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**Autor:** Heslop, Kate  
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## ‘[...]f Sueins .k.’: *Glælognskviða* and Its Contexts

KATE HESLOP (BERKELEY)

Þórarinn loftunga’s *Glælognskviða* (Sea-Calm Poem) was first performed in the early 1030s, some time between its subject, Óláfr Haraldsson’s, translation on 3 August 1031 and its addressee, Sveinn Álfifuson’s, hasty departure from Norway in 1034/5 (Magerøy, 1948: 43-4). Its nine verses are recorded in manuscripts of Snorri’s *Óláfs saga helga* (cf. Louis-Jensen, 1997, on these manuscripts and their interrelationships), where v. 1 is introduced as follows: *Þess getr Þórarinn loftunga í kvæði því, er hann orti um Svein Álfifuson, er kallat er Glælognskviða* (“Þórarinn loftunga tells of this in the poem which he composed for/about Sveinn Álfifuson, which is called *Glælognskviða*”).

This passage occurs near the top of fol. 1v of AM 47 fol, *Eirspennill*, written in Iceland in the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Although parts of the leaf are missing, the rubric is still partly visible: [...]f Sueins .k. This is the only medieval manuscript to preserve this wording. With missing letters supplied from the Kringla transcript (AM 35 fol, c. 1675-1700), it reads [*Uppha*]f Sueins konungs (“beginning [of the saga] of King Sveinn”). In this branch of the transmission, then, *Óláfs saga helga* is interrupted by a saga of the Dane Sveinn Álfifuson, son of Knútr inn ríki and much-disliked ruler of Norway 1030-1034/5. The majority of *Óláfs saga helga* manuscripts do not go so far. There Sveinn’s name often receives a large decorated initial, as it does here, but the key word *Upphaf* is absent, relegating Sveinn from saga protagonist to a blip in the royal line from Óláfr Haraldsson to his son Magnús Ólafsson. But the unfortunate Sveinn not only ruled Norway under the shadow of his sainted predecessor; his only named skald composed a poem that is, although *um Svein Álfifuson*, about St Óláfr.

This context goes some way towards explaining Þórarinn’s surprising choice of the meter *kviðuhátt* (disputed; perhaps ‘poem’s meter’) for *Glælognskviða*. *Kviðuhátt*, a catalectic variant of *fornyrðislag*, is the meter of 14% of the lines in the encomiastic corpus.<sup>1</sup> And it was the skaldic medium of choice for praising one’s addressee by means of a poem about other people altogether, usually dead ones.<sup>2</sup> As Kari Gade has shown (2005), the metrical and syntactical constraints imposed by the brevity of this meter’s odd lines gave *kviðuhátt* verses their characteristic shape, that of a concatenated series of subordinate clauses with copious nominal variation.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Tarrin Wills for this information.

<sup>2</sup> *Erfikvæði* in *dróttkvætt* address the immediate descendants, usually the sons or brothers, of the dead man. The usual explanation for Þórarinn’s choice of *kviðuhátt* is that its simplicity made the poem comprehensible to his young, English-speaking patron (Lindow, 2008: 112; Townend, 2005: 257).

vit leita til ríkis áttíunda þingum en þar þá komur til hátt óðind  
ing kunnz kgl þóðr þs at h skyldi fara síðan inór ríka vid ríki þu  
til þarada er inór yar z hapa þar nr; kgl nafn yr noi; Síðan þor fuañul  
dantúkar z hafde þíðan líð miki þor með þm harallb; j z mart ariara in ri  
kna þes geer þoarín lofninga i kvaðe þer h orri um sve al; fer kallat er glalognz kunda þ ua  
dullant þue danur goðo dýoua þ; nr; doagl; þar yar jarll fyrst at up hafi z hór in er þm  
þygdre anan dænge auidu ter; Síðan þor so inór z nr; þm alþra mod h; z v h þar kgl te  
kuz a hino lofþgr h v þa kornj astan i vikuna er orka þa stikastom z Olafz kgl þer  
Sveit leita er þerðm þyr en h kom u haustid nosd; i þrand h; h y þar til kgl tekuz teni ad  
ro stadom. Sv kgl hafde ny loy id um margu hlute z v þ ept þ leita ten loy u danm  
en sum mycklo þrekari. Engi maðr skyldi af ldi fara nema in; kgl lejri en of þerri þa  
þellu ynd kgl eigur h; en hór er man yarzi skyldi hapa þur yarzi lde lausum eyri þ  
maðr yarð i utlegð z tagnæz ar þr þm þa eignæz kgl ar þan at solum skyld; hór þon  
þi þa kgl maðr maðr af arm huerio z lar af vira þverrom þ v kallar ymar taddi z þ  
an simoz z hufvryia h; rygnar to þ var lin orer sva unkat ar þerir pengi um meða  
þing z lengsta. Þonds þ skyldet ar goza þuf þo aðll er kgl villdi hapa at þuf þum smou  
þo in skyld goza en lid þeranz z goza þ h; er v uer gamali yr z þ ept h; þoz eiga h; þ  
in er a þar þer skyldi gualda kgl id up d; huadan sem h; er en þ ero v þskar. Skip þur  
er þerri af ldi þer skyldi laða kgl rum um þuer skip maðr h; er til illde þerri k  
þldo þankar in hapa sva mikil meoð moz at einz þeina yrm skyldi rinda x noð in  
þam. En er þesi laga teining yar þur f; alþyð þa toku in þes at reisa hugi sva up in  
or z goðo kuz sin in illb mto þ lva er z h; þ; vir i moþerom vid olaf kgl taku þ nu  
in þærð vmatu z lag af kuydigi þes er þ þorðoz vid olaf kgl z þellur h; þ; þe þdy  
þeud þeðo z reitar þer en nu hafi þ anad z þrakkan z þ nr; þoz glæpi z uðengskap. En  
þ v ei goðu til moþeris þa þa allir at uþeþliga yar um rager baro in þo e trastul at  
goza up teud moð. Sveit kgl bar þ með til at með þor þu gullada knu in þi sono sva ad  
a adia naþrænde z þ in; at þa uar eþgi þorþoz til upreistar. Þuar þor þu in amæd  
til Sveit kgl makt z kenðo in ma þ alþro all þ er innoð skapi þoz en þa yader tan  
V þer þar þor þu raða ~~með af margu in in til Olafz kgl~~ með af margu in in til Olafz kgl  
at margu in in þi ldi at Olaf er uari maðr tan þeðlage ok iartogur mar  
gar yar in at þeð h; þe þor þa marg a þer til Olaf kgl um þa luti er in þom skip  
ta maðr pengi marg in af þe aþerai þor sum heilf þer en sum þar þeina eða  
aða luti er noð þyn þoz til þem

olaf kgl  
þaragna goðo

Manuscript AM 47 fol., 1v (© The Arnarnagnæan Collection, Copenhagen. Photograph: Suzanne Reitz)

Along with (and to some extent determined by) this catenulate structure go commonalities in subject-matter and diction that arguably originate in a particular performance setting and social context, namely, the aristocratic funeral: so much so, I would suggest, that we are justified in seeing this poetry as a key medium of funeral memoria.<sup>3</sup>

Þjóðólfr of Hvin's ninth-century composition *Ynglingatal* (*Yt*) provided the template, as far as we can tell. Its final verse reveals that it was composed for Rognvaldr heiðumhæri, but it is *about* 28 notoriously deceased rulers, whose relationship to Rognvaldr is unclear. The *Háleygjatal* (*Hál*) of Eyvindr skáldaspillir ('skalds' despoiler'), composed in the late tenth century for Hákon jarl Sigurðarson, reckons its patron's lineage back to Óðinn and Skaði and takes the *kviðuháttr* memorial in the genealogical direction implied, but nowhere stated, in *Ynglingatal*. This pattern of imitating and outdoing, seen also in Eyvindr's *Hákonarmál* vis-à-vis the anonymous *Eiríksmál*, is likely to be the origin of Eyvindr's wry nickname. Finally Egill Skalla-Grímsson, in his *Sonatorrek* (*St*) and *Poem for Arinbjörn* (*Arbj*), gives the form a characteristic spin, praising his sons and his friend Arinbjörn in poems that are primarily about the poet himself and his quotidian and mythic adversaries. These are the only *kviðuháttr* poems that pre-date *Glælognskviða*, but it continued to be a viable medium for praise poetry, with Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonarkviða* (c. 1270) a fascinating late composition in the meter.

The commonality, and mediality, of these poems goes deeper than this, however. Shared characteristics – also shared by much of the later *kviðuháttr* poetry – include:

1. the poem is about the dead:
  - *Yt* (the kings), *Hál* (Hákon's ancestors), *St* (Egill's parents, brother and sons).<sup>4</sup>
2. it mentions particular landscapes (the place of death and/or burial of the poem's subjects):
  - *Yt*: *á beði Skútu*, v. 3, *við Fýri*, v. 6, *í Limafirði*, v. 12, *at Uppsolum* vv. 13 and 16, *á Vendli*, v. 15, *á Lófundu*, v. 17, etc.; *Hál*: *Straumeyjarnes*, v. 5, *á Fjølum*, v. 7, *á Qglói*, v. 9; *St*: *á nesi*, v. 25; *Arbj*: ?possibly *í Fjórðum*, v. 22.
3. it includes complex, unusual kennings, often involving *ofljóst* on personal names:
  - *Yt*: e.g. *slonguþref verðar Sleipnis* ("flung grasper of the meal of Sleipnir" [HAY > PITCHFORK], v. 8, *mær bróður Býleists* ("maiden of the brother of Býleistr") [= Loki > = Hel (*hel* 'the underworld')], v. 23; *Hál*: e.g. *mogr Hallgarðs* [*hallr* 'stone' = *grjót* 'gravel', *Grjótgarðr* > Hákon Grjótgarðs-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. already Wessén, 1915; Ohlmarks, 1944, argues similarly for the *erfíkvæði* genre as a whole; objections to this in Fidejestøl, 1982; cf. also Harris, 2006. For a recent argument for funerary practices as embodied memoria, cf. Williams, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Arinbjörn is still alive at the point that *Arbj* is referred to in *Egils saga*, but the prose framing of *Egils saga*'s long poems is not above suspicion.

son], v. 8, *brúðr valtyís* (“bride of the slaughter-god”) [= Óðinn > = Jorð (*jorð* ‘land’)], v. 12; *Arbj*: e.g. *björn bjóða ótta birkis* (“bear of the table of the terror of the birch”) [FIRE > HEARTHSTONE (*arinn*), *Arinbjörn*], v. 16.<sup>5</sup>

4. it has a list- or chain-like (catenulate) structure:
  - *Yt* lists 28 kings, the surviving verses of *Hál* seven, and both poems’ names end in *-tal* (‘list’); *St* mentions the deaths of two sons, father, mother and brother, using the verb *telja* (v. 5); *Arbj*, in a self-reflexive moment, observes that *valið liggja / tvén ok þrén / á tungu mér* (‘two or three [ideas] lie chosen on my tongue’), v. 15.
5. it mentions the afterlife (Óðinn; Valhöll) and female psychopomps (*Hel*, *Hildir*, *Rán*):
  - *Hel*: *Yt* 7, 23, 24, *St* 25; *Hildir*: *Hál* 7; *Rán*: *St* 7-8; Óðinn: *Yt* 3, *Hál* 1-2, 6, 8, *St* 21-24, *Arbj* 6-7, 13; *Valhöll*: *Arbj* 14, *St* 10-11.
6. it mentions commemorative monuments of stone or wood:
  - *Yt*: *sá frömuðr \*reyrs Hogni vas of horfinn beinum foldar* (“that wielder of the reed of Hogni [WARRIOR] was surrounded by the bones of the earth [STONES]”, v. 19; *Hál*: *náreiðr vingameiðr drúpir á nesi* (“the corpse-bearing swaying tree droops on the headland”), *fjolkunnt Straumeyjarnes merkt steini of hrør fylkis* (“well-known Straumeyjarnes [is] marked by a stone over the ruler’s body”), v. 5; *St*: *mærðar timbr, máli laufgat* (“timbers of praise, adorned with the foliage of speech”), v. 5; *Arbj*: *mærðar efni, auðskæf ómunlokri* (“stuff of fame, easily shaped with the voice-plane”), v. 15, *lofkøst* (“praise-cairn”), v. 25.

There is no space here for a full exploration of the links between these features and the archaeological evidence for Viking Age funeral practices, particularly as the latter are highly variable. Key points include, however: the importance of the gravesite as a locus of memory, sometimes over very long periods (cf. e.g. Hållans Stenholm, 2012; Klevnäs, 2016); the associations between stone and the world of the dead (cf. e.g. Kaliff, 1997; Aspeborg, 2005); the fragmentation of bodies in funeral rituals (cf. Lund, 2013), which finds parallels in the fragmentary rhetoric of the kenning, especially in *ofljóst*; the importance of lists (from the runic inscriptions of Rök and Högby to the husbands, daughters, sisters and brothers whose deaths are recalled by the mourners in *Guðrúnarkviða I*; cf. Harris, 2000); and the self-referential rhetoric of the conclusion, in which the skald compares his poetic memorial with the wooden or stone monuments of the gravesite.<sup>6</sup> Bodies, landscapes and monuments are anchors for memory in these poems.

<sup>5</sup> *St* lacks *ofljóst*, but the sequence of head-kennings in *St* 19: 6-7, *í jorðu grímu, rýnnis reið* ‘land of the face, chariot of thought’ is reminiscent of *Yt*’s chains of riddling kennings (note, though, the emendation of ms. *í aróar grímu*).

<sup>6</sup> The saga topos of the audience recording these poems in runes, as in the prose frame of *Sonatorrek* (*Egils saga*, ch. 78), may be a reflex of this feature, cf. Clunies Ross in this volume.

*Glælognskviða* is the earliest poem to celebrate Óláfr's sanctity (cf. Lindow, 2008). By presenting him as *rex perpetuus Norvegiæ*, able to grant Sveinn rule over Norway (v. 9), it argues that the succession of Sveinn to the throne is legitimate (v. 2). The *kviðuhátt* tradition provided the skald with a powerful way of making this point. Stating the location of the grave (*í Þrandheimi ... Þars Óleifr áðan byggði ... ok þar varð kykvasettr* ("in Trøndelag, where Óláfr previously dwelt, and there became enshrined alive"), vv. 2-3) and affirming that the deceased has departed to the after-life (*hann hvarf til himinríkis* ("he departed to the heavenly kingdom"), v. 3) emphasizes the old king's departure and the legitimacy of the new one. Even the list motif is vestigially present in *Glælognskviða*, an indication of the abiding force of memorial tradition:

*Þar vas jarl  
fyrst at upphafi,  
ok hverr maðr,  
es honum fylgði,  
annarr drengr  
þóðrum betri.* (v. 1)

There the jarl [= Haraldr Þorkelsson] was first and foremost, and every man who followed him, each warrior, [was] better than the next.

But Óláfr's sanctity compelled Þórarinn to an innovative re-purposing of the traditional medium of funeral *memoria*. The saintly king needs no psychopomps, but departs to heaven under his own power: *sonr Haralds hafði harðla ráðit sér til himinríkis* ("The son of Haraldr [= Óláfr] had powerfully taken himself to the heavenly kingdom", v. 4). Óláfr's corpse is uncorrupted, whole and beautiful (v. 5), unlike the disarticulated, fragmented dead body of pre-Christian funeral ritual (*koggla hrørs* ("limbs of the corpse"), *St* 4; the *ægir hjarna* ("sea of the brains") of King Aðils mixes with the mud of the grave, *Yt* 16). The repeated deictic *þar* in v. 3 refers to his shrine's place in the middle of Niðaróss (Trondheim), from where his successor Sveinn will *æ ævi sína ... byggðum ráða* ("always rule the settlements throughout his life") (v. 2); earlier *kviðuhátt* poetry emphasizes instead the peripheral location of its subjects' burial sites, often close to bodies of water. The postmortem activities of the pre-Christian dead among the living could cause anxiety (McKinnell, 2009, and cf. *St* v. 18), but *St* Óláfr is a "mediator" (*sættir*, v. 4) between God and man. The bulk of Þórarinn's poem is taken up with a sensual evocation of the miraculous new media of communication between heaven and earth that Christianity offered the believer – bells that ring by themselves (v. 6), candles (v. 7), *reginnagla máls bóka* ("the sacred nail of the language of books") (v. 9: the referent of this, the poem's only elaborate kenning, is disputed) – and the healing power of the heavenly grace that they mediate, manifest in the bodies of believers:

Þar kœmr herr,  
 es heilagr es  
 konungr sjalfr,  
 krýpr at gangi.  
 En beiðendr  
 blindir sækja  
 þjóðir máls,  
 en þaðan heilir. (v. 8)

A host comes there, where the holy king himself is, [and] bows down for access. And people, petitioners for speech [and] the blind, make their way [there], and [go] from there whole.

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