



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

**"Frá mínom véom oc vøngom" - an  
examination of literary representations of  
the mythological figure of Skaði**

**Ritgerð til M.A.-prófs**

**Sarah Welschbach**

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Háskóli Íslands  
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## 1 Introduction

Skaði as a goddess of darkness and death, Skaði as the female by-product of the god Ullr, Skaði as a *jötunn* woman, Skaði as a fairy-tale-princess, Skaði as the representation of the Sami women...

Many ideas have been brought forth about this mysterious figure that is the mythological female Skaði. This is mostly due to the fact that the information about her is quite limited but so rich in details that it gives us many possibilities to interpret her character and discuss her origins. Skaði is such an interesting figure in Norse mythology because she herself is so ambiguous and consequently causes the development of many ambiguous opinions on her.

This paper will be an attempt to assemble information on Skaði's character and to illustrate the ideas about her that have been brought forth based on literary as well as archaeological sources in order to give a better understanding of how the figure of Skaði could have been viewed throughout the Viking Age, a period of time broadly dating from 793 to 1066 (Jesch 1991, p. 1). In my work I shall address a variety of ideas that scholars have written about and that are connected to Skaði and I will try to outline an idea of her origin and character.

My focus will lie on her classification as both a goddess and a *jötunn*-woman and further on her position of power in both the mythological world and the physical world that are inherently linked. The question of whether Skaði belongs to the deities or to the opposed inhabitants of Jötunheimr has been the topic of many discussions and I shall elaborate on this matter and give information on the two ideas throughout my thesis in accordance with the appearance of corresponding evidence.

The sources I will use are literary works from medieval times, place name evidence and archaeological findings, and based on these I will try to define her importance in and influence on both the mythological as well as the physical sphere. Therefore I shall closely examine her interaction with other powerful mythological beings as well as her possible status as a goddess. In connection to this I will also have a close look on evidence that suggests a ritual worship of the figure Skaði.

I will also try to mark out the way in which Skaði's story spread, as it can be seen to be proof of her importance.

I shall furthermore trace different ideas of her origins that are connected to fairy tales from Middle-Europe and also the Sami-society of the North as well as parallels that link her to Roman and Greek mythology.

It shall become clear that the matter of determining Skaði's character will always stay an ambiguous one in almost every aspect and that, in many cases, an idea can neither be dismissed nor be supported extensively. But as I come to the end of my thesis I shall mark out the ideas which I have made out to be supported best by the current literary and archaeological evidence.

## 2 Sources

### 2.1 Introduction to the sources

In this chapter I will present the most important literary and archaeological sources on my topic and the context in which they have to be interpreted. It has been shown that in dealing with the Viking Age the matter of sources is a complicated issue and it is not possible to work properly with the sources if the background information on them is not taken into account.

Two main kinds of sources on Nordic mythology shed some light on the Viking Age religious beliefs. These are the literary sources on one hand and the archaeological sources on the other. Both kinds of sources prove to have their virtues and drawbacks and we will see that neither one can be worked with properly, without simultaneously considering information received through the other one.

Thus working with both kinds of sources, if possible, gives us a big advantage. On one hand we may be able to assume that the myths and gods described in the literary sources were indeed part of the Viking Age's religious beliefs, because the archaeological evidence, such as figurines and pictorial representations on monuments, which were created throughout the Viking Age, suggest so. On the other hand the literary sources help us to understand the meaning behind such inscriptions and pictures. In my research on the mythical character of Skaði I will therefore look into both literary and archaeological sources which hold reference concerning my topic, linking them together and interpreting them jointly when they have a bearing on my subject.

## 2.2 Literary sources

The literary sources are far more understandable than the archaeological sources. They present complete story arcs and link images together. But there is one major disadvantage when it comes to the indigenous literary works on Nordic mythology and it lies in the uncertainty of their period of creation and transmission.

The oldest written records that can be found in Scandinavia are runic inscriptions that were carved on wood and stone (Larsson 2005, p. 403). These carvings are usually of very short length except for occasional instances where whole stones are covered in runes, for example the Rök stone in Östergötland (Larsson 2005, p. 406). Throughout the Viking Age runic inscriptions remained the only way for the Scandinavian people to record spoken language. Its disadvantage lies in its shortness, as people were only able to record a minimum amount of information in carved runes (Jesch 1991, p. 43).

With the Christianisation came the graphical representation of language to Scandinavia. Around 1050 AD ink and animal skins came to replace the carving of runes and the people started to pin down information by writing it down in manuscripts (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2005, p. 245). In the beginning the people in the monasteries worked with Latin religious works and it was not until the 12<sup>th</sup> century that they started to use their own language to write down stories about their own culture (Jesch 1991, p. 43).

As a consequence of this late use of graphical representation of language, the stories about the Viking Age peoples, about their religious beliefs and about their lifestyles, were not written down during the Viking Age period but rather at least 200 years later (Hultgård 2008, p. 212). This is a crucial fact which we have to keep in mind when working with our literary sources on Nordic mythology. The material on Viking Age beliefs was recorded only after a century-long period of major cultural and social change and by the time people proceeded to write down what they remembered about the Nordic gods and their world, most of the Viking Age beliefs had been replaced thoroughly by Christianity in real life (Hultgård 2008, p.212).



In reference to this, it has been questioned at what time the mythological stories preserved in Eddic literature might have been created. Archaeological findings, such as the Gotland stones, that show parallels to what we are told about the gods in Old-Icelandic literature, suggest that the core of some stories may be quite old (Gunnel 2005, p. 93) . It has furthermore been pointed out that the Scandinavian people of the Viking Age had a strong oral tradition and that they thus might have been able to preserve stories in a poetic format for a very long time as:

we now know that social memory can extend back for up to 300 years and that the same types of oral folk tales can survive in a culture for a much longer period, (Gísli Sigurðsson 2005, p. 286).

However, we have to consider that what we read in the literary sources may have been altered heavily, not only because the people did not remember the material correctly, but rather because they did not understand it any more or wanted to adjust it to their new Christian belief and lifestyle (Hultgård 2008, p. 212, Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 1).

The main literary sources relevant for Nordic mythology in general and thus for my topic are three medieval works: these are the *Poetic Edda*, the *Snorra Edda* and the *Heimskringla*. They all stem from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and *Heimskringla* and *Snorra Edda* are even attributed to the same author: Snorri Sturluson (1179 - 1241). Those three works provide us with a good amount of information on Nordic mythology; they can, however, not be seen as authentic works on heathen beliefs, as we have to consider "at every turn how the differences between the time of writing and the times in which the stories are set may have affected creations of the narrative. (Orri Vésteinsson 2005, p.23)".

The main manuscript of the *Poetic Edda* is estimated to stem from around 1270. In contrast to the *Snorra Edda* and the *Heimskringla* its author is not known. The main manuscript is called *Codex Regius* and it is considered the most important because it preserves the majority of all Eddic poetry<sup>1</sup>. The *Codex Regius* of the *Poetic Edda* contains 11 mythological poems, which centre around cosmology and the adventures of the gods, and 20 heroical lays, that tell us about the lives of mortal

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1 Eight leaves are missing from the second part, that are estimated to have contained parts of *Sigrdrífomál* and the *Brot af Sigurðarqviðu*. This gap in the text is referred to as the *Great Lacuna*.

heroes. In this thesis I shall mainly use the *Codex Regius*<sup>2</sup>.

Skaði appears in the mythological poems *Grímnismál*, *Locasenna* and *For Scírnis* which will therefore be of main interest in my research. In *Grímnismál* stanza 11 Þrymheimr is listed as Þjazi's home and Skaði is said to have inherited the place after Þjazi's death. In *Locasenna* Skaði has a heated argument with Loki in the stanzas 49 to 52 in which she mentions that there cultplaces made in her honour. In the prose ending of *Locasenna* we are informed that Skaði takes revenge on Loki by putting a toxic snake over his head after the gods have bound him. In *For Scírnis* Skaði poses as the (step-) mother of Freyja and Freyr in the prose introduction and the first stanza.

In Snorra Edda Snorri Sturluson quotes some of the Eddic poetry as well as giving quite a lot of extra information. It has been estimated that Snorri Sturluson knew many of the poems that we can find in the *Codex Regius*, maybe from an earlier version of the *Poetic Edda* or another similar work, that contained Eddic poems (Gunnell 2005, pp. 82-3; Jesch 2008, p. 294). In contrast to the *Poetic Edda* the *Snorra Edda* is mainly a prose work and is considered to have been written by Snorri Sturluson, a politically powerful Icelander from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, who, amongst other things, was known for his poetic skills. We are not in possession of the original, instead the *Snorra Edda* has been preserved in a variety of manuscripts of which I will only name the four oldest ones. The *Codex Uppsaliensis* is considered to be the oldest one and stems from around 1300. The *Codex Uppsaliensis* stands out from the others by differing considerably text wise, but most of all because it is the only manuscript that actually names Snorri Sturluson as the author (cf. Seelow 1998, pp. 249-50). The one that is preserved best is from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and is called *Codex Regius* or *Konungsbók*. The third manuscript stems from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and it is referred to as the *Codex Wormanius*. The fourth manuscript is estimated to have been written rather late, around 1600, and is called *Codex Trajectinus* (Seelow 1998, pp. 249-50)<sup>3</sup>. The main purpose of the

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2 I shall refer to the version edited by Neckel and Kuhn in 1962.

3 In this thesis I will quote from the versions of *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* that have been edited by Anthony Faulkes in 1988 and 19998 and that are mainly based on the *Konungsbók* manuscript.

composition of the *Snorra Edda* was to serve as “a didactic work about the art of skaldic poetry” (Simek 1993, p. 295). Herein lies another difference between the *Snorra Edda* and the *Poetic Edda* as the latter one seems to be composed for the purpose of recording the cultural past (Jesch 2005, p. 294).

In this thesis I will elaborate at first on the accounts in *Snorra Edda* that stand in connection with Skadi, and then go on to the *Poetic Edda*. I will do so due to the fact that what we are told about Skaði in the *Poetic Edda*, specifically her revenge on Loki (*Locasenna* prose ending), seems to chronologically happen after the incidents that we are told about in *Snorra Edda*, such as Skaði's demand for compensation and her marriage with Njǫrðr (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2).

Unlike the *Snorra Edda* the *Heimskringla* tells the history of the Norwegian kings. No manuscript of *Heimskringla* actually names Snorri Sturluson as the author. He is nevertheless generally thought to have written this book on the biographies of Norwegian kings. This theory is partly based on the strong similarity between Snorri Sturlusons' *Ólafs saga hins helga in sérstarka*, a work that can clearly be attributed to him, and the version of the *Ólafs saga hins helga in sérstarka* that appears in *Heimskringla* (cf. Seelow 1998, p. 249). For this compilation Snorri Sturluson drew a lot of information together from older accounts on the Norwegian royals, such as *Fagrskinna* and *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sǫgum*. *Fagrskinna*, named this way because of its beautiful outlook, is a manuscript from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century that recounts the history of the Norwegian kings end ends, as *Heimskringla* does, with the battle of Ré in 1177 (Ármann Jakobsson 2005, p. 396). The *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga* is estimated to have been written down in the first half of the 13 century and, just like the *Fagrskinna*, it tells the history of the Norwegian kings (Ármann Jakobsson 2005, p. 396). The *Heimskringla* is preserved in various medieval handwritings. Most popular was the manuscript written in the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *Kringla*, which was destroyed in a fire in Copenhagen in 1728. Fortunately it had been copied before so that this version of *Heimskringla* is still around and it is nowadays the most frequently used version (Bagge 1991, p. 11.)<sup>4</sup>.

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4 For my thesis I will use the *Heimskringla* edition from 1944 which has been edited by Steingrímur Pálsson.

Even though we do not have a vast variety of independent sources when it comes to Nordic mythology, the aforementioned sources are relatively extensive works. The *Poetic Edda*, *Snorra Edda* and also *Heimskringla* provide us with quite a lot of information on the Scandinavian gods. Yet there are still instances where the meaning and idea of the texts seem unclear and incomplete and there is nothing left but to accept that the information we get from our literary sources only shows us the tip of the iceberg that is Nordic mythology.

### 2.3 Archaeological sources

When it comes to the archaeological artefacts and data we are dealing with actual contemporary evidence, meaning that their creation and usage was directly motivated by their times' lifestyle and religious beliefs. The people who made the figurines and picture-stones were most probably people who were brought up with pagan religious beliefs and participated actively in them throughout their whole life.

The archaeological artefacts relevant to my subject are of three types. I will take a closer look at a picture-stone from Gotland which depicts a female being with snakes. Furthermore will I examine one of the pictures found on the rune-stones of the *Hunnestad* monument. I will also have a look at a figurine from Denmark which features a similar motif. These archaeological findings will be dealt with in chapter 10.1.

Unfortunately we face one major disadvantage when it comes to archaeological findings: they rarely offer any explanation of what they depict. We are almost never given any information about the usage or meaning of picture-stones, grave-findings or carvings.<sup>5</sup> Therefore we have to go to our literary sources for help in revealing

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5 A rare exception is for example the *Hunnestad* monument where we have runic inscriptions combined with pictures. But even here the information provided does not really tell us anything about the picture, as it mainly states that the monument has been erected in honour of a dead relative and does not directly refer to the picture seen on it. Runic Inscriptions have been found on other archaeological findings, such as combs and swords, but have seldom proven to be clear or helpful in estimating the artefacts meaning.

some of the possible (religious) motives behind such findings.

### 3 Etymology

One of the most mysterious and therefore heavily debated facts about Skaði is her name. Many ideas have been brought forth where 'Skaði' could have derived from and what it could have meant with one of the most interesting theories being that the *jötunn*'s name is the eponym of Scandinavia (Helle 2008, p. 1). However, in the end this matter has stayed rather a mystery as the linguistic evidence to support the different theories remains sparse and ambiguous. Nevertheless I shall give an overview over the different theories in the upcoming chapter. I will thereby clarify the pros and cons that either support or contradict the ideas established by scholars. It shall become obvious that the different theories can neither be fully dismissed nor taken for a fact due to the lack of evidence in this area.

#### 3.1 Meaning and interpretation

The name 'Skaði' equals the noun 'skaði' that is found quite frequently in the Old-Icelandic word pool. As such, a possible translation of the name 'skaði' is "harm" (f.ex. Zoëga 2004, p. 366; Davidson 1993, p. 63; Cleasby & Vigfusson 1874, p. 536). In Eddic literature names associated to the topics of battle, destruction and harm are not seldom and there are two groups of mythological beings in particular that are shown to have a strong connection to these kind of names. Those two groups are the female *jötnar* and the *valkyrjur*.

The meaning of the names of the female *jötnar* often refer to nature or sound, as for example Mjöll which can be translated as "snow" (Motz 1981, p. 501) or Gjálp, the "roaring one" (Simek 1993, p. 111)<sup>6</sup>. Others refer to animals and bodily features (Motz 1981, p. 502). In her article *Giantesses and their names* Lotte Motz lists another group of names that, she argues, represent the negative features of the

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6 Other translations are "trockener Neuschnee" (deVries 1962, p. 390) and "powder snow" (Simek 1993, p. 219) for Mjöll, "brausen" (deVries, p. 170) and "screamer" (Lindow 2001, p. 144) for Gjálp.

*jǫtnar* (Motz 1981, p. 498). This is where we find Skaði whose name is translated as 'harm' and who Motz puts into the category "aggressiveness" (Motz 1981, p. 503). Skaði is not alone in this category. A number of figures are seen by Motz to portray the vicious and harmful aspect of the female *jǫtnar*, such as for example Greip, meaning "grip" (Lindow 2001, p. viii), and Angrboða, "the one who brings grief" (Simek 1993, p. 16)<sup>7</sup>.

There is another group of mythological beings whose names closely connect to battle and destruction: the *valkyrjur*, the 'choosers of the slain'. The *valkyrjur* are females of Norse mythology that have been given the task to collect the dead that fall in battle in order to bring them to Óðinn's home Valhøll (Simek 1993, p. 349). The *valkyrjur* often bear, "mostly expressive names, of which the majority point to the warlike function," (Simek 1993, p. 349). *Grímnismál* gives an impressive list on *valkyrjur* in stanza 36. Many names refer to battles and weapons, such as Randgríðr, "the shield-destroyer" (Simek 1993, p. 261) and Skeggöld, "battle-ax" (Simek 1993, p. 288), or Hlökk, "noise, battle" (Simek 1993, p. 153), and Guðr, "battle" (Simek 1993, p. 125).

With the female *jǫtnar* and the *valkyrjur* there are a lot of figures around that bear names connected to harm and destruction. But, what is confusing nevertheless is, that the meaning of Skaði's name does not really fit the personality of the figure Skaði. Even though Skaði is a powerful being that rules over Þrymheimr (*Grímnismál* st. 11), she is nowhere described as being exceedingly harmful. In fact the only time that she actually harms somebody is when she places the toxic snake over Loki's head (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 49). Considering that Loki took the lead in killing her father (*Locasenna* st. 50) and also in comparison to other harmful scenarios figures of Norse mythology have taken part in, as for example the killing of Gullveig in *Völuspá* (*Völuspá* st. 21), this act of revenge does not really seem to justify interpreting her name as 'harm'.

In contrast, Angrboða's name harmonizes well with her actions. The *jǫtunn*- wife of Loki is mainly known for giving birth to monstrous offspring: the wolf Fenrir, the

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7 Other translations are "die Kummer verkündende" (deVries 1962, p. 47), „she who offers sorrow“ (Lindow 2001, p. V).

Midgardserpent Jormungandr and the death-goddess Hel (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 27). These three characters are vicious antagonists of the gods and are described as very harmful (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 27) so that the gods desperately try to get them under control<sup>8</sup>. Considering the overall negative nature of her offspring, Angrboða's name seems far more justifiable when it comes to its meaning than Skaði's, as Angrboða's offspring actually harm the gods and bring them grief.

It should also be remembered that Jötunheimr and its inhabitants do not at all take an exclusively hostile or violent stand against the gods (Mozt 1981, p. 498). The *jötnar* share a far more complex relationship with the gods which also involves positive interactions with the gods such as helping the gods, marrying them or giving birth to their children.<sup>9</sup> Skaði seems to represent the positive features of the relationship between the gods and the *jötnar* rather than the negative ones. Her favourable character and her recognition among the gods is supported in the *Poetic Edda*. Here Skaði is called “scír bruðr góða” (*Grímnismál* st. 11), the ‘shining bride of the gods’. The expression puts emphasis on her close connection to the gods as she is considered ‘their bride’ and it illustrates an admiration for Skaði who is described as being ‘shining’. Skaði is also more than willing to marry Baldr and later agrees to a marriage with Njörðr (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2) and also allies herself with Óðinn in *Heimskringla* (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10). Skaði is, at least at times, considered a more than pleasant ally whose relationship to the gods is characterized rather by matrimonial linkings than by hostile conflicts.

Some scholars support the idea that the name Skaði derives from the Gothic “skadus” meaning “shadow” (Orel 2003, p. 331; Davidson 1993, p. 63; Steinsland 2005, p. 145). In this context it has been suggested that Skaði was originally a goddess of darkness (Turville-Petre 1964, p. 164). In his article *Jätten Thjazi och det samiska elementet i nordisk mytologi* from 2006, Kusmenko supports the idea that Skaði was linked to darkness. He suggests that Skaði and the god Ullr, who share a

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8 This can be seen for example upon the binding of Fenrir (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 25) or upon the ‘disposal’ of the midgardserpent (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 27).

9 In *For Scírnis* Gerðr marries Freyr (albeit against her will) (*For Scírnis* st.38); in *Gylfaginning* we learn that Óðinn has the son Þór with the female *jötunn* Jörð (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 13); in *Skáldskaparmál* the female *jötunn* helps Þór to defeat Geirrðr. (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 25)



variety of features with each other<sup>10</sup>, were seen as a unity consisting of the two opposing elements 'darkness' and 'light':

Medan Ulls etymologi härledes från "ljus", förknipper man Skades etymologi med ordet för "skugga" (jfr got. *skadus*, fsax. *skado*, fht. *scato*, ty. *Schatten*, eng. *shadow* "skugga", sv. dial. *skadda* "dimma"). På detta sätt bildar Skade och Ull ett semantiskt par "ljus och skugga" (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21).

What stands in decisive contrast to this explanation of her name is the aforementioned lines in the *Poetic Edda* that explicitly link Skaði to light (*Grímnismál* st.11). It seems conflicting that one would have referred to Skaði as a figure of light if he would have been aware of her main obligation as a goddess of darkness. But this meaning of Skaði's name could just as well have become lost so that the poet who created the line on Skaði as the "scír bruðr góða" (*Grímnismál* st.11), unknowingly chose an adjective that contradicted the meaning of her name.

On the whole interpreting her name as 'darkness' seems to fit the figure Skaði better than interpreting her name as 'harm'. In the Eddic literature we are informed that Skaði's home Þrymheimr lies in the mountains in the North<sup>11</sup>. The North of the Scandinavian peninsula is known for its long period of darkness during winter. Also the idea of Ullr and Skaði posing as the two opposing components of darkness and light that are eventually inherently linked to each other seems credible.

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10 Ullr and Skaði share a similar title: Skaði is called the *ǫndurdís* (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p.24) and Ullr is referred to as the *ǫndurás* (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p.19). They furthermore practice the same activities such as skiing and hunting with the bow (Snorri Sturluson 1988, pp. 24-26). I will elaborate more intensively on this in chapter 5.1.4.

11 In *Skáldskaparmál* we learn that Þjazi has to fly north to get to his home Þrymheimr (Snorri Sturluson 1998, pp. 1-2). After Þjazi's death Þrymheimr becomes Skaði's home (*Grímnismál* st.11)

### 3.2 Eponym of Scandinavia

It is mainly the account of Pliny the Elder from AD 79, *Naturalis historia*, that has given room to the speculation if Skaði could be the eponym of Scandinavia. Of superior importance is the fact that in this account, which is the first and thereby oldest account to mention a place called Scandinavia, the author initially refers to it as “Scadinavia/Scatinavia” (*Naturalis historia* book IV paragraph 96, , book VIII paragraph 39). As a consequence scholars have argued that there originally must have been a Germanic form “\*scaðin – aujo” (Helle 2008, p. 1) or “*Scadin-avia*” (Dumézil 1973, p. 35) that would have translated as “the dangerous island” (Helle 2008, p.1) or “island of the goddess Skaði” (Dumézil 1973, p. 35), with the first syllables ‘scaðin’ being a reconstructed Germanic form of ‘skaði’. Surprisingly the idea of ‘Skaði’s Island’ is also found in the earliest recorded Sami yoik songs from the middle of the 19th century where the term is used to refer not only to the region of Scandinavia but to the whole terrestrial globe (Svennung 1963, pp. 54-5). In reference to these songs one would tend to consider the term and the name ‘Skaði’ to potentially have its origins in the Sami language. It has been shown, however, that the initial ‘sk’ is not of Sami origin but must have come from the Germanic languages:

On the basis of Scandinavian loanwords it can be inferred that both sk- and -f- were adopted in the west during the early separate development of the Saami languages, but never spread to Kola Saami. These areal features thus emerged in a phase when Proto-Saami began to diverge into dialects anticipating the modern Saami languages (Aikio 2004, p. 14).

It can thus be concluded, that even though the name has later been included into Sami mythology, it did not originate from there. Nevertheless it does support the idea that Scandinavia may have been understood as ‘the island of Skaði’ at one point in time.

Dumézil surmises that the people stopped understanding the true content of the word at a certain point and that it eventually came to serve as a name for the Skaði. Dumézil argues that Scandinavia was not named after the mythological figure but rather that Skaði had been named after Scandinavia (Dumézil 1973, p. 35). He argues that the first syllable might have had a more positive meaning than ‘harm’.

I do not believe that *Scadin-avia* is etymologically “the Island of the goddess Skaði”: the first term of the word must have, or have had, a more positive content, alluding to “darkness” or something else that we cannot be sure of. I believe that the name of the goddess Skaði was abstracted from the geographical name, which was no longer fully understood, (Dumézil 1973, p. 35)

What has to be kept in mind is that the aforementioned *Naturalis historia* is the only source where the term ‘Scatinavia/Scadinivia’ can be found. In all other accounts an ‘n’ has been added before the ‘d’ in the first syllable. As a consequence the idea of a particular linguistic connection between the name ‘Skaði’ and the term ‘Scandinavia’ is rendered problematic, or as de Vries puts it in his *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*: “Die Etymologie ist zweifelhaft” (de Vries, 1962, p. 482).

#### 4 Place-name evidence

Many of the names of Northern gods and goddesses can be found in place-names: such as for example Ullr in 'Ullevi' and 'Ulleraker' (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21) or Þórr in 'Thorsåker' and 'Thorshof' (Simek 1993, p. 321). It has been suggested that these place-names are evidence for the ritual worship of pagan Scandinavian deities during the Viking Age (Hultgård 2008, pp. 212-213). In these place-names the combination of the names of gods with terms such as *akr*, *vé*, *vangr*, which have all been estimated to often describe places of ritual worship (Hultgård 2008, p. 217), implies indeed, that those places might have had a venerating function.

In the *Poetic Edda* Skaði seems to be connected to ritual worship. In *Locasenna* when Loki reveals himself to be the killer of her father, Skaði threatens him that no good will ever come to him from her shrines and fields:

Veiztu, ef fyrstr oc øfstr vartu at fjörlagi,  
þá er ér á þjaza þrifoð:  
frá mínom véom oc vöngom scola  
þér æ kǫld ráð koma.  
(*Locasenna* st. 51)

The terms 'vé' and 'vangr' are translated as "temple" (de Vries 1962, p. 648) and "field" (de Vries 1962, p. 643) and refer to places of ritual worship (de Vries 1962, pp. 643; 648). In her article *Giants as Recipients of Cult in the Viking Age* from 1968, Gro Steinsland points out that the deities who are in charge of a home, as for example Freyja who is in charge of Folkvangr (*Grímnismál* st. 14) or Óðinn who is in charge of Valhǫll (*Grímnismál*, st. 8-9) usually also have a "physical shrine" (Steinsland 1986, p. 213) as a counterpart to their mythical dwelling. As a consequence, Skaði, who is declared the owner of Þrymheimr is supposed to have had places of worship established in the physical world, too. Indeed, place-names have been found in mainland Scandinavia that suggest a function as ritual cult-places of the mythological figure Skaði:

there is an obvious reference to cult places connected to Skaði, which could find substantiation in the various Swedish, less frequently Norwegian, place-names which might be derived from Skaði: Skedevi, Skedvi, Skea and place-names based on Ska- and Skada-; (Simek 1993, p. 287).

Hilda Ellis Davidson agrees with the idea of a ritual worship of Skaði. She connects

Skaði to the Sami and suggests that the centre of worship could therefore have been Halogaland, where Sami and Vikings lived together during the Viking age.

It seems possible that her cult flourished in Halogaland, since she shows characteristics of the Saami, who were renowned for skiing, shooting with the bow and hunting, her separation from Njörd might point a split between her cult and that of the Vanir in this region, where Scandinavians and Saami were in close contact (Davidson 1993, pp. 61-2).

Kusmenko as well supports the idea that the names 'Skadevi', 'Skädharg' and 'Skädví' are teophoric place-names alluding to places where Skaði was worshipped. Here again he refers to the god Ullr, whom he sees as Skaði's counter-pole and who is seen as being the god to which the teophoric place-names 'Ullevi' and 'Ulleraker' are attributed (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21). He argues that the toponymics connected to Skaði and Ullr are spread in a similar area: "Att dessa två gudar bildade ett par vittnar också identisk spridning av teofora ortnam med Skade och Ull [...], som förekommer i Mellansverige och i Östnorge men inte i Danmark" (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21).

Taking the literary hint into account as well as Skaði's connection to Ullr it definately seems possible that the place-names 'Skadevi' and 'Skädví' are indeed connected to Skaði and refer to cult-places that were dedicated to her. Neverthelss has the idea of a 'venerated' Skaði always been a conflicting topic as I will show in my chapter 10.

## 5 Skaði in *Snorra Edda*

### 5.1 Skaði's gender-ambiguity

En Skaði, dóttir Þjaza jötuns, tók hjálm ok brynju ok ǫll hervápn ok ferr til Ásgarðs at hefna fǫður síns. (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2)

Skaði's entrance into the story is unusual as well as unexpected to say the least. Her father Þjazi has just been killed by the gods, after he abducted Iðunn. Upon Iðunn's rescue Loki lures Þjazi into Ásgarðr where he is murdered by the gods. (Snorri Sturluson 1998, pp. 1-2). Then Skaði shows up in order to claim retribution for her murdered father.

The demand for compensation is a logical consequence to the killing of Þjazi<sup>12</sup>, but having Þjazi's 'daughter' approach the gods in order to get compensation is a surprising development, as what Skaði undertakes, "was normally regarded as a masculine role, to seek either blood vengeance or monetary compensation from the enemy for a killing within the family" (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 6).

Literary sources from the early Middle Ages strongly support the fact that legal actions, such as the demand for compensation for a killed family member, were a man's duty. Those literary sources are most notably the *Grágás*, a record of laws written in the Old-Icelandic language, and the Old-Icelandic family sagas.

Unfortunately these works, just as the literary accounts on pagan mythology, were written down more than 200 years after the Christianization of Iceland and not during the Viking Age (Orri Vésteinsson 2005, p. 9). Due to this we have to consider that these works do not accurately reflect actual life and law in Viking times, but probably have been altered throughout the period of social and religious change in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century (Orri Vésteinsson 2005, p. 9). However, the ideas on retribution and the way they are illustrated in these works shall not be ignored as they still seem to link to the ideas of pre-Christian times, as I will show in the upcoming paragraphs.

According to *Grágás* the traditional role-allocation of the Icelandic society

12 In *Grágás* we encounter two large chapters on the 'Treatment of Homicide' and on 'the Wergild Ring List' (Laws of early Iceland 1980, p.139-188). Both chapters suggest that the act of killing a man could not remain untreaded.

demanded the male relatives to take care of everything connected to the compensation for a dead family member, no matter if the task was to demand, receive or hand out retribution .

Enn mesta bavg skal taka faðir. oc sonr. oc broðir ens vegna mann oc taka af föður oc søne. oc broðor veganda. (*Grágás* 1852, p. 195)

Saga-literature supports this fact by showing that it was the males obligation to handle the relations between families. In case problems arose the male heads of the parties would get together to work out a solution, even though the ruckus was more often than not caused by female family members. Classical examples for this arrangement can be found in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, where the dispute between Hallgerðr and Bergþóra develops into a forth and back killing-manouver, in which their subordinates kill each other on the women's command, while their husbands, Gunnar and Njáll are constantly forced to get together to discuss the retribution that must be performed for the homicide (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, pp. 90-105).

The *Grágás*, however, does suggest that daughters could take over the male-bound duty, but this was supposed to be an exception and restricted to the cases in which the father had no male offspring.

Su er oc kona ein er bæðe skal bavgge bœta oc bavg taka ef hon er einberne eN su kona heitir bavgrygr. En hon er dottir ens davða enda se eigi scapþiGiande til hofuð bavg en bœtendr life þa skal hon taka þrimerking sem sonr. Ef hon toc eigi full sætte at vigs bótom til þess er hon er gipt. (*Grágás* 1852, pp. 200-1)

The conditions outlined in this paragraph that allow a woman to take over a man's role in the retribution business fit with the *Snorra Edda's* description of Skaði's situation. Skaði seems to be Þjazi's only offspring as no other family members are mentioned (Clover 1986, p.40). Furthermore is she not married either, so there is no male that could take over her duty of demanding retribution:

Perhaps she is to be thought of as an only child as *Grímnismál* 11 impleis, in which case her role is similar to that of those exceptional women in Old Icelandic law who had no brothers or other suitable male kin and so took part in vengeance payments (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 6).

The way in which Skaði takes over the task of avenging her father is even more particular. Upon venturing to the gods' home Skaði dresses in armour and takes up weapons. Even if females were allowed in special cases to take over the duty of demanding retribution (*Grágás* 1852, pp. 200-1), having them dress up in armour

was surely considered an oddity in Viking society. That cross-dressing in fact was not seen as a positive feature is supported by saga-literature. The *Laxdæla saga* tells us that a woman was allowed to divorce from her husband in case he was wearing effeminate clothing:

Hér kan ek gott ráð til. Gerðu honum skyrtu ok brautgangs höfuðsmátt ok seg skilit við hann fyrir þessa sakar. (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, p. 94)

Cross-dressing is found in other accounts of Eddic literature and here as well it is not deemed a positive trait. In the poem *Prymskviða* Þórr is forced to dress up as a woman and stresses how harmful this act could be regarding his reputation, saying: "'Mic muno æsir / argan kalla, / ef ec bindaz læt /brúðar líni." (*Prymskviða* st. 13).

There is also a number of female beings throughout medieval Icelandic literature that cross-dress and/or indulge in male activity. Óðinn's *valkyrjur* and the so called maiden warriors – young women that put on mail and "enroll in the martial life" (Clover 1986, p.36) – are two groups that are famous for their gender-ambiguous actions. Furthermore, cultural studies hint at the different role-allocations in Sami societies. Skaði's gender-ambiguous actions have also been interpreted as a strong connection towards her male counterpart Ullr (Kusmenko 2006, p. 20). In the following chapters I shall have a look at these figures and ideas and see how well Skaði connects with them, as her cross-dressing may have been more than a mere literary device and possibly hints at her origins.

### 5.1.1 *Valkyrjur*

As I have already pointed out in chapter 3.1., the mythological figure Skaði possibly shares a connection with the *valkyrjur* when it comes to the meaning of their names, which refer to battle and destruction. With 'harm' as a possible translation for 'skaði' the name would fit well into the concept of *valkyrjur*-names. As we approach the subject of cross-dressing and male activities practised by females we will see that the names are not the only possible connection that links Skaði to the *valkyrjur*.



The *valkyrjur* are a part of Nordic mythology and are represented in Eddic poetry, the *Snorra Edda* as well as in medieval Old-Icelandic saga-literature. The term ‘*valkyrja*’ is nowadays commonly translated as “chooser of the slain” (Jesch 1996, p. 139) and is thought to refer to their task as Óðinn's servants who are in charge of picking up the heroically fallen warriors (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 30) as well as serving them drinks in Valhøll (*Grímnismál* st. 36).

Most importantly *valkyrjur*, just like Skaði, dress up in male clothing. In *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri*, a poem on the hero Helgi from the *Poetic Edda*, we are told how the hero Helgi meets the *valkyrjur* as they descend onto a battlefield covered with bodies. Upon this meeting the *valkyrjur* are described as dressed in mail and equipped with weapons.

Þá brá líóma af Logafjöllom  
enn af þeim líómom leiptrir qvómo  
þá var und hiálmom á Himinvanga  
Brynior vóro þeira bloði stocnar  
Enn af geirom geislar stóðo.  
(*Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* st. 15)

But they *valkyrjur* not only choose the fallen warriors but furthermore seem to have been involved in the battle as advising maybe even deciding figures:

Þessar heita valkyrjur. Þær sendir Óðinn til hverrar orrostu. Þær kjósa feigð á menn ok ráða sigri. (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 30)

The involvement in battle is considered to have been an (entirely) male activity in the physical Viking society, as a consequence Judith Jesch draws the conclusion in her book that “the valkyries' military functions may not have reflected anything in the lives of human women” (Jesch 1996, p. 127). Once more this can be seen to support how gender-ambiguous the actions of the *valkyrjur* were.

A feature in which Skaði and the *valkyrjur* are not compatible is their means of transport. The *valkyrjur* are depicted to favour horse-back riding and literary evidence presents them as roaming the battlefields on the back of their horses in order to fulfil their duty as the ‘choosers of the slain’.

Prennar níundir meya, þó reið ein fyrir,  
hvít und hjálmi mæ;   
marir hristuz, stóð af mǫnom þeira  
(*Helgaqviða Higrvarðzsonar* st.28).

In *Völundarqviða* the *valkyrjur* are presented as swan-maidens who have the ability to fly. "Þar vóro hiá þeim áltarhamir þeira. Þat vóro valkyrior. [...]Þá flugo þærat vitia víga oc kvómo eigi aptr" (*Völundarqviða* prose introduction).

In contrast to this, Skaði herself is called the "øndurdis" (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24), the 'ski-goddess'. This illustrates that not only does Skaði use other means of transport than the *valkyrjur* but also that she is defined over this usage of skis as the ski-goddess. It also implies a different locality. Where the swan-maidens are connected to swans and thereby to the animals' usual habitat, coasts and lakes (*Völundarqviða* prose introduction)<sup>13</sup>, Skaði is connected to the cold and snowy mountains in the north, where according to *Snorra Edda*, her home Þrymheimr is located (Snorri Sturluson 1998, pp. 1-2). For Skaði as well as for the *valkyrjur* the means of transport pose as an important factor in their identification and therefore this can be seen as a decisive difference between these figures of Nordic mythology.

Another aspect that sets Skaði apart from the *valkyrjur* is the difference in social status. The *valkyrjur* of Norse mythology are repeatedly referred to as serving figures. They serve Óðinn in collecting the dead and pour out drinks for the Einherjar in Valhøll.

Enn eru þær aðrar er þjóna skulu i Valhøll, bera drykkju ok gæta bordðbúnaðar ok ǫlgagna.  
(Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 30)

In contrast to the serving *valkyrjur*, Skaði is a ruler. She is nowhere reported to take up a serving action. Instead *Grímnismál* tells us that Skaði becomes the ruler of Þrymheimr after her father's death:

Þrymheimr heitir inn sétti, er Þiazi bió,  
sá inn ámatki iǫtunn;  
enn nú Skaði byggvir, scír brúðr goða  
fornar tóptir fǫður.  
(*Grímnismál* st. 11)

At Ægir's feast she is reported to be dining with the Gods, not serving them during the dinner (*Locasenna* prose introduction).

Even though Skaði shows parallels to the *valkyrjur* when it comes to cross-dressing, there are decisive differences between Skaði and the 'choosers of the slain', such as their means of transportation and their status in the mythological hierarchy, that

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13 Interesting is that Skaði in *Snorra Edda* laments over the noisy swans that she encounters while staying at Njǫrðr's coastal place (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24)

make a strong original relation between these figures of Nordic mythology seem unlikely.

### 5.1.2 Skaði and Hervör, the maiden warrior

In medieval Old-Icelandic literature we occasionally come upon another group of female beings that put on armour and take up weapons. Scholars refer to these women as “warrior women” (Jesch 1996, p. 179) or “maiden warriors” (Clover 1986, p. 36). Maiden warriors share many similarities with the *valkyrjur* such as the aforementioned masculine way of clothing. The parallels between maiden warriors and the *valkyrjur* are often so strong that the characteristic outlines of the two groups merge and the identification of a figure as a *valkyrja* ‘or’ a maiden warrior becomes impossible (Jesch 1996, p. 180).

In the *fornaldarsögur* we find a saga heroine in a story very similar to Skaði's. This is the shield maiden Hervör in *Hervara saga ok Heiðreks*. Just like Skaði she is forced into a male role after the death of her father due to being his only male offspring. In the process she dons armour and learns how to fight.

Dóttir Bjarmars var með barni; þat var mæð einkar fōgr. Sú var vatni ausin ok nafn gefit ok kōlluð Hervör. Hún fæddist upp með jarli ok var sterk sem karlar, ok þegar hún mátti sér nokkut, tamdist hún meir við skot ok skjöld ok sverð en við sauma eða borða ( *Hervara saga ok Heiðreks* 1956, pp. 10-11).

But as the story progresses Hervör's career as a maiden warrior comes to a sudden end. In chapter five Hervör becomes tired of her adventures and subsequently proceeds to take on the new role of a good housewife and become married.

Síðan var Hervör langa stund í hernaði ok varð mjök sigrsæl. Ok er henni leiddist þat, fór hún heim til jarls, móðurfōður síns; fór hún þá fram sem aðrar meyjar, at vandist við borða ok hannyrðir. Þetta spyrr Hōfundr, sonr Guðmundar, ok ferr hann ok biðr Hervarar ok fær ok flytr heim ( *Hervara saga ok Heiðreks* 1956, p. 23).

The quote implies that a maiden warrior will only take on the role of a male heir as long as there is no spouse or son available to take care of the male affairs (Clover 1986, p. 40).

This stands in strong contrast to the course of events in Skaði's tale. Skaði neither gives up her rule over Þrymheimr nor does she become Njörðr's obedient wife after the marriage. On the contrary, Skaði proceeds to alienate Njörðr from his home by getting him to live in the mountains with her:

Skaði vill hafa bústað þann er átt hafði faðir hennar – þat er á fjöllum nokkvorum þar sem heitir Þrymheimr – en Njörðr vill vera nær sæ. Þau sættusk á þat at þau skyldu vera nú nær í Þymheimi, en þá aðrar nú at Nóatún. (Snorri Sturluson 1988, pp. 23-4)

Eventually she even decides to split from her husband as she is said to be leaving Njörðr's place in order to be able to live in the mountains: “Þá fór Skaði upp á fjallit ok bygði í Þrymheimi” (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24). This suggests that she has kept a certain independence upon her marriage, implying that the power which comes with being the ruler over Þrymheimr (*Grímnismál* st. 11) has not become Njörðr's power but has stayed with Skaði.

Another difference is that Skaði does not, unlike the maiden warriors, engage in fighting. Even though *Skáldskaparmál* reports her as wearing armour and weapons (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2) there is no account on her actually taking part in a battle. In contrast to this Hervör is presented with an immense fighting and killing-spirit. “Hún gerði ok optar illt en gott, ok er henni var þat bannat, hljóp hún á skóga ok drap menn til fjár sér.” (*Hervara saga ok Heiðreks* 1956, p. 11).

One of the main points in which Hervör differs from Skaði is her independence from men, which seems to be a temporary thing in Hervör's case as she later, upon her marriage, retires as a warrior maiden and lets her husband take care of social and political matters (*Hervara saga ok Heiðreks* 1956, p. 23). In contrast to this Skaði does not give up her independence upon her matrimonial alliance with Njörðr but in the end proceeds to separate from him, clearly suggesting that the power she holds as the ruler over Þrymheimr has not gone over to Njörðr. As a consequence a close relation of Skaði to the figures of the warrior maidens does not seem likely either.

### 5.1.3 Sami women

Skaði position as *þundurdís* (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24), a female being that is strongly connected to skiing, is a feature that links her to the Sami people. This means of transport is not only a strong component of the mythological figure Skaði but was also an important part of Sami life during the Viking Age, and hunting with the bow as well as skiing are considered “typiska samiske sysselsättningar” (Kusmenko 2006, p. 20). Prehistoric findings of skis in the area of North Scandinavia support the fact that skiing had been an integral part of Sami society for a very long time (cf. Zachrisson 2008, p. 35).

In Viking times the women's duties seem to have been on the ‘inside’, on the farm, rather than outside (Jesch 1991, p. 22). Most of the working tools found in the graves of Viking women support this idea:

grave goods do indicate the tasks most commonly associated with women. Not unexpectedly, these are the domestic indoor tasks (Jesch 1991, p. 22).

In Sami society the gender rules had been outlined differently. Sami women, just like their husbands, were allowed to indulge in outdoor activities (Zachrisson 2008, p. 36). The hunting on skis, as it is practised by Skaði, was therefore not seen as male activity in the Sami society: “The goddess Skaði skis and hunts with bow and arrows, like a Sámi woman,” (Zachrisson 2008, p. 36).

To the vikings this action might have seemed gender-ambiguous. In respect to this Else Mundal suggests that the vikings were likely to imagine a Sami woman to turn up in male clothing to avenge her father, as the Sami women already practised activities that were thought of as male activities in Viking societies.

I find it very likely that Saami female gender roles served as a model for the skiing and hunting Skaði, and since these activities in Old Norse society were seen as typically male, it is very logical – also when we leave Skaði’s wish to avenge her father’s death out of account – that she should arrive in Ásgarðr with the most masculine manner Old Norse female gender role would allow, as a *skjöldmær* and as a *baugrýgr*. (Mundal 2000, p.353)

Skaði is further connected to the Sami through her father Þjazi. In his work Jurij Kusmenko has presented strong evidence that the *þotunn* Þjazi is related to the Sami god Tjaetsiolmai. The similarity in the name is obvious and in contrast to many other attempts to find a suitable etymology for the name ‘Þjazi’, Kusmenko points out that a derivation from ‘tjaetsi’, which is translated as ‘water’, “åtminstone

formellt vållar inga svårigheter” (Kusmenko 2006, p. 13). But Skaði's father is not the only family member that connects her to the Sami. In *Heimskringla* Skaði is reported to have had enough of Njörðr and to later marry Óðinn (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10). Skaði also has various offspring by Óðinn, most notably the son Sæmingr (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10). Here again it is a name that links Skaði to the Sami. Kusmenko points out that the name Sæmingr could be a derivation from the Sami term ‘sami’. This seems a credible possibility as “ingenting hindrar oss att direkt förbinda Sæming med *sami/sapmi* särskilt om vi tar hänsyn till att samernas självbenämning var bekant i Norden.” (Kusmenko 2006, p. 20).

Despite the fact that the Sami women in contrast to Skaði are not known to actually have dressed in armor, Skaði links very strongly to the Sami. Her means of transport, the skis, connect her to the Sami and so do her relatives: her father seems to be connected to a Sami god with a similar name and her son's name seems to be link to the Sami, too. Skaði definitely relates more strongly to the Sami women than to the maiden warriors and the *valkyrjur*.

#### 5.1.4 Skaði and Ullr

A curiosity connected to Skaði's name is the fact that it inflects, in accordance with the Old-Icelandic noun ‘skaði’ as a masculine. Therefore it has been speculated if she had originally been a male figure, namely the god Ullr (cf. Davidson 1993, p. 61). Indeed does Skaði show parallels to the god Ullr. Both of them are given titles that link them to skiing. *Gylfaginning* lists Skaði as the *ǫndurdís* (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24) while Ullr is declared the “ǫndur-Ás” (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 19). Furthermore do they share the hobby of hunting with a bow with each other (Snorri Sturluson 1988, pp. 24 -6).

The idea is questionable nevertheless. Despite the fact that Ullr and Skaði share similar features there is no reason to believe that they must have been one and the

same deity originally. It is not uncommon to have a female and a male figure sharing their most important features and thereby posing as a male and a female representation of a certain mythological aspect. This arrangement is common in the mythological world of the Vikings and does not necessarily mean that the two figures were originally one (Philippson 1936, p. 316). Freyja and Freyr are the most popular example for this as they do not only share a similarity in name but are also known for exhibiting similar features, such as their connection to fertility and boars (Petre-Turville 1964, p. 176). Still they are not perceived as having been a single god originally, but rather a "divine pair" (Petre-Turville 1964, p. 172). Other examples, where it seems as though a female and male component are in charge of the same mythological aspect are Njǫrðr and Nerthus (Petre-Turville 1964, p. 172) and also Rán and her husband Ægir (Simek 1993, p. 260; Steinsland 2005, p. 254).

Ullr and Skaði further exhibit traits that suggest that they had been seen as two parts of one mythological aspect rather than one and the same deity. Skaði's name, as has been shown, could possibly be derived from the Gothic 'skadus', meaning 'shadow'. In connection to this Ullr could be derived from "\*uel-" (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21) what can be translated as 'shining'. These names, which possibly translate as 'light' and 'darkness' strongly suggest that Skaði and Ullr were seen as a "semantiskt par" (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21).

Furthermore are not all of Skaði's actions unmistakably masculine. As I have shown in the previous chapter skiing and hunting with a bow may have posed as masculine activities in the Viking society but there was certainly no gender limit to these activities in the Sami society (Zachrisson 2008, p. 36). In the Sami society women, just like men, contributed to the feeding of the family by hunting on skis (cf. Mundal 2000, p.353).

Nevertheless, there seems to be a very strong relation between the two mythological figures Skaði and Ullr. Their connection over the hunting-and skiing-element cannot be dismissed as their 'titles' tell us that both figures are defined by these actions. A rather possible idea is that they posed as a divine pair, similar to Freyja and Freyr. The possibility that they were one and the same deity based on Skaði's (arguably) masculine behaviour, however, seems unlikely.

## 5.2 Skaði's retribution

### 5.2.1 Choosing a husband

En Æsir buðu henni sætt ok yfirbætr, ok hit fyrsta at hon skal kjósa sér mann af Ásum ok kjósa af fótum ok sjá ekki fleira af. Þá sá hon eins manns fœtr forkunnar fagra og mælir: “Þenna kýss ek, fátt mun ljótt á Baldri.”  
En þat var Njörðr ór Nóatunum. (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2)

Upon her arrival in Ásgarðr the gods grant Skaði a compensation for her murdered father. This compensation consists of three parts. The first part involves the choosing of a husband. We have to remember that in Viking times marriage probably was first and foremost a matter of politics (cf. Jesch 1991, p. 53). Matrimony was an integral part of the ongoing power-struggle and the binding via marriage could enlarge a parties predominance or better it's position of power (Andersson and Miller 1989, p. 24). In hindsight to this the act of choosing a husband has to be understood as an option for Skaði to strengthen her rule and upgrade her reputation.

Her initial choice of a husband supports the idea of the political importance behind the act. Skaði is originally opting for Baldr as her future husband. Baldr, we are told earlier on in Snorri's account, is the most popular and well-loved among the gods: “Annar son Óðins er Baldr, ok er frá honum gott at segja. Hann er beztr ok hann lofar allir.” (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 23). Skaði, who rules over the cold realm of Þrymheimr, which is located in Jötunheimr, would have definitely profited from an matrimonial alliance with the *ás* Baldr, who is high in rank and popular, and, as the only legitimate son Óðinn has had with Frigg, probably the next one in line to become the ruler over the gods (Clunies- Ross 1989 p. 6). What is more, we are also told in *Völuspá* that Baldr is one of the few gods to come back after Ragnarøk (Völuspá st. 62).

Skaði's action of trying to enter into a marriage with a god does not pose as an



exception in the world of Nordic mythology. Throughout Eddic literature we are confronted with a variety of suitors from Jötunheimr, that desire to make goddesses their spouses. The *jötunn* builder who offers the gods to build a wall around their home wants the goddess Freyja as a payment (Snorri Sturluson 1988, pp. 34-5), as does the *jötunn* Þrymr (*Þrymskviða* st. 8), and we should also not forget about Skaði's father who demands Iðunn in exchange for Loki's freedom (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 1).

Among these suitors from Jötunheimr Skaði is the only female one. Once more it becomes apparent how gender-ambiguous her position as the only offspring is. As a consequence it does not come as much of a surprise that she also takes over the male role in this part of the story and becomes the suitor (Lindow 1992, p. 131). Erroneously in the end she is the only individual from Jötunheimr that succeeds in engaging in a marriage with a god (Lindow 1992, p. 131).

But it is a pyrrhic victory, as Skaði mistakenly picks Njörðr instead of Baldr. Njörðr is not only of lower rank than Baldr (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 23) but is also a hostage in the realms of the *æsir*: "Eigi er Njörðr Ása ættar. Hann var upp fœddr í Vanaheimum, en Vanir gísluðu hann goðunum" (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 23). With a husband in such an inferior position there is little hope for the politically minded Skaði to strengthen her own position: "Skaði's marriage is flawed and mediated, however, by her choice of the hierarchically lower Njörðr for Baldr" (Lindow 1992, p. 131)

The question is left why the gods make Skaði choose her future spouse by his feet. It seems that the gods are aware of Skaði's intentions of choosing Baldr and therefore "cunningly set her the Difficult Task of choosing him from a line-up of divine legs;" (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 4).

When we look at the story of the builder who demanded Freyja as his wife, we find that there are certain similarities between the two stories. In both cases the gods originally agree to the demand, but end up cheating their way out of it<sup>14</sup>. In Skaði's case the gods also initially allow her to choose herself husband but, suspecting that

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14 In the story with the *jötunn* builder, Loki distracts the builder's stallion into running away and therewith makes it impossible for the *jötunn* to finish the wall in time (cf. Snorri Sturluson 1988, pp. 34-5).

she longs for the popular Baldr, they trick "her into believing she was selecting him in an apparently free choice" (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 7). Eventually, by making Skaði choose her husband by his feet, they succeed in keeping Baldr, as Skaði chooses Njörðr (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). This is definitely in the interest of the *æsir* that did "not marry exogamously" (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 5), meaning that they did not marry out of their divine ranks due to the fear of losing power to other beings, such as the *jötnar* (Clunies Ross 1989, p. 4), even though they had amorous relations with those (Clunies Ross 1989, p. 5).

It has been pointed out that the motive of choosing a spouse by his/her feet can also be found in the Middle-European fairy tale of *Aschenputtel* (Lindow 1992, p. 132). In this fairy tale, just like in Skaði's case, there is a number of possible spouses to choose from, but the only possibility the suitor is given to find the spouse he/she is longing for is by finding the 'right foot/feet' (Grimm and Grimm 1812/15, p. 100). The endings are different though: where the prince in *Aschenputtel* identifies the right one as his spouse (Grimm and Grimm 1812/15, p. 101) Skaði is the victim of her misconception (Lindow 1992, p.132) and ends up with Njörðr instead of Baldr (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). Interesting is also that Skaði takes on the role of a suitor which in the fairy tale of *Aschenputtel* is a masculine role. Once again we are met by the topic of crossing gender-boundaries, which we have seen Skaði do before as she, for example, dons mail and demands compensation for her father (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2).

In this part of Skaði's story different themes from different societies seem to have mixed. The component of choosing a husband by the feet strongly alludes to the Middle-European fairy-tale *Aschenputtel*. Unfortunately though we can not say if it was the fairy-tale that originally influenced Skaði's story or if it was the other way around. Interestingly enough Skaði seems to once again act out a male role when she becomes the suitor. In Eddic literature as well as in *Aschenputtel* the role of the suitor is usually a man's role.

### 5.2.2 Loki's trick

Þá gerði Loki þat at hann batt um skegg geitar nokkvorðar ok ǫrðum enda um hreðjar sér ok létu þau ymsi eptir ok skrækti hvárttveggja við hátt. Þá lett Loki fallask í kné Skaða ok þá hló hon. (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2)

The scene between Skaði and Loki can be counted among the more extraordinary ones when it comes to Eddic literature. It is a grotesque scenery that leaves us with a lot of questions such as for example, why Skaði initially chooses to have the gods make her laugh but also why it ends up happening in such a way as it does. In this chapter I shall discuss the different ideas about what could be the meaning behind Loki's act and how the story may have been perceived in Viking times.

Skaði's demand to make her laugh can be seen as a challenge, as the texts adds that she considers it impossible. "Þat hafði hon í sættargjörð sinni at Æsir skyldu þat gera er hon hugði at þeir skyldu eigi mega, at hlægja hana." (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). In order to that her initial goal to reach with this action might have been to embarrass the almighty – but in this aspect not so almighty – gods. We know that Óðinn frequently sets out to challenge other beings most notably the *jötnar*. In *Vafþrúðnismál* Óðin challenges the *jötunn* Vafþrúðnir to a duel of knowledge. Upon his departure Frigg warns Óðinn, as it seems to be a risky task

Heima letia    ec mynda Heriafǫðr  
                         i gǫrðom goða,  
þvíat engi jötun    ec hugða ianframman  
                         sem Vafðrúðni vera.  
( *Vafþrúðnismál* st.2)

Risky, probably not only because many of the male *jötnar* are known for their vicious nature but also because it would probably damage Óðinn's reputation if he lost.

Furthermore do we have to think about what it would have meant in political terms if the gods had failed to fulfil a part of the retribution. A failed compensation might have allowed Skaði to ask for more until the gods would have been able to fulfil her demands or it might have caused the peaceful relations between Skaði and the gods to end. Examples of unsuccessful retributions are found in saga-literature. In the *Laxdæla saga* Bolli tries to even out his odds with his foster-brother Kjartan.

After he married the woman who had been meant for his foster-brother, Bolli tries to give Kjartan a young stallion to make up for the injustice, but his brother turns him down. As a consequence the situation between the foster-brothers remains tense as the original balance has not been restored. “Bolli átti stóðhross þau, er bezt váru kǫlluð; [...]Þessi hross vildi Bolli gefa Kjartani, en Kjartan kvazk engi vera hrossamaðr ok vildi eigi þiggja.[...] Skilðusk eptir þat með engri blíðu,” (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, p. 135). Eventually, as the story progresses, the foster-brothers end up fighting each other, what leads to Kjartan's death (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, p. 155). We can surmise that, just as in *Laxdæla saga* an imbalance would have been the result if the gods had failed to make Skaði laugh (cf. Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 8).

Making the princess laugh is also a motif in a well-known fairy tale (Lindow 1998, p. 105). In the story of *Die Goldenen Gans* the hero is supposed to get the ever-gloomy princess to burst out in laughter in order to be allowed to marry her:

da regierte ein König, der hatte eine Tochter, die war so ernsthaft, daß sie niemand zum Lachen bringen konnte. Da hatte der König ein Gesetz gegeben wer sie könnte zu lachen machen, der sollte sie heirathen (Grimm and Grimm 1812/15, p. 306).

Just like in Skaði's story the act of making somebody laugh poses as a challenge which has to be won in order for the story to move on.

The way Loki makes Skaði laugh when he binds his testicles to a goat's beard and engages in a very odd tug-of-war, further reminds of the story of *Die Goldene Gans* where the people get stuck to each other after touching the golden goose (Grimm and Grimm 1812/15, p. 306). The parade of people that are forced to follow the goose wherever it goes, is subsequently used by the hero to make the princess laugh (Grimm and Grimm 1812/15, p. 306).

But next to the similarities we also have to consider the differences. While in the fairy tale of *Die goldene Gans* the process of making the princess laugh is followed by the marriage (Grimm and Grimm 1812/15, p. 308), it is different in Skaði's case. Skaði is already married to Njǫrðr when she orders the gods to make her laugh (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). In contrast to the fairy tale pattern it is also not the soon-to-be-husband who makes her laugh but Loki, with whom she does share a rather antagonistic relationship: in *Skáldskaparmál* Loki is referred to as “þrætudólgr Skaða” (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 20).

It shall nevertheless be pointed out that this gender- and genitalia- connected sort of humour is nothing exceptional in Old Norse-Icelandic literature on the whole (Ármann Jakobsson 2007, p. 193). In *Brennu-Njáls saga* the poet Sigmund who makes fun of Njáll's missing beard as a sign of his unmanliness is executed by Njál's sons for his "slandrous verses" (Ármann Jakobsson 2007, p. 191).

“Þér synir mínir eiguð allir eina gjöf saman: þér eruð kallaðir taðskegglíngar, en bóndi minn karl in skeggláusi.” [...] “Þat er illa þá,” segir Sigmundur. Skarpheðinn laust á hjálminn ok hjó hann síðann banahögg, (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, pp. 114-6)

The poem *Þrymskviða*, in which Þórr is forced to dress up as Freyja in order to get back his hammer, suggest as well that an instability in gender was in fact considered to harm one's reputation decisively (*Þrymskviða* st.17).

These Episodes found in Old-Icelandic literature give us an idea about how sexually dubious Loki's actions might have seemed in Viking times and here may lie the reason for why Skaði laughed at Loki's actions. Jokes, referring to the sexual abnormality of a person, were, as we have seen, very popular and meant a good deal of embarrassment for the person concerned (cf. Ármann Jakobsson 2007, p.191). For Skaði, Loki's “þrætuðólgr” (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 20), such an act of self-degradation must have come very unexpected (Mundal 2000, p. 355). By actually embarrassing himself in the worst way possible Loki successfully fulfills the compensation as Skaði is unable to hold back her happiness – or rather her Schadenfreude – upon seeing the god engaged in a tug-of-war with the goat:

Loki is not normally a good representative for the gods, but on this occasion the childbearing Loki is well-chosen. His pain illustrates the gods' wounded masculinity. The nanny-goat with a beard, which normally is an indication of masculinity, is well-chosen to represent the giantess who acts in the male gender role. Her position is not extremely good either. She has lost her father and is on her own among enemies. But the gods' position is worse, their position is dishonouring. (Mundal 2000, p. 355)

In the end though Skaði loses more than she gains. By laughing over Loki's dishonouring scenario Skaði has lost the challenge she has put to the gods (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 8).

### 5.2.3 Óðinn's special retribution

The last phase of Skaði's retribution may be considered to be when Óðinn takes Þjazi's eyes and throws them up into heaven where they become stars (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). It is a two-sentence action in *Snorra Edda* and no more words are lost on this event. As a consequence one cannot get around the feeling that there is something odd about this special act of retribution.

This may be due to the phrasing of the episode. While the choosing of the husband is referred to as "fyrsta" (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2), the first part of the compensation, the word "ok" (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2) accompanies the second part, in which Skaði challenges the gods to make her laugh. But already after the second part of the compensation, where Loki makes Skaði laugh, we are informed that the gods have successfully fulfilled Skaði's demands and that peace between the two parties has been restored. "Var þá gjör sætt af Ásanna hendi við hana." (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). This is somewhat confusing as it is said before Óðinn performs his part of the "yfirbóta" (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2).

What is more, the act of throwing Þjazi's eyes into heaven has been attributed to Þórr and not to Óðinn in another source. In *Hárbarðzlióð* we are told that Þórr took the *jötunn*'s eyes and placed them in the sky. "Ec drap Þiáza / inn þrúðmóga iqtun, / upp ec varp augom / Allvalda sonar / á þann inn heiða himin;" (*Hárbarðzlióð* st. 19).

It is in fact much more likely that Þórr conducted such an act (Lindow 2001, p. 65) as he has been associated with creating stars in another myth. In *Snorra Edda* Þórr creates a star out of Aurvandil's frozen toe when he, just like in Þjazi's case, throws the body-part up into heaven:

ok þat til jartegna at ein tá hans hafði staðit ór meisinum ok var sú frerin svá at Þórr braut af ok kastaði upp á himin ok gerði af stjörnu þá er heitir Aurvandilstá. (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 22)

It also seems somewhat questionable that Óðinn would have to fulfil a separate compensation. In contrast to Loki or Þórr, who both claim to have taken the lead in the killing of Þjazi<sup>15</sup>, Óðinn does not seem to have played a special role in the murder

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15 In *Locasenna* Loki says that he took the lead in killing Skaði's father (*Locasenna* st. 50). In *Harbarðzlióð* Þórr boasts that it was him who murdered the *jötunn* (*Hárbarðzlióð* st. 19)

of the *jötunn*.

We can only speculate on why this special act of retribution is attributed to Óðinn in *Skáldskaparmál*. The making of stars with the help of body parts seems to be a talent that should rather be attributed to Þórr than to Óðinn (Lindow 2001, p. 65). A possibility is that Snorri Sturluson wanted to link Skaði to Óðinn in advance, as he later presents them as a pair in his *Heimskringla* (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10).

### 5.3 Skaði's failed marriage

The failure of Skaði's marriage shows how unsuccessful Skaði's compensation actually was with which she tried to politically strengthen her position (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 7). In *Snorra Edda* we are told that Skaði and Njörðr come to face problems as they cannot decide on where they want to live. As a consequence they decide to rotate between the places: "Þau sættusk á þat at þau skyldu vera níu nætr á Þrymheimi, en þá aðrar níu at Nóatúnum" (Snorri Sturluson 1988, pp. 23-4).

However, neither of them feels comfortable when he or she has to stay in the other one's dwellingplace. In *Snorra Edda* the remnants of an otherwise unknown Eddic poem tell us about Skaði's and Njörðr's problem:

En er Njörðr kom aptr til Nóatúna af fjallinu þá kvað hann þetta:  
"Leið erumk fjöll-  
varka ek lengi á,  
nætr einar níu:  
úlfa þytr  
mér þótti illr vera  
hjá sǫngvi svana."  
Þá kvað Skaði þetta:  
"Sofa ek máttigak  
sævar beðjum á  
fugls jarmi fyrir  
sá mik vegr  
er af víði kemr  
morgun hverjan: már."  
(Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24)

We have to keep in mind that a dwelling place is not only a god's home but also resembles a god's personality (Simek 1993, p. 260).<sup>16</sup> . As a consequence it is not only the dwelling place of the other one that the two gods abhor but also each other's personality and it is here that it becomes clear how overall flawed the relationship is and how badly the compensation has turned out for Skaði (Lindow 1992, p. 131).

The act of rotation can be compared to the changing of places Persephone undertakes in order to spend some time of the year with her husband Hades in the

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16 An excellent example are Ægir and Rán who both embody the sea in its different states. The merciless Rán, who drags the sailors down into the water (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 41) represents the harmful stormy sea (Simek 1993, p. 260) whereas her hospitable husband Ægir (*Locasenna* prose introduction) "personifies the sea as a friendly power" (Simek 1993, p. 260).



underworld (*Homeric Hymns* 1914, *Hymn to Demeter* line 459-71). Persephone is seen to represent the fertile nature (Foerster 2012, p. 1) and upon her descend into the underworld her mother Demeter becomes so sad that she prevents the plants from growing and thereby renders nature infertile (*Homeric Hymns* 1914, *Hymn to Demeter* line 307-313). The period Persephone spends in the underworld (four months) is seen to represent the winter time (Foerster 2012, p. 1). Therefore Persephone's rotation between the places reflects the change of seasons, with the time spend in Hades representing winter (Foerster 2012, p. 1).

The stories share similarities. Njörðr does not only represent the calm seaside, but is also occasionally linked to fertility (cf. Turville-Petre 1964, p. 162). In *Hákonar saga góða* in *Heimskringla* we are told that the people drank to his (and Freyr's!) honour so that he may give them a fruitful harvest: "en síðan Njarðar full ok Freys full til árs ok friðar" (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 98). Therefore he can be seen to match Persephone. Skaði, being the *ǫndurdís* (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24), poses as a personification of the snowy winters (Turville-Petre 1964, p. 165) and therefore could be seen as playing the part of Hades who causes the first winter by stealing Persephone and bringing her to the underworld (Foerster 2010, p. 1).

Interesting is, that in this case again Skaði takes over a role that elsewhere seems to have been associated with man, the role of the male Greek Hades.

In connection to this we could suspect another flaw in the alliance between Skaði and Njörðr which renders their marriage so complicated: it seems like Njörðr and Skaði are unable to act out their traditional gender-roles (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 6). In Njörðr's case this role-reversal becomes apparent when he has to act out the role of the bride that is given to Skaði: "Compensation in the form of a spouse ordinarily involves the giving of a bride, and it appears, then, that Njörðr has somehow been feminized," (Lindow 2001, p. 242). Also Skaði hardly seems like a "paragon of soft femininity" (Jesch 1996, p. 139) as she not only favours hobbies, such as hunting and skiing, that were viewed as male activities in the Viking society (Jesch 1996, p. 139) but also interacts "with the male world of the warring gods and giants," (Jesch 1996, p. 138).

A marriage in which the gender roles were changed the other way around seems

to indeed have been viewed as some kind of illegitimate absurdity (Ármann Jakobsson 2007, p. 169). This is also suggested in the *Brennu-Njáls saga* where Hallgerðr insults Bergþóra, Njáll's wife, by implying that she, with her thick and hard fingernails, seems to be the male part of the couple whereas Njáll, who does not have a beard, seems to be the female part (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, pp. 90). In reference to this the unclear gender-roles of Skaði and Njörðr (Lindow 2001, p. 242) may also be seen as a possible reason for the failing of their marriage.

It also seems to be Skaði who eventually ends their relationship. In *Snorra Edda* we are told that, after the rotation system has proved itself to be of no avail, Skaði “fór upp á fjallið og byggði i Þrymheimi” (Snorri Sturluson 1988, *Gylfaginning*, p. 24). The phrasing of the sentence, hinting out that she is not only staying in Þrymheimr for a limited period of time but instead ‘lives’ there alone, suggests in fact that Skaði choose to give up on her marriage with the sea-god and retreats to her home.

When it comes to Skaði's failed marriage with Njörðr we have to realize that it is most of all their antithetic characters that render their matrimonial alliance so problematic. Not only are they attributed to two opposing locations, which differ immensely in climate and nature, but they are also both struggling with their gender-roles. A fact that once again strongly suggests that Skaði was received as a gender-ambiguous being.

### 5.3.1 *Gesta Danorum*: Hadingus and Regnhilda

In *Gesta Danorum* we come upon Hadingus and Regnhilda, two Scandinavian aristocrats that have gotten married and now face a problem as they cannot decide on where they want to stay. While Regnhilda abhors the squeaking swans and the

seaside , Hadingus dislikes the cold and the howling of the wolves in the mountains. (Saxo 1970, p. 64) . It doesn't take much to understand that this is the story of Skaði and Njörðr's marriage in disguise (Turville-Petre 1964, p. 30).

The incident, where the couple is unable to decide where to live is not the only episode that reminds of the story of Skaði and Njörðr. When Regnhilda looks after the wounded Hadingus, who just saved her from a *jötunn*, she puts a ring in a wound on his foot and as the wound heals the ring leaves a mark on the foot (Saxo 1970, p. 62). Later, when Regnhilda's father tells her to choose a husband, she is able to identify Hadingus by the mark of the ring which she left in his wound (Saxo 1970, p. 62).

This very much reminds of how Skaði has to choose Njörðr, most of all as it is again the foot that plays the decisive role, even though Regnhilda in contrast to Skaði is able to pick the one she favours (Saxo 1970, p. 62).

The change of the protagonists is likely to have been caused by Christianity . Upon the arrival of Christianity the Christian writers tried to pass on their knowledge of pagan times in Christian disguise (Orton 2005, p.307). Therefore gods and supernatural beings were turned into humans (Simek 1993, p. 75) – an act that is referred to as euhemerism.

Skaði and the myths connected to her have been estimated to have originated from the Scandinavian peninsula (Davidson 1998, p. 24). On the one hand have the (possible) toponymics connected to Skaði only been found in the area of today's Sweden and Norway (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21), on the other hand do the forests and mountains of the Scandinavian peninsula seem to suit the hunting and skiing Skaði (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24) much better than the naturally flat Denmark or the rather barren countryside of Iceland (Davidson 1998, p. 24). As a consequence the account on Hadingus and Regnhilda in *Gesta Danorum* suggests that the story of Skaði's and Njörðr's matrimonial conflict spread fairly wide (Gunnel 2005, pp.82-3), since it appears in the Old-Icelandic account of *Snorra Edda* as well as in the Latin writings of Saxo Grammaticus from Denmark. This can be seen as an indication towards how important and well-known not only the story was but also their protagonists: Njörðr and Skaði.



## 6 Skaði in the *Poetic Edda*

### 6.1 Skaði in *Locasenna*

#### 6.1.1 Skaði and Loki

In *Locasenna* Skaði informs Loki about the fate he is going to suffer from the hands of the gods who, according to Skaði, are going to bind him to a boulder with his son's intestines. (*Locasenna* st. 49). Later on in *Snorra Edda* as well as in the *Poetic Edda* we get to know that this is in fact the fate Loki has to suffer (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 49; *Locasenna* prose ending). Nevertheless this cannot be seen as a hint at Skaði's possible prophetic talent. Instead it seems as though it was in fact Frigg who has had a vision concerning Loki's future and that she has talked about it to others<sup>17</sup>, even though she herself does not want to tell Loki about it (*Locasenna* st. 29).

Another detail that supports this lack of prophetic talent in Skaði's case is the fact that Skaði does not seem to know how exactly the different gods were involved in the killing of her father. This becomes apparent upon Loki's answer to Skaði's warning, when he informs Skaði that he took the lead in the killing of Þjazi. "fyrstr oc ǫfstr/var ec at fjǫrlagi/þars vér á Þiaza þriform." (*Locasenna* st. 50 ).

Upon getting this information Skaði proceeds to threaten Loki "frá mínom véom / oc vǫngom / scolo þér æ kǫld ráð koma." (*Locasenna* st. 51). In her threat she involves the expression 'vé oc vangr' (*Locasenna* st. 51), a term estimated to have been used to refer to possible cult-places 'shrine' and 'field' (de Vries 1962, p. 643-8), which are said to have been places where ritual worship took place during the Viking Age (Turville-Petre 1964, p.238). These lines strongly hint at an actual power that the mythological figure of Skaði may have had in the physical world, marked by her cult-places and worshipper (Steinsland 1986, p. 213).

In an attempt to insult Skaði, Loki proceeds to imply that she has had sex with him. "Lettari í málom/ vartu við Laufeyjar son,/ þá er þú léz mér á beð þinn boðit;"

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<sup>17</sup> Skaði is not the only one to imply that she knows about Loki's fate by the hands of the gods. We already have Freyja suggesting that she is aware of Frigg's vision (*Locasenna* st. 29) and also Freyr implies that he knows about Loki's future (*Locasenna* st. 41).

(*Locasenna* st. 52).

Again an accusation of 'sexual uncorrectness', this time in the form of adultery, is used to debase somebody in the worst way possible (Bagerius 2009, p. 48). But it is not only adultery she is accused of, now, that Loki has confessed to be the killer of her father, Skaði is also accused of having had intimate contact with a being that carried out an act of utter cruelty against her family. In the end it is not the question if the accusations are true or not. By making the accusation Loki has already hurt the Skaði's reputation in a significant way (Bagerius 2009, p. 48).

Interesting once again is Skaði's radical and less feminine behaviour in *Locasenna* as she alone taunts "Loki with her knowledge of his fate, specifically denying him profitable counsel" (Quinn 2005, p. 524) and charges "him instead with her 'kǫld ráð'" (Quinn 2005, p. 524). Very important is also the mentioning of her ritual worship. In the upcoming chapters 10 I will further illuminate the topic of ritual worship and I shall make clear what role it plays in defining the figure Skaði.

### 6.1.2 Skaði's revenge

Skaði's revenge, the way it is presented to us in *Snorra Edda* (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p.49) and the *Poetic Edda* (*Locasenna* prose ending) seems like a consequential and somewhat satisfying end to Skaði's story. Upon learning that it was Loki who killed her father, Skaði threatens him immediately. It is only logical to finally have her carry out her threats (von See 1997, p. 506).

After the gods bound Loki to a rock, Skaði shows up at the place and puts a snake over Loki's head. The snake's poison proves to be very harmful and causes Loki great pain so that he writhes in agony: "en meðan drýpr eitrit í andlit honum. Þá kippisk han svá hart at jörð ǫll skelfr" (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 49).

The archaeological evidence suggests that the story of Loki's binding was known at least by the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Gosforth cross, a stone cross found in the English county of Cumbria, shows various pictures that have been identified as illustrating scenes from the *Poetic Edda*. The Gosforth Cross is estimated to stem from the first

half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Scandinavian settlers were inhabiting this part of the British Isle (cf. Pluskowski; Patrick 2003, p. 36). One of the pictures on the stone cross shows a bound male figure and female figure which is holding up a bowl over the male figure's body. The female figure has been estimated to be Sigyn and the male figure to be Loki (Bailey 2002, p. 19) as the picture is thought to illustrate scene from *Snorra Edda* (Bailey 2002, p. 19), in which Sigyn tries to protect Loki from the poison and therefore catches it in a bowl (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 49).

The Gosforth Cross, which is located in England, further supports the assumption that Skaði and the myths connected to her were known throughout many places inhabited by members of the Viking society. Even though the picture does not show Skaði, it is connected to the myth in a very close way and implies that Skaði's action, the way they are described in the *Snorra Edda* may have been part of a Viking-Age-myth.

## 7 Skaði in *Heimskringla*

### 7.1 Euhemerism

Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* is a work about the Norwegian which that was written down in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Ármann Jakobsson 2005, p. 389). It is important to note that it was put together for the Norwegian kings who in the 13<sup>th</sup> century were proud Christians and had a long history of missionary Christian kings (Ármann Jakobsson 2005, p. 389). The part I am about to work with in the upcoming chapter, as it is the only part that contains information concerning Skaði, is called *Ynglinga saga*.

The *Ynglinga saga* is the first saga in *Heimskringla* and marks an exception as it "must be regarded as a primary source for pagan mythology" (Orton 2005, p. 308). But since the work was supposed to be for the Christian kings, heathen mythological knowledge had no place in it (Orton 2005, p. 308). As a consequence the mythological myths had to become profane stories. Therefore the pagan gods were changed into humans for literary purpose, based on the idea that all the gods were originally people, who only through worship came to be seen as gods (Simek 1993, p. 75). This act of turning mythological figures into historical personalities is referred to as euhemerism (Orton 2005, p. 308).

### 7.2 Skaði's second marriage with Óðinn

In *Heimskringla* we learn that Skaði indeed did split from her husband Njǫrðr. "Njǫrðr fekk konu þeirar, er Skaði hét. Hon vildi ekki við hann samfarar" (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10) .

If and how divorce happened in the Viking Age is hard to estimate. The *Grágás* supports the idea of strong matrimonial binding. In the law-record from the Middle Ages we are informed that divorce was seldom granted to people and that it could



not be performed unless the priest in the assigned area was willing to divorce the couple: “Hiona scilnaðr scal huergi vera a landi her nema þar er byscop lofar.” (*Grágás* 1879, p.168).

Therefore we can guess that Skaði's action of simply ending a matrimonial alliance all by herself suggested a certain independence and power, as we have to estimate, from what *Grágás* tells us, that it was not easy to separate from one's spouse once a marriage had been arranged.

As *Ynglinga saga* carries on we learn that Skaði becomes Óðinn's wife. “Njǫrðr fekk konu þeirar, er Skaði hét. Hon vildi ekki við hann samfarar ok giftist síðan Óðni.” (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10) This development seems like an upgrade when it comes to the status of her new partner (Clunies-Ross 1989, p. 6-7) as Snorri Sturluson refers to Óðinn as the highest of the gods, in contrast to Njǫrðr who is said to be third (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 23): “Óðinn er æztr ok elztr Ásanna. [...] Óðinn heitir Alfǫðr, þvíat hann er faðir allra goða. [...]” (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 21).

Another interesting development that we learn about in *Heimskringla* is the fact that Skaði has children with Óðinn, most notably the son Sæmingr (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10). Archaeological evidence suggests that in Viking times sons were of great importance to their mothers as the son's greatness would reflect onto his mother. This is implied by the runestones that were made on the demand of female Vikings and often talked about the great deeds of their husbands and sons:

Stones with runic inscriptions commissioned by women in memory of their male relatives often show a concern with the men's social and military status in life. Naturally, a widow would have a more secure status if her husband had been an important man in life, preferably one with some noble deeds under his belt, but mothers seem also to have basked in the reflected glory of their dead sons. (Jesch 1991, p. 53)

Skaði's son Sæmingr seems to have been of great importance (Mundal 2000, p. 349; Steinsland 2005, p. 170): as we have seen before we have good reason to believe that Sæmingr was seen as representative of the Sami in Northern mythology (Kusmenko 2006, p. 20). Furthermore are we told in *Heimskringla* that the very powerful Háleygjafjarlar declare themselves to be descendants of Óðinn and Skaði (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10). Keeping in mind that a woman's reputation seems to

have been built on the deeds of her husbands and sons, we can assume that Skaði as a (mythological) figure must have had a well-respected status as her husband and son and further ancestor are all shown to be powerful beings (Iunies-Ross p.7-8).

In reference to this we should also consider her connection with Freyja and Freyr for whom she seems to have posed as a stepmother. This is suggested by the Eddic poem *For Skírnis* where she is referred to as the mother of Freyr and Freyja (*For Skírnis* prose introduction and st. 1). It has been suggested however, that she was in fact seen as the stepmother and not the mother (von See 1997, p. 69). This is supported by the fact that in *For Skírnis* Skaði refers to Freyr as “morg” what can be translated as ‘son’ but also simply as ‘boy’ (von See 1997, p. 69). Also we are informed in the Eddic poem *Locasenna* that Njǫrðr begot Freyr and Freyja together with his sister (*Locasenna* st.36). However, Skaði is shown to intensively care for her stepson Freyr who has just unluckily fallen in love with the jötunn Gerðr. Therefore she urges his best friend Skírnir to go and convince Gerðr to marry Freyr (*For Skírnis* st.1). As a consequence we can guess that Skaði – also as a stepmother – may have emerged with credit through her link with the pair of *vanir*-gods Freyja and Freyr.

The account in *Ynglinga saga* illustrates Skaði as a rather powerful being. We can estimate that in accordance with the archaeological findings she probably profited from the power and the reputation of her new partner Óðinn as well as from the great deeds of her children, most of all Sæmingr, and her stepchildren. As female connected to all these mighty beings she is likely to have been viewed as quite a powerful figure herself (Jesch 1991, p. 53).

The categorizing of the mythical being Skaði has proven to be quite difficult. Even though Skaði is most often referred to as a *jötunn* it is not at all that clear to which group of mythological beings she belongs. In fact the most direct link that would connect Skaði to the *jötnar* is missing: no literary account refers to Skaði as a *jötunn*. Despite this fact we have reason to believe she is one of the *jötnar*: the literature provides us with decisive information on her character, which exhibits many *jötunn* traits (Steinsland 1986, p. 214).

A decisive fact about Skaði in reference to her affiliation with the *jötnar* is her dwelling place (Steinsland 1986, p. 213). After Þjazi's death we are told that Skaði becomes the ruler over Þrymheimr (*Grímnismál* st. 11). Even though we are not told explicitly where Þrymheimr lies it seems likely that it was located in Jötunheimr. In *Skáldskaparmál*, when Þjazi takes Iðunn away, we are told that he brings her to his home Þrymheimr: “Þá kemr Þjazi *jötunn* í arnarhem ok tekr Iðunni ok flýgr braut með ok í Þrymheim til bú sín” (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). Later on in the story we are told that Loki has to go to Jötunheimr where Þjazi resides with Iðunn, to bring back the goddess and her apples of eternal youth. “Ok er hann fær valshaminn flýgr hann norðr í Jötunheima ok kemr ein dag til Þjazi jötuns.” (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p.2). Therefore it seems likely that Þrymheimr was placed in Jötunheimr. Jötunheimr, as a consequence would also be Skaði's home. As the name already suggests Jötunheimr is the home of the *jötnar* and literature has thus far not given any reason to suspect that any other mythological being would voluntarily choose to reside in this place except for the *jötnar* (Lindow 2001, p. 206).

Þrymheimr does not only seem to be placed in Jötunheimr, but the name of Skaði's realm also fits well with the names attributed to *jötunn*-beings in general. The first syllable of the term Þrym is translated as “lärm, krach” (de Vries 1962, p. 624). The meaning of many *jötunn*-names centre around the topic of sound (Mozt 1981, p. 501), such as for example Gjálp, which means “roaring one” (Simek 1993, p.110). In fact we know about a *jötunn* who is named Þrymr: in the *Poetic Edda* we find the *Þrymskviða* in which the *jötunn* Þrymr is the main antagonist.

Astonishingly enough de Vries estimates the word 'prymr' to come from the "ai. 'ðrymm'" (de Vries 1962, p. 624) what he translates as "grosse schaar, macht, glanz". Given that the two words indeed are connected, the connection would further support Skaði's status as a powerful (and maybe even ritually worshipped) being.

In many literary accounts the *jǫtnar* are connected to mountains (Ármann 2006, p.109) and so is Skaði. The female *jǫtunn* Gunnlǫð for example resides in a mountain: "Flytr Stuttungr mjǫðinn heim ok hirðir þar sem heita Hnitbjörg, setr þar til gæzlu dóttur sína Gunnlǫðu." (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 4). Many *jǫtnar* carry the syllable 'berg' in their names which is translated as 'mountain'. Examples are the female *jǫtunn* "Bergdis" (Simek 1993, p. 34) and the *jǫtunn* "Bergelmir" (*Vafðrúðnismál* st. 29). In reference to this Skaði as well is linked to mountains. In *Grímnismál* Skaði's dwelling place is said to be located in the mountains. "Þá fór Skaði upp á fjallit ok bygði í Þrymheimi" (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24)

Skaði acts out the typical roles that are attributed to the *jǫtnar* in Eddic literature (Lindow 1992, p. 131). Like many *jǫtnar* Skaði demands one of the gods as her spouse (cf. Lindow 1992, p. 131). Upon her father's death she desires a marriage with one of the gods as a part of the retribution (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). Many Eddic stories tell us about *jǫtnar* that demand female goddesses as their wives. Þjazi wants Iðunn as his wife (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 1), the *jǫtunn* builder tries to get his hands on Freyja (Snorri Sturluson 1988, pp. 34-5) and so does Þrymr (*Þrymskviða* st. 8). But this is not the only *jǫtunn*-typical role Skaði fulfils. Like many other female *jǫtnar*, for example Gerðr and Gunnlǫð, Skaði engages in an matrimonial-like relationship. The get-together between a male god and a female *jǫtunn* is thought to answer to a very old mythological pattern referred to as the *hieros gamos*.

Myten om det hellige bryllup, *hieros gamos*, er en fortelling om en erotisk allians mellom ekstreme motpoler. Guder og jotner står for motsatte krefter i kosmos, (Steinsland 2005, p. 405)

In the constellation of *hieros gamos* the female *jǫtunn* represents the earth (sometimes also winter and/or death) and the male god represents a fertile element such as the rain or the sun (Turville-Petre 1964, pp. 165, 174). Therefore the *hieros gamos* was perceived as "the marriage between the fertilizing heaven (or else sun)

and the receptive earth" (Simek 1993, p. 146) from which a "revival of the nature's fertility" (Simek 1993, p. 146) was expected. The most popular example for the *hieros gamos* is supposedly the matrimonial-like relationship between Gerðr and Freyr (Steinsland 2005 pp. 403-5). In *For Scírnis* Freyr gets his friend Skírnir to pursue the *jötunn* Gerðr in order to make her marry him (Freyr). In this poem Gerðr "personifies the cornfields" (Turville-Petre 1964, p.174) and Freyr is the "god of sunshine" (Turville-Petre 1964, p.174). The alliance between the *jötunn*-woman Gerðr and the *vanir*-god Freyr shows similarities with the marriage of Skaði and Njörðr. Njörðr is a *vanir*-god as well and is seen to represent fertility (Turville-Petre 1964, p. 162) like Freyr, where Skaði takes over Gerðr's role as the perceptive earth (Turville-Petre 1964, p. 165). Just like Gerðr Skaði fills out the typical bride-role often given to female-*jötnar*. Furthermore is Skaði even referred to as the 'shining bride of the gods' in *Grímnismál* (*Grímnismál* st. 11). The element of beauty is often found in connection with female *jötnar*, too. Gerðr, the *jötunn* who becomes Freyr's wife is also referred to as beautiful "Hann sá í Iðunheima, oc sá þar mey fagra," (*For Scírnis* prose introduction). Skaði's role as a suitor of a divine being and also her role as a bride of a *vanir*-god are roles that have typically attributed to male respectively female *jötnar*.

Furthermore does Skaði's title as "öndurdis" (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24) support her *jötunn* decent. With the first syllable of her title meaning 'ski' her strong link to the cold winter time is unmistakable. Like her, many of the *jötnar* are intensively connected to snow and frost (Simek 1993, p. 159). This becomes most obvious in one of the various synonyms that is used to describe them: "hrímpursar" (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 10-11), an expression that translates as "hoar-frost giants" (Simek 1993, p. 159). Furthermore are *jötunn*-names often linked to cold weather. In the heroic lay *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* we come upon the female *jötunn* "Hrímgerðr" (*Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* st.12) whose name translates as "frost-gerðr" (Simek 1993, p. 159). Another male *jötunn* in *For Scírnis* carries the name Hrímnir, what can be translated as "the one covered with hoar-frost" (Simek 1993, p. 159).

Skaði's links to the Sami suggest a *jötunn*-heritage as well. In the past it has been

argued that the *jötnar* represented the Sami society. Else Mundal points out that in Viking times Sami inhabited the same region that the *jötnar* are said to live in in Eddic literature.

The otherness of the Saamis and their culture and the fact that they mostly lived outside the areas where the Nordic people lived, especially in the North, but farther south also in the border areas between Norway and Sweden and in the inland of Eastern Norway, conformed to the pattern of Midgarðr–Útgarðr. According to the mythological map the Saamis became the Útgarðr people. [...]In addition to the associations with Útgarðr, the descriptions of Saamis in many texts seem to focus on certain parallels with giants, and it is especially when these characteristics or qualifications which are typical of giants are connected to Saamis, that the Saamis are called *jötnar*. (Mundal 2000, p. 349)

Also living in the more Northern regions the Sami are strongly connected to the cold and the snow. This connection to frost is, as said before, also found among the *jötnar*.

Last but not least does Skaði show an affiliation with an animal that seems to be linked especially strongly to female *jötnar*, the snake. The snake plays a quite decisive role in Skaði's revenge, as it's toxic saliva causes Loki to writhe in agony (*Locasenna* prose ending). Other female *jötnar* are also known for their strong connection to snakes. Angrboða most notably gives birth to a gigantic snake named Jörmungandr (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 27). Hyrrokkin, another female from Jötunheimr that has good relations with the gods, uses snakes as reins while she is travelling on her wolf (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 46).

## 9 Skaði as an áss

While there is no literary source that calls Skaði a *jötunn* we are surprised to find that she is referred to as an 'áss' and a 'dís' both in *Snorra Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*. At first sight this might strongly suggest that Skaði is in fact not a *jötunn*, but as we look closer we have to realize that those expressions are not at all as clearly defined as we think they should be.

In Eddic literature Skaði is referred to as '*ǫndurdis*'. The term '*dís*' is in fact used to refer to goddesses (Simek 1993, p. 63). Freyja for example is called "vanadis" (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 29). But a lot of other figures are referred to as *dísir* as well, and many of them are not presented as goddesses. In *Guðrúnarqviða in fyrsta* the valkyries are referred to as the "Herians *dísir*" (*Guðrúnarqviða in fyrsta* st. 19). In *Atlamál in grœnlenzco* a group of dead women are called *dísir*.

Konur hugðac dauðar koma í nótt hingat  
værit vart búnar, vildi þic kíosa,  
byði þér brálíga til beccia sinna ;  
ec qveð aflima orðnar þér *dísir*.  
(*Atlamál in grœnlenzco* st. 28)

In *Grímnismál* the term *dísir* is used as a synonym for the *nornir*, when Óðinn tells Geirrǫðr that the *nornir*'s wrath will cause his death (*Grímnismál* st. 53). It seems that the term *dís* is a rather complex one and does not necessarily refer to goddesses as the *dísir*'s functions seem to have been "extremely varied" (Simek 1993, p. 62). Therefore, calling Skaði *ǫndurdis* does not necessarily mean that she was perceived as a goddess but perhaps rather as a powerful female.

Skaði is also referred to as an áss in *Snorra Edda*. Here Skaði shows up in an enlisting of guests that are referred to as *ásynjur* : "Til þeirrar ferðar varð fyrst Óðinn ok Njǫrðr, Freyr, Týr, Bragi, Viðarr, Loki; svá ok Ásynjur, Frigg, Freyja, Gefjun, Skaði, Iðunn, Sif." (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 40). But the correctness of this enlisting seems rather doubtful. Next to Skaði, whom clearly exhibits *jötunn*-traits, we also find Iðunn and Freyja counted among the *ásynjur*. In Freyja's case we can be sure that she does not belong to the *æsir* as she is referred to as *vanadís* (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 29). Also Iðunn is more likely to belong to the *vanir*, as the main traits of the

*vanir* are their connection to fertility and life (Turvile-Petre 1964, p. 158). Iðunn is known to be the owner of the apples that grant gods eternal youth (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 2) As a consequence Iðunn seems to rather belong to the *vanir* than to the *æsir* (Turvile-Petre 1964, p. 158).

Apart from these two instances in which she is referred to as a goddess, there is not a lot that connects Skaði to the deities. It has been suggested that Skaði was part of a ritual worship and that therefore she must have been goddess (cf. Holtsmark 1967, p.78). In reference to this I will show in my next chapter that ritual worship was not restricted to the domain of the gods but rather could be practised for other beings as well.



## 10 Skaði as a worshipped being

In the past the idea of a ritual worship of *jötnar* has greatly been dismissed by many scholars working in the field of Norse mythology (Holtsmark 1967, p.78; deVries 1970, pp.243-4). It seems that for a long time *jötnar* have been received solely as the antagonists of the gods. In reference to this scholars have ruled out the possibility of a religious worship of the *jötnar*: "Men jotnene har aldri kultus. De har vært bekjempet, ikke dyrket" (Holtsmark 1967, p. 78).

Literary sources contradict this one-sided reception of the *jötnar*. The relationship between the *jötnar* and gods seems far from being plain negative and antagonizing. On the contrary, many female *jötnar* exhibit positive traits in the interaction with the gods. The Eddic corpus shows them as being beautiful (Gerðr is called a "mey fagra" in *For Skírnis*, prose introduction) and helpful (Griðr gives Megingjarð and Járngreipr to Þór in Snorri Sturluson 1998 p. 25). It becomes more than once apparent that the *jötnar* are powerful and in some aspects even more powerful than the gods. This is shown for example in *Gylfaginning* where the female *jötunn* Hyrrokkin succeeds in lurching the ship with the dead Baldr on board after the gods tried to do so in vain. It should be remarked that – here as well – the *jötunn* lends a helping hand to the gods.

"Þá gekk Hyrrokkin á framstafn nokkvans ok hratt fram í fyrsta viðbragði svá ay eldr hraut ór hlunnunum ok lönd öll skulfu. [...] Þá var borit út á skipit lík Baldrs," (Snorri Sturluson 1988, *Gylfaginning*, p.46)

In respect to this we can conclude that the *jötnar* were not seen exceptionally as antagonists but at times revealed to be powerful and helpful beings.

As I have shown in the previous chapter Skaði is counted among the *dísir*. Despite the fact that many of these so-called *dísir* are not referred to or described as goddesses, various Old-Icelandic sources tell us about their worship. One example can be found in the *Víga-Glúms saga* where the word *dísablót*, dis-sacrifice (Simek. 1993, p. 60), is used, describing a sacrificial feast in honour of the *dísir*: "Þar var veizla búin at vetrnóttum ok gørt ok allir skulu þessa minning gera" (*Víga-Glúms saga* 1956, p. 17)<sup>18</sup>. A very interesting fact in connection with this *dísablót* is that it

18 also: "ok hafði Bárðr þar búit veizlu móti honum, ok skyldi þar vera dísablót," (*Egils saga*

was held in autumn (*Ólafs saga helga* 1911, p. 237) or the beginning of winter (*Víga-Glúms saga* 1956, p. 17). Skaði herself is, as we have seen, strongly connected to snow and skiing (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24) and thus linked to wintertime.

Another figure that proves the assumption wrong, that only gods were worshipped is Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr. Her character is found in Old-Icelandic saga-literature as well as in Eddic literature. Like Skaði, Þorgerðr is connected to the *jǫtnar* through several features. Her first name has been assumed to come from the name “gerðr” (Simek 1993, p. 326), the name of Freyr's *jǫtunn* wife.

The Old-Icelandic literature talks on various occasions about the ritual worship conducted in honour of Þorgerðr. In *Brennu-Njáls saga* we are told about a temple that had a seated figure of Þorgerðr in it (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1955, p.108). In *Skáldskaparmál* we are told that sacrifices were made to honour Þorgerðr and her father.

Svá er sagt at konungr sá er Hølgi er kallaðr, er Hálogaland er við nefnt, var faðir Þorgerðar Hølgabruðar. Þau vǫru bæði blótuð ok var haugr Hølga kastaðr, (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 60)

But what is more, Þorgerðr is also listed as one of the troll-women in the same account of *Skáldskaparmál* (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 112).

A ritual worship of Skaði herself is pointed out in *Locasenna* where Skaði refers to the cult-places that have been created for her. She tells us that there are ‘vé’ and ‘vangr’, ‘shrines’ and ‘fields’ that are dedicated to her (*Locasenna* st. 50). Considering that we find in fact place-names that can be translated as ‘skaði's shrine’, as for example ‘Skadevi’ (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21) in Sweden, a ritual worship of Skaði seems not unlikely. What is more archaeological sources support the idea of a cultural worship of female *jǫtnar* as I will show in the upcoming chapter.

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*Skallagrimssonar* 1933, p. 107); " Í svíþjóðu var þat forn landzsiðr, meðan heiðni var þar; at hǫfuðblót skyldi vera at Upsølum at góí; skyldi þá blóta til friðar ok sigrs konungisínnum," (*Ólafs saga helga* 1911, p. 237)

### 10.1 The snake-witch stone, the Grevensvænge figurines and the Hunnestad monument

Although there is no archaeological finding that for sure can be said to represent Skaði, a few artefacts depicting female beings may contain a link to Skaði. Such archaeological objects are various types of art depicting a female with snakes.

The first finding I want to refer to is a picture stone from Gotland, which often is referred to as the “snake-witch stone” (fig.1)



fig.1

This monument is estimated to have been made between 400 and 600 AD, in the final period of the Iron Age, when the Viking Age was just about to begin. The snake-witch stone shows a being, probably female as the absence of male primary sexual characteristics suggests, holding a snake in each hand.

There are two main traits that link the snake-witch on the stone to Skaði. The first is a rather obvious one: both, Skaði and the snake-witch seem to be female.

Furthermore can the picture be linked to Skaði by means of the snakes. There is only one account on Skaði that has been included in both the *Snorra Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*. This is the story about her revenge, when she places a toxic snake above Loki.

Skaði tók eitorm ok festi upp yfir annlit Loka: draup þar ór eitr. (*Locasenna* prose ending)

Þá tók Skaði eitorm ok festi upp yfir hann svá at eitrit skyldi drjúpa ór orminum í andlit honum. (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 49)

Similarities between the two figures, despite Skaði being a literary figure and the snake-witch a carved one, suggest that they may have been connected to each other

in one way or another. I would not go so far as to suggest that the figure holding the snake is in fact Skaði, most of all because Skaði as we know her from the literary sources is – at best – part of a heathen religious belief of the outgoing Viking age <sup>19</sup>, whereas the picture stone stems from the end of the Iron Age. That does nowhere mean that Skaði could not have existed as a worshipped deity before the Viking Age, but such a figure will hardly have been exactly the same as the Skaði we meet in the literary sources. However it seems very possible that the figure Skaði was inspired by this snake-witch, maybe that it even represents an older version of her.

The snake-witch-stone is not the only artefact that depicts a woman with snakes. A figurine found at Grevenhvænge, Denmark also shows a female being holding a snake (Fig.2). The corded skirt, found as part of the clothing on female bodies from the same period, as well as the highlighted breasts strongly indicate that the figure is supposed to be a woman. The snake, that is considered to originally have been attached to the figurine, is rather large in comparison to the figurine.



Fig.2

Another image relevant in this context is to be found on the rune-stone DR284 (Fig.3), which is part of a group of stones known as the Hunnestad monument. The image on the stone depicts a female being riding on an animal while using snakes as reins and having one snake come out of her mouth.

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<sup>19</sup> Here again one has to consider the fact that the literary sources on Skaði were produced rather late, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when all of Scandinavia had officially become Christian. We can't really say how much of the material on Viking Age belief has been altered through the transkription process of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig.3

There are other characters besides Skaði that can be linked to the statue and the pictures. One of them is the *jötunn* Hyrrokkin mentioned in *Gylfaginning*. There the gods try unsuccessfully to launch the burial- ship with the dead Baldr on board, until they finally receive help from a female *jötunn*, Hyrrokkin. This female *jötunn* is described to be riding a wolf while using snakes as reins.

En skipit gekk hvergi fram. Þá var sent í Jötunheima eptir gýgi þeiri er Hyrrokkin hét. En er hon kom ok reið vargi ok hafði höggorm at taumum þá hljop hon af hestinum, (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 46)

Here we have a description which seems to match the image on the DR284 stones very well (Price 2006, p. 181). In associating the myth with the image on the Runestone we also recognize that, despite being written centuries after the conversion to Christianity, the Icelandic literary works on Nordic mythology connect surprisingly well with the archaeological findings from mainland Scandinavia.

The third and probably the best known character of *jötunn*-kin associated with the poisonous reptiles is the *jötunn*-woman Angrboða who gives birth to the world-serpent Jormungandr (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 27).

The similarities between the three characters are obvious: all three are females and *jötnar* or have close connections to the *jötnar* (in Skaði's case), and all of them have some kind of power connected to snakes. There is the possibility, at least for the figures of Hyrrokkin and Skaði that they may initially have been one and the same, and it was not until later in the Viking Age that they came to be seen as two different beings. This cannot be said for sure though but, what seems obvious, is the

influence that the snake-women has had on the concept of the three female *jǫtnar* Skaði, Hyrrokkin and Angrboða.

Because of the similarities of the three artefacts -the rune-stone, the figurine and the picture-stone – one would think that they might have been produced roughly around the same time in the same area, knowing that religious beliefs were bound to change over time as well as from area to area. The opposite is the case. The Grevensvænge figurine, which is from Denmark, has been dated back to the latest period of the Bronze Age, the picture-stone from Gotland stems from the end of the Iron age and the rune-stone DR 284 is supposed to have been erected in Skåne during the Viking Age (McKinnell 2005, p. 114). This distance in time as well as in space does nowhere mean that the pictures and the figurine must be totally unrelated; rather it indicates that there must have been some kind of belief in a powerful female connected with snakes, which may have been quite strong and popular and thus existed for a very long time and spread widely over South Scandinavia.

Having had a look at the archaeological sources we have to face the fact that none of the findings that have survived and resurfaced up until now can clearly be said to depict Skaði. What it has shown though is that the belief in a powerful woman connected to snakes certainly was popular for a long time prior to the Viking Age, and it seems likely that this snake-woman cult inspired the concept of powerful mythological females, such as Skaði.

## 11 Conclusion

Already in the first chapter two main ideas were outlined in connection to Skaði's classification and position in the mythological as well as physical world. We are presented on the one hand with a possible connection to the female *jōtnar* and on the other hand with possible evidence supporting the idea of a ritual worship of Skaði. Having had a closer look at Skaði's name it has become obvious that its interpretation is a difficult matter as neither the translation 'harm' (Davidson 1993, p. 63) nor 'shadow' (Kusmenko 2006, p. 20) can clearly be attributed to her character. We have furthermore seen that Skaði's name would fit into the pattern of *jōtunn*-women's names in case 'harm' is its original meaning (Mozt 1981, p. 503) but also that it does not respond well with this feature. What is of great importance is the fact that there are a number of toponyms which can be found on the Scandinavian peninsula, that possibly have a connection to Skaði. Place-names like Skadevi and Skedvi clearly hint at a ritual worship of Skaði (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21). In connection to this we have found a corresponding line in the *Poetic Edda* that tells us that Skaði was worshipped and possessed cult-places dedicated to her (*Grímnismál* st. 11). For many scholars the idea of ritual worship of Skaði has been a complicated one as she was usually categorized as a *jōtunn* (Holtsmark 1967, p.78; de Vries 1970, pp.243-4). But the example of the *dísir* as well as the figure of Þorgerðr Hǫlagbrúðr illustrate that worship was not necessarily bound to the *æsir* and *vanir* but could be conducted for other beings as well. Skaði, whom is called the *ǫndurdís* (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24) has been declared a goddess based on the term *dís*, that is occasionally used for goddesses. However, it was not exclusively used for goddesses (de Vries 1970, pp.243-4) as we have seen. It has become clear that other powerful figures were referred to as *dísir* as well, amongst them the *nornir* and the *valkyrjur* and other female beings resembling those characters. What is more, we have found out that a *dísablót* (*Víga-Glúms saga*. 1933, p. 17), a sacrificial feast in honour of the *dísir*, was held and that the ceremony was conducted in the beginning of winter (*Víga-Glúms saga*. 1933, p. 17) – a time inherently linked to the ski-loving Skaði from the cold mountains (Snorri Sturluson

1988, p. 24). The example of Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr furthermore shows, that *dísir* were not the only non-divine beings that apparently received some kind of worship throughout the Viking Age. Þorgerðr is counted among the trolls but is also said to have been worshipped. In his work *Snorra Edda* Snorri Sturluson calls her troll-woman (Snorri Sturluson 1998 p. 112), but also tells us that she and her father were venerated (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 60 ). This strongly indicates that the ritual worship of a troll-woman might not at all have been viewed as no-go in Viking times. Other literary works strengthen the idea that a *jötunn* could have been honoured in a ritual manner as they mention cultic elements in connection with Þorgerðr. In this regard the archaeological evidence as well implies that female *jötnar* possibly could have been venerated. Through the combination of literary sources with figurines and images on stones it became apparent that the female *jötnar* can be linked to archaeological findings that show female beings with snakes.

Skaði's position meanwhile is an interesting and not the least weak one .The *Snorra Edda* tells us how she confronts the gods on their misdeed of killing Þjazi and how she makes sure that retribution will be granted on this matter all by herself (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2). From the Eddic literature and in connection with the *Grágás* we can estimate that her power stems most of all from the fact that she seems to be the only offspring of the *jötunn* Þjazi. As such she is heir to his realm and has to demand retribution in his name. According to *Grágás* she takes on a role that was usually reserved for man (*Grágás* 1852, p. 195). Her male role, and her act of cross-dressing that is connected to it, can be seen to link her to many other powerful (mythological) women that ignore gender-boundaries. But it is not the *valkyrjur* or the warrior maidens she resembles most closely but rather the Sami women. With the Sami women she furthermore shares her main features: the hunting and the skiing (Kusmenko 2006, p. 21).

As we got further into the thesis it became apparent that skiing is not the only thing that links Skaði to the Sami: Also Skaði's jötun-father Þjazi closely resembles the Sami god Tjaetsiolmai (Kusmenko 2006, p. 12) . What is more, one of the sons Skaði has with Óðinn is named Sæmingr (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10) and is considered to represent the Sami (Kusmenko 2006, p. 20) and to be somewhat of a



founding father of the Háleygjarjarla. Skaði definitely profits from her son's greatness, as we have estimated that in Viking Age the great deeds of husbands and sons would reflect onto their wives and mothers (Jesch 1991, p. 53).

Skaði's independence is another matter that is closely connected to power and which is presented to us in the literary sources. Her independent nature becomes most evident when she splits from Njǫrðr (Snorri Sturluson 1944, p. 10). Divorce in Viking times probably was not an easy matter as the *Grágás* tells us that a separation was only allowed under certain circumstances (*Grágás* 1879, p. 168). Therefore we can guess that a female being who splits from her partner solely because she does not want to live in his place must have had some kind of individual power.

Interesting is that the failed marriage between Njǫrðr and Skaði was very well-known in Denmark (Saxo 1970, p. 62-4) and Iceland (Snorri Sturluson 1988, p. 24), even though it probably derived from the Scandinavian peninsula (Davidson 1998, p. 24). The fact that the tale spread so far illustrates how interesting and important it was to the people of the Viking Age. The Gosforth cross suggests that Skaði and her myths were popular even in England as we can find a picture of the kneeling Sigyn and the bound Loki on the monument.

Skaði's character exhibits many traits that link her to the *jǫtnar*, such as her connection to the Sami (Kusmenko 2006, p. 20), that were seen as the basis for the creation of the mythological *jǫtnar*, but also her connection to winter and mountains and her role as a suitor demanding a divine spouse (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2) as well as a wife of a *vanir*-god (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2) strongly suggest a *jǫtunn*-heritage. Even though she is called *dís* (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 2) and *ás* (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 40) she does not show many parallels to female goddesses (Steinsland 1986, p. 213) except for a possible ritual worship of her figure.

Therefore I introduced the term of a worshipped being in my thesis. With this term I stress the idea that worshipped beings in Viking times did not necessarily have to be goddesses. It was shown that figures such as the ambiguous Þórgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr were recipients of cultic praise (Snorri Sturluson 1998, p. 60) and that therefore there is no need to exclude Skaði from the possibility of being a ritually worshipped

being as well as a *jötunn*. In the end I think that there is an impressive amount of evidence that supports the idea that Skaði was worshipped but that she also was perceived as a *jötunn* and that, even though the *jötunn*-god relation was an antagonistic one in many aspects there is no need to exclude the possibility of a worship of a powerful being that is counted among the *jötnar*.

## 12 List of illustrations

Fig. 1: "snake-witch stone" , picture-stone, Smiss, Gotland, after Lundborg 1006, p. 42.

Fig. 2: Grevensvænge figurine, Jutland, after Turville-Petre 1964, p. 116.

Fig. 3: Rune-stone DR284, Hunnestad Monument, Skåne, after Steinsland2005, p. 253.

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