunvör least of all.) A last instance of such a drink is that in \textit{Göngu–Hrólf’s saga}, when a dwarf tries to seduce Ingibjörg, Björn’s wife. As part of his wooing he offers her a jug to drink from, but she refuses it and spills the drink on the floor. However, we are told that later on “\textit{Ingibjörg, kona Bjarnar, tók krankleika nokkurn undarligan um vetrinn. Hún gerðist öll blá sem hel, en sinnaði um engan hlut, sem hún væri viðstola.}”\textsuperscript{1066} (Ingibjörg, Björn’s wife, caught an extraordinary disease during the winter. She became all black as Hél, and

\textsuperscript{1063} \textit{Vqís} XXXII, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{1064} \textit{PorstVik} III, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{1065} \textit{PorstVik} V, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{1066} \textit{GHR} XXIII, p. 222.
cared for nothing, as if she had been wit-stolen.) It seems that the dwarf eventually succeeds in tricking her to drink a magic beverage like the one he first offered her, most of all because later on we are told that “Hann tók Ingibjörgu ok lagði í sæng hjá sér hverja nótt, Birni ásjáanda, ok hafði hún allt blíðlæti við hann, en mundi ekki til Bjarnar, bónda sins.”1067 (He took Ingibjörg and laid next to her in bed every night in front of Björn, and she was very friendly towards him [the dwarf] and remembered nothing of Björn, her husband.) Oblivion of the beloved one, as we have seen, is one of the symptoms of having drunk a magic potion intended to alter people’s memories.

In short we can see that in all the instances of ingestion of a magic drink that affects the memory, the result is the inability to recollect past events, but most of all, all the sources emphasize the fact that the beloved one is forgotten. The effects of these magic drinks resemble in a certain way the effects of overindulging in alcohol, with the consequence of a blackout, with the sole difference that the amnesia caused by these drinks lasts for more than one night. Perhaps the altered state of consciousness caused by them was due to the addition of some psychotropic plants to the beverage. However we lack the evidence to support such a point of view. What we can know is that these strong drinks were not spirits, for, as we have seen, spirits were not introduced to Scandinavia until the late fifteenth century. In any case, the reaction that they provoke is extremely similar to that discussed later in this chapter, of ‘drykkja vit út frá sér’ (drink the wit out of the self)1068 and in the case of Göngu-Hrólf's saga the effects are described in a very similar way; Ingibjörg becomes vitstola (wit-stolen). Whatever was mixed with the drinks was a substance strong enough as to cause an altered state of consciousness that could last for a long period, and perhaps once the individual was under the influence of the beverage it could be easier to trick him or her into consuming more, thus prolonging the period of oblivion. Finally, due to the fact that the sources

1067 Ghr XXIII, p. 224.
1068 See section 7.2.
always connect such beverages with the oblivion of the beloved one in order to take on a new lover, one should not discard the possibility of them being some sort of love-philtre prepared by lovers in competition for the attention and emotional control of a certain person. This last point may become clearer once we study the drinks that are capable of restoring memory.

As mentioned earlier on, there are a few cases of beverages that allow people to regain or improve their memory. The only example of a drink that makes a person improve his memory comes from the Eddic poem Hyndluljóð, while all the other instances refer to antidotes against beverages that induce oblivion. The reference to the magic drink in the poem is brief, even if it is the driving force behind the whole story. In it, Freyja takes Óttarr, her lover, in the shape of a boar to consult a vǫlva so that she can give him a drink of a magic q/l that will allow him to remember his whole genealogy. Stanza 45 reads as follows:

\[
\text{Ber þú minnisvöll minom getli,} \\
\text{svát hann qll muni ord at tina} \\
\text{þessar ræðo á þriðia morni,} \\
\text{þá er þeir Angantýr ætteir reikia.}^{1069}
\]

[Give memory-q/l to my boar / so that he all remembers, words to recount / from this conversation, on the third morning, / then when those from Angantýr's kin he recounts.]

The abilities of speech and memory conferred by this magic drink are somehow comparable to the alleged properties of the mead stolen by Óðinn.\(^{1070}\) While the mead made out of Kvasir's blood has the characteristic that “hverr er af drekkr verðr skáld eða fræðamáðr”\(^{1071}\) (each who drinks from it becomes a poet or a scholar) the minnisvöll drunk by Óttarr turns him into a person learned in history, which is very similar to being a scholar. Also, this drink is, just as the 'mead of poetry' was, in the possession of a Jötunn-woman from whom it is taken by force.

\(^{1069}\) Hyndluljóð 45.  
\(^{1070}\) See Chapter 3.  
\(^{1071}\) Skspm 57, p. 3
The rest of the beverages that confer memory work mainly as antidotes against the drinks which take the memory away, and in the case of Sigurðr it seems that the beverage just loses its effects. *Vælsunga saga* tells that after his marriage with Guðrún "ok er lokit er þessi veizlu, minnir Sigurðr allra eīða við Brynhildr"\(^{1072}\) (and when this feast ended, Sigurðr remembers all his vows to Brynhildr.). So, without the need of an antidote, the magic potion seems to have lost its effects. If it was indeed a drug that had been provided to him in order to make him forget Brynhildr, then after the marriage the need to keep him under the influence of the drink becomes unnecessary, and they stop coercing him into taking it.

In the case of *Gængu-Hrólf's saga* the memory of Íngibjǫrg is restored by the same dwarf who took it away, as he "gaf henni minnisveig at drekka, ok vitkaðist hún þá skjótt."\(^{1073}\) (gave her a memory-beverage to drink, and she quickly regained her wit). Similarly, in the case of Vikingr, in *Porsteins saga Vikingssonar* the antidote comes not from the same person but from the same vessel and drink which made him lose his memory. To cure him "Hálfdan dreypir þá á varrir honum af inum efra hlut hornsins. Raknar Vikingr þá við, ok er hann tók at magnast, var því likt sem hann vaknaði af svefini."\(^{1074}\) (Hálfdan put drops of the liquid from the upper part of the horn on his lips. Hálfdan recovered his senses with that, and he became stronger, it was as if he had woken from a dream.) It is interesting to notice that in these instances the recovery of memory is equated with a gaining of wits, which are often said to be lost due to excessive drinking.\(^{1075}\) Perhaps the idea of magic potions taking away and restoring memory came from analyzing the effect of regular alcoholic drinks over people's minds, which then led to imagining a concentrated drink that could produce the effect of overindulgence with only a few drops.

\(^{1072}\) *Vq/s* XXVIII, p. 178.
\(^{1073}\) *GHr* XXV, p. 230.
\(^{1074}\) *PorstVik* VI, p. 14.
\(^{1075}\) See section 7.2.
Apart from the previously mentioned effects of the magic drinks, which made people forget about their beloved in order to take on a new lover, there were other ways in which they could affect people's emotions. There was a certain kind of drink that could enforce or destroy friendship, and could be used as a tool to create or destroy alliances. There are, however, only two instances in which these beverages are mentioned, both of them found in Gqngu-Hrólfs saga.

The first example takes place when Gqngu-Hrólfr and Stefnir are having a quarrel over a woman. One night Gqngu-Hrólfr meets the ghost of one of his ancestors, who gives him two buckets full of drink. The ghost tells him "Hér eru tvær byttur, er þú skalt við taka ok skenka óllum þínnum mónum af annarrí, þegar þeir vakna í morgin, en af inni minni byttunni skulið þit Stefnir drekka, ok mun þaðan af engi hlutri at áskilnaði verða." (Here are two buckets, which you shall take with you, and serve drinks to all your men from one as soon as they wake up in the morning, and you and Stefnir shall drink from the other bucket, and after that you will never have disagreements on any subject.) The effects of the first bucket's drink will be discussed later on in this section. As for the second bucket we read that the effects were that "Settust þeir þá niðr ok drukku af byttunni, ok þóttust þeir við þann drykk mikít styrkna. Gerðist Stefnir þá bliðr við Hrólfr ok segir honum makligast at njóta Ingigerðar." (They sat down and drunk from the bucket and they felt much stronger with that drink. Then Stefnir became friendly towards Hrólfr and says him to be best suited to have Ingigerðr.) The effect of this beverage is somehow similar to those of magic drinks making a person forget the beloved one. The main difference is that here, even though both Gqngu-Hrólfr and Stefnir drink the same potion, the only one that forsakes his beloved one is Stefnir. This might be because this potion was intended to improve friendships rather than to induce temporary amnesia. Magic drinks that have such an

1076 GÍr XXXII, p. 254.
1077 GÍr XXXII, p. 255.
The effect can be also an extrapolation of the characteristics of alcohol intake, as its consumption works as an emotional booster. It is well known that one of the effects of alcohol is that it reduces the serotonin level in the organism. Another instance in which serotonin production decreases (and the production of many other hormones is boosted up) is when a person falls in love. Hence, alcohol intake might cause a sensation similar to love or to an amplified sense of friendship between fellow drinkers. Friendliness as a result of alcohol intake might have led to the conception of a magic brew with the characteristics and results of that which Gǫngu-Hrólf and Stefnir consume. Similarly, though the text does not mention it as being a magic brew, in Vǫlsunga saga we read that Sigurðr first noticed the extraordinary qualities of Guðrún while he is drinking: “ok eitt kveld skenkir Guðrún. Sigurðr sér, at hún er væn kona ok at öllu in kurtisasta.”

(and one evening Guðrún serves the drinks. Sigurðr notices that she is a beautiful woman and most courtly in all manners.) In the narrative, this occurs soon after Sigurðr drinks the potion that makes him forget Brynhildr, however the saga does not mention if the drink served by Guðrún was a love-potion or just a regular drink; in other words, we cannot know if Sigurðr gets infatuated by Guðrún because he ingested a love potion, because she was indeed beautiful or just because he was drunk.

Gǫngu-Hrólf’s saga suggests the use of another magic brew that can induce the opposite effect to that we just mentioned. The same dwarf that seduces Bjǫrn’s wife tries to set the whole court against Bjǫrn, and the dwarf seems to resort to a magic drink in order to achieve his goal. The saga says that one day, when the dwarf was at the court “For jarl nú heim í staðinn með mönnum sínum, ok gengu undir drykkjuborð. En þegar híðin hafði kennt fjyrsta rétt ok drukkit fjyrsta bikar, var öllum horfin vinátta við Björn.”

(Now the earl went home in the town with his men and went to the drinking-table. And as soon as the retinue had tasted the first course and drunk the first beaker

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1078 Vǫls XXVI, p. 174.
1079 Gfr XXIII, p. 223.
they all withdrew their friendship from Bjørn.) The only explanation for this change of attitude seems to be the ingestion of a magical beverage or, less likely, the consumption of a magical meal.

As we have seen before, communal drinking could also result in brawls, as is the case of *mannjafnaðar*. Perhaps this last kind of magic drink was making use of yet another property of alcohol, which is that of creating conflict among drunkards. In any case, its properties about forgetting friendship resemble those beverages that make someone forget about the beloved one.

**PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF MAGIC DRINKS**

Magic alcoholic beverages could also have an effect on the drinker’s body, affecting their vigour and health. There are just a few examples of this kind of drink, and most of them overlap with some of the examples examined earlier about the intellectual effects of such potions. In general, this kind of alcoholic beverage could have two different effects. One is that it could make a person stronger and heal his wounds, while the second is that it could transmit a disease or cure the same disease it transmitted.

Our first example of a drink that could strengthen a person comes, once more, from *Gángu-Hrólf’s saga*, a very rich text when it comes to the use of magic concoctions. In it a character named Grímur tells a man that “ek skal gefa þér enn meira afl en þú hefir áðr”\(^{1080}\) (I shall give you yet more physical strength than you had before.) When the man accepts the offer, then “tók hann horn undan skikkiu sinni ok gaf mér einn drykk. Pótti mér þá hlaupa afl í mik.”\(^{1081}\) (he took a horn from under his cloak and gave me one drink. It seemed to me that physical strength then jumped into me.)

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\(^{1080}\) *GÍ 27*, p. 234.  
\(^{1081}\) *GÍ 27*, p. 234.
The power conferred by this drink makes him so strong that he is able to defeat Gqngu-Hrólfur, who is one of the strongest legendary heroes.

The same saga tells about a similar strength-conferring drink, already mentioned above. This comes from the previously mentioned bucket offered to Gqngu-Hrólfur by the ghost of Hreggviðr. As we have already seen, the second bucket brought peace to the conflicted relationship between Gqngu-Hrólfur and Stefnir. On the other hand the first bucket, which was to be drunk by his men, had a very different effect:

Ārla um morgin vakti Hrólfur lið sitt ok skenkti öllum af hýtumni, en þegar hverr hafði af drukkti, kenndi engi sínna sára, þótt aðr væri ofærir, þegar setst hafði með þeim. Eggjúdu þeir mest, at berjast skyldi, er aðr vildu hardast þýja.1082

(Early in the morning Hrólfur roused his host and served everyone a drink from the bucket, and once they had drunk from it no one could feel his wounds, even though before they had been impaired, as soon as the drink had settled in them, those who before were more eager to flee now were the ones that were most incited to fight.)

This drink does not only have the ability to confer strength and cure wounds, but it can also transmit courage and strength to men. Perhaps this is another example of the resemblance between magic and common alcoholic beverages: if they are drunk in the right amount, both can make men believe that they are able to do the undoable.

The only example of a magic drink in the Íslendinga saga refers precisely to this kind of strength-conferring drink. This is to be found in Gull-Þóris saga. In this saga Gull-Þórir dreams that has a conversation with a ghost, who provides him with a drink. The ghost does not mention what its properties are, but it is implied that it will confer on Gull-Þórir the strength to break into a cave and have a fight with the dragons that dwell in it. When the ghost offers Gull-Þórir the drink he says: “Nu er hér kalkr, er þú skalt drekka af tvá drykki, en þó verðr eptir þat sem má.”1083 (Now here is a goblet, and you shall drink from it two times, and each one in your host shall drink once from it, and that which remains shall be left.) When Gull-

1082 G hr XXXIII, p. 255.
1083 Gullf III, p. 185.
Porir wakes up he finds the goblet next to him and drinks from it. We are not told if he felt empowered after having drunk it. But, as a matter of fact the drink was so strong that he and all his retinue fall asleep once more after having drunk from it. However Gull-bórir and his companions have enough strength to go into the cave and defeat its dwellers.

This kind of beverage helped men do the unthinkable, that which was beyond their abilities – to find strength where there was none, and courage when surrender was the logical option. However, that is yet another property of alcohol, and in saga literature we can find several examples of men drinking just before a battle, maybe in order to gain the same courage that these magic drinks conferred.\textsuperscript{1084}

Finally, there are only two examples of drinks that can transmit and cure an illness. Both of them have been partially discussed before in this section, so I will only discuss them briefly. As mentioned before, \textit{Porsteins saga Vikingssonar} makes reference to a horn, owned by the king of Indialand, whose contents can transmit and cure leprosy, depending on the side of the horn from which the drink comes. When Vikingr drinks from this horn he becomes sleepy and "\textit{honum var heldr orðit kynligt við drykkin}. Hann hafói hroll mikinn i bunkum [...] Tók hann þá krákleika mikinn ok lagðist í rekkiu af sótt þeiri, er líkþrá heitir."\textsuperscript{1085} (He had become strange because of the drink. He had great shivers in his body [...] He got a great illness and lay in bed due to that disease that is called leprosy.) He becomes infected with leprosy, and the only way to cure it is by having a drink from the upper rim of the horn.\textsuperscript{1086} As a result his whole body becomes covered with a black scab and becomes weaker every day. When he finally manages to get a drink from the upper rim of the horn we are told that "\textit{svá fell öhreinendi burt af honum sem hreistr af fiski, þar til er honum batnar dag frá vegi, til...}"

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1084} Examples of men drinking before or during battle have been discussed in Chapter 4.
\item \textsuperscript{1085} \textit{PorstVik} V, p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{1086} Those who have drunk from a horn will realize that it is quite difficult to drink from the upper rim of the horn – that is, by holding the concave end downwards instead of upwards –, at least not without spilling all its contents; so this might have been considered as a rather difficult task.
\end{itemize}
so the uncleanness fell away from him like scales from a fish, with the result that he became better day by day and so it went until he was healed.) Ingibjǫrg, Bjǫrn's wife, contracts a very similar disease after probably being coerced by the dwarf into drinking the magic potion. As we have seen, Gængu-Irðolf's saga reports that after being tricked by the dwarf "Ingibjǫrg, kona Bjarnar, tók krankleika nokkurn undarligum um vetrinn. Hún gerðist öll blá sem hel." (Ingibjǫrg, Bjǫrn's wife, caught an extraordinary disease during the winter. She became all black as Hel.) In both sagas the illness has the same symptoms, which consists in the skin of the diseased becoming black. Since the symptoms are the same, and Porsteins saga Vikingssonar names it as leprosy we could assume that Ingibjǫrg had become a leper. However that is not part of our matter of research. Perhaps it was just a motif that people who contracted a disease by the ingestion of a magic drink turned black. In any case, the evidence is too scant to determine the particular conditions that could be transmitted through drinks. Ingibjǫrg not only becomes black as a result of drinking a magic potion, but, just like Vikingr, she also loses her memory. The main difference is that Vikingr's health and memory are restored through a drink, while Ingibjǫrg's memory is recovered by drinking and her health is restored with an ointment. So the saga says that the dwarf "færði Ingibjǫrgu ór kledum ok smurði hörund hennar með góðum smyrslum" (undressed Ingibjǫrg and rubbed her skin with a nice ointment), which is what ultimately restores her health.

The evidence is too scant to draw conclusions from the curative and noxious effects of alcohol over people's health. The idea of curing someone by using a magic drink could well come from the fact that medieval medical books recommend mixing

1087 PorstVik VI, p. 14.
1088 GÍr XXXIII, p. 222.
1089 GÍr XXV, p. 230.
curative herbs with wine. The noxious effects of drinks may be due, apart from the obvious ill-condition that a hangover might cause, to the probable use of poisons mixed with beverages.

In general, we have seen that the magical properties of alcoholic drinks can affect people’s memory, emotions, strength and health. The first three seem to be an extrapolation of the effects that non-magic alcohol can have over men’s and women’s psyche and physic. Maybe the idea of a magic drink that could create such effects was just an extrapolation, an exaggeration of the results of over-indulging in drinking, but achieved with only a few drops of a magic beverage. The strong and intense properties of these drinks have some resemblance with the effects of spirits, which were unknown in Scandinavia at the time. As we have seen, the magic effects of these drinks come from the ingredients - such as herbs, pig’s flesh, strength and glory – used in their concoction, but the role of these ingredients is too obscure to draw any conclusions about their role in the beverage’s effects.

7.2 - DRUNKENNESS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POWER AND DECEPTION

Sjaldan vegr sofandi madr sigr

In the prologue to his Gesta Danorum, written between 1208 and 1218, Saxo Grammaticus describes the Icelandic folk in the following manner:

Nec Tylenium industria silentio oblitteranda: qui cum ob nativum soli sterilitatem luxuriae nutrimentis carentes officia continue sobrietatis

1090 For examples of medical prescriptions recommending the mixture of herbs with wine see Codex Vindobonensis.
1091 A sleeping man seldom gains the victory. Väpnf XVII, p. 58.
exerceant omiaque vitae momenta ad excolendam alienorum operum notitiam conferre soleant, inopiam ingenio pensant. 1093

(The diligence of the men of Iceland must not be shrouded in silence; since the barrenness of their native soil offers no means of self-indulgence, they pursue a steady routine of temperance and devote all their time to improving our knowledge of other’s deeds, compensating for poverty by their intelligence.) 1094

The sobriety (sobrietas) Saxo mentions with regard to Icelandic culture appears to be not only due to the scarcity and cost of resources and alcohol in the island but it is also presented as a cultural trait. Abstinence or moderation in the consumption of alcohol could also have derived from the awareness of the effects of alcohol over people’s minds. These ideas, along with a principle of moderation, are stressed in the didactic poem Hāvamāl, where several stanzas warn the audience against drunkenness and the effects of alcohol.1095 Stanzas 11-14 instruct the audience about how to behave while travelling, an occasion on which it was most likely to find oneself among strangers. Stanza 11 advises the traveller to remain sober at all times and avoid overindulging in alcohol.

Byrði betri berrat maðr brauto at
en sé manvit mikit;
vegnest verra vegra hann velli at,
en sé ofdryccia qls. 1096

(No better burden could a man carry on the road / than a great commonsense; / worse travelling provisions he can’t carry on the field / than to get drunk on ql.)

The reason for this counsel appears to be more of a practical than of a moral nature. As we can see, the following stanza in the poem clarifies the reason for this recommendation; and the reason appears to be that he who is travelling needs to be constantly aware of the intentions of those who surround him. Alertness should have

1095 Even if the Gnomic Poem, where these stanzas are contained, is believed to have been written in pre-Christian Norway (see Evans, ‘Hāv’, in Medieval Scandinavia, ed. by Pulsiano, p. 272) it may somehow reflect the ethos or some of the concerns of Icelandic society, where it was written down in the late thirteenth century.
1096 Hāv 11.
been of great importance for the person who, while travelling, finds lodging in a place where he is most probably surrounded by strangers and, perhaps, some enemies.

\[
\begin{align*}
Era \text{ svá gott}, & \quad \text{sem gott qveda,} \\
ql \text{ alda sona;} & \quad \text{pviat færa veit,} \quad \text{er fleira dreccr,} \\
sins til geðs gum. & \quad 1^{107}
\end{align*}
\]

(It is not as good as it is said to be / qt, for the sons of men / because the less he knows, he who more drinks, / his mind from that of other men.)

From this last stanza we perceive that temperance, at least when among strangers, was a recommended ideal as people needed to remain aware and be able to interpret the context in which they found themselves. Sobriety was considered intrinsically linked to awareness, and it was essential to find out if one was sitting among friends or foes. As the poem puts it: "Opt vito ògqrla, þeir er sitia inni fyrir, / hvers þeir ro kyns, er koma"108 (Often they don’t fully know, those who sit in [the hall?] / whose kinsmen are those who come.) and this can also well apply to travellers who arrive to a hall, they do not really know whose kinsmen are sitting inside. As a matter of fact, the possibility of sitting and lodging among strangers was very real at the time and being among enemies without knowing seems to have been a vital risk. As Theodore M Andersson puts it, "all these precepts deal with excess and illustrate on a much less abstract and more practical level the sort of negative ideal urged by the sagas [...] what this section [of Hávamál] shares with the sagas is an awareness of the community in which the individual lives."109 Accordingly the first piece of advice to be given in Hávamál refers to this concern:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gáttir allar} & \quad \text{aðr gangi fram,} \\
\text{um scodaz scyli,} & \quad \text{um scegnaz scyli;} \\
\text{þviat óvist er at vita} & \quad \text{hvar óvinir} \\
\text{sitia á fleiti fyrir.} & \quad 1^{100}
\end{align*}
\]

107 Háv 12.
108 Háv 133.
100 Háv 1.
(All the doorways, before you walk forward, / one should look at, / one should spy, / because it is not known for certain where enemies / sit ahead in the hall.)

It seems then, that remaining sober and aware was essential for survival in a society in which the duty of revenge could, and did, extend almost indefinitely within the kin group of the person to be avenged and where vengeance could be wreaked on any member of the family of the murderer. It was necessary to know who one’s companions were and to be able to spot any signs of hostility; Hávamál mentions sobriety as one tool to gain this knowledge.

Furthermore, another major objection that the poem has against drunkenness is that:

\[
\text{Kópir afglapi, er til kynnis komr,} \\
\text{ðylsc hann um eða þrumir;} \\
\text{alt er senn, ef han sylg um getr,} \\
\text{uppi er þá ged guma.}\]

(The fool gapes when he comes on a visit / he mutters to himself or sits fast, / all happens at once, if he gets a drink / then his mind is exposed.)

According to the poem, being drunk was considered a disadvantage since drunken men are not only unable to recognize other people’s intentions but are also unable to conceal their thoughts and may even render themselves unconscious. Both situations would allow others to have power over them. On the other hand, as we have already seen in the section devoted to gift-giving, refusing to drink less than other men at a hall or feast could also be considered an insult or an act of treachery, as the man who remained sober then had control over those who became drunk. Remaining sober while among drunkards was often seen as suspicious. Hávamál offers the solution to the dilemma of how much to drink at the end of its section on advice to travellers, provided in stanzas 1-19. The poem closes this section by saying:

\[
\text{Haldit maðr á keri,} \\
\text{drecci þá at höfl miðr,}
\]

101 Háv 17.
102 See above, section 6.1.
mæli þarf æda þegi;
ðykýnis þess
at þú gangir snemma at sofá.\textsuperscript{103}

(A man shall not hold on to the goblet, he shall drink \textit{mique} in moderation, / he shall speak useful things or be silent, / of bad manners no one blames you / that you go early to sleep.)

In general, drunkenness is portrayed in the written sources as an instrument of power in three different ways. First, as we have already seen in the case of \textit{Hlívamál}, drunkenness could be a tool to make people expose their intentions as well as a way by which someone could render a person unaware of the fact that trouble may be brewing or plots against him are getting thicker. A second portrayal is using drunkenness as a tool to influence people's minds, either by persuading them to make certain oaths and/or promises while they are under the influence of alcohol\textsuperscript{104} or by inducing a certain degree of amnesia due to overindulgence.\textsuperscript{105} Finally, the most common use portrayed in the literature is to render the enemy extremely drunk or unconscious with alcohol in order to attack or deceive him.

Alcohol as an instrument to influence people's minds seems to occur most often in the \textit{Fornaldar saga}, which could be expected since this saga genre contains more references to alcohol than the \textit{Sturlunga saga} compilation and \textit{Íslendinga saga}. Even if the \textit{Fornaldar saga} are fictional and rather untrustworthy when it comes to a historical analysis, they can cast some light on the perceptions and uses of alcohol in the society that created them. Taking into account that the sagas were both read or recited out loud for an audience one can expect a certain degree of identification between members of the audience and the saga characters.\textsuperscript{106} The slaves in the audience could visualize

\textsuperscript{103} Háv 19.
\textsuperscript{104} Oath-sweriing has been studied in section 6.3.
\textsuperscript{105} This could be achieved by the ingestion of magic beverages. See section 7.1.
\textsuperscript{106} A good example of sagas being read out-loud as entertainment comes from \textit{PorSk}. Here, on occasion of a journey to Hrafagil "honum var kostr a bodinn, hvat til gamans skylidi hjø, sögur eda dans, um kveldit. Hann spurd, hverjar sögur i vali varri. Honum var sagt, at til væri saga Tómas erkiðskups, ok kaus han hana [...] Var þá lesin sagan." (\textit{PorSk} LXXV, p. 218.) (he [Porgill] was asked to choose which entertainment to have during the night: sagas or dance. He asked which sagas were there to choose. He was told there was the saga of Archbishop Tómas, and he chose it. [...] Then the saga was read.)
themselves as the freed slave in the saga, the freemen in the audience could have imagined themselves as the invincible warrior in the text. Following Lars Lönnroth one can say that

The scene of action in sagas and Eddie poems often corresponds to the kind of scene where sagas and Eddie poems are said to have been performed, according to medieval sources. There are thus many Eddie poems and saga episodes dealing with various types of recitations, games, contests and other entertainments at the drinking table, usually in some kind of large hall with benches, high seats and other stage props suggesting a feast of courtly dimensions. And we know from numerous sources that this was the kind of social context in which such texts were in fact performed, even though the performance was more likely to take place in the farmhouse [skáli] of a chieftain than in a royal hall [halla].

The parallelism between the action scenes in the Fornaldar saga and the scenario in which they were read or performed could thus have led to a certain degree of identification between the drinkers in the text and the drinkers in the audience. This kind of rapport is better known as a ‘double scene’, which is “something that occurs in the course of an oral performance whenever the narrative appears to be enacted by the performer or his audience on the very spot where the entertainment takes place.”

Since the saga actions concerning the use of alcohol to influence people’s minds often take place within a hall, we can expect a certain degree of empathy or identification on the part of the audience at the hall or farmhouse where the text was being read. After all, the risk of being manipulated while drunk was a peril that both legendary heroes and real life men could confront.

A clear example of this manipulative use of drunkenness can be found in Qvar-Odds saga. In his saga we find two different attitudes towards drinking: the first one is the case of Qvar-Oddr, a legendary hero, who is travelling in disguise as a thrall and the second, that of Óttarr and Ingjaldr, two actual thralls that he befriends. At the hall of

Similarly, on occasion of a wedding at Reykjavik we are told that the entertainment was “margs komin leikar, baði dansleikar, glimur ok sognaskemmtan.” (Porthafj H, p. 27) (many kinds of entertainment; dancing, wrestling and saga-telling). On this occasion the sagas seem to be recited instead of read, which is irrelevant for my argument. What proves relevant is the fact that the sagas recited at this feast - even if some of them do not survive - belonged to the genre of the Fornaldar saga.

Lönnroth, ‘Double Scene’, p. 96.

Lönnroth, ‘Double Scene’, p. 96.
the king Qrvar-Oddr's behaviour is well in agreement with the advice for travellers given in Hávamál: "Nu sitr Neðramaðr þar ok drekkir jafnan lítt um kveldin ok leggst snemma niðr. Svá fer fram, þar til er menn skulu fara á dýraveðarnar. Þat var um haustit."\(^{1109}\) (Now the Birch-man [i.e. Qrvar-Odd] sits there and drinks very little in the evening and goes early to bed. He continued doing so until the men should go hunting. That was in the autumn.) As a hero, he behaves like a role model when it comes to drinking. On the other hand the slaves Óttarr and Ingjaldr behave in the exact opposite way:

\[\text{Þat var einhvern aftan, þá er konungur er út lenginn til svefnis, at þeir risa upp Sigurðr ok Sjólfur ok gengu með sitt horn hvátt þeira ok hjálta þeim at drekkja bræðrum, Óttari ok Ingjalði, ok báðu þá at taka við ok drekkja af. Ók er þeir hófðu af drukkti, þá komu þeir með önnur tvau, ok taka þeir við ok drekkja.}^{1110}\]

(It happened on a certain evening, when the king had left and gone to sleep, that Sigurðr and Sjólfur stood up and went with their horns towards the brothers Óttarr and Ingjaldr and offered them a drink. And when they had drunk the horns, then they brought another two and Óttarr and Ingjaldr drank them.)

The brothers are aware that their attitude is not the most recommendable, as they say that Qrvar-Oddr prefers to go early to bed because "þat þykkir honum vænligra en at drekkja frá sér vit allt, sem vör gerum."\(^{1111}\) (he thinks it is more promising than to drink his wits out of himself, as we do.) Sigurðr and Sjólfur make use of the fact that Óttarr and Ingjaldr are drunk to convince them to enter into a bet in which the thralls appear to be in a clear disadvantage. After the terms of the bet have been set "sófa þeir af nöttina. En um morgininn, er þeir vakna bræðr, þá kemr þeim í hug, at eigi veri allsvinnlig vedjan þeira orðin."\(^{1112}\) (they went to sleep through the night. And in the morning when the brothers woke up they came to their minds and realized that their wager was not a very wise one.) The lesson of this episode seems to be that foolish men do not know how to drink, especially because a few days later the same scene is repeated.

\(^{1109}\) Qrv XXV, p. 303.  
\(^{1110}\) Qrv XXVI, p. 305.  
\(^{1111}\) Qrv XXVI, p. 306.  
\(^{1112}\) Qrv XXVI, p. 306.
(Now some days passed, and it happened one evening, when the king had left, that Sigurðr and Sjólf obtained each one with his horn and offered them to Óttarr and Ingjaldr. They drank them up. Then they brought them two more.

Then Sjólfri said: 'The Barkman is still lying down and not drinking.'

'He must be better behaved than you' said Ingjaldr.)

And a third time:

It happened one evening, when the king had gone to sleep, that Sjólf and Sigurðr went to the brothers and took them two horns, and they drank them up.

Then Sjólfri said: 'Is the great Oddr laying down?'

'Yes,' they said, 'that is more sensible than to drink our wits out of ourselves, as we do')

On this occasion the brothers end up making an even worse bet, wagering their heads against two golden rings.

These episodes seem to be an exemplum aimed at the audience, emphasising the risks of excessive alcohol consumption. This does not mean that people in the audience did not drink their wits out of themselves; in fact overindulgence in alcohol was probably a problem, even if limited only to great feasts or social occasions, so that the composer decided to include a didactic episode. This passage seems to be of a didactic nature due to the constant contrast and comparisons between Qrvar-Oddr's and the brothers' attitude towards drinking. On each occasion in which they are drinking themselves witless, Óttarr and Ingjaldr still have enough sense to recognize that Qrvar-
Oddr's decision to drink little and go early to bed is more sensible and reflects better habits. But the second lesson this exemplum seems to be teaching is that people who drink in excess put themselves under the control of other people and risk being abused or even losing their lives. And this seems to happen only to those who stay up drinking late, after all the sensible men have gone to bed.

A further example of how he who stays up drinking late can be an easy target for treachery occurs in Välsunga saga. In it King Gunnarr stays drinking for a while after the rest of the court had gone to sleep. Then Vingi talks him into going to visit King Atli as, he says, Atli wants to put him in charge of his kingdom. Gunnarr is not aware of the fact that this is a deceitful plot because: “Nú var bæði, at Gunnarr var mjöök drukinn, en boðit mikit riki, mátti ok eigi við sköpum vinna, heitr nú ferðinni ok segir Högni bróður sinum. Hann svarar: ‘Yðart atkvæði mun standa hljóta, ok fylgja mun ek þér, en ófús em ek þessarar ferðar.’”1116 (Now it happened that Gunnarr was very drunk and offered much power, he could not escape his destiny; he now promised to make the journey and told this to Hogni, his brother. He answered: ‘Your oath must stand, and I must follow you, and unwilling am I to do this journey.’) King Gunnarr was so drunk that he was unable to read another person’s mind; he was unable to distinguish a treacherous plot from a trusty one. Eventually his drunkenness ended up costing him his sense and with it his own life (and that of his more sensible brother, Hógni too) at the hands of Atli.

However, one’s drunkenness and lack of wits could also be used as a tool in one’s favour, as we can see in Hrölf's saga Gautrekssonar. In this, King Hríðfr visits King Eiríkr in order to ask for his daughter’s hand. King Eiríkr receives him with a feast at which “váru þá tekin borg ók vist ok drykkur inn borinn. Ok er þeir hófðu drukkit um hrið, váru margir vel kátir. Hrölf fr konungr var heldr hljóðr ok fátalaðr.”1117 (the

1116 Vqls XXXIII, p. 201.
1117 HG VIII, p. 74.
tables were laid and provided with food and the drink was carried in. And when they had drunk for a while then they were very merry. King Hrólfr was thoughtful and in silence.) Hrólfr’s silence and thoughtfulness might imply that he remained sober; after all he was a legendary hero and hence a role model, in contrast to King Eiríkr, who unleashes a plethora of insults aimed at Hrólfr as soon as he raises the topic of marrying his daughter. The next day King Eiríkr realizes that he did wrong in insulting such a powerful king as Hrólfr and pretends not to remember the previous night’s conversation with the excuse that he was drunk:

_Byrjar þat eigi várr konungiligr tign at mæla nema á göblan hátt við jafnvíðulígan hófilingja sem þú ert, ok ef vör höfum þat nokkut talat, at yðr mislíki, þá mun þat satt sem mælt er, at ól er annarr maðr. Viljum vör þat allt með skynsemi aptr taka ok látu sem ömelt sé._1118

(It does not correspond to our royal status to say nothing but good things about such a magnificent leader as you are, and if we have such things said, as to offend you, then it proves the saying that qlí is another man1119. We want to take all that back now that we have our reason back and let it be as if it was never spoken.)

King Hrólfr seems to understand that the insults were spoken by a drunken man and decides to not take offence. On this occasion Eiríkr manages to make use of his own drunkenness to his advantage. Meanwhile Hrólfr’s attitude seems to be according to one of the counsels given by Brynhildr to Sigurðr in Vǫlsunga saga: “ef þú heyrir heimsleg orð drukkinna mana, deit eigi við þá, er vindrúknir eru ok tapa viti sinu. Slikir hlutir verða mör gum at miklum mótrega eða bana.”1120 (if you hear foolish words from drunken men, do not quarrel with those who are drunk on wine and lose their wits. Such things increase the sorrows of many and even lead to death.) Drunken words come from witless persons, and so it is better if they are ignored. An episode bearing some resemblance to that in Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar can be found in Íslandinga saga. Here, just before swearing an oath to Sturla Þórðason Gizurr states: “en þat mun ek

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1118 Hg IX, p. 79.
1119 Qlí er annarr maðr. Literally ‘qlí is another man’ can be interpreted as ‘qlí makes another man.’ This proverb appears also in GrXIX, p. 66.
1120 Vqls XXI, p. 163.

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(and I shall say this before I take my oath, that I shall never speak harsh words against you while [I am] not drunk.”) It seems as if drunkenness and its subsequent loss of wits could be taken as an excuse for men to speak their minds without any consequences. This is an interesting fact. On one hand Hávamál warns men against drunkenness because it could lead them to expose their mind, thus revealing, maybe secret intentions or a secret sense of contempt against someone. On the other hand, the examples in the sagas seem to imply that the words of a drunken man were not to be taken seriously, even if they reveal a concealed hatred.

It is possible to find a pattern in the Fornaldar saga episodes involving drunkenness as a tool to mould people’s minds. That is, the hero usually knows when to stop drinking, while those characters who are portrayed as weaker or dishonourable do not know how to control their drinking and hence they are more likely to be manipulated. If the idea of the double scene does really apply to these drinking scenes, one can gather that there was a certain concern on the side of the authors to include brief exempla in their texts. These presented the hero and role model as someone who showed moderation at the table. This can, in a certain way, lead us to believe that medieval Icelanders were not as temperate as Saxo Grammaticus imagined them to be, since the motif of the foolish drunkard is so frequent. However, since scenes of drunkenness appear more frequently in the Fornaldar saga than in other saga genres, the possibility exists that binge-drinking was yet another unusual or fabulous event, like the ones portrayed in the legendary sagas. Overindulgence in alcohol belonged to the realm of the fantastic, while contemporary Icelanders still had to struggle and spend large amounts of wealth in order to throw a grand feast.

1121 Isl CXXIX, p. 414.
Rendering one's enemy drunk and/or unconscious in order to attack or deceive him is one of the most common ways in which the literature portrays the use of alcohol as an instrument of power. However, this seems to be more a motif of the *Fornaldar saga*, where it happens relatively often, than of the *Íslendinga saga* and *Sturlunga saga* where it basically does not occur at all. These episodes of drunkenness tend to happen at feasts and in halls, which were the occasions and settings in which alcohol ran more freely than it did on a daily basis. It is interesting to note that this type of representation of drunkenness as a means to dispose of an enemy occurs most frequently in a group of sagas that are mainly legendary tales of the past. Even if the *Fornaldar saga* cannot be considered as historical sources they can provide some hints about the mentality of the period in which they were written down. As Torfi Tulinius puts it, “the legendary sagas, despite their fictional nature, teach us about Icelandic society—not as it was, but as it saw itself, and above all as it wished to be.”¹¹² In other words, even if the *Fornaldar saga* were the genre in which the authors presented their idealized and romanticized vision of the past, these characteristics also made them the ideal vehicle to denounce, in a concealed way, the decadence of the Sturlung age. And the thirteenth century, during which most of them were committed to parchment, was precisely a century in which the struggle for power led to great acts of violence in Iceland. The *Sturlunga saga* compilation, almost contemporary with the period in which the *Fornaldar saga* were written down, depicts several acts of violence against people inside their halls, where they were probably drinking. This might then explain why both groups of sagas present the motif of killing the enemy while he is drunk.

For example, in *Íslendinga saga*, Órakja goes with a group of men in order to attack Gizurr’s farm. On the way some men ask for information about Gizurr and learn that he is hosting a feast where large amounts of alcohol are being served. The group’s

¹¹² Tulinius, p. 13.
reaction is one of joy: “Drekki þeir, drekki þeir ok biði vár svá.” 1123 (They are drinking, they are drinking and they wait for us like that.) The group’s reaction is understandable, for they know that if they are to fight against drunken men the victory will most probably be on their side. 

Sturlu saga narrates an episode when, during a feast, “Aðalrikr var þar kominn ok reikadi á golfi. En er hann kom fyrir Skeggja, þá brá hann öxi undan skikkju ok hjó í höfuð honum, svá at öxin sökk” 1124 (Aðalrikr had come and tottered on the floor. And when he got in front of Skeggi, then he quickly got an axe from under his cloak and struck him in the head so that the axe sank.) Aðalrikr manages to escape from the place in spite of doing this deed in front of a large amount of people. Perhaps this was due to the inability of men to react due to alcohol consumption. In general, drunken men are depicted as easy targets.

Perhaps one of the most famous murder scenes in the Íslendinga sagnur is that of Gisla saga, when Gisli Súrsson avenges Vésteinn, his brother-in-law, by killing Þorgrimr, his other brother-in-law. Gisli waits until Þorgrimr arranges a winter feast at which over sixty guests arrive. Then “tóku menn til drykkju um kveldit, ok fara menn í rekkjur eptir þat ok sofa.” 1125 (The men started drinking in the evening, and after that they went to bed and slept.) Later that night Gisli goes to Sæból, Þorgrimr’s farm, and exploits the fact that all the guests are asleep in order to murder Þorgrimr in his sleep. Gisli manages to escape because “menn allir váru qlíærir á Sæból í vissu eigi, hvat af skyldi ráða; kom þetta á þá óvara, ok urðu því eigi tekin þau ráð, sem dygði eða þarf var á.” 1126 (all the men at Sæból were ql-mad and no one knew what to suggest; this happened unexpectedly, and so no one was able to provide any idea that could be of any help or use.) The saga does not tell us if Þorgrimr is just as drunk as his retinue is at the time of his death. However, Þorgrimr’s unawareness of Gisli fondling both him and his

1123 Ísl CLV, p. 459.
1124 Stt IV, p. 66.
1125 Gisl XVI, p. 52.
1126 Gisl XVI, p. 54.
wife in their sleep just before he is killed may lead us to think that he is not completely sober. In any case, what is relevant in this scene is that all the men in the farm are so drunk as to not know what is the most logical action to take once the murder is discovered. They had drunk their wits out and so rendered themselves powerless in the hands of the enemy. Similarly, in *Þóðrar saga hreðu* King Sigurðr is easily killed at a feast while sitting at the drinking table (drykkjubord) and the most of the killers manage to escape unharmed due to the inability of the king’s retinue to capture them.

The strategy of rendering the enemy unconscious with alcohol in order to kill or abuse them is found more often in the *Fornaldar sagn*, a genre in which alcohol is not portrayed as a rare and expensive commodity. The way in which this trick is generally depicted can be illustrated through an example given in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. In it Helgi and Hróarr (aged ten and twelve respectively) go secretly to King Fróði’s hall in order to kill him and thus avenge their father. On his side, the king, worried about the possibility of Helgi and Hróarr avenging Hálfdan, their father, asks a seeress to tell him about the boys. She warns him:

> Sé ek, hvar sitja synir Hálfdanar, Hróarr ok Helgi, heilir húðir; Peir mumu Fróða fjörvi rena.  

[I see where the sons of Hálfdan sit, / Hróarr and Helgi, both healthy, / they will plunder the vital parts of Fróði.]

The boys are then discovered and flee the hall while the king’s men chase them in vain. Believing himself out of danger, the king then says: ‘*En drekka munum vér nú megar kveldlangt*’ [...] *Reginn gengr at byrla mönum ok bar á þá ölit með ákafa ok margir aðrir með honum, vinir hans, svá at þar fell hverr um þveran annan niðr sofandi.*

("And now we are able to drink all night long.' [...] Reginn waits upon the men and

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1127 See *Gisl* XVI, pp. 52-54.  
1129 *Hrólfs* III, p. 9.  
1130 *Hrólfs* III, p. 10.
eagerly serves them \( q/ \), and so do the other men, his friends, that help him in the task, so that all the men at the feast fall asleep there, one after the other.

The boys then take advantage of the drunkenness of the king’s retinue and set fire to the hall, where all the men lie unable to react since due to their drunkenness they do not realize that the hall is burning. Similarly, in Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka we are told about an attack during a feast: “veizla var kapsamlig ok drykkr svá sterkr, at Hálfsrekkar sofnuðu fast. Ásmundr konunger ok hirðin lögðu eld í höllina.”\(^{1131}\) (the feast was intense and the drink so strong the Hálfsrekkar [King Hálfr’s champions] fell fast asleep. King Ásmundr and his men set fire to the hall.) And in Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar we hear that “þeir sátu við drykk glaðir ok kætir. Heyra þeir út gný mikinn ok vápnbrak, ok þvi næst var borinn eld at skemmunni þeiri, er þeir sátu inni,”\(^{1132}\) (they sat at drink and were cheerful and merry. They heard a great roar and the din of weapons outside, and then the building in which they were sitting was on fire.) The list of events in which people are attacked while drunk or drinking could continue, most instances resembling the ones just presented. In general, attacking someone while drunk would render that person defenceless and this situation seems to have been exploited, at least in literature, to defeat men and groups of men that could not be otherwise overcome.

However, the use of alcohol as an instrument of deceit did not necessarily have to end in death. Sometimes it could be used in order to render another person unconscious. In Gængu-Hrólfss saga, for example, it is used by a princess who is planning to run away from her captors. She achieves it in the following fashion:

\[
\text{Petta sama kveld gerði konungsdóttir sík blíða við menn sínar ok veitti }
\text{þeim kapsamliga. Hún gerði allar sínar skemmumeyjar svá drukknar, }
\text{at þær fellu safnur niðr, en er skammt var af nótí, kom Hrólfur í }
\text{kastalann ok hitti konungsdóttur ok bæði hana bína með sér at ferar.}\(^{1133}\)
\]

(That same night the king’s daughter acted gently towards her men and served them with liberality. She got all her maids so drunk that they fell

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\(^{1131}\) Hálfr XII, p. 114.
\(^{1132}\) HG XXXV, pp. 169-70.
\(^{1133}\) GFr XXI, p. 218.
down asleep and, early during the night, Írólfr came to the castle and
found the princess and asked her to get ready to go with him.)

The Princess’ gentleness towards her men as well as her liberal pouring of drinks are
done with the intention of rendering everyone in the castle unconscious, thus facilitating
her escape. Similarly, in the same saga Gqngu-Írólfr becomes the victim of a similar
trick when drinking with a group of farmers. They serve the drinks liberally and “er
Írólfr gerðist drukkinn, vildi han fara at sofa”\textsuperscript{1134} but “en er liðin var nótinn, vaknaði
Írólfr ok eigi við góðan draum, því at hann var bundinn at hóndum ok fóturn.”\textsuperscript{1135}
when it was late at night Írólfr woke up, and not after a good dream, because he was
tied both at his hands and feet.) Gqngu-Írólfr was indeed famed for being an extremely
strong man and a great warrior so that the only object capable of defeating him was not
a sword or a spear but alcohol and inebriation. This seems to have been also a common
method to overcome an enemy, or it could even be used for sexual abuse, as we can see
in the eddic poem \textit{Vqlundarkviða}. The poem tells about Vqlundr’s revenge on King
Niðuðr by killing his sons and abusing his daughter. He achieves this last act because
“\textit{Bar hann hana biðri, þviat hann bettr kunni, / svá at hón i sessi um sofiþa.}”\textsuperscript{1136} (He
defeated her with \textit{bjórr} because he was more used to it / so that she fell asleep on the
bench.) Again, alcohol-induced unconsciousness is used a tool to deceive someone.

In general, we have seen that drunkenness could be used as a tool to overpower
or deceive one’s enemies, especially those who could not be defeated while sober. This
could be done in different ways. One way could be using the effects of alcohol over
people’s minds, by rendering them witless so that they could be easily manipulated. A
second way was taking advantage of others’ drunkenness in order to attack them, as a
drunken man can not defend himself so easily, if at all. A third way was by rendering
someone else unconscious in order to defeat them. On most occasions these methods

\textsuperscript{1134} \textit{Gfr} XIII, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{1135} \textit{Gfr} XIII, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{1136} \textit{Vkv} 28.
are presented as a way of defeating a person who could not be overcome by weapons. *Hávamál* shows great concern about these dangers so that it opens with a series of recommendations about how a person shall remain sober, at least while among strangers. It is also noteworthy that most of the occurrences of drunkenness as an instrument of power come from the *Fornaldar saga*. This could be due to the fact that this literary genre was probably a vehicle to express current social concerns, one of which was the possibility of being attacked or abused while inebriated. It could also be due to the fact that these legendary sagas have more reference to alcohol consumption than the *Íslendinga saga* and the *Sturlunga saga* compilation. The pseudo-historicity of these last two saga genres may be the reason why the *Fornaldar saga* have more references to alcohol consumption and its use as an instrument for deception. After all, as we have already seen, alcohol was not abundant in medieval Iceland and Norway, so its uses and dangers were, perhaps, a topic more fitting for the legendary realms.
CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen in the previous pages, alcoholic beverages in the West Norse world were a rare and expensive commodity. Thus, the many comments I received in the course of my research about the 'Vikings being binge drinkers who normally overindulged in mead' seem to be groundless. Mead, at least by the time our sources were written down, was rarely drunk. However, it had a special place in the literature referring to the remote past as well as a symbolic role in myth and in poetry.

In general, the high costs involved in alcohol production conferred on all beverages a symbolic value. Drinking, in literature and in reality, it seems, had a symbolic role that superseded its biological nature. When thirsty, people drank milk or water on a regular basis; thus these two drinks are basically absent from the literature. But alcohol, even if consumed in order to quench thirst, seems to have been consumed symbolically. Each drink and each kind of vessel had its own added value. The same applies to the locations where alcohol was consumed. As we could see, whether in a hall or at a tavern the act of offering alcohol added to the status of the provider. Due to its cost, alcohol became a symbol of wealth and power. It helped to display wealth either through offering feasts or by providing costly beverages in expensive drinking vessels; it also helped to gain allegiances through gift-giving, as alcohol was a gift that could not be easily repaid. But most of all, alcohol helped to enhance people's power through the sense of community created during drinking occasions. Alcohol could also increase a person's power through demonstrations of manliness during drinking competitions, mamnjaferd and boasting bouts while drunk. However, its negative aspects are also portrayed in the literature. That is, namely, as a tool to render a person powerless both by inebriation and through magic alcohol consumption.

Concerning the questions that I asked at the beginning of this study about the what, where, when, how and why of drinking we can extract the following answers. The
most common alcoholic beverages were lactose-based; the fact that they were a quite mundane product, added to their extremely acidic flavour, turned them into the most despicable of beverages. Therefore, they are not often the subject of literature, as they appear to be unworthy of entering the world of sagas. And when they do appear in literature they are often associated with villains and are seldom said to be consumed; instead they are used for other purposes, such as hiding or extinguishing fires. Maltose-based beverages are the most commonly mentioned ones in all the written sources. This is perhaps due to the fact that they could be easily produced, stored and transported. Thus, with the advent of the Hanseatic League maltose-based beverages were imported into Scandinavia from countries where cereals could be easily produced. Among these beverages there are frequent references to *mungát*, which seems to be some sort of strong *qt*. This might mean that *mungát* was actually a beverage of a mixed nature, several different kinds of sugar being added in order to fortify it. There are, however, no clues to its exact nature. Glucose-based beverages, especially *mjǫðr*, seem to have been outdated in the North, most probably due to their high cost. This might have made *mjǫðr* the most prestigious beverage until it was replace by *vin*, another extremely expensive beverage that had the added advantages of being exotic but perhaps ready at hand in the Continent. Wine, it seems, ended up replacing mead not only as the most prestigious drink in this world, but also in the otherworld, as it is said to be Óðinn's only nourishment. Beverages of a mixed nature, such as *bjór*, are seldom mentioned, and seem to have been outdated by the time our sources were written down. Thus, *qt*, *mungát* and *vin* are the most frequently mentioned, but, as we have seen, not often consumed.

The mythology clearly reflects the situation concerning alcohol in reality: the gods, just like mankind, had to struggle in order to obtain alcoholic beverages. Apart from the mythical goat Heiðrún, who is an endless source of mead, there are no other
alcohol sources in Ásgardr. Regardless of the fact that the gods owned this goat, they often are said to travel in order to obtain their alcoholic beverages, making little use of Heiðrún. Just like ordinary people, the gods must also import their drinks or consume it elsewhere than in Ásgardr. Mead, the drink associated with Valhóll and considered as the origin of the poetic language, is said to have been stolen from the Jötunn. This myth relates what seems to be a Prometheus-like tale about how alcohol came into the possession of the gods. There are, however, discrepancies in the different sources for this myth. According to Snorri this mead has the characteristic that it turns men into scholars and/or poets. However, the myth as related in the Poetic Edda, without making use of Snorri in order to interpret it, seems to relate quite a different story. In it the mead is a regular beverage; it does not confer any special abilities apart from inebriation and loss of consciousness, just like any other alcoholic beverage. Thus, it seems that Snorri's Edda narrated a different myth about mead than that of Hávamál, or that by the time the myth reached Snorri it had evolved or was misunderstood by him. The actual confusion between both myths seems to come from a generalized tendency to utilize Snorri's Edda in order to interpret the Eddic lays and vice versa.

The main places where alcohol was consumed were drinking halls, taverns and at the Althing. Drinking halls, even if similar in nature were linguistically differentiated. Hallar were the drinking places owned by the nobility and, therefore, absent in Iceland. Drinking halls in Iceland as well as those owned by farmers in Norway were called skálar. As we saw, the sole difference between hallar and skálar was symbolic rather than architectural. Within the hall seating places were also symbolically allotted, with each seat representing the position that each of the attendants had in society. Within the hall, the most honourable place was the háseði or qndvegei. Again, both these places were similar in esteem, the only difference being that a high-seat was only to be found in Norwegian hallar, that is, they were seats reserved for the nobility; meanwhile the
qndvegi was the place of highest esteem in skálar, as no farmer could – regardless of his wealth and power – could occupy a háseti. With the development of towns in Norway a new kind of drinking establishment appeared. These new drinking places were called skytningar or hjúkölfar. Their role was basically to shelter the growing floating population of merchants that arrived in Norway. The Crown seems to have favoured these places not only to take the drinkers out of the streets, but also because alcohol sales in these establishments were easier to control and tax. As we have seen, Icelanders travelling in Norway seem to have followed in these establishments a similar ethos to that which they were expected to follow in Icelandic drinking halls. In Iceland and in Norway people seem to have also gathered to drink at the national and local assemblies, which might have led to quarrels or difficulties reaching agreements; accordingly, there were several attempts to control alcohol intake at these locations.

The main drinking occasions were weddings, funerals and seasonal feasts. It is not rare to find weddings and funerals being celebrated simultaneously in the sagas, perhaps as a reflection of an actual social practice at the time. One possible explanation is that this was done due to the high cost of alcohol. Thus, the host, taking into consideration the large sums involved in feast-offering, tried to spare by combining celebrations. Weddings are said to have taken place mainly in midsummer and at the beginning of winter. This may be due to the fact that these were the seasons of abundance. Both during midsummer and the start of winter merchants were travelling back and forth to Norway and the Continent, bringing raw materials that could be used for brewing. Also, at the start of winter the livestock surplus was sacrificed in order to ensure the survival of the rest of the farm animals throughout the cold months. Finally, at the beginning of winter all agrarian activity stopped, allowing people to spend more time at leisure.
The how and why of alcohol consumption correspond, as I mentioned earlier, more to the realm of the symbolic than the biological. Festive drinking is, in many cultures, a way of creating a community. But in Iceland and Norway the high cost of alcohol gave these occasions an added value; they became symbols of power and wealth. Thus, alcohol and feast-hosting seem to have played an important role in the Norse gift-giving culture, though alcohol and feasts were gifts difficult to pay back. Only the rich could afford to throw a fortnight-long feast. And there seem to have been some troubles arising from the decision of who was to host a feast, as it seems to have been the role of the most powerful person. Thus, possible candidates sometimes clashed, not wanting to recognize the supremacy of the other. During feasts wealth and power were also displayed through the ostentation of costly drinking vessels. These kinds of vessels are rare archaeological finds, which only seems to confirm the great esteem they have in literature. Mannjafnadar and other drinking games were also a way of displaying someone's personal assets, not only through the boasting of the contestant's personal achievements but also through the ability to remain sober. Sobriety seems to have been a much valued asset. In literature and myth it appears as a personal quality of the greatest of men while, on most occasions, it is only the most wretched that appear as binge drinkers. This may be due to the other, and more sinister, way in which alcohol is depicted. Drunkenness is depicted as a tool of power as it makes people lose their wits. Thus, in literature many a hero who is otherwise invincible can only be defeated while drunk. Drunkenness is also depicted as a way of rendering someone unconscious and turning him or her into an easy victim. Magic alcoholic beverages seem to have a similar role. Many of these drinks have exactly the same properties as alcohol, affecting people's memory and emotions, but the effect can be achieved with only a few drops.
In general, most of the sources coincide in their depiction of alcohol. Literary, archaeological, historical and legal sources point towards alcohol being rare and expensive. Perhaps the main difference is that in literature, alcohol seems to be idealized. Saga composers imagine the legendary times as a period in which alcohol, mostly wine, was abundant in comparison with the almost alcohol-less present the contemporary sagas depict. Feasting occasions also seem to have been rare, in the contemporary sources, while the further we get into the past, the more common feasts are said to be.
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Figure 3.1. Stenkyrka stone.
Figure 3.2 Tjängvide stone
Figure 3.3 Klinte stone
Figure 4.1 Plan of the longhouse at Borg (Herschend, p. 55)
Figure 4.2 Image comparing the size of the longhouse at Borg with the Torondheim Cathedral (Herschend, p. 68)
Figure 4.3. Eighteenth-century illustration of Håkons Hall (Roscher Nielsen, p. 42)
facilitate the mucking out. Nearby was a during the later Viking period.

The ground farmhouse a probably type Viking Age Iceland. Cor with the early settlements of and show of including separate room building was in Iceland.

Figure 4.4 The longhouse at Stöng (Graham-Campbell, *Viking World*, p. 81.)
Figure 4.5 Runic stick 648- Søndre Søstergården (*Norges Inskrifter*, p. 98)
Figure 6.1 Reconstruction of the Borg funnel-beaker. (Holand, p. 218)
Figure 6.2. Bucket found in the Oseberg burial. (Marstrander, p. 131)